

UNDISCLOSED, the State v. Pamela Lanier
Episode 2 - An Offer She Can't Refuse
April 30, 2018

[00:22] Colin Miller: It's quite possibly the most famous line in film history:

[00:24] Marlon Brando, as Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*:
"I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse."

That's Don Vito Corleone telling his Frank Sinatra-esque godson that he's going to make a studio head think twice about not casting him in an upcoming movie. That studio head later wakes up with the severed head of his racehorse in his bed. According to the website *Phrase Finder*, author "[Mario] Puzo appears to have been making an reference to an existing phrase so that the Godfather character could ironically pretend that his 'offer' was benevolent."

Specifically, the site references the 1934 movie *Burn 'Em Up Barnes*, in which oil speculators negotiate with a woman who has inherited property only to find out she's found another suitor:

[00:58] clip from *Burn 'Em Up Barnes*:

Mr Warren:

Drummond, I've got to have that land. There's millions of dollars worth of oil under it.

Drummond:

Don't worry Mr Warren. I'll make her an offer she can't refuse.

In the wake of her husband Dorian's death, Pam Lanier was presented with offers she couldn't refuse, both of the literal and ironic varieties. So, how was it that she turned them all down?

[1:40] Rabia Chaudry: Hi and welcome to Undisclosed, the State vs. Pam Lanier. This is the second in the series of 4 episodes on the case of Pam Lanier, who was convicted of murder in North Carolina, based on the poisoning death of her husband Dorian in 1997. My name is Rabia Chaudry, and as always I'm here with my colleagues Susan Simpson and Colin Miller.

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

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.

[2:11] Rabia Chaudry: In order to understand Pam Lanier's decisions, let's go back, all the way back to November 9, 1955. On that day, Pam was born to Shirley and Herbert "Whitey" Sanders in Chinquapin, North Carolina. Shirley was raised across the street from where Pam grew up and was the 10th of 10 children; her father was a farmer, and their house had no electricity or indoor plumbing. Whitey was the 7th of 7 children whose father was a sharecropper during the Great Depression. After serving in the Korean War, Whitey returned home to a career in civil service.

Shirley and Whitey married when she was 17 and he was 21; when they were 20 and 25, Pam was born. The family first lived in a \$25 a month 2 room house with no bathroom before moving to a home near Shirley's parents when Pam very young.

[3:00] Pam Lanier:

Before that we lived in a house up the street. The things I can remember was waking up on Christmas morning, and there was a wagon with this dog in it. We wanted a dog so bad. And that Christmas morning that dog was sittin' in that wagon.

When Pam was three her brother Greg was born:

[3:23] Colin Miller:

And what was your relationship like with him?

Pam Lanier:

Real good. I was three years older. As a matter of fact he's in the hospital today, he had back, I mean shoulder surgery yesterday. He will be 60 in October, and I'll be 63 in November, and we were pretty tight. Why, if I would go out and he didn't, you know before he got his license, I would take him with me. So we were pretty tight.

[3:44] Rabia Chaudry: In 1960, Whitey built the family a new house across the street from Shirley's parents. After Pam's maternal grandfather passed away, her maternal

grandmother moved in with the family when Pam was seven years old. Pam recalls going out and cutting twigs that she would chew to feather up the ends so that her grandmother could use them to dip into her snuff, or chewing tobacco. She describes playing in the field and a barn that had tobacco stalks across the street.

The Calvary Free Will Baptist Church in Haw's Run was a central fixture of Pam's childhood:

[4:15] Pam Lanier:

My father and mom was both in Free Will Baptist Church, and my father, um, led the singing from the choir, and the congregation, and we knew Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and Thursday night was Young People's Night, we were to be in church. If we had dates, then we waited, either they went to church with us or we couldn't go with them afterwards. So it was kinda, you know, if they wanted to see us bad enough, me or my brother, they had to go with us, go to church.

[4:45] Susan Simpson: Pam tested pretty well on standardized tests, but she wasn't that great of a student. Her description of her schoolhouse days brings to mind Pippi Longstocking; while some other students were serious, Pam was footloose and fancy-free:

[4:58] Colin Miller:

And what was school like for you? Did you enjoy school, was it sort of ...

Pam Lanier:

I was mischievous. [Colin: OK...] I'm bein' honest. [Laughs]

Colin Miller:

And in what way were you mischievous? Pulling pranks and...

Pam Lanier:

[laughs] Well not exactly pranks, but I was mischievous. I'm the girl that climbed on top of the school breezeway in front of the flag so they could take pictures. Nobody else would do it, I went up there and done it for 'em, and they took pictures to go into yearbooks and things. I was just always the one that...I was in one class that, I'm trying to think, all of 'em was ...it was a history class, U.S. history. I was the only girl out of thirty-some guys, so naturally, I didn't do no work. You know, pretty much [laughs] I was full. I had real long hair and they

would brush my hair, and the teacher, that was his first year there, and he told me, he took me to the library to take the exam, and he told me, he says, "Let me tell you something Pamela, if I ever have another one in there like you in that class, I'm quittin'". Next year he didn't even work. [laughs] He said I run him off. [laughs] But I really wasn't bad, I was just mischievous.

Pam's friend Lisa Padgett, who would eventually marry Pam's brother, describes Pam in similar fashion:

[6:00] Colin Miller:

What were your impressions of Pam growing up?

Lisa Padgett:

Um, well I mean, she was a typical person her age. I mean, you know, she was always sweet, and she could be rowdy like other people, but nothing out of the way. I never knew her to ever be harmful to anyone.

