

Undisclosed: The State v. Jeff Titus
Episode 9: Peyton Place
Monday, January 19, 2021

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**Jeff Titus:**

I was convicted on innuendos and things that I said.

**Jacinda Davis:**

And here's, here, and I'm look- I'm the kind of person who, who I need to understand it. I need, I need proof. I, I need the facts to make sense to me. And what doesn't make sense to me is why all these people who don't know each other would testify that you said these things. Why would these unrelated people from different parts of your life all testify that you made incriminating statements?

**[00:50] Rabia Chaudry:** At Jeff Titus's trial, 15 of his former coworkers testified against him. Most of these witnesses had worked with Jeff at the Veterans' Affairs Medical Center in Battle Creek, where Jeff had been employed from 1976 until 1994. And all of them said that while working with Jeff, he'd made incriminating statements to them about his role in the Fulton Game Area murders.

**Jacinda Davis:**

Like they're saying you said you probably did it, or you'd shoot people in the back.

**Jeff Titus:**

I did talk about the gun. I found the gun. I turned around and told people about it. I mean it was in the paper. They would ask me questions about it. I mean a lot of times I didn't bring it up. It was them bringing it up and I told them. Now for me to say well, did you shoot them? And I say did I probably? Why would I say that? It doesn't, it doesn't make sense.

Jeff says he would've talked to many of these coworkers about the Fulton Game Area murders because it was a subject that came up in conversation a lot. But Jeff denies ever saying the specific comments that these witnesses testified about.

**Jacinda Davis:**

Is it possible then you could have said some of those statements in passing, if someone was on my property, I'd shoot them.

**Jeff Titus:**

No, I don't think I would have said that. Only if someone I had to defend myself.

**Jacinda Davis:**

Well, do you think you could've exaggerated, said something to impress people? You know, maybe after having a couple beers at the bar, you could have said something as a way...

**Jeff Titus:**

Yeah but see it wouldn't have been at no bar because all them people were at work or whatever. The majority of them. And I don't go to a bar.

Jeff says that these 15 coworkers who testified against him are not telling the truth. That he didn't say the things that they say he told them.

**Jacinda Davis:**

So the people who came to testify about the things you were saying... what do you think their motivation was?

**Jeff Titus:** I do not know.

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[03:13] Rabia Chaudry: Hi, and welcome to Undisclosed. This is episode 9 of our series on The State v. Jeff Titus. 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, this is Susan Simpson. I'm an attorney in Washington, D.C. and I blog @TheViewFromLL2.

Colin Miller: Hi, I'm Colin Miller. I'm an Associate Dean and Professor at the University of South Carolina School of Law, and I blog @EvidenceProfBlog.

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Jeff joined the Military after high school. And after four years he got out of the Marines and came back to Michigan, where he enrolled in college and soon got a job working security at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Battle Creek. The VA Hospital is a sprawling medical complex on the edge of town, and though it provides a variety of medical services to veterans in Michigan, it is primarily a neuropsychiatric facility.

**Brandenburg:**

You know that's a psychiatric medical center. They may want to claim it's a medical center... it's a nuthouse is what it is.

**[04:31] Susan Simpson:** i've spoken to a lot of Jeff's old co-workers, and often after these interviews the part that sticks out the most to me was not what I'd learned about Jeff Titus or the murders. But what I'd learned about the VA itself.

**Susan Simpson:**

The conditions at the VA sound like they were pretty horrible.

**Jacinda Davis:**

That sounds horrible. I mean the fact that they have people patrolling for patients who black out... is crazy.

**Susan Simpson:**

I thought he was gonna say three or four times a year. He said three or four times  
a WEEK.

**Jacinda Davis:**

Yeah, they just couldn't keep it safe or secure.

We heard stories about a tree out in the VA yard that they'd finally had to cut down -- after it had come to be known as the hanging tree. And about a patient who'd starved to death in his hospital bed, with somehow no one noticing. And about a skeleton found in the nearby woods that turned out to be a patient who'd wandered away and never been found.

Conditions at the VA are, by all accounts, much better now than they had been back then. But as Jeff's friend Big Jack Warren recalls, the VA could be a rough place to work. Though Jack Warren later moved to working at the medical center's power plant, he'd started off as a plumber there.

**Big Jack Warren:**

In the morning they would hand out work orders. You didn't go to building thirty-nine. It was referred to as Knuckle City. You would wait until the police officers had left the building and got people drugged up to where they weren't as combative, then you could go in there and do your job.

One of the nurses who worked with Jeff Titus was Irene, she had been stationed out in the ward in the building that Big Jack Warren had referred to as Knuckle City.

**Irene Gruell:**

I was working over on 39-East, we only got ten patients, and they were-- and we had four people all the time. We had a radio so that if somebody went berserk we could call them and they would help us and put them in a cuff and belt and lay them on their bed.

**[06:18] Susan Simpson:** It wasn't just the requirements of the job that had made the VA a challenging place to work. One of Jeff's old coworkers had described the place to me as "the weird duck farm" -- and he had *not* been talking about any of the patients there.

One of the first witnesses I spoke to in this case was Big Jack Warren. And he was the first person to tell me what life at the VA had been like.

**Big Jack Warren:**

The VA is Peyton Place number two. That's the truth.

**Susan Simpson:**

You weren't kidding. You told us that when we met last time, and then I talked to everyone else and like, yeah, you were right. It was drama.

**Big Jack Warren:**

The stuff that goes on out there...

**Kelly Warren:**

But had his lawyer had been halfway decent and they had done any investigation they would have found out.

**Susan Simpson:**

And it's not like Jeff was the only one people had issues with. Because, like, I'll

start talking about Jeff and they'll be like, oh, this other guy. Oh man. He was even worse. Like, it was awful. Like, no. Let's talk about Jeff right now.

**[07:11] Susan Simpson:** Peyton Place, in case you're wondering, like I was, is a soap opera that ran back in the 60s, full of convoluted drama and meandering love affairs. But if anything, the story lines from the VA were messier than anything on Peyton Place. While Jeff Titus and the murder case had been a favorite point of gossip for a while, it was by no means the biggest scandal to hit the hospital.

**Colin Miller:** The drama at the VA had a lot of sources. There were, of course, the romantic rivalries among the staff.

**Big Jack Warren:**

Yeah. That's why I call the place Peyton Place. A lot of guys or a lot of people, I should say, are divorced. More kind of frisky.

There was workplace intrigue as well. In some of the correspondence that was included in Titus's personnel file, one of the nurses complained that, after she'd been switched to work in a new ward on a different shift, her friends that she'd worked with on the old ward had become paranoid about her -- because they were worried that she'd gone and, quote, "turned them in for something," and that's why she was avoiding them.

And at the VA, gossip was the currency of the realm.

**Irene Gruell:**

And then you find other stuff that's ... I mean, rumors. You know? So you know what's going on-

**Susan Simpson:**

I heard there were a lot of dramas going on.

