

# METRO

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# Attack Led To Charges In Hikers' Slayings

## Man Tried to Abduct Woman in Shenandoah

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When Shenandoah National Park rangers arrested Darrell D. Rice in 1997 for trying to abduct a female bicyclist, he said he only wanted to "ruin her day" and "make her a little unhappy." But the frenzied nature of the attack led the rangers to focus on another crime—the 1996 slayings of a lesbian couple, court records say.

Rice, 34, of Columbia, told investigators that day that he didn't have anything to do with the deaths of Julianne M. Williams and Laura S. "Lollie" Winans, who were killed at a secluded campsite a year before his arrest. But he said he didn't mind talking freely about the case and even remembered hiking in the park that summer while search parties scoured the woods and trails for the couple.

"All I heard was that . . . they were lesbians, uh, some kind of relationship . . . between girls," Rice said in the interview, according to papers in U.S. District Court in Charlottesville.

An investigator then asked Rice what he thought would be going through the mind of the man who killed them. Rice answered: "He could be thinking the same thing I'm thinking about, like people at work . . . nagging on me, you know . . . thinking about that."

Rice, who frequented the popular park to hike and ride his mountain bike, was charged this week with capital murder in the deaths of Williams, 24, and Winans, 26. His case marks the first time prosecutors have invoked a 1994 law creating enhanced penalties for crimes motivated by bias against gays. Officials said Rice singled out his victims because of their gender and sexual orientation.

But family members say they are stunned by the allegations, including the alleged bias against gays and women.

RICE. From B1

"He has so many friends who are openly gay," said Rice's older sister, Dawn Metcalfe. "This doesn't make sense at all. He has never expressed any kind of hatred toward any women."

"I just think they are using this hate crime law to pin something on him. None of us can believe Darrell is capable of killing those women."

Williams and Winans were last seen at an Appalachian Trail shelter on May 23, 1996, while on a five-day trip, and their bodies were found June 1 near Skyline Drive. Authorities said their throats were slashed and their hands bound.

Hundreds of pages of documents filed in the Charlottesville court in connection with the attack on the bicyclist show that U.S. Park Police and FBI agents quickly focused on Rice as a possible suspect in the 1996 slayings. Investigators delved into his apparent contempt for women and questioned why he was in the area when Winans and Williams were killed.

According to the documents, Yvonne Malbasha was bicycling along Skyline Drive on July 9, 1997, when Rice drove by in his pickup. After stopping to take the tags off the truck, Rice drove back and forced her off the road. Rice screamed at her to get in his truck and demanded that she show him her breasts.

Rice tried to ram the woman with his truck several times, the documents say. The woman hit him with her water bottle and jumped behind a tree. She started to scream, a car came by, and Rice fled.

"He told me he was going to get me and to get into the truck, and he was screaming at me," Malbasha testified at Rice's trial. "I was terrified. I thought he was going to kill me."

During the trial, prosecutors speculated that Rice intended to rape his victim. Rangers found a piece of nylon cord, 10 feet of rope and a number of "flexi-cuffs" in Rice's truck, all of which officials said could have been used to restrain and abduct her.

Rice told investigators that he got a rush from confronting the cyclist, describing himself as possibly "bi-polar or something" be-

cause he was "real happy" during the attack, the documents say.

During the 1997 interviews with investigators, Rice said he sometimes harassed random women he came across.

He said he yelled offensive comments to a woman jogging in Annapolis and another time spat at a woman's shoes as he rode his bicycle in Maryland.

"Rice stated that females were 'more vulnerable' than men and that's why he chooses to confront them," investigators wrote in interview notes. "Rice felt that these confrontations were the result of people being mean to him at work."

Rice, who said he was fired from a job about a week before the attack, told investigators that he sometimes "explodes" over stressful situations, the documents say.

At one point during the July 1997 interviews, an official asked Rice: "When did you first feel like you were coming apart?"

His answer: "Like the summer of last year. No. The year before that."

Rice, who was convicted of attempted abduction in the 1996 attack, has been jailed in a Petersburg, Va., prison. Because there was no danger he would attack again while in prison, authorities said, they methodically built a case against him in the killings. Sources said the evidence was presented to a federal grand jury over the course of several months.

Rice's father, however, is convinced authorities are mistaken. "This doesn't sound like Darrell at all," Leon Rice, 65, said.

Virginia State Police officials said yesterday that detectives are investigating whether Rice could be connected to a 1996 string of stalkings of female drivers on Route 29, but they have not named him as a suspect. Police believe the assailant in those cases may have been responsible for the March 1996 abduction and killing of Alicia Showalter Reynolds, a pharmacology student.

Rice is to appear in federal court in Charlottesville for an April 25 arraignment. Court officials yesterday said he does not yet have a lawyer.

Staff writers David Cho and Brooke A. Masters contributed to this report.