

UNDISCLOSED, The State v. Dennis Perry
Episode 9 - That Makes Me God
September 3, 2018

[2:30] Colin Miller If at some time over the past decade you happened to catch the episode of *Unsolved Mysteries* about Swain case, more likely than not, in the episode that you watched, you didn't see anything about any possible suspects in the case. Instead, you heard some interviews with law enforcement, watched Robert Stack fiddle around with the killer's glasses, and saw some reenactments of how the shooting went down. And then, at the very end, suddenly an image flashes up on the screen and announces that this case is now a solved mystery: a man named Dennis Perry is serving two life sentences for the murders at Rising Daughter Church.

But that's not always how the episode went. Before 2003, when Dennis Perry was convicted, it was usually the original Slain Swain segment that aired on TV. And that original version of the show had a section on possible suspects in the case. Most of that discussion centered around one possible suspect in particular.

[3:12] Robert Stack, *Unsolved Mysteries*:

For five months, police searched for the killer using the composite drawing. But no new leads or clues surfaced. [sirens]

Finally, July 5, 1985, police, 135 miles away in Telfair County, Georgia, pulled over a car for a minor traffic violation. In the trunk, they found an automatic weapon and a submachine gun. Three suspects were taken into custody. One of them was Donnie Barrentine.

Agent Joe Gregory:

We were given some information by some acquaintance of these people, that Donnie Berrentine had told people in Florida that he had murdered a black preacher and his wife. In a church.

[4:19] Rabia Chaudry: Hi, and welcome to *Undisclosed*. This is the ninth episode in the case of *The State v. Dennis Perry*. My name is Rabia Chaudry. I'm an attorney and author of the book *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 EvidenceProf Blog.

[4:55] Susan Simpson: In the 33 years since the Swains were killed, there have been well over a hundred people who were, at one time or another, identified as potential suspects in the case. And that's only including the potential suspects who were actually investigated to some degree. If you included all of the names of all of the people who've ever been called in as suspects by anyone who's watched any of the TV shows about the case, your list would be hundreds of names longer still. But even of the possible suspects who were actually investigated to some degree, most of those individuals were never suspects in the strong sense of the word. More like persons of interest, who were checked into, and ruled out. And Camden County is not all that big, so it's probably not surprising that, while I've been down there, I've sometimes run into people who were, at one point or another, named as suspects in the case. Like one time I was down in Woodbine, talking to a man I'd met about how I was down there looking into the Swain case, and when he handed me his business card, I recognized his name right away.

[5:56] Susan Simpson:

And I'll say in advance, this is a very long list, but did you know you were a suspect in the Swain murders?

Larry Linker:

You've got to be kidding.

Susan Simpson:

I am not. Your name is on the list. It's a very *long* list.

Larry Linker:

I never knew that. Why in the hell would I be...I mean I don't understand. Well see, let me tell you something. Back when the Smiths...there were five generations, I mean, what is it, I don't have any memory... [Susan: three, yeah] I mean, like like 80 years, you know at all? Well *his* daddy, his daddy's daddy, put my daddy in prison one time. For *nothing*.

So over the years, yeah, there have been a lot of potential persons of interest in this case. But there were only ever a few for whom there was really enough evidence against them that they became a subject of serious interest to investigators. And in this case, when it comes to possible suspects, there is one name that has always stood out

from the rest: Donnie Barrentine. Before the case was reopened in 1998 and Dennis Perry became the prime suspect, that designation had belonged to Donnie Barrentine. And his status as a suspect didn't go away even after Dennis Perry was convicted. Even after Dennis Perry's conviction, some people continued to believe that Donnie Barrentine might have really done this. And from time to time the original episode of Unsolved Mysteries episode would still air, with his face on the screen, and his name listed as the prime suspect in the case..

Donnie Barrentine was never charged with the murders of Harold and Thelma Swain, but the case has never really left him alone either. And for the past 33 years, he's had to live with accusations that he was responsible for their deaths.

[8:40] Rabia Chaudry: To Deputy Dale Bundy, the reason that the initial investigators had never able to solve the Swain case, and the reason they had failed to ever correctly identify Dennis Perry as the culprit, was because they'd been blinded by their obsessive focus on Donnie Barrentine.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

They got tunnel vision. [Susan: For?] For Donnie Barrentine and that bunch, because of what Kittrell had said. That's exactly what happened, Joe Gregory from the GBI, bless his heart, he had gotten so convinced that Donnie Barrentine did it that he couldn't look anywhere but Donnie Barrentine.

Dale Bundy isn't right about this, though. That's not what happened with the original investigation. From the thousands of pages we've gone through from the initial investigation, tunnel vision wasn't actually one of the original investigators' sins. There was intense interest in Donnie Barrentine, yes, but not to the exclusion of other suspects and other theories. And after the case against Barrentine stalled out, they began looking for the next big break in the case.

[9:40] Susan Simpson:

He did accuse you and Joe Gregory of having tunnel vision, which...

Deputy Butch Kennedy:

[laughs] That's probably true. But we didn't have anybody to tunnel.

If the original investigators had ever had a suspect that they could've pursued to the exclusion of all others, then sure, Butch Kennedy, they might've fallen into the trap of having tunnel vision. But that hadn't happened. There'd never had a target that they'd

been able to pursue for months on end. With every single suspect they'd investigated, they'd eventually hit a wall. There'd come a point where they just couldn't push the investigation any further in that direction. And when they hit that point, when they felt like they'd run down everything they could, they moved on to new leads, and new clues, and new possibilities. It's not that they completely discarded old theories and old suspects -- and from time to time they'd circle back to those old leads, to revisit them with fresher eyes -- but at no point did they become so convinced of any one theory that they began to reject or disregard any evidence that could hint at an alternative solution to the puzzle.

So Dale Bundy's belief that other investigators focused on Donnie Barrentine to the exclusion of other suspects isn't accurate. But his perception that other investigators had tunnel vision on Donnie Barrentine, and that it impeded their ability to effectively investigate this case -- well that actually makes some sense. Because for the most part, the investigators that Bundy was dealing with in 1998 were *not* the original investigators -- he spoke to Butch Kennedy and Joe Gregory about the case on only a handful of occasions, and never at length. Instead, the investigators that Bundy was primarily dealing with were from the defense team. And when it came to the defense team, Dale Bundy's description of an investigation plagued by tunnel vision is a thousand percent correct. Because once the defense team learned about Donnie Barrentine, he pretty much became the focus of the entire defense investigation. They decided Donnie Barrentine was the man who had really done this crime, and they never looked back.

So, at Dennis Perry's trial, the defense strategy can be summarized in four words: Donnie Barrentine did it. Everything the defense did was focused on portraying Donnie Barrentine, and not Dennis Perry, as the real killer. But, it didn't work. The jury didn't buy it. They convicted Dennis Perry instead.

