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**MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY;**

**PROF'S DARK SECRET;**

**College shocked to learn psychology department chair killed parents in '67**

By Dave McKinney, Frank Main, Jon Seidel and Becky Schlikerman

Staff reporters

A psychology professor at Downstate Millikin University killed his parents and sister 46 years ago when he was a teenager, a revelation that has jolted the bucolic liberal arts college that has employed him for nearly three decades and sparked calls for his resignation.

Described as "an older hippie," James St. James landed a top teaching award at the small college in Decatur and chairs its psychology department, but he kept the dark secret from his past from Millikin's administrators and the central Illinois city in which he has lived.

Reached Thursday at his Decatur home - its front porch cluttered with plants, patio furniture and a stack of newspapers - St. James, 61, declined to comment.

"The university has issued a statement and that will, that will have to do," he said.

Not until the publication of an investigation by a Texas newspaper did it become known that he was at Millikin after shooting his parents and teenage sister to death in Texas in 1967. St. James avoided prison time after being found insane at the time of the slayings.

After he was hospitalized for several years, he was found to be sane in 1974, later changed his name from Jim Wolcott, got his college degrees and joined the Millikin faculty.

St. James' violent past has provoked a debate about his future with the private college, which for now is sticking by him and saying it expects him to continue teaching psychology classes this fall. Millikin also made clear it had not been told of the killings when it initially hired St. James.

"For 27 years, he has taught a variety of courses at Millikin, served in various leadership roles and built a successful academic career receiving academic awards including the 1997 Teaching Excellence and Leadership Award," the college said in a statement released Thursday.

"Millikin University has only recently been made aware of Dr. St. James' past. Given the traumatic experiences of his childhood, Dr. St. James' efforts to rebuild his life and obtain a successful professional career have been remarkable," Millikin said.

The college said it expects St. James "to teach at Millikin this fall."

But the mayor of Decatur said St. James should consider stepping down for the sake of Millikin's reputation as a "gem" within his community.

"I first heard this when my alarm went off today, that's what was on the radio. I was sitting there trying to grasp what this is all about," Decatur Mayor Mike McElroy told the Sun-Times on Thursday.

"I have seen him in the community, I'd like to think I'm a person who is forgiving and a person who likes to give everybody an advantage. But I'd have thought something with this record would have been found by Millikin University," he said.

"I'd hope the character of this gentleman has been such ... that he in fact will do the right thing, which for the sake of the university, would be to resign. If I had done something where I worked, I'd resign because I wouldn't want to bring any more publicity or potential shame on the company I work for. I'd hope that's what would happen," McElroy said.

The Wolcott family killings in August 1967 resulted in national news coverage, shocking the central Texas town of Georgetown, which then was a sleepy suburb of 5,000 people near Austin, Texas.

His father, Dr. Gordon Wolcott, chairman of the biology department at a local university, and 17-year-old sister, Libby Wolcott, were found shot to death in the family's home. His mother clung to life when police arrived, only to die from her wounds a short time later.

St. James, who was 15 at the time of his family members' deaths, went on trial for the killings but was cleared by reason of insanity and sent to a psychiatric hospital, where he spent the next six years before being released. In 1976, he changed his name, according to court records.

Word of St. James' professorship after his involvement in his parents' and sister's deaths was broken by the Georgetown Advocate, a central Texas newspaper that investigated where St. James went after leaving the region.

"On the evening of Thursday, August 4, 1967, James joined Libby and some friends on a trip to Austin to see a show," the Advocate reported. "They returned home about 10 p.m., and life in the Wolcott house appeared to be normal.

"By midnight, Libby and Elizabeth had retired to their respective bedrooms, while Gordon read in the living room. Inexplicably, just after midnight, James, by his own account, sniffed some airplane glue 'to give him a boost,' loaded a .22-caliber long-barrel rifle, walked to the living room and shot his father twice in the chest. He then walked to Libby's bedroom and shot her once in the chest, and when she fell he shot her in the face," the paper reported.

