

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | THE ART OF MURDER
S1E5 Transcript

KEN TAYLOR: Why is the computer not on the ground? Why is the, like, the window not broken? He's a fit guy. This is not a scene that's a fight, in my mind. Why did he not try and stop this from happening? And when I asked the pathologist, "How long would Mr. Buller be able to move before he died?" And I was told two minutes. Well, I can do a lot of damage in five seconds, never mind two minutes. Two minutes is a long time.

NARRATION:

IT'S THURSDAY AFTERNOON, JANUARY 18TH, 2001. AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO, CANADA, STUDENTS SETTLE IN FOR THEIR 4PM ART CLASS. IT'S TAUGHT BY DAVID BULLER, A POPULAR PROFESSOR WHO'S NEVER LATE FOR HIS CLASSES. UNTIL TODAY. WHEN DAVID DOESN'T SHOW UP, A FEW CONCERNED STUDENTS STOP BY HIS OFFICE. THE DOOR IS SHUT TIGHT, AND WHEN THEY KNOCK, HE DOESN'T ANSWER. LITTLE DO THEY KNOW THAT THE BODY OF THEIR BELOVED PROFESSOR LIES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR.

I'M STEVE FRENCH AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "THE ART OF MURDER."

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, ON JANUARY 19TH, DETECTIVE SERGEANT KEN TAYLOR WITH THE TORONTO POLICE HOMICIDE SQUAD IS IN THE MIDDLE OF A GYM WORKOUT WHEN HIS PAGER GOES OFF.

KEN TAYLOR: There's a sudden death at the University of Toronto. It's a professor there who was found dead in his office. And the coroner's on the way, and 52 division has secured the scene.

NARRATION:

THE OFFICE IS LOCATED INSIDE THE CONNAUGHT BUILDING AT 1 SPADINA CRESCENT.

KEN TAYLOR: This is a downtown monument basically, this building. It's a really popular area of Toronto and it's in the U of T campus, which is the largest university in Canada. It's a four-story building. It's an arts building, and it also contains an eye clinic where they preserve eyes. And the rest of it is basically for the arts department at the University of Toronto. The body was found by a cleaning lady at about 6:30 in the morning. She was cleaning, saw what she saw, and came out and called the security who called the police.

NARRATION:

THE VICTIM IS A SINGLE MALE, 50-YEAR-OLD DAVID BULLER. HE'S A VISUAL ARTS PROFESSOR AND HAS TAUGHT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FOR FIFTEEN YEARS.

KEN TAYLOR: Well, when we walked in, we could see Mr. Buller lying on the ground on his right side. The chair he was, it appeared like he was sitting in the chair and it fell over. Right away we look at the scene and it's very calm. It's not like there had been a fight there. It's a very, very quiet scene. He's fully clothed, black pants, blue shirt, black shoes. So, we looked at it, and our first thought was, this could be a potential suicide. I expected to see a weapon underneath Mr. Buller's body. And, when I rolled his body over to see if there was a knife under his body, there was not. So now, we're dealing with a murder. Right away, the first thing that I looked at was right at the ident guy, probably with a, looking a little startled. And I just told him, "Luminol every door." That was the first thought out of my head is luminol every door in this building.

NARRATION:

THE VICIOUS SLAYING HAS PRODUCED A LARGE POOL OF BLOOD. DAVID WAS STABBED SIX TIMES IN HIS CHEST AND ONCE IN HIS BACK. SURELY THE KILLER WOULD HAVE HAD BLOOD ON HIS HANDS WHEN HE LEFT THE SCENE OF THE MURDER. DETECTIVE TAYLOR HOPES THAT LUMINOL, A CHEMICAL AGENT THAT REACTS TO INVISIBLE TRACES OF BLOOD BY EMITTING A BRIGHT GLOW, WILL HELP LEAD HIM TO THE KILLER. AS TAYLOR BEGINS HIS INVESTIGATION, HE'S STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT THE VIOLENCE OF THE ATTACK IS STRANGELY AT ODDS WITH THE CALMNESS OF THE SCENE. IT'S ALSO AT ODDS WITH THE MAN HIMSELF.