Sometimes, I think that maybe if Donnie Barrentine had not been arrested that night in Telfair County, and if he'd never become a possible alternate suspect in this case, Dennis Perry might not be in prison today. Because if the defense hadn't had Donnie Barrentine to blame, they'd have been forced to develop some other kind of defense strategy, and to focus more on showing the jury all of the weaknesses in the State's case. And, if they'd done that, I think Dennis Perry would have had a much stronger chance of an acquittal. Hindsight, as always, is 20/20, and it's easy to second guess a defense strategy after the verdict has been returned. But in this case, it's clear that the defense counsel's strategy of pointing the finger at Donnie Barrentine did not work to Dennis' advantage at his trial.

[12:48] Colin Miller: When Dale Bundy reopened the investigation into the Swain case in 1998, he pretty much immediately disregarded the case's previous prime suspect. That was old news. Dale Bundy seems to have believed, not unreasonably, that if Donnie Barrentine had been involved in the Swain case, that would have already been established by now, with all the people who'd been looking at it. And that it'd be more effective to focus new investigative resources elsewhere, at new leads that may have been overlooked before.

Accusations against Donnie Barrentine were also nothing new. He was kind of a magnet for unsubstantiated murder accusations, but none of them had ever been shown to be true. And besides -- this wasn't the kind of murder that Barrentine would do.

[13:26] Susan Simpson:

OK, did you look at...

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Well Donnie Barrentine is a bad boy. [Susan: Well, yeah, but...] I can tell you that. He was accused of blowing the head off of a farmer with a shotgun in an orange grove in Florida, and killing another person. Donnie Barrentine told us point blank: he says, "They looked at me for doing this", he says, "That's not my style". He says, "To go in a church and shoot somebody with a small caliber handgun", he says "That's not my style".

Dale Bundy was not the only investigator involved in the reopened investigation, though, and not everyone in the Sheriff's Department was so certain that disregarding Barrentine was the right way forward in the case. In 1998, Mike Ellerson, then a deputy at the Camden County Sheriff's Office, had also been assigned to the Swain case, to provide support to Bundy's investigation. And Ellerson did not recall Dale Bundy or the other officers on the case ever bringing Barrentine's name up. As Mike Ellerson recalls it, at the time that he was assigned to the case, the only possible suspect that was discussed was Dennis Perry, and Dennis Perry alone.

[14:31] Susan Simpson:

So here's where you first come in. Do you think Bundy was thinking of Perry before he went to talk to Cora, or is that when he first got...

Deputy Mike Ellerson:

I think so

Susan Simpson:

Why do you think that?

Deputy Mike Ellerson:

Because it was...because Barrentine's name never came up. I mean, Perry was the only name that ever came up.

Susan Simpson:

So even before witnesses were talked to, you think Perry's name came up?

Deputy Mike Ellerson:

I think so. Before me, you know.

Susan Simpson:

It's just so strange, I can't figure out why he even knew...so his story is he went to talk to Cora Fisher and he had Perry kind of in the back of his mind. But there's a million suspects in that file. Why would you ever pick out Perry out of all of that?

Deputy Mike Ellerson:

Perry's the only name I ever been told or heard. And I had to read through stuff in order to come up with Barrentine.

It wasn't until Ellerson had read through the files on his own that he even learned about Donnie Barrentine, or about the fact he'd ever been considered a suspect in the case. As far as Mike Ellerson remembers, Dale Bundy had never brought up the possibility that other suspects might exist.

Dale Bundy was right, though, about the fact that Donnie Barrentine had already been the focus of considerable investigative efforts. And not just from Camden County. Back in the mid-80s, Donnie Barrentine has been investigated by a lot of law enforcement personnel from a lot of jurisdictions, for a lot of crimes he'd supposedly committed, and all of those investigations seem to have concluded that Barrentine's bark was worse than his bite. The only charges against him that ever stuck were a weapons possession charge he picked up after being arrested in Telfair County, Georgia, in 1985. And it was that same arrest that led to him becoming, for a time, the prime suspect in the Swain case.

[16:04] Rabia Chaudry: Late in the evening on July 5th, 1985, in the city of McCrae, Georgia, State Trooper Bobby Christian made a traffic stop, and he pulled over a 1978 Toyota Corolla. The reason why he made the traffic stop isn't clear -- the reason for it doesn't seem to have been recorded anywhere. But for whatever reason, he decided that it was suspicious, and he pulled them over.

There were three men in the car, all of them in their mid to late 20s. Two of them -- Donnie Barrentine and Jeffrey Kittrell -- and been from the town of Marianna, in the Florida panhandle. And third -- David Roberson, the driver of the car-- was from Georgia, in a town not too far from Brunswick. Trooper Christian frisked the men, one by one, and then he made a search of the car. And when he did, lo and behold, he found a weapon. And not just any weapon. It was a rare, high powered, and extremely expensive machine gun, capable of firing 1200 rounds a minute. And it was equipped with a silencer.

Later on, the police would also discover that, at the time of this traffic stop, one of the men had been in possession of a 9mm, and to hide it, he'd tossed the gun, under the Corolla, where it was later discovered. One of the three men -- David Roberson -- would tell police that the 9mm belonged to him. And, he claimed, that 9mm was legally owned and registered in his name.

But the machine gun, well, that was different. That was not a gun that any of the three men were legally authorized to possess. And so, all three of them were arrested and taken to the Telfair County jail to be booked on weapons charges.

And, four days later, the Telfair County authorities made a call down to Camden County.

[17:52] Susan Simpson:

So what about Barrentine - how did you find out about Barrentine in the first place?

Deputy Butch Kennedy:

McRae.

Susan Simpson:

So they called you? How did they know to call you? It's not far, but it's not close either.

Deputy Butch Kennedy:

They, with the information that we had spread, and this guy had a machine gun in the car, and he was on his way to kill somebody, they thought it might be of interest to us.

On July 10th, 1985, Butch Kennedy and another deputy named Hugh Jenkins headed up to Telfair County. There, they interviewed all three men. Those interviews with Jeff Kittrell, David Roberson, and Donnie Barrentine were recorded, and though the tape has been lost, we do still have the transcripts. And those transcripts show that, in these interviews, the investigators didn't learn very much. All three men gave roughly the same story: David Roberson had just been driving around randomly, trying to get his mind off of some tragic events he just had recently gone through, when he'd stopped at a convenience store and run into Donnie Barrentine and Jeff Kittrell. They'd gotten in Roberson's car, and they'd all been riding around together when they were pulled over for some kind of traffic violation. And all three of them had just been *shocked* when Trooper Christian had pulled a machine gun out of the car. All three of them were floored -- can you just imagine it? They said. They were riding around with that machine gun all night, and didn't even have a clue that it was there. One of the other two men must have brought it with him, and failed to tell the others.

