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## 'Dirty DUIs' figure gets 8-year sentence

Justin Berton

Updated 11:15 p.m., Tuesday, September 25, 2012

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Mary Nolan leaves the federal courthouse with attorney Richard Guadagni in Oakland, Calif. on Tuesday, Sept. 25, 2012 after pleading not guilty to six charges of wire-tapping and tax invasion. Nolan, a San Ramon divorce attorney, has been linked to the "dirty DUI" scandal involving former private investigator Christopher Butler. Photo: Paul Chinn, The Chronicle / SF



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[Christopher Butler](#), the private investigator at the center of a sensational scandal that involved "dirty DUIs" and drugs stolen from police evidence lockers, once longed for fame, money and a starring role in his own television reality show.

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Instead, he got eight years in federal prison.

On Tuesday in Oakland, U.S. District Judge [Saundra Brown Armstrong](#) sentenced Butler, 51, after the disgraced former police officer admitted his role in a stunning array of dirty deeds that included seven felony counts related to dealing drugs, framing men for drunken-driving arrests, and opening a brothel in Pleasant Hill that masqueraded as a massage parlor.

Butler told prosecutors his co-defendant, [Norman Wielsch](#), 51, the former commander of a state antidrug task force, protected the house of prostitution and profited from it.

Wielsch has pleaded not guilty to those charges as well as stealing drugs from an evidence locker - which prosecutors said he gave to Butler to sell - and is scheduled to go on trial in January.

But of the two men, it was Butler, a former Antioch police officer with 10 years of service, who was driven to the criminal side in search of celebrity, his attorney said.

Butler had landed a Lifetime reality show in 2010 titled "P.I. Moms of San Francisco" that followed his crew of female detectives as they tracked down cheating husbands and secretly videotaped their missteps. To keep up with the demands of the fledgling show, and the costs of running his agency, Butler fell prey to one of man's oldest enemies: an insatiable ego.

"It overpowered his judgment to walk away from decisions that were destructive," said his attorney, [William Gagen](#).

Butler turned to selling drugs provided to him by Wielsch, prosecutors said.

### **Wearing a wire**

But the plan soon unraveled after one of Butler's most trusted employees agreed to wear a wire and videotape Butler and Wielsch negotiating the sale of a pound of methamphetamine. After their arrests in February 2011, details of Butler's tangled web of criminal activity in Contra Costa County unfolded, leading to the federal indictments that also roped in two Richmond police officers and a deputy sheriff.

Inside the courtroom, Butler looked nothing like the once well-coiffed man with a mane of white hair. Instead, his head was shaved to stubble and he wore oversize tan prison garb with slip-on shoes.

Instead of talking in the confident tones that once seduced reporters into writing about his team of mommy investigators, he choked with emotion during a brief statement.

"I want to apologize to the community for the anxiety, fear and suffering I have caused others," he said.

To the law enforcement community he was once part of, he apologized for his betrayal and the embarrassment he caused. He broke into tears at the mention of his family and appeared to cut his comments short.

For three victims who were ensnared in Butler's "dirty DUI" traps, the mea culpa was appreciated but not accepted.

"It couldn't have happened to a nicer scumbag," said attorney [Brian Gearinger](#), who represents three men who are suing Butler in federal civil court.

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Team flag is flying in Santa Clara. Check out the construction progress. [Photos](#)



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All three men allege that Butler orchestrated their drunken-driving arrests after their ex-wives hired the investigator.

### Possible witness

As a condition of his plea agreement in May, Butler can now be called as a witness in three federal criminal cases he's connected to.

His attorney said Butler, if needed, would testify against Wielsch, former Contra Costa Deputy Sheriff [Stephen Tanabe](#), and San Ramon divorce attorney [Mary Nolan](#).

Earlier in the day Nolan, 60, pleaded not guilty to a charge that she hired Butler to plant listening devices in the [cars](#) of her clients' ex-husbands. Tanabe, 49, who has pleaded not guilty to charges he conspired with Butler to set up drunken-driving arrests, will ask the judge to dismiss his case next month.

Gagen said before Butler entered federal prison in May after pleading guilty, he'd already started on a life-altering path of self-reflection and humility.

Butler had completed courses in theology and philosophy at Holy Names [University](#) and received a 4.0 grade-point average, Gagen said.

The attorney said Butler now spends his days at the federal prison in Dublin reading books and reflecting on his actions. If Butler testifies against his co-defendants, and it leads to convictions, prosecutors can ask for a reduction in Butler's sentence.

"When Chris Butler gets out of prison - whenever that may be - he'll be a different person," Gagen said.

*Justin Berton is a [San Francisco Chronicle](#) staff writer. E-mail: [jberton@sfgate.com](mailto:jberton@sfgate.com). Twitter: [@justinberton](#)*



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