

Undisclosed: The State v. Jason Carroll
Episode 1: Attempt to Relocate
Monday, October 4, 2021

Trigger warning: this episode contains details from an autopsy report and descriptions of violent injuries to the victim. Please listen with discretion.

Also, stick around after the credits to hear some behind the scenes audio of what it really sounds like when you're in a car for days investigating a decades old murder.

[00:28] Rabia Chaudry: Social Media can be weird. You'll tweet or post all kinds of serious, important things, day and night, but the thing that ends up going viral is a silly thought or observation that strikes a chord you didn't expect. That's what happened to me when I tweeted this nearly four years ago:

"Me to my children: I would kill and die for you
Also me to my children: I AM NOT YOUR DAMN MAID AND WILL BURN ALL
THE SHIT ON YOUR BEDROOM FLOORS IN A MASSIVE BONFIRE AND
DANCE AROUND THE FLAMES IN GLORY AND RAGE"

This tweet got almost two and a half million engagements and ended up in viral facebook posts and random articles all over the internet. Not because it was profound in any sense, but because parents around the world totally understand where I was coming from. Especially the "I would kill and die for you" part.

Because most of us parents, we would...right? We would kill and die for our kids? But the real question is, what else would we do? How far would we go to protect them?

Parents have lots of terrible fears when it comes to their kids, and most of those fears revolve around not being able to protect our babies when they need us. But imagine this nightmare: that you do everything in your power to protect your child, only to have your involvement possibly doom them.

That's what it seems like happened in this case, the State of New Hampshire v. Jason Carroll. Carroll was convicted of the 1988 murder of a woman named Sharon Johson, based on one single piece of evidence - his own confession. It was a confession tormented out of him, and a confession that he may not ever have given if his mother didn't beg him to. That's right, his own mother begged her son to confess to murder, ironically, in order to try and save him.

And why not? After all, what won't a parent do for their child?

[02:56] Rabia Chaudry: Hi, and welcome to Undisclosed. This is The State v. Jason Carroll. My name is Rabia Chaudry. I'm an attorney and 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, I'm Susan Simpson. I'm an attorney in Washington D.C. and I blog at [TheViewFromLL2](#).

Colin Miller: Hi, I'm Colin Miller. I'm the Associate Dean and Professor at the University of South Carolina School of Law and I blog at [EvidenceProfBlog](#).

[05:22] Colin Miller: Larry Young, a heavy equipment operator, was the first to arrive to work on the morning of July 29th, 1988 in the Randolph Woods area of Bedford, New Hampshire. It was a new development, and so far only one house had been built, right at the entrance to the community, which was surrounded by woods on all four sides. It was a rather remote area, about two miles and three winding roads from a main street.

He was hauling a massive Komatsu excavator on a trailer up a gravel road through the open construction area, and as the road curved to the left it also inclined slightly. Parts of the road were muddy and wet and it was dotted with small puddles. There were dirt embankments that ran for the last couple of hundred feet on both sides of the road, until it dead-ended at a shallow pond.

Young drove the truck as far as he could take it and then stopped. He got out and unloaded the excavator from the trailer in order to drive it closer to the pond, where he was supposed to drop it off. As the machine crawled up the last few dozen feet towards the pond, Larry suddenly noticed what looked like scuff marks in the gravel. He kept

going, not too concerned, assuming a bunch of deer had come through and left the marks.

[06:36] Young drove another few feet but then suddenly hit the brakes when he thought he saw a dummy lying in the dirt. A moment later he realized it might not be a dummy at all.

Young stepped down from the excavator and carefully hopped over the scuff marks to take a closer look. It was the body of a woman lying parallel to the pond, her head pointing towards the excavator.

His fears confirmed, Young walked back on the same path, trying to disturb the scene, when he noticed pools of blood. He also saw that the scuff marks stretched in a line from the woman's body all the way underneath the excavator, as if she had been dragged from that spot about twenty feet to where she was left. He had driven and parked right where the scuff marks began.