So Butch Kennedy and Hugh Jenkins returned home to Camden County without any answers. But then, just a few days later, they got another call from Telfair County: one of the three men they'd arrested had changed his mind. Telfair County told them, he wants to talk, and he knows something about your double homicide case.

Butch Kennedy and Joe Gregory went back up to Telfair County again, and on July 15th, 1985, at 6:15 pm, they interviewed Jeff Kittrell for a second time. And what he told them would change the direction of this case forever.

[21:52] Susan Simpson: This second interview with Jeff Kittrell was tape recorded too, but for this interview, there was no cassette tape, and no transcript either. All we have to go off of is a three page memo that Agent Gregory prepared afterwards.

However, we do have one tape recording of Kittrell telling this story. Many years later, after Dennis Perry had been charged with the murders, his defense team began investigating for themselves, and they began developing a defense that would try to portray Donnie Barrentine as the real killer. And since the defense team had called

Kittrell and tried to interview him, Deputy Dale Bundy felt that he had to do the same. And so, in December of 2000, Dale Bundy and a GBI agent made the trip to Marianna, and tracked down Jeff Kittrell at the Food World, where he was working as a grocery store clerk.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

I guess you know why we're here.

Jeff Kittrell:

Yes sir.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Alright. We, uh, we made an arrest last January on a fella for a double homicide in a church up in our county. I know years ago, you'd heard Donny talkin' about killin' somebody on a similar case, and all that stuff.

Jeff Kittrell:

No.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Donny Barrentine is who I'm talkin' about.

Jeff Kittrell agreed to speak to the investigators about what he knew, and here's what he told them about the Swain case.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

What do you know about that shooting up there in Georgia?

Jeff Kittrell:

Well, the only thing I know about the shooting in Georgia, the one that happened over there, in uh, Woodbine, I had got off work, there was several friends... I don't remember who all was at the house that night. And we was sittin' around watchin' cable and all, TV, and uh, Donny come walkin' in the door. Knockin' at the- come walked in the door. Him and, uh, a blonde-headed guy. Come walkin' in the door. Blonde-headed guy with glasses on. And, uh, he uh, he said, uh, "Y'all been watchin' the news? Y'all been watchin' the news?" I said, no. We weren't watchin no news. We were gonna watch a movie.

One day in 1985, Jeff Kittrell said, he'd been having a get-together at his place in Cottondale, Florida, which was not too far from Marianna. He'd just been hanging out with some friends, watching TV, when Donny Barrentine and some other guy had walked into Jeff Kittrell's house. Kittrell hadn't known the guy, but he was blonde and wore glasses. And then, Donny Barrentine started asking if everyone at the house had been watching the news. And when they told him no, Barrentine started bragging.

Jeff Kittrell:

And he went to braggin' about, said, "Well, I'm God. I'm God." I said, "What are you talkin' about, Donny?" He said, "Well, you know," he said, "God put man on Earth, God take man off this Earth." He said, "I put man on this Earth." He says, and "I take man off this Earth." He said, "Y'all'll see it in the news. Up there in Woodbine. Up there in church. Up there in Woodbine. It was the black church." He said that, he pointed at the other guy, he ain't never called that guy's name. Pointed at him, he said, "We went up there to the church. Up there in Woodbine."

According to Kittrell, Barrentine had come into this party and started announcing, "God put man on this earth, and god takes man off this earth. I put a man on this earth and I've taken a man off this earth. That makes me god." And then, Kittrell says, Barrentine told them about he and this blond friend of his had gone up to a black church in Georgia. Kittrell didn't know the name of Barrentine's buddy, this blond man from Georgia with the glasses, but, Kittrell said, this man was real cold blooded.

And so far, the way that Kittrell has told the story here, at the Food World in Marianna in December of 2000, that's pretty much the same way he told the story he told the story to Joe Gregory and Butch Kennedy back in 1985, up in Telfair County after they'd been arrested. And according to the transcript from one of the interviews that Kittrell had with Gregory and Kennedy, Kittrell told them:

[Barrentine] and his partner walked in there and hollered at the preacher, hey you! Yeah, I want you. Said that the preacher come back that way, said when the preacher got back there he said then, I shot him down. That's what he said, I shot him down. ... That uh, he shot, he said that the preacher come back there and he shot him down, that his wife jumped up a screaming, hysterical like, and come back there and he shot her down and then the organ players jumped up a screaming and he shot her. She fell like she'd been hit, but come to find out, she had just fainted.

[26:40] Rabia Chaudry: In 2000, while talking to Bundy in that Food World, Kittrell said something similar.

Jeff Kittrell:

And he said that, uh, they went in the church, and the preacher was up in the pulpit preachin'. And uh, he said, "And I shot him down in the pulpit." And he said that the preacher's wife, she jumped up and went screamin, he said, and whoever else was over there, he pointed at him and he said, he shot her down.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

And that sounded matter-of-fact? Right there in the pulpit?

Jeff Kittrell:

Right there in front of the pulpit. And he says that uh, then the organ player jumped up and went to screamin'. He said, and she was a big ol' fat, black woman. He said, and I shot her. I thought I hit her, but apparently I missed her and she just fainted.

That's obviously *not* how the Swains were killed. They were shot in the vestibule, not the pulpit. And Kittrell's claims that the couple in the black church had been shot up in the front of the church is one of the reasons that Dale Bundy told Kittrell that his story had to be wrong.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

And I think what you heard that night, and I'm not calling you a liar, don't misunderstand me, I think it was Donnie shootin' off his mouth about something he'd seen on the news. 'Cause there's some things that you've told us, right here, things just don't add up as far as what happened in the church that night. Because his account of what he told you is not what happened in the church that night.

It wasn't just that the details in Jeff Kittrell's story were wrong, Dale Bundy said. The way the Swains had been killed just didn't sound like the way Donnie Barrentine would have done things.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

That's gonna pretty well... I can get Donnie Barrentine off the hook for this one.

The way this shooting was one is not Donnie Barrentine's style. I know a lot of things, this was done sloppily. It was done with a lot of witnesses lookin' on, and the kind of weapon it was done with, I don't think Donnie would have done it that way.

Jeff Kittrell:

I know that he, uh--

Deputy Dale Bundy:

'Cause Donnie usually used a lot of guns when he did things.

Jeff Kittrell:

He used a shotgun, mostly.

In short, Dale Bundy said, the way the Swains had been killed had been amateur hour. And Donnie Barrentine was more skilled than that. Plus, using a little .25 caliber, like had been used to kill the Swains-- that just wasn't his style.

[31:16] Colin Miller: Back in 1985, though, the original investigators hadn't been willing to dismiss Jeff Kittrell's story on the grounds that Donnie Barrentine would've done a much better job of it, if he'd been the killer. Two days after getting the story from Jeff Kittrell about Donnie Barrentine's confession, Butch Kennedy and Joe Gregory drove to Marianna, Florida, and began interviewing the other people who'd been at this party with Donnie Barrentine. And all of the people they spoke to confirmed that it had happened.

