

UNDISCLOSED, the State v. Gary Mitchum Reeves
Episode 2 - Bad Moon on the Rise
July 17, 2017

[0:22] Gary Reeves

You gotta... you have to understand what this county was like. This was a wild west. This was a wild place. Bootlegging, prostitution, gambling. The clubs was corrupt. The judicial system was corrupt. Everybody was on the take. Mafia was in and out of here. Liquor uh, was coming in here in abundance.

[0:52] Susan Simpson In 1970 eighteen of Rome's most prominent clergymen wrote an open letter to the sitting grand jury. It said:

"Alarming allegations of widespread organized crime and corruption [of] governmental agencies in Rome, Floyd County had come to our attention. We urge you to instigate a thorough and complete investigation at the earliest possible moment. Specific allegations involving prostitution, including the development and use of juvenile prostitution, procuring drug traffic, interstate white slavery, arsen, and payoffs to law enforcement officials require unstinting investigation and prosecution."

The letter was in response to a boiling over scandal that involved alleged ties between the heads of Floyd County's criminal enterprises and the heads of Floyd County's judicial and governmental agencies. As well as the selective enforcement of the law and the selective un-enforcement of the law for a fee. And that kind of corruption was bound to lead to violence. Life in Rome for a bootlegger was dangerous.

I'd heard a lot from Gary, but I wanted to hear more about what life was like for other bootleggers in Rome back then. There aren't too many bootleggers left around these days, but some of their relatives are still there and that's how I ended up talking to Charles Ledbetter about his father, Kelly Ledbetter.

[1:57] Charles Ledbetter

He was a bootlegger. He, everybody bootlegged back then. I was in high school and, you know, I was sort of ashamed of it. But...all the kids thought that was great, you know...

[2:13] Susan Simpson Charles used to work at the Floyd County Sheriff's Department, but after his retirement, he opened a general store down in Cave Springs, just south of Rome. One day while I was up in Floyd County, I stopped by his store to talk to him. And while we

were talking Charles called up Gayle Godfrey to come by so I could hear from him as well. Gayle's a long term resident of Floyd County, and he's seen a lot.

[2:30] Gayle Godfrey

At that time, there was no bonded liquor in Rome or Floyd County. Bonded liquor is made by the manufacturers. And Kelly sold White Lightning, which was made in the woods, back in those days.

[2:46] Susan Simpson Both types were illegal in Floyd County, so sometimes what bootleggers were carrying was liquor bought legally in other counties and illegally brought in. And sometimes what they were carrying was White Lightning, aka moonshine.

Gayle had never tried white lightning himself, and didn't know Kelly Ledbetter well, but he did remember the first time he'd ever met Kelly, back when he was a kid - maybe 11 or 12. He was with his older brother and his brother's friend, riding along in the backseat, when they decided they wanted some liquor. So they went to Kelly Ledbetter's place.

[3:12] Gayle Godfrey

And Kelly had a drive-in window to sell White Lightning out of. And I'd never heard of a drive-in window at that time. So they drove up there and to the window, and...and Kelly came to the window. And my brother told him he wanted a pint of liquor.

[3:38] Susan Simpson Kelly Ledbetter had a tank of White Lightning set up so that when a customer drove up, they'd give an order, he'd fill a jar up from the tap, money and moonshine would change hands, and away they'd go.

But Kelly would move beyond selling whiskey out the window of his house. He had a club that catered to Rome's upper classes. One where they could to dinner... and discretely enjoy a whiskey on the rocks.

[3:59] Susan Simpson

I heard your dad owned a place called the Chicken Club.

Charles Ledbetter

He did. It was uh, it was a, it was a restaurant and bar, and actually, most of the people come to it were people from, uh the Sheriff's department, uh judges, lawyers, a lotta... sort of like the only place in town, couple of places which you could go get a steak and bring a bottle with ya, you know the brown bags, what they done.

[4:27] Susan Simpson It was these kind of clubs that Grace started working in, before she opened her own beer joint.

[4:33] Gary Reeves

So Grace had worked all these clubs back then. Before they voted liquor in, they had these private clubs and she worked those. So she, she knew all these judges and stuff.

[4:43] Susan Simpson But these places where a judge could go at the end of the day after court left out to enjoy a manhattan or two -- they weren't legal.

[4:50] Gary Reeves

Again, this was a dry county for liquor, not beer. You had beer joints everywhere. You had 5 beer joints on one block - on Broad Street.

[4:59] Susan Simpson And although for the most part no one blinked an eye at the judges and sheriff's deputies and DA's regularly socializing together to enjoy prohibited substances, the hypocrisy wasn't lost on everyone. In 1968, the May term of the Grand Jury made a special presentment before Judge Robert Scoggin on the issue of the non-enforcement of liquor laws at private clubs in Floyd County:

"It is our opinion for Floyd County to be a place where one wants to live, work and raise a family we must have a community of law and order and to be a society of law we must have respect for the law. This, of course, requires the uniform enforcement of all laws so that the rich, as well as the poor, will know that if they violate the law they will be prosecuted. No group, whether large or small, should be permitted to say which law will be enforced or which law will be violated. When this is done every man soon feels that he is entitled to be the sole judge as to what is right and what is wrong. In this respect we find that there has not been a uniform enforcement of laws regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages. We do not say that this is the fault of any one person or group but it is the fault of the entire community. By failing to enforce the law properly, we are contributing to a breakdown in law and order. If the majority of our citizens are not in favor of the present liquor laws they should be changed and this can be done in a constitutional way. But unless they are changed, all laws should be enforced and we do hereby call upon not only the law officials to do so, but we call upon all of our citizens to refrain from violating the law."

In other words, as enforced in Floyd County, the law, in all of its majestic equality, forbade the rich and poor alike from drinking liquor anywhere that was not a private club.

This kind of casual corruption was only the start of it, though. Remember those complaints about prostitutes in the clergyman's letter? Well, it's not much of a mystery what that was referring to.

