

Undisclosed: The State v. Jeff Titus
Episode 11: White Rabbit
February 1, 2021

Detective Wiersema:

All police can, if they want to, steer witnesses. They can get information, from experience and training, that the person may not want to give up. It all comes with experience and training. I on one hand say the facts are the facts, and that's what I go by. Some others maybe embellish things a little bit to make it go their way because it's important for them, to them. It's important, but not enough to... I'd rather see ten guilty people go free, than one innocent person go to prison or jail. That's the way I feel about it. And that's it.

[01:03] Colin Miller: You've probably noticed that there are a number of witnesses in this case whose stories have changed over time. Witnesses who said one thing to begin with, only to say another thing by the time of Jeff Titus's trial.

These changes haven't been random, though. There's a pattern there.

Take Rich Adams, for example. He told the original detectives that a man had threatened him in the game area, not far from where two deer hunters were shot and killed -- but after seeing a picture of Jeff Titus, Rich Adams said the man who'd threatened him was *not* Titus, it had been someone else. Then, eleven years later, the cold case team tracked down Rich Adams and interviewed him again -- and by the time the cold case team was done, Rich Adams was saying that the man who threatened him *had* in fact been Jeff Titus.

Or take Jeff Titus's coworker, Michelle. In 1994, she told a VA investigator that Titus had mentioned that someone had been killed behind his farm, but he hadn't said much about it, beyond the fact he'd been investigated and cleared as a suspect. Six years later, though, the cold case team tracked down Michelle and interviewed her again -- and by the time the cold case team was done, Michelle was saying that Jeff Titus had confessed to finding two bodies on his property, and to having taken one of the victim's guns with him.

This happens again and again in the case file. A witness has one story, but then they talk to the cold case, and now they have another story instead.

But all of these witnesses with changing stories, the one who mattered the most was Bonnie Huffman.

Detective Wiersema:

They had nothing to put him there until they changed the story of Ms. Huffman.

Detective Bruce Wiersema had interviewed Bonnie Huffman back in 1990, just a little more than a week after the murders had happened.

Detective Wiersema:

Initially she told me that during that time of the evening of November 17th of 1990 that Jeff had come over in his truck alone, that it was in the evening after dark- well after dark- and she thought it was between 8:00 and 9:00 pm.

[03:06] Colin Miller: The story that Bonnie Huffman told Wiersema had been consistent with Titus's own story about when he'd come by to visit Bonnie and her parents that night.

But twelve years later, the cold case team tracked down Bonnie Huffman, and interviewed her again.

Detective Wiersema:

Subsequent to that, the cold case detectives had re-interviewed her several times apparently and her timeline then started changing to earlier in the evening. It was still light. She was still hunting, leaving the woods toward her home and that's when she - Jeff drove up at, just at dusk, which makes no sense to, to me, anyway.

If you ask cold case Detective Mike Werkema why he'd been able to solve this case, when Detective Bruce Wiersema had not been, he'll tell you it's because he's the better detective.

Detective Mike Werkema:

He was pretty close-minded when it came to Jeff Titus. Right from the onset. I don't like being critical. But the way that this case was investigated, the actual time that the people spent on these interviews is amateurish, at best.

The cold case team solved this case, Werkema says, because the cold case team found evidence that the original investigators missed.

But Detective Wiersema believes the cold case team did not solve this case by finding anything. He believes they used a different method to solve this case.

Detective Bruce Wiersema:

A witness says one thing that puts him out of culpability, and somebody steers the witness toward their timeline is not something you do. I don't do, I wouldn't do. I take the facts as they come, if they don't lead where I want, then I'm sorry.

~~~~~

**[05:30] Susan Simpson:** Hi, and welcome to the Undisclosed Podcast. This is Episode 11 in our series about the case of Jeff Titus, out of Kalamazoo, Michigan. My name is Susan Simpson. I'm an attorney in Washington, D.C., and I blog @TheViewFromLL2. I'm here this week with my colleague, Colin Miller.

**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 @EvidenceProfBlog.

~~~~~

[06:09] Susan Simpson: At Titus's trial, the bulk of the evidence against him consisted of witnesses who testified to things that he said, or allegedly said, in the years and months after the murders. These witnesses had been found by the cold case team when it reopened its investigation in 2000, and began by interviewing Jeff's old coworkers at the VA hospital.

Detective Bruce Wiersema:

It was to where I didn't even know about all these things he had said because that came later, these things came later. And then the cold case team dug these people up. Which is, you know, great. They did a great job as far as I'm concerned, but there's no proof, there's no evidence. How he got convicted I'm still not certain.

Wiersema *had* been aware of some of this evidence, though. When he was investigating the case back in 1990, several of Titus's coworkers *had* called in with tips about him. They'd reported that he was a weird individual, and he'd been talking about how he found the victim's missing shotgun, things like that.

But when the cold case team spoke to Jeff's coworkers 10 years later, those coworkers reported that Jeff Titus had made different, and more incriminating statements. It was this evidence from the VA that enabled the cold case team to make an arrest.

There was no physical evidence, no forensics, to link him to the crime. There were no witnesses who could place him anywhere near the scene. In fact, there were several witnesses who could place him 27 miles away -- what Detective Wiersema describes as a "golden alibi." These witnesses said that, from 4pm to 6pm, when the murders happened, Titus had been at the Shephard Farm, and on his way back, he and his friend Stan had stopped at the Burger King in Battle Creek for dinner, where, at 6:44pm, Stan had used a calling card to make a call home to his wife. Stan and Jeff had then arrived back at Titus's farm sometime after 7:15pm. That was when they'd seen the glow of lights from behind Titus's field, and run to the police when they went back there to check it out.

Jeff Titus:

And then I offered the ambulance and them and the Sheriff's Department, they'd come through my property to park right down there. And then the ambulance come later and pulled into my yard. So I sit there and talk to them because I knew them, Spencer's Ambulance Service -- his wife was my daughter's teacher. And so we sit there and chit chatted. And then I went down to the neighbors and told them what happened.

The neighbors were Pat and Bob Burnworth, who lived just to the south of Titus's farm. And both Bonnie and her mother Pat Burnworth had confirmed to Wiersema that Titus's visit had not occurred until very late that evening.

Detective Wiersema:

Yes, it was this time. It was dark. My mom was cooking. It was late. We have late dinner like in Europe. Yes. Boom. It was all laid out there. It's dark. It's between 8:00 and 9:00. We know that.

During the cold case team's reinvestigation, they'd interviewed Pat Burnworth twice. She told them, once again, that she had seen Jeff Titus at 8 or 9pm that evening. But the cold case team had not spoken to Pat's daughter Bonnie, at least not before Titus's arrest. It was on April 30, 2002 -- just six weeks before Titus's trial was scheduled to begin -- that cold case team Detective Mike Werkema spoke to Bonnie Huffman for the first time.

Detective Werkema:

Every homicide I've ever been involved with, after the arrest, there's always new nuggets that come. Always. Every case. Once the person's arrested, it hits the media, another person will come out and say, "That ...". And that happened in this case, too. The media's all over this and new facts come out. Jeff Titus gets arrested, Bonnie reads this and says, "Whoa whoa wait a minute", and calls us up. "We need to talk some more."

What Detective Werkema is describing is not actually what happened with Bonnie Huffman, though. Bonnie did not come forward to the police -- Det. Werkema had found her. He'd been waiting for her at her job one day, and had asked to speak to her. She'd agreed, and, according to Werkema's report of this interview, Bonnie told him a very different version of events from what she'd told Detective Wiersema 12 years before.

