

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | THE NAMELESS VICTIMS

S1E11 Transcript

SCOTT MCCORD: I think about these kids literally every day. I wonder, somebody has to be missing them, or I would think somebody is missing them. And I've dedicated so much time to trying to find a mom and dad, an aunt and uncle, a brother, a sister, because I know they have to be out there somewhere.

NARRATION: IT'S OCTOBER 18TH, 1983. A COUPLE DECIDES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE EARLY FALL WEATHER TO ENJOY ONE OF THEIR FAVORITE PASTIMES: FORAGING FOR MUSHROOMS. THEY GO HUNTING IN A FIELD OFF HIGHWAY 41, NEAR LAKE VILLAGE IN NEWTON COUNTY, INDIANA. WHAT THEY FIND THERE, NEAR AN OLD BARN AND SOME OAK TREES, IS SHOCKING AND GRUESOME. FOUR BODIES, ALL YOUNG MEN AND ALL VICTIMS OF A SERIAL KILLER WHOSE LEGACY HAS ENDURED FOR OVER A QUARTER CENTURY.

I'M STEVE FRENCH. THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "THE NAMELESS VICTIMS."

SCOTT MCCORD: Back in the '80s, it was scrub brush and trees, and there was a barn with a silo, and then a small ranch-style house. It was abandoned for years and there was just a dirt driveway that went back into the barn. And they were poking around the barn and they just came upon them — three white males, one black male. And they were in a very shallow grave with just some leaves thrown over the top of 'em, so they were very easy to find. The three white males were found buried side by side. The fourth body, which was the black male, was buried about 50 yards away from the other three. They were partially skeletonized.

NARRATION: CORONER SCOTT MCCORD KNOWS A LOT ABOUT NEWTON COUNTY'S HISTORY WHEN IT COMES TO BODIES THAT HAVE BEEN BURIED THERE. LOCATED IN THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF THE STATE, ABOUT 30 MILES OUTSIDE OF CHICAGO, IT'S JUST FAR ENOUGH AWAY TO FEEL LIKE YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COUNTRY — AND JUST REMOTE ENOUGH IF YOU NEED TO DISPOSE OF A DEAD BODY WITHOUT ANY WITNESSES.

SCOTT MCCORD: We were kind of the dumping grounds for the mafia. It was not unusual for us to find one or two bodies a year. The Spilotro Brothers were found here in Newton County, which was a big mafia hit. The movie *Casino* actually involves them. At the very end of it, two guys are beaten to death and buried in a cornfield. Well, they were buried in Newton County. So, actually it wasn't a shock. The part that was a shock was that there were so many, that there were four. And needless to say, that created a large police response, and two of them were relatively quickly identified as Michael Bauer, a 22-year-old male, and John Bartlett, a 19-year-old male.

NARRATION: THERE IS NO WAY TO TRACE THE OTHER TWO VICTIMS, BOTH YOUNG MALES IN THEIR TEENS OR EARLY TWENTIES. WHEN FOUND, ALL FOUR VICTIMS HAD BEEN DEAD FOR MONTHS, VICIOUSLY STABBED TO DEATH AND LEFT PARTIALLY CLOTHED. EACH CAREFULLY

POSITIONED, FACE UP, THEN LOOSELY BURIED UNDER STICKS AND LEAVES. INVESTIGATORS IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZE THAT THE MURDERS ARE NEARLY IDENTICAL TO SEVERAL OTHER YOUNG MALE HOMICIDE VICTIMS, ALL LINKED TO AN ELUSIVE PREDATOR DUBBED "THE HIGHWAY KILLER."

NARRATION: FAST FORWARD 25 YEARS. IT'S NOW 2008, THE YEAR SCOTT MCCORD IS ELECTED CORONER FOR NEWTON COUNTY. HE'S IN HIS NEW OFFICE UNPACKING BOXES OF OLD RECORDS LEFT BEHIND BY THE PREVIOUS CORONER.

SCOTT MCCORD: Just one day when I went up there to start doing some cleaning and get things set up, I ran across these two boxes. When I picked up the boxes and kind of shook them, it was very light. There was very little weight to it, so I knew it wasn't papers that were in there. But the sound that it made kind of sent chills down my spine. I knew there was something in there that should not be in there. The boxes were just the old Bankers Box type, you know, with the little string on the side. One had "Victim Three" written on it and the other had "Victim Four." Nothing else. There was no other clue to what might be inside these boxes. When I opened them, shocking is not quite the word that you can use to describe that. New to the job, and you open a box up and you see a skull staring back at you. The complete skeletons were in the box. Initially, it was a shock and then it made me mad that that's the way they were treated. Inside one of them, there was just a corner of a piece of paper that had the state police case number on it. So, I contacted the state police and had them reference the cases for me. When they did, they said, "Well, those are victims of Larry Eyler's. Why are you worried about it? That case is closed." And I said, "No, I have the skeletal remains of two of them in my office."

