

**UNDISCLOSED, The State v. Dennis Perry**  
**Episode 12 - Those Who Know Us Best**  
**October 8, 2018**

---

**[00:52] Susan Simpson:** If you believe the State's case, Dennis Perry is someone who is both incredibly violent and incredibly racist. He is someone who shot down two people in a church because he saw an opportunity to satisfy not only his desire for revenge over a petty slight, but also his desire to find out what it was like to kill a black person. And he is also someone who is cold and calculating enough to get away with it for 15 years.

You haven't heard from Dennis Perry yet on this podcast, and my hope is that one day, maybe you will. For now, though, Dennis Perry can't speak for himself, which means any sense of what kind of person he was and is, has to come from others. And those who have known Dennis Perry will tell you the same thing: there is nothing they have seen about Dennis Perry that would make them think that he was possibly capable of committing these crimes.

**Karen Perry:**

This is totally, totally not him. I just do not believe, and I will always believe he had nothing to do with this.

**Susan Simpson:** That's Karen Perry. She didn't know Dennis at the time of the murders at Rising Daughter, but she met him only a few years after. And for 13 years, she was Dennis's wife.

**Karen Perry:**

Like I said. He was a happy go lucky guy. Always laughin'. Always a jokester. He would have done anything for anybody. He'd give you his left arm if you needed it. He was a giving person. A loving person. He was a good guy.

**[02:19] Susan Simpson:** In this episode, you'll hear about what Dennis Perry was like from the viewpoint of those who were closest to him, both before, and after his arrest. And you'll hear about what happened to him, and what his life was like after he was charged with the murders of Harold and Thelma Swain.

**Susan Simpson:**

... before he got convicted?

**Karen Perry:**

We were great. We had a good marriage. I mean, like I said. We were just starting to build our dream. Our home. Everything. And it was all taken away.

**[03:22] Rabia Chaudry:** Hi, and welcome to Undisclosed. This is Episode 12 of the series of *The State v. Dennis Perry*. My name is Rabia Chaudry. I'm an attorney and the author of the New York Times Bestseller, *Adnan's Story*, and I'm here with my colleagues Susan Simpson, and Colin Miller.

**Susan Simpson:** Hi. This is Susan Simpson. I'm an attorney in Washington, D.C., and I blog at [TheViewFromLL2](#).

**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](#).

**[05:13] Karen Perry:**

I really believed he was framed. He was picked. And he just... there's just no way he could have done it. It just was not his character to do something like this.

**Rabia Chaudry:** Karen never doubted his innocence. But she and Dennis needed to find a way to prove his innocence to everyone else. And, most importantly, to his jury.

**Karen Perry:**

So, when they told me what was gonna happen, that they're gonna go to trial, and they were gonna seek the death penalty... at that time, they told me that I was gonna need two attorneys. I would need one from Jacksonville, and one from Georgia. And that's when... and Dale and my dad knew each other. My dad had acquired- had retained him at one point... sometime in the past, and recommended that I give Dale a call and see if he'd take the case. And I had to come up with a retainer fee, I think it was... he was only asking off of me \$25,000. Just to retain him. And it wasn't anything to do with the other... the Georgia lawyer. So, we came up with \$25,000 for Dale, and the families had to get together. We had to pull all our resources together- and did what we could do to try to help. We didn't want him going in there with a public defender. We wanted him to have 2 attorneys that have been through this, and could get him out of it.

After Dennis Perry's arrest, the family had scraped together \$25,000 to retain Jacksonville-based attorney Dale Westling as his lawyer. And when that money ran out, Dennis Perry was declared indigent, and Camden County became responsible for paying the bills of both Dale Westling and also Georgia attorney Ed Clary, who acted as local counsel on the case. At the time, Karen and the rest of Dennis' family had thought Dale Westling had been a good choice.

**Susan Simpson:**

Had Westling handled a capital case before?

**Karen Perry:**

Yeah.

**Susan Simpson:**

Do you know how many, or...

**Karen Perry:**

I don't know, but he said that all the cases... he's-- he's never lost a case. Is what he told me.

**Susan Simpson:**

Lost *any* case?

**Karen Perry:**

Like, any case to do...

**Susan Simpson:**

Like, any capital case?

**Karen Perry:**

Yeah, any capital case.

**[07:41]** In the years since, though, no doubt colored with the hindsight of the case's outcome, many of Dennis' family members have come to have a different opinion on their attorney selection.

**Daniel Perry:**

And I started sayin'... you're gonna need a lawyer. And then they got Karen's

daddy's lawyer, and that's who Dale Westling is. An idiot.

As far as Dennis' brother Daniel remembers it, Dennis' attorney just sat on the case for three years, and then waltzed into court unprepared.

**Daniel Perry:**

You're supposed to be this great lawyer, and Dale was the worst man we could have ever got. He did not care about that case. His daughter lived up in Atlanta, so the only time he would try to do something was when he was going to visit his daughter. He would spend an hour trying to talk to us about something and then that was it. That was the only time he actually worked on Dennis' case until it came up to trial. As far as I was concerned. And when that happened... he wasn't ready. He was supposed to be this *great* lawyer.

**[08:43]** Karen Perry, who was much closer to the trial preparations, saw it differently. Dale Westling did do a lot of work, she said. At least at first. And she was in regular contact with him. Extremely regular contact -- if you hadn't known that Karen Perry was Dennis Perry's wife, based on the references to her throughout the defense file you'd probably have assumed her role had been a paralegal from the firm who was dedicated to the project.

**Karen Perry:**

Dale pretty much kept me updated. I'll tell you what, I stayed on his behind, too. I mean, after a while, and I'm not just sayin' this, with attorneys, but after a while, I think with the case growing stale through our investigation... on our, you know. With the attorneys that I had- it just kinda got stale, and they just seemed to start puttin' things on the back burner. They would take their time about it. Like in the beginning it was like, they jumped right in on it. But, it seemed like after a while, they just kinda-- it just kinda grew stale with them, or somethin'.

Three years would pass between Dennis' arrest in 2000 and his trial in 2003. And for three long years, Karen visited Dennis every moment she could -- which wasn't very many moments at all.

**Karen Perry:**

I used to went up there every weekend. Every Saturday. My Saturdays. Every Saturday to see him for a 30 minute visit.

After his arrest, Dennis Perry had been moved from Jacksonville to Camden County, and from there, for his own safety, to Glynn County. That's where he was for most of those three years.

**Karen Perry:**

Our visits were, like I said, 30 minute visits. We had a glass partition between us. We had to talk through phones. There were times where he absolutely felt totally alone. That nothing was movin' quick enough. And that's always the case in the court system. Everything goes slow.

**Susan Simpson:**

I know that's always the case, but...

**Karen Perry:**

But for three years... you sit up there for three years. That's ridiculous. I've never heard of a town keepin' somebody in a county jail for three years.