Detective Werkema:

Here's the Titus house. Here's the Hoffman house. She was hunting over here in this field over here. She was walking up to the road, to walk home, and moments later, he's in her driveway. And then he proceeds to tell her about the homicide and what's going on. She watched the killer leave the scene.

In her 2002 interview, Bonnie told Detective Werkema that Titus had come by her parents' farm between 6:15 and 6:30pm that evening. He had stayed for about 30 minutes, she said.

Jacinda Davis:

The new time or the adjusted time, places him at the location near the time of the homicides?

Detective Wiersema:

Soon after. That would mean if he visited her before nightfall that he was in the area and could have been responsible for shooting those people near his property.

Jacinda Davis: That's huge!

Detective Wiersema:

Very huge. Big. We don't believe that's the case. We know he was at St. Mary's Lake area on White Rabbit Road at the Shephard and Crandall Farms until dark.

As Detective Wiersema acknowledges, Bonnie's statement had been a potentially exciting development for the cold case team. But there was still a problem -- Bonnie's

new story places Titus in Fulton at a time closer to when the murders happened -- but not quite close enough. 6:30pm doesn't work for the prosecutor's story. Because not only do Stan and the Shephards both say they saw Titus at their farm just after dark, but Stan Driskell has a phone record that places him and Jeff at the Burger King in Battle Creek at 6:44pm.

Jacinda Davis:

14 minutes. Right? 6:30 to 6:44?

Detective Wiersema:

Yeah, that's 14 minutes.

Jacinda Davis:

That's 14 minutes.

Detective Wiersema:

Yeah, it would not be possible. It would not be possible for him to get up there and pick up Stan on White Lake, on White Rabbit Road, and get to the Burger King on North Street. No way.

Jacinda Davis:

Maybe if, if it was 6:15, because then that would be ...

Detective Wiersema:

Still wouldn't.

Jacinda Davis:

Still not?

Detective Wiersema:

Still wouldn't, no.

By the time of Jeff Titus's trial, Bonnie Huffman's story has changed again. And in this third story, the time of Jeff Titus's arrival at her parents' house has moved earlier once again, by nearly an hour.

Jacinda Davis:

And then it's almost like someone pointed out well, it couldn't have been 6:15 and 6:30 because he was back at the Shepherd's at six. So then at trial it changes to 5:35 - 5:45

Detective Wiersema:

So, it almost seems like somebody was steered in a direction, led a witness, maybe? Led to believe certain things, which some people do. And I'm not saying they did, but it's been known to happen.

~~~~~

**[11:27] Susan Simpson:** Back in 1990, when the Fulton Game Area murders occurred, Mike Werkema had been a detective with Kalamazoo City. He was in a different jurisdiction from the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office, and so was not involved in the deer hunters case. But in the early 1990s, he pulled a couple of cold cases down from the shelf and managed to solve them, and that inspired him to go to the prosecutor's office and persuade them to begin a cold case task force. Several jurisdictions in the area -- including Kalamazoo County, Kalamazoo City, and Portage City -- had all contributed funds that they'd received from federal grants to create a new, inter-agency cold case team.

Though, as cold case detective Rich Mattison explained, this funding was only good for one-year blocks.

**Rich Mattison:**

And then the opportunity came along, where the cold case homicide team was started in 1998. And it was a ... apparently all jurisdictions get federal money that they can do what they want with it. And the whole county, all the departments, agreed to put that money together to start a cold case homicide team.

For this funding, and therefore the cold case team to continue on, the county and city governments involved would have to renew the program annually.

**Rich Mattison:**

Well, you know, we were always kind of year to year.

The cold case team's funding issues weren't a secret. In Titus's case, the cold case detectives had been quite open with them about the funding concerns they'd had.

**Kelly Warren:**

But that's when he told us, um, that once that they solved this case that they would have a hundred percent success rate and that they could go on, to go on and there would be a whole department developed around to do cold cases. But

if they didn't solve a hundred percent that they wouldn't be able to, that it was going to be shut down.

**Susan Simpson:**

They told you this?

**Kelly Warren:**

Mm-hmm. Detective Brown did in the Kalamazoo police station.

**Susan Simpson:**

Alright, so, he was telling you it's a high stakes thing for us, [Unintelligible] we're 100% perfect and we get a division for this.

**Kelly Warren:**

Yep. He said that they already had all, but one case solved. They had, this was the last case that hinged on whether or not that they got a cold case team for Kalamazoo.

These funding issues were further complicated by the fact that the Kalamazoo cold case task force was an inter-agency unit, with funding and detectives contributed by several law enforcement agencies. And each of the agencies involved had wanted to get something out of it for themselves. After all, why keep paying for a cold case team when they're only gonna solve cold cases for other agencies?

That's why, in 1999, it had been decided that the cold case team needed to find a Kalamazoo County case to solve.

**Rich Mattison:**

And I think we had done, yeah we had done a city case between the deer hunter. So we had done a Portage case, a city case, and you know, our command was kind of looking at us, knowing we got some open cases, too, and kind of saying, well, when are you going to work on this? And we wanted to anyway, but it was kind of time for a county case to be resolved. And, uh, so, we picked this one up. Yeah, I, I personally feel that Mike Werkema and Mike Brown wanted to do this so bad, they had blinders on.

~~~~~

[15:02] Colin Miller: Some members of the cold case team claim that their unit had a 100% success rate. Going into the deer hunter case, Werkema says, they were batting

a thousand. Every case they'd opened, they were able to bring successful convictions and closure. They were getting a lot of momentum, and a lot of attention from the media. And everyone likes hearing good news, Werkema says. Especially from the police agencies. And now, the cold case was bringing good news.

Werkema says he liked working cold cases. He'd learned, over time, that when you're working a cold case, you can hear new things from witnesses that the original investigators had never been able to hear. His strategy, he said, is to reach back out to the same people who were talked to back then, and to use different angles than were used before. And to use respect, passion and compassion. He would show them pictures from the case, or pieces of the victim's jewelry, whatever it was that helped him to play on the witness's emotions. The thing he always used, he said, was to draw on people's desire to bring closure for the victim's family.

Werkema says that his interview style involves going out and talking to a witness, hearing what they have to say, then going to another witness, and learning something else from them. He'd then go back to the first witness with this new information, and would use that to help the first witness remember something more than they had before. And then you repeat the process again and again, until you find out what you need to know. Detective Werkema calls this process, "waking a memory."

Detective Werkema:

What I learned with -- with time, attitudes and allegiances change. When people say, no, I don't remember, and I would convince them ... Yeah, I do remember, I'm just not too sure I wanna talk. And then it's a process. I would talk, I would meet people three, four, maybe six times.

But there's a downside to this process too, as Werkema himself acknowledges. "You do that five or six times," he says, "and you write five or six reports on that, and then the defense attorney looks at that and says: look, every time you talked to the witness, she told you something different."

Werkema's response to this is: Well, yeah. The witness is telling him something different each time, he explains, because every time he talked to the witness, he brought them another tidbit of information that he'd learned, and with that new information, the witness remembered things a different way.

[17:20] Susan Simpson: I've spoken to several witnesses who recalled having several interviews with Detective Werkema. And yet, in the case file, there's only a single report of one interview for them. I can't help but wonder if, at times, Wekerma was

consolidating these five of six multiple interviews into a single final report. Cause if you do it that way, the defense attorneys can't see just how often the witnesses' statements have changed.