Young walked down the path to his truck and reached for his CB radio to call his boss, who in turn called the police at 8:39 am. As Young waited for someone to arrive, he leaned down to peer under the machine and saw a wristwatch and a pair of broken glasses ground into the dirt, and a single shoe caught under an excavator track. He backed away and waited, and within ten minutes, at 8:49 am an officer from the Bedford police arrived on the scene and was soon joined by officers from New Hampshire State Police.

[07:53] Susan Simpson: The crime scene was spread across over fifty feet, all of it in a construction area that was basically enclosed, aside from the south east corner where the dirt road led into it. On the left side of the pond, if you were facing it, as Larry Young had been when sitting on his machine, stood a huge dirt pile from the excavation. On the right side of the pond was raised land.

The spot was virtually hidden unless you came all the way up the gravel road and right upto the pond. Investigators found themselves having to avoid the sides of the road as they approached the crime scene because it was so wet and muddy from rain the day before.

The victim's body lay to the left of the excavator, and south of the pond, with her feet pointing towards the large dirt pile and her upper area oriented towards the pond. She was on her back and her body, including her curly brown hair, was covered in dirt and

blood. Her feet were resting on a patch of damp mud, her left hand was tucked under her body, and her right arm was stretched outwards.

Her shirt was missing, and she wore blue socks, denim pants that were partially unbuttoned on the right side, and a bra that was open in the front, exposing her chest. One gray moccasin shoe lay on the ground beneath her feet. It was clear that she had been stabbed repeatedly in the chest area.

[09:30] The left side of the pants were scuffed up with dirt, her left arm had a scrape mark on it, and sand and small stones were seen stuck to the victim's upper-right bicep. There was blood around her mouth, and a reddish brown blood soaked stain in the dirt to the right side of the body.

The scuff marks in the gravel were hard to miss, and they showed a clear path from where the excavator now stood to the body. At trial, Larry Young would testify that the marks were spread as far and wide as the excavator machine itself, which was roughly eleven feet wide and eighteen feet long. It was, as he said, "A very big area of scuffing," and it was clear that struggle had taken place.

The scuffs weren't the only marks in the ground. Roughly twenty-five feet in front of the excavator, right by the pond, were tire tracks from a standard vehicle, and according to Young, he saw footprints that were definitely not his. At least, that's what Young testified to around two years later, but a report taken the same day by an officer specifically noted that, "no footprints were observed by crime scene technicians in the area of the crime scene."

It turned out the excavator had not only driven right over the origin point of the scuff marks and some car tracks, it had also rolled right through a pile of blood.

The excavator was moved to see what else might be under there, and investigators found a second moccasin, a Bulova wristwatch, and three rings: an engagement ring, a wedding band, and a gold ring with blue and white stones. Next to the excavator were the crushed glasses with one lens popped out, that Young had seen earlier.

And, under the machine, they found more reddish-brown blood stains soaked into the earth, one that was nearly two feet in diameter, indicating a fairly big amount of blood loss.

[13:17] Rabia Chaudry: It seemed to investigators that the initial attack on the victim happened where the machine stood, and then she was dragged to the dirt pile. There was another possibility though - that she had been killed elsewhere and her body driven to the spot, taken out of a vehicle where the scuff marks began, and then dragged to the dirt pile.

The police worked with two dental hygienists to take casts of the tire prints, as other techs gathered the scattered evidence from the ground. Shortly after noon, the victim's body was removed by funeral home attendants and transferred to the Medical Examiner's office at the Concord Hospital. It was received there by New Hampshire State Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Roger Fossum.

If that name sounds familiar to you, it means you know your true crime. Dr. Fossum was State's witness in the trial that convicted Pamela Smart, one of the most notorious cases to come out of New Hampshire. Now, this wouldn't take place until a few years after this current crime scene unfolded, but he was already well respected in the field, having been the very first Chief Medical Examiner ever appointed in the state, in 1986. Fossum is credited for building the entire Office of the Chief Medical Examiner from the ground up, and today there are multiple awards named after him that are given out annually by multiple different agencies.