That's how many people describe Pam: a rowdy exterior and a sweet, caring interior. According to Pam's mother Shirley, that altruistic core has weathered two decades in prison:

[6:33] Shirley Sanders:

Well, Pam has always got along with people good. And she was always trying to help if she could. In fact she about wore us to death right now, 'cuz she's up there and we're here, trying to help *us* out. So, I'd say she was a very loving, caring person.

Colin Miller:

And when you say she is trying to help you out, how is she trying to help you out?

Shirley Sanders:

Oh, she calls, the first thing: "How y'all? How y'all? Are y'all alright? Are y'all alright?" I says Pam, we are all right, but if [unclear], I don't know what I could do. But [unclear] you're alright.

[7:15] Susan Simpson: Two things stand out for Pam about high school. One, she was in the Homecoming Court. And two, during her three years of high school, she would drive kids to school in a bus as a side job:

[7:23] Pam Lanier:

I even went to bus rodeo.

Colin Miller:

And what's bus rodeo?

Pam Lanier:

Where they pick someone from the school to go that they think's capable...it's like a horse rodeo, you have barrels, and you go in and out of barrels....[background laughter] Why are you laughing? [laughs]

Attorney Mark Rabil:

Trying to imagine a bus jumping over a barrel.

Pam Lanier:

They go in and out, they have barrels like you're riding a horse, and you know, you go in and out, ever who is skillful enough to go in out through the barrels. And then they have you put it in reverse, and you go back and forth with them. And you know, you do all this stuff, it's just a rodeo thing with a bus. That's why it was called a bus rodeo. And I come in second for our school.

[8:18] Colin Miller: As we touched upon last episode, Pam got married young, at age 18, to her high school sweetheart, Dennis Parker, and they moved down to Miami, where he had family:

[8:26] Colin Miller:

And what was life like in Miami, how long were you there?

Pam Lanier:

Hmmm, I don't know, it was less than a year. It was all right, but it wasn't home. [Colin: Umm-hmm] I think that was more infatuation than anything, you know it was just high school...I don't know...but it was kind of like that.

After returning to North Carolina and ending her marriage with Dennis Parker, Pam worked at Marine Corps Exchange for the next several years. At the time, Pam got to know Mack Lammonds (pronounced Lah-monds), who was married to her friend Lisa Goodson. Lammonds and Goodson later got divorced, and, when Pam was in her mid-20s, she started dating him. According to Pam, she liked him for his looks and the

fact that he loved to go to clubs and dance. The two got married in 1980, and Pam gave birth to their son Dustin in 1983.

According to Pam, after Dustin was born, Mack and she began to drift apart; he would go out partying and leave Pam at home to take care of Dustin. And, when Mack would drink, a darker side began to emerge:

[9:17] Pam Lanier:

We would argue and fight a lot, and I would get..you want to know the truth, well I would get the crap beat out of me every now and then. But other than that, when he wasn't drinkin' he was all right.

Colin Miller:

So when he drank he got abusive?

Pam Lanier:

Kind of, pretty much.

[9:30] Colin Miller: According to Pam, the abuse got so bad that she stopped eating and dropped down to 95 pounds.

During the marriage, both Pam and Mack worked, but Mack would mostly drink his paychecks away. Pam was working at a mobile home lot on weekdays and at a dragstrip on weekend. When Pam finally got sick of Mack's abuse, she decided to divorce him in 1985. Mack was already paying child support for a child he had with Lisa Goodsen, so Pam and he came to an agreement:

[9:50] Pam Lanier:

He had a child by Lisa, he had to pay child support to Brent, so if he paid child support to me, that, you know, he couldn't. So I told him, give me the rights to my son, and I won't never bother you, and I never did.

And so, after the divorce, Pam was a single mother with a young son and no child support:

[10:13] Colin Miller:

And so then after you get divorced then, what's life like before you meet Johnny Ray?

Pam Lanier:

It's hard kinda, I mean, you know, I've got a son, a little boy.

[10:29] Rabia Chaudry: Dustin and she moved into what Pam describes as a "tiny little house" that didn't have plumbing for a period of time because she couldn't afford to fix it. Then, in 1986, a year after the divorce, Pam made a bad decision at her job at the mobile home lot:

[10:43] Pam Lanier:

I was working, and I was in charge of the petty cash and stuff, and it all come through that. But I wasn't, I mean mean I was kinda, I was in charge of it, but there was other people that was gettin' money too, ah, the deal. I mean, they would have me give them money for lunch and things like that. So when it did come up short I was guilty because I was the one in charge of it. And I had used it too for the same thing and so I took the blame for it.

Colin Miller:

And was that that you needed the money, or what was sort of going through your head when you decided to take the...

Pam Lainer:

I don't even think it had nothin' to do with needing money. I think it was just basically, there was food, there was things that we could have, like if we wanted to all go out and eat or do whatever we had it.

Pam would lose her job and eventually plead guilty to misdemeanor embezzlement. Without means to support her son, she took a job at the bacon plant at Holly Ridge despite it being described to her as a "man's job." Pam ran the fork lift and would yank the meat off of hogs that were hanging from hooks. On weekends, she would pick blueberries for grocery money and spend Saturdays working at an all-night breakfast place to supplement her income.

A year later, in 1987, two friends introduced her to Johnny Ray Williams, but the two didn't get off on the right foot:

[12:02] Pam Lanier:

I did not know I was going to with them to a warehouse, a tobacco warehouse closing. And they wanted me to meet someone named Johnny Williams. And um when I went down there, Jonny actually was drunk, and I was introduced to him

and I did not like him, I mean I'm being honest, I did not like hm. Cute, yes, Liked him, no.

[12:29] Rabia Chaudry: But a few weeks later, Pam and Johnny Ray would hit it off at a party at a horse barn and date throughout 1987. He was a farmer and an auctioneer, and, unlike her prior husband, Johnny Ray was even keeled, even when he was drunk:

[12:44] Colin Miller:
Was he ever abusive?

