

## JUSTICE DENIED: The Tragic Murder of Actress Dominique Dunne.

In 1982, Dominique Dunne was a young actress best known for her role in the movie *Poltergeist*. Her promising career was on the rise and her boyfriend was equally ambitious. Dominique had just ended her two year relationship with John Thomas Sweeney. Sweeney was an up-and-coming Chef in Los Angeles, who worked at *Ma Maison* and had even spent time working as Chef Wolfgang Puck's chief assistant. In the beginning of their relationship, Dominique was thrilled by the things they had in common and their strong attraction to one another, but eventually Sweeney grew jealous and possessive. He panicked when Dominique had to do love scenes with male actors and began to show up on the set where she was working. Sweeney tried to assert more and more control over Dominique's life and if she resisted, his fear of rejection would turn into anger. They often had long, bitter arguments and at the height of a quarrel he grabbed her by her hair so violently that handfuls of hair came out by the roots. She ran out of the house and went to her mother's. Sweeney followed her and proceeded to bang on all of the doors and windows. A few days later, Dominique relented and went back to live with him.

It wasn't long before they were fighting again, and this time Sweeney grabbed Dominique by the neck, threw her to the floor and began to strangle her. Thankfully, a friend sleeping in a nearby room heard Dominique's loud, gagging noises and stopped him from killing her. Dominique managed to slip out of the bathroom window, and when Sweeney heard her car start up, he ran out of the house and flung himself in front of the car. She stopped long enough to let him jump off the hood and then raced away.

Dominique knew he was dangerous and out of control. She hid at a friend's house, eventually speaking with Sweeney on the phone. She was able to persuade him to move out of their house, and when he did, she had the locks changed and moved back in.

One evening, while Dominique was rehearsing her lines with actor David Packer, Sweeney showed up at her front door. Leaving the chain fastened, she cracked the door and spoke with him. She told Packer she was going to speak with Sweeney on the porch and went outside.

Packer could hear loud, angry voices followed by smacking sounds and a thud. He called the police, who told him that it was out of their jurisdiction. Packer quickly phoned a friend and told him that if he was found dead, the killer was John Sweeney. He then went outside and approached the driveway,

where he could see Sweeney crouching down by the bushes. “Call the police,” Sweeney said. “I killed my girlfriend and I tried to kill myself.” When he was arrested, he was calm and collected. Investigators found no evidence of Sweeney’s reported attempt to take his own life, but he had choked Dominique into unconsciousness. She remained on life support at the hospital for four days before dying at the age of 22.

During the trial, the Prosecutor fought hard to have Sweeney’s violent past admitted into evidence. Sweeney had lived with a woman from 1977 to 1980, who testified that he had beaten her on ten separate occasions, once putting her in the hospital with a perforated eardrum and collapsed lung; another time he broke her nose. But, the Judge ruled her testimony inadmissible and prejudicial. Unaware of Sweeney’s violence history, the jury convicted him of voluntary manslaughter, which carried a maximum sentence of six years in prison. Sweeney ended up serving less than four years in a medium-security prison, and when he was released he went right back to a high-paying job at a trendy restaurant in Santa Monica.

To learn more about the Dominique Dunne case, please visit <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20086105,00.html>