**[6:43] Charles Ledbetter
Well they had a house of ill repute**

**Susan Simpson
Peggy's??**

**Charles Ledbetter
Peggy's**

**Susan Simpson
I have heard all about Peggy's (laughing)**

**Charles Ledbetter
All the judges and all got to go up there. And Mable's. And they were known worldwide.**

[6:55] Susan Simpson Mabel's and Peggy's were Rome's houses of lesser repute, but of the two, Peggy's was the real attraction. And, by the way, Charles really wasn't exaggerating in what he said about Peggy's being known around the world. I think for a certain generation of Romans, their favorite travel story is about that time they went to some far-flung location, and when they mentioned to the locals that they were from Rome Georgia, the response would be, "Oh, I hear Peggy's is nice."

And if you're wondering about how a nice little southern town that still outlawed liquor could also openly have brothels that were known to all the church-going folk and yet still coexisted more or less peacefully with the community, well the answer is simple. Peggy kept the judges and police well paid. And while they probably didn't pay as well as Peggy's did, Rome's other less-than-legal establishments were all paying too.

[7:39] Susan Simpson

So a lot of people mentioned to me that back in the day, um, it was understood that if you were, you know had a beer joint or had a bar, you were given a cut to the local police and local judges. And that's just kinda how it was.

Gayle Godfrey

I would, I would say that's right (laughing).

Susan Simpson

It seemed like everyone knew it, it wasn't really a secret.

Gayle Godfrey

Right. Now I guess...I guess what they were doing was asking for a little protection of their business.

[8:10] Susan Simpson The protection money wasn't an issue so much for the beer joints that were actually just beer joints. But in places where White Lightning was on offer, or other activities took place, or if you were transporting the stuff in or doing anything else the law technically forbade, then when you were counting in your profits, yeah you better make sure the justice system was getting its own cut.

[8:26] Gary Reeves

Anyways this was, it was corrupt. Um, the law was um, a lot of the police were on the take. Everybody was making money.

[8:34] Susan Simpson And sure, even if you were paying tribute, you were still gonna get raided once in awhile... but you'd also get a friendly phone call the night before to let you know that the law enforcement would be by for a chat the next day.

[8:44] Gary Reeves

So every now and then they'd have to raid. Just to make it look good, you know. So Henry would, she'd get a call - 'You're gonna get raided,' so here we'd go and you'd start hiding stuff and all that stuff. So they were on the take.

[9:00] Susan Simpson Most of the old timers I spoke to wouldn't go on the record, even now. But retired law enforcement and retired law breakers alike all told me the same thing: Rome had been a tough and crooked little town, and the law and the bootleggers were often closer than they were far apart. And bootleggers were far from the worst of it -- there were some serious criminals in town, people that were, as I was told, not to be trifled with

under any circumstances. As one person put it, "Give 'em a couple hundred dollars, and someone would be gone."

And as for the police and courts, well, it'd cost you a bit more than that, but if you found yourself in jail, they could get you out. Or could make sure that you never went to jail in the first place.

It was kind of a symbiotic relationship. Or maybe mutually parasitic is a better term for it.

And sure, some of the county and city officials were good folks, but on the whole, I was told it'd been more crooked than it was straight. And even the good folks, sometimes they were on the take too.

[9:55] Gayle Godfrey

What do you know about the Sheriff at that -- back then by the name of Joe Adams? Joe Adams was a... he turned his head on a lot of stuff, but in another way, he was a good man. He went to the bootlegger and -

Charles Ledbetter

That's what I tell ya about my dad.

Gayle Godfrey

Put some money in my hand.

Charles Ledbetter

And buy Christmas stuff for poor people and give it out.

Gayle Godfrey

He never kept the money for himself. He went and bought groceries for the carloads...

Charles Ledbetter

And my dad delivered em.

Susan Simpson

Oh! So it's kind of a social tax?

Gayle Godfrey

Yeah. But deep down inside, Joe Adams was a good man. But he, he took money from the bootleggers and went and bought stuff and that's -carried it to needy families and all. Which I, I guess back at that time was pretty good because there was a lot of people hurting.

[11:01] Susan Simpson Sheriff Joe Adams was apparently kind of like the Robin Hood of crooked cops. But those government officials on the take weren't always so generous.

[11:10] Gary Reeves

There was a judge here, his name was Bob Scoggin. If you operated here illegally, and you didn't pay tribute to him, you wouldn't last long. So everybody that was in big business paid tribute, major bootleggers and stuff, made payoffs.

[11:36] Susan Simpson With law enforcement being paid to look the other way, and going to their private clubs to enjoy the contraband whiskey that was prohibited to everyone else, it's no surprise that even a small Georgia town like Rome would become a hotbed of violence.

[11:49] Gary Reeves

Now you know, the environment in Rome, was all the beer joints, and I told you, I named all those to you. So the lifestyle around here was just rough & tumble. Now I know there are other people who lived here that didn't get in trouble like I did, but it was a rough place to live. There was a lot of shootings going on.

[12:11] Susan Simpson And for a bootlegger, life in Rome could be dangerous.

[12:16] Charles Ledbetter

Yeah he was a good man, my father was. You know, I always thought about him being old when he died, but 46 years old is not old when you get to my age.

Susan Simpson

It's old when you're 19.

Charles Ledbetter

(Laughs) Yeah. Um, there's a lot of speculation about who done it you know.. And I think I know who done it, but I'm, you know, I'm not going to say that name because...

Susan Simpson

What I've heard is that your dad got in some kind of trouble not too long before his death. And that he had made comments that he might talk.

Charles Ledbetter

Well, yeah, he was going before the grand jury to talk, to tell them what he knew about something, and he never made it to the grand jury.

[13:13] Susan Simpson Kelly Ledbetter was assassinated on February 25, 1968. An unknown assailant, who had been lying in wait from a distance, shot him once with a high-powered rifle as he was leaving his club one night and getting into his truck. His murder went unsolved, but his obituary hints at some of the strange social structures that were in place at Rome at that time. Kelly Ledbetter had been a bootlegger, although he had other business interests too, at the time of his death he did have pending charges for bootlegging. But he was also a respected citizen, and Rome's most important law enforcement and judicial officials turned out for his funeral. His obituary read, "*An honorary escort will be composed of by Judge Robert L. Scoggin, Sheriff Joe Adams,*" and then a list of 13 other names. I don't recognize all of them, but at least 4 of them were police officers with Rome or Floyd County. And both the sheriff and chief judge of Floyd County were counted as close personal friends of the assassinated bootlegger.