Pam Lanier:

No, I have to give him that. He was really, like i said, he was really ...if you was to try to be disrespectful to me, like if we were somewhere, and say for instance Mr. Mark and somebody was having problems and they were using foul language and things like that, and if I was in the presence he would say, "hey listen, don't do that in front of my wife". You know, or whatever. He was just never, he wasn't like that.

[15:32] Susan Simpson: Johnny Ray adopted Dustin, and a few years into the marriage, Pam gave birth to their daughter Kayla in 1989. The farming life, however, wasn't working out. Johnny Ray eventually ended up taking a job at a bait and tackle shop and Pam worked at a surf shop, but it wasn't enough to make ends meet. As we noted in Episode 1, their property was being foreclosed upon, and they weren't able to pay the premiums on Johnny Ray's life insurance policy. And then, at around midnight on September 4, 1991, Johnny Ray drowned behind their trailer in Surf City, North Carolina.

What Pam didn't know is that their insurance agent had paid their premiums up to that point. and she likes to point out that she would have been in dire straits without that money and with two young children. But the money she got allowed her to turn things around:

Pam Lanier:

So actually it was a Godsend, because here I was livin' at the beach. I ended up turnin' it around and buying a double-wide and puttin' it near Mom and Dad and movin' from the beach, so they could help me with my children, yes.

But it wasn't just this insurance money that changed things; Pam once again started working multiple jobs:

Pam Lanier:

When I was livin' down there I worked at Lanier's restaurant, and I worked at Burt's Surf Shop. So I worked quite a bit between the two of 'em. The surf shop was a full time job because I was assistant manager on the children and women's department.

And then, after a few years, Pam ran into Dorian Lanier:

Colin Miller:

How does it come to be that you start the relationship with Dorian?

Pam Lanier:

I guess you would say Shenanigans, mainly, 'cause um, it was a nightclub down at the beach. It was, uh, beach club and everybody hung out there. So I would go down and hang out sometimes there, and I kind of got to get more familiar with him down there.

Colin Miller:

Right. And, so, having lost Johnny Ray, is this something where...

Pam Lanier:

This was later, no, this was later, after that.

Colin Miller:

And is it sort of a gradual process? Or did you two...

Pam Lanier:

No, it was gradual. It was gradual. It wasn't nothin' fast.

[17:13] Susan Simpson: Dorian was a turkey farmer, and, after the two of them got together, Pam decided to try her hand at turkey farming too, on land that she leased with Tammy Brown, the wife of Dorian's nephew. Pam and Dorian ended up getting married, and Pam sold her double wide so that they could move into a house on Ludie Brown Road that people refer to as the Ludie Brown House.

Colin Miller:

So the Ludie Brown House is kinda broken down a bit, and you come in and fix it up?

Pam Lanier:

Yes.

[17:29] Colin Miller: According to everyone, things went well for Pam and Dorian at the Ludie Brown house until December 10, 1996. On that day, Pam came home from work and ran into Dorian and his friend Jackie Hatcher: (18:10)

Pam Lanier:

I come in from work and Dorian and Jackie was there, Dorian had told me that he had put some clothes in the dryer and he says, it smells smoky, he says to pay attention to it, you know, 'cause he had been, he thought there had been a problem in there. But anyway when he left, there was a problem. It was fired up a little bit. So I called him and told him to come back and he come back, him and Jackie did, and um... he took the washer, he says, I don't know what it is, but he says there is smoke in here. He says, I'm gonna pull the washer out and put it under the carport and plug, you know, so you can wash clothes, and plug into an extension cord. And he said the little bit of fire back there is gone. Cause there was a little bit of blaze back there. He says it's gone, it shouldn't be a problem. He no more left and had been gone hardly no time at all when the place was on fire again, and then that's when I called the fire department and had them, I called him, told him to get home, the house, you know, the laundry room is on fire, and it done damage to like, it busted the door, the door was like, here's the laundry room, here's the carport, and here's the side door that goes into the den. It popped the door and done smoke damage, you know, to it, but I had a sectional there, and the only thing that was damaged was right there where the sectional was, it did blaze it a little bit, but the sectional was taken to Halls Run to a friend of mine, and her and her children used it after the fire. They cleaned it and used it, so it wasn't even burnt to the point where it could not be used again.

Now, if you're wondering why Pam is explaining the limited damage caused by the fire, it's because that fire was probably the prosecution's second biggest point of emphasis at trial, behind only the drowning of Johnny Ray. Why? Well, this takes us back to the Doctrine of Chances.

The Ludie Brown house was insured by the North Carolina Farm Bureau Insurance Company, and Dorian was the Vice President of the Duplin County Farm Bureau Federation. And so, despite the fire in the house merely causing minor damage, Dorian was able to get it declared a total loss, meaning that Pam and he got an insurance payout of just over \$140,000.

If you want to know how this fire was portrayed at trial, this clip from *Deadly Women* with SBI agent Blake Wallace and Prosecutor Pat Murphy will give you a pretty good idea:

Male Narrator:

Pam was home alone.

“Pam” Actress:

“Dorian!”

Male Narrator:

And a fire broke out.

“Dorian” Actor:

“God damn, this my house!”

Female Narrator:

Pam manages to escape the burning farmhouse.

“Dorian” Actor:

“Are you okay?”

“Pam” Actress:

“Yes!”

Female Narrator:

Dorian and Jackie do their best to save the homestead.

Male Narrator:

They run back over there, and by this time the house is engulfed. The house was basically a total loss.