**Irene Gruell:**

All the time, yeah. All the time. You heard from anybody and everybody, and if you wanted to ... you better not say nothing because it spreads, you know?

When Jeff Titus's coworkers found out that two men had been murdered not far from his farm, it's no surprise there was lots of talk about that too.

**Big Jack Warren:** Well, it was the talk of the hospital.

**Susan Simpson:** Okay. So, the hospital was talking about it a lot?

**Big Jack Warren:**

Yeah. And s-, people were forming opinions on how he had acted around them, you know?

**Susan Simpson:** So it wasn't just Jeff talking. It was others talking about it.

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**Irene Gruell:**

But then later on, he came back and other people were talking about it like, oh yeah, you shot somebody and killed them.

**Susan Simpson:** So people at the VA were talking about it?

**Irene Gruell:** Yeah.

**Susan Simpson:** Like co-workers?

**Irene Gruell:** Yeah.

**Susan Simpson:** So that was... I guess that came up a lot, probably? Or did it?

**Irene Gruell:** Yeah, for a couple of weeks.

**[09:30] Colin Miller:** One of the employees who'd worked with Jeff Titus, and who was still there ten years later when the cold case team arrived and spent months out at the VA talking to Jeff's old coworkers, was Beverly. She'd first learned of the accusations against Jeff from other security officers that she was friends with.

**Beverly:**

He goes, "I can't believe you went on a ground search with him back in the woods," because we had a ground search to go on, to look for a patient.

I said, "Oh, get outta here," you know. Just joking around.

He goes, "He's been accused of... he might have murdered somebody or something like that."

I thought about that after he was arrested, right after he was taken to court and stuff like that. I'm like, oh my God, maybe he did do that.

**Colin Miller:** Now, Beverly had not been one of the witnesses who testified against Jeff at his trial. But a lot of her coworkers had. Jack Warren's wife, Diane, was able to sit through parts of the trial, and she saw a number of them take the witness stand.

**Susan Simpson:**

So you heard the VA witnesses? What did you think about that?

**Diane Warren:**

I think they called everyone that didn't like Jeff to speak. To the point the judge said he had heard enough VA people.

**Susan Simpson:** It just kept going on. It was like half the trial, literally.

**Diane Warren:** It was constant.

**[10:43] Colin Miller:** It was constant, and it was kind of confusing. For the jury at Titus's trial, this testimony from all these former coworkers would've seemed disjointed at times, with both witnesses and attorneys dancing around parts of the story that were being left unsaid. There were references to a prior investigation of some sort, as well as allusions to Titus's coworkers disliking him, but no straight answers as to what exactly the witnesses and attorneys were talking about.

As one of the jurors told us, though, once the trial was over, they'd been allowed to hear the rest of the story.

**Paul:**

And, yeah. And then, the other was the guy that supervised him for a while he was a security officer in the hospital up in Battle Creek, Veterans Hospital.

And after, after the trial was over, the judge, Judge Schaefer, came in and goes, "Remember that guy," he said, and we all go, "Yeah," and he said, there was something strange about him." It looked like he wanted to really start talking about what was going on, but he kept to the questions. He didn't... And what had happened was, see he fired Titus for sexual harassment.

**[11:53] Susan Simpson:** In 1994, Jeff Titus was fired from the VA following an investigation into claims of sexual harassment. When Jacinda and I had first heard why Jeff Titus had been fired from his job at the VA, we'd had the exact same thought:

**Jacinda Davis:**

See, I guess in my mind, I'm thinking 1990. Like it would have had to be pretty serious to get fired.

I mean seriously, what would someone have to do to get fired for sexual harassment in the 1990s? You'd have to be Harvey Weinstein or Louis CK, right? And those guys didn't even get fired in the 1990s.

The cold case team may have been thinking along the same lines that Jacinda and I were, because after learning about what had happened at the VA, the cold case detectives tracked down and interviewed as many women who worked with Jeff Titus that they could find. It was the statements they got in the course of that investigation that formed the bulk of the cold case team's case against Titus at the time of his arrest.

From what I've seen in the files, I don't doubt that Jeff Titus should've been fired for sexual harassment. But I should be clear here -- calling this sexual harassment is *my* description of what happened. It's the term I'd use. But it's not the term that the women themselves used to describe their complaints. And it's not how the ones we spoke to would describe it now.

**Susan Simpson:**

But she didn't describe it as sexual harassment. I think it was, but...

**Jacinda Davis:** No, she didn't describe it as sexual harassment.

**Susan Simpson:**

She'd only heard vague rumors of others possibly doing it... No wonder they didn't call her.

**Jacinda Davis:**

They didn't call her because she was not flexible. She didn't report it, she said it stopped.

**[13:34] Rabia Chaudry:** The investigation into Titus had begun in 1994, after a nurse filed a complaint about him with the VA's Equal Employment Opportunity counselor. The



EEO counselor then interviewed her, as well as few of the other nurses, and she concluded that a lot of the complaints against Jeff Titus followed a similar pattern. A nurse would become friendly with Jeff, and they would start to chat a lot at work.

While doing his rounds through the medical center, Jeff would often stop by the nurse's ward to talk to them. At first, it was fine -- the nurses wouldn't mind having someone to talk to, and pass the time at work. But then Jeff would just keep coming back, keep talking to them, keep being around them, and they'd become more and more uncomfortable with the situation. But they also felt like they didn't have the authority to tell him to go away. After all, he was a security officer -- his job was to be there in the hospital. But his behavior made them very uncomfortable, and they hadn't known what to do.

As one nurse, a woman named Amy, told the VA investigators, "[Y]ou know, it just ... when it goes on and on and on and you're sitting there trying to do your work and, you know, trying to hint, like leave, please - but he wouldn't go away."

Michelle, another nurse at the VA, described Jeff's behavior in much the same way. The EEO counselor told investigators that her allegations against Titus were "a type of harassment other than really sexual. ... But the comments and behavior was such as to make her uncomfortable being around him. You know, more fearful of just being annoyed[.]"

Both Amy and Michele, it should be noted, later testified against Jeff Titus at his trial.

But not all of Jeff Titus's coworkers experienced Jeff's behavior as a problem. Some nurses, like Irene, did not remember him as causing any issues at all.

**Irene Gruell:**

I usually never had any problems with that, you know? And he was very friendly and stuff.

**Susan Simpson:**

I've heard he may have flirted with some of the nurses.

**Irene Gruell:**

Oh, all the nurses he flirted with. Even me, and I was old. I was like, damn.

**Rabia Chaudry:**

So, his reputation was just... that, but otherwise he was ok?

**Irene Gruell:**

But he liked to come around. Well, if you're a security guard, what are you going to do? You check wards and then there's nothing else to do. So he used to go through different wards and then sit down and chit-chat. Especially on 39-2 East, where I was working. When the patients saw a security guard, they was behaving themselves.

**Susan Simpson:**

Ah, so I guess the nurses kind of liked having a security guard nearby?

