

Deputy left a trail of troubles in California

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Howard Watson was an enigma even before he went from being one of Dallas County Constable Jaime Cortes' most senior deputies to a suspect in several felony crimes.

Some deputies who work for Cortes say they knew little about Watson's background.

But information that came to light during a Dallas Morning News investigation of his past suggests there may be a reason for that.

Dessory Channels, a California woman who says she is one of Watson's former foster children, claims he began sexually abusing her while she was still a minor and is the father of her three children. She also told The News that Watson was in the repo business in California and kept some high-end cars that he'd seized, driving them for months and even years with temporary license tags.

The charges against Watson, 66, filed Jan. 27 as part of an investigation into suspicious activities at some constable offices, include the unauthorized use of two motor vehicles, tampering with government records and coercing two women into performing sexual acts instead of arresting them on outstanding warrants. His wife, Janette, is charged with providing a false seller's name and previous owner's name on a vehicle title certificate and tampering with a vehicle title.

One of Watson's former landlords told The News that Watson concocted a story about becoming the beneficiary of a rich uncle's estate and presented falsified financial documents when he leased a house in an upscale Los Angeles suburb with an option to buy. Watson stopped paying rent after two months, said the landlord, who won a civil judgment of more than \$30,000 against the Watsons that was never paid.

Records show that Watson had other run-ins with authorities in California, including a child support case filed on Channels' behalf. He also faced criminal charges of domestic abuse and assault with a firearm that were later dismissed, according to Los Angeles County records.

Watson apparently left California even as authorities were looking for him. He re-emerged in Texas, where he trained to be a police officer and quickly became one of Cortes' top deputy constables.

Watson remains in jail and declined a request from The News for an interview. As of Friday evening, county records did not list a lawyer for him. An attorney for Janette Watson had not conferred with her and could not comment. She could not be reached for comment.

Child becomes a mom

Channels said she came to know Howard and Janette Watson when she was brought into their home as a foster child in the early 1990s.

"He started sexually assaulting me at age 13," Channels, now 32, told The News. "He also said if he would ever see me with anyone else, he would have me killed. That man kept me scared all the time."

In general, The News does not identify sexual assault victims. But Channels talked willingly about her ordeal with the knowledge that her name and photograph would be published.

Channels said that Janette Watson became aware of what was going on when Channels was about 14, after she became pregnant and was taken to get an abortion. Janette moved out, Channels said, when Channels became pregnant again when she was about 18, eventually giving birth to a boy. Almost a year later, she gave birth to twin

girls. Channels said that Watson is the father of her 13-year-old son and the 12-year-old twins.

The Watsons were licensed to provide foster care from May 1990 through July 1991, according to California Department of Social Services records. A spokeswoman for the department said she could not say whether the couple had been investigated or disciplined because archival information is not kept from that long ago.

Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department sought child support on Channels' behalf in a lawsuit filed in February 2007. The case was dismissed for lack of prosecution in December 2008. Channels said that Watson couldn't be found. The case was filed slightly less than six months before he began working as a Dallas County deputy constable.

Channels said that she and Watson had a relationship for several years. She said that Watson was manipulative, threatening - and sometimes would beat her.

"I didn't do anything for years because of the fear that he would do something to me or to whomever I would be around," she said.

She ultimately moved out on her own. But she said when she did, Watson continued to harass her.

Fed up, she said she filed a domestic abuse complaint with the West Covina Police Department.

Los Angeles County records show two charges related to domestic abuse and threats were filed in the West Covina Courthouse against Watson on July 17, 1998. Both charges were dismissed on Sept. 8, 2003.

Channels said investigators were unable to locate Watson after she filed her complaint. She also didn't have any contact with him for a number of years.

"It seemed like the police frightened him and he completely stopped," Channels said. "He didn't come around. ... He didn't call. And that was just the turning point for me, because that's when I realized he was afraid of someone else."

Channels had contact with Watson once more, about seven years ago. Her son was very ill and in the hospital. Channels tracked down one of Watson's daughters, who lives in California, and asked her to let Watson know, "because at that point I didn't know if my son was going to make it or not." Channels also didn't have the money to pay the medical bills.

Watson, she said, did call. "And all he said was, 'I'll see what I can do. I'll see if I can go down there.' That was the last time I ever heard from him."

Collecting cars

Channels said she was not surprised when she learned that Watson's troubles in Dallas County may involve vehicles with temporary license plates.

Watson was one of several Precinct 5 officers who aroused suspicions in the county tax office about two years ago by renewing temporary registration permits every month for various vehicles.

Watson handled the most paper tag transactions, a former tax office manager said. It led county officials to wonder whether the constables had title to the vehicles as well as where they were getting the vehicles. The constables wouldn't say.

