

August 1990. I stood next to my attorney, confident silver-haired Chuck Thompson, before a judge in Opportunity Justice Court. It felt like I was having an out-of-body experience.

The City of Opportunity, Nevada, is a small town in the northwest area of the Las Vegas Valley, just on the other side of Lone Mountain. With its own city government and police department, this stand-alone community operated under a city charter providing attractive business opportunities that the City of Las Vegas no longer offered.

“People of the State of Nevada versus Ron Coury, Arthur Coury, Robert Alber, and Arthur Charles. Criminal case numbers 90FH0010 A, B, C & D. The Honorable Judge Arnold Stabinski presiding.”

All sights and sounds were surreal, the whole scene like something out of a bad dream. How could four innocent men be standing here accused? And yet, there we were.

“Defendant Ron Coury is charged with: Count One, second degree kidnapping, a felony. Count Two, false imprisonment, a gross misdemeanor. Count Three, coercion, a felony. Count Four, extortion with the use of a deadly weapon, a felony. Count Five, extortion to collect a debt with the use of a deadly weapon, a felony. Count Six, coercion with the use of a deadly weapon, a felony.”

As the court clerk droned on, my eyes drifted to Deputy District

Attorney Bryn Baird, her placid features giving no hint of her goal to put me and the managers of my three bars in prison for more than 50 years.

“Mr. Coury, how do you plead?”

For a moment, I didn't realize the judge was speaking to me. A surge of adrenaline snapped me out of the fog. “Not guilty, Your Honor.” My voice was unwavering. I hoped the judge took note, perhaps seeing it as evidence of my innocence.

Next up was “Defendant Robert Alber,” charged with five counts, the same as mine except for coercion with the use of a deadly weapon. My general manager Bob Alber, who oversaw operations at all three of my bar/restaurant locations, stood tall, befitting a fellow former Marine with nothing to hide. With his attorney, Don Green, by his side and providing directions as needed, Bob stood when his name was announced. “Not guilty, Your Honor,” Bob declared, without waiting to be asked how he was pleading.

Then it was on to my brother Artie, eight years my junior and the location manager of Winners Lounge and Restaurant. He'd done it all at my other bars, working as a cook, bartender, server, and bouncer, diligently rising through the ranks before earning his position as manager. And now this.

Charged with three counts, Artie answered, “Not guilty,” then calmly sat back down beside noted criminal-defense attorney Richard “Rick” Wright.

My cousin, Art Charles, patiently waited his turn with his attorney, Steve Stein beside him. A big man of about 280 pounds and strong as an ox, Art had been a Las Vegan ever since his parents, my Uncle Joe and Aunt Margie, along with his younger brother Doug, moved out from Brooklyn back in the 1950s. Art was head chef and kitchen manager at Winners, a job I'm sure he never thought in a million years

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could put him in danger of spending the rest of his life behind bars.

“Not guilty!” Arthur thundered, in a deep resonant voice befitting a man his size, to the three counts with which he was charged.

How did it come to this? How did four businessmen working hard to take care of their families and contribute something to the community end up pleading innocence when we were the ones who should have been pressing charges? The answer was a paradox. It was simple, yet much more complex than you might ever imagine.