**Irene Gruell:** Yeah.

**[16:15] Rabia Chaudry:** Of course, even the coworkers who didn't mind talking to Jeff Titus often noted that they preferred not to talk to him for too long -- as Jeff's conversational repertoire could be somewhat limited in scope.

**Irene Gruell:**

But anyway he always talked about hunting, or deer, or shooting or something like that, it was like he was a big hunter. It's just him and hunting-- didn't he have a kid, too?

**Susan Simpson:** He had two little girls, yeah.

**Irene Gruell:** Yeah, he was talking once in a while about them.

**[16:34] Rabia Chaudry:** Not all of the complaints about Jeff Titus were complaints about sexual harassment. Some of Jeff's behaviors annoyed both of his male and female coworkers alike -- it wasn't the sort of behavior that creates a hostile work environment that amounts to sex-based discrimination under Title XII of the Civil Rights Act.

But where Jeff's behavior crossed the line into sexual harassment was when he repeatedly sought out certain nurses and talked to them at length *because* they were women.

**[17:08] Colin Miller:** But even if the women involved would not describe Jeff's behavior as sexual harassment, they did describe it as harassment, full stop. He would also get too personal in his discussions with the nurses that he worked with -- he would tell them about how beautiful his wife was, or tell them about a fight the two of them had had. And

he'd cross serious boundaries, in ways that the women saw to be potentially threatening. He'd comment on the kind of car they drove, or chime in on conversations with information he'd found out about them while writing up parking tickets.

**Susan Simpson:** What do you recall about her?

**Jeff Titus:**

Oh, she was, because we turned around, we're talking and then the ones [unintelligible] well, I know where you live. Because we, we sit there talking and stuff and then she got real defensive. Like I say because I was always talking to the nurse that worked in there. And then I know she made a complaint against me and stuff.

And Jeff Titus's friendships with the women he worked with caused other problems for him, too, even when the women themselves had no complaints. One of Jeff's coworkers, Beverly, often talked to Jeff Titus at work, and considered him a friend. It was Jeff's supervisor, not Beverly, that had objections to Titus speaking to her.

**Beverly:**

When I wasn't working I would go up there and we'd meet and have coffee when he was on break. My cousin told me to stay away from him, he said, you know he's not trustworthy. And I said, 'Well, he's never done anything to me.'

**Susan Simpson:** He was his boss...

**Beverly:**

Oh he was his boss, but he was also my cousin too, so he was looking out for me. I guess him and Jeff didn't get along. And I guess he was telling him to stay away from me.

**Susan Simpson:** Paul might have thought there was a connection there.

**Beverly:** Yeah.

**Susan Simpson:** Got it, so that would be what the conflict was at the time.

**Beverly:**

Yeah. He didn't want me getting involved with Jeff at all. And I couldn't understand why. We weren't doing anything, we were just talking and having coffee, and things like that.

And Jeff's friends at work, like Jack Warren, had seen that Jeff's actions were a problem.

**Jack Warren:**

Yeah, he thought he was a little bit of a Romeo. And I would try to tell him, you know, that's your wife, that's the mother of your children, why are you jeopardizing that for something that's going to be a weekend stand or, or whatever, you know? It don't make no sense to me. And, and I know a couple of them were people that were called on the stand.

**Susan Simpson:**

S-, did he actually have relationships with any of those women?

**Jack Warren:**

I know in a casual way he did, like helping them with doing landscaping, for example. He would help anybody really, if they ask him, especially a girl.

Now the sexual harassment allegations against Jeff Titus were not the kind of clear-cut misconduct that would guarantee he'd be fired from the VA. Because, yeah, in the 1990s, it did take a lot to get fired for sexual harassment. On the one hand, Jeff Titus's behavior was disturbing, and persistent, and creating an uncomfortable and even frightening workplace environment for the women he worked with. On the other hand though, there's no record that he'd ever continued to harass any coworkers once he'd been instructed not to. As one report in the file notes: "I spoke to [the nurse], and learned that Officer Titus was, indeed, frequenting the ward for varying periods of time. I asked her to make it clear to him that he was not to 'hang around' the ward anymore. She did so, and the problem ceased immediately."

There were also a number of nurses who'd written letters to Jeff's supervisors in his defense. They'd described how Jeff Titus would stop by their wards a lot to chat, and he, quote, "sometimes talks too much about his family, but is never out of line." Once you told Jeff you had to get back to work, they said, he'd turn around and leave. Irene, the nurse from building 39, described Jeff Titus in similar terms.

**Susan Simpson:**

So she complained he came up to her ward and talked to her all the time, and she didn't like it.

**Irene Gruell:**

Why didn't she just say -- hey, get out of here, or something? You know? He used to come on to, it was 39 2East, ok, it's the lockdown unit. We had 10 patients, and that's it. And shoot, sometimes I was glad he was around for maybe 10, 15, 20 minutes, so the patient would see him and give me an easier way, I wouldn't have to worry about some of them coming and....

If there had only been the sexual harassment complaints, Jeff Titus might not have been fired from the VA. There was enough ambiguity there that it might not have been enough for the VA to uphold his termination.

But the case for Jeff Titus's dismissal became ironclad after he went in to testify before the VA's investigators.

**Jeff Titus:**

I don't know. They said I got myself fired because of the comment I made. That my - I could hit something from two-hundred yards, or, or whatever.

**Susan Simpson:** Yeah, that probably didn't help.

**Jeff Titus:**

Well something like that. 'Cuz like I say, I could shoot eight-hundred yards at a walking target, so it would have meant, I mean, I know it ticked somebody off, because they said that was the grounds that they used to terminate me. Said it was intimidating.

At Titus's disciplinary hearing, the VA's Regional Director had been acting in the role of prosecutor, and he was the one who had questioned Jeff Titus, and gotten him to talk about his shooting ability. As the Regional Director would later tell the cold case team, as soon as Jeff Titus had made the comments about his ability to shoot a human-sized target from several hundred yards away, he'd known he'd succeeded at his part of the job, and that Titus would be fired. The Regional Director had been right.

**[23:05] Rabia Chaudry:** The reason that these old events from the VA Hospital matter in this case, and the reason we have to talk about them now, is that when the cold case team reopened their investigation, they began by sending flyers that offered a \$5,000 reward to Jeff's old workplaces, and following that, they'd talked to dozens of Jeff's old coworkers. For the first couple months of their investigation, they were over at the VA almost every single day. And while the cold case team's interest in Jeff Titus as a suspect makes sense, it does seem unusual that they'd kicked off their two year

investigation into him by trying to learn everything they could about these old sexual harassment claims.

**Jacinda Davis:** You can see why they looked at him...

**Susan Simpson:** I would look at him!

**Jacinda Davis:**  
...as a suspect. And then they dig up this stuff from the VA.

**Susan Simpson:**  
That's the part where I would be like okay, well, let's go back to finding stuff that actually matters.