Channels said Watson had his own repo company in California and his own crew. She said the crew had a couple of towing trucks but often would drive away in the cars they took rather than use the trucks. She doesn't recall the name of Watson's company.

"We kept a lot of cars at our home," she said. "There were Porsches, Mercedes-Benz, a couple of Beemers. ... The good cars, we would keep for a couple of years. The regular cars, they would stay at the house two or three days and then they would be sent out."

Channels said if Watson picked up a Mercedes-Benz, he would go to a dealership and say that someone stole his plates and he needed paper plates - "and the people would just give them to him."

With paper plates and a copy of a state registration on the dashboard, she said, "you can drive around in California like that for years, and no one is going to notice the difference, unless you get stopped."

Channels said Watson drove a Mercedes-Benz 560 SEC for about two years with paper plates and "no one ever stopped him."

Officials with the California Department of Consumer Affairs can find no record that Watson was licensed to be a "reposessor" in California or any other license for him. The department also licenses private investigators and security guards, among other professions. A spokesman said it is possible that he was repossessing vehicles without a license.

On a job application with a Dallas-area charter school where he briefly worked, Watson said he owned and operated a company called Global Investigation for 22 years in California. He described the work he did as "skip-tracing" assets. That term typically refers to efforts to locate debtors who are attempting to evade bill collections or judgments. Watson also was listed as the owner of a company called Assets Retrieval

in California, and had links to two Nevada companies: Global Assets Retrieval Inc. and Global National Investigation Inc.

Channels said that sometimes there were confrontations when Watson was picking up cars. She recalled one incident in which Watson and a couple of men were trying to repossess a car in the Crenshaw neighborhood of Los Angeles.

"There was shooting back and forth ... they started going at it with each other," she said.

California records show that Watson was charged with assault with a firearm in April 1991, but that case involved two off-duty Los Angeles police officers. According to a police report, a man in a parked Cadillac yelled an obscenity at officer Steven Del Castillo and another officer as they were leaving a residence. The man followed them as they drove away and later fired a shot at Del Castillo. Del Castillo and the second officer identified the driver as Watson in a photo lineup.

The case was dismissed a little over a year later. In court documents, Watson's lawyer complained that Watson's right to a speedy trial had been violated. The lawyer also claimed that a man only known as "Raul" - an acquaintance of Watson's foster children - had been driving the car that night without his permission and Watson's defense had been harmed because Raul couldn't be located.

Channels said that Watson sometimes told her things about himself, but she didn't always know what to believe.

She said that Watson claimed he worked for the CIA in California while she was living with him and that "he always had someone watching every move I made." She said that he also told her he had been a detective, and "always claimed to be connected with the police department." She said he had a badge but wasn't sure whether it was real.

The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training could find no record that Watson was ever a law enforcement officer in the state.

Lease leads to lawsuit

David and Diana Quintana leased a house they owned in upscale Chino Hills to the Watsons in the early 1990s.

The Watsons admitted to some financial difficulties, David Quintana told The News, but said they were expecting a financial windfall. If all worked out as planned, they were interested in buying the house.

"Their story was that they had twin children who had recently died, and because of that trauma, they had fallen behind on their mortgage" and had lost their home to foreclosure, Quintana recalled.

Watson also produced trust documents and tax returns from an accountant showing that he was the beneficiary of a rich uncle's estate, Quintana said, and would be receiving roughly \$600,000 from the trust within the year.

The Quintanas agreed to lease the home, which was on the market at the time, with an option to buy.

It didn't take long for things to go sour. Quintana said the Watsons paid rent for only two months. Eviction proceedings were initiated.

"They trashed the place and took our property and moved out in the middle of the night, just before the sheriff came to lock them out," Quintana said.

Little was true

The Quintanas tried to get the money they were owed and filed a lawsuit against the Watsons. In the process, they said they discovered that very little of what the Watsons told them was true.

Quintana, an attorney in Oxnard, Calif., said he couldn't find where Watson had actually worked. The trust and tax documents were false. The accountant, whom he'd talked with to verify the trust and Watson's inheritance, wasn't legitimate. And the rich uncle was a fiction. Quintana said that he discovered that the Watsons had stiffed other landlords and given them conflicting information. Local detectives began looking at whether the Watsons had committed criminal fraud, Quintana said, "but the Watsons were gone from the area before that got going."

Quintana didn't know it, but even the Watsons' tale about the deceased twins was suspect.

Dessory Channels said that Watson did have a pair of older twins with his wife, but they are still very much alive. Another daughter still lives in California. Watson lost a son in a car accident, she said, but that was in 1994, after they'd moved out of the Quintanas' house.

The Quintanas got a judgment of more than \$30,000 against the Watsons, but have never seen a dime of it.

"As I look back on it, you only get conned if you want to believe what they are saying bad enough," Quintana said. But like most con men, he said, Watson "was articulate, persuasive and a good actor."