The first person they spoke to was Jeff Kittrell's girlfriend, Sue Wilkes. She told the investigators:

One night, about two and a half months ago or so, I think it was the first part of April. I remember Donnie Barrentine came over to the house where Jeff and I were living. I'm pretty sure that Timmie Walker was there, too. Donnie was real drunk. He usually was. He had this 9mm and he was waving it around. He got to talking about being God. He said something about, "God giveth and God taketh away and with this, I'm God, because I can take it all away." Then he got to talking about killing a black preacher and his wife in a church. He said that the preacher was shot first and then when the preacher's wife ran through the door, she was shot, too.

The investigators then went to speak to Timmy Walker, and asked him about this party, and he told them:

Well he was talking about being God and all that and he was waving his gun around. Then he started talking about killing a black preacher and his wife. He said it was in a church over in Jacksonville. He said it was a drug hit because the man wouldn't pay for his drugs. He said that somebody went in while he waited outside and shot the preacher after they called him to the back. Then he said something about when the preacher's wife ran back and stuck her head in the door, that she was shot, too.

With these witnesses from Marianna corroborating the story they'd heard from Jeff Kittrell when they'd interviewed him in Telfair County, the investigators went back to Georgia to conduct more interviews. This time, they wanted to speak with Donnie Barrentine, and see what he had to say about these witnesses who were claiming he'd confessed to committing the murders at Rising Daughter Baptist Church.

Unfortunately, although there were numerous interviews of Donnie Barrentine, we have records showing the contents of only a single interview -- and that's the very first, very brief interview that Butch Kennedy had with Barrentine up in Telfair County on July 10th. That was the day they'd interviewed all three men, and all three men, including Barrentine, had told Kennedy that they didn't know a thing about anything. It never gets into the substance of anything at all.

But it's the only record of any of their interviews with Donnie Barrentine that we have. All the rest are missing now. Though, back in 1985, Kennedy is sure, every interview that had with Barrentine had been carefully documented.

Butch Kennedy:

Foster followed up with a document.

Susan Simpson:

It's very possible, I think we've lost a lot of records.

Butch Kennedy:

Glenn Thomas, in fact, Glenn Thomas, had the interview, or had the follow-up that Foster had sent back. Or sent to us.

Susan Simpson:

How do we get those files?

Butch Kennedy:

...another story.

Susan Simpson:

I don't believe they threw them- do you think they threw them away? Or do you think they're somewhere sittin' around in Camden County and we just gotta find it?

Butch Kennedy:

Maybe they just can't find it.

Without the written records of Barrentine's interviews, all we're left with are the memories of the law enforcement personnel who interviewed Donnie Barrentine, to try to reconstruct what he said to them, or how Barrentine explained all the witnesses who had come forward to tell the police that he'd confessed to the murders at Rising Daughter. But in 1988, only a few years after those interviews took place, Agent Joe Gregory told *Unsolved Mysteries* about what he recalled about those interviews with Donnie Barrentine:

Agent Joe Gregory:

After several interviews with Donnie, he admitted that he had told these people in Florida that he killed a black preacher and his wife, and then he just smiled and said, but I was lying to 'em. We've never come up with any hard evidence to connect Donnie with this case.

[35:10] Rabia Chaudry: That lack of hard evidence was not for a lack of trying, though. In late July of 1985, investigators arranged for Donnie Barrentine to be put in a lineup. The lineup took place down in Jacksonville, Florida, because, for some reason, that's where Donnie Barrentine had been moved to at that time. So Butch Kennedy and Joe Gregory chose two of the church ladies, and took them down to Florida to view the lineup: Vanzola Williams, who'd spoken to the killer out in the vestibule, and Gwen Owens, who had gotten a glimpse of the killer, and had helped in preparing composite images of him. In the *Unsolved Mysteries* episode, there's a reenactment of what happened next:

Actor:

You'll be viewing five individuals. I'd like you, if you will, to place yourself, in your mind, back at the church the night that this incident happened, okay?

Actress:

Yes, sir.

Actor:

The five individuals on the other side won't be able to hear or see you. Lights.

Actor 2:

Lights.

Donnie Barrentine, and five similar looking inmates and officers from Jacksonville. We have a photo of the six of them, all together, facing the camera, wearing mostly slacks and collared shirts, and it absolutely could be the album cover for some 80s one hit wonder band. Donnie Barrentine was #1 in the lineup, furthest to the left, but if you didn't know who he was already, there's nothing about him that seems to make him stand out from the others in any way. Here's how Agent Gregory described it:

Agent Joe Gregory:

We had a lineup, a live lineup, with Barrentine and, well some of them were actually police officers because we was tryin' to get 'em the same height, you know, as close in age as we could and everything, like an honest lineup. And she stood in the viewing room, they couldn't see her, and she stood there for 15 or 20 minutes, just lookin' up and down, up and down. Then she got to starin', obviously, at Barrentine. And I'm sittin' there just thinkin', "Oh boy, oh boy. She's gonna pick him out, she's gonna pick him out." And finally Butch ask her, "Ms. Williams, is there anybody there you recognize?"

And then, Vanzola Williams made her choice. GBI Agent Joe Gregory remembers that moment when Vanzola Williams pointed to one man in the lineup.

Agent Joe Gregory:

And she points to Barrentine and says, "That's him." And both of our hearts just dropped. And then she says, "Well, I'm not positive. But I think that's him." She said, "But I am positive those are the same boots he had on in the church."

Vanzola Williams was interviewed for the Unsolved Mysteries episode, and she described why she hadn't been fully confident that the man she'd selected out of the

lineup had, in fact, been the man she'd encountered in the vestibule on the night that Harold and Thelma Swain were killed:

Vanzola Williams on *Unsolved Mysteries*

There was about six mens there. And I really couldn't say that one of 'em was him, you know, because the person I saw had short hair. His complexion was a little bit lighter. But he had the same boots that I saw that night. The boots was what I recognized. But I wasn't really really sure.

[38:29] Colin Miller: The man she'd picked out had shorter hair, and he wasn't as tan. Hair can be cut, and tans can fade, so it didn't mean this *wasn't* the same man, but it did mean she wasn't as confident in her identification of the man's face. But the boots, well those, she said, she did recognize.

Agent Joe Gregory:

That's how we got into the Barrentine boots. These were custom made boots. Not a deal where, oh, I went to the store and bought a pair just like 'em.

So these were not the kind of boots anyone could just buy off a shelf -- they were custom snake skin boots. And, as Vanzola Williams told the investigators,

Agent Joe Gregory:

"But I recognize his boots. They're the same boots he was wearing the night he killed the Swains."