But the bigger problem here is that Werkema's self-described technique for doing interviews is not an interview technique. It's not a process for obtaining accurate information from witnesses. What Werkema is describing here is a textbook process for how to induce false memories. You take someone's actual memories, and then you combine those real memories with information that you tell them has been corroborated by others. This leads, eventually, to source confusion -- where the witness can no longer remember whether this new information is something they remember themselves, or is something they've been told.

And when you repeat this process over and over again, a significant proportion of your witness *will* develop false memories. That outcome has been replicated in numerous scientific studies that have used a process very similar to Werkema's interview technique, to reliably induce false memories in test subjects.

Detective Werkema denies that he's ever done anything to improperly influence a witness's testimony. And when Jacinda told Werkema about how Detective Wiersema had said that it was possible for a detective to steer witnesses in this manner, Werkema had objected.

Detective Werkema:

Integrity is everything. And I mean, that is, that is the cornerstone of police work. You can't jeopardize your integrity. But the notion that someone would think I would lie -- I took offense to that.

The thing is, Werkema didn't have to be lying about anything here. To induce someone to have a false memory, it's irrelevant whether the person who's doing the inducing has any idea that that memory is false. Detective Werkema could have genuinely believed that he was "waking" a memory -- without ever realizing that what he was really doing was creating one instead.

This technique of waking memories wasn't Werkema's only tactic for solving cold cases though. He had a few other tricks up his sleeve as well.

When Jacinda first began working on this case, and first began talking to Jeff Titus, he'd told her about one possible suspect that he was really hoping her team would be able to investigate.

Jacinda Davis:

So, I wanted to ask you, I know you-, last week I had asked you about, um, how you heard the name Bennie Klomp.

Jeff Titus:

Yep, Bennie Clump. And that was through Rick Van -- Vendeville.

Jacinda Davis:

Yeah, can you just tell me that story again, like where that name - how that name first came on your radar.

Jeff Titus:

Because he's, he's an inmate here. He used to be from Kal -- he was from Kalamazoo and I don't know the whole story on him, but he come to me and told me. He said, Jeff, you should look into Bennie Clump. And, uh, he always seem- this guy, always seemed to know everything that was going on with the case and everything and he would turn around and I even had one of the CO's turn around and tell me, said this guy knows everything about your case.

This inmate that started talking to Jeff in prison was Richard Roy Vendeville. And eventually, Vendeville told Jeff that he knew who had committed the murders that Jeff was in prison for. It was a guy named Bennie Klomp, Vendeville said.

Jeff Titus:

He said there was a contract for fifteen thousand dollars on Estes, and uh, that he's a drug dealer, and Estes had stole a bunch of drugs from him, so he put a contract on him. And then Klomp knew about this.

Jacinda Davis:

Now, was this something that your lawyer ever looked into?

Jeff Titus:

No, like I say, they didn't put a lot of stock in this guy, but this guy sure knew an awful lot.

Jacinda Davis: They didn't put a lot of stock into the, the inmate.

Jeff Titus: Yeah.

Now, here's this guy from Kalamazoo, who just *happens* to have an encyclopedia-like knowledge of Jeff's case, and who, for unexplained reasons, seeks Jeff out in prison to tell him who he thinks really committed the murders. And Jeff takes all of this at face value -- it doesn't really seem to occur to him that maybe he should question what's going on here.

When I first heard this story, it set off alarm bells for me. There was something not quite right about how detailed his knowledge of Jeff's case had been. For instance, one of the things Vendeville told Jeff was about how, on the day of the murders at the Fulton Game Area, this guy Bennie Klomp had actually been there.

Jeff Titus:

He was telling me that he was out there that day and it was in one of the reports that he was out there.

Jacinda Davis: And that ...

Jeff Titus: He's in one of the later cold case files.

Later, after he'd had this conversation with Vendeville, Jeff had been looking through his case file one day, when a line that was buried deep within one of the cold case team's reports had jumped out at him.

Jacinda Davis: I actually found it, it took a long time, but I found the report.

Jeff Titus: Oh, you did find?

Jacinda Davis:

Yeah, and I'm trying to pull it up right now so I can read it to you. So, this is a further interview with Bobby Brown by one of the detectives. He advises that he also noticed an individual by the name of Bennie Klomp.

Rich Vendeville is not the first guy to ever come forward with claims about first-hand knowledge of someone placing a hit out on Doug Estes. There have been others who've made this claim as well. Though, in each instance, the claim has come from a witness whose credibility I would rank, on a 1 to 10 scale, as negative 3 or lower.

And Doug Estes's stepson, Bobby Brown, has always dismissed the idea that these allegations of a hit could have any relevance to the case. Because when Bobby, Doug, and Doug's friend Mark had gone hunting that day, they'd only decided to try out Fulton

after the three of them had loaded up into Mark's truck and headed out. So it wouldn't have mattered if there *had* been a hit on Doug Estes -- because no one could've known he'd be at the Fulton Game Area that day.

No one, that is, except for the people who saw him when they'd arrived.

Susan Simpson:

So you're coming down X Avenue, you think?

Bobby Brown:

Yeah.

Susan Simpson:

Did you pass by any other parking lot areas or -

Bobby Brown:

Yeah, where they keep their camper, the McNees.

Susan Simpson:

The McNees? So, you drive past it, and you see them and anyone else, or -

Bobby Brown:

I thought Bennie was there -- I'm sure he was there.

Susan Simpson:

So, the McNees -- Junior, Howard?

Bobby Brown:

Yeah, it would be one of them. They looked about the same (laughs).

Susan Simpson:

I think they do (laughs).

Bobby Brown:

Yeah, they do (laughs).

Susan Simpson:

(Unintelligible) on Facebook page.

Bobby Brown:

They both had great, big, long beards that - yeah it was like 4 four or five people there.

Susan Simpson:

Yeah. So, you've seen them. You're like, oh, it's crowded here. Let's keep going.

Bobby Brown:

Yeah. I knew that there was another spot just up past that creek where you could pull in, and yeah, that's where we went.

Bobby is certain it was the McNees he'd seen in the parking area that day. He'd known the McNees family well -- they lived just across the street from where Bobby had grown up. Bobby knew Bennie Klomp too, and he says he is certain it was Klomp he saw there with the McNees -- Klomp, he says, has some very distinctive facial features.

Bobby Brown:

Because Bennie Clump was missing the, the end of his nose. He was fighting with his wife and a window cut his nose off. He looked like the Gordon's fisherman.

[24:47]Colin Miller: Bobby is right that the McNees family had been in the parking area on X Avenue where Bobby remembers seeing them. A week after the murders, a reporter from the Detroit Free Press had driven down to the game area to interview hunters in the area. He hadn't found many -- after the murders, most hunters had decided to stay clear of the game area for a while -- but he did find one group that remained. He took a photo of them with their camper, in that parking area off of X Avenue. According to the article:

"[The] McNeese men have been setting up deer camp on a swampy patch of public land south of Battle Creek every November for the past 28 years. Every year, Earl Sr., 62, and his sons, Howard, 41, and Earl Jr., 35, stayed until each got his buck. But the grisly discovery of two hunters to death near their camp Nov. 17 may change all that. ...

With [the murders] fresh in their minds, there is talk among the McNeeses, who had just one buck among them by Sunday afternoon, of cutting short the stay this year. Maybe, they said, they won't return next year. "Used to be out here if you walked up on another guy, you stool a while and talked about how many deer

you'd jumped," said Earl Jr., arms crossed while tugging at a full, shaggy beard. [] "I don't let anyone walk up behind me anymore," Earl Sr. said."

