

# There Are Fissures of the Heart That Never Mend



**The Harold A. Wildstein, ex-Staten Island ferry/ex-Rikers Island floating dorm, moored to a New Jersey salvage dock prior to dismantling.** (Photo by Don Southerland from Shipspotting.com)

APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2018 -- Yesterday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, was the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of only the second time in the 33-year NYCD career of Harold A. Wildstein that he didn't show up for work as a counselor to Rikers inmates.

April 4th, 1990, like yesterday, was a wet and chilly Wednesday. It was a raw un-Spring-like day for the early morning walk that he had previously taken quite literally thousands of times from his and his wife's apartment on Sedgwick Avenue, near the Jerome Park Reservoir, to the elevated train station at 231<sup>st</sup> St. and Broadway in the Bronx Kingsbridge section.

Perhaps because of the chill wind and rain, the 62-year-old civilian staffer was shielding himself beneath (and partially behind) an open umbrella or newspaper as he hurried along Albany Crescent a few minutes past 5 a.m. Thus, he may not have immediately noticed the assailant approach him.

# **Rikers I. Worker Is Shot to Death During Robbery**

## **Bronx Man Counseled Inmates for 33 Years**

By JAMES C. MCKINLEY Jr.

A counselor who co-workers said had helped thousands of Rikers Island inmates in his 33-year career was shot to death early yesterday during a robbery on his way to work, the police said.

The counselor, Harold Wildstein, 62 years old, was attacked just after 5 A.M. as he walked along Albany Crescent in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx on his way to a subway station at 231st Street and Broadway, the police said. The robber shot Mr. Wildstein once behind the left ear and made off with less than \$50 in cash, they said. Another \$12 was found scattered around his body, which was found face down on the sidewalk.

Mr. Wildstein was taken to Jacobi Hospital, where he died at 1:41 P.M., hospital officials said.

Investigators said last night that they had no suspects or witnesses.

Mr. Wildstein, a civilian employee of the Department of Correction, did not carry a gun. When he was killed, he was on his way to the Correctional Facility for Men on Rikers Island, where he supervised a staff of 11 counselors who listen to the problems of the 2,000 inmates housed there.

Since joining the Department of Correction in 1956, Mr. Wildstein worked to rehabilitate inmates, and never expressed cynicism about his job, his co-workers said. He always arrived at the prison at 6:30 A.M. and worked until 5 P.M. In 33 years, he had missed only one day of work, his supervisor, Carol James Richardson, said.

"Harold truly believed in re-socializing these people," Ms. Richardson said. "He believed that everyone has the propensity for change."

Mr. Wildstein also taught sociology at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan, said Gladys Marcus, a dean at the institute.

He lived with his wife, Ernestine, on Sedgwick Avenue near the Jerome Avenue reservoir. They had no children.

Ms. Richardson, his supervisor, said: "If you would expect something this heinous to happen to people, you wouldn't expect it to happen to Harry Wildstein. He was such a humble, pleasant individual. If he was going to be mugged, he wouldn't resist."

Police deduced from evidence at the scene (no witnesses were found) that Wildstein was the victim of a badly executed robbery. He was found mortally wounded, lying face down, shot behind the left ear, with \$12 in loose bills scattered around him. If the perpetrator netted anything from the crime, police estimated the "take" likely amounted to less than \$50. The social services professional died fewer than nine hours later. Jacobi Hospital doctors declared him dead at 1:41 p.m.

*The New York Times* next day account, at the top of Page 3, reported "co-workers said he had helped thousands of Rikers Island inmates" during his Correctional career spanning more than three decades.

At the Rikers jail for adult males serving misdemeanor sentences, then called the Correctional Institution for Men but now the Eric M. Taylor Center, "he supervised a staff of 11 counselors who listen to the problems of the 2,000 inmates housed there," according to the *NYT* report.

His colleagues were described as saying Wildstein, who joined NYCD in 1956, really "worked to rehabilitate inmates, and never expressed cynicism about his job." Co-workers cited how he "always arrived at 6:30 A.M. and worked until 5 P.M."

Wildstein's own supervisor, Carol James Richardson, said: "In 33 years, he had missed only one day of work. Harold truly believed in re-socializing these people, that everyone has the propensity for change." She added:

"If you would expect something this heinous to happen to people, you wouldn't expect it to happen to Harry Wildstein. He was such a humble, pleasant individual. If he was going to be mugged, he wouldn't resist."

Well regarded in his profession as a sociologist,

Wildstein taught the subject at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan. In 1967 as then NYCD Asst. Director of Rehabilitation on Rikers Island, his “unremitting efforts” helping federal Labor Department project researchers conduct a special study drew warm acknowledgment in their final report, “*Restoration of Youth Through Training.*” In its monthly publication, the American Sociological Association reprinted the *NYT* story of Wildstein’s murder.

After the built-for-NYCD barge jail opened moored to the Bronx mainland across from Rikers in the fall of 1992, it was given a name one taken from an ex-Staten Island ferry – *The Vernon C. Bain* -- moored on the island as auxiliary housing. Subsequently, the temporarily nameless ex-ferry was given a new appellation, *The Harold A. Wildstein*, in honor of the slain rehabilitation counselor to Rikers Island inmates.

His name on a ferry as a memorial was fitting, given that when Wildstein began his 33+ years career with NYCD in 1956, he would have taken ferries from the 134<sup>th</sup> Street slip on the Bronx mainland to get to work on the island. Later, after the bridge from Queens opened in 1966 and the Rikers ferry slip was eventually deactivated, his workday commute to the job would take an hour and a half by shoe leather and public transit: at least two trains and a bus.

Talk about dedication, perseverance and endurance! Ironically, it took a robber’s bullet to end Harold A. Wildstein’s faithful pursuit of service to the rehabilitation of convicted criminals.

As jail population eased in the early 2000s, the ex-ferries' use as reserve dorms declined. Then they were used for DOC offices, inmate programs, and services. When NYDC began shutting down a number of its regular jails, on and off Rikers, the time had come for the agency to bid farewell to the former ferries and for NYC to put them up for bid.

*The Wildstein* was purchased by a Bayonne company for scrap, brought to the waters of the Kill Van Kull separating Staten Island from New Jersey, and placed alongside a pier about July 2003. The vessel was partially disassembled but sunk into the waters at the foot of 2d Street in Bayonne before salvage was completed.

The Correction History webmaster researched on-line to track down the family of Wildstein’s widow, Ernestine, to invite her in-put for this memorial web page but, through a relative, she respectfully declined. “It’s still too painful,” he said for her.

No. Time doesn’t heal all wounds. There are fissures of the heart that never mend, no matter how many years.

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For more about Rikers’ ex-Staten Island ferries/ex-floating dorms, visit <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/museum/gallery/ferries/scrapkeane.html>

To <http://www.correctionhistory.org> home page