**Susan Simpson:**

I still don't understand why it took that long. Do you know why it took so long?

**Karen Perry:**

No. I'll never know. I don't know. I know they don't do these things like this here in Jacksonville. They move you in and move you out pretty quick.

The delays weren't due to the fault of any single party. Sometimes it was the State slowing things down, and sometimes it was the defense team. And sometimes it was just a result of the way the court's calendar was structured. But the end result was that Dennis Perry wasn't even arraigned for over a year after his arrest, and it was 16 months after his arrest before the State began handing over discovery.

And some of the delays seem to have been caused, in part, by something of an assumption on all sides that this case would be resolved by a plea agreement, and wouldn't be going to trial at all. But that never happened.

**[11:52] Susan Simpson:** In August of 2002, Dennis' attorney sent him a letter outlining the history of plea negotiations in the case to date:

*Dear Dennis:*

*This will acknowledge the following:*

*You are currently charged with two counts of murder in the first degree. The maximum penalty is death as to each count. I have told you that, based upon the facts of this case, a conviction would (in my opinion) result in a sentence of death.*

*I have told you that the case has a "odds" picture of approximately 60/40 our way. Thus, I believe that we have a slightly better chance to win than the State does*

*Approximately three weeks ago, John Johnson called me and gave me an offer. He said that in exchange for pleas of guilty the State would recommend two life sentences. I presented the offer to you and you rejected it. I recommended that you not accept the offer.*

The next offer that came in from John Johnson was 15 years. Dennis Perry turned that offer down, too. As described in Westling's letter,

*I called Johnson and told him that you would not take fifteen years.*

*Early last week, Johnson called and told me that he would take twelve years and reduce your charges to voluntary manslaughter.*

*The law in Georgia would require you to serve 90% of the twelve years or 130 months. You would receive credit for 32 months already served. You would thus have 98 months remaining.*

*On Saturday, August 24, 2002, Ed Clary and I met with you in the jail and presented you with two plea agreements. We suggested that you sign one for ten and one for twelve years. It was our strongest recommendation that you accept this proposal. Frankly, we felt that it was an offer that should be accepted. We strongly advised that you sign both plea agreements, give us authorization to present the ten year proposal first, and to then present the twelve year proposal if it was rejected.*

And again, Dennis said no. He would not give authorization to his attorneys to accept the deal. But Dennis' attorneys kept trying.

*Ed visited with you during the evening hours of August 26, 2002, and presented you with five plea agreements. He asked you to sign one for four, six, eight, ten and twelve years. We then intended to present them (one at a time) to Johnson with the smallest term being presented first to be followed by the additional term if Johnson was not willing to accept our initial offer. You rejected Ed's advice and told him that you would not sign a plea agreement.*

**[13:55]** Because Dennis Perry would not follow his attorneys' advice, they were now asking him to sign a letter, confirming his rejection of the plea deals.

*Based upon the charges that are pending, this plea agreement is incredibly good and should be accepted. I can not stress enough my advice that you accept this plea agreement.*

*Again, you have chosen to ignore my advice and that of Ed Clary. You have elected to proceed to trial.*

*By signing this letter you'll acknowledge that all of the statements referenced herein are true and correct.*

Dennis signed the letter. He wouldn't agree to take any plea. It's not that he didn't know the risk of doing so -- that it might lead to his execution-- but as Karen remembers it, it was what the plea deal would require that, for Dennis, made the plea bargain not possible. A plea bargain would've meant a plea colloquy, and would've required him to give a factual statement of how he'd done the crime.

**Karen Perry:**

That's the part he turned down, 'cause he said, and I remember him sayin', I am not gonna tell a lie to god. I am not gonna get up there and lie and tell these people that I did this. That I'm guilty when I know I didn't do it, and I'm not guilty.

**[17:25] Colin Miller:** In Dennis' legal files, amid all the transcripts and legal filings and discovery, there are also personal letters and notes tucked here and there, correspondence that Dennis Perry has sent and received over the past 18 years after his arrest. And in those letters and notes from those first three years, when Dennis was awaiting trial, you can see traced out the slow progression of his case as it moves

forward to trial, and how he and his family grappled with the situation, trying to come to terms with what had happened.

Some of the letters date back to not long after Dennis' arrest. In those early notes, you can see the family's utter faith that this situation was only temporary, that it was all just a colossal mix up that would be rectified soon. Like a Hallmark card from Dennis' sister-in-law, Tamara, that must have been written sometime in 2000. On the outside, there's a little mouse struggling to lift a barbell, his feet not even reaching the floor, with the message, "It may not always be easy...", and when you open it, the card says "but I know you will make it." And the message from Tamara written there inside is just as cheerful and optimistic as the card,

*"Hey there Bubba. How's it going? Good here. Daniel's so glad to see you and talk to you. Sorry they wouldn't let me in. But I'll see you soon enough. 'Cuz it won't be long now. You just remember to keep your head high and not let this little bit of time get you down. We are going to use our house as bond if we need to, and you can be at peace about getting bond. They have to give it to you now. Love, Tamara."*

They did not, in fact, have to give Dennis bond now. And they didn't.

There are also lots and lots of letters from Karen. Karen wrote to Dennis all the time. Telling him about how much she missed him, about how her day had gone, giving him updates on the latest episodes of *The Amazing Race* and how her favorite teams were doing, and how much their dogs and their parrot Squeaky missed Dennis too.

In one letter to Dennis, Karen wrote,

*"I love you precious, and I'm so proud of you. Of how strong you have been through all of this. There are not enough hours in the day for me to give thanks to God how much I am so thankful he brought you in my life 10 years ago. You are my best friend. Well, sweetie, I got to finish getting ready. I know who holds our hands together.  
I love you,  
And Pootie loves you too,  
I'll see you in the morning.  
Karen."*

**[19:21]** Karen's letters are also useful for us now in investigating the case, because they help to reconstruct what was being done -- and what wasn't being done -- at various stages leading up to Dennis Perry's trial. Karen kept close tabs on everything being done, and she updated Dennis regularly. For instance, in one letter, she wrote:

*"Hi Babe!*

*Just sitting around watching The Amazing Race. Team Cha Cha just got put out -- they crack me up. Anyway, I am going to go see [defense investigator] John Bradley in the morning. I am going to go over a few things with him. These latest interviews from the GBI, all this stuff, is very good for us. I am going to make you copies and you will get yours in the mail Monday probably along with this letter. Good reading material. Next time you talk to Dale, you tell him, "My wife is tired of repeating herself trying to get certain things done, such as this interview with Peggy Barrentine, Greg Barrentine's sister who lived with the Wildman Leon Avery. ... It's the little things that could bring us answers we need. I found my letters that Dale [Westling] wrote to Mr. Bradley last month about finding Peggy Barrentine. I'm going to take them with me and confront Bradley at the pass."*

