

UNDISCLOSED, the State v. Chester Hollman III
Episode 2 - This Story Is A Lie
February 12, 2018

[0:24] Colin Miller: In “Mistaken Identity,” a 1990 episode of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, Philip and Vivian take a helicopter to a vacation in Palm Springs, leaving Will and Carlton to drive the family Mercedes down to the resort town. After officers pull them over for what Will describes as DWB or “driving while black,” they accuse them of a rash of car thefts in the area. After being unable to get their parents to corroborate their story, Will and Carlton are thrown in jail, prompting Will to concoct one of his famous schemes: he’ll confess to the carjackings on the condition that the confession is filmed, with the hope that Philip and Vivian will see the broadcast and intervene:

***News Reporter:** The ringleader agreed to confess only if a camera crew were present to broadcast live (laughter). Would you’re about to see is a Minuteman 21 news exclusive.*

***Will Smith:** Yeah, we done it (laughter). Word to Big Bird, we flicked 8 Benzitos, 15 Jags, and a Maserati! But I aint like the upholstery so I took it back, Jack (laughter)!*

Of course, the gambit works, and Will and Carlton are freed, a result you’re much likelier to see in Tinseltown, instead of the West Philadelphia streets where Will Smith was born and raised. On those streets, a false confession will lead to a life sentence, not a laugh track, and it’s one that later backtracking is unlikely to undo.

[2:00] Rabia Chaudry: On Monday, August 19, 1991, 21 year old Chester Hollman III spent much of his day in Delaware, visiting his parents and girlfriend before heading back in the evening to Philadelphia, where he shared an apartment with a roommate. For the previous two years, he worked as an guard for Brooks Armored Car Service, driving around most days with millions of dollars, and picking up and dropping off huge packages of cold, hard cash from vaults and money rooms in businesses across Philadelphia.

On any other Monday, he would have been at work, but this Monday was his first day of vacation from work, and in fact his first vacation ever. That morning, he had deposited his paycheck and an extra check of \$500 that he’d borrowed from his employer, thinking that he might need a little extra cash to enjoy his week off.

Chester was excited to start his vacation, but after a day of visiting family in the suburbs and doing some shopping, he was just a little bored. So he made some phone calls from his parent's house between 10:45 pm and 11:20 pm, and then figured Philadelphia would probably have more going on, so he headed out about ten minutes later, at 11:30, after saying his goodbyes to his parents and sister.

Once on the road, he stopped in the city of Chester, to the southwest of Philadelphia, to get a burger, fill up the gas tank, and grab a fruit punch Gatorade. He ate and drank as he drove, and after finishing, he stuffed the balled up burger wrapper back in the bag along with the receipt, and tossed it out of sight somewhere in the car.

By the time he got back to Philadelphia it was around 12:15 am. There, he saw Deirdre Jones, a young woman who lived in the same building as him, walking along the road with her sister, Tiffany. He pulled over, calling out to them, but they ignored him at first because they didn't recognize the car.

He had a nice ride for that day -- a white Chevy blazer. But it wasn't his blazer actually, it was his roommate's, who had said he could borrow it while he was out of town. He could have taken his own car, but why put extra mileage on it? Besides, his 1984 Toyota Celica wasn't nearly as impressive as the gleaming new truck.

After the girls realized it was Chester waving at them from the big white Blazer, he parked behind their building, and went around to the front of the apartments where Deirdre and Tiffany were now chatting with a couple of guys. Chester hung out and chatted with them for a few minutes, and then he headed inside. And as he swiped his keycard, he realized Deirdre had snuck up behind him, saying that she wanted to hang out. So he suggested going for a ride in the city and she agreed, but first they had to pop into his apartment so he could drop off his overnight bag.

Chester was in the bedroom when he heard Deirdre shout from his living room to someone below. It was Carol McCoy, who lived two floors below him, and she was shouting right back up from her own window. They decided to give Carol a quick visit before going for their ride.

Back down in the parking lot, Chester asked Deirdre if she wanted to drive the Blazer, but she said no, she didn't actually know how to drive. So Chester got in the driver's seat, and suggested that they go visit a friend in Southwest, thinking he should definitely be home that late at night. It was close to 1am.

Chester and Deirdre lived in an apartment building on Broad Street in Philadelphia, a main thoroughfare that runs north to south through the city, and they needed to head southwest to get to his friend's place. So they took a right onto Broad Street, southbound, all the way down to Lombard Street, a little over 2 miles away. There, they hung a left and went about five blocks before a couple of police cars pulled up behind them, with their lights flashing.