[39:22] Rabia Chaudry: On August 17, 1985, Butch Kennedy and Joe Gregory drafted up a warrant for Donnie Barrentine's arrest for the murder of Harold and Thelma Swain. A copy of that warrant is still in the case file today. But that's as far as the case against Barrentine ever went. The District Attorney for the Brunswick Judicial Circuit, Glenn Thomas, refused to sign off on it, and Donnie Barrentine was never charged.

Without an absolute identification from Vanzola Williams, and without any other physical evidence linking Donnie Barrentine to the crime scene, it meant the bulk of the case against him consisted of statements from the Florida witnesses about Donnie's confession. And based on his assessment of those witnesses credibility, DA Glenn Thomas did not want to bring that case.

Butch Kennedy:

He said that he didn't want to give Joe a warrant, because he didn't want to use, in so many words, drug dealers and prostitutes as reliable.

Susan Simpson:

Which DA was this?

Butch Kennedy:

Glenn Thomas.

Susan Simpson:

Okay. So he didn't want to prosecute Barrentine 'cause he-

Butch Kennedy:

He didn't want to take the word of, uh, a street whore or prostitute and drug dealers as credible.

Butch Kennedy was too polite to repeat DA Glenn Thomas' actual words, but the reason Glenn Thomas told Kennedy and Gregory that he wasn't going to charge Barrentine was that he wasn't going to use "whores and crackheads" in his courtroom.

Agent Joe Gregory remembers that conversation as well:

Agent Joe Gregory:

And when we went to the DA with it, he said, "I'm not puttin' whores and drug addicts on my, on the stand in my courtroom.

Susan Simpson:

Oh god.

Agent Joe Gregory:

Now we wasn't talkin' about a business exec here, we're talkin' about a guy that was a drug dealer himself. So he didn't hang out with what the DA called reputable witnesses.

Susan Simpson:

They usually don't.

Agent Joe Gregory:

But he went down there to Florida and bragged about doin' this.

But putting aside the inflammatory phrasing, if DA Glenn Thomas did not believe the witnesses against Donnie Barrentine were credible, then, as a prosecutor, it was his right not to pursue the charges here. Of course, if Glenn Thomas refused to bring any case where the witnesses were people that he thought were morally questionable, that would be another matter. But assuming that Thomas truly did not believe that the potential witnesses in this case were credible, then declining to bring charges was the right call.

And ultimately, the DA did not charge Donnie Barrentine with anything at all, whether related to the Swain case or otherwise. But that doesn't mean he escaped scot free from his arrest in Telfair County. Possession of that machine gun that had been found in the car with them was not just a state-level offense, it was also a crime under federal law. And even though the DA declined to charge Donnie Barrentine, the feds didn't.

Robert Stack on *Unsolved Mysteries*:

The murder charges against Donnie Barrentine were not pursued. But he was subsequently convicted on weapons charges and is currently serving 5 years in a federal penitentiary.

[42:36] Susan Simpson: After the case against Donnie Barrentine had been shut down by the DA, the investigators moved on to other leads and other suspects, though from time to time, they'd still look back into Donnie Barrentine again. Every few years, someone in the Camden County Sheriff's Department would take the case out again, and start poking around and start looking into the Barrentine theory once more. They'd re-interview old witnesses, and look into potential new witnesses, and see if other jurisdictions had information now that might help them put the pieces together. None of it really went anywhere, though -- that part of the investigation pretty much stalled out in 1985 when the DA declined to charge Donnie Barrentine, and for 15 years it never really progressed from there.

And then, in January of 2000, Dennis Perry was arrested for the murders at Rising Daughter Church. And in preparation for his trial, his defense team began to conduct their own investigation. And they very quickly reached the conclusion that it was Donnie Barrentine who had really killed the Swains, and for the next three years, Dennis' defense team would continue to investigate Barrentine. They would also investigate nearly a half dozen other people that, for one reason another, the defense team had come to believe might have been Barrentine's accomplice. Because Jeff Kittrell had

always claimed that Barrentine hadn't done these murders alone. Barrentine had had a buddy with him, Kittrell said, a blond man with wire-rimmed glasses who, according to Kittrell, was a real cold-blooded kind of guy.

And over the course of their investigation, this buddy of Donnie Barrentine's became the defense team's great white whale in this case. For years, they chased rumors of him, through Florida and through Georgia, and a half dozen different times they became convinced they'd finally found him. Only to decide, upon further investigation, that it was not the right man. Again and again they went back to the prosecution with new claims about who this man might've been, and the prosecution's frustration with this endless parade of alternate suspects was kind of understandable. In the end, the defense never did come up with a final theory about who Barrentine's buddy might've been.

And in hindsight, it's hard not to wonder if this cold blooded blond man that Kittrell had spoken of was less of a great white whale, and more of a giant red herring.

[45:14] Colin Miller: Even though the defense never found any solid answers as a result of the defense's reinvestigation into Donnie Barrentine, the State was forced to re-investigate into Barrentine too. Because if the defense's case was going to be that Donnie Barrentine did it, then the State's case would have to be that Donnie Barrentine didn't do it. And that put the Camden County Sheriff's Department in an unusual position. As Dale Bundy told Jeff Kittrell in 2000,

Deputy Dale Bundy:

We're probably the first police in the world tryin' to prove that Donnie Barrentine didn't do something.

Plenty of investigators had come and gone before in an effort to prove Barrentine was guilty of some crime or another. Now, the Camden County Sheriff's Department was setting out to prove his innocence. So Dale Bundy and the GBI agents assisting him interviewed witnesses, tracked down Barrentine's family, and, finally, in 2002, were able to find Donnie Barrentine himself. And after some persuading, they managed to convince him to drive up to Camden County to talk to them about the case.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Purpose of this taped interview is to interview Mr. Barrentine under grant of immunity issued to him earlier today by John Johnson, assistant district attorney in Wayne County. Mr. Barrentine is to be interviewed about the murders of

Harold and Thelma Swain and associated statements. Mr. Barrentine, are you here of your own free will?

Donnie Barrentine:

Yup.

Bundy's interview with Barrentine was short, just a half hour long. And in this interview, Bundy and the two other investigators in the room were definitely *not* employing the Reid Technique.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

We came here today to basically get yourself out of this.

That's the only reason Barrentine had ever agreed to drive all the way from Marianna to Camden County to be interviewed in the first place. For nearly 20 years, he'd had to deal with these accusations against him, and he just wanted to find a way to finally be free of it all.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Why'd you come here today?

Donnie Barrentine:

Well, um, to get this damn thing settled.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

And when you say getting settled, what does that mean?

Donnie Barrentine:

Well, every, every year or two it'll pop up. Some damn cop try to question my mama, you know, where do I live, I don't know what I gotta do.