[20:24] Colin Miller Essentially every witness I've spoken to disputes this characterization of the fire. For example, here's Pam's mother Shirley:

[20:30] Shirley Sanders:

And if they would read the, the notes from the trial, I don't have any of it now, it's in there, where they said up there on the stand that, uh, they totaled the house, but the reason they totaled it was 'cause Dorian was on the board!

Colin Miller:

Right, so they made it seem like a much worse fire than it actually was.

Shirley Sanders:

Oh yes, it was in, it was in the den, and in the laundry room. And it did, uh, turn the ceilings all kind of smokey in the kitchen part and everything. But they went in there and cleaned the house. And they took the furniture, like I said, I've got a piece of furniture right here, of it right now.

A couple months ago, journalist Phoebe Zerwick went to the Ludie Brown house with Pam Hatcher, the EMT who came to the Lanier house on the night Dorian died:

Phoebe Zerwick:

So tell me your name, and then tell us where we are and what you see here.

Pam Hatcher:

Pam Hatcher. We're at 603 Ludie Brown Road, the house is standing, and it did not completely burn, and supposedly she burned this house to the ground.

Phoebe Zerwick:

Why?

Pam Hatcher:

For money.

Phoebe Zerwick:

And did this come up at the trial?

Pam Hatcher:

Several times.

Phoebe Zerwick:

And what did they say about it at trial?

Pam Hatcher:

She was alone and she was the only one here when the house burned, so therefore she burned it.

Phoebe Zerwick:

And what did they say about how the house was burned?

Pam Hatcher:

Totally destroyed. And the contents.

Phoebe Zerwick:

And what do you see here?

Pam Hatcher:

A brick structure, old, same house that was here before.

Phoebe Zerwick:

So the only thing...

Pam Hatcher:

And people live in it, they've rented it since they sold it, the guy that owned it.

Phoebe Zerwick:

From what you remember, what part of this house was burned?

Pam Hatcher:

The laundry room that was separate from the living quarters.

Phoebe Zerwick:

Did you come see it after...?

Pam Hatcher:

Yes ma'am.

Phoebe Zerwick:

With her?

Pam Hatcher:

No, not with her.

Phoebe Zerwick:

Okay.

Pam Hatcher:

I came.

Phoebe Zerwick:

Okay.

Pam Hatcher:

So.

Phoebe Zerwick:

So this is sort of like part of the... what do you think this is, part of the story that...

Pam Hatcher:

The prosecutor to determine motive was monetary gain, so they used her burnin' this house. Intent.

Phoebe Zerwick:

As an example of the first time that she did something for monetary gain?

Pam Hatcher:

This would be the second. Killin' Dorian was the second. This would be the first.

Phoebe Zerwick:

Right, so the first time.

Pam Hatcher:

To show intent, or whatever they said...

Phoebe Zerwick:

And as far as you know, this house has been occupied for the last 20 years with...

Pam Hatcher:

Yes ma'am.

Phoebe Zerwick:

And it didn't have to be rebuilt?

Pam Hatcher:

Never. Never.

Phoebe Zerwick:

Okay, thanks.

[23:11] Colin Miller: It's not surprising that Pam Hatcher came away with this impression of the evidence after attending trial. If you just read the prosecutor's opening statement and closing argument, your takeaway would be that Pam intentionally started this fire to benefit financially, making it likelier that she killed Dorian as a type of double dipping. But that's very different from the argument that Pat Murphy made in arguing to the judge that evidence of the fire was admissible outside the presence of the jury. It's actually the first subject covered in the trial transcript. According to Murphy:

"So the relevance of the fire in their prior -- in the Ludie Brown residence, is that it is a fact that during the course of their marriage, that marital residence was destroyed and they got \$140,000 as a result of an insurance settlement on that and then used that money to, shortly before his death, purchase a brand new home and then that's the position they were in shortly before he died. We don't intend to show she actually set the fire. The circumstances of the fire, I believe, are relevant, but we don't intend to try to show here she actually is the one who set the fire to cause that residence to burn."

Instead, according to Murphy, evidence of the fire was admissible under the Doctrine of Chances. In other words, what was the likelihood that Pam would benefit financially from a fire at her house and then benefit financially from the death of her husband over the course of a year, with both the fire and the death being accidental? In later upholding this decision on appeal, the Court of Appeals of North Carolina would hold that "[t]he Ludie Brown fire evidence, along with the evidence of Johnny Ray Williams' death, strengthens the application of the doctrine of chances and lessens the probability that Dorian Lanier's death occurred as an accident."

[25:07] Rabia Chaudry: But we've already noted that Pam thought that Johnny Ray's life insurance policy had lapsed at the time of his death, and there are real questions about whether Pam benefitted from Dorian's death.

Pam and Dorian had contracts with Nash Johnson and Sons to raise turkeys, and Pam estimates that they were taking home about \$20,000 every few months from those contracts. And while Pam was able to handle certain parts of being a turkey farmer, she needed Dorian's help for other parts:

Colin Miller:

In terms of your turkey farming, what was life like with you being a turkey farmer?

Pam Lanier:

Oh, disastrous. (laughs). I'm not very good with the turkeys. I mean I'm just gon' be honest, but I knew, I knew what to do, I knew to go through the turkey houses and we would pull out the dead ones, you know, and get 'em ready to be picked up and taken... well I'm bein' honest! (laughs). And I knew if I wanted a turkey, this sounds gross y'all, don't listen, don't think me the worst (laughs) if I wanted turkey for supper or somethin like that, I like the breast of the turkey, I would kill one of the turkeys and skin it (laughs) and take the breast off and clean it and, I mean, I'm kind of a country girl (laughs). I mean, it's... but now he took care of the medications and things like that, because me and Tammy didn't know what to do. We went through 'em and picked 'em up, you know, and got rid of 'em. And if we thought they were sick we would let Matt or Dorian know, or something you know, or even Lewis, Lewis worked with us.

