

THE FLINT VOICE

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PAID
Davison, Mich.
Permit No. 96

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Vol. III, No. 8

Genesee County's Independent Newspaper

November 1979

Did Rutherford Receive \$30,000 "Gift" From Convicted Gambler?

by Michael Moore

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The *Flint Voice* has learned that Mayor James Rutherford, while Chief of Police, may have been the recipient of \$30,000 from a well-known convicted gambler, George Sahadi "The Horn" Joseph.

The *Voice* has also discovered that more than one person saw Joseph slip Rutherford a brown paper bag, an incident made public four years ago when only one witness would come forward with the information.

It has now been alleged that the brown paper bag contained a \$30,000 "gift" from Joseph to Rutherford. *Voice* sources claim Rutherford and Joseph had been friends since 1956.

The entire sequence of events leading up to this serious charge began on the night of March 31, 1972.

Four Flint undercover police officers—William Kontyko, Michael Hanna, Kenneth Burns and Norman Day—were tailing Joseph in an attempt to gather information on his various organized crime activities. At 11:20 p.m. they followed him into the parking lot of the Westgate Plaza on Ballenger Hwy. Then, as if they couldn't believe what they were seeing, Joseph got out of his car and, carrying a brown paper bag, got into the parked car of police chief James Rutherford who had been waiting there for him.

For over an hour Rutherford and Joseph sat in the car. When Joseph got out and went back to his car, he didn't have the brown paper bag with him.

The stunned officers discussed what they had witnessed. Why would their police chief be meeting with a known criminal like Joseph? What was in that bag? How would they fill out their report of the incident?

Sgt. William Kontyko returned to the station and wrote up what he saw. By morning, word had gotten back to Rutherford what his own men had observed. Before the news spread around police headquarters about the incident, Rutherford announced to everyone at the morning meeting that he had met with Joseph last night and received information on a number of gambling houses in the city. He made a big deal out of the meeting hoping to squelch any suspicion of wrongdoing. What seemed strange to the police officers was that everyone already knew about those gambling houses.

In August of 1975, Sgt. Kontyko made his report open to the public. Rutherford was furious.



Former Police Chief and present Mayor James Rutherford

"I have never seen nor heard of any brown bag," he declared to the press.

Rutherford then challenged Kontyko to take a lie detector test.

"If he'll take one, so will I," Rutherford promised.

Kontyko took it and passed with "flying colors." Rutherford was in a sticky position. He still said he would take the test.

Meanwhile, an investigation by the prosecutor's office could not provide any solid evidence to back up Kontyko's charges. The other three officers with Kontyko on the night in question said that they did not see any brown bag.

A number of police officers, though, have told the *Voice* that one of those officers confided in them that he did, indeed, see the brown bag but was frightened about losing his job. He claimed to have been threatened by acting police chief Herb Adams (a business associate of Rutherford's) when the story became public.

Rutherford found his "out" with the prosecutor's investigation. Claiming the prosecutor had "cleared him," he said there was no longer any need to take the lie detector test.

There is some speculation, though, that Rutherford may have taken the test, flunked it, and withheld the information from the public.

The president of the Flint League of Women Voters had called Rutherford's campaign headquarters one day to talk with him. Instead, she was told that Rutherford had "gone to take a polygraph." No one ever could substantiate what seemed to be a flippant—yet extremely damaging—remark.

The major question for the past four years has been: If there was a brown paper bag, what was in it? Some recent information supplied to the *Voice* may provide the answer.

After Joseph concluded his meeting with Rutherford on that particular evening, he met with Flint Sgt. William Pribble, a member of the vice squad. He apologized to Pribble for being late, saying that he had just come from a meeting with Rutherford. He told Pribble that he had just given Rutherford a \$30,000 gift. He bragged about his control of the police department and told Pribble he could do "the same for you."

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Pribble later turned this information over to city manager Daniel Bogan, police ombudsman Joe Dupcza and Richard Dicks. Bogan, Dupcza and Dicks have all confirmed Pribble's story to the *Voice*. They said that Pribble also went to the F.B.I. and the U.S. Attorney. Pribble volunteered to take a lie detector test and offered to testify in court, if necessary.

Nothing ever came of any investigation. All of the news media in town were given the story but none of them did anything with it.

Joseph died in 1974. Pribble retired the same year (he had been listed as missing for almost seven months before he retired). Rutherford was elected Mayor by 169 votes the following year.

Kontyko, who had long been a critic of how organized crime was allowed to flourish in Flint, was transferred to the patrol division. His fight to stop corruption in the police department failed to make much headway. Commented Rutherford protege and assistant police chief Louis Szabo: "Kontyko's just got this hang-up on organized crime."

That "hang-up" led to an incident that would haunt Rutherford for years to come. It is now November of 1979 and Rutherford is once again making another round of campaign promises.

Perhaps there wasn't \$30,000 in that brown paper bag.

Perhaps nobody but Kontyko did see the bag.

Perhaps there was no bag at all. So why hasn't Mayor Rutherford taken that lie detector test?

A lot of people are asking that question this week.