[15:58] Gary Reeves

We played a dangerous game, and we lived a hard, fast, rough life. And I had people -- I remember the first gun I bought was for protection. I never bought a gun to want to kill anybody with. But I did have a guy pull a knife and hold it at my throat for a long ways, I'd have to tell you about that another time, and after that I bought a gun.

[16:32] Susan Simpson Gary had his own share of close calls during his bootlegging career, but at the beginning, it hadn't seemed like there was much danger to it. He'd gotten an early start in the business thanks to his older brothers. He was the youngest of 6 children, but his next youngest brother was already 14 by the time he came along. Which means, he had lots of older siblings to show him the ropes of the trade.

[16:51] Gary Reeves

But I was driving a car, when I was about 8, 10 years old. They would take me out, my brothers, on country roads, and I learned to drive a car with a straight shift on the column, so I could drive good by the time I was 10, 12 years old I could handle a car pretty good. Back then you had a lot of dirt roads out there, and sometimes you

might get in a chase, a little bit of a chase, and if you..the key was, knowing the roads, knowing the outs, and getting on those dirt roads and stirring up some dust and you could pretty well get by. That's pretty well how I got started in it.

[17:37] Susan Simpson His training as a bootlegger may not have begun until he was 8, but his training as a beer joint operator had come earlier. When he was little, his parents had gone through some health troubles, and they'd sent him to live with his cousin Flick for a while. And since Cousin Flick ran a beer joint, Gary became an apprentice beer joint operator.

[17:53] Gary Reeves

Flick is where I learned -- after him and Estelle divorced I'd stay with him at night, and we'd play five card draw, seven card stud. He taught me how to play cards, how to gamble, and he would give me beer and we'd go in and open up the beer joint. And back then we had what we call the long neck bottles that's returnable, and you'd go in and you'd pop one of those Budweiser or Blue Ribbons and that was breakfast (laughs).

Susan Simpson

How old were you?

Gary Reeves

Ah, somewhere, maybe 6, 7 years old. He wouldn't give me a lot, but he would say "Okay, you can have a little bit of it."

[18:41] Susan Simpson When he tells these stories, Gary is protective of his parents, reluctant to acknowledge that the conditions of his childhood, that he was raised in, were, to put it mildly, not necessarily ideal.

[18:52] Gary Reeves

Well, again, that's what I wanted to explain about my parents. They had worked hard all their lives, had raised this family, and then having me at that age, they were just so tired. We never lacked. I guess we were some of those people that were poor but we didn't know it. It didn't take much back then.

[19:20] Susan Simpson And to get a little pocket money, Gary found his own ways to get by.

[19:26] Gary Reeves

I started trying to work when I was just a little kid. And one thing is, my dad would come in from work, and he wore overalls, and he worked in the card room at the cotton mill, he would have lint just all over him. And I had to help him wash his back, and I remember looking at that when I was a kid and, "My god this man works hard." So I never wanted to take from them, I wanted to give to them. And I could always hustle a buck. If I could make enough money to go to the movies, I'd walk and I'd spend the day at the DeSoto Theater, sometimes I'd go on to the First Avenue Theater, and walk home that night.

Susan Simpson

How old were you?

Gary Reeves

Then I was probably 10, 11, somewhere like that.

[20:13] Susan Simpson So, he was an entrepreneur from an early age. Even the local fair coming to town was a chance to make some money.

[20:23] Gary Reeves

I would park cars in my yard and charge them a whole lot less than they had to pay at the fairground. So once I got my yard, I filled the yard up with cars, and you couldn't get any more in, I'd close, and then I had a hole that I could go under the fence and come out in the cattle barn at the fairgrounds, so then I'd go there and spend my money.

[20:43] Susan Simpson It's not that Gary didn't have a happy childhood. He did. It's just, there really wasn't hardly any of it.

[20:48] Gary Reeves

At that time, you're looking for your niche. First of all, I'm growing up too fast. That wonderful childhood Davy Crockett days, fairground days, that all pretty well ended by the time I was 12. That was gone. Those days was gone.

Susan Simpson

Did you stay in school?

Gary Reeves

No, no. Me and the guys, we went to junior high for a while. When you are driving cars different places and uh... you can get into joints, it was kind of hard to go back to school, and pledge allegiance... I was already in a different world.

[21:43] Susan Simpson At 15, Gary's first son was born. Within a few years, he and his first wife had three children together, though they split up not long after that. But Gary was providing for all of them, and when you're trying to take care of a growing family while you're still in your teens and without a high school education, a career as a bootlegger made an enticing option. Gary's brothers had put him in touch with people who could use his skills in driving the back roads, and he could make a good money that way. And also it was maybe a lot of fun.

[22:11] Gary Reeves

My son was born December the 23rd 1963. I ended up coming back to Rome and then I started working for, okay I'm going to name some names, they're dead. It was Dink Causey. Dink was real connected. He furnished a lot of the bootleggers. There were a lot of ways to make money in making liquor besides just making the liquor. I started hauling sugar, because they made it harder to make from the corn, so to make it faster sugar was used. So you had 100-pound bags of sugar that would be delivered to different places and you had the jugs... all the makings that went into making whiskey, he furnished the supplies.

[23:10] Susan Simpson Living the way he was, Gary was much older than his actual years. And that's literally true, at least as far as the government was concerned.

[23:18] Gary Reeves

I upped my age. In fact, I got a picture of the driving license, where it shows I was born in 1944. I've got those driving licenses, I'll show it to you in a minute. But I was born in '48.

[23:29] Susan Simpson In order to get by doing some of the things he was doing, he changed his birth year to reflect that he was four years older than he really was. So when he was 14 years old, he had the government ID of an 18 year old, and the rest of the world thought he was 18 as well. When they eventually met, in late 1968 or early 1969, Grace was actually 11 years older than Gary -- a fact she never knew, as, at that time, Gary was still going by his fake birth date of 1944. But you can see in the news articles reporting on Grace's murder, that Gary Reeves, age 30, was arrested. In reality, he was only 26 at the time.

But, even before he got with Grace, Gary's life as bootlegger had expanded beyond the Floyd County back roads to the interstate highways.