Or in another letter, from March 2002, Karen wrote:

*"Dear Sweetie,*

*Hey! How are you doing? I got up early this morning so I could drop you a line or two. The night before I couldn't sleep until 3:00 in the morning. My mind was racing and my adrenaline was kicking in, after I read some more interviews done between Jeff K[ittrill] and B[utch] K[ennedy]. D[onnie] B[arrentine] told Jeff even while they were in jail who killed the Swains, and that they were armed with pistols. It was what I've suspected all along. It all goes back into Brantley County. Well, we are closer now than ever, we are gonna catch this guy. ... By the time you get this letter, I will have seen Dale [Westling] about all of this. Babe, I love you so much and God gives us so much strength to go through this. It won't be long now, soon you will be back home."*

**[21:02]** Most of the letters come from Dennis Perry's papers, which means they're the letters he'd received. But a few of the letters that he had written are in the files as well. Like in 2002, he sent his little brother Shane a birthday card. On the envelope, he drew balloons and confetti, and the message, 'Happy Birthday Lil' One.' And on the inside, he wrote:

*"Lil Bro,  
Sorry I can't be there to help you celebrate but I will be thinking of you. Please  
don't drink too much. And mind your mom. Happy birthday. Love you. Dennis."*

And there's another letter in there that he wrote to Karen, in late 2001. The letter begins with the salutation, "Dearest Poo," and goes on to tell Karen about what he's heard from his attorneys, which isn't much at all.

*"Mr. Clary [didn't] know anything about Dale [Westling] sending the letter to Johnson or the letter that we had gotten back from Johnson. I think Dale [Westling] needs to keep more in touch with Mr. Clary more often and use him more. I mean that's what he is there for. I told him about the letter from Johnson and he kinda painted me a scenario about what he thought. He said the reason that Johnson said what he said is because they have probably got the heat on Donnie Barrentine right now and they have got him sweating bullets. And told him it's about time somebody started working on stuff that they had had for so long. But I think Dale Westling needs to keep him more informed, because I think he feels left out... I will see ya Saturday.*

*Love ya!*

*God loves ya too!*

*Dennis*

*P.S. Mom told me that you sent Dale some email giving him what for. "You go girl."*

There is only so much "what for" that Karen could give to Dennis Perry's attorneys, though. And there was nothing she could do about the State's delays and slow production of documents to the defense.

**Susan Simpson:** And even the stuff the State did hand over, it came in a form that was as inconvenient as possible.

**Susan Simpson:**

How was it organized? How was it...

**Karen Perry:**

It was a mess, I mean, it was just packs of paper. Just files of paper. It wasn't anything filed. Everything was just scrambled together. Just notes that were being taken by the lead investigators at the time...

In many cases, it seems like Karen Perry took the lead in how the discovery was reviewed and handled.

**Karen Perry:**

Dale let me take the stuff home so I could read it.

**Susan Simpson:**

Did he have a copy?

**Karen Perry:**

No. He let me take the stuff home. I took it to work and I made copies of everything and I took all the documents back to him. I had a set so me and his mother could do our own little investigation. 'Cause she knew a lot of people in Camden County.

**[23:19]** Karen gave everything she had to helping Dennis. She was his pitbull, nipping at the heels of his attorneys whenever they seemed, in Karen's view, to be slacking on the job. She was relentless in her emails and her lists and her questions. She did everything she could to make sure that nothing in this case was missed.

**Karen Perry:**

Every night I sat down when I got home from work and went through pages. And reading. And all the investigators back then -- pretty much everything in there was pointed towards Donnie Barrentine.

Karen still remembers clearly what her reaction was to the evidence, once the State had, 15 months after Dennis' arrest, finally handed it over.

**Karen Perry:**

Well we sat down and started laying it all out and reading everything. And I'm telling you, everything in there did not point to Dennis. It pointed towards Donnie Barrentine. All the evidence pointed towards that man. In Marianna, Florida.

**Susan Simpson:**

Except the glasses. And the hair.

**Karen Perry:**

Except the glasses.

**Susan Simpson:**

And the hair.

**Karen Perry:**

It could have been- he could have been a second partner. I mean, the real person that did the shooting might have been his buddy. We don't know. That's what we were thinkin'. I think two people did it, because somebody cut the phone wires in that church.

**[24:50] Rabia Chaudry:** In February of 2003, three years and one month after his arrest for the murders of Harold and Thelma Swain, Dennis Perry went to trial. The trial was held in the city of Brunswick, in Glynn County, one county over from Camden. Dennis' attorney had sought a change of venue, reasoning that the jury pool in Glynn County would be less familiar with the case. And going into trial, for Dennis' friends and family, spirits were relatively high, all things considered.

**Susan Simpson:**

So they were all pretty confident that he would be acquitted?

**Karen Perry:**

Yeah, we all thought ... I mean, this was crazy. We all thought he was gonna be acquitted.

Karen had met Dale Bundy before, on those times when he came down to Florida to interview Dennis. But until Dennis' trial, she had never met Sheriff Bill Smith.

**Karen Perry:**

He's sneaky. And you know (laughs), one of the days ... and I think it was the first day we got there for trial, I had to get on the elevator. And I had... (laughs) I remember saying this to him ... I was going to school. I went back to school to learn how to investigate cases like this. Yeah, I was doing Criminal Justice in college, and that was another thing that I wanted to get back 'cause I wanted to learn more about how the process worked so I could help try to get Dennis out of it. I did everything I could on my end to try to help to get him out, but apparently just ... financially I didn't have it.

So, and I started learning all this ... actually, in the courthouse, on the elevator, I was alone with Bill Smith, the Sheriff (laughs). He knew who I was and he started to drum up conversation with me. I wouldn't talk to him -- just hurry up, get off the

elevator ... but he noticed the books that I had in my hand and they were my criminal books. He goes, "Oh ...", he wanted to strike up a conversation with me, "Oh, you're going to Crim Justice school?" And I said, "That's right, and I need to learn everything I can about the process, how it's done."

That's about all he said to me and then I got off the elevator. That was the only contact I ever had with him face to face.

Karen was listed as a defense witness, which meant that she'd been sequestered. So, along with Dennis' mother, she spent that entire week locked away in a room in the courthouse, not knowing what was going on in her husband's trial just a few doors over. She wasn't even there for the jury's verdict. It was announced so quick that she and Dennis' mother hadn't made it into the courtroom in time.

**[27:28] Karen Perry:**

I remember Daniel going to his mom and his mom walked out and looked at Daniel, and Daniel looked at his mom, and she just broke down. She literally broke down and he had to tell her.