**Jacinda Davis:**  
Is it a big jump from like harassing women to killing two random people?

The cold case team's strategy worked. These interviews about the sexual harassment investigation would turn up witnesses who later gave damning testimony against Jeff at his trial.

Michelle was one of those witnesses, though she herself had not actually initiated any complaints against Jeff. Jeff had bothered her at one time, she said, but then he'd stopped. A couple years later, Michelle's husband had heard that another woman who'd filed a complaint against Jeff, and he'd given Michelle's name as someone the VA investigators should talk to. That's how she ended up being interviewed about Jeff in 1994.

When the cold case team talked to Michelle in 2000, she'd told them that Jeff had never mentioned to her that he'd been a suspect in a murder case to her. But she did tell the cold case team that he'd once threatened her husband. To the cold case team, this was new and potentially important information. The cold case team had heard lots of stories about Titus being weird, they had no shortage of statements about that. But they'd heard almost nothing about Jeff Titus being aggressive, or threatening violence against others.

Michelle's statement to the cold case team is one of the exceptions. She'd told the investigators that, quote, "[s]he recalled one incident where she had a verbal argument with her husband over the telephone and that TITUS overheard [this,] and after she hung up he offered to go to her residence and kick her husband's ass."

**[25:39] Susan Simpson:** Jacinda and I wanted to talk to Michelle about what it'd been like working with Titus at the VA, but her address had been hard to find. For some reason, whenever we tried to plug it into our phones, the results that came back had us driving in literal circles, cutting through cornfields and leaping over highways, with no apparent end point.

**Susan Simpson:** How are we supposed to follow these directions?

As we drove down a road that we thought must be in the rough area of where Michelle lived, we came across a house where a man and a woman were standing out in the driveway. So we'd pulled in to ask for directions -- or, if we got lucky, maybe the woman out there in the driveway would be Michelle herself.

As it turned out, we did get lucky. The woman in the driveway was Michelle. But we didn't get a chance to speak to her.

**Jacinda Davis:** Oh, this way...

**Susan Simpson:**

No, that way...I think that way ... Hey, we're looking for [BLEEEEEEP] -- is this it? Is this the right address?

**Man:** Is this the right what?

**Susan Simpson:** Is this the right place?

**Man:** Why?

**Susan Simpson:** I'm looking for Michelle.

**Man:** Why?

**Susan Simpson:** We're down here working on a- investigating an old case...

**Man:** Old case of what?

**Susan Simpson:** ...from Kalamazoo, and...

**Man:** You gotta give me more than that.

**Susan Simpson:**

So, we're trying to talk to all the witnesses from the case file, and she was listed in it...

**Man:** By who?

**Susan Simpson:** By the police that did the case file back in 2000...

**Man:** And what's this referring to?

**Susan Simpson:** A murder case that we're investigating...

**Man:** A murder case?

**Susan Simpson:** Yes.

**Man:**

So who are you? Let me see your IDs. You're investigators, you gotta have IDs. Who are you affiliated with...

**Susan Simpson:** No...you know, let's go. I'm not dealing with this.

**Man:**

Well what the fuck, you come up to my house, asking me questions.

**Susan Simpson:** Let's get out of here....

I'd had my window partially rolled down, and as we were talking, the man had walked up to the passenger-side door, where I was sitting. He'd bent over and leaned in where I had the window open, with his face just inches from mine. And while I had a mask on, he most definitely did not. At that point, I decided it was time to bail. I hit the button to roll up the power window, and we reversed out. As we drove away, I could see Michelle watching us.

**Susan Simpson:** She was out there.

**Jacinda Davis:** She knows exactly what we're talking about, too.



During the brief conversation in the driveway, Michelle had been trying to intervene to talk to us. But each time she tried to approach, her husband had held his hand out in her direction, and she'd drawn away again. But she could hear us, and just judging from her reactions, I'm pretty sure Jacinda was right -- she'd known *exactly* what we'd been there to talk to her about.

And I think it's worth considering that maybe there's another way to interpret Jeff Titus's comments to her from all those years ago. The one the cold case team had interpreted as a threat. When Titus had heard Michelle and her husband arguing with her on the phone, and after she'd hung up, he told her, "You want me to go over there and kick his ass?"

But that phrase is usually not meant to indicate any actual intent to do violence. It's more an expression of sympathy to whoever you're talking to. I could see myself saying that, maybe, in that situation -- and no one ever would ever think that I'd meant it literally. Unless of course I ever wound up being accused of murder. In which case, yeah, maybe after that people would remember it as something I'd meant in earnest.

It's something you can see happening again and again in the case file. Comments that Jeff Titus made to coworkers, who acknowledge they'd never thought twice about it at the time -- and then, years later, when they found out he was being investigated for murder, they had seen these old comments in a new light. A new, and incriminating light.

**[29:15] Colin Miller:** The sexual harassment allegations may have been what ultimately led to the investigation that got Jeff Titus fired from the VA, but his problems had begun much earlier. Jeff's friend Tony -- who was the union steward, and so was familiar with some of the disciplinary proceedings that had been brought against Jeff -- says that Jeff's bosses had been looking for a way to get him fired long before the sexual harassment complaints were made.

**Tony Baiocchi:** But they were out to get Jeff.

**Susan Simpson:** They wanted him gone, that's very clear from the files.

**Tony Baiocchi:**

Oh yeah. Well, they were working an angle, Norris is trying to pin it on him. He was making all sorts of calls, trying to get Jeff jacked up

This isn't paranoia -- there were people at the VA who really were out to get Jeff. There are literally emails back and forth between some of his supervisors where they discussed whether certain minor infractions, like a uniform violation, could be used as a sufficient pretext to go ahead and terminate him. And when the cold case team interviewed one of Jeff Titus's former bosses, he'd told them straight up that, yeah, he'd done everything he could to get Titus fired when he'd been the chief. But he'd never succeeded.

And Jeff's bosses had fair reason to dislike him as an employee. There are plenty of examples of Jeff saying and doing things at work that were weird and reckless. Things that caused headaches for his supervisors. Here's Susan reading from one of the disciplinary reports in Jeff's personnel file.

**Susan Simpson (reading):**

*"At the first opportunity, I confronted him with the trap that was found in the VA hospital, which he readily admitted was his and which he demanded we return to him. He also stated he was surprised we didn't find more traps because quote, there are a lot more out there."*

**Jacinda Davis:** (Laughing) Good God, Jeff.

**Susan Simpson (reading):**

*"I tried to reason with Jeff about the folly of setting animal traps around the hospital property, but his position was intractable. He was petulant, felt singled-out and said it was harassment."*

**Jacinda Davis:** (Laughing) Oh God.

**Susan Simpson:**

This poor guy like he was a, he was, Captain Hobbs is like, animal traps with Titus's *name* on it, set in the fucking VA hospital with psychiatric patients.