[24:15] Gary Reeves

So, running liquor with Dink -- I graduated from this level of liquor to running liquor to Detroit. That's when I realized -- the first trip I made to Detroit, my brother Doyal ran a U-Haul place in Marietta. We got a U-Haul truck from him and we go to Dayton, Tennessee and we load the truck with liquor. It was snowing, there was a blizzard going on, and when you got 2 gallons of liquor in each hand and you're trying to get down a trail in this snow and get it in the back of a truck -- it was hard work. Fast money, hard work. Dangerous. So, when we got into Detroit, this Cadillac pulls up with shotguns and guns and they lead us to a warehouse by the Canadian border and we unload the liquor there. Now that's a big difference from delivering a couple gallons to a house out in the country somewhere. So I knew then, this is big time here.

[25:29] Susan Simpson And after a while, Dink was using Gary for other jobs besides just hauling liquor.

[25:35] Gary Reeves

Time went on, this kind of thing went on for a good while, we did a lot of this. Then one day he says, "Ride with me down to Esom Hill." Well we go to Esom Hill, and there's a load of guns that had been stolen, an inside job, and it was done by police. And this is what we did: merchandise would come in where they would hijack a truck, or a train, a boxcar, and steal all the merchandise off of it and take it to a place, then we would go and get it and sell it to different--we had sources where we could unload this stuff.

I'm telling you all this, and then when people hear this they're going to say, "Well this guy should have been in prison a long time ago. Well, yeah, but not for what I got put in there for.

[28:40] Susan Simpson On the day Dink and Gary picked up the guns in Esom Hill, one of the firearms they got was a high-powered rifle, and Dink had a special delivery to make.

[28:49] Gary Reeves

So we come back to Rome. We come in with these loaded guns. The first place we go is Judge Robert L. Scoggin, Bob Scoggin, we go to his place. He comes outside, he

sees me, and I knew him but I had not had any dealings with him. Dink's mother, who was a bootlegger, she paid for protection through him. So , uh, we deliver the gun to Scoggin and I remember him looking at me, he didn't look like he liked that I was there and I didn't really, I didn't feel too comfortable with it myself. But, I trusted Dink. So we left there, and I just remember Dink saying something about, "There'll be a dead bootlegger in a few days."

[29:43] Susan Simpson Gary has no knowledge of what happened next. Or how Dink knew what he knew, or whether Dink really knew what was to come. But, Dink was right. Not long after that, Charles Ledbetter came home to find a police officer waiting for him.

[29:56] Charles Ledbetter

I think I was gone on a date. I was- I come in and a friend of ours, a policeman, was at my house, and told me I needed to go with him. I had no idea what was wrong, and he carried me to the hospital. My dad was at the hospital. He died instantly, but I didn't know that at the time. He run the Moose Lodge on Shore Ave., across the street- on Division St.- from the Krystal. He had come out of the building to get in his truck and somebody shot through the windshield and shot him in the head.

[30:52] Susan Simpson Initially, the police had some leads to follow, but most of them just didn't shake out. And although they had all kinds of rumors to look into, all kinds of ideas as to who might've wanted to kill Kelly Ledbetter... the investigation went cold.

[31:05] Charles Ledbetter

My Mother spent every penny she had on private detectives trying to find out what-- who killed him, but...

[31:13] Susan Simpson Over the next decade or so, a couple attempts were made to reopen the case. As reported in an August 1970 article in the Rome News Tribune,

Reliable investigative sources have told the News-Tribune they are exploring new leads in the ambush-slaying of convicted bootlegger Kelly Ledbetter which has gone unsolved for 2 years. The newest lead under investigation is that Ledbetter's death may have somehow been connected to a charge of possessing and transporting tax-paid liquor, which was pending at the time he was slain. [. . .]

One of Ledbetter's brothers said he was told by the GBI, "You're going to be awfully surprised when you find out who did it."

The article went on to say,

An alleged procurer told the News-Tribune that Ledbetter "was pressuring the wrong man." The procurer said that he would deny having made the statement if questioned by law enforcement. The investigators, who have been probing allegations of vice and crime in connection with Rome and Floyd County, indicated that they suspect a conspiracy in the slaying.

Then, in 1976, the judge who had taken Judge Scoggin's seat after defeating him in the 1974 election tried to reopen the Kelly Ledbetter case once more. Judge Frazier charged the grand jury, to look into the case again, to see whether it warranted re-opening. He told them:

[32:23]"I know that you are as concerned as I am to see that matters such as these are fully investigated and that those criminally responsible are brought to justice. I therefore direct that you investigate these cases and determine what further action might be taken to see that they are brought to a proper conclusion. Ladies and Gentlemen, go to your task and investigate this and all other matters which you feel are proper. Do not be afraid to investigate any matter which you feel should be investigated, regardless of the persons involved or the institutions concerned. Good government begins with you. If you do your job, and I know you will, then this will be a good first step toward better government."

Judge Frazier continued:

"Throughout this investigation, rumors have appeared regarding this case. More specifically I have heard it said that the local police have solved the murder but are unable to proceed in their investigation."

As reported in a 1976 article on these efforts to reopen the case,

Reliable sources have told the Broadside that a Rome police detective has a report that alleges the motive of the Ledbetter murder, the person who ordered it, and the murderer himself. But no one has ever been charged in the murder.

...Ledbetter was killed a month after he was arrested by county police on a charge of possession and transporting tax paid liquor. He was expected to be convicted and given a prison sentence. Some observers believe that Ledbetter was going to go before

a Grand Jury and give information that might have linked other persons to other crimes in the county.

There was an implication last April in the habeas corpus hearing of self-proclaimed fix man of Floyd County, Hugh Don Smith, that Ledbetter was killed to shut him up. Smith at the time said that former Judge Scoggin "has partial facts on a couple killings in this county." Smith alleged that Scoggin worked with him in a bribery system that let probationers free for a fee. The judge has denied the charges.

[34:14] Susan Simpson None of this went anywhere, though. The Grand Jury would decline Judge Frazier's recommendation that it investigate the case, and no further action was taken to solve Ledbetter's murder. Charles Ledbetter, Kelly Ledbetter's son, thought that maybe what he needed to solve his father's murder was a man on the inside.

[34:30] Charles Ledbetter

Even when I went to work for the Sheriff's department, I tried to find out about my Daddy's -- one of the main reasons that I went. But, all the records had disappeared, so...

[34:43] Susan Simpson But at the time Charles Ledbetter joined the sheriff's department, there should have been a file there still. There should've been something.

[34:49] Charles Ledbetter

You're not supposed to throw a case that's not been closed yet, you know- away, but...