Karen had known immediately what that look meant. Dennis Perry had been convicted. Later that evening, her husband would be spared the death penalty, but in exchange would receive two life sentences, and no possibility of appealing his conviction.

**Karen Perry:**

Naturally, I was devastated. Really upsetting (crying). I don't believe he did it. If you knew Dennis, he was just a happy go lucky guy. He'd give the shirt off his back to you. I mean, he just ... I would've known something. I would've seen something or felt something wasn't right in our marriage. And this was at a time ... we had just bought a house, we had just got the business going, just bought a boat, we were just ... we were living our dreams. I'm sorry (crying).

**Susan Simpson:**

You can take a moment if you need to. No rush.

**Karen Perry:**

But I do not believe he did this. I believe he's innocent. I believe that sheriff in that county is as crooked as a snake.

**[31:53] Rabia Chaudry:** Karen was married to Dennis for 13 years, but they are no longer married now.

**Karen Perry:**

After the trial was over with and he was taken back to Glynn County, back to the county jail, I came up that following weekend -- 'cause like I said, every Saturday I'd ... that was my time spent, Saturday morning. Pretty much all day Saturday. He told me, "You know, Karen, I can't let you stay married to me now that we know what's gonna happen to me." And I said, " And we need to think about what we're going to do." And he said, "I need for you to get an attorney and let's go ahead and start the divorce proceedings." So I said okay. So I did. Drew the papers up, and it was a little while before I actually got them back, where he signed them. And we were able to get the marriage, you know ... but it took a little while for Dennis to sign them. At one point, I didn't know if he was gonna sign them or not. But he did.

Dennis finally signed the papers, and the divorce was final.

**Susan Simpson:**

Did you wanna get divorced?

**Karen Perry:**

Not at the time, but when after he was convicted it was the only -- it had to be done. He didn't want me to have a life being married to somebody in prison, sentenced for life. He made the decision to dissolve the marriage.

**Susan Simpson:**

Do you think that was the right decision?

**Karen Perry:**

(Sighs) At the time, no. But now that I'm ... now that you look back at everything ... in his mind, it probably was.

**Susan Simpson:**

What about for you?

**Karen Perry:**

For me? It's hard to say. Hard to say. No one wants to lose their home, and their house, and their business, and their husband to something like this. It was ... it

devastated me. All the time, I stayed by myself. I couldn't do anything, I didn't want to go anywhere. I was afraid that people out there knew me and they knew what I went through ...

When Dennis Perry was convicted, every part of Karen's life changed, forever. She's spent the past 15 years building a new life from the one she had before.

**[34:36] Karen Perry:**

I had to move on, I had to get a new job. Actually, after all that happened, I ended up ... I had to file bankruptcy. I lost everything trying to pay them guys. At the same time my parents -- my brother came and helped me move. I moved back home for a little while and stayed with mom and dad -- I think for six months. So I had to go from moving to out to a new job and all that, all at the same time. And I just regrouped. Tried to build -- put myself back together through all of this. It was hard. Real hard.

**[35:37] Colin Miller:** Years later, in in 2009, Dennis Perry remarried. His wife, Brenda, is from Camden County, and she has known Dennis for most her life. But before his arrest, she hadn't really seen him for a decade.

**Susan Simpson:**

How often was Dennis in Camden County?

**Brenda Perry:**

I can remember the year and I can't remember the day, but I can tell you the day that I saw him. I had just gotten married and we had bought a place right there on the corner. And there was a little bar right up the road from the store, probably half a mile, and it was called The Island Grove. So my mom and my grandmother then went up there one night, and that's when Edward was running the bar -- him and Leah. Dennis' uncle Ed was running that bar. So we went up there, and my husband didn't go. When I saw Dennis that night, and he had asked me, at some point, to take him down to the store to get a pack of cigarettes. So I took him down to the store to get a pack of cigarettes and I brought him back, and he got out the car, and he kissed me on my cheek and I left. And I was done then.

**Susan Simpson:**

(Laughing)

**Brenda Perry:**

I was in love. So I went on back home and I stayed married for 20 years, and he went about his business, you know, and he got married for 13 ... and now here we are (laughs).

Brenda's and Dennis's paths didn't cross again for many years. But Brenda didn't forget about Dennis either. And when her own marriage ended, she decided to look Dennis up again.

**Brenda Perry:**

I got a divorce in 2007, and I knew that he was in jail. I knew about what all went on but I didn't keep track because I didn't ... he had a wife, and I'm just not the kind of person that gets involved in things. You know, that was his life, and I let him live his life. So when I found out that ... after me and David got divorced, I went by and seen Nanny, which is his Nanny -- he had the same house where Ed and them lived, and I asked her where Dennis was and she gave me the address. And then I got with Helen, and we got married in 2009.

Most of Dennis' friends and family hadn't seen it coming. Karen hadn't either.

**Susan Simpson:**

How'd you feel when you found out he got remarried?

**Karen Perry:**

I was surprised that he did. I didn't know anything about Brenda -- apparently he's known Brenda for a long time -- how they got together or decided to get married, I don't know anything about that. But I was surprised. But I was happy for him. If he's happy and that's what he wanted, anything to give him an ounce of hope that he will get out of there. Apparently she's very ... from what I hear, is very adamant at tryin' to get him out of this too.

Karen had heard right, though, about Brenda. For the past 9 years, Brenda has been very adamant about getting Dennis out of there.

**Brenda Perry:**

And so I go every weekend. I ain't missed a weekend since we got married. I go every weekend. I go tomorrow, as a matter of fact.

**Susan Simpson:**

Oh. Has he always been close by, or ...?

**Brenda Perry:**

No, when he was at Autry it was almost 400 miles away.

Brenda knows the life she's chosen is a hard one, but her support of Dennis has been tireless. And the case files that Karen was meticulously compiling and keeping guard over have now been handed down to Brenda.

**Brenda Perry:**

And this was the evidence ... I didn't know, and I told Dennis, I said I'm sure y'all had it. This was the DNA on the hair.

**Susan Simpson:**

Yeah.

**Brenda Perry:**

Where it says it's not Dennis's.

**Susan Simpson:**

Mm-hmm.

**Brenda Perry:**

So you got that, right? I told Dennis, I said, "I'm sure they got it, but I'm gonna take it." This was the letter from Butch Kennedy that he wrote in reference to Dennis -

**Susan Simpson:**

Oh!

**Brenda Perry:**

-that he sent to the governor.

**Susan Simpson:**

I've not seen this.

Brenda has a busy life, with a house full of family, and lots of kids running around who've grown up with Dennis' pictures all over the walls.

**Brenda Perry:**

My grandchildren love him. We have great-grandchildren, and to them this is Papa. The little girl in the picture, Diamond, we used to go see Dennis and she'd say ... we pulled up there one day and she said, "Grandma", she said, "what's those wires up there?" You know, talking about the razor wires. I said, "That's just protection." She said, "Well isn't it nice that those people put those wires to keep bad people from getting to our Papa?" I said, "Yes, it's very nice." I never told her any differently (laughs). She thought that was very nice that people were trying to protect her Papa from bad people.