"Awakened by the blasts from the rifle, his mother Elizabeth called out from her bedroom. James then shot her twice in the head and once in the chest. He later admitted that he had decided to kill them a week prior and had made a plan the night before," the paper reported.

After police responded to the crime scene, St. James was eventually taken to his minister's parsonage where a Texas Ranger asked him if he'd killed his parents, and the boy responded he had, according to court records.

"In what order?" the officer asked.

"Father, then sister, then mother," St. James responded, according to court records.

When a police officer asked him "why?" St. James said he "hated" his family, court records showed.

In an interview with a doctor, St. James said that five days before the killings he became convinced "that he had to do something about them, that they were contriving to drive him out of his mind," according to court records.

Other grievances he listed against his family were that his mother "ate loudly," and his sister had "a bad accent," court records show.

St. James also pointed authorities to the .22-caliber rifle he had hidden in the attic after using it to kill his family, court records show.

The Advocate reported that court records indicated St. James acknowledged sniffing airplane glue for several months before the crimes, which his doctors said contributed to his paranoid schizophrenia.

Wolcott was charged with the murder of his father - the other two counts were dropped. An all-male jury ultimately found him not guilty by reason of insanity and ordered that he be institutionalized at a psychiatric hospital until he "became sane."

While at Rusk State Hospital, St. James began taking classes from Stephen F. Austin University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1976, two years after his release. That same year, he legally changed his name.

In 1980, St. James obtained a master's degree in psychology. Six years later, he was hired at Millikin, and in 1988, St. James received his doctorate from the University of Illinois.

Shayla Holub, a psychology professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, described St. James as her mentor when she attended Millikin in the late 1990s.

Holub said she learned of St. James' criminal background for the first time on Thursday when she received a Facebook message.

"He was always supportive and a good mentor," Holub said. "I was really proud of Millikin for standing by him. I would be really disappointed if he were asked to resign."

Holub said she became hooked on psychology during her freshman year while she took St. James' introductory psychology class.

She studied with St. James over the four years she attended Millikin, and he advised her on her honors thesis on 'automaticity' - "the notion that if you practice something enough, it becomes automatic," she explained.

St. James, who wears his hair in a ponytail, "dresses the part of an older hippie," but "I don't think of him that way," Holub said. "I just thought of him as my professor."

Holub said she doesn't know a lot about St. James' personal life.

"He was my professor, you know?" she said.

Millikin University student Jentry Grader said she still respects St. James and hopes revelations from his past don't ruin the rest of his life.

"I feel comfortable with him," Gentry said. "And I do not see him as a threat to anyone."

Dan Beto, one of three college students who were the first to enter the home after the murders, said he also learned Thursday that Jim Wolcott became James St. James and is now a professor.

On the night of the murders, St. James flagged down the car Beto and his friends were riding in. The students went into the home and witnessed the grisly scene. Then Beto stepped outside and stayed with St. James, who kept saying "Oh my God" and pounding his fists in the grass.

Beto said he is now retired after spending more than 40 years working in the criminal justice system, most recently as executive director of the Correctional Management Institute of Texas.

"You can't take away the fact that he murdered his father, his mother and his sister and that it looked premeditated," Beto said. "[But] I am glad he got his life straightened out and got education."

Douglas M. Benold, a retired doctor who declared St. James insane after a 1968 examination, said everyone in Georgetown is talking about the Millikin revelation.

Benold said St. James' father was his biology professor at Southwestern University in Texas. He called St. James' parents "real fine people" and the daughter a "real nice kid."

Asked about St. James' new life, the 89-year-old doctor said: "I think that's wonderful, if it's for real. Knowing his background, I'm glad he's there instead of in Georgetown."

Dave McKinney wrote and reported this article from Springfield. Frank Main and Becky Schlikerman reported from Chicago, and Jon Seidel reported from Decatur.