**Jacinda Davis:** And Titus is like, yeah, so what?

**Susan Simpson:**

Yeah, yeah! That's a good place to trap and like this is mine, give it back to me. And the Chief is like, Jeff this is a bad idea. Like we're a psychiatric hospital, we can't leave freakin animal traps. I can see why they wanted to fire him. I cannot say they were wrong.

**Jacinda Davis:** I can see why they might want to fire too.

To be fair to Jeff, the traps had not been set in a location where it was likely that any patients would ever encounter them. But still. It was a bad idea.

Jeff Titus got written up for more mundane workplace infractions as well. For instance, in September of 1990, Jeff Titus had been working the night shift when he'd fallen asleep on the job. He'd been stationed out by a roadway, and at 4:35 am that morning, his supervisor had gone by his car and seen him sleeping inside. As the warning notice in his personnel file noted, "You cannot monitor anything while sleeping, and you sure cannot observe anything."

And then, a couple years later, Jeff Titus received yet another written reprimand. This time, it was because he and another security officer had been on patrol at the VA when they came across the scene of a recent accident, where a truck had struck a deer that was attempting to cross the road.

The driver that hit the deer had been, quote, "attempting to comfort the wounded animal" when Jeff Titus arrived on the scene. And after assessing how bad its injuries were, Titus had taken quick and decisive action.

**Tony Baiocchi:**

These old people hit a deer, and Jeff was gonna put it out of its misery, but he bludgeoned it in front of the old people.

Jeff Titus then managed to make the situation even worse. State police were called to the scene, and Titus asked them for a roadkill salvage permit -- which allowed Titus to legally take the deer home for processing.

Titus was once again disciplined over the deer incident. Both for exercising poor judgment -- due to him killing the deer in front of the horrified driver -- and also for the appearance of impropriety -- due to him accepting a benefit from the state police officers, in the form of the road kill permit, and thus creating a perception of a conflict of interest.

**[33:37] Rabia Chaudry:** It's fair to say that Jeff Titus was not always a model employee. But some of his supervisors seem to have disliked him for reasons that had nothing to do with his workplace conduct. Beverly, whose cousin Paul was at one time chief at the VA, remembers him telling her about how much he'd disliked Jeff. But he would also never explain to her what exactly his problem with Jeff had been.

**Beverly:**

That's why my cousin was warning me, don't hang around him and things like that. He said, I have a very funny feeling about him.

It's not something that was ever explicitly written down in Jeff's personnel file, but from talking to his old coworkers, it became clear there was another reason that Jeff's boss wanted him to be fired. And it had nothing to do with work.

**Brandenburg:**

Bill Hobbs was the Chief of Police when I left, and he called me probably a year after the murders happened, and mentioned that Jeff Titus was one of the original suspects. Bill and I were pretty close, I was his number one charge, and we both agreed Jeff probably did it. This sounded like Jeff Titus. So. That's how I found out, through Bill Hobbs. Because I was working at the Battle Creek Federal Center at the time.

**Susan Simpson:** And why did you think it sounded like Jeff Titus?

**Brandenburg:**

Just the way he was, you could tell by talking to him that there was some sort of a dark side or a not normal side to Jeff.

**[35:35] Susan Simpson:** If you just read the transcripts and case file, you're going to walk away thinking that Jeff was a nightmare coworker. And Jeff for sure had coworkers who didn't like him. But after actually talking to people who knew him from out at the VA and his other jobs, they described a much more nuanced picture of what Jeff had been like.

**Irene Gruell:**

If you need some help with a patient, we had a radio so they came right away and some of them got a little nuts so we had to put them in a cuff and belt. Whenever he was on, he was always right there, on the spot.

But if I think back, he never really abused a patient or nothing, he was pretty nice to them.

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**Warren:**

I talked to the various police officers that he worked with, and they had a lot of negative feelings about Jeff. But when it come to Jeff doing his job and them needing help, Jeff was right there.

Despite the various disciplinary problems that he had, Jeff Titus was actually pretty good at his job. Most of the time, anyway.

**[36:41] Rabia Chaudry:** In 1994, Jeff's boss at the time, Chief Kalikin, had been interviewed by the VA investigators. Kalikin noted that while Jeff caused a lot of polarizing feelings among his coworkers, he'd had friends as well as foes -- for every employee that complained about him, there was another saying they wanted him there.

Although that investigation had been for sexual harassment, the VA investigator was aware of that Jeff had been a suspect in the Fulton Game Area murders, and some of his investigation seems to have been directed with that in mind.

The investigator asked Chief Kalikin if he'd ever seen Titus angry, but Kalikin said he couldn't think of an instance where he had. He'd seen Jeff in physical confrontations, yes, but he'd always handled himself well -- the chief had never seen Jeff lose his cool, or become abusive. "[In] the 2 1/2 years that I've known him," Kalikin said, "I've never seen him get overly excited about anything. But that's just his nature."

The VA investigator had asked Kalikin a lot of questions along those lines.

***Susan Reading:***

*Do you think he is capable of harming another person? And I know that's a professional judgement I'm asking you to make.*

***Colin Reading:***

*Perhaps in a fit of rage he could. But, that's - it's so hard to say. I'm not a psychiatrist. I have to base it on my personal observations. I've never seen him in a physical confrontation where he's ever lost control. Usually he's very calm and when he reacts, he reacts very rapidly, he don't waste no time. If he's got to react physically, he don't wait around and become indecisive.*

***Susan Reading:***

*Q: [Could Jeff Titus be] vindictive?*

***Colin Reading:***

*A: I've never known him to be vindictive. I've never known a case where he has displayed vindictiveness. Once again, I can't say. He could or he couldn't, you know.*

**Susan Reading:**

*Q: Could he be described as intimidating?*

**Colin Reading:**

*A: A lot of people I've talked to, especially females, once again it's a love/hate relationship with Jeff. Either they think he's sweet and kind or they think he's morbid and [lunatic] or intimidating. He's got those eyes that will look right through you, and if you ever had a conversation one-on-one with Jeff, you'd know what I'm talking about. ... I've heard, for example, Laura, make the comment that his looks intimidate her. Once again, a person's looks - you have to look past that. If you are in a position like I am, as a chief of a service, I can't take a person's looks to mean that he or she is a good or bad employee. I can't base my judgement based upon his looks. But Jeff does have those piercing eyes.*

**[38:59] Rabia Chaudry:** Jeff Titus's eyes are something that get commented on a lot. They're one of the reasons, for instance, that nurses told the VA investigator that they were intimidated by him.

And it is true that Jeff has a distinctive appearance.

**Jacinda Davis:**

Here's a picture of... this would have been before '90 because the kids are so little.

**Susan Simpson:** Oh my god. That's so '80s.

**Jacinda Davis:** Have you seen Jeff as a kid?

**Susan Simpson:** No. OK. He looks kind of crazy there.

**Jacinda Davis:** I think he has those eyes that people are either like attracted to them or find them spooky.

**Susan Simpson:** Yeah.

**Jacinda Davis:** He looks like... and I know this is not very nice, but he looks like

the serial killer named... He's got the same eyes.

