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He's living a sexual nightmare: Says alleged oral-sex assailant is still a cop

May 04, 2012 | By Dana DiFilippo, Daily News Staff Writer

JAMES HARRIS is a man tormented.

He dreams often of suffocating, choking as he wakes, unable to catch his breath. He keeps a knife tucked into his waistband almost always, a desperate defense against horrors he can easily imagine because he says he has lived them. He hesitates to get into anyone's car, unwilling to surrender control to the person behind the wheel. He has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and paranoia.

Although five years have passed since the incident that changed his life, his torment doesn't end because his tormentor is still out there.

In uniform.

Although Philadelphia Police Officer Michael Paige was arrested and fired in 2007 for allegedly forcing Harris to perform oral sex on him in his police cruiser in Fairmount Park, Paige is back on the force, patrolling the streets of West Philadelphia. Paige dodged conviction, despite DNA evidence proving that a sexual encounter had occurred, because the judge accused Harris of playing the victim after consensual sex.

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Harris remains haunted by his past. But he hopes he'll begin to see relief next week. After filing a federal civil-rights lawsuit against Paige and the city in 2008, his case goes to trial Monday.

"I just want somebody to just simply say this disease did what he did," said Harris, 34, of North Philadelphia. "If I were a young white girl, he would have been hammered, nailed to the cross. Because I'm a young black male and he's a cop, they believed him."

Brian Puricelli, the attorney representing Paige, declined to comment Wednesday, saying he didn't want to try his case in the press. Paige, 45, a National Guard drill sergeant who was reached Wednesday while on military leave from the Police Department, defended his actions that night as "explainable" but also declined to comment specifically, saying: "I believe you would better learn [the details] by coming to the

trial.”

The saga started in the early hours of March 16, 2007, when Harris went with a friend to the Belmont Plateau, where they parked to smoke marijuana and hang out after a late-season snowstorm.

About 2 a.m., Paige pulled up in his marked police cruiser.

Things immediately got weird, Harris said.

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