NARRATION: THE SKELETONS ARE ALL THAT REMAIN OF THE TWO UNIDENTIFIED YOUNG MEN FOUND STABBED TO DEATH NEAR THE ABANDONED BARN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS EARLIER. HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? WHY DID NO ONE CARE? AT THAT MOMENT, SCOTT VOWS TO IDENTIFY THESE TWO FORGOTTEN VICTIMS AND RETURN THEM TO THEIR FAMILIES.

SCOTT MCCORD: It's our job, as coroners, to bring closure, to make a positive identification on someone and to bring closure to the families. And I think somewhere along the line, the ball got dropped. I honestly don't know how the skeletons of these kids could be left in cardboard boxes all these years, sitting in someone's closet. I gave them names of Adam and Brad, A and B. People can forget numbers very easily, but you can't really forget someone's name. The good thing is that these bodies were intact. Animals hadn't gotten to them yet, so there was no scattering of the bones. So, each of the skeletons that I have are 100% complete. So, I had a complete body in each box. I moved them into a tote, a container that could be secured, and I took them down to Indianapolis University. They have two forensic anthropologists, and they took the bones, and they just basically put these kids back together, as you would see on TV with the skeleton on a big table. That's exactly what they did.

NARRATION: SCOTT KNOWS THAT THE BEST WAY TO IDENTIFY THESE TWO YOUNG MEN IS TO RETRACE THE FOOTSTEPS OF THEIR KILLER, LARRY EYLER. EYLER IS BELIEVED TO HAVE

MURDERED AT LEAST 21 MALE VICTIMS THAT HE PICKED UP ALONG THE INTERSTATE BETWEEN ILLINOIS AND INDIANA, AND AS FAR SOUTH AS KENTUCKY.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: All the bodies were found in close proximity to the highway. The victims were not necessarily gay. Some of them were young men who were hustlers. In other words, they would do anything for drug money out on the streets.

NARRATION: GERA-LIND KOLARIK WAS A JOURNALIST IN CHICAGO COVERING CRIME BACK IN THE 1980s. SHE FOUND STORIES USING OLD SCHOOL REPORTING TECHNIQUES, DEVELOPING SOURCES CALLED BEAT CHECKS.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: A beat check is having a source and calling them every day and seeing what was happening. Coroners would lead me to murders. I would call — Are you ready? — seven coroners, every morning.

NARRATION: AFTER GATHERING DETAILS ON DOZENS OF MURDER CASES, GERA-LIND SEES A PATTERN TO THE GRIZZLY HOMICIDES.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: Mickey Babcox, who was now the Sheriff, and I remember calling him and saying, "You know what? This is crazy, but I think that this is a serial killer. We have now twelve bodies that I have kept track of up in Indiana, and some from Illinois." So, the Sheriff said, "Gera, thanks and everything. Why don't you tend to your stories, and we'll tend to being cops," and I said, "Sure, Mickey." And later that night, I get a phone call at my home, and he says, "Agatha Christie, you have one heck of a story."

NARRATION: NEWS QUICKLY SPREADS ABOUT A SERIAL KILLER ABDUCTING AND MURDERING YOUNG MEN AROUND THE MIDWEST, AND A HOTLINE IS ESTABLISHED. ONE TIP THAT COMES IN GIVES THE LICENSE PLATE OF A POSSIBLE SUSPECT AND THAT CLUE BREAKS THE CASE WIDE OPEN.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: On September 30th, 1983, they stopped a pickup truck in Indiana. Lowell, Indiana. A police officer saw two men get out of a pickup truck and go down to a ditch. He ran the truck license, and it said, "The man is wanted for questioning by a task force on a series of possible murders."

NARRATION: THAT MAN IS 32-YEAR-OLD CHICAGO NATIVE LARRY EYLER. THE POLICE SEARCH EYLER'S TRUCK AND FIND INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE: A KNIFE SMEARED WITH BLOOD, A CABLE, AND EVEN FLECKS OF BLOOD INSIDE HIS BOOTS. LARRY EYLER IS CHARGED WITH MURDER. BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM — THE POLICE DIDN'T HAVE A WARRANT TO SEARCH THE TRUCK.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: His Constitutional rights were violated. The evidence had to be suppressed and could not be used against him in the murder.