[34:54] Susan Simpson But as Gayle Godfrey noted, the police records back then had a bad habit of growing legs.

[34:59] Gayle Godfrey

Seem like in those days, that uh, there wasn't as much security with those files as there should have been.

[35:10] Susan Simpson They were just... gone. Even after becoming law enforcement himself, there was nothing Charles Ledbetter could do to make those records exist again.

[35:18] Susan Simpson

So you guys tried for a long time, to try to investigate?

Charles Ledbetter

**I did. On my own. But, I had got up to Captain. And I could get access to some of the files, but... you can't get access to something that's not there. You know that's... [?]
[Turn it off?]**

[35:36] Susan Simpson Unfortunately, just like the records in the Kelly Ledbetter case, the records from Grace's murder had disappeared decades ago. Gary tried before to get them, back in the 90s, but nothing could be done. Rome Police Chief Hubert Smith tried to help Gary back then to track them down... but, like Charles Ledbetter said, you can't find what's not there.

[35:58] Hubert Smith

Hello?

Gary Reeves

Chief!

Hubert Smith

Yessir.

Gary Reeves

Just want to touch base with you, Uh, I sent you a letter about my records.

Hubert Smith

Yeah, I gave it to Marshall.

Gary Reeves

Okay, I, I know y'all don't have those records, that they were missin'. But, I- I just needed, um, in writing, that they're not-- that they are missing, and just document it in the letter.

Hubert Smith

It's a shame we never could find those things.

Gary Reeves

Well, they're missin' from the DA's office as well.

Hubert Smith

Yeah, I reckon' [unintelligible] don't have them either.

Gary Reeves

Yeah, they're missing from the archives.

Hubert Smith

Yeah.

Gary Reeves

So, uh, I- uh, I don't know. I ...

Hubert Smith

I don't know either about that. I just want you to... [dial tone]

Gary Reeves

It's just kinda strange that, you know, they disappeared in all three places.

Hubert Smith

Uh, didn't they have another thing up there, that you said that they, that they had a little case on you before... and they had that, didn't they??

Gary Reeves

They had that. Yeah, but the other stuff was gone. [dial tone]

[36:40] Susan Simpson It's hard not to wonder how many case files Rome and Floyd County have lost over the years. And it makes me thankful that at least most of the Joey Watkins case was there to be found, even if some crucial pieces were missing. Because, according to an ex-police officer with the Rome Police Department who called up Gary after seeing his story on TV, a case that might be awkward for the City of Rome or Floyd County is likely to turn into a case file you'll never see again. In fact, there was one case that was still haunting him -- a guy who had been sentenced to prison for kidnapping and rape, but for years had kept writing proclaiming his innocence. Finally the former officer had decided to take a look at his file, just to see, just to figure out why this rapist and kidnapper kept saying he was innocent. And when he did, what he saw convinced him something had gone horribly wrong. That the case file didn't look right, and the guy looked like he really might have been innocent. But when the ex-officer tried to do something about it, he was told to keep his mouth shut.

[37:35] Ex-RPD Officer

Now, I was told, in no uncertain terms, now this is the exact words, that there was a witness involved that testified against the man in prison,

Gary Reeves
Mmhm.

Ex-RPD Officer
And I was gonna, I wanted to carry- I had me a photo- a lineup made, with photos, and I had both men in there, and they did favor some.

Gary Reeves
Mmhm.

Ex-RPD Officer
But, I wanted to go back, and re-do the whole case. Do a new lineup, and everything. And, I was told, in no uncertain terms, that I was- that they were not gonna upset a citizen of Rome that had testified against a person, and that I *WOULD* get out of it, and stay out of it.

Gary Reeves
Oh, really?

Ex-RPD Officer
Yeah. I went to the District Attorney with it, anyway. Even after I was told that.

[38:16] Susan Simpson The case never did get re-opened, as far as the officer knew. He left the force, and there was no way to ever get access to that case file again.

[38:24] Ex-RPD Officer
When I left, there was still some things that... were... iffy. If you understand what I'm sayin.

Gary Reeves
Yeah.

Ex-RPD Officer
And I was told that as far as ever gettin' my hands on another case file or seein' another case file I'd never be allowed to do it as long as they could prevent it.

[38:42] Susan Simpson In Gary's case, the loss of that police file is brutal, in terms of giving us a chance to reconstruct what really happened that night. The police didn't do

much investigation, but they did do some, and because that file is missing, there are two big things in Gary's case that I'm not sure we'll ever be able to know the answer to. The first is how many shots were fired, and the second is who tracked the bloody footprints through the house.

The number of shots we'll get into later, because there's at least a little bit to go on there... a little. But, the bloody footprints -- well, they can't really be more than a side note in this case, due to the loss of the police file, but if we had known everything about them, they could've been huge. Unfortunately, the only reason we even know they exist, is because when Charlotte was interviewed, in the summer of '75, she mentioned them.

[39:32] Charlotte Reynolds

I was sitting on the living room floor. And I just happened to look down beside me and there were some footprints on the carpet in the living room. And it was, it wasn't a very clear print, but it looked like just someone had walked through some blood or something, and it was on the carpet. And it was rather a large foot print, you know. You couldn't see the whole footprint, but you could sort of see the front of the foot and the back. [Like the heel?] And so we went into the bedroom and I got one of Gary's shoes, and it was a much larger footprint than Gary's shoe.

[40:14] Susan Simpson This never came up at trial, and it's not in any records I've seen, other than here. But according to Charlotte, there are footprints, in blood, somewhere in that house on Maple Street, after Grace was killed. Charlotte saw them, and the police were interested in them too-- so interested that they even had Charlotte pull out Gary's shoes so they could try to see if it was a match. Only it wasn't. The bloody footprints were too big to have come from Gary, and while I don't know this for a fact I guess, I think it's okay to assume that means they were too big to come from Charlotte or Beverly.

Beverly recalls the footprints too. She says they were going back into one of the bedrooms, but whether it was Grace and Gary's bedroom, or Bo and Charlotte's bedroom, she couldn't remember now. Charlotte, in her interview back in '75, just said they were on the carpet somewhere. So outside of the kitchen, anyway, but that doesn't help clarify if they were heading back into a bedroom like Beverly says,

But if the footprints were too big to be Gary's, whose were they? And the fact the cops had Charlotte compare Gary's shoe to them suggests to me at least that the cops had ruled themselves out as being the source. It seems like they had reason to believe the prints weren't left by anyone who had a good reason to be at the crime scene.