Brenda says that everyone she knows has been supportive of her and Dennis. Or at least, if they're not, they haven't brought it up.

**Susan Simpson:**

What do people in Waverly think about you being married to Dennis Perry? Do you ever get comments about it? Does anyone ever ...?

**Brenda Perry:**

No. Nope. 'Cause people know I don't care what they think. But I've never had any issues with anybody so ... anybody that I've come in contact with -- the people that I work for, the people that I work with, have been very, very supportive of Dennis and I. And I don't not tell them, if anybody asks me where my husband is, I tell them he's incarcerated. I've never kept it a secret. I've never had any negativity back from it, from my job, from my co-workers, from anybody that I know.

Brenda herself is not one to keep quiet about any negative feedback she may have, though.

**Brenda Perry:**

And I was like Dennis, I believed in the justice system, but I knew the people that were involved were crooked.

**Susan Simpson:**

And when you say "people involved", who do you mean?

**Brenda Perry:**

I mean Bill Smith.

In 2012, Bill Smith was running for election again, trying to regain his office as sheriff after being defeated at the polls four year before by Tommy Gregory, who was the son of GBI Agent Joe Gregory. And while out campaigning, he ran into Brenda.

**Susan Simpson:**

Have you seen him before, or ...?

**Brenda Perry:**

Bill Smith?

**Susan Simpson:**

Yeah.

**Brenda Perry:**

All my life

**Susan Simpson:**

So you'd run into him regularly?

**Brenda Perry:**

Oh yeah. Yeah, 'cause he said, "Brenda, I got a sticker. I'm running for sheriff again, you wanna get one of my stickers to put on your car?" I said, "Bill, I wouldn't put your stickers on my doghouse."

Brenda told Bill Smith exactly why she wouldn't be wearing his sticker anywhere.

**Brenda Perry:**

"Bill, I just wanna know how do you sleep at night knowing you sent an innocent man to prison?" He said, "What?" I said, "Yeah, I'm talking about Dennis Perry. You know who I'm talking about, don't you? 'Cause you helped send him there." "Yeah, I know who you're talking about, but you ain't his wife." I said, "Well that goes to show you, you don't know everything, like you didn't know everything back then." I said, "Yes, you sent an innocent man to prison." He said, "Well he confessed." I said, "You got that in writing or on tape somewhere?" "No." I said, "Exactly. You got nothing." I left him, but it didn't phase him.

Brenda knows that Dennis Perry's sentencing agreement means he has no right to appeal his conviction, and his odds of ever being paroled while maintaining his

innocence may be slim. But she's hopeful that, maybe, finally, something will open up in Dennis' case one day.

**Brenda Perry:**

And I wanted to tell y'all. I know y'all don't know me from Adam and that's okay, but I'm gonna tell you that Dennis is my soul and heart. I love him more than life myself, that's how I feel. I mean, when I wake up in the morning, he's the first thing on my mind. He's the last thing on my mind when I go to work (crying), and that's ... you know, every event is about him. And I never, ever loved anybody like I love him. We've never spent an intimate moment together, but he is my whole world. And I just get up and go because I know that ... the fact that he's sitting there, and I don't care what happens with, who it has to do with, I'm gonna go every weekend because that's the only peace he has, and I'm all he's got. And he is my world. And he is the most compassionate -- he doesn't blame anybody for where he's at, you know? 'Cause we talk about it, 'cause I blame people [Susan laughs].

Brenda knows that Dennis faces long odds in his case. But forever, as long as it's needed, she'll keep doing whatever she can to bring him home.

**Brenda Perry:**

That's what he tells me all the time, 'cause I get real anxious and he has to bring me down sometimes, ya know, 'cause ... but he is my sole meaning for life, my sole. It was like that day that I told you about, The Island Grove, and when he kissed me on my cheek, and I was already married, I knew then that he was my life. But there was nothing I could do about it then. I was married, and that's just the kind of person I was. I had to raise my children, ya know? So me and David was married for 20 years, but when we divorced ... and we didn't even divorce on bad terms, ya know, it was just time. Once they got grown and we got divorced, I knew then I had to find Dennis, and ever since that day that's where I've been. I mean he is my sole life. He's my life. If he never comes home and I have to die alone, he is my sole life.

**[44:25] Rabia Chaudry:** In 1985, the investigators on this case from the Camden County Sheriff's Department had firmly believed that this was not a racially motivated crime. In 1998, the investigators may have changed, but this belief had not. Dale Bundy did not believe the murders of Harold and Thelma Swain had been racially motivated either.

**Deputy Dale Bundy:**

This was definitely not a hate crime.

But when Dennis Perry was arrested and charged with the murders, the idea that this was a racially motivated crime returned, albeit in a somewhat muted way. At his trial, at least as far as the transcripts show, there was never any explicit reference made to racism. The prosecution doesn't seem to have made any efforts to stress the racially motivated nature of the crime, or to prejudicially portray Dennis Perry as a racist -- if anything, the absence of any direct acknowledgement by any of the attorneys that race was even a factor in this case feels like a strange gap in the case's narrative.

But there was one very direct piece of evidence at Dennis Perry's trial that, if true, indisputably showed that Dennis Perry had been racially motivated in his killing of the Swains.

**Cynthia Clayton:**

Well, you know, Jane Beaver had ... she gave, you know, like I said, when I listened to this lady talk about Dennis Perry sitting in her house, talking about killing a nigger, ya know, and then next week ... you know, because he asked for money and the person didn't give him any money, and then next weekend Thelma and Harold pops up dead ... this is what she's testifying to. This is what she's saying happened in her house.

And when Susan asked Lavinia why she thought Dennis Perry was guilty, she too cited Jane Beaver's statement as one of two things that stood out to her.

**Susan Simpson:**

So, you mentioned the ... what were you saying earlier about the Wilson boy?

**Lavinia:**

He was caught, he was let go, but he ... how do you say, fell for the ... took responsibility for the crime. And someone said that he said ... they said why did you want to do it and he said, "I wanted to know what it felt like to kill a nigger." But that's hearsay or reading or television. But anyway, I was told he said he did it.

**[46:35]** Lavinia doesn't remember now where she learned this, but she must have heard it at trial, from Jane Beaver herself. But it's the only motivation she is aware of for why Dennis Perry would have done this.