NARRATION: WITHOUT ADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE OR A CONFESSION, THE MURDER CASE AGAINST LARRY EYLER IS DISMISSED. GERA-LIND WAS IN THE COURTROOM THE DAY THAT HE WAS RELEASED.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: It was just the Gay Life newspaper and myself, and that's when the Sheriff looked at me and he says, "He's free to kill. It's just a matter of time before he kills again."

SCOTT MCCORD: Originally, when all this was going on, the police were attributing this to the gay community and gay killings because Larry Eyler was gay. But he was an opportunity killer and a rage killer.

NARRATION: SIX MONTHS AFTER HIS RELEASE, LARRY EYLER IS ARRESTED FOR ANOTHER MURDER AND THIS TIME, THE CHARGES STICK. HE'S SENTENCED TO DIE BY LETHAL INJECTION BUT MAKES A DEAL TO AVOID THE DEATH PENALTY IF HE GIVES UP DETAILS ABOUT HIS CRIMES.

SCOTT MCCORD: He gave individual confessions for all of the kids that he killed, and he named names on the ones that he could remember, but he couldn't remember these two, but he specifically was able to tell when and where he picked them up. His confessions weren't very long, weren't very detailed, but it gave at least an indication of when and where. Whenever he would get into an argument with his boyfriend, he would go out and kill. He would take his rage out on anybody he could find. He would offer the kids drugs and alcohol, and the drugs that he gave was called Placidyl, which would render the person unconscious, and then he would take them to wherever he was going to kill them, and wait for 'em to start to come to and he'd have them tied up and he would stab them to death.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: He would kind of bury the bodies. He wouldn't put them on the side of the road. He'd take them into a forest area, and he would cover them with some dirt. He didn't have a shovel or anything. He'd cover them with dirt, leaves and everything, and just leave them there. The identification from the victims, their IDs, their Social Security cards, whatever they had as an ID on them, those all disappeared.

NARRATION: THE REMOTE BARN IN NEWTON COUNTY WAS ONE OF EYLER'S FAVORITE SPOTS TO BRING HIS VICTIMS. HERE, INVESTIGATORS FOUND EVIDENCE OF HOW HE KILLED THE YOUNG MEN.

SCOTT MCCORD: When the police finally discovered the bodies, there were signs that he had tied these kids up to one of the posts inside the barn. He had, like, ropes that were used. So, the killing actually occurred inside the barn, and then he would take the bodies outside and bury them. When I say buried, he didn't do a very good job of burying, obviously, since the bodies were found by mushroom hunters, but he did at least try to. I don't want to use the term clean up, but he tried to make things as neat as possible. It was a perfect area for him. It was a nice, secluded area that he wanted to keep reusing. But I believe that those were the only the four in Newton County.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: The one pattern, what's really strange, is that there was always a series of phone calls that the police found near where they believe the person was murdered. They would order phone records. Remember, this is the time of the pay phones, right? Where that barn is, there was a pay phone off the highway. He would call his lover, John, and who knows how long. Some of the conversations lasted five minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes. Some were quick, some were long. And we wonder why he was calling him. Was it to say, "Come over here?" Or was it to say, "I did something, and I feel bad?" Or, you know what I mean? But he'd always call his lover John.

NARRATION: LARRY EYLER DIED IN PRISON OF AIDS IN 1984, AND ALONG WITH HIM DIED ALL HOPE OF GETTING MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF HIS FORGOTTEN VICTIMS. SINCE DISCOVERING THE SKELETONS MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, CORONER SCOTT MCCORD HAS SPENT WHATEVER FREE TIME HE HAS SEARCHING FOR CLUES TO HELP IDENTIFY ADAM AND BRAD. HE'S GONE THROUGH EVERY SHRED OF EVIDENCE FOUND IN THE BARN, AND HE'S READ EVERY WORD OF LARRY EYLER'S CONFESSION, WHICH IS WHERE HE FOUND ONE CLUE THAT COULD HELP IDENTIFY THE VICTIM THAT HE NAMED ADAM.