NEWS REPORT: Bearing a strong resemblance to her slain uncle, it was David Buller's niece who stepped out of the darkness of her family's grief to make a heart wrenching appeal for the killer to come forward.

KARYN SANDLOS: I was in my early 30s, and I was in grad school at the time. I was in a busy office. Phones were ringing, people were talking, there was a lot of activity, and suddenly somebody said, "Karyn, the phone is for you." And I thought, who's calling me here? And, when I took the phone, it was my sister, and I just immediately knew something was wrong. And she said, "Karyn, I'm so sorry. It's Uncle Dave." And I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "He's been murdered." And I think I just immediately went into, what is a sort of default reaction for me, which is to kind of go numb.

NARRATION:

DAVID'S NIECE, KARYN SANDLOS, IS NOW AN ART PROFESSOR IN CHICAGO, FOLLOWING IN HER UNCLE'S FOOTSTEPS.

KARYN SANDLOS: We always had David's paintings, you know, hanging in our house when I was growing up. And I just remember being small and looking up at these giant canvases full of shapes, and colors, and movement, and wondering about them. You know, what was this kind of art that my funny uncle made? David was somebody who people respected. He was smart. He was creative. He was hilariously funny. He was a good friend to other people, and he worked hard. And he was a very, very committed teacher, and a very serious painter.

NARRATION:

DAVID BULLER'S BEST FRIEND, PAUL CASSELMAN, HAS KNOWN DAVID FOR DECADES.

PAUL CASSELMAN: Dave was very much an introvert. He could be great with people, absolutely, but his default position would be, give me a good book and a little bit of scotch, and I'm going to be really happy this evening. I talked to him on the morning of his murder. And we left it that he had to go to a class for one o'clock, and we would connect that evening. I called him and there was no answer. And I thought, well, maybe he's gone to bed. He's had a longer day, so I'll reach him in the morning. And when I couldn't reach him in the morning, I was still at my home then, when, on the radio, I heard that he had been murdered. And, I went into shock mode and tried to let as many people know as I could.

NEW REPORT: The popular University of Toronto art professor was found murdered in his faculty office on Spadina Crescent Friday morning.

KARYN SANDLOS: At first, of course, they had to rule out the possibility that this was a hate crime. That it had to do with homophobia.

NARRATION:

DAVID WAS GAY AND HIS ART, OFTEN DEALT WITH A PROVOCATIVE EXPLORATION OF MALE SEXUALITY. THE BOLD, HOMOEROTIC THEMES IN HIS WORK WERE QUICKLY SEIZED UPON AS A MOTIVE FOR HIS MURDER. COULD THIS HAVE BEEN A HATE CRIME?

KARYN SANDLOS: When somebody is a gay person, and they're out, as David was, that is going to be one of the first angles the police are going to investigate. Especially for an artist like David, who was gay, and who came up and came out when it still wasn't acceptable to be gay. There was still a lot of stigma, and a lot of prejudice against gay people that David had to contend with. One of the things, you know, people wondered about after David was killed: was there something about his art-making that could explain why he was killed?

KEN TAYLOR: With respect to a hate crime, there was no evidence to suggest that at all. Other than the violence, that, which has got nothing to do with hate, but it's just a violent way that Mr. Buller's life was taken.

KARYN SANDLOS: The police describe it as a crime of passion. It's something that happens between people who know each other. The level of violence indicates there was a relationship. But one of the challenges, I think, for us then was that, you know, David was a pretty private person, especially when it came to his personal life. If he was dating someone, you know, he wouldn't necessarily have shared that with us.