Murders don't happen every day in NH, and almost never in the upscale town of Bedford, so it was no surprise that the body was examined by the Chief Medical Examiner himself. Dr. Fossum began his work 2pm, just hours after it was found, and the autopsy report determined the following:

[14:59] Colin Miller: The woman weighed 150 pounds and was 5'6" tall. She was wearing a beige bra stained with blood that had been sliced open in the front. Her blue jeans had side closures and mud stains on both the left leg and right knee area, and she was wearing gray and blue socks, one gray moccasin shoe, and a white pair of underwear.

Her jeans and underwear weren't the regular kind though. They were maternity jeans and maternity underwear. The woman was pregnant, seven months along, and the baby had also died.

The victim's body was covered in a large amount of sand and mud, more of it stuck on the left than the right side. Her face was swollen and had a clear contusion on the right side, and spotted with innumerable petechiae- small red spots caused by broken

capillary vessels under the skin. It was clear to Dr. Fossum that she had been beaten on the right side of her head and face.

[15:52] There were multiple abrasions on her neck, and what looked like a three-inch-long linear mark across it, perhaps from a ligature. An internal examination confirmed what Dr. Fossum suspected, that she had been strangled. There were multiple strap muscle hemorrhages and a fracture on the thyroid cartilage and her tongue had been bitten in a number of places; self-inflicted wounds that likely happened as she struggled to breathe.

Strangulation wasn't the only cause of death though. She had also been stabbed thirteen times in her chest, and once in the back. Of the thirteen wounds in the front, only three had gone deep enough to puncture through the chest wall and into the lung cavity, none of which injured the lung deeply.

The single stab in the back, however, did penetrate the lung and cause massive internal bleeding. According to the autopsy report, the wounds were dull on one edge and sharp on the other, consistent with having been made with a single edged blade, likely a utility knife.

Dr. Fossum determined the cause of death to be both manual strangulation and multiple stab wounds, and the manner of death to be homicide. The victim had fought back; she had defensive wounds on both of her hands, including stab wounds in the webbing of her left hand, as she had tried to protect herself.

The toxicology report was clear, showing no intoxicants in her system, and her stomach was empty. Her time of death was established as between 6 pm and 12 am the night before, on July 28th, 1988.

As Dr. Fossum conducted the autopsy, thirty miles away the police were still at the scene of the crime, searching for additional evidence. The news about the body spread quickly and by 2 pm, news crews were already on the scene.

[17:57] Susan Simpson: At 2:45 that afternoon, two witnesses showed up at the crime scene to report that they'd been there the night before, and that they had seen something. Nancy Scull and her husband Kevin Doherty had picked up their son from Chuck E. Cheese in Manchester, about fifteen minutes away, around 8:30 the prior night. They decided on the way home that they'd swing by the construction site in Randolph Woods, to check on the progress of the property they had bought there. They drove up the gravel road towards the pond, arriving sometime between 8:45 and 9:00

pm, but they stopped when they saw a car parked in the dark with all of its doors closed, near the pond but not facing it.

According to diagrams from police files, they were roughly forty to fifty feet from the car, and didn't go any closer. They both thought there might have been a couple in the car, maybe lovers who were spending some time together because in the past when they'd gone by the construction site, they'd found pornographic material and newspaper ads of people looking for sexual partners discarded there.

Nancy and her husband weren't sure what kind of car it had been, and couldn't agree on the color. Nancy thought the car was small and red, but Kevin thought it was possibly a dark Blazer. Another witness, Tom Jahn, came forward shortly thereafter and reported that he had been out jogging between 8:30 and 9:00 on the night of the murder, headed in the direction of the road leading to the construction site, when he witnessed a small car with two people in it come towards him, then make a u-turn.

Neither of these three witnesses reported seeing any other vehicles in the area at the time, but given their timelines, they may have seen the same car, and it could have been the car that drove the victim to the site, dead or alive.