And Lavinia isn't alone in this. Gwen Owens, who unlike Lavinia had been identified as a witness and so was sequestered from the trial, didn't have the opportunity to hear Jane Beaver's testimony herself, and for the most part had no idea about what had taken place at Dennis Perry's trial. But there was exactly one portion of the testimony she too was aware of. Because at one point, while sitting over in a witness sequestration room, Gwen Owens and the others with her had heard laughter coming from the courtroom. They'd asked about it, and been told it had been in reaction to testimony from one of the witnesses. Gwen Owens didn't know who the witness was, but from context, it must've been Jane Beaver. Because what Gwen Owens was told was that the laughter had come in response to a witness testifying that Dennis Perry had told her that he'd always wanted to kill a black person. The laughter must have been from Dennis' friends and family, because they'd found the idea so preposterous.

**[47:48] Susan Simpson:** But that's about all Gwen Owens knew about the trial. She told me, "All we know is the person they got was convicted. We did know that." Gwen Owens had never known about the rest of Jane Beaver's story, about how Dennis Perry had supposedly asked to borrow money from Harold Swain. When I told her about it, that was the first time she'd ever heard of it.

All she'd heard, and all most people I spoke to seemed to remember, was Jane Beaver's story about what Dennis Perry had told her weeks or a week before the murders: he wanted to find out what it was like to kill a black person.

And if Jane Beaver is correct, that would seem to lead to the necessary conclusion that Dennis Perry was himself a racist. Something Dennis Perry's defense team did not try to rebut at his trial, because, well, how could they have, anyway? How can you possibly prove that someone isn't a racist? Sure, some people are racist and have no problem making their views known. But there are plenty of people too, who harbor racist views and are much more circumspect about it, and rarely, or perhaps almost never, express those beliefs to others.

But this idea of Dennis Perry being some kind of secret skinhead just didn't fit anything I knew or had heard about him. I couldn't find anyone who'd known Dennis while he was growing up that recalled him acting in a racist manner, or expressing racist views. Waverly was a predominantly black area, and Dennis Perry had often been the only white kid on the bus when he was going to school down in Camden County, but the neighborhood the Wilsons lived in was fairly integrated, especially by Camden County standards. But, if Dennis Perry had ever acted in racist ways, no one there recalled it.

And Dennis Perry's friends and family rejected the idea out of hand -- it just wasn't even up for debate.

**[49:25] Susan Simpson:**

In your experience, has Dennis ever been racist, or ever expressed any sort of hostility against black people?

**Clayton Tomlinson:**

No. No, no, no, no, no, no.

Which is not surprising, since that's coming from Dennis' friends and family. But it wasn't just them. Not a single person I talked to in Camden County who had known Dennis, not even the people who believed he was clearly guilty, thought of him as being a racist at all.

**[49:50] Carlton Johnson:**

He never was racist with me.

**Susan Simpson:**

So, he didn't, her story was that he just hated black people.

**Carlton Johnson:**

If he did, he never, I ain't never seen that side of him.

In fact, with two, and exactly two exceptions, there was nothing I could find anywhere that supported this claim that Dennis Perry had been a racist, and so racist that he'd killed someone just to find out what it was like to kill a black person.

The first exception is Jane Beaver, and her story about Dennis telling her just that.

And the second exception... well, until recently, no one really knew about him. In fact, during my first trip to Camden County, Clare and I were talking about how strange it was that he didn't exist.

**[50:30] Susan Simpson:**

You know what shocks me though? There was no jailhouse informant in this case. Like, this seems like a perfect case for a jailhouse informant. It could fill a lot of holes up. Did they never try? Why wouldn't you get an informant?

**Clare Gilbert:**

How long was he in jail before he was tried?

**Susan Simpson:**

Years. Years. They had to have tried to get an informant, I feel like. The case is crying out for one.

Turns out, they did try. There was a jailhouse informant. I'd like to claim I'm a psychic, but, no. Sometimes, these cases are just predictable.

Later on that week, while talking to Dale Bundy, I had almost forgot to ask about any possible informants, since nothing in the files I had seen had suggested any existed. But after our interview, as were packing up, I remembered what Clare and I had been discussing earlier on the way in, and I asked one more question.

**[51:27] Susan Simpson:**

He was in prison for a while before trial. Did you ever look to see whether he had ever talked to anyone in prison, or...?

**Deputy Dale Bundy:**

Yes, he did. In jail.

**Susan Simpson:**

Who did he talk to?

**Deputy Dale Bundy:**

We didn't use it at trial, because the guy would have been impeachable, but he spoke to an inmate in, or he had a roommate in the Glynn County Jail - we didn't house him here. There was an inmate, and I don't remember the guy's name, but, he came to us and said "I want to tell you what Dennis Perry said."

So, Bundy had gone out and talked to this guy.

**[52:03] Deputy Dale Bundy:**

What do you know about Dennis? He said one night he was in his room, and a couple of black guys had come in to talk to him. And Dennis, I think he said Dennis had the top bunk. And Dennis came in and they were leaning on Dennis's bunk, and they left. And he said, "I hate," pardon my French here, "I hate

niggers.” He says “I don’t like ‘em on my bed.” He says “I’ve already killed two of them, and I’ll kill some more if I get a chance”. So we called in the GBI, and the BGI polygraphed him. And he told the truth.

Bundy wasn't able to remember the guy's name after so many years, but he remembered talking to him, and he'd believed his story.

**[52:47] Susan Simpson:**

So you found him believable, from what you talked to him?

**Deputy Dale Bundy:**

Yes Ma'am. And the polygraph was administered by the GBI, by a very reputable polygraphist.

Without having anything more to go on, Clare and I weren't sure where to start with finding this informant. But luckily, the very next day, we got a break. We were going through files in the DA's office when Clare found a folder labeled with a name I hadn't seen before.

**[53:14] Clare Gilbert:**

OK...Ruffner?

**Susan Simpson:**

This is him.

**Clare Gilbert:**

...took a lie detector test...

Gregory Trent Ruffner. That was our informant. It turns out, in October of 2000, about 10 months after Dennis Perry's arrest, he'd written a letter to the DA's office about Dennis:

*Dear [DA Stephen] Kelly:*

*I'm writing to you concerning the double murder case in Camden County. I'm a trustee out here at the detention center, and when we change out the laundry and uniforms throughout the jail, I often talk with a lot of inmates. Well the other night I was reading the paper I saw this guy's picture Dennis Perry in there saying he was charged with these murders. Well he had made numerous comments about n-words and what he will do to them. I really didn't pay it much*

*attention but when he said it, but when I saw his picture and his charges it struck me that he was real hateful and guilty. I really need to talk to you or someone in your office about what he said to me.*

A week later, Deputy Bundy and GBI Agent Ron Rhodes went out to talk to Ruffner. In his memo, Agent Rhodes wrote:

*"Ruffner stated he was working the laundry detail in the jail approximately two to three weeks ago when he entered the cell of Dennis Perry. Ruffner stated Perry asked him if he could wash his blanket on his bed because "[n-words] keep putting their arms on my blanket." Ruffner advised Perry then stated, "I hate these motherfucking [n-words] and if I ever get the chance again, I'll kill me another one." Ruffner stated he did not know Perry at this time, but as he read the newspapers several weeks later, he recognized Perry's picture in the paper in reference to Perry's preliminary hearing."*

*"Ruffner further provided Agent Rhodes with a piece of paper, which Ruffner stated he wrote Dennis Perry's comment down right after he stated it. The piece of paper Ruffner provided Agent Rhodes can be located at the rear of the case file."*

There was no piece of paper in the DA's case file, so who knows what it said. But a few days later, Ruffner was given a polygraph, just like Bundy had told us, and there was a page with the results on it. The results: no deception indicated. Then, five months later, Ruffner wrote another letter to the DA's office:

*Mr. Kelley,*

*I gave a statement and took a lie detector test about something inmate [Dennis] Perry told me before. Well, last week I was moved over to his side of the jail and I got a chance to talk to him for a couple of days. He told me he killed the black people and it didn't matter because y'all didn't have no evidence.*

*He also told me the drugs he was on.*

*The reason I'm writing this is because when I went to take the lie detector test the detective in Camden told me to try and see what else I could get out of inmate Perry. So I did what I could. If you think it could help please come see me.  
Sincerely,*

*Trent Ruffner.*

From the file, there wasn't much indication of what had happened with Ruffner after that. He was listed as a State's witness in their filings, and there are several notes referencing failed efforts to find him and serve him a subpoena for trial, but no indication they succeeded in serving him.

But we do know, from Bundy's interviews with other witnesses, that back there in 2000 he'd taken Ruffner's statements as the corroboration he needed to show Dennis Perry's guilt. For instance, in Bundy's interview with Jeff Kittrell, it was Ruffner's story that Bundy was referencing to explain why he knew that Donnie Barrentine's confession had just been empty bragging:

**[56:16] Deputy Dale Bundy:**

We've got a man in jail that, the night we arrested him made some statements where we're sure he's the man, and as of late he made some more statements where we're sure he's the man.

But according to Bundy when we talked to him, although he'd found Ruffner believable, the prosecutor had ultimately made the call not to use him at trial.

**Deputy Dale Bundy:**

A jailhouse person, like I said, the reason we didn't use him is that he would have been too easy to impeach. You understand what I'm talking about, impeaching a witness?

**Susan Simpson:**

Yeah, he had a long history of...

**Deputy Dale Bundy:**

And it would've tainted our case that we were desperate enough that we would have to use something like that.

Even though Ruffner wasn't brought in to testify at Dennis's trial, I wanted to know more about his story. He was still living in Brunswick, and we had the return address listed on his letters to the DA, so we started with that, and from there, relatives and neighbors helped us track down where he was staying.

**[57:08] Neighbor:**

Last house on the right.

**Susan Simpson:**

Excellent!

But he wasn't home the first time we went. So we tried again.

**Susan Simpson:**

Ruffner...anyone home?

**Ed Costikyan:**

This mattress wasn't there the first time.

**Susan Simpson:**

There's lights on, let's try again. Everyone out.

And tried again.

**Susan Simpson:**

Greg Ruffner, take 302.

And kept trying. But we had no luck. Between my attempts and the attempts of the GIP interns to contact him, we met not only with Ruffner's family, but also his girlfriend's extended family, and various people that were hanging out at his house that we still don't know who they are. All of whom however promised to pass on our info to Ruffner, and to ask him to get in touch with us. But he never did, and we never did manage to run into Ruffner himself.

Which means, for me, it's looking like Gregory Trent Ruffner is going to be the witness that got away. Because last week, he got arrested on some pretty serious charges, so while I hate to declare failure on anything, my window of opportunity to hear from Ruffner himself may have closed.

But if Ruffner's story is true, it seems like there should be some kind of evidence out there to corroborate it. Because according to Ruffner, Dennis Perry was the kind of guy who'd announce his desire to kill black people to a random acquaintance. And over the 18 years since Dennis Perry's arrest, there's no way he'd have made comments like that just to Ruffner that one time, and no one else ever.

So even if I couldn't talk to Ruffner, I could talk to others who knew Dennis Perry from being incarcerated with him. And find out whether they'd ever seen anything to indicate that Dennis Perry was so racist it could drive him to commit murder.

**[58:44] John Lawrence:**

Oh no, no way, he's not a racist person

**Colin Miller:** That's John Lawrence. Susan first heard about him while going through some family photos with Brenda.

**Brenda Perry:**

These are pictures that we had taken since we had gotten married. This was his bunkmate for 6 years. This was my best friend, and so they got married. He's home now.

John Lawrence and Dennis Perry were together for nearly a decade in Autry State Prison, and for most that time, they lived together in the same small room.

**Brenda Perry:**

Yeah, they were kind of, they were real big buddies, and so they just kind of watched one another's back, and just got one another through. John was a good boy.

One day, after Brenda and Dennis had reconnected and gotten married in 2009, Dennis told Brenda he had an idea: he thought Brenda's friend Michelle should meet his roommate, John Lawrence. Brenda thought that was a great idea too, and, efficient as always, she quickly took care of matters.

**Susan Simpson:**

So you introduce your friend to him, to his roommate [laughs]...

**Brenda Perry:**

Yeah, she worked with me, I was her boss, and she was divorced and everything, and I said "Michelle, ..." and she was miserable, [background: she's a good girl, too]. Yeah, she's a good girl. I said "Michelle, me and Dennis have somebody we want you to meet."

**Susan Simpson:**

Oh my god.

**Brenda Perry:**

So she went up there to to visit Dennis, or we set it up for her to visit John, she went up there, and yeah, they got married.

Dennis and Brenda's matchmaking turned out to be a success.

**Michelle Lawrence:**

Well, Brenda and I, we'd been friends forever. Forever. And, I was going through a rough time, I just went through an ugly divorce. And Brenda's husband, Dennis, at the time said I needed to pen pal John.

At first, John and Michelle only wrote to one another. But things progressed from there.

**Michelle Lawrence:**

It was almost a year before I went to the facility. But John and I wrote, and talked on the phone, and just, [John Lawrence in background: communicated] we just communicated. I fell in love with him through the letters. But yeah, it was a year later that I went and met him.

After that, Brenda no longer had to make the weekend drive to Autry alone.

**Michelle Lawrence:**

Brenda and I went religiously, every weekend. We travelled that 3 1/2 hour ride together, split a hotel room, and were there, every weekend.

Michelle no longer has to spend every weekend making the trip to see John. After 23 years, he was released from prison, and the Lawrences now live together up near Athens, Georgia.

**Michelle Lawrence:**

I consider our happiness -- I thank them every time I see them. But yeah. They're good people.