But without a case file to give some kind of additional information, the bloody footprints are a dead end.

Which leaves me wondering: what if there were other problems with the crime scene that Grace or Beverly never mentioned, so we have no way of knowing about now. Like, say, the bullet trajectory. Let alone how many bullets there were, where were they coming from? Did the police ever check into that at all? Probably not, given that there was no real investigation, but I wish now we had some way of figuring out something as basic as that.

[43:21] Susan Simpson With the Rome Police case files gone, we'll likely never know what happened to those bloody footprints, or what happened to Kelly Ledbetter. But in the Ledbetter case, at least, there were other agencies involved, outside of the Rome Police Department, and I thought they might have their files still. Worth trying to track down, anyway. And even though it's not directly connected to the events on Maple Street on August 13, 1974, when Grace Reynolds was killed, I keep coming back to the Kelly Ledbetter case for the same reasons I kept coming back to Gary's. Because, again and again, Gary's case and the corruption investigation into Judge Scoggin would keep overlapping in small and sometimes surprising ways. But beyond the direct ways in which it ended up touching on Gary's case, what happened with Kelly Ledbetter shows the odd and usually dark dynamics set into motion by Floyd County's liquor prohibitions.

As it turned out though, the GBI, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, still had their files on the case.

[44:16] Susan Simpson

So I've gotten first round of documents I was looking for, but I do have some of the GBI file now. Have you ever seen that?

Charles Ledbetter

No, I haven't.

Susan Simpson

Um, I'm curious - how many times do you think Judge Scoggin's name is mentioned in it?

Charles Ledbetter

Probably about a hundred times, I would imagine.

Susan Simpson
Zero.

Charles Ledbetter
You're kidding.

[44:40] Susan Simpson The GBI had investigated Ledbetter's death, and had meticulously looked into rumor after rumor after rumor about some ne'er do well or another who might've done it, or had a reason to do it, or someone said they heard that he did it, but then the case ended. The GBI shut it down in '73 without ever developing anything worth going off of. In their list of theories about the case, they got pretty creative, theorizing that the motive could've been anything from some kind of dispute over a truck, to a dispute with his business partner at the furniture store that he co-owned, or even that his death was due to his wife's involvement in some way. But my personal favorite was number four on their list of reasons that Kelly Ledbetter had been killed and that's: "The dislike of Kelly Ledbetter by many persons who have expressed their dislike for Kelly Ledbetter many times."

But despite the GBI's intense focus on rumors about Kelly's death, never once did the GBI's original investigation so much as hint at what the newspaper articles, and the talk around town, were all hinting at themselves: that Kelly Ledbetter had been threatening to turn state's evidence against certain Floyd County officials shortly before he was assassinated.

The murder of Kelly Ledbetter is very much unsolved today, and there's nothing tangible that exists now, nothing that I've seen, that would constitute any real evidence against anyone. Gary does believe Scoggin was involved because, well, that's what Dink told him, and he'd been there when Dink handed over the high powered rifle, and it wasn't long after that that the sniper outside the Moose Lodge got Kelly. But Gary doesn't know anything for sure beyond what he saw, and there are plenty of other explanations for what could have happened to Kelly Ledbetter, as the GBI's list of theories shows. But Judge Scoggin *should* have been on the list of people who were questioned about it. Other people with far less in the way of rumors about them were investigated pretty thoroughly. One guy even got arrested. They guy wasn't charged, just arrested and held until they ran out of excuses to hold him. Yet Scoggin's name never even shows up in the original GBI investigator's file.

[46:34] Susan Simpson In 1970, the GBI did conduct a full-scale investigation into vice and bribe taking in Floyd County, but since corruption isn't a violent crime, it's not a file the GBI still has today. And the prosecutions that arose from the investigation ended up falling apart, so we don't know what the vice investigation actually found. We do know, though,

that a main target of the GBI's investigation was Judge Scoggin. And bribes he was taking to fix cases and set bonds. But while we may not have any paper records today, Charles Ledbetter's friend, Gayle Godfrey, served on a Grand Jury where Hugh Don Smith testified about the bribes paid to judges for favorable legal outcomes. And according to him, Hugh Don Smith had more than the news articles at the time had let on.

[47:18] Gayle Godfrey

Hugh Don was smarter than some of them thought he was . He had the goods on the judge. He had a check where he had paid for Bob Scoggin's television, where he had his carpet replaced in his house. He had checks of all that. They went and pulled that carpet up to see if it was the carpet that Hugh Don Smith said he paid for for Bob Scoggin's house, and also the TV. And I remember the Judge said that it's a shame when they pull a Judge's carpet up and check his TV. And this was Hugh Don Smith's testifying before the grand jury that I was on.

[48:20] Gary Reeves

You asked me a question, first time we met, or one of the times you was here, I was telling you about Dink, getting the gun, taking it to Scoggin's and all that, and you asked me how did that make me feel. Well ain't nobody ever asked me that, of course I didn't tell that story to any reporters or anything. [laugh]I hope I didn't. But I remember, what I remember is when we drove up, and he saw me and I could tell that man was not happy that I was in that vehicle. But he'd been paying tribute to Scoggin for years on anything that came in that he would get a load of - furniture , or a load of..where it be guns, where it be clothes, whatever it was, and we fenced it, and he always gave Scoggin tribute. And he kind of, I guess liked that, knowing he had a judge in his pocket. I didn't get into that. I wasn't that big type of operator, I just worked with him. But I remember him looking at me, and I did have enough sense to realize, after they told me what might happen, I had enough sense back then - I didn't ask a lot of questions. And life was moving so fast. We went on to the next thing and I didn't really think that much about it. But I'm gonna tell you something, when I saw her, his daughter's picture in the paper -- that bothered me, and I'm thinkin' - she was a child when that happened. Could I have done something to prevent that from happening? I don't think so. I think it would have only gotten me killed sooner, [Susan: yeah] myself.

[50:25] Susan Simpson I think Gary was probably right about that. If there's one thing I've learned from looking into this case, it's that in Northwest Georgia in the 1960s, life was often cheap, and I mean that quite literally.