This is actually not the first time you've heard about the McNees hunting party on this podcast. We've mentioned before how, on opening day of 1990, a group of hunters had shot a buck on property that belonged to Jeff's neighbor, Alan Stanton. The hunters had lied to Stanton about having permission to hunt there, and when Stanton found out, he'd been angry. That group of hunters had been with the McNees hunting party.

And Bennie Klomp's presence at the McNees campsite on the day that Doug was killed is something that Doug's stepson Bobby Brown has wondered about over the years.

Susan Simpson:

Were there ever any other leads or things that you thought about that you thought maybe ...

Bobby Brown:

Maybe Klomp.

Susan Simpson:

So Bennie Klomp, you ...

Bobby Brown:

Because I thought if there's anybody crazy enough to do some shit like that.

Susan Simpson:

It's Bennie Klomp.

Jacinda Davis:

But why Bennie? Like ...

Bobby Brown:

He's ... because he was on cocaine all the time and just fucking high strung.

Jacinda Davis:

But was there beef?

Bobby Brown:

Attitude. Had his -- No. It's just always bragging up his boys because they do karate and shit. He's a weird dude, obviously.

Jacinda Davis:

But I, did you tell me a story once about like Benny coming over to the house and pulling down the blinds.

Bobby Brown:

Yeah. Because he was high on cocaine.

Given how close the McNees' camp site had been to the murder site, and given that -- at least according to what the McNees told the Detroit Free Press -- the McNees had remained hunting in the game area even after the murders happened, you'd think they'd have been quickly interviewed by investigators.

There weren't, though. For unclear reasons, it wasn't until 1992 that Wiersema was able to interview them. His report reads:

Both EARL, SR. and HOWARD MCNEES advised that they didn't know either ESTES or BENNETT. They had gotten there on 11/13/90 and left on or about 12/1/90. They normally hunt west of the creek into the swamp area wearing waders, and have been calling there since eight or nine years ago. HOWARD advised that he had been there and had left on that particular Saturday. He came back to town and had gone back on Sunday morning when he heard about it. These individuals report no suspicious activities or any problems while there camping, and were very surprised to hear what had occurred. Subjects were surprised that the police had not contacted them at the campsite during the time in question, but had no real information to pass on anyway.

When Wiersema interviewed the McNees, they'd suggested that they hadn't been at the game area when the murders happened. But they'd still been there at least until 2 or 3pm that afternoon, when Bobby had seen them as they'd driven into the game area.

But there's another witness Wiersema interviewed shortly after the murders who had told him something curious. This witness had been hunting across the road and down a little ways from the McNees' camp site, and he told Wiersema about something he'd seen that day:

About 5:00pm, just after [the witness] heard two shots, [he] observed a hard side, small trailer leaving the area on "X" avenue. As he was leaving the area, he heard some people yelling, but could not hear what was being said.

This witness had heard two shots, then seen a trailer drive away, and *then* he'd heard the screaming begin.

And the only known trailer that had been in the X Avenue area on the afternoon of the murders had been the one that belonged to the McNees.

~~~~~

**[29:10] Colin Miller:** In that cold case report of Bobby's interview, the one where he told the cold case detectives about seeing Bennie Klomp and the McNees at the game area, the detectives had followed up by asking Bobby if Norberto Againeses, who was a friend of Bobby's and Doug's, had also known the McNees and Bennie Klomp. Which made us wonder: did the cold case team have some reason to believe that Norberto *did* know Klomp and the McNees?

And when Jacinda and Susan spoke to Norberto, it was one of the things they'd wanted to follow up on.

**Susan Simpson:**

What about Howard McNeese or Junior McNeese?

**Norberto Againeses:**

I know McNeese.

**Susan Simpson:**

Do you know of them having a problem with Doug?

**Norberto Againeses:**

I mean, you have to understand Doug didn't take a lip from nobody. It didn't matter who it was. If he thought he was in the right, he was in the right and somebody was gonna get knocked out.

**Susan Simpson:**

Did he ever knock any of the McNeese out though?

**Norberto Againeses:**

He got in a really bad scuffle over at the Tap Room with them. This was about, probably a year or so before that.

**Susan Simpson:**

Was it Junior or Howard?

**Norberto Againes:**

It was the old man.

**Susan Simpson:**

The old man, okay.

**Norberto Againes:**

Yeah, so I think that probably the young guys were really upset because Doug and him had gotten into it.

**Susan Simpson:**

So, but he was not a young man.

**Norberto Againes:**

Yeah.

**Susan Simpson:**

Seems kind of like an unfair fight for, for Doug to have fought him.

**Norberto Againes:**

Doug didn't give two shits. If he was in the right, he was in the right.

**Susan Simpson:** So the McNeese did have a problem with Doug.

**Norberto Againes:**

Yeah because they couldn't do anything other than shoot him to get rid of him because he was bigger than them, tougher than them, badder than them.

**Susan Simpson:**

So there ...

**Norberto Againes:**

Even two of them at a time.

**Susan Simpson:**

There was a problem there?

**Norberto Againes:**

Yeah, there was a problem there.

If Norberto is right, then, theoretically, the McNees might've had a problem with Doug if they had seen him drive into the game area that day.

**Susan Simpson:**

So I don't know. I mean I don't believe it but I'm, I'm now curious if that's, could be true. Did they like see y'all driving in that day and they're like oh that's that bastard who beat up our dad?

**Bobby Brown:**

He was sitting on that side of the truck.

Doug had been sitting on the side of the truck that was closest to the parking area, so Bobby thinks it's possible that Bennie Klomp and the McNees could've seen Doug through the truck window.

But Bobby says, even if they had seen him, he just doesn't think they would've had any reason to care.

**Susan Simpson:**

But you, you didn't know of any beef between Benny Clump and your dad, or your stepdad?

**Bobby Brown:**

No.

**Susan Simpson:**

What about the McNees?

**Bobby Brown:**

I didn't think they knew each other.

**Susan Simpson:**

So Norberto, dang Norberto told us a story. I don't know. I know.

**Bobby Brown:**

(Laughs) He's a storyteller.

**Susan Simpson:**

He is! But his story was that he, he fought the McNees' dad who was like fifty or sixty at the time, and the McNees boys were angry about it.

**Bobby Brown:**

Huh.

**Susan Simpson:**

But that's from Norberto so ...

**Bobby Brown:**

Why is he trying to throw a wrench in the gearbox all over the place? That don't, what a weirdo.

I don't trust Norberto's stories. On that 1 to 10 scale of witness credibility, Norberto's hovering somewhere around negative 10. But there were enough coincidences with this whole Bennie Klomp thing that I was at least curious about what could be going on.

The obvious person to ask about all of this would be Bennie Klomp himself. Unfortunately, Jeff Titus had told Jacinda that he didn't think it'd be possible for us to go talk to him.

**Jeff Titus:**

Now, I heard Bennie Klomp turned around and shot himself after he killed his wife.

**Jacinda Davis:**

So, you're saying he thinks -- he killed his wife and then he shot himself?

**Jacinda Davis:**

Said he killed his wife and, and, and shot himself after that. But the, Rick Vanderville was the one that told me this. And he says, "I still say it was Klomp that was the one that was down there."

It turned out Vendeville had been right. Once I figured out how to spell Bennie Klomp's name -- and lemme tell you, that took longer than you'd think -- I'd been able to confirm he had died. And in exactly the same way as Vendeville had described.

And I'd been able to see then why the cold case team had also never had the chance to speak to Bennie Klomp. Because the first time they'd heard about him was April 27, 2000, when they'd interviewed Bobby Brown for the first time, and Bobby told them

about seeing Bennie Klomp at the game area that day. The cold case team's notes from that interview had been prepared and typed up four days later, on May 1, 2000.

And that evening, Bennie Klomp had killed his wife, and then himself.