Chester immediately pulled to the side with two cop cars surrounding him. He knew things were serious, and that this was no routine traffic stop, when two Philadelphia police officers approached the car holding guns aimed right at him.

[5:42] Rabia Chaudry: Hi and welcome to Undisclosed, the State v/ Chester Hollman. My name is Rabia Chaudry, I'm an attorney and author, and I'm here with my colleagues, Susan Simpson and Colin Miller.

Colin Miller: Hi, this is Colin Miller. I'm an Associate Dean and Professor at The University of South Carolina School of Law, and I blog at EvidenceProfBlog.

Susan Simpson: Hi, I'm Susan Simpson. I'm an attorney in Washington D.C., and I blog at TheViewFromLL2.

[8:04] Chester Hollman:

My name is Chester Hollman, the Third, I'm 47 years old. I was arrested on August 19th, 1991. I've been incarcerated now, going onto my 27th year.

[8:18] Susan Simpson: Chester had no way of knowing the night he was pulled over, that he would never see freedom again. He was, in fact, fairly confident that this was just all a mistake. It had to be. Whatever it was the police thought he did though, he knew he hadn't done anything wrong. Other than one minor altercation in a bar, the result of alcohol-induced poor decision making, he had a clean record. And some years of college under his belt already, he had a good job, money in the bank. Besides, he could pretty much account for his day and that evening on August 19th. So whatever it was they thought he'd done, they were wrong.

He and Deirdre got out of the car and answered the questions being shot at them: where were they coming from, where they going? Chester's heart was pounding, he

was terrified. It's not that he hadn't ever been around a gun before; in fact, he'd had a gun issued to him by his work. But having loaded weapons pointed at him, pointed right at you, that's a different thing altogether.

And then Chester heard a police dispatcher say that the suspects were wanted back at the scene of the crime. He had no idea what crime scene they were talking about. The officers finished up searching his car, where they found his Brooks Armored Car Service work ID, and they also found a hunting knife, and a baseball bat, although those weren't his, they were his roommate's.

Chester and Deirdre were cuffed, put in separate cars and then taken, along with the white Blazer, down to the corner of Chestnut and 22nd street, where Tae Jung Ho had been shot and killed less than ten minutes earlier.

[9:50] Chester Hollman:

We got there, and we pulled up, it's like maybe 2 or 3 police cars, I think it was. Some, uh, maybe 4 or 5 witnesses out under a street light. So Deidre, the car Deidre was in, she was ahead of me in the van, and the Blazer was ahead of them. So they came back to me, the officer opened up the car, and the witnesses looked in. And there was only one witness that looked in, and that was the black guy, as I found out later was Andre Dawkins. He looked in and he said "I'm not sure if that's the guy." He said "Where's the other guy? I know what the other guy looks like." So I made sure I stuck my head out again, to make sure everybody could see me, he said "That's not him." So they closed the door, and they went and did the same thing with Deirdre, and I watched everybody go up and look at the Blazer.

[Operator] This is a call from Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution - Retreat. This call is subject to recording and monitoring.

[10:39] Rabia Chaudry: The phone system at the prison, by the way, is set up so that this annoying message interrupts your conversation every 5 minutes, as if anyone would forget who they're talking to. Anyway, back to Chester.

[10:48] Chester Hollman:

And from there we went to, I don't know what precinct it was, but they took us to a district. We got to the district, well I did. I got to the district, they put me in a cell. By the time I got in the cell I heard they said that the guy had died.

[11:03] Colin Miller: So Chester sat, cuffed to a chair that was bolted to the floor, waiting for something to happen, someone to come talk to him. And someone did. A detective, who walked in about twenty minutes later with a notepad in his hand. He leaned over Chester and asked him a single question. "Oh you like killing people huh", punched him in the mouth, and then walked away.

Ten minutes later, the same detective came back into the room and started questioning Chester as if nothing had happened before, as if he hadn't just punched a handcuffed man in the face.

When the interrogation began, Chester did what most 21 year olds would do - he asked for his parents. He was told the phone was tied up at the moment though. So Chester began answering general questions, every so often stopping to request a phone call. But over the next couple of hours, the rotating slew of officers and detectives who came in and out of the room all told him the same thing - the phones weren't available. For hours and hours, not a single phone was available for him to make a call.

At one point, Chester's heart lifted because two familiar faces came into the room - the heads of security at Brooks, both of the men being ex-state troopers. He was friendly with them and thought this was a good sign, but when they had a seat with him, they grilled him in the same way.