And so, when Dorian died, so did those turkey contracts:

[26:19] Colin Miller:

And so, financially at this point, you had these turkey contracts. What happens?

Pam Lanier:

By the time I go to court I don't have no turkey contracts.

Colin Miller:

Right. When do those end?

Pam Lanier:

It was right after he died. It was not long after he died. There was no turkey contracts.

Colin Miller:

And they did that because...? They knew that he couldn't...

Pam Lanier:

He couldn't... his contract had nothing to do with me. And the one up there, we couldn't handle it so, we didn't keep it. I mean there was no reason to keep it. Two women can't do it, and you know, not with children, no.

[26:57] Rabia Chaudry: So, while it is true that Pam got some property after Dorian's death, she also lost her primary source of income. So claiming that Pam killed Dorian for financial gain seems a bit of a stretch, at best. Many also claim that the idea that Pam would have killed Dorian is not just a stretch, but shocking. Here are some clips from interviews that Wake Forest journalist student Natalie Wilson did with people who knew Pam and Dorian. First, we have Pam's daughter Kayla:

Kayla Lanier:

They had a great relationship. Like I said, I never saw them, not one time, argue. My mom never really cussed or anything. Neither did he. So, and she doesn't raise her voice. That's what I'm saying, like when we'd get in trouble, she'd just look at us and we would know, like, just stop, because she never raised her voice. So they never...she still doesn't raise her voice. Like, she just has never done that. So, I never saw them get in an argument ever.

Next, we have Kayla's cousin April:

April Everett:

I never saw, I mean, Dorian, he just thought she was the best thing ever. And she seemed to think he was, he was too. They, I mean they always were happy, they never argued when I was around. They...she was a great mother and she was a fantastic aunt.

Natalie Wilson:

Yeah...

April Everett:

I mean, I, I don't...I don't even know how this, any of this, could have even been told any other way. I mean she just, she took care of everyone.

And finally, we have April's brother Mitchell:

Mitchell Sanders:

Dorian absolutely adored her. I mean, he's, he thought she was everything in the world. And she [felt the] same way towards him.

[28:22] Rabia Chaudry: Now, Mitchell isn't just speaking about the general relationship between Pam and Dorian; he's also talking about the two months between early September 1997, when Dorian had his bulldozer accident, and November 19, 1997, when he died from arsenic poisoning. Mitchell was there constantly for those two months, helping out with the farm, and we'll hear more from him next episode when we delve into those last two months of Dorian's life.

But, for now, the key takeaway is that, the way that people saw the relationship between Pam and Dorian helps explain why suspicion didn't initially fall on her, despite the determination that Dorian had died from arsenic poisoning. Here's Pam Hatcher describing the interactions between Pam and Dorian's family after his death:

Pam Hatcher:

His family included her in everything from that November to April. I thought that was very odd. If I thought you killed my brother, you wouldn't be in my house! I wouldn't be in your house! Ya know, they did, they had Thanksgiving, they had Christmas, they had baby showers, weddings, she was invited to, yeah.

[30:01] Colin Miller: When I first talked with Pam Lanier on the phone, she struck a similar chord, asking me whether I would have dinner with her if I thought she'd poisoned my brother. I followed up with her on this subject when I met with her attorney and her in prison, and it was clear she'd asked him the same hypothetical.

Colin Miller:

In the months after Dorian has passed away it's my understanding you had like Christmas dinner with them, and..

Pam Lanier:

That Christmas I did, yes. That goes back to that conversation you had with me. You said, hell no I would not eat at your table [laughing], you remember that?

Attorney Mark Rabil:

I said what?

Pam Lanier:

You told me, hell no I would not eat at your table [laughing], you remember that?

Colin Miller:

If he thought you had killed....

Attorney Mark Rabil:

Oh, oh yes! Yes [background laughter].

Pam Lanier:

I will always...

Attorney Mark Rabil:

I like fresh turkey, what do you mean [laughing]?

Pam Lanier:

I remember him saying that when he met me [laughter]. He said, hell no I wouldn't....[background laughter]. But um, we did. They, um, his father gave us our Christmas, and um, Scotty, his brother, they all come over and ate Christmas morning with us - his father and his stepmother, just like we always did. We always would do it on Christmas morning and they'd come over there Christmas morning and ate. Now if you thought I killed your brother or your son, would you be at my table eatin'?

Colin Miller:

Yeah, well that's...my favorite...[laughing].

Attorney Mark Rabil:

I wouldn't eat but I might come...

Pam Lanier:

I mean, it is what it is [laughing].

[31:16] Susan Simpson: So, again, between November 1997 and early April 1998, everything was fine between Pam and Dorian's family. Pam no longer had the lucrative turkey contracts, but she was doing her best to make ends meet:

Pam Lanier:

Social security, and I was workin' at the car lot. And then I was also workin' with Danny - I would do, um, clean his shop up on weekends. His barber shop, well his... it wasn't a barber shop, it was a shop for women and men. I would clean his shop up, and then, um, one of the real estate companies in Jacksonville would call me when they needed houses cleaned and I would go do their houses for 'em.

For a while, Pam was able to make things work with the help of her parents and another couple. Here's Pam's mother Shirley:

Shirley Sanders:

Up there after Dorian died, we stayed up there during the week and another couple would stay on weekends. And it was just too much for us. We told her we had to come home. We stayed up there for about a year like that, and we told her we just could not keep it goin'. But uh, that she had to do somethin'.