But while Gary had some close calls and made some enemies during his time as a bootlegger, as far as I can tell, none of those enemies were made for professional reasons. There were, however, at least two men who had personal reasons for wanting Gary dead, and nearly got him a few times.

[50:51] Gary Reeves

I had her, I had Doyal Wade and another guy named Doyal, both of them wanting to kill me.

Susan Simpson

Doyal Sharp?

Gary Reeves

-- no, Doyal Sharp was a good friend, he's the one who told me Doyal Wade, he believed Doyal Wade was planning to kill me, he'd bought a pistol from him.

[51:07] Susan Simpson And yeah I know the number of Doyals involved in this case is ridiculous, especially since that I'm not sure I'd ever heard the name Doyal before meeting Gary, but just hang in there for now.

Anyway, Doyal Wade was Grace's husband, that's why *he* wanted to kill Gary. Even though Grace had left him before Gary ever entered the picture, The other Doyal, well, that was an older dispute, and Gary didn't want to get into the details of why exactly that Doyal wanted him dead, out of respect for the living family members of the people involved, but I'll just say that unlike Doyal Wade it's pretty clear that other Doyal had every right to be pissed at Gary. Still, Other Doyal was the kind of guy whose reactions tended towards the excessive.

[51:44] Gary Reeves

Now this guy that was after me, he'd already killed his brother-in-law and shot another guy. This guy was a deadly little fella.

[51:55] Susan Simpson Gary had been a bootlegger since before he was out of grade school, so his life was never particularly safe, but after he met Grace, it seems as if his stories from that time become more reckless. More on the edge. And maybe that's why, when he remembers the times he had with Grace in the beer joints, it's usually Bad Moon Rising he remembers playing on the jukebox.

[52:14] Gary Reeves

But when I met Grace, she was working at the Six Mile -- and I'd heard about Grace -- uh... can I tell you this... and it won't... I don't... think I want to put it on the thing. She was known as Amazing Grace. [laughing] I'm sorry. Well I don't want to embarrass, I mean, I don't want to sound like I'm talking bad about her, but she was known as Amazing Grace. And I walk in the Six Mile, and she's waitressing. Her job was to keep the juke box playing and keep the pool tables going, and of course I knew that because I'd been in that business. And I knew who she was. Anyways I told her my name, and she said, "I've heard about you, you're kind of a living legend." Well I might have been a legend in my own mind or something, but...

Dadgum we went together that night. That was it.

[53:25] Susan Simpson When I spoke to Beverly, she told me about how Grace and Gary had been like Bonnie and Clyde together. That's an exaggeration, their life together wasn't really anything like that. But, I can see how to a 10 or 11 year old, it might have seemed that way. And, more than once, Gary and Grace stood side by side as they faced down possible death.

[53:45] Gary Reeves

So Grace and I was out one time, we was at Gordon and Mary's. If you walk in the front door, then you imagine kind of a horseshoe bar, and on one side you got tables, and on the other side you got tables. So Grace and I are over here in this corner. Well this guy that I carried the wife to New York with pulls in. He comes in. And this has been a year or so later. He walks over to this table where these guys were on the other side of us. I thought it was about a dozen of them at the time, but in reality it was only 3 or 4 guys, but it looked like a dozen of them. I mean man, he came in, I knew I had a problem. And they walk out to the trunk of his car. He opens the trunk of his car.

And so old boy running the place, he comes over to me and he says, "Man, they goin' to shoot you when you try to go to that front door. You got- I don't know how many of them there were, let's say 4 or 5 of them - you got that many guns pointed at you right now."

Well Grace always carried a pocketbook and I had a big .38 pistol that she kept in the pocketbook, and I had a small .38 pistol that I could keep on me. I don't know what made me think I needed the bigger gun, and she was probably a better shot than I was anyway, but anyway I said well "Let's trade guns", and he said, "get ready

to stand up", and god bless his heart, Sergeant Glenn Harper, county policeman, walks in. Walks straight to those guys, carries them outside. Doyal, this guy's just raising Cain - tellin' "He carried my wife off," he did all this. And he comes back in, and he says, "Y'all walk out." And we walked out. And got out of that one.

And then the night down at the Six Mile, we were there. We had a couple with us, that was with us, we're at the booth. So we're down there, and I'm going up to the juke box, and I'm probably playing Bad Moon Rising, I guess, I don't know, but I'm playing the juke box. I turn around, and the First Doyal had already made it to bar. The second one, her husband, was walking in. Doyal Wade had a girlfriend named Peggy. She had called 'em - Doyal, they had a beer joint, The Pines beer joint - had called 'em and told 'em I was there, so I here they come. They're going to shoot me. Well Talbert walks over to the table and I sit back down. Again, we swap guns. And this couple with us, they just sitting there. Man, I mean they really ain't got nothing to do with this thing, and I'm trying to figure out ok, how can we get them away from this if we're gonna have a shootout here.

And Talbert, James Talbert, he says, "There's no way you're going to shoot your way out of this. You're outgunned. There's more than those two." And he ran 'em out, and made 'em leave. And again we walked away. So, that's a few times that Grace -- I gotta give it to her, man. She stood up with you. I mean, she... ready to do battle ... Can we pause?

[57:20] Susan Simpson They escaped shootouts those nights, but only because the whims of impulsive and violent men happened to fall in their favor. It could have easily gone the other way. And Doyal Wade was often a problem for Grace, throughout the time Gary was with her. Doyal and Grace never did get divorced, and as far as Gary knows they were never back together, but Doyal Wade had never stopped trying. And while all these Doyals are confusing to keep up with now, apparently it was pretty confusing back then too. In fact a guy in Grace's Place got shot once because of it.

[57:48] Gary Reeves

The place is rocking and rolling that night it's full. Dink has come by. We were in the men's room splitting up money on a deal we'd done. I don't remember what the deal was, we made some money somehow, we're splitting the money up. We hear a shot. And that place, it had one door. It cleaned out, it emptied out. Man, they were gone, I'd never seen anything emptier. Well nobody standing there but me, him and Dink and Grace, and this guy points the gun at me, and it seems like it misfired, but Grace got between us and she pushed him out the front door. I mean she had guts with

that. Which I found out later from a guy who knew this guy real well, that he, that his plan was, he wanted Grace.