~~~~~

[35:45] Susan Simpson: As far as I know, Bennie Klomp was never contacted by the cold case team, and never knew what Bobby Brown had said. I've gone through the case file for his murder-suicide, and there's nothing in there that would connect it to the Fulton Game Area investigation. Shortly before the murder-suicide occurred, Klomp had confided in a friend that he thought his wife was having an affair, and that was assumed to be the motive for the crime.

Klomp had told his friend the name of the man that he thought his wife was seeing, and the address of where he supposedly lived -- though, it's curious that, when police tried to investigate it, they couldn't find any evidence that such a man had ever existed.

Still, from what I've been able to dig up so far, I haven't seen anything further to suggest that Bennie Klomp was involved in the Fulton Game Area case. Nor have I found anything to explain why Rich Vendeville was so eager to convince Titus that Klomp was the one who'd done it.

While looking into this whole Klomp thing, I decided to try and learn more about the source of this rumor. I asked a number of current and former police officers in the Kalamazoo area if they'd ever heard anything about this Richard Roy Vendeville, and from a number of them, I'd gotten the same kind of curious response: "That's the guy who killed the Poldermans, isn't it?" they'd said.

Marinus and Sary Poldermans had lived in the township just to the north of Fulton. They were a couple in their 90s, and their 62 year old daughter often stopped by to check on them.

In August of 2000, all three had been found bludgeoned and stabbed to death in the Polderman's home. The case went cold, for a while, but eventually five people were convicted, including Rich Vendeville's 19 year old girlfriend and his 17 year old niece. But Vendeville, who was 39 years old at the time, had never been charged himself, though, for some reason, an awful lot of police officers in Kalamazoo seem to think he should've been.

[37:48] Colin Miller: In 2002, Vendeville was convicted of a different crime. He was found guilty of stealing a purse that had been left in a car overnight, and received a sentence of 20 to 40 years. At his sentencing hearing in this case, Vendeville had given a statement on his own behalf. He'd asked the judge to take into consideration all he'd done to help the community, and to give him a lighter sentence because of it. Vendeville told the court:

"I am the reason for area crimes being solved, and without [my] knowledge and help, these crimes would not have been solved. ... I can prove that the clues and information that I have give[n] to these Kalamazoo area cold case homicides were the reason they [were] solved [and] was my sole responsibility."

Vendeville named two cold cases that he says had been solved with his assistance. Assistance, he said, that he had been able to provide, thanks to the assistance that the cold case team had provided him, by giving him information about these cases that only the police or the killers could've known. As Vendeville explained at his sentencing hearing:

"[T]he Kalamazoo Prosecutor's Office allowed their detectives to destroy clues and information in these homicides. [T]he detectives contaminated the case by [having] Mike Werkema [take] me to various murder scenes and g[i]ve me information that I had already told him these people were admitting to doing these murders. This information was not available to the public, it was used in hopes against the suspects [] to solve -- further solve the crimes of cold case murders. ...

[Werkema] gave me information so that I could release clues and information against Kalamazoo area suspects. I was also placed in the same cell with a certain suspect [for] the cold case team, which was Jeff Titus."

Years later, Vendeville had written a number of letters to Jeff Titus's attorneys. In those letters, Vendeville explained in greater detail how, while he was in jail in Kalamazoo County, he'd been alerted by a deputy that Werkema was bringing in someone who'd been charged with a homicide, and that Vendeville should gather whatever information from this suspect that he could. That suspect turned out to be Jeff Titus.

After Jeff had been booked in, and placed in his cell on A-North block, Werkema had arranged to have Vendeville pulled from the cell and brought in to meet with him in private at the jail. During this meeting, Werkema had told Vendeville all about the Fulton Game Area murders, as well as Titus's work history at the VA hospital. Vendeville's

mission, Werkema said, was to get whatever information from Titus to help make a case against him.

But according to Vendeville, he'd told Werkema he thought Werkema had the wrong guy -- that he didn't think Jeff Titus had done it. The murder of Bennett and Estes had been drug related, he says he told him.