Susan Simpson: This interview with Donnie Barrentine did not go into much detail about anything. Much of it consisted just of Bundy having Barrentine confirm that couldn't remember ever confessing to the murder of Harold and Thelma Swain, but that if he had confessed, well, it wouldn't have actually meant anything.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

As you were told earlier, several people have come forward and made statements about being at a party down in Florida. They said at the party you

came in drunk waving a weapon around, a handgun of some kind, claiming that you could play god, and you could give life and take life away. And that you had a friend, a bad ass friend of yours, I believe is how they put it, had gone to a church near Woodbine, Georgia and killed a preacher and his wife. Do you remember making those statements?

Donnie Barrentine:

I don't remember it, but if we were drunk that long ago it's possible.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Okay. Would you, is there a possibility you might have shot your mouth off about somethin' that you really didn't do just to impress somebody while you were drinkin'?

Donnie Barrentine:

It's possible.

Deputy Dale Bundy:

Okay. Have you ever done anything like that before in your younger days?

Donnie Barrentine:

Shot my mouth off? I'm sure I have.

Later on, at Dennis Perry's trial, Donnie Barrentine's testimony was pretty similar to what he's saying here. Barrentine just didn't remember confessing to the murder of the Swains, but if he had confessed at a party back then, well, he'd been drunk and spouting off. That's all. Just tryin' to talk big. Whatever it was he said, he hadn't meant it.

And, prosecutor John Johnson argued, when Donnie Barrentine had testified on the witness stand at Dennis Perry's trial, he'd had no reason to lie. If Barrentine had committed the murders, well he could have safely gone ahead and safely said so right then and there, and nothing would have happened to him for it. He had immunity. He had nothing to fear from telling the truth.

[49:18] Rabia Chaudry: The kind of immunity Donnie Barrentine was given is called use and derivative use immunity, and the fact Barrentine got that sort of immunity is not necessarily so unusual. Although it doesn't seem like the meaning of use and derivative use immunity was ever fully explained to either the jury or to Donnie Barrentine, both of

whom were left with the impression that he could never be prosecuted for the murder of the Swains, what it really meant was that nothing Donnie Barrentine said could ever be used as evidence against him.

But what was unusual about the grant of immunity given to Donnie Barrentine was the language used on the immunity agreement itself. It said,

COMES NOW the State of Georgia, by and through the District Attorney for the Brunswick Judicial Circuit, ... and, ... finding that said DONNIE BARRENTINE was a witness to the death of Harold and Thelma Swain, was present at the scene and has given statements to other persons about his involvement and his testimony to such is necessary to the public interest, hereby grants to DONNIE BARRENTINE use and derivative use immunity in the trial of the case of the State of Georgia vs. Dennis Perry.

No one has ever been able to explain why the grant of immunity that was given to Donnie was explicitly based on him having been present at, and a witness to, the murders of Harold and Thelma Swain. Because the State's whole theory of the case is that Dennis Perry did it, and Donnie Barrentine had nothing to do with it at all. So it's unclear what reason there could be for Donnie Barrentine to be given immunity on the basis of being a witness.

In fact, not even the prosecutor who prepared that immunity agreement knows why.

Agent Joe Gregory:

When the newspapers ask him why he granted Barrentine immunity to come up there and testify what he testified? He didn't know, but he said there must have been a good reason.

Susan Simpson:

He couldn't recall.

Agent Joe Gregory:

No, he couldn't recall.

But the biggest problem with the defense's strategy of blaming Donnie Barrentine had nothing to do with anything the prosecution had done. The way I see it, by trying to claim that the evidence showed Donnie Barrentine was really the killer, all the defense accomplished was to endorse the prosecution's case against Dennis Perry. Because

the evidence against both Donnie Barrentine and Dennis Perry overlaps in so many ways. And for both Perry and Barrentine, the case for their guilt is based on statements from witnesses who'd claimed to hear confessions, and eyewitnesses who'd claim to recognize them from the crime scene. And many of the weaknesses in the State's case against Dennis Perry were the same as the weaknesses in the defense's case against Donnie Barrentine.

So if the defense was going to argue that evidence they had against Donnie Barrentine been sufficient to show his guilt, well, that must mean that the evidence the prosecution had was sufficient to show Dennis Perry's guilt as well.

Take, for instance, the eyewitness identifications. Of all the witnesses at the church that night, Vanzola Williams had had the best opportunity to view the killer, from when she'd spoken to him in the vestibule. And Vanzola Williams had identified both Donnie Barrentine and Dennis Perry as the killer, and she'd had the same degree of confidence in making both identifications. For both Perry and Barrentine, Vanzola said, they looked like the man in the vestibule, but she wasn't sure.

[52:36] Colin Miller At the pre-trial hearing in Dennis Perry's case, Ms. Vanzola testified that, after Jane Beaver had shown her the photo of a man that she thought was the killer and asked if Vanzola and Cora could identify him, Vanzola had said that she'd never gone to the police to tell them about the incident. On cross, Dennis' defense counsel questioned her about why this was:

Q: Could you tell me how come you didn't [tell the police about the photo Ms. Beaver showed you]?

A: Because I wasn't sure. I didn't tell any - - I didn't even tell my family about it.

Q: Because you weren't sure?

A: Yes.

Q: You didn't want to point the finger at a man that you didn't think you were sure?

A: I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure.

And you can compare what Vanzola Williams said about her identification of Dennis Perry with what she said about her identification of Donnie Barrentine.

Vanzola Williams on *Unsolved Mysteries*:

But I wasn't really really sure.

[53:20] Susan Simpson: And there's another similarity here as well: Dennis Perry and Donnie Barrentine were both identified as a result of suggestive identification procedures. Something I hadn't actually realized until Butch Kennedy pointed it out to me.

Butch Kennedy:

In our lineup, in Jacksonville, we actually screwed that up.

Susan Simpson:

How so?

Butch Kennedy:

We let him wear his boots.

Susan Simpson:

And she recognized the boots, so that kind of tainted it?

Butch Kennedy:

I don't know that anyone's ever brought that to anyone's attention.

Susan Simpson:

So obviously he's wearing -- yeah... So, with the boots she was like, "That's it, that's it, that's it." (Sigh) But she did recognize the boots, she seemed very confident about the boots.

Butch Kennedy:

Yeah, she did (laughing).

Susan Simpson:

But then, can you ... because the boots had fixated in her mind, is she actually identifying Barrentine, or is she identifying the boots?

Butch Kennedy:

And she did, she DID in her statement say, "Those are the same kind of boots that person had on."

Butch Kennedy is right. Both about it being a screw up, and also about no one having brought it up before. This never came up at Dennis's trial or in any report I've ever seen, but by allowing Donnie Barrentine to wear his own clothes in the lineup, the

investigators had inadvertently opened up the possibility that it was the suspect's clothes that Vanzola Williams had identified, not the suspect himself.

[54:48] Vanzola Williams on *Unsolved Mysteries*:

But he had the same boots that I saw that night. The boots was what I recognized.