SCOTT MCCORD: In Larry's confession, he admits to picking this kid up hitchhiking, along US 41, where US 41 and 63 join, just north of Terre Haute, Indiana. And if you follow over the interstate, it takes you right into East St. Louis. One day, out of sheer boredom, sitting down going over the information on these kids, and with Adam, he had a red and white belt that had the word "Devil" stitched into it. And, I just Googled "red devil," as maybe a school mascot or any way that red devil might come up, and I found that there are two, maybe three, schools along the Interstate that runs into Terre Haute from East St. Louis that have mascots that are the Red Devils. That's how I came up with the thought that maybe he was from the East St. Louis area. He was just hitchhiking. He was literally at the wrong place at the wrong time and got in the truck with the wrong person, and that was his undoing. With Brad, I don't have a clue. Brad could be literally from just about anywhere.

NARRATION: IN HIS DETAILED CONFESSIONS, LARRY EYLER REFERS TO MOST OF HIS VICTIMS BY NAME. BUT IN THE CASE OF SCOTT'S TWO UNIDENTIFIED SKELETONS, EYLER REMEMBERS ONLY THAT THEY WERE EASY PREY FOR HIS VIOLENT IMPULSES. UNFORTUNATELY, EVEN IF THE TWO YOUNG MEN HAD BEEN REPORTED MISSING AT THE TIME, IT'S POSSIBLE INVESTIGATORS WEREN'T ABLE TO CONNECT THE MISSING PERSONS CASE TO EYLER'S VICTIMS.

SCOTT MCCORD: Eighties, you know, a lot of your smaller police departments didn't have a computer system to enter data into, so maybe the reports just got lost in the shuffle.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: It was antiquated back then, and they didn't have the system. Kankakee didn't have any idea about what was happening in Indiana. Indiana had no idea what was happening in Kankakee, or in Lake County, Illinois, back in the 1984s.

NARRATION: IT'S ALSO POSSIBLE THE TWO VICTIMS WERE ESTRANGED FROM THEIR FAMILIES, WITH NO ONE TO REPORT THEM MISSING. LARRY EYLER WAS A GAY SERIAL KILLER WHO PREYED MOSTLY ON GAY MEN, AND IN THE EARLY 1980s, HIS VICTIMS MAY HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BY THE AUTHORITIES.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: I felt that there was a homophobia out there. If these were young women that were disappearing, it would have been all over the news.

SCOTT MCCORD: There were some things that were said to me when I first took these cases on about just leaving them alone, and some of the statements that were made kind of shocked me about the attitude of the people that were supposed to care. If you do any reading at all on the Larry Eyler case, everything was attributed to him being gay. So, they automatically thought all of these kids must be gay. Again, this is just a supposition on my part, but I think that a lot of parents were probably either ashamed to admit that their son was gay. I can't imagine that going on as long as it has, but that's the only thing I can figure, is somebody should be out there that's missing them and should understand that we don't care about your sexual orientation now. But, that's what I think happened back in the '80s. And I think that's why, once the case was closed, I think that's why everything just kind of came to a screeching halt.

NARRATION: IN THE YEARS SINCE THE UNIDENTIFIED REMAINS WERE FOUND, NOT ONLY HAVE ATTITUDES CHANGED, BUT SO HAS FORENSIC TECHNOLOGY. AT INDIANAPOLIS UNIVERSITY, ANTHROPOLOGISTS HAVE MANAGED TO UNLOCK CLUES TO ADAM AND BRAD'S TRUE IDENTITIES.

SCOTT MCCORD: They were able to find: had there been any prior fractures of the bones? Were the teeth, you know, missing? Or of bad dentition, good dentition, fillings present? Anything that would help identify them.

NARRATION: THEY MAKE AN INTERESTING NEW DISCOVERY ON THE SKELETON NAMED BRAD.

SCOTT MCCORD: There was still some tissue and they were able to soak that tissue and find a tattoo that was totally missed back in the '80s. He actually had two tattoos on his right forearm — a cross with two dots above it. We've tried to figure out what that might mean. It, it, looks, it's not a professional tattoo. It looks like a, almost looks like a jailhouse tatt. I had a contact in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with the police department there, the gang unit, and he ran that, and he could not find a match for it. So, what it actually is, we don't know. But he has a cross with two dots and then there's a small rectangular-shaped tattoo as well. Brad is a white male with reddish brown, medium length hair. 17 to 22 years old. 5'5" to 5'10" with average build. He was found wearing the ankle high hiking boots, size 10 and a half, the button pocket, brown slacks with a 30-inch waist.

NARRATION: NEW DETAILS ALSO EMERGE ABOUT THE BLACK MALE NICKNAMED "ADAM".