And so, in April 1998, Pam made the decision to sell some farm equipment that was in her name to Doug and Wanda Lanier and an option to purchase the farm for \$225,000. And, with that, the relationship between Pam and Dorian's family fundamentally changed. Once again, here's Pam's friend Lisa Padgett:

Lisa Padgett:

Then all of a sudden, it started coming around, and they all wanted, because, um, she had to sell some of the farm to be able to pay off, um, a big building that they had built. Ya know, because it was in her name and she had to pay that building off. So she had to sell some stuff, some equipment and stuff, well then that's what stirred, starting stirring the pot, right there.

Colin Miller:

Right, so in other words, the...the family wasn't happy when she started selling off some of this property?

Lisa Padgett:

Yes, yes. And they were not happy with the person that she sold it to.

Colin Miller:

And who is the person she sold it to?

Lisa Padgett:

Doug Lanier.

Colin Miller:

Okay. And why weren't they happy with her selling it to Doug Lanier?

Lisa Padgett:

Because they didn't like Doug. Because he's one of those people that will speak his peace and he'll tell you, um, what's what. And they didn't like that.

And here's Pam's niece, April Everett:

April Everett:

And the family, his family, *loved* her, until she got left his land. Or, and his, and the house and stuff. Like, literally, she did stuff with them all the time. All the neighbors, everyone...everyone loved her. And then when they, when she wouldn't just hand them over his farmland, or whatever, that's when everyone just, like turned on her.

And here's Pam herself:

Colin Miller:

And then what happened to the relationship between Dorian's family and you after...

Pam Lanier:

After this thing...?

Colin Miller:

Of selling to Doug.

Pam Lanier:

They, they didn't have nothin' else, that was it.

Colin Miller:

And do you think that because you were trying to sell it they...

Pam Lanier:

I think so.

Colin Miller:

Didn't talk to you. Yeah.

Pam Lanier:

I think it had a lot to do with it.

[34:11] Susan Simpson: In describing Chinquapin, where all this took place, Pam's attorney Mark Rabil found a metaphor for her case based on what we've just heard:

Mark Rabil:

A lot of little family plots, cemeteries, which I'm thinkin' that's probably a good name for, good name for the case: Family Plot. Um, because the case itself, seems to me, is evolving into this thing where the family, Dorian's family, basically was okay with Pam and wasn't thinking she was a suspect until she put the land up for sale that she was, would have been inheriting. And that's when the investigation and accusations started getting goin' and getting goin' in earnest. And, um, so it, it's like - Family Plots. Not that we're saying anything remotely like his family was responsible, 'cause they really had very little to do with him, and there apparently was a lot of resentment with Dorian, her hus -- the guy who died, because he, um, bought the property from his parents. Initially, the plot of land, which is - when we sat and we, we went to the land, and it's actually much more beautiful than all of the land around it because it's, it's - everything else is flat except for this, really, this little area, and it's like, sort of this little valley with all these beautiful trees, and ya know, lots of acreage. Beautiful, beautiful spot, and the parents had initially given it all to like five, the five kids, but then had to get it back to fight, to borrow against it, and then somehow Dorian ended up with it. I'm thinking he bought it from them, but he ended up with it in his name. So there's a lot of resentment about the land.

[35:55] Colin Miller: Rabil's comments call to mind the Alfred Hitchcock movie Family Plot, with the film's double entendre title referencing both a literal family plot in a cemetery and the drama that can divide a family. When a family member has died,

there is perhaps nothing that can divide a family more than then the filing of an action under the state's Slayer Statute. So, what exactly is a Slayer Statute? For an illustration, consider another case involving the possible wrongful conviction of a North Carolinian.

In 2006, Michelle Young was found dead in the house that she shared with her husband Jason and their toddler daughter. Jason stood to receive \$4.2 million dollars of life insurance from his wife's death, but her family blocked him from getting that money by getting a judgment under North Carolina's Slayer Statute:

Unidentified Male:

Within the civil statute, this defendant Jason Young, to be the slayer - that is he unlawfully killed Michelle Marie Fisher Young. Within the slayer, within the definition of slayer, in the civil law. Is that correct?

Unidentified Female:

That is correct.

In other words, if it can be proven that a family member was the slayer of the deceased, she is prevented from inheriting his money, property, and insurance proceeds.

[37:32] Rabia Chaudry: And now, we get into the twin meanings of the famous *Godfather* line from the introduction. Because, whether it was Dorian's family or the neighbors, immediately after Pam made the decision to sell, and the lawsuit was brought under the Slayer Statute, she and her family started getting harassed. Here's Lisa Padgett:

Lisa Padgett:

Me and my husband, at that time, we would go up and stay every weekend with her, because she was being...they were harassing her. They wrote on the side of her house. They would beat on the windows. They were just terrorizing her and those children.

Colin Miller:

Right. And we don't know exactly who was doing that, but it was taking place?

Lisa Padgett:

Mmm hmm. It was taking place, and the, the Sheriff Department would be called up there and they would come out. There weren't nothing really they could do, but they never really tried to do anything. Never really tried to find out who it was.

[38:23] Rabia Chaudry: Mitchell Sanders would stay with Pam and the kids at night because of the harassment:

Mitchell Sanders:

At night time, some people would go up there and spray paint stuff on the house, I can't remember what it was, but I do remember them spray painting the house.

While Mitchell doesn't remember exactly what was spray painted on Pam's house, another witness, Vivian Parker, has said that they were black Xs, bringing to mind the houses in post-Katrina New Orleans. Mitchell does, however, recall the effect the harassment had on the family:

Mitchell Sanders:

They had the kids and her scared to death to even stay here at night, and that's why I continued to stay, it gets where it can just rattle your brain, it was just, it gets so crazy.

