



A Matter Of Conscience: Redemption of a hometown hero, Bobby Hoppe

Dennie B. Burke

Sherry Lee Hoppe

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Few things are more American than Friday night high school football. For the star of a winning team, the world is, indeed, an oyster. So it was for the late Bobby Hoppe, Chattanooga Central High's "living legend." Hoppe's hard work, determination, and raw talent earned him the respect of his peers, and the adoration of the lower-middle-class community that needed a hero. It also propelled him to a spot on the Auburn Tigers college football team.

In the early morning of July 20, 1957, home for the summer break, the Auburn star had just enjoyed a date with his girlfriend. As he drove home something went terribly wrong; Hoppe shot and killed Don Hudson, his sister's ex-boyfriend, a disreputable whiskey runner who just four days earlier had been released from jail. Convinced his act was in self-defense, Hoppe nonetheless fled back to Auburn, where he would lead that season's team to the 1957 national championship. But Hoppe's conscience would haunt him for most of his life.

A Matter of Conscience is more than the story of what happened that night, and what became of Bobby Hoppe. It is also more than the recounting of the highly-publicized trial conducted thirty-one years after the alleged murder. It is a love story of keen insight, unsentimental compassion, and a deep love, written by Sherry, who always believed the best about her husband, and stayed by his side even when he was "engulfed in darkness."

Dr. Sherry Lee Hoppe is president emeritus of Austin Peay State University, and the author of a biography of a civil rights leader. Dennie B. Burke was executive director of Public Relations at Austin Peay State University, and the editor and primary writer for the university's award-winning alumni magazine. Relying on trial transcripts, newspaper clippings, and interviews with witnesses, family and friends, Hoppe and Burke provide a compelling account of what happened to the hometown hero.

In the epilogue the authors write, "*Between the radiant white of a clear conscience and the coal black of a conscience sullied by sin lie many shades of gray—where most of us live our lives.*" *A Matter of Conscience* is a book for fans of memoir and courtroom drama, as well as for those who love to read about true life in all its shades of gray.

JULIE MCGUIRE (November 19, 2010)

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