[19:57] Rabia Chaudry: At 10:15 am on Friday, July 29th, 1988, roughly ninety minutes after a woman's body was found in a construction site in Bedford, a call came into the Bow, New Hampshire police dispatch.

A man named Kenneth Johnson was calling to report that his wife, 36 year old Sharon Johnson, *may* be missing. He wasn't sure if she was, but he had gotten a call from her workplace saying she had not shown up that morning.

According to Ken, he had last seen Sharon the previous day, when he'd met her for lunch at her workplace. Sharon Johnson worked at the Digital Corporation in Amherst, New Hampshire, about twenty-five miles from their home. He had returned home and in the evening waited for her to get back from work, but had eventually fallen asleep.

He woke up in the morning when the call came from Digital that Sharon had not come in. When he was asked by the woman calling if he thought Sharon came home at all the night before, Ken said he didn't think so, but he wasn't sure. He hadn't seen the clothes she was wearing the day before anywhere in the house, which he should have if she had come in late, changed, and left before he woke up.

He told police that Sharon had on “pregnant pants” and a “pregnant shirt” with animals or something on it the last he saw her. She had a car, a green four door Subaru, that she drove to work in the day before, and presumably drove away in as well.

Just then, as he was talking to the Bow police, Ken got a call on the other line and briefly switched over. When he came back, he told the officer that it was the woman from work again. She had called again to tell him that Sharon had left work the night before between 6:15 and 6:30 pm, and also that he should maybe try to call the Massachusetts State Police, because Sharon was planning on buying Megabucks lottery tickets just across the state line that night.

Ken had not called the Mass State police but had made a call to New Hampshire State Police that morning. They told him to wait a couple of hours and then if she didn't show up, to call his local police station, which is what he was doing now. Sharon, he explained, was pregnant. And it was a complicated pregnancy, so Ken was wondering if he should call around to hospitals, but didn't know where to call.

The officer on the other end of the line told Ken that they'd put out the call on this missing persons report and get back to him.

[22:41] Colin Miller: At 10:30 am an “Attempt To Locate” bulletin was issued statewide to the police, with a description matching the unknown victim in Bedford: a brown-haired woman with glasses, about 5'6” tall, and pregnant.

The officers at the crime scene in Bedford learned of the missing persons report almost as soon as the bulletin went out, and lead investigator Detective Sergeant Thomas Morency placed a call to the Bow Police to get more information.

According to Detective Morency's report written on the same day after speaking to Bow police, while Kenneth Johnson may have called in his wife missing, it was actually a coworker of Sharon who had raised the red flag and urged Ken to do so.

Carleen Webb was a Quality Control Auditor at Digital, and worked closely with Sharon Johnson, who worked as a Quality Control Technician. On the morning of July 29th, Carleen arrived to work early, before 7:00 am, and expected to see Sharon there as well. When Sharon, who was never late to work, hadn't shown up for the next ninety minutes, Carleen called Sharon's house, and spoke to Sharon's husband Ken.

[23:42] Rabia Chaudry:

So the morning that she didn't show up to work, you started calling the house at- she was supposed to show up around 7:00 I think, right?

Carleen Webb:

She was pretty prompt. She was always there early, probably even before me. I can't remember exactly. I had a young boy at the time, a toddler. So it was a little bit harder to get to work, but she was very punctual.

[24:05] Colin Miller: That was Carleen Webb, who was the first to notice Sharon was missing, and also testified at the murder trial, speaking to us this summer about what she recalled of that morning.

Rabia Chaudry:

Well, the first- so this is a copy of the calls that you made from your desk that day, and the first call you made that morning was at 6:43 am, so you were there pretty early. But it was not to her number. 8:47 am is the first call to her house. It lasted about five minutes. So do you have any recollection, or does this help you remember anything about that first call, and did you just call wondering if she's coming in or if she's sick, or why?