Vendeville said that Werkema had come back to the jail again later, to meet with him again, and Werkema had told him Titus was a "dirtbag" who was hiding some things that Vendeville should try to find out. But Vendeville says he told Werkema the same thing he'd told him before: Estes and Bennett had been killed because of drugs, not deer.

~~~~~

**[40:48] Susan Simpson:** In this case, there are an awful lot of witnesses that I do not trust. But out of all of them, I trust Richard Roy Vendeville the least. To put it in the mildest of terms: he's an unreliable narrator. In his communications with Titus and Titus's attorneys, Vendeville had his own agendas he was trying to work. Nothing he says can be taken at face value.

Still, some of Vendeville's claims, if true, ought to be trivial to verify. For instance, Vendeville says he was placed in a jail cell with Jeff Titus and instructed to report back on confessions or other information that Titus gave him. But if Vendeville really had been placed in a jail cell with Jeff Titus like he says he was, then the jail would have a record of it.

**[41:31] Colin Miller:** And Jeff Titus's attorneys checked into just that. They filed a FOIA request for records of what cells Jeff Titus and Rich Vendeville had been held in during Titus's stay at the jail following his arrest on December 12, 2001.

For Jeff Titus, the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office had no problem providing the requested records -- Jeff Titus had indeed been in a cell on A North, just like Vendeville had said.

But as for where Vendeville had been held, the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office could say only this:

*We can confirm Richard Vendeville was booked in the Kalamazoo County Jail 11/5/2001 - 1/9/2002. However, we do not have record of cell locations for*

*Richard Vendeville. We have determined that the requested records do not exist within our agency.*

Vendeville was at the jail when Titus was booked in, that much can be confirmed. But whether Vendeville really had been placed in a cell with Titus, like Vendeville claims, there's no way to know for sure. The records that would confirm it are missing.

One thing that we can verify though is that Vendeville does indeed know a lot about the Fulton Game Area murders, and how the cold case team conducted its investigation in that case. Vendeville knows things that were never publicly reported, and were never part of any court proceedings. He has to be telling the truth that there was *someone* who was sharing that information with him. The only question is who the someone was.

**[42:55] Susan Simpson:** In his letters, and in his statement at his sentencing hearing, Vendeville did give one clue as to someone who might have more information about all of this. He'd mentioned his sister a number of times, and said how she'd been a long-time associate of Detective Mike Werkema's.

His sister had met when Werkema, Vendeville said, when Werkema was still working as a street-level cop. So Rabia and I had gone to speak to Vendeville's sister, and we'd learned some things. And afterwards, we'd both been a little lost for words.

**Rabia Chaudry:**

Oh my God almighty.

**Susan Simpson:**

Hoo boy.

**Rabia Chaudry:**

Oh my God.

**Susan Simpson:**

What did we just walk into?

**Rabia Chaudry:**

Holy shite.

**Susan Simpson:**

Ummm... Let's get out of here.

When we'd told Rich Vendeville's sister that we were there in Kalamazoo to investigate a cold case that Mike Werkema had been involved in, and that we'd wanted to talk to her about her brother, her response had been: "Mike must've said something to you about Rich, huh?"

We told her no, it was the other way around, but we were curious about whether Vendeville had really worked for Werkema, like he'd said.

She said yes, Vendeville had given information to Werkema, but he wasn't really *working* for him. Vendeville was, quote, "just cutting deals to get his ass out of bullshit." Though, Vendeville's sister did confirm that he'd been responsible for solving at least one of the cold cases that Vendeville had named at his sentencing hearing as one of the ways that he'd helped the community.

Vendeville's sister had also confirmed that she and Detective Werkema had known one another for years, just like Vendeville had said. Werkema was like a brother to her, she told us. He'd been her guardian.

**[44:28]** But most of what Vendeville's sister had been able to tell us had nothing to do with the Fulton Game Area case -- she'd known more about other cold cases in the area. But the deer hunter murders was one she had no direct knowledge of.

Her brother *had* told her a few things about it though. She remembered Vendeville saying that the deer hunters had been killed over a dope deal, and that he'd known who'd been the one to kill them. And once, when they were driving together on 35th street out near Comstock, Vendeville had pointed at a house and told her that the person who'd been behind the murder of the deer hunters had lived there. Vendeville's sister says that she thought he'd given her names, but this many years on, she can no longer remember who it was he'd said.

**[45:08] Colin Miller:** A number of the claims that have been made by Vendeville have to do with Kalamazoo's Silent Observer program. Silent Observer is a tip line where people can call in information about criminal cases, and -- if that information leads to an arrest -- they'll receive a monetary award. When Jacinda and Susan spoke to cold case Detective Rich Mattison, he told them what he remembered about how the Silent Observer program worked in Kalamazoo.

**Detective Mattison:**

Silent observer thing where they could remain anonymous or that they typically didn't give that information out,

**Susan Simpson:**

Okay. Who, who ran silent observer?

**Detective Mattison:**

One lady that has since passed. It was a committee of people. Ours was a girl by the name of Janine, and she's the sheriff's assistant basically.

**[45:57] Colin Miller:** Much like Baltimore's Crime Stoppers program, Kalamazoo's Silent Observer program is ostensibly an independent, non-profit organization. But in both Kalamazoo and Baltimore, there's not much daylight between these tip-line programs and the law enforcement agencies that utilize the tips that get called in.

**Detective Mattison:**

Yeah, we just make contact directly with Janine.

**Susan Simpson:**

Ok, and how would the money get paid out, if it was paid?

**Detective Mattison:**

They would issue a check.

And just like with Crime Stoppers, Silent Observer has been used by detectives in Kalamazoo to secretly pay witnesses for the help provided in solving cold cases.

In one of Vendeville's letters to Titus's attorneys, Vendeville had included a newspaper clipping about another cold case that Werkema had been involved in. 1988, the elderly owner of a bike shop had been bludgeoned to death -- robbery had been the killer's apparent motive. The case went unsolved for over a decade, but then the cold case team got involved.

Detective Mike Werkema reinterviewed a number of witnesses, and some of those witnesses changed their stories, leading to the arrest Scott Alan Baldwin, who had worked at the bike shop about three years before the murder happened.

Baldwin was convicted in 2001; the prosecution's star witness in the case had been Baldwin's ex-girlfriend.

But after Baldwin's conviction, his attorneys had learned that the cold case team had some unusual interactions with their star witness. Prior to her testifying at trial,

Werkema had given Baldwin's ex-girlfriend copies of her prior statements, to help her remember while on the stand everything she'd told the cold case team before. And after the trial, this star witness had received something else from Werkema too.

As described in the Kalamazoo Gazette article, in a section Vendeville had marked with yellow highlighter:

*"As for the reward money [Baldwin's ex-girlfriend] received, Werkema said police submitted her name for reward money from Silent Observer and that she received the funds after the case against Baldwin had been adjudicated. Werkema said the woman was completely unaware of the reward until she received it."*

Like in the Baldwin case, a Silent Observer reward had also been offered in Jeff Titus's case. In fact, the cold case team had widely advertised this reward at Titus's former workplaces, in order to encourage his former coworkers to come forward with information about Titus. They had also advertised it around Fulton.

But in Titus's case, we don't know who the reward money ultimately went to. That still remains a mystery today.

~~~~~

[48:34] Susan Simpson: I haven't been able to speak to Detective Werkema myself, but cold case Detective Mike Brown has always been willing to share his thoughts on the investigation. So I'd asked him about Bonnie's story, and what he thought of it.

Susan Simpson:

And I do have a lot of questions about Bonnie Huffman.

Detective Mike Brown:

Oh, yeah.

Susan Simpson:

What do you think happened there?

Detective Mike Brown:

Well, I didn't, I never talked to her to be honest with you. I didn't talk to her so, who was it that talked to her?

Susan Simpson:

Werkema.

Detective Mike Brown:

Yeah, there you go. I didn't talk to her.

Even Detective Mike Brown, who has always been the most enthusiastic advocate of Jeff Titus's guilt, does not place any significance on the changing stories of Bonnie Huffman. He didn't talk to her, and he'd had no part in it. And since he knows nothing about it, he's not going to make any effort to defend what was done to obtain her testimony in the first place.

Susan Simpson:

It doesn't sound like you put much, you're that concerned with Bonnie Huffman, are you?

Detective Brown:

No.

Susan Simpson:

It wasn't her that you think puts him at the crime scene.

Detective Brown:

I'm not concerned with Bonnie. I'm not concerned with a guy in a ditch. I'm not concerned with any of that. None of that.

[49:45] Susan Simpson: But even if Mike Brown isn't concerned about Bonnie Huffman, the jury at Jeff Titus's trial had been. She was the only evidence that connected Jeff Titus to the crime scene. All other eyewitness evidence says he wasn't there.

My best chance at figuring out why Bonnie Huffman's story had changed was to talk to her. So, late last year, I talked to her on two separate occasions.

The first time, Jacinda and I had gone together, but that interview was not recorded. About a month later, I decided I needed to try again; it was too important not to. I went back to talk to Bonnie, and she'd agreed to a recorded interview.

Unfortunately, Bonnie's dogs had been super excited about being on a podcast. They barked. A lot. I've never tried harder in my life to make friends with a dog, but it didn't work.

But while attempting to interview her, I'd asked Bonnie the most important question I had: when Jeff Titus had come by that night, to tell them about the murders in the Fulton Game Area, what time had it been?

Susan Simpson:

So, did he come by... when did he come by?

Bonnie Huffman:

Uh, that night? The night that he did that? I'm gonna say it was around... 8 o'clock?

Susan Simpson:

So you weren't living there, but you'd gone home that day?

Bonnie Huffman:

I was [unintelligible] ... [talking to barking dogs] Enough is enough.

8pm, Bonnie told me. That's the same answer she'd given Detective Wiersema 30 years ago, in 1990, when he'd first asked her the same question.

It was also the same answer that Bonnie had given Jacinda and I before, when we'd talked to her the first time a few weeks earlier.

Susan Simpson:

Ok, she was very clear that it was that night.

Jacinda Davis:

She did say that it was dark.

Susan Simpson:

She said it several times.

[51:28] If you ask Bonnie Huffman, today, when Jeff came by, she will tell you she is certain it was very late that evening, well after dark. And that brought me to the second most important question I had for her: Why then, had Bonnie given a different answer, when she had been testifying at Jeff Titus's trial?