As the cold case team explained to Jacinda and her crew during filming for *Killer in Question*, Jeff Titus's appearance is also part of why he ended up being arrested and charged with murder.

**Detective Werkema:**

We have the case to our local FBI. they sent it to Quantico, and the Behavioral Science Team. Now, these guys are the best in the world. In the world!

**Mike Brown:**

Quantico called me up. Said, "Hey. We believe Mike Brown is onto something. This Titus guy, we believe, is your suspect."

**Stu Fenton:**

The one thing that stuck out in my mind from Quantico is that picture of him pointing out where the gun was found. And if you look at that picture as the FBI did, under a magnifying glass, it is hugely incriminating. He looks sociopathic. He looks hard, he looks mean, he looks incriminating. They looked at this picture, they looked at his face, and they said look at that. The man just looks guilty.

**[40:54] Susan Simpson:** Now, Jeff Titus is not always the most photogenic person in the world, but the particular photo that Stu Fenton is referring to here, the one the FBI examined with a microscope and then concluded that Jeff was guilty in -- well that photo looks completely normal to me.

It's the photo that one of the original investigators took on the day Jeff Titus called in to report finding the shotgun. They'd gone out there to get the gun, and then after that they'd taken Jeff Titus back into the game area to show him the crime scene. In the picture, Jeff Titus is gesturing towards the forest floor, but he's actually pointing to where the bodies had been found. Not where he'd found the gun.

His expression is mostly neutral, perhaps a touch wary -- which I think a lot of people might feel, if a police officer started taking a photo. But Prosecutor Stu Fenton and cold case Detective Mike Werkema -- and, apparently, also the FBI -- see something more in this image.

**Male 1:**

He's a creepy character. A sociopath.

**Stu Fenton:**

Yes. Which is why he was able to pass a polygraph. Kill without conscience. As he told people he could do.

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**Jacinda Davis:**

Did you talk to people about finding the gun and about the murders? Not what they testified to, but just in a general sense. Did you talk to people? Like, "Hey, I found a gun."

**Jeff Titus:**

People, people asked me questions about it and stuff. They heard about it at work and they asked me about it, and I told them I found it.

**Jacinda Davis:** So, you did talk about it.

**Jeff Titus:** Yes, I did talk about it.

Jeff Titus doesn't deny that he talked about the murders at work. Not all of his coworkers Jeff recall him saying much about it.

**Susan Simpson:**

A lot of the VA employees testified that he'd be talking about the murders a lot at Work?

**Beverly:**

He didn't talk to me at all about that. Like I told the other detectives, I think he might have mentioned that, "People are saying that I shot somebody out there on my property." I said, "Really?"

**Susan Simpson:** And he just said, "I didn't," or...

**Beverly:** I really don't remember, dear. I'm being honest, I think he said, "Well I wouldn't- or I didn't do that."

**Susan Simpson:** He never tried to claim credit for it, thought? To you?

**Beverly:** No...



**[43:15]** Beverly had been friends with Jeff, and they'd talked a lot at work, but she doesn't remember him saying much of anything about the case itself. Most of what she'd heard about it had come from other coworkers, not from Jeff.

On the other hand, some of Jeff's coworkers remember him talking about the case quite a lot. Paul Norris, who had been Jeff's supervisor, told the cold case team he'd had a lot of conversations with Jeff about it over the years, though he couldn't remember Jeff ever saying anything incriminating about it.

If he had, Paul would've had reason to remember it -- he strongly disliked Titus, and had been trying for years, without success, to try to find a way to fire him. But everything Paul remembered Jeff saying was consistent with what Jeff has always said about the case. About how, two days after the murders, he'd found the missing shotgun in the game area, and he'd called to report it.

Some of Jeff's coworkers, though, recall Jeff telling a very different story, and each of them remember something different. It's as if Jeff had told ten different coworkers ten different stories.

It took a little while for the cold case team to discover these stories. When they first began interviewing witnesses out of the VA, none of the first dozen or so coworkers that they spoke to had recalled anything about Jeff Titus taking the gun home, or cleaning it, or anything like that. Then, after a few weeks out there, the cold case detectives talked to a nurse named Sandy. Their report from that interview notes that she gave them some important new information:

***Colin Reading:***

*"At that point [Sandy] said something that no other witnesses who have been contacted have said. She stated that JEFF TITUS told her that when he found the gun he took it back to his residence and cleaned it. She stated that she never asked him why he cleaned it, but it did occur to her that since he was a police officer that he should know better than to do that with something that might be evidence."*

**[44:50] Rabia Chaudry:** After speaking to Sandy, the cold case detectives immediately contacted Jeff's coworker, Mark, and asked to reinterview him. Although Mark hadn't remembered anything about Titus cleaning the gun when the cold case team had interviewed him the first time, in this second interview he remembered all about it. As noted in the cold case detective's report:

**Quote:**

*Both SANDY and MARK, without any prompting from me, brought up the idea that the shotgun had been taken back to his residence and cleaned by him before it was ever turned over to the police. None of that information up to this point has ever appeared in this police report either from the original report or from what the Cold Case Team has developed up to now.*

In the next few days, the cold case detectives found three more witnesses who remembered this same story about Titus cleaning the gun. And all three of these witnesses testified at Titus's trial. The jury found what they had to say to be compelling evidence of Titus's guilt:

**Paul:**

He's supposed to have a criminal justice background, and he cleans this gun instead of taking it, and he cleans everything. He cleans the ammunition that was in it, he cleans the gun inside and out.

Jeff Titus told police that he'd never touched the shotgun. So why, then, did he tell coworkers that he'd taken it home and cleaned it?

Jeff says the answer to this is simple: he didn't tell them that.

**Jeff Titus:**

Well, people didn't like me. You either liked me or you didn't like me. There was no in-between.

**Susan Simpson:**

Yeah, but that doesn't mean- just because they didn't like you doesn't mean you couldn't have said you brought the gun home.

**Jeff Titus:**

No. I didn't bring the gun home. And I didn't say that I brought the gun home.

One of the witnesses who testified that Titus *had* said he took the gun home and cleaned it was Chief Kalikin. That's the same chief that testified in the 1994 sexual harassment investigation. And in 2002, at Titus's murder trial, Kalikin said that, after becoming chief, he'd heard rumors from some of the other officers about Jeff Titus's possible role in the Fulton Game Area murders. So he'd sought out Titus, and told him to take a walk with him. And then he began grilling him about the homicides that his coworkers suspected him of committing.