Vivian Parker says that Pam also started getting threatening calls from anonymous callers. For Mitchell's sister April, the harassment that Pam received has soured her view of Chinquapin for the rest of her life:

April Everett:

And I haven't been back there since.

Natalie Wilson:

Back to...

April Everett:

Chinquapin. I haven't even, I don't drive by there, I don't do anything.

Natalie Wilson:

Oh, really?

April Everett:

Yeah. I just think it's a horrible place [laughs]?

Natalie Wilson:

Why do you think that?

April Everett:

Just because of the people there. The way they treated my aunt. There's nothing there that I want to see.

[39:39] Colin Miller: When I talked with Pam about the harassment, the main thing she recalled was something with the closest parallel to *The Godfather*:

Colin Miller:

And around the same time, you and your family started getting harrassed

Pam Lanier:

Yes.

Colin Miller:

And can you describe what you experienced?

Pam Lanier:

There was things- signs and stuff wrote on my door. It looked like paint. My dog died. I had a bulldog and I left one day, and he had a cage that was right outside that had been from Lowe's. When I was home he was in the house with us, but when we left, I put him out. And when I come home, somebody had put something in there for him to eat, and it was not nothing I had put in there for him to eat, and he was dead.

[40:22] Susan Simpson: Now, it's important to reiterate that we don't know whether it was Dorian's family or neighbors who were doing all of this. But it's also important to note that the State's initial decision wasn't to charge Pam with Dorian's murder. The District Attorney at the time was William Andrews, and he candidly told Pam and her attorneys that there wasn't enough evidence to take her case to trial.

But later, Andrews was replaced by a hard charging DA named Dean Bowman, and Bowman decided to move forward with the case against Pam. And so, in January 1999, Pam was arrested for the murder of her husband:

[40:55] Colin Miller:

How do you come to learn that you'd been charged in connection with murder in connection with Dorian's death?

Pam Lanier:

Uh, Doug. He called me and he told me, he said, "I got something to tell you." He said, "Where is your children?" I said, "They're at school." He said, "Where you going now?" I said, "I'm fixing to go to pick 'em up." And, at the time then, they were in Jacksonville at a private school, a Christian school there. And he says, "Is there anybody at the house with you?" And, I said, "No." He said, "Well, I got something to tell you, but I prefer you not be home by yourself." I said, "Well, then, you just need to tell me." I said, "I'll be alright, tell me what you gotta tell me." I said, "What's going on?" And then he told me I was indicted. And, he said, "They're giving you 24 hours to turn yourself in." And he said, "In the 24 hours," he said, " I'll call you back in a little while, go get your kids, tell your family." And then, he said, "I'll call you back." And that's what he did. I had 24 hours to make arrangements for the children, and I was to meet him the next day at 10:00 and he would carry me in. And I met him- I can't remember if it was Hardee's or McDonald's, it was one of those places, I met him there at 10:00, and me and him got in his vehicle and we went to the Sheriff's Department together.

But it seems pretty clear that Bowman thought he had a weak case. On October 11, 2001, he made Pam an offer she couldn't refuse. Here's a letter that Pam received from her attorney:

Colin Miller Narrating:

Dear Pam:

This will confirm the meeting held at your parents' residence on Friday, October 11, 2001, to discuss a possible negotiated resolution of your case. As you well know, you were charged with the felony crime of first degree murder and the State is seeking the death penalty. Should you be convicted of first degree murder, there are only two (2) possible punishments, death or life without parole.

On Friday, October 11, 2001, Doug Parsons and I met with you, your parents, and your son, Dustin, to discuss a possible negotiated resolution of your case. The State would permit you to plead guilty to the felony crime of involuntary manslaughter and receive an active prison sentence of twenty (20) months. Moreover, you would be required to forfeit your rights to the property of Ivy Dorian Lanier, Sr.

This plea would be predicated on the legal theory that you unintentionally caused the death of Ivy Lanier by an act of omission, i.e. that is you failed to secure adequate medical care for Mr. Lanier in a timely fashion. This negotiated plea would not require you to admit that you intentionally caused the death of your husband.

Doug and I carefully reviewed the evidence, applicable law, and our options regarding your case. Based upon a combined trial experience of fifty-two (52) years and more than four hundred (400) jury trials, it is our joint recommendation that you take this plea.

[43:33] Susan Simpson: But, Pam did refuse the offer. So, two weeks later, the State came back, and sweetened the pot. Under this second deal, Pam would enter the same plea and receive a sentence of between 16 and 20 months. Once again, Pam said no. With these offers being rejected, Dean Bowman added some honey and some vinegar.

Pam Lanier:

With the third one, they said, that Bowman and Murphy said if I did not take that plea, that they were going to charge me for Johnny's death. And, I think it's in there, Johnny's death. They wanted me to sign it, too. They said, "Tell her that if she doesn't sign in, and we go into court, then we're charging her for Johnny's death.

Pam's memory is accurate. The third plea deal says that, if she pled guilty to involuntary manslaughter in connection with Dorian's death, she wouldn't be charged with Johnny Ray's death. There was also something else in this plea bargain:

Pam Lanier:

One of them had work release in it. That they would request work release - get the judge to request work release for me, that's basically what they told me.

And, once again, Pam turned down the deal. That deal remained on the table through the start of trial, when, one final time, the prosecution sweetened the deal once again:

Colin Miller:

And, I saw somewhere in the paperwork that it might have been six months at some point in time?

Pam Lanier:

Yes. They even offered that at the Courthouse.

Colin Miller:

So where was that?

Pam Lanier:

At the Courthouse during the trial.

Colin Miller:

So during the trial they offered you 6 months?