KEN TAYLOR: Mr. Buller was a 50-year-old, gay man. He was on a gay dating website, which we found out later, didn't have any, he didn't get any contacts. We went to several places where

Mr. Buller attended, like, you know, for a drink, in bars in gay town, and they were so cooperative. Whatever I asked these people to do, and how could they help, and, "This is terrible." And we have a really strong relationship with the gay community in Toronto, and they were willing to help us.

NARRATION:

DETECTIVE TAYLOR CREATES A FAKE PROFILE, SIMILAR TO DAVID'S, ON THE DATING WEBSITE HOPING IT MIGHT LURE A KILLER OUT OF THE SHADOWS. BUT THERE'S NO EVIDENCE THAT THE MURDER IS CONNECTED TO ANY RELATIONSHIP OF DAVID'S.

KARYN SANDLOS: He told me that he wasn't seeing anybody at that time, and he was okay with that. He was comfortable with where he was at in his life. It seemed very unlikely to me that this had been a lover or a date. It seemed much more likely that it was someone from some other part of David's life. Someone he knew, but in some other context.

NEWS REPORT: Lead Homicide Detective Ken Taylor says the last person to see Buller alive was a student, who saw him on an elevator Thursday afternoon. Taylor is downplaying speculation the killing is associated with Buller's gay lifestyle. The detective says there was no sign of a break in at Buller's office.

NARRATION:

IT'S DETERMINED THAT THE MURDER WEAPON IS A FIVE OR SIX INCH LONG KNIFE. BUT AFTER A MASSIVE NEIGHBORHOOD SEARCH, THE WEAPON IS NEVER LOCATED. DETECTIVES ALSO STRIKE OUT ON A FORENSIC SWEEP OF DAVID'S OFFICE BUILDING.

KEN TAYLOR: I had our forensic people spray every handle in the Connaught building with this luminol to see if any blood would react, because it's possible the killer might have blood on his hands. And I don't know, there's hundreds of door handles that they went around. It took two of them for, like, an hour and a half to do it. And they did every handle in the whole place and not one reacted.

NARRATION:

UNFORTUNATELY, AT THE TIME OF DAVID'S MURDER, THERE WERE NO SECURITY CAMERAS IN THE BUILDING. BUT AFTER INTERVIEWING STUDENTS AND STAFF WHO WERE THERE THAT AFTERNOON, THE INVESTIGATORS ARE ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER A PRECISE TIMELINE OF DAVID'S ACTIVITIES LEADING UP TO THE MURDER, AND PERHAPS EVEN PINPOINT AN EXACT TIME OF DEATH.

ON THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 18TH 2001, AROUND 1PM, DAVID WAS SEEN TALKING TO ANOTHER TEACHER IN A NEARBY UNIVERSITY BUILDING. HE THEN WALKED TO HIS OFFICE IN THE CONNAUGHT BUILDING.

KEN TAYLOR: He arrives there shortly after one, maybe around 1:05. At 1:09, the computer in his office is started up. And then at 1:10, we know he uses his phone in his office to call the person that he just left the Sidney Smith building, and left her a voicemail. And it was just about business. There was nothing, not of any interest to us. Right below Mr. Buller's office, in the eye clinic in the Connaught building, there was, one of the ladies there was having a baby shower. And there was eight to ten people at this baby shower, about one o'clock. At about 1:30, the people in the baby shower, they hear a loud altercation, or a fight, occurring directly above them, and that happens to be Mr. Buller's office. It lasts for a couple of seconds, and then it stops. They don't know if it's a male voice, a female voice. One person described it as a thud. But they basically just went on with their baby shower and just thought it was just an argument between two people. The party continues until about 1:45, when they're starting to split up from the baby shower.

NARRATION:

WERE THE NOISES HEARD BY THE PARTY GUESTS AT 1:30 THE SOUND OF DAVID WITH HIS KILLER? DETECTIVE TAYLOR REVIEWS TIMESTAMPS FROM DAVID'S COMPUTER HARD DRIVE, AND THE MYSTERY ONLY DEEPENS.