[55:06] Colin Miller: The boots contributed to Vanzola Williams' identification of Donnie Barrentine, and that's a problem. Because Donnie Barrentine's boots looked familiar to Vanzola Williams, it's possible that her recognition of the boots contributed to her tentative identification of Donnie Barrentine as the man she'd seen in the vestibule. If instead, someone else had been in the lineup wearing those same boots, she would have been more inclined to pick that individual out instead of Donnie Barrentine.

Still, although both identification procedures were flawed, this isn't to say that the identifications used for Barrentine and Perry were equivalent in magnitude. The way that Dennis Perry was identified was about as prejudicial and suggestive as an identification procedure can possibly be. Indeed, it would have been unconstitutional if it hadn't been for the fact that at a private individual, Jane Beaver, had done the initial flawed identification procedure before a law enforcement official repeated her prejudicial and suggestive process.

The potential suggestiveness of the Barrentine lineup was, in comparison, much smaller in magnitude, and likely wouldn't have precluded introduction of Vanzola Williams' identification had Donnie Barrentine been charged. Still, it does mean there may be good reason to avoid putting too much weight on Vanzola Williams' identification of either Donnie Barrentine or Dennis Perry.

There's another similarity between Donnie Barrentine and Dennis Perry as well. Both of them had the same alibi for the murders: they'd been at work, hundreds of miles away, at the time the Swains were killed. For Dennis, his alibi was the concrete company he'd been working at in Jonesboro, Georgia. For Donnie, his alibi had been an assembly line where he'd made industrial washing machines over in Marianna, Florida.

When Barrentine was arrested in 2002, he told investigators he couldn't remember where he'd been on March 11, 1985, but he knew he'd been at work that day.

[56:57] GBI Agent Trull:

Do you recall where you were at, by any stretch, on March 11th, 1985?

Donnie Barrentine:

No.

GBI Agent Trull:

I mean, I know that it's a longshot, but you understand we have to ask. I mean, that's [inaudible]. Were you working at that time?

Donnie Barrentine:

Uh, I worked in a place called Unimac

And Donnie Barrentine had a time card to show it. According to Agent Joe Gregory, for both Dennis Perry and Donnie Barrentine, after they'd been named the suspects in the case, he'd investigated by seeking out work records for both of them. Although, this is where the alibi defenses for Donnie Barrentine and Dennis Perry diverge, because the work records for Donnie Barrentine still exist today, while the work records for Dennis Perry have been lost.

But according to Barrentine's time card, he'd been at work at Unimac until 3:29 pm on the day the Swains were murdered. Now, if that had been 3:29 pm eastern time, that would have left Donnie plenty of time to get to Rising Daughter. But it wasn't. Marianna is in the panhandle, on central time, an hour behind, which would have made the drive from Marianna to Waverly a closer call. But not close enough to mean that he still couldn't have done it.

[57:58] Agent Joe Gregory:

One thing that the DA tried to say, "Oh it was impossible for Barrentine to drive from his job", because he was supposedly working that day, but we found out it was very common that people would walk out in the middle of the day and their buddies would log 'em out at the end of the day, you know, time clock 'em out.

Susan Simpson:

And his drive would have been easier than Dennis Perry's would have been.

Agent Joe Gregory:

Nobody recalls seeing him, of course we're talkin' a lot of, you know, time had passed since we went down there talking to these people, but nobody recalls seeing him that day. But coming back, we proved that it was very easy to make it

back from his town in Florida to the church, with time to spare. But the DA told the jury it was impossible.

Susan Simpson:

Yeah...

Agent Joe Gregory:

Couldn't be done. Lied to 'em. And he knew that Butch and I had driven that route and that you could do it.

Susan Simpson:

That's kinda what gets me -

Agent Joe Gregory:

He just flat lied to them.

And there was one more fact that applied to both of them equally: the forensic evidence. Because those glasses found in the vestibule did not belong to Dennis Perry, and they didn't belong to Donnie Barrentine either. And the DNA obtained from the hairs stuck in those glasses excluded Dennis Perry from being a contributor, but they also excluded Donnie Barrentine.

[59:24] Susan Simpson: The cases against Dennis Perry and Donnie Barrentine are based on similar evidence, and they also had similar weaknesses. In fact, had it been Donnie Barrentine that was charged in these murders, instead of Dennis Perry, in some ways the cases wouldn't have looked all that different. And, from the evidence I've seen, neither case is one that should have been prosecuted in the first case. So much in both is just left unanswered, or else left to be answered by unreliable witnesses.

But even assuming, for the sake of argument, that one of these cases *had* to be prosecuted, and that the State *had* to proceed to trial on either one case or the other, well, what I still don't get is *why* they chose to make that case the one against Dennis Perry.

Susan Simpson:

What gets me though, is that from the prosecutors perspective, it would have been so much easier to get Barrentine.

Agent Joe Gregory:

It would have been.

Susan Simpson:

Like they had to work a lot harder to get Dennis Perry.

Agent Joe Gregory:

Oh, my boss -- my bosses even went with me to Florida and we talked to one of the guys down there who had "found the Lord", and, you know, he was gonna testify. They didn't want nothing to do with it.

At Dennis Perry's trial, I think it's safe to say the defense did not succeed in proving that Donnie Barrentine was the real killer in this case. Far from it. But still, when were speaking to jurors about what they recalled in this case, and about how they had evaluated the evidence they were presented, I'd been startled to hear just how overwhelmingly they'd rejected the defense's case. For most the jurors, the evidence about Donnie Barrentine had done nothing to persuade them of Dennis Perry's innocence. Some of the jurors seemed put off by the attempt to cast blame on someone else, while other jurors seemed to think that the desperation of raising that kind of defense tended to point at Dennis' own culpability. If anything though, the defense's focus on Donnie Barrentine had acted to increase the jury's confidence in his guilt, not undermine it.

And at first, I was really struggling to understand why that was. Yes, there were real problems with the defense's theory that Donnie Barrentine had done this, and yes, I too had questions about the credibility of some of the defense witnesses. But at the same time, at least to me, as far as Dennis Perry's case was concerned, Donnie Barrentine was reasonable doubt personified. You have two people accused of the same crime, with extremely similar evidence against both. And at a minimum, the evidence against Donnie Barrentine was as strong as any evidence there was against Dennis Perry. So in a situation where there exists equivalent evidence against two different suspects, how could a jury possibly conclude that there was sufficient evidence against either one to show their guilt beyond a reasonable doubt? Even if the jury had found the evidence against Dennis Perry to be stronger or more credible than the evidence against Barrentine, the existence of such similar evidence pointing at another suspect should have been enough on its own to still create a reasonable basis for believing that it could

have been Barrentine, and not Perry, who did this. That would be a reasonable doubt. That would be an acquittal.