Carleen Webb:

I was concerned. I was concerned. I thought, she's seven months pregnant and she's so punctual. And if she wasn't going to be somewhere, she'd be calling you saying why she was running late. And so I called the house, finally. Because I thought, "Maybe I should or shouldn't do this," mind my own business type of thing. But I was concerned. She's seven months pregnant, if she's broken down or she needs help--

Rabia Chaudry: Maybe her husband doesn't know.

Carleen Webb: Exactly. So I called the house.

[25:10] Colin Miller: When she called the house, she had been hoping to learn that Sharon was still home. When Ken made it clear that Sharon wasn't there, Carleen hung up with a bad feeling about the whole thing. She urged Ken to call the police, but according to Carleen, Ken didn't seem to be interested in doing so.

That information certainly didn't sit well with Detective Morency, who left immediately to talk to Carleen and other employees at Digital in person. Carleen explained that she

had last seen Sharon the day before at work, and that Sharon had told her she was planning on working until about 5:30 but would see her early the next day.

Sharon usually was at work by 7 am, and when she still hadn't shown up by 8:30 am, Carleen got concerned. She called Sharon's house at 8:47 am and Ken picked up. Carleen asked if Sharon was there, Ken said no, and then hung up the phone. She called back and asked him not to hang up, and once again probed him about whether Sharon was home. Ken told her he didn't know anything, didn't know if Sharon was at the house or not, or whether she had even come home the night before. Ken told Carleen he had waited up until 1 am, or maybe it was 2 or 3 am, for his wife to come home, and then had fallen asleep on the couch.

According to Ken, he had spoken to Sharon when she was still at work the evening before and she had told him she was going to run some errands, go to the bank and then go buy some Megabuck lottery tickets before coming home.

Carleen wasn't satisfied. She asked him to check the bathroom to see if there were any wet towels, insisting he look for clues that his wife had perhaps come in late at night and then left before he woke up. The day before, he told her, everyone in the home had put away their clothes and personal items in closets because the house was going to be bombed with insecticide. As far as he could see, all of Sharon's clothing was still put away.

Carleen was getting frantic as it started to dawn on her that Sharon had never made it home the night before, but Ken's tone was remarkably unconcerned.

Carleen Webb:

Immediately after talking to him, I don't know. He was just too calm. Just not...

Rabia Chaudry:

So you said to him, "She's not at work. Is she at home?" And he was like...

Carleen Webb:

Yeah. Well, he kept trying to answer questions with the statement that they had sprayed for insects and I think he said there were two wet towels. Everything he said really wasn't resonating with me as to someone that's... I would be upset. I felt like he was trying to...

Sarah Cailean: Downplay it?

Carleen Webb:

Yes! Like, “Don’t worry about it, there’s two wet towels,” “I didn’t hear her come in,” “I fell asleep.” That type of thing. “She leaves very early, I missed her.”

And I’m thinking that... someone doesn’t come home, and leaves the house and you don’t know about it... I just felt like it was very strange.

[28:20] Susan Simpson: Ken told her to call back in an hour, and she did, at 9:57 am. At that point, Carleen told Ken he needed to call the police. After all, even if Sharon had come home the night before and left super early, that meant she still hadn’t made it to work, and something was wrong.

Strangely enough, Ken didn’t want to call the police. “You call the police,” he told Carleen. She wasn’t sure what to make of that, so she hung up and consulted another coworker who said absolutely not, Ken was the person who should call to make a missing persons report. She called Ken back ten minutes later at 10:02, and again at 10:14, insisting he call the police. That was when Ken finally made the call mentioned earlier, at 10:15 am.

Carleen would call Ken twice more, just to see if there was any news. In total, she had called Ken six times that morning, searching for Sharon.

Carleen Webb:

I just felt like he wanted me to go away. Like, “Stop asking me questions.” I just felt like *he* felt like he had to share information in a way that seemed plausible, almost. Like this is normal...

Rabia Chaudry: Like *you* shouldn’t be so worried.