Was his service revolver involved in the crime, they asked. Chester of course responded that he hadn't done anything, he wasn't involved in any crime. He tried to convince the two men that the police had it all wrong, but his heart broke when one of the men told him it was just better for him to cooperate because he was in serious trouble.

Chester was stunned, and as they left he asked if they would contact his parents for him. They said they would, but they never did.

Instead Chester was interrogated for nearly seven hours, at least that's how long he thinks it was, and during that time never spoke to his parents, or a lawyer. It wasn't until around 9 or 10am the next day that he finally spoke to his mother, who had already heard about his arrest on the news, and who assured him they were working to get him an attorney as soon as possible.

But in the meantime, the police already had a nine page record of questioning Chester.

According to the police report, the interrogation began at 4am, and was conducted by Detective Jeff Piree.

[13:14] Rabia Chaudry: A 1970 article in the NY Times titled “The War of the Cops” chronicled the violence against Philadelphia police officers by black militants, in an in-depth long form piece that explored “the long-standing bitterness of the urban ghetto toward the men in blue”.

At the time, 24 year old officer Jeff Piree, who spent most of his time patrolling West Philly, was profiled in the piece. Piree, you see, had ulcers at his tender age, thanks to both his job and his personality:

The article noted, “He looks for trouble and he loves to find it. He chases people down dark alleys. He will frisk a man on the street if he sees him flinch at the sight of the patrol car or notices him walking stiff-armed, as if he might be concealing a sawed off shotgun under his jacket. He has had guns pointed at him half a dozen times. This year, he had an arm slashed while fighting a knife-wielding junkie. Last year, he wrestled a man with a gun and ended the match by forcing his opponent to shoot himself in the chest. “I’m gung-ho,” he admits. “I love being on the highway patrol. I deplore violence, but if we have to have it, then I want some of it.”

Piree certainly did want some of it the night Chester Hollman was detained; he was the one who had begun the night by punching Chester in the mouth.

[14:26] Susan Simpson: Chester’s interrogation, at least as it reads on paper, started with questions about who Chester was with when he was pulled over that night.

“Deirdre,” he responds.

“Well, ok, but who were you both with before the cops stopped you?” He was asked.

“Nobody,” Chester tells them.

He is asked who was driving, and of course he was, and he’s asked if anyone else had been driving before him. Remember, most of the eyewitnesses to the crime had seen a young black woman driving the white Chevy Blazer, and they’d seen two men involved. Piree was trying to figure out where the other perps were.

Chester's asked if he ever was in the rear of the car, or entered from the rear door. "No," he said

And then, they asked about the car itself, the white 4-door S10 Chevy Blazer. Chester says it's not his. It's his roommate's. It's Shawn Boyce's, who had lent it to him that morning, although actually it's not even his roommate's car. It's a rental from Alamo, and Boyce, ironically, used to work at the Budget car rental place until getting fired. But he had the Chevy and a second car, a Cadillac, from Alamo and had taken the other car on a trip to NY earlier the previous day, leaving the truck with Chester.

Boyce had been dating a girl named Sharon who was working at Alamo, and Chester thought, but wasn't entirely sure, that both of the cars were inventory stolen from the rental company.

Piree then moved on to the weapon - did Chester own a gun?

Well, he did, but it wasn't his personal weapon. It was a service revolver, a .38, that he didn't carry with him when he wasn't on duty. That, along with a bullet proof vest, were both back in his apartment.

[16:06] Susan Simpson: And, "What about his clothes?" Piree asked. What had he and Deirdre been wearing before the police stopped him? Did they have any other clothes with them in the vehicle? No, they didn't, and they hadn't changed all night. Detectives' notes show that Chester had on a white t-shirt that said, "He's not heavy, he's my brother" written on it, aqua green sweatpants, a dark baseball cap, white Fila sneakers, and a diamond stud in his left ear. In his pocket he had \$37.

During the interview, Piree noted that Chester's T-shirt had a faint red stain. He asked, "You have what appears to be blood on your right sleeve. Can you explain that stain".

Chester's one word response is written down as "no".

Piree asks again when and how Chester met up with Deirdre, and if anyone else was with them, or if they had picked up any hitchhikers. Chester insisted, no, no, it was just us.

And one of the very last questions Chester is asked is whether they were in the area of Chestnut and 22nd all night.

Once again, Chester says no.

The interview ends there, with a note from Piree:

[17:21] Colin Miller, narrating:

At this time, I showed Chester Hollman three pages of a statement by Deidre Jones, he read the three pages and then stated: "I don't want to say any more. I told that bitch to keep her mouth shut. Shit."