KEN TAYLOR: At 1:58, on Mr. Buller's computer, he's looking at paintings on his computer. At 2:02PM, the victim opens AppleWorks to do a drawing. The drawing is of, it looks like two males looking at each other. And it's kind of like a doodle. One appears to be Mr. Buller, and then the other one appears to be a male, and this person's in bondage. That drawing is saved at 2:21pm. And at 2:24, there was a print request for the drawing.

NARRATION:

THE DRAWING THAT WAS SAVED AT 2:21 DID NOT HAVE ANY WORDS ON IT, BUT THE DRAWING THAT WAS PRINTED JUST THREE MINUTES LATER, AT 2:24, SHOWS WORDS THAT MUST HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE DRAWING IMMEDIATELY AFTER IT WAS SAVED.

KEN TAYLOR: If you go back on the computer, the drawing is saved, but no words are saved. The words were not saved on the computer. And then at 2:25, the plug was pulled out of the computer. So, I believe that Mr. Buller was murdered at, or near, 2:24pm.

NARRATION:

THE PHRASE ON THAT PRINTED DRAWING CONSISTS OF SIX WORDS, AND IT'S A CLUE POLICE REFUSE TO RELEASE IN THE HOPE THAT CAN BE USED TO CONFIRM THE GUILT OF A POTENTIAL SUSPECT. THE DRAWING ITSELF HAS BEEN MADE PUBLIC AND HAS SPARKED MANY THEORIES.

PAUL CASSELMAN: I think the drawing was there as a ruse to reinforce this homophobic reaction. When I first saw the picture, I didn't think Dave had done it. It just looks so coarse. But our friend said he had seen this type of image that Dave had done in another context. But, what

it, it had, it had a profile of a look-alike of Dave wearing a baseball cap. And in the background was a male torso in bondage, with arms extended above the head. And, there is some sort of splotchy, sponge-like markings around this.

KEN TAYLOR: I believe this drawing is directly related to Mr. Buller's murder. The question is 1) did Mr. Buller a) in fact, do this drawing? And if he did, was he the one that put the words on the drawing? Or, was it someone else? Was Mr. Buller already dead?

NARRATION:

THIS STRANGE CLUE RAISES THE POSSIBILITY THAT DAVID'S MURDER MIGHT BE CONNECTED TO HIS ARTWORK.

KEN TAYLOR: We learned that Mr. Buller had hired models. And we looked into the people that he hired. And I interviewed one, and I think there was a couple of them, but he's been doing this for years. And everything was professional, above board. There was nothing untoward.

KARYN SANDLOS: Was it a student? Was it a colleague? Was it an associate? And over time, the most likely explanation, the one that just keeps staring us in the face, is that it must have been someone who knew David and was familiar with the campus.

KEN TAYLOR: If you said to me, go to the front door and find room 230, you'd have a really hard time finding it. You'd have to know where it is. You would really have to know how to get there because it's a maze, because they have art classes, and classrooms where they do the paintings, and where they do sculptures, and these kinds of things.

NARRATION:

AS INVESTIGATORS ZERO IN ON THE STUDENTS AND STAFF OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, THEY SOON LEARN ABOUT ONE STUDENT FROM THE ART SCHOOL WHO HAS A VIOLENT AND COMBATIVE REPUTATION.

KEN TAYLOR: He was a former student of Mr. Buller, kind of an odd guy. And the year before, people were intimidated by him. He was loud. He was abusive. He didn't like the fact that he was being taught by a gay professor. He complained about everything. He complained about the professor he had before. He complained about the stuff that he had to do his drawings. He was one of these type of people. Hadn't been a student for well over a year. One of the witnesses said they believe they saw this person of interest at the University the day before the murder. So, it's a very good chance that he may very well have been in the Connaught building 24 hours before Mr. Buller was murdered. When we asked him about it, he admitted to being a student. He had nothing to do with it. He hasn't been there, except he went down there the day before, because he went to the library, because he was upset that they took his privileges to the library away.