Carleen Webb: Right. Like I shouldn’t be worried. And I was very concerned.

[29:45] Susan Simpson: Over the course of those calls, Ken told Carleen that he had already checked back roads near his house for Sharon, and had called the State Police. The second to last time she called, at 10:44, he told her he was on the phone with the Bow Police Department making a report. When she called back a minute later, at 10:45, he told her he was on the phone with Sharon’s father.

At that point Carleen realized she wasn’t going to get anywhere further with Ken, and placed a call herself to the convenience store in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts where Sharon often went to buy lottery tickets, which also turned out to be a dead end.

The only other thing Carleen was able to offer to the police was that Sharon was very close to a woman named Cathi Hampson, and called her every day. It was possible that Cathi may have more information to give them.

Investigators next spoke to Arthur Young, another coworker of Sharon's who corroborated Carleen's account. When he had left work at 6:15 pm the night of the murders, Sharon had still been there. There was some work they needed to wrap up together but she told him that she had to head out soon to do some shopping, cash a check, and pick up lottery tickets. She promised to come in early the next day to finish up the work with him, but then never showed.

The very last person to see Sharon at work the previous day had been a coworker named Ed Sanders, who told the police that Sharon was the second-to-last person to leave work, after which he himself had closed up shop. Sharon had told him that she was going to meet a friend to go shopping for her baby, and she had left wearing washed out blue jeans, gray moccasin shoes, a shirt with a bear and baby rattles on it, and a blue jacket. He wasn't exactly sure what time she left, but it was by 6:30 pm.

[31:40] Rabia Chaudry: At this point less than four hours have passed since Sharon Johnson's body was discovered, but the police already have reason to be focused on her husband. That's because it seems he's already not being truthful.

First, he told Carleen that he was on the phone with the Bow police department when she'd called him at 10:44 am. His phone call to the Bow police, however, took place at 10:15 am, and while we don't have the audio of the call, we do have the transcript, and my husband and I ran through it together, with me playing Ken's part and hubby playing the dispatcher's part. It took only six minutes to get through the transcript, which means Ken's call to the police couldn't have gone on until 10:44 am. It should have been over by 10:21, or even if you doubled the time it took us to get through the transcript, it would have ended by 10:27 am.

But there's also another reason we know that he wasn't on the call with Bow police when Carleen called at 10:44 am. That's because after he hung up with the Bow police, and he only called them once, that's when he called the New Hampshire State Police. We know this because of a written report by State Trooper Terry Markell that states that he received a call from a man, presumably Ken Johnson, at 10:30 am asking if there had been any car accidents because his wife was missing. The trooper told him that he

wasn't aware of any, but that he should contact the State Police headquarters, and then gave him the number.

So we know that Ken was lying to Carleen when he told her that he was on the phone with Bow police when she called him at 10:44 am, but you might not have caught the other lie here. You might recall when Ken called the Bow Police Department at 10:15 am to report his wife missing, he told the dispatch officer that he'd called the New Hampshire State Police *already*. Not only that, he also told the dispatcher that the State Police told him to wait an hour or two before calling the local precinct. But State Trooper Markell's report, and Ken's own phone records, tell us that Ken hadn't called the State Police at all, until after he hung up the phone with Bow.

Like I said, at this point only a few hours had passed since Sharon Johson was found murdered, but her husband already couldn't get his story straight. And it would only get worse over the course of the day, when police first visit Ken to take a missing persons report, and then later show up to tell him that his wife had been found murdered.

Next time, on Undisclosed.

Rabia Chaudry: *If you have any information related to this case, or any of the cases that we cover, remember, you can reach us on our phone line at: 410-205-5563.*

As always, a big thank you Balookey for our logo, to Patrick Cortes for our theme music, and Mital Telhan for keeping the ship tight and the ball rolling as our Executive Producer. A special thanks to my research assistant Jennifery Leahy (and her mom), and Homicide Investigator Sarah Cailean, who spent way too long in a car with me driving around New Hampshire.