**Susan Reading:**

*Q: Did you ask him any questions about what he had done with the gun?*

**Colin Reading:**

*A: Yes, sir. I asked him exactly that-what he had done with it. He explained to me that he had kept it a couple days and then turned it into the sheriff's department. And I asked him at that time why would you keep the shotgun for a couple days knowing of its evidentiary value. And he said that it was rusted when he found it, and he wanted to clean it up before he turned it over to them; him being a former marine and desiring to take care of the weapon properly, he had wiped it off and oiled it. And he had also kept it to play games with the sheriff's department. ... He felt that they had insulted him during the course of the investigation that they had conducted and it was his way of getting back at them.*

But this memory that Chief Kalikin's had, of Titus telling him he'd cleaned and oiled the gun -- that memory was new. He hadn't had before. When he'd first spoken to the cold case team, Kalikin had told them that he thought he'd once asked Titus "did you wipe the shotgun off?" But Kalikin had told them he did *not* remember how Titus had responded to that question. And he had not remembered Titus's response until he testified at the trial.

**[48:11] Colin Miller:** The second witness who testified about Titus taking the shotgun home was Michelle -- the witness who Susan and Jacinda had tried to talk to in her driveway, but had not been able to.

At Jeff Titus's trial, Michelle had testified that Jeff Titus once told her he'd found two dead hunters on his property. He also told her he'd found a gun with the bodies, and he'd decided to keep it for himself.

He said he'd grabbed the gun before heading back to his house to call the police to report finding the bodies. And as for how the two hunters had ended up dead on Titus's property, Michelle said, quote, "[Titus] had just said that they deserved it for being on his property 'cause they were trespassing."

To the prosecution, the first part of Michelle's testimony was damning for Titus because it couldn't possibly be true -- Titus hadn't found the bodies. So if Titus was claiming to have found them, it could only be because he'd killed them himself. And the second part of Michelle's story -- the part about Titus saying the hunters deserved it -- was also

damning, because it was an indirect expression of culpability. The dead hunters had deserved to be killed, Michelle says Titus had told her.

But this testimony from Michelle in 2002 was vastly different from what she'd said before in 1994, when she'd first been interviewed under oath as part of the VA's investigation into Jeff Titus. Because in 1994, Michelle hadn't remembered Titus ever saying anything about Titus taking a gun home with him. Instead, she'd told the VA investigator:

***Susan Reading:***

*It was like a few years ago, or something. He said that the FBI was investigating because they'd found some dead guy on his property or something, and the gun that had killed him was his or something and that he got let off. That they found that he wasn't guilty or something like that.*

Michelle's memory was already vague in 1994, just a year or two after she said this conversation with Titus had occurred. She referred to it as "that time when we talked about somebody dying or whatever."

**[50:04] Susan Simpson:** In this interview from 1994, Michelle had been trying to give evidence of how intimidating Jeff Titus had been, but she didn't really have many examples. Her complaints had included things like how, one night when she'd gone into work, she'd gotten a flat tire out behind the hospital, and Jeff and another coworker had come out to change the tire for her.

Michelle told the VA investigator that she thinks she would've been scared if it had just been Titus out there, but since the other coworker was there too, it had been fine.

So, if Titus had told Michelle about two dead men on his property deserving to be killed because they were trespassing, there is every reason to think she would've shared that story with them at the time. It's a much clearer example of potentially intimidating behavior.

**[51:02] Rabia Chaudry:** There was another nurse who also testified about how Titus had told her that he'd taken the shotgun home with him and cleaned it. But this nurse had not been involved in any of the sexual harassment complaints. It was Irene -- the nurse who hadn't minded when Jeff Titus would stop by her ward to chit chat.

**Irene Gruell:**

I said, I don't have no problem with him, he's not bothering me. I'm glad he's

here with the patients... But I didn't hear any problems. When I was on my shift, I didn't have any problems with the patients or him.

At Jeff Titus's trial, Irene testified that, just a week or two after the murders at the Fulton Game Area, Titus had come up to her ward to talk, like usual. But this time, she said, he'd told her about how he'd found a shotgun on the border of his property, and how he'd taken the gun home with him. To which Irene had responded: "You don't just find a nice gun and think you can keep it!" But Titus had brushed off Irene's concerns, and told her that, actually, he thought he *could* just keep the gun -- and that's why he had cleaned it.

Last year, though, when Susan and I went to speak to Irene, she told us a very different story.

**Irene Gruell:**

What he told me about ... he shot a hunter that was on his property?

**Susan Simpson:** He shot a hunter?

**Irene Gruell:**

Well, they were hunting and he was on his property and he told him to go and I guess the guy didn't go fast enough and he shot him.

**Susan Simpson:** He told you that?

**Irene Gruell:** Yeah.

Today, Irene remembers a conversation with Titus in which he confessed to the murders.

**Irene Gruell:**

He said he shot at somebody because he didn't get off property fast enough.

**Rabia Chaudry:** When he told you he shot a hunter, did you think he was joking?

**Irene Gruell:** I thought he was, but deep in my heart -- I thought no, that's him.

She does not recall the conversation she testified about at Jeff's trial, when she'd remembered Jeff telling her about how he'd found a shotgun and kept it.

**Susan Simpson:** Do you remember Jeff Titus talking about a gun?

**Irene Gruell:** Oh yeah, he said he had a bunch of guns.

**Susan Simpson:** Do you remember him talking about a gun in particular?

**Irene Gruell:** If he did, I don't remember.

There is nothing to suggest that Irene is lying about her conversation with Jeff Titus. She has no animosity towards him. She certainly has no motive to lie about it now. But if she's telling the truth about what she remembers, then the memory that she has is false. That's not how she's ever remembered it before, not in any of the recorded statements from her that we have.

**[53:58] Colin Miller:** If Jeff Titus ever did tell anyone that story about what he did with the shotgun -- if he ever really did tell his coworkers about how he'd taken the gun home and cleaned it and oiled it -- then Jeff Titus was lying to them.

Because Jeff Titus did not take the shotgun home and clean it. He couldn't have -- the shotgun had not been cleaned. In the original police report, where the evidence was logged in and described, the entry for the Mossberg shotgun reads: "Chamber was dirty and the barrel has lead marks or residue in it, showing that the weapon has not been cleaned and is dirty."

And in the notes from the Michigan State Police lab, which later examined the Mossberg, the shotgun was described as having been dirty, both outside and in.

There were no *fingerprints* found on the gun. So it can be said that the gun was clean of fingerprints. But the gun itself was not clean.

There's another reason, too, to be skeptical of this story about Titus telling his coworkers he'd cleaned the shotgun. Because some of Titus's coworkers told the cold case team that they'd remembered Titus's statements in a different way.

For instance, Paul Norris, who was one of the chiefs that had strongly disliked Titus, and had wanted him fired, had told investigators that he too had heard Titus talk about the murder investigation. And Paul Norris had remembered Titus telling people about how the shotgun had been cleaned of any fingerprints. But, Paul Norris told the cold

case team, Quote, "TITUS was saying this as information that he had learned, not that [Titus] himself had done the cleaning of the shotgun."

Paul Norris wasn't alone. Other coworkers remember Titus's comments the same way. But none of them, of course, had been called to testify at his trial.