Michelle and John both hope Dennis will have the chance to come home to Brenda one day too.

**Michelle Lawrence:**

Him even being able to fall in love with Brenda and to trust her like he does -- he would be lost without Brenda. You know, they, that's just who he needs is Brenda. But it took him a long time to open up her. We'd sit there at those small tables, and they would just be talking and talking. And cry. Yeah. That's a whole 'nother world.

John, for his part, had lived with Dennis when Brenda and Dennis met. But he didn't get the same perspective on Brenda and Dennis that Michelle got to hear.

**Susan Simpson:**

Did he ever like share with you that he was talking to this woman, or...

**John Lawrence:**

Naw, we don't talk about that. [laughs] No, you don't do that. Certain things is off limits, you know because some guys in there...

**Michelle Lawrence:**

They look for your weakness. [Susan: Ah]

**John Lawrence:**

And they don't mind, whatever it takes to get up under your skin, they'll do it. Even if it's talking to your lady, or sleep, they'll do something behind your back. You have to be careful.

**Michelle Lawrence:**

John used to always tell me, you have to watch that word 'vulnerable'. They can't come off as vulnerable. Or weak.

**John Lawrence:**

Can't.

Which is why, although John and Dennis lived together for years, it wasn't until John was out of prison that he really began to learn about Dennis' case.

**John Lawrence:**

When we was in the penitentiary, we don't talk about the cases, and ah, he never mentioned it to me. I heard through [Sketcher?].about what went on, but as far as me and him coming out and talking to me about it, that's one thing we don't

do. We don't invade people's privacy. I was there for him as a friend, and anything I could do to help I did, and vice versa he did the same for me.

And there were a lot of times that John Lawrence and Dennis Perry had to be there for one another.

**[1:03:11] Michelle Lawrence:**

They have to survive.

**John Lawrence:**

It is scary, to be honest with you. Like I said, I did 23 years, it was horrible, when I say horrible, I mean fighting, stabbing...

So even though John and Dennis never much talked about their cases, John believes he knows exactly what kind of person Dennis is. And John, who is a black man, has never once had reason to think Dennis was racist.

**John Lawrence:**

Like I said, me and him were bunkmates for years. No one who knows him better than I do. He never came off towards me as a racist. I mean, if he can help you he would. Anything he can do, he will help you out.

And John Lawrence never heard Dennis Perry use slurs or racist language, let alone anything remotely likely what Jane Beaver claimed to have heard.

**John Lawrence:**

I mean, we're all human, everybody gets upset, but he still, when he got upset, as far as that is concerned, that never came up, that never happened. He never called nobody out by name. Never disrespected nobody. We always did things together, him and I, so I mean I can't, I don't see how, I don't see the racist in him. I don't. Like I said, I've been with him for a decade, so, a half a decade.

I know him better than any of 'em. He's been down to earth with me. We're like brothers, and we're still like brothers.

**[1:04:54] Susan Simpson:** Dennis didn't meet John Lawrence until after his conviction, which was many years after his arrest. But even in his years in the Glynn County Detention Center -- during the time when, according to Trent Ruffner, he was looking to kill another black person -- his statement stands at odds with what else I've been able to

learn about Dennis' time there. And from Dennis' letters and notes from that time period, there are further glimpses into what his life was like then, at the Glynn County Detention Center. One of the letters was written in 2002, and it was a short note that said,

*Hey Dee,*

*I pray that things are well with and for you. Myself I'm fine. So how did things go [at your court date] on the 28th? ...*

It ends,

*"Well my brother, this was just a little note to let you know that you are still in my thoughts and prayers. Tell everyone I said hello, and if my boy Scrappy is still there, tell him he's supposed to be keeping in touch with me."*

I looked up the man who'd written the letter. He was out of prison now, but just going off of the dates I could find, it seemed like he would have been in jail with Dennis at the same time Trent Ruffner was. And if I couldn't talk to Trent Ruffner, maybe I could find someone who could at least tell me what Dennis' life was like at the time he and Ruffner were in jail together. The letter writer was a black man, so maybe if there had been talk in jail about Dennis Perry's desire to kill another black man, maybe he'd have gotten wind of it. Although from his note, it didn't seem like he had.

So I called him. And he didn't recall anyone named Ruffner, and thought he probably would've remembered a name like that if he had known him. But he did remember Dennis Perry.

**Letter Writer:**

Like I said, we were roommates, and we were roommates for a while. I have nothing bad to say about him. I remember nothing bad that he did, or anything like that.

**Susan Simpson:**

Yeah, I just wondered....

**Letter Writer:**

I don't know anything about no racist remarks, like I say, none of that. I don't even remember Dennis ever getting into a fight.

The letter writer and Dennis had never gone into any details about their charges, though the letter writer had known of the murders at Rising Daughter and knew that was what Dennis was in for. But he and Dennis had gotten along.

**Letter Writer:**

We even had bible study together. So, you know. No I don't see Dennis being no racist, uh uh. It could've been hidden now -- I don't put nothing past no one. It could've been hidden. But as far as openly, no, he didn't do that.

The letter writer had no way of saying what was in Dennis Perry's heart, but as far as his words and actions showed, Dennis just never gave any sign of harboring the kind of racist views that would lead someone to commit murder.

And that's why this whole argument is so frustrating. Dennis can't ever prove he's not a racist -- that's just not something that's knowable, or provable. But if Dennis Perry was so racist he'd been motivated to kill a black person just so that he could know what it felt like, I think it's reasonable to expect that some fragment of that racism would have expressed itself on some other occasion in his life.

Dennis Perry's friends and family likely did him zero favors with the jury when they laughed at Jane Beaver's story. But I can see why they did now. They laughed because to them it showed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jane Beaver had made the entire thing up.

**[1:08:46] Susan Simpson:** Thanks for listening to Episode 12 of Undisclosed: The State vs. Dennis Perry. We'll have an addendum on Thursday for you, so if you have questions about this episode or the last one, send them to us on Twitter with the hashtag UD Addendum.

Mital Telhan, is our executive producer. Our logo was designed by Ballookey, and our theme music is by Ramiro Marquez and Patrick Cortez. Audio production is done by Rebecca LaVoie of Partners in Crime Media, and host of the Crime Writers On podcast.

To find case documents, timelines of key events, and witness charts, go to our website, at undisclosed-podcast.com. Episode transcripts are available on our website too, prepared by our transcribing team Brita Bliss, Erica Fladell, Dawn Loges, and Skylar Park.

And thanks so much to our sponsors for making it possible for us to come back week after week. Don't forget to follow us online, on all our social media our handle is @UndisclosedPod. That's Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

And if any of our listeners out there have information on Dennis Perry's case that you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us at undisclosedpodcast@gmail.com, or leave us a message at (410) 205-5563.

That's all for this week, and thanks so much for listening.