NARRATION:

TO VERIFY THE STUDENT'S ALIBI, DETECTIVE TAYLOR PULLS SECURITY FOOTAGE FROM A BANK NEAR THE SUSPECT'S HOME. AT 12:34, THE AFTERNOON OF THE MURDER, THE STUDENT CAN BE SEEN ON CAMERA.

KEN TAYLOR: We have him going back towards his house at 12:39PM. I have somebody watch the video till about five or six o'clock, and he never reappears on the video. It's about an hour and a half away, with public transit, from where he lives to the Connaught building. So, could he have jumped over fences to not be seen on the camera? Well, that's possible, but even, at quarter to one, an hour and a half takes you till quarter after two. So, uh, we basically ruled this person out as a suspect. It was virtually impossible for him to get down there.

KARYN SANDLOS: Because David's murder happened in his workplace, we had to take into consideration the possibility that David was killed by someone he worked with. That's not an easy idea to wrap our minds around, because David had colleagues he worked with for many, many years. People who were colleagues, but also friends of his. And we've had to grapple with the real possibility that there was a colleague, or colleagues, who may have had a long simmering dispute with David, and who ultimately lashed out at him in this incredibly consequential way.

PAUL CASSELMAN: A colleague. A jealous colleague. A colleague who admired Dave, but was threatened by Dave on one level, had the opportunity to do this, and did it. It was somebody who he had to trust, to be that close to him. And it's somebody capable of betrayal.

NARRATION:

PAUL CASSELMAN BELIEVES DAVID'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES HAD BECOME STRAINED. WAS ONE OF HIS FELLOW FACULTY MEMBERS ENRAGED ENOUGH TO COMMIT A SAVAGE MURDER? DETECTIVE TAYLOR INVESTIGATES AND LEARNS THAT, AROUND THE TIME OF DAVID'S DEATH, THE SUSPECTED COLLEAGUE WAS IN THE BUILDING, ONE FLOOR UP FROM DAVID'S OFFICE. BUT HE ALSO HAS WHAT SOUNDS LIKE A SOLID ALIBI. HE WAS CONDUCTING STUDENT INTERVIEWS EVERY 20 MINUTES.

PAUL CASSELMAN: Who were the students who were doing the interviews? When were they being interviewed? What's the gap between the interviews? Are those students so reliable that they actually all showed up? Was there not fifteen minutes to go down and create this opportunity? I don't know. I don't know.

NARRATION:

DETECTIVE TAYLOR RUNS DOWN THE POSSIBILITIES, BUT IS UNABLE TO UNCOVER ANYTHING TO SUGGEST THE FACULTY MEMBER IS THEIR SUSPECT.

KEN TAYLOR: I think there might have been some frustration between them at a time. But it's, these people work together all the time. So, they've been working together for at least 10 years, maybe longer than that. That I'm guessing, but I know they've been together for quite some time. And nothing else came out from any of the other faculty that there was any frustration between the two of them.

NARRATION:

DAVID'S WORK COLLEAGUE, WHO REMAINS PAUL CASSELMAN'S PRIME SUSPECT, PASSED AWAY SOON AFTER THE MURDER, SO IF HE WAS THE KILLER, THE SOLUTION TO THIS MYSTERY MAY HAVE DIED WITH HIM.