INVESTIGATION INTERVIEW RECORD CONTINUATION SHEET		CITY OF PHILADELPHIA POLICE DEPARTMENT	
NAME <i>Chester "Tyke" Hollman</i>	PAGE <i>8</i>	CASE NO.	
<i>A</i>	<i>I Don't want to say anymore I told that bitch to keep her mouth shut. Shit.</i>		

[19:24] Rabia Chaudry: 20 year old Deirdre Jones sat in another room in the Police Administration Building with Detective David Baker. The record of the interview begins at 2:30 am with Deirdre signing off on her Miranda warnings and then telling the detective quote "in her own words" what had brought her there that night:

[19:38] Detective Baker (narrated by Susan Simpson):

Will you go on in your own words and tell me what happens that brings you here today?

Deirdre Jones (narrated by Colin Miller):

Well, we were driving, me and Chester, me and Chester was driving down, I don't know the name of the street, and we was pulled over by the police and they told us to get out of the car and they asked me where was the gun, I said, "I don't

know what you are talking about,” and then they said, “Where are the people that were with you?” Then, I said, “I don’t know what you are talking about, we are by ourselves,” then they put the handcuffs on me and then they took us to this other block, I don’t know the name of it, and this man came up, he just walked past the car, he didn’t even look in the car, and then he flagged his hand and said, “Yeah, that’s her,” but he really didn’t look in the car.

[20:16] Rabia Chaudry: We don’t have the audio of the interview, though we know it was recorded, and that’s unfortunate because it could really help explain how Deirdre started off her interrogation by stating when she was pulled over she didn’t know why or what was going on, to a totally different story in the very next question:

[20:30] Detective Baker (narrated by Susan Simpson):

Will you start at the beginning and tell me how you got in the vehicle, and what happened from the time you got into the vehicle?

Deirdre Jones (narrated by Colin Miller):

I was home. Chester came past, he had his friends in the car, and he said, “C’mon, let’s go somewhere,” and I said, “Okay, since Tiffany is with her boyfriend, I’ll go because I’m bored.” When I got in, I said, “Where are we going?” and he, Chester, said, “Oh, just anywhere. We are just going riding.” And, I said, “Okay,” Then we drove around a little bit. He was still saying “Where do you wanna go,” and I was like, well, I said, “I really don’t know my way around, and if I say, we’ll get lost.” Then, he said, “Do you wanna drive?” And I said, “no, because I can’t see without my glasses, plus I can’t drive.” Then, we got into Center City, whatever the block was, the girl stopped. Well, I didn’t tell you about that. Chester, when he asked me if I wanted to drive and I said no, he asked the girl that was with us if she wanted to drive, and she said, “Yeah, I’ll drive.” And that’s when we went into Center City, and that’s when they got to the block where we stopped and Chester and the guy started plotting on this guy. They were talking about getting this guy for this stuff, and I was telling them, no, that I wanted to go home. Then this guy in a green shirt said to Chester and the guy, they was getting out of the Jeep, “Yo, don’t mess with him.” They got out and like rushed him anyway. Chester was on the side, the other guy was in the front. Then, I heard a gunshot. The other guy was like blocking the front, so I couldn’t see the shooting. So then they ran back to the front, and I couldn’t see who did the shooting. Then they ran back to the Jeep. Chester jumped in the back window, and the other guy got in the door, and the girl took off. Then we drove. I don’t know where. When we got to wherever we got, the guy and girl got out, and

I told Chester I wanted to go home. Then, we was going around this block, and I thought Chester was taking me home. Then we got stopped by the cops.

[22:11] Rabia Chaudry: Deirdre goes on to describe the other two people in the car - a medium built, brown skinned young man with a dark hoodie and high top sneakers, and a young black woman with shoulder length hair, swirly earrings, a t-shirt and sweatpants. She doesn't know their names though; she tells the police the music was up so high she didn't hear them.

Deirdre states that Chester was driving at first, but then he switched with the other woman and when they got into Center City, the district in which Tae Jung Ho was killed, the man in the hoodie began plotting to "get somebody", to rush someone and rob them. This part of the conversation, apparently, wasn't hindered by the music, and Deirdre protested, saying she didn't want any part of it, and she asked to be taken home.

Deirdre then says they spotted Tae Jung and decided on rushing him, so the girl driving backed up the car from the corner where they were at, presumably Chestnut and 22nd, the guys got out, she heard a shot and saw someone fall. Then, the two men came running back to the car and they drove off, stopping after a few minutes, whereupon the other woman and hooded man got out of the car. She estimated where they got out of the car because she didn't know the exact location, but it was about four minutes before they were pulled over by the police.

