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PIERCE COUNTY

## Defendant admits conspiracy in perjury-twisted murder case

TACOMA (AP) A defendant in a convoluted Pierce County murder case has admitted there was a conspiracy to protect his brother, who initially admitted killing a Virginia teen during a 1997 road-rage incident.

Campbell Alefaio was acquitted in his 1998 trial after testifying that his confession was a lie to protect a friend.

He and five other men blamed this other man for firing the shot that killed Ann Marie Harris, 17, of Mount Vernon, Va., who was visiting a friend at Fort Lewis.

All six were later charged with perjury and conspiracy to commit perjury. Campbell Alefaio and three others were convicted last year. A fifth defendant made a plea deal and testified against them.

The sixth man Campbell Alefaio's brother, Puni Alefaio, now 32 was acquitted.

On Friday, Puni Alefaio pleaded guilty to a gross misdemeanor charge of obstructing a law enforcement officer during the investigation of Harris' death.

Puni Alefaio's statement stopped short of saying he was personally involved in the conspiracy to save his brother from a murder conviction, and that he was the mastermind behind it, as prosecutors tried to prove at the perjury trial.

But Deputy Prosecutors John Neeb and Lisa Wagner, who have been trying to unravel the tangle of lies in the case for five years, called his admission a breakthrough.

Puni Alefaio was sentenced to a year in jail, with credit for 45 days already served and the remaining 320 days suspended. He also was ordered to pay about \$1,900 in court costs.

Harris was killed March 29, 1997, after the driver of the car she was riding in brake-checked the one carrying Campbell Alefaio and

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friends. Campbell Alefaio initially confessed to firing the random shot that killed Harris, but just before his trial, he and the other men in the car changed their stories.

They said another man, Kenneth Tuialuuluu, had killed Harris and that Campbell Alefaio had confessed only to protect Tuialuuluu, a friend of his. All the men stuck to that story, leading to Campbell Alefaio's acquittal in 1998 then all were charged with perjury and conspiracy to commit perjury three years later.

At sentencing Friday, Puni Alefaio's attorney, Bryan Hershman, did his best to put Alefaio in a positive light. His client had nothing to do with Harris' death, Hershman said, but "his remorse has been plentiful and consistent. He is a God-fearing man and he prays for her consistently, even today."

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