KEN TAYLOR: It's really, really frustrating. And again, I don't want to hear that Mr. Buller was such a great guy, and he was this. I want to hear, like, somebody didn't like him, or he didn't get along with this person, or there's something here. He owed somebody money. He's got a drug habit. There was nothing like that. And it's also frustrating where there was people within 30 or 40 feet when this happened. Like they were there all afternoon. Like, you tell me you didn't see anything? You didn't see anybody walk in, walk out, in the front door. Like people are walking in and out of that building all the time. And there was no ruckus. Somebody, somewhere, has got to see something. And nobody did. The biggest frustration I have is the scene is a suicide scene. This is not a scene that's a fight, in my mind. There's things there that are not disturbed. Why is the computer not on the ground? Why is the, like, the window not broken? He's a fit guy. Why did he not try and stop this from happening? And when I asked the pathologist: "How long would Mr. Buller be able to move before he died?" And I was told two minutes. Well, I can do a lot of damage in five seconds, never mind two minutes. Two minutes is a long time.

NARRATION:

AFTER HUNDREDS OF INTERVIEWS, DETECTIVE TAYLOR IS NO CLOSER TO FINDING DAVID'S KILLER, AND THE FRUSTRATION HAS TAKEN A TOLL.

KEN TAYLOR: I was in homicide for 20 years. When this happened, I was in about five, six years. And it's just sort of stuck with me. It's one of the cases and that's no disrespect to any other case that I have, but it's just one of those things that, because I grew up in the city and it's like, something's not right here. This can't happen. So, you can hear the frustration of my voice and it's 19 years ago. Anyway, sorry.

NARRATION:

DAVID BULLER'S FAMILY CONTINUES TO HOPE FOR JUSTICE IN THIS CASE.

KARYN SANDLOS: We try very hard to make sense of David's murder, and in a way we're still trying. I think one of the great losses about David's life being cut short when it was, when he was 50 years old, is that we never got to see where he would have taken that work. Because he really had entered into, I think, the next phase of his practice, and it had lit a bit of a fire under

him. He was excited about it. And he was in a very, very productive moment when he was killed. When David was murdered, I lost the most interesting, most inspiring, the funniest uncle any kid could ever hope for. He never tried to teach me anything, but he taught me so much. I can only imagine the ways we could have connected now, talking about our work, that we never got a chance to do.

PAUL CASSELMAN: So, 20 years ago, Dave is murdered. And it was the most shocking day of my life. The grief is grief. The guttural sobs, they're just so deep. I didn't think about what I had lost. I just knew that it had been deep. Over all these years, I've realized many, many times, what I've lost.

KARYN SANDLOS: I think, what is so puzzling to me, to this day, is how blatant the crime was. How extreme, you know. How bold. This happened in the middle of the day in a busy university campus building, lots of people around. How is it that we still don't know what happened? We're not giving up. We're never giving up on trying to find out what happened to David, and there could be a person out there who knows something. We've always believed that somebody knows something. And they just haven't wanted to admit it to themselves all this time. That's what we hope for. That somebody will feel their conscience, and that time will be the thing that's allowed them to do that.

NARRATION:

ANYONE WITH INFORMATION ABOUT DAVID BULLER'S MURDER IS ASKED TO CONTACT THE TORONTO POLICE SERVICE AT 416-808-7400, OR ANONYMOUSLY CONTACT CRIME STOPPERS AT 416-222-TIPS, OR GO TO UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

ROBERT KELLER: He said, "I had a dream last night," and I said, "Oh, yeah? What was it about?" That's when he explained. He says, "Someone came to me and told me that they needed me, and they needed my thoughts, and my expertise and in some things, and they wanted to take me with them." Then he said, "Well, I believe they're from another planet."

NARRATION:

Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13. It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran. Produced by Lloyd Lochridge, Christine Lenig, Courtney Ennis, and Paige Hymson. The Story Producer for this episode was Molly Ryan, and it was edited by Paul Yates. From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil, Andy Jaskiewicz and Bill Schultz. Production support by Sean Cherry and Ian Mandt. Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay. Publicity by Josefina Francis and Hillary Schupf. The original theme music was composed by Gary Malkin and Michael Boyd.

THANKS FOR LISTENING TO EPISODE 5 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.