**[55:44] Colin Miller:** There was also another nurse. A woman named Donna. Donna said that very shortly after the murders had happened, maybe two weeks or so later, she'd taken a patient outside for a smoke break when Titus had come up to her and started talking about the murders.

So Donna had asked him a question.

**Donna:**

And I said to him, "You did this," and he said, "Probably."

Donna told investigators that she had never had a conversation with Jeff Titus before this. She'd thought he was weird so she'd kept away from him, so this conversation had happened out of the blue. After Donna had asked him twice if he'd done the murders and he'd answered twice by saying, "Probably," Donna said she went back inside the hospital and told a coworker about what had happened. And after that encounter with Titus, Donna told the court she'd refused to go back out on a smoke break again. She had been too afraid of Titus. She also never talked to him again.

And other than the one coworker, she never told anyone else about the incident either. Not until ten years later, anyway, when the cold case team interviewed her. That's when she finally told the investigators that Titus had confessed to her that he'd probably done the murders.

Donna told the cold case team that she felt very badly she hadn't been brave enough to come forward to tell the police about the confession sooner. She knew it had been important information, but she had been frightened that if she'd said anything about it, Jeff Titus would find her family and kill them.

**[57:01] Rabia Chaudry:** According to cold case team Prosecutor Stu Fenton, Donna's testimony, all by itself, was proof beyond a reasonable doubt of Jeff Titus's guilt. It's 98% of a confession, Fenton said. Close enough to show Titus's guilt.

But Titus says this conversation never happened.

**Jacinda Davis:**

The other thing Werkema said to ask you is why did you tell people - I think there was a woman from your office who asked you did you do it - and your response was, "Probably."

**Jeff Titus:**

I didn't say that. I know everybody thought I did. I mean, that was a thing going around.

**[57:43] Rabia Chaudry:** Donna's name never surfaced in any of the VA investigations into Jeff -- she'd never been identified as someone Jeff Titus may have acted inappropriately towards. So we have no prior interviews from her to compare with her statements to the cold case team.

But Donna did tell investigators that she'd confided in exactly one coworker about Jeff Titus's semi-confession, though. The cold case team never spoke to that person, but Susan did. Donna had been a close friend of hers at work, she said, but she'd never heard Donna mention anything about Jeff Titus confessing to murder. She remembered talking to Donna about how they didn't like Jeff, because he was a braggart, but that was it.

And there's lots of other things too, from Donna's statements in her interviews with the police that don't quite fit together. Like how Donna told the detectives that Titus had hit on her at work -- and when they asked how he did so, she told them that Jeff Titus was always asking her where, quote, "her and the other girls" went out for drinks after work, and if he could meet them there.

But Titus didn't go to bars. He didn't meet up with coworkers at the bar for a drink after work, or anything like that. Not a single other witness at the VA has ever mentioned anything like that happening.

And there's another detail from Donna's story that doesn't quite add up, either. Because Donna testified that she was certain this conversation had happened very shortly after the murders -- no more than two weeks or so.

Actually, this is a common theme in a lot of the statements from Titus's coworkers. A lot of the witnesses said they'd had these conversations with Jeff immediately after the murders occurred -- just a day or two later, some of them said. A week or two at most. No more than that.



But these witnesses are wrong. Their conversations with Titus could not have happened as they describe.

Because in September of 1990, two months before the murders, Jeff Titus had gotten caught sleeping on the job. The following month, as a result of the sleeping incident, Jeff Titus had been fired. He'd lost his job -- as far as anyone knew, he wasn't coming back to the VA at all. But Jeff Titus had appealed the decision, and after review the VA had decided to reverse the decision, and reinstated his employment. His termination had been converted into an 86 day suspension.

Jeff Titus was not working at the VA when the Fulton Game Area murders occurred, and he did not return to work until two months later, on January 20, 1991.

Which means all the employees who testified about having conversations with Titus at the VA immediately after the murders were remembering things wrong. All of these workplace conversations with Titus had to have happened at least two months after the murders, if not longer -- because Titus had been suspended from work at the time.

**[1:00:45] Susan Simpson:** Trying to investigate the statements from Jeff Titus's coworkers had been frustrating because there's just so little there to hold onto that seems solid. Most of what his coworkers had to say was vague and inconsistent, and none of it is ever corroborated with other evidence. But that's also not surprising given the context -- these witnesses were testifying about a casual conversation they'd had with a coworker that they hadn't seen in nearly a decade. Just because the memories were jumbled up by the time of Titus's trial doesn't mean they weren't remembering *some* kind of conversation with Titus that they'd once had with him.

And cold case Detective Mike Werkema is likely right about what led to Titus's arrest.

**Detective Mike Werkema:**

Jeff Titus put himself in prison, with his mouth.

The reason why the cold case team was able to find 15 coworkers who would testify that Jeff Titus made strange comments to them at work is almost certainly because Jeff Titus had in fact made strange comments at work.

Jeff's friend Tony, the union steward, had seen how, during the sexual harassment investigation, Jeff Titus had talked himself into getting fired from his job, by rambling on about his shooting abilities during the VA hearing. And Tony had seen how, when it

came to the Fulton Game Area murders, Jeff had been talking himself into trouble there too.

**Tony Baiocci:**

We had conversations. People that knew Jeff -- you know, it was a concern to us. Especially how he would talk. We'd tell him, shut your mouth, these people don't know you. And you're going to bring yourself a lot of problems by talking the way you're talking.

**Susan Simpson:** What kind of things would he be saying?

**Tony Baiocci:**

Well, like we were playing cards at lunch in my shop, and Jeff would sit in and new guys would come into the shop and stuff. He'd introduce himself, "I'm Jeff Titus, do you know who I am? Yeah I'm the guy who shot those guys down by Athens."

We'd say, "Shut your mouth, these people don't know you, and they don't know you're talking crap." But he would just say random weird things like that -- but we knew better.

Tony told an investigator this same story when he was interviewed before Jeff's trial -- his memory, at least, has not changed in the past 20 years. Though no one at the euchre table seems to have taken Titus's comments seriously, since no witnesses at Jeff's trial testified to hearing him make any comments around the shop like that. Tony himself wasn't called as a witness, either.

**Tony Baiocci:**

I was always mad that they didn't call me as a character witness, but maybe I paint the wrong picture of Jeff.

Tony says that he and Jeff's other friends had known Jeff was just goofing around when he said things like that, they'd known that he was just talking crap. But they'd also known Jeff's weird comments were trouble -- they'd seen that trouble coming a decade before it ever arrived.

**Tony Baiocci:**

He shouldn't be in prison, he shouldn't be convicted. It's caused me anxiety about it, because I know as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, that's not Jeff.

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That's all for Episode 9 of Undisclosed: the State v. Jeff Titus. We're back next Monday with Episode 10, and don't forget to send us your questions for this week's addendum episode.

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And if any of our listeners out there have information on Jeff Titus's case that you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us at [undisclosedpodcast@gmail.com](mailto: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.

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*Transcribed by Skylar Park, Dawn Loges*