[23:17] Susan Simpson: Deirdre's statement matches up pretty well with what the police already knew happened based on reports of witnesses, but there are inconsistencies. Because after Deirdre is reminded by the police about the visit to Chester's apartment, she adds this fact to her statement, but she says that Chester then left the apartment, she then went back outside, and Chester finally returned with friends in his car. She also says he has friends in his car the "second time he picked her up," although a few questions earlier she had said the first time he drove up to her his friends were already in the car.

Later on in her questioning, Deirdre adds a few very important details - like how they stopped at a gas station and she stayed in the car with the other female while the two men got out and wandered around, and then got back in the truck after 15 minutes. They drove around a bit more and then came back to the same gas station again, which is when the men got out once more and attacked the victim.

Deirdre's story has nearly completely changed by this point, but it should sound familiar - a white car at a gas pump that drove off and then came back to the same pump, that's the same story two other witnesses gave to the police - Joseph Caban and Andre Dawkins. Remember them? That's the guy at the telephone booth and the guy who was cleaning up in the parking lot that night.

Deirdre's interview ends with this question: Is everything you told me the truth and did anyone force you to make this statement? She answers yes, it's the truth, and no, she was not forced.

[24:44] Rabia Chaudry: This is the nine page statement that was then walked over to Chester Hollman and shown to him - a confession by his friend, who he had already admitted was with him that night. And it was after seeing this statement, as noted on the bottom of Chester's own statement, that he allegedly said: "I told that bitch to keep her mouth shut."

[26:20] Colin Miller: The bottom of Chester's statement also notes that, after seeing the signed confession by Deirdre, he said he didn't want to talk anymore. And he didn't. There is no confession by Chester, ever. In fact, he has maintained his innocence to his attorneys and family and friends all these years.

There was one more confession though. This was by Tiffany Jones, Deirdre's sister. About twelve hours after her sister confessed, 17 year-old Tiffany is questioned by the police. Her story goes as follows:

Tiffany saw Chester earlier in the evening the night of the murder, around 7 or 8 pm, while she was out shopping with her sister. Chester was driving in a white jeep of some kind. She saw him again around 10:30 pm that night at the front of their apartment building, and said both times he seemed mopey and sad. She said Deirdre and Chester then went into the building together and she didn't see them for the rest of the night.

One of the detectives questioning her says, "Tiffany, I believe you are telling a lie, isn't it a fact that you were with Chester and your sister in the white vehicle?" Tiffany responds no, it isn't a fact.

A couple pages later she says the next time she heard from her sister was when she got a call at 9am from the police station when Deirdre told her everything: that Chester had two other people with him and they had a plan and she was scared but couldn't

leave and Chester told her what to say to the police. Which is mostly like what is contained in Deirdre's confession.

But then, Tiffany's pressed again by the detective, twice: Tiffany, please tell me what really happened okay?

[27:51] Rabia Chaudry: And Tiffany does. She confesses to being with her sister and Chester that night, admitting that she was the second female in the car. She describes Chester and a second man, one she thinks was named Troy, get out and kill Tae Jung, then taking off in the jeep and then stop somewhere where Troy got out and she got out too, leaving her sister behind.

That is where the statement, which is typewritten, ends. But there is handwritten line on the very bottom, one that is then furiously crossed out, but I managed to make out what it said underneath - "This story is a lie", initialed, TJ. Tiffany Jones.

And it was a lie. It was all a lie. Which is why, years later Deirdre came forward to say this:

[28:37] Deirdre Jones:

I was forced under threat of my personal safety to testify in a murder trial. The defendant in the trial was Chester Hollman III. The trial took place at Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas in 1993 with regard to the murder that took place in 1991 in Philadelphia. My testimony was forced, inaccurate, and given under duress.

Rabia Chaudry: Next time, on Undisclosed.

A big thank you and shout out to Celeste Trusty, who is an assistant producer and lead investigation on this case with me, and also to Zachary Stern with the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, thank you for all the work you've done in helping us research this case. Thank you to Mital Telhan, our executive producer, to Baluki for our fabulous new logo and branded graphics. A big thanks to all of our sponsors who keep us on the air and of course a big thanks to the person who keeps us sounding good, our audio producer extraordinaire Rebecca LaVoie of Partners in Crime media, and host of the podcast Crime Writers On and HGTV and me. Make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter - our handle is @UndisclosedPod. And you can use the tag #UDAddendum to tag us in questions for every week's addendum. Thanks so much for listening.