[58:49] Susan Simpson Even the best laid plans can go awry, though, and this plan had one critical error. Because, see, Gene Byrd, the shooter, was trying to shoot Doyal Wade, Grace's estranged husband. Gene Byrd somehow thought that killing Grace's ex would help him get with Grace. But the guy in the bar that night, the one that was shot, was a guy name Doyal Minter. Different Doyal.

[59:10] Gary Reeves

And this guy walked in and somebody called his name, his name was Doyal, and he heard Doyal, and shot him.

[59:23] Susan Simpson There are still two people alive other than Gary who witnessed this shooting. Gary called one of them up, to see if he'd talk to me, but I guess old habits die hard - even now, 48 years later, he wasn't going to risk getting mixed up in any kind of criminal investigation.

[59:35] Gary Reeves

You didn't actually see the shooting, you heard the shot, you came out and saw the guy laying on the floor. All right, would you just say that? They ain't... no this ain't got nothing to do with court, nothing. We're not talking about...nothin'

[59:51] Susan Simpson But the other one still around is the guy who got shot. Doyal Minter. He survived, and he's still around today. And he hasn't forgotten the night a guy walked up and shot him in the chest with no warning.

[1:00:03] Doyal Minter

That's been 50 years ago, kinda, haha. Guy who thought I was somebody else, and walked up and shot me. There was another guy that had the same first name, and he was trying to get him. 'Course I was lucky, blessed you could say. It just hit my ribs, and went around my ribs, and stuck out my back a little bit.

We were shooting pool me and a couple guys I went down there with. I was settin there and getting ready for my next shot, and he just walked up and shot me. Didn't say a word, nothing. He thought I was another person is what he told the police. The Detective who worked the case, he told me that he thought I was Doyal Wade.

[1:00:59] Susan Simpson Anyway, that guy who got his Doyals mixed up, that wasn't his first shooting. And he had this magazine he liked to show people to prove it.

[1:01:07] Gary Reeves

His name was Gene Byrd. He had killed a guy in California, and there was a story about it in one of those detective magazines. He had confessed to the murder, had his picture and everything, confessed to the murder, but they couldn't ever find the body.

[1:01:21] Susan Simpson Gary has it mostly right. Gene Byrd did get convicted of the killing. But he also made a deal with the judge -- if he'd lead the police to the body in the desert, he'd get his sentence reviewed. So in 1968 he took the detectives out into the desert, showed him the grave, and then he went free. Then by 1969, he was back in Rome, shooting the wrong Doyal.

But this story about the shooting at Grace's Place, something about it's always felt kind of off to me. I mean to be fair, Gene Byrd had never needed much motive to kill. He was intelligent, and had a knack for getting away with murder, but he was always kind of indiscriminate. His daughter told me that it wasn't just the guy in the desert he'd killed out in California -- he'd stabbed a guy to death in a motorcycle shop as well. And after the shooting in Gary and Grace's bar, he went to prison, but within a year a judge had ordered him released, and then he'd go on to kill someone else in south Georgia somewhere before later being killed himself.

But still. Why would Gene Byrd want to kill Doyal Wade? Grace had left Doyal. She was with Gary now, and Gene Byrd knew that. I mean, that's why Gary and Grace had the bar together. Grace didn't want Doyal Wade -- he was a problem in her life, a nuisance at best, and sometimes a threat. When Gary wasn't at the bar, she'd have to have one of her brothers or someone else come and be there with her, just in case Doyal Wade showed up. Which is why I still can't understand Gene Byrd's motivations that night.

[1:02:41] Gary Reeves

After the thing happened, he said, he's after Grace. He was after Grace.

Susan Simpson

But was he clearing the field, or was he trying to please her?

Gary Reeves

I don't, I don't know. He. The way Gene told me, he was wanting Grace. And was trying to get with Grace..

Susan Simpson

Yeah so why kill the ex?

Gary Reeves

I don't know...I'm telling you, the man came in that beer joint as calm, there was no nothing, no rage or anything

[1:03:26] Susan Simpson Whatever voice of rage and ruin motivated Gene Byrd to shoot Doyal that night, it wasn't events like that there were the problem in Grace and Gary's relationship. When it came to preparing for a shootout, they were strong together -- that foundation was solid. But after they were out of the beer joints, after the danger had cleared, things would fall apart between them. I think it was *because* the danger had cleared, that things would fall apart between them. After all, Bonnie and Clyde isn't a story that is going to end in happily ever after.

[1:03:51] Gary Reeves

Well we got out of Rome, and I got away from the wild beer joints, and the shoot outs and the cuttins' and the fightins' and all the wild stuff and got to Atlanta, and I got into...I got a job there at the liquor store, and I got into a different type of people. I mean it was a, we had Emory students that come there. It was a different life. And man I enjoyed that life. And and, we had, I had built up making pretty good money, and was taking care of the kids, but Grace would only stay for so long, and then she had to get back to that life. She would leave everything and go back to the beer joints. And then after a while we'd hook back up. There was something there with her... I don't want to speak bad of the dead, but she could only live that kind of life for so long, and then she had to get back to that.

[1:05:00] Susan Simpson Later, in a different conversation, Gary told me this again, that the dangerous life kept calling Grace back in. But then he added: "and it was calling me too. After all, I somehow ended up back there."

And when Gary returned to Rome, the old dangers were still there waiting, ready to be picked up from where he'd left them off.

[1:05:20] Gary Reeves

Well I had 2 people tell me that Doyal was planning to kill me that night.

Beverly Reynolds

I know Doyal Wade come in that bar and told my momma that he loved her and that he would never give her up. I know he come in that bar and said that, and that she would never be with nobody else. And I took that against you.

[1:05:43] Susan Simpson If you want to check out case materials, photos, transcripts, court records related to Episode 2 of Undisclosed, the State v. Gary Mitchum Reeves, don't forget to visit our website at undisclosed-podcast.com. And if you have questions about the case or want to talk about the episode, join in the discussion online at our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media accounts. Special thanks for this episode go out to Lisa Harris with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for her help in tracking down old case files, and to Mital Telhan for her work in making this show happen, as well has to Nasia Bady. I'll be back next week with Episode 3, but meanwhile, if you've missed hearing from Rabia, you should check out her interview on this week's episode of the Slate podcast Mom and Dad are Fighting, co-hosted by our own sound editor Rebecca LaVoie.

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