Pam Lanier:

Yes. Doug come and told me that they had mentioned even six months. Would I consider taking it? I said no. He said, are you gonna say no for 6 months? I said the same thing. I said no for the rest of it. I said, it didn't happen, and I'm not doing it.

Colin Miller:

And how hard were your attorneys pushing you to accept the plea bargain?

Pam Lanier:

Real hard. Doug was. Doug, matter of fact, Doug got mad at me one time and slammed his fist down on the desk. He said, Dammit, do you not know that you could die? That if they find you guilty, that you're facing life or death? I said, Doug I'm not scared to die. I said, don't try to scare me, because it's not gonna work. I said, I didn't do it, and I'm not signing those papers.

[45:33] Susan Simpson: Pam's attorney Doug Parsons, who later became a judge, has a similar memory:

Doug Parsons:

We related back to her what our findings were. We begged her, I mean, just, begged her, and then later, begging turned to yelling at her about not considering the 16-20.

Pam Hatcher advised Pam Lanier not to take the plea deals, but now she second guesses that advice:

Pam Hatcher:

She told me, she said, I'm so upset. She said, don't know what to do. I said, did you kill Dorian? She said, no. I said, then don't sign it. I wish she would have signed that last one. I really do.

But Pam Lanier has no regrets:

Colin Miller:

Obviously, you're saying, I didn't do it, and that's the reason I'm not going to accept it. Were you thinking at the time, they're going to have to find me not guilty, or were you thinking that there was a real chance that I could be convicted here.

Pam Lanier:

No. honestly, you know? I didn't do it. I believed in the system. They weren't going to find me guilty. And even, if, even if, today, and I've said this before, in front of these two right here- My mom said that if I had it to do all over again, that she would break my hands, and push the pen. She said, now, that, I would do. I don't even think that I would sign something like that today, because I didn't do it. You know? I've been here 17 years. I didn't do it. So, you know what? I can live here another 17 if I have to. I don't WANT to, but if I have to, I will, because I *did not* do it. It's the principle of the thing. They're trying to make me say some thing that didn't happen.

[47:06] Colin Miller: And so, there you have it: Pam Lanier refused the offer she couldn't refuse: Six months in prison that could be served on weekends in exchange for a plea. Not a plea admitting that she had poisoned her husband or even intentionally prevented him from getting medical care. A plea that she was reckless or possibly even just negligent in failing to get him all the medical care he needed.

Without a plea bargain, the case continued through the trial, and just before Thanksgiving 2001, the jury found Pam guilty of murder.

Colin Miller:

So, when this case goes to the jury, and they're announcing this guilty verdict... was that surprising to you, or did you kind of expect it based on...

Pam Lanier:

I knew it. I knew it. I knew it. I felt it.

The jurors, however, spared Pam's life and decided against the death penalty. That left them with just one other sentencing option: life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. I asked Pam what her life has been like in prison:

Pam Lanier:

It took me awhile to get adjusted. Because I was missing my home and my children. But, I did get adjusted, and I turned out to be- I got my apprenticeship in Della Lab, I got cosmo, I worked with Travel and Tourism for a little over 7 years. I worked across the bridge that used to be the duplicating where they do the SBI files and stuff? The books? I was the secretary there. So, I kind of knew what was going on on the outside, what was going on with the legislation, with the bills and stuff, because we did it all there. I knew at some point in time that maybe, if not-- I always told my bunch, they'd always pick on me about school. And I said, well, there's 2 things that's gonna happen in my life. Either, I'll go home one day smart, or I'll- you'll walk by my coffin, and it'll say "She Died Smart." But, either or, I said, I'm gonna be alright. And, I have - here- I cannot tell you. [voice breaking- near tears] They treat me just as good as gold. I work in Cut-n-Curl. There are 6 of us that do five-hundred and some women's hair here. I'm in charge of all the chemicals. They pay, they come, and I pour their colors. You know. The girls put them in. The other 5 girls along with me. And I cut. And I'm not saying this in a bragging way. But, I'm good at what I do. I'm very good at what I do. So, saying that, they don't push me in any way. They kinda know me by my first name? My unit manager- Miss Williams- she was the one that approved y'all. She's been very good to me. I don't get in trouble. The staff's very good to me. Yeah, I want to go home. But if I have to stay [crying] here- I would like to say here. But, if I have to go to Goldsbrough, but, either way, I'm gonna be alright.

[49:58] Colin Miller: So far you heard two-thirds of the evidence presented against Pam Lanier at trial: the evidence connected to the drowning of Johnny Ray, and the evidence connected to the fire at the Ludie Brown house. That leaves the final third: So what happened in the two months between Dorian's bulldozer accident and his death that led the State to suspect that Pam had poisoned him or at least that there wasn't another plausible explanation for his death? Next time, on Undisclosed...

[52:00] Rabia Chaudry: A big thank you to everybody that makes Undisclosed possible and has made this series possible. Thank you to our sponsors who help us put on our episodes week after week. Thank you to Mital Telhan, our executive producer, for

helping keep this ship afloat. Thank you to Rebecca LaVoie, our fantastic audio producer and also the co-host and producer of a couple of my favorite podcasts, including Crime Writers On, do not miss her podcast. Thank you to Baluki for our logo, to Christy for maintaining our website. A big thank you to AC Parham for helping with research on the Pam Lanier series, and also Rebecca LaVoie will be hosting our Addendum, so I'm pretty excited about that, and make sure to tag Rebecca in your questions, anything related to this case, use the hashtag #UDAddendum, and Rebecca LaVoie's Twitter handle is @Reblavoie. Also a big thank you to our listeners. Thanks for coming back week after week. Check us out and make sure to follow us online on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, our handle is @UndisclosedPod. And please do not forget to subscribe to us on iTunes and rate us. Thanks so much. See you in a week.

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