And yet the jury had voted unanimously to convict. The jurors' interpretations of the Donnie Barrentine evidence varied, but all of them seemed to agree that the story they'd been told about Donnie Barrentine, and him being an alternate suspect, well it just didn't make much sense. The fact some random yahoo from Florida had once gotten drunk at a party and said some ridiculous things, that just wasn't nearly enough to connect him to a murder in Georgia.

And hearing the jurors' reactions to Donnie Barrentine made me realize that the story I knew, that the evidence I was aware of from reading through all the case files and witness interviews, that had never actually made it into the trial at all. It wasn't in the transcripts. The story the jury had heard was much simpler and more contained, and easily dismissed. And I started to see why the jury could have seen the evidence against Donnie Barrentine as nothing more than drunken bravado by someone unconnected to Rising Daughter in any way.

But there is nothing simple or contained about the investigation into the story told by Jeff Kittrell back in 1985, because there are a hundred spiraling rabbit holes that this story runs down, and the jury never got a glimpse of any of them.

[1:04:10] Rabia Chaudry: Without some reason to connect Donnie Barrentine to the Swains, the jury rejected the idea that he could have been involved in the murder. The story just didn't make any sense. Donnie Barrentine had lived in Marianna, Florida, hours and hours away from Camden County. There was no reason for him to have been in Waverly in the first place, so even if he'd made some drunken confession, there was no real reason to credit it.

Except, Donnie Barrentine didn't live in Marianna in 1985 -- not for all of it, at least. He'd moved to Waynesville, just over the county line into Brantley County, the next county north of Camden, and it's not far at all from Rising Daughter. Donnie's cousin, Greg Barrentine, lived there in Brantley County, and so Donnie was there, along with his friend Jeff Kittrell, to go work for Greg.

And working for Greg was, apparently, how Donnie Barrentine, Jeff Kittrell, and David Roberson ended up getting arrested in Telfair County. In 2000, in that interview with Bundy down at the Food World, Jeff Kittrell told Bundy about what had led up to them being in McCrae that night. He said that he and Donnie had been hanging out at Greg's

house, when Greg had gotten a call from somebody. Kittrell wasn't really sure who. Greg had called up David Roberson, and Roberson drove over in his Corolla. And then, Greg sent the three of them -- Jeff, Donnie, and David on their mission to Telfair County.

[1:05:32] Jeff Kittrell:

Uh, Greg had sent us to, uh, some man's house -- anyway, and Greg sent us over there to pick up the money. That's all I know. That's what they told me -- we was going over there to pick up the money. And we went over there and so I got out and walked to door, and Donnie was toting that machine gun behind his back. It had a silencer on it and all. And he went and knocked on the door, and some little kid come to the door.

[1:06:06] Susan Simpson: As far as I have been able to tell, just about every word of what Jeff Kittrell said here was actually true. In July of 1985, a 14 year old boy had been staying home alone in his parent's house in Telfair County, while his parents were out of town, and late one evening, someone had rung the doorbell. And standing there at the door, had been a thin man, with longish, dark brown hair, and with another man not far away -- him a bit shorter, and with longish, shaggy, light brown hair. And the first man, the one with darker hair, asked to speak with the boy's father, telling him, "We've got a relative that we need to put into a nursing home." Now, the boy's father ran a nursing home, so the question sort of made sense to him, but what didn't make sense was for someone to come by like that, that late at night, asking to have someone placed in the home right then and there. But the boy told the man that he was home alone, and then the men at the door had left.

Jeff Kittrell:

They asked him was his daddy there, and the boy said, "No, he just left", and he says, "Alright, we'll be back later", and turned around and went back to the car, and we left there.

[1:06:58] Rabia Chaudry: So Kittrell, Barrentine, and Roberson left the house that they were sent to, but they didn't get far. Not long after, Trooper Bobby Christian pulled the car over, found the machine gun, and arrested them.

As for why exactly the three men had gone to the house in McRae, well, that's still not clear. We've heard a lot of different conflicting explanations about what their plan was that night, and it's possible that not all of them ever knew the plan in the first place. Years later, David Roberson would say that he assumed that Kittrell and Barrentine had

gone to the house to rob the man or kill him or something, but he never knew who the man was or exactly why they'd gone there. He was just following orders from Donnie's cousin, Greg. And Jeff Kittrell also said that he didn't really know why were there that night -- Greg Barrentine had told him to do it, so off he went.

And McRae wasn't the only destination that they had in mind, Jeff Kittrell had told Agent Gregory and Deputy Kennedy. Greg had told them to go further north still, to the city of Macon. They had a hit that they were supposed to do there. Greg told them to go to a man's house, and cut all the phone wires, but make sure to fold all the wires back so they couldn't touch. Then they were supposed to go to the man's door, ask him where his cocaine stash was, and kill him.

As Agent Gregory noted, somewhat dryly, in his memo summarizing this interview with Jeff Kittrell,

"It should be noted that the manner in which Kittrell was instructed to cut the telephone lines is very similar to the manner in which they were cut at Rising Daughter Baptist Church."

And it wasn't just this MO that seemed to link Rising Daughter to the Barrentines. According to Jeff Kittrell, from what Donnie Barrentine had told him about it, the reason the Swains had been killed wasn't much different than the reason that, in July of '85, Barrentine and Kittrell and Roberson had been sent off to McCrae and Macon.

Jeff Kittrell:

He said, uh, the preacher's son-in-law -- owed for some cocaine, you know, a kilo, two kilos of cocaine. They said, he's hiding out, we can't find him. So people sent us to draw him out in the open. He said, we went by old Colombian style. See, Donnie's always wanted to pose himself as a hit man. He wants people to think of him as a big hit man.

[1:09:40] Susan Simpson: At Dennis Perry's trial, the jury never heard any of this evidence that could potentially link Donnie Barrentine to the Swains, and if they had, maybe that would have led to a different outcome with their verdict. Then again, if the defense had tried to introduce more evidence about Barrentine, and his potential ties to what happened at Rising Daughter, well, it's possible that would have just backfired against the defense as well. Because the story about the drug debt and the phone wires, it's all coming from Jeff Kittrell, and Kittrell's stories, well they tend to have a lot of

problems. For instance, Harold Swain didn't have any son-in-laws, so we can be sure, at least, that a son-in-law with the drug debt is not the reason the Swains were killed. But sometimes, what Jeff Kittrell said, even the stuff that sounded kind of crazy, would turn out to be true. Which means it's possible the answers we're looking for here, to find out what happened to the Swains, aren't in Camden County at all, but one county north, in Brantley County.

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Thanks for listening to Undisclosed - The State v Dennis Perry. We'll be back on Thursday with an Addendum episode, so send us your questions with the hashtag #UDaddendum.

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And, if any of our listeners out there have information on Dennis Perry's case that they'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us at undisclosedpodcast@gmail.com.

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

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**Transcript compiled by Brita Bliss, Erica Fladell, Dawn Loges, & Skylar Park**