Bonnie said she didn't remember much about the trial at all, she said. In fact, she told me, she only had one clear memory of what happened in the courtroom that day:

Susan Simpson:

Do you remember at trial when you testified?

Bonnie Huffman:

All I remember is a blue shirt and a blue tie.

Susan Simpson:

Nice tie?

Bonnie Huffman:

Nice tie.

Susan Simpson:

What did he say about that? Did he, uh...

Bonnie Huffman:

Oh, I told him he had a beautiful tie.

Susan Simpson:

So he just said, "thanks?"

Bonnie Huffman:

Yeah.

Susan Simpson:

Yeah.

Bonnie remembers that Jeff Titus had on a beautiful blue tie, and that she'd complimented him on it. Although she'd known it probably wasn't proper for her to be speaking to the defendant directly.

Bonnie Huffman:

I know, I've never forgot that. It was such a nice tie.

Even after talking to Bonnie, I still do not know why her story changed. Was the story she told at trial a false memory that, in the 20 years since, she's now forgotten that she ever remembered in the first place? It's possible, I think. Or is there something more going on here to explain it all?

In trying to answer this question, there was something else Jacinda and I had wanted to ask Bonnie about.

“Had you ever heard anything about a reward being offered in this case?” we asked her. Nope, she said, immediately. Very immediately.

Susan Simpson:

Alright. Did you believe her, about the reward?

Jacinda Davis:

It was the quickest answer of all the answers.

Susan Simpson:

It was the very quickest answer she gave the whole time.

Jacinda Davis:

Yeah.

Susan Simpson:

It was a very confident answer.

Jacinda Davis:

It was a very... yeah.

Susan Simpson:

I don't know. Maybe I'm just being paranoid but I'm glad that you thought the same because I-

Jacinda Davis:

I thought of everything we asked her, that she would have remembered the most.

And in any event, the existence of the reward money was not necessary to explain what happened here. As Detective Wiersema noted, there are much more straightforward explanations for why and how a witness's testimony could change.

Detective Wiersema:

Why does it change in this kind of a case? Somebody has more than likely led you to doubt yourself and is steering you to make it more beneficial to the case at hand.

Although Bonnie Huffman's story about when Jeff Titus came by that night has been notably inconsistent, the same is not true for her mother. Across three police interviews and in her trial testimony, Pat Burnworth's answer to this question was always the same:

Titus came by at 8 to 9pm she said. And because Pat Burnworth has been so consistent about when Jeff Titus came over that night, her testimony has gotten less scrutiny in this case over the years. But even though Pat Burnworth's story about when Jeff Titus came by that night has remained consistent over the years, the rest of her story has not.

Take for instance, her strange claim to the cold case team that Titus liked to walk into her house and search through her cupboards looking for food. And her equally strange, although more incriminating claim that Titus was somehow confused about his property lines, and didn't know where his property ended and began. And then there was the claim she made to the cold case team, and also at trial, that on the night Jeff Titus came by her house, he told her that he had just found two bodies in the woods, and had not yet told the police about it.

[55:00] So no, Pat Burnworth's story about what time Titus came over didn't change. But every other part of the rest of her story has gone through some dramatic changes.

And when talking to others about this case, Pat Burnworth has made a number of inconsistent claims. Helen Nofz was the neighbor who, along with her son, had gone down to speak to the man who'd run off the road and gotten stuck in a ditch at about 5pm on the day of the murders.

In both 1990 and 2001, Helen Nofz told investigators that they should talk to Pat Burnworth, because Pat Burnworth had told her she'd seen a car speeding away after the murders before it crashed in a ditch.

And when I spoke to Kelly Warren, the daughter of Jeff's friend, Big Jack Warren, she told me about how, the week after the murders, she'd gone over to Jeff's property to hunt, and while there she'd had a conversation with an older woman who lived in the farm across the street from Titus. A woman who, based on Kelly's description could only have been Pat Burnworth.

Kelly Warren:

I remember hearing it down there when we were hunting. But that goes back to

that car that was speeding away with the two people running ... out of ... down from along by the farm beside Jeff's barn at the same time, at that old farm across the street, and some lady seeing them. Running out of the woods but they didn't have nothing. Like no guns or nothing. Like, no guns or nothing. And they weren't dressed appropriately to be hunting.

And then there was a call that was made to Silent Observer, back in 1990, from someone who had heard similar, and yet very different claim, from Pat Burnworth. The tip read:

Pat Burnworth, who lives near the scene, reportedly has told people in the Fulton area that a few minutes before the screams one of the neighbors helped three drunks out of the ditch. Also, that everyone thinks that Titus is the killer, as he has told many people that he is a State Trooper and while being armed, kicked people off his and state property.

Not only are all these reported statements from Pat Burnworth contradictory to one another, they're also things that Pat Burnworth and her daughter Bonnie never repeated to the police in their interviews. Neither Pat nor Bonnie ever told the original detectives about hearing screams, or seeing three drunks, or a speeding car, or men running out of the woods, or even that they harbored suspicions about Titus being the killer.

So, where then, were these stories coming from?

While Jacinda and I were down in Fulton, we'd wanted to speak to one of Titus's neighbors, a guy named Jerry, because he'd lived near the ditch where the ditch man had run off the road and we were hoping he might've seen something. It turned out, though, that he'd only moved in after the murders had happened.

He had heard a lot about the Titus case, he told us, but everything he knew was second-hand.

Susan Simpson:

So, how'd you find out? Do you remember?

Jerry:

My neighbor, actually.

Susan Simpson:

Which one? The --

Jerry:
Burnworths.

Susan Simpson:
They told you about it, yeah.

Jerry:
Well Pat was alive then. Pat knew a lot about it.

Susan Simpson:
What'd she know? What'd she tell you about?

Jerry:
Just conversations between him and things that he's done in the neighborhood that weren't so great.

I'd heard from several people in Fulton that, back in the day, if you'd really wanted the inside scoop about what was going on around town, Pat Burnworth was who you should be talking to. Jerry would agree with that.

Jerry:
Pat kept up on shit (laughs). She was a bit of a busybody. She was very outspoken, and uh, but she was a good person, I really liked Pat. Spent a lot of time with her.

Susan Simpson:
Just social, or like ...?

Jerry:
Oh, I used to have an Amish buggy, with a horse. I'd take Pat, pick her up for rides all the time.

Jacinda Davis:
Aww.

Susan Simpson:
Oh that's cool!

Jerry:

We'd ride around the neighborhood.

Jacinda Davis:

Nice.

Jerry:

And sometimes I'd ride up to the bar and get drunk (laughter) and come home.

It's not always possible to track down where a rumor comes from. But when it comes to rumors about Jeff Titus in the Fulton area, well, in the cases where I was able to trace the rumor back down to its origins, nine times out of ten those stories were coming from the same place.

Susan Simpson:

He apparently grew marijuana somewhere up around here.

Jerry:

Well I've heard he did too.

Susan Simpson:

Who?

Jerry:

Titus.

Susan Simpson:

Oh no (laughs) He's kind of ... straight-laced.

Jerry:

Some people were saying that for the money he had invested in that place --

Susan Simpson:

Ohh.

Jerry:

He was living so much -- somewhat financially out of his means. But I do remember that conversation coming up.

Susan Simpson:

Oh was that with Pat, or ...?

Jerry:

Yeah, I think through Pat, but ...