SCOTT MCCORD: The forensic anthropologist puts him at anywhere between 15 and 20 years old. He had short, cropped hair, around 5'10 to six foot tall, and best weight guess was 140 to 160 pounds. He was wearing Levi jeans, a gold belt buckle with the word "Jeans" on it, and Hush Puppies style boots with the side buckle, which was popular back then.

NARRATION: IN 2016, AFTER SPENDING EIGHT YEARS SEARCHING FOR THE IDENTITY OF THESE TWO YOUNG MEN, SCOTT DECIDES TO HOLD A FUNERAL IN THEIR HONOR.

SCOTT MCCORD: We held it at our government center, and the local cemetery here in my hometown actually donated a crypt in the mausoleum, so that the boys could be stored there in hopes of one day, if they're ever identified, we can just go to the mausoleum and open it up, and get them out, get them returned to their families.

NARRATION: BEFORE THE SKELETONS ARE PLACED IN THE CRYPT, DNA SAMPLES ARE TAKEN, HOPING THAT FORENSIC GENEALOGY CAN BE USED TO FIND A FAMILY MATCH, OR AT LEAST NARROW DOWN THE SEARCH TO A GEOGRAPHIC AREA.

SCOTT MCCORD: It's going to take somebody entering their DNA into the system. If they opt-in, to where we can search, maybe we can get a hit, but that's, you know, it's going something that sparks someone's interest that says, "Hey, I remember a kid back in the '80s that kind of resembles him." That's what it's going to take. It's something that's been left undone for too long. These kids, there has to be family out there. There just simply has to be, and somebody needs to know where they're at. So, I just took it upon myself to do it.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: When I first found out that Scott, the coroner in Newton County, wants to identify them. You know what? I felt like crying. Because, it's like, somebody still cares as much as I do.

SCOTT MCCORD: It's one of those things that it becomes personal after a while. These are kids that, well, I say kids but they're my age now. We're basically running out of time because their families are going to be gone, if they're not already.

GERA-LIND KOLARIK: These are somebody's sons, somebody's brother. And they've always in back of their mind, "Whatever happened to him? Is he still alive? Where is he? Why hasn't he ever called?"

SCOTT MCCORD: There's a lot of people out there that are web sleuths, that's what they do, is they surf the internet trying to help solve these cases. And every now and then, I'll get somebody that will send me, even if it's just, you know, a random name or whatever. And I follow up on every one of them until the very end, until I can exclude them. I used to get phone calls, as a matter of fact, I had just gotten one a few weeks ago, at 1:30 in the morning. A young man called me and was going to give a tip. I was actually out camping when I received the phone call, and I asked the person to text me the information, and they never did. So, it kind of ended right there. Just when you're ready to give up, somebody will throw a little tidbit out

there that kind of gets the fire going again. Most people in my position would have just simply buried the bones in an unmarked grave and walked away. I can't do that. I don't know why. Maybe I care too much, but I just can't. There's somebody out there that knows something that, it's going to take something to nudge their memory enough to make them make the call.

NARRATION: ON APRIL 25, 2021, JUST THREE DAYS BEFORE THIS EPISODE OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES WAS SCHEDULED TO BE RELEASED, THE NEWTON COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED A POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION FOR ONE OF THE TWO NAMELESS MALE VICTIMS OF LARRY EYLER. THE VICTIM KNOWN AS "BRAD DOE" FOR NEARLY 38 YEARS, WAS REVEALED TO BE JOHN INGRAM BRANDENBURG, JR. OF CHICAGO, IL. HE WAS IDENTIFIED THROUGH A COLLABORATION WITH THE DNA DOE PROJECT AND THE USE OF GENETIC GENEALOGY. JOHN OR "JOHNNY" AS HIS MOTHER CALLED HIM, WAS 19 YEARS OF AGE WHEN HE DISAPPEARED. HIS FAMILY HAS BEEN SEARCHING FOR HIM EVER SINCE AND IS RELIEVED THAT THIS MYSTERY HAS BEEN SOLVED.

TO SEE A FACIAL RECONSTRUCTION IMAGE OF THE REMAINING UNIDENTIFIED VICTIM, "ADAM DOE", OR IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT HIS IDENTITY, CONTACT THE NEWTON COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE AT 219-285-2515, OR SUBMIT A TIP AT [UNSOLVED.COM](https://www.unsigned.com).

NEXT ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

JESSICA WINCH: The first thing I asked them was, "Is her purse there? Is there a coat there? Is her cigarettes there?" And he said "Yes, yes, and yes." Instantly, I knew something was wrong.

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 Caitlin Cutt, and it was edited by Christopher Buchanan. 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 11 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.