I had not meant to laugh in this interview, but the idea of Titus secretly growing marijuana just caught me so off guard. No, Titus did not grow marijuana in his cornfields. His wife Julie's parents had helped them buy the old Stryker Farm, and Titus and his father-in-law had done a ton of carpentry work on the old building -- they'd turned it into a picturesque farmhouse, but it hadn't started like that. And I am certain that absolutely no drug money had been involved in repairing it.

Jerry:

I didn't know that much. I'd heard that rumor about him.

Susan Simpson:

But, it was a common rumor

Jerry:

But I also heard that he's very territorial.

Susan Simpson:

Jeff Titus?

Jerry:

Mm-hmm.

Susan Simpson:

Did you hear that from Pat?

Jerry:

Mm-hmm.

This claim that Jeff Titus was territorial is one of the more persistent rumors in this case, but it's also one that's puzzled me ever since I started to dig into this case file. Because *everyone* up there is territorial. You're weird if you're not territorial. Jerry himself, for instance, has strong feelings about his property, and makes no apologies about it:

Susan Simpson:

And it seems like no one here likes hunters on their land.

Jerry:

No.

Susan Simpson:

So that doesn't seem weird to me.

Jerry:

It's a respectful thing, ya know?

Susan Simpson:

You don't want people you don't know with guns running around.

Jerry:

No, it's not so much that, it's our fucking property. You wanna get on my property, ask me. Or and if I say no, keep your ass off here. Whether I've got five ... my parent's got 6-7 hundred acres ...

Susan Simpson:

Wow.

Jerry:

And we run into this shit constantly. It gets old. Ya know, this is our property, we pay the fucking taxes. Keep your ass off it. It's that simple. I don't walk in your house or wander out in your house, yard, then you should show me the same respect.

Susan Simpson:

Is it like a regular problem up there, on their property?

Jerry:

Everywhere.

Susan Simpson:

Okay.

Jerry:

Yeah. I was back on my parent's farm, that we've owned for generations, walking to my deer stand and some guy says, "what the fuck are you doing here?" And you're saying that to me and I've got a loaded gun on me.

Susan Simpson:

Wow.

Jerry:

I just quit hunting because I got tired of this shit. Because ... I'd shoot somebody (laughs). You know, you get sick of this shit.

Susan Simpson:

Yeah, I could imagine.

Jerry:

Yeah.

Susan Simpson:

Especially during hunting season here. Ya know, the game ...

Jerry:

Yeah, i just -- in general, you know, it's a matter of respect.

To give some perspective on the kinds of baseless rumors that Pat Burnworth was spreading around about Jeff Titus, just consider this: Pat managed to convince *this guy* that *Jeff Titus* was unusually territorial.

And these sorts of rumors were spreading beyond the Fulton area. Take Marian Gibbs, for example. She gave the extremely damaging testimony at Jeff Titus's trial about a conversation that, supposedly, she'd had with Titus at the sawmill that her husband ran. Marian had also heard lots of rumors about Jeff Titus. Rumors that heavily influenced her view of him.

Marian Gibbs:

You know, and there were rumors going around about how he had bullets lined up on something, on maybe the, the mantle of his fireplace or something, you know, that supposedly were for specific people.

Susan Simpson:

What'd you hear about that? Like, did you ever hear any names or?

Marian Gibbs:

One of the ladies that testified, she was a neighbor of his ...

Susan Simpson:

Patricia Burnsworth?

Marian Gibbs:

Pat Burnsworth.

Susan Simpson:

Got it.

Marian Gibbs:

Yeah, Pat.

Marian was not the first person, though, that I've heard this particular story from. Because Bonnie Huffman had told me the same thing.

Susan Simpson:

So, tell me about what you were saying earlier, about the, the bullets?

Bonnie Huffman:

Our name was on them.

Bonnie Huffman had said that Titus had written her name, and her mom's name, on bullets that he kept in his house. And Bonnie was certain this was true, because she'd heard from an extremely credible source.

Bonnie Huffman:

I don't know where they'd be now, but I do know, that um, they were above the door.

Susan Simpson:

Do you ... so the detectives told you about this?

Bonnie Huffman:

Yes.

This is where I need to stress that there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that Titus ever had a bullet with Bonnie's name on it. That part of Bonnie's story is not true, it didn't happen.

But I do wonder if the other part of Bonnie's story could be true. The cold case detective who interviewed her had been Mike Werkema. Could he really have told Bonnie that Titus had a bullet with her name on it?

Susan Simpson:

Did the -- did the police tell you this to warn you, or ...

Bonnie Huffman:

They warned us.

Susan Simpson:

Okay.

What Bonnie Huffman is describing would be gross misconduct by Werkema. She's making serious allegations against him, whether she realizes it or not.

But I'm not so sure it really was Werkema who told Bonnie this, even though that's how Bonnie recalls it today. I think it's possible that this could be another false memory -- another conflation of sources. Because I haven't seen evidence of Werkema telling any other witnesses that Titus had bullets with their names on it, but we do know someone else who told people that. Bonnie's mother, Pat. She'd told the exact same story to Marian Gibbs, after all.

So it's at least possible, anyway, that Bonnie was really told this story by her mother, and now, years later, she's misremembering it as something Detective Werkema told her. False memories can be tricky like that.

Whoever it was that told Bonnie this story, Bonnie truly seems to believe that Titus had bullets with her name and her mother's name inscribed on them. And we know from Marian Gibbs that this is a story Pat Burnworth really had been telling others even before Titus's trial. Though it's far from the only story that Pat Burnworth was telling others about Jeff Titus. There were other stories too.

Marian Gibbs:

You know, Pat had said that Jeff had come over to her house and basically said he had -- basically, what Pat said, that he confessed. Um, I thought that was interesting. See and Pat had talked with me about that, and it was probably not something that she was supposed to do, but she had a conversation with me before we went to trial and told me these things. And it was like, oh, I certainly wouldn't want to have been living that close to him.

After speaking with Marian, Jacinda and I had started to realize just how damaging all these unfounded rumors had been to Titus's case. No, the rumors themselves weren't repeated in court -- but they didn't have to be in order to influence witness testimony.

Jacinda Davis:

Two things that stood out to me that I hadn't thought about before is that it was in Bonnie Huffman, or Pat Burnworth's, and in these people's, everyone around them's best interest that Jeff was convicted, because if -- if he wasn't, the picture that they painted of him was so scary that you would ...

Susan Simpson:

You would do anything to make sure that he didn't come back.

Jacinda Davis:

You would do anything to make sure he -- the conviction happened.

~~~~~

That's all for Episode 11 of Undisclosed: the State v. Jeff Titus. Thanks for listening, and we'll be back in two weeks, on February 15th, with Episode 12. But don't forget to send us your questions for this week's Addendum on Thursday.

Mital Telhan, is our executive producer. Our logo was designed by Ballookey, and our theme music is by Ramiro Marquez. Audio production is done by Rebecca LaVoie of Partners in Crime Media, and host of the Crime Writers On podcast. Music from this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions.

Transcripts for episodes are available on our website at [undisclosed-podcast.com](http://undisclosed-podcast.com). They're brought to you by our amazing transcript team Dawn Loges, Brita Bliss, Skylar Park, and Erica Fladell.

And of course thank you to our sponsors for making it possible for us to come back week after week. You can follow us online, and on all social media our handle is @UndisclosedPod. We're on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

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

undisclosedpodcast@gmail.com, or you can call and leave a message at (410) 205-5563.

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

---

*Transcribed by Skylar Park, Erica Fladell*