

## UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | POINT BLANK RANGE

### S1E28 Transcript

MICHAEL CRUGER: Eugene Palmer is the epitome of evil. He is a heartless individual who has zero respect for society. And anytime he was challenged, he would have violent outbursts. There is no justification for this murder. This murder was as cold blooded as it comes. We're not going to stop until we find him.

NARRATION: IT'S EARLY ON A SEPTEMBER MORNING IN STONY POINT, NEW YORK, ABOUT AN HOUR NORTH OF NEW YORK CITY. 39-YEAR-OLD TAMMY PALMER WALKS HER TWO CHILDREN UP HER DRIVEWAY TO THE MAIN ROAD WHERE A BUS PICKS THEM UP FOR SCHOOL — SOMETHING SHE DOES EVERY MORNING. AS SHE HEADS BACK DOWN TO HER HOUSE, A SHOT RINGS OUT FROM THE WOODS NEXT TO THE DRIVEWAY. AND THEN A SECOND SHOT. TAMMY FEELS A SHARP PAIN IN HER LEFT WRIST AND GRABS HER HAND. REALIZING SHE'S NOW BLEEDING, SHE STUMBLES TO THE DOOR OF HER HOUSE, BUT IT'S LOCKED. TRAILING BLOOD, SHE THEN RUNS TO THE BACK OF THE HOUSE AND COLLAPSES. THE SHOOTER EMERGES FROM THE TREES, APPROACHES HIS HELPLESS VICTIM, AND FIRES ONE FATAL BULLET INTO HER CHEST.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "POINT BLANK RANGE."

DISPATCH: 911, where's your emergency?

WITNESS: Uh, Gate Hill Co-Op Road.

DISPATCH: Okay.

WITNESS: I heard a shot.

DISPATCH: Uh-huh?

WITNESS: A lot of screaming, another shot, no more screaming, and another shot.

DISPATCH: Okay, three shots and you heard screaming.

WITNESS: Yeah. I think it came from the Palmer's.

DISPATCH: From the Palmer's?

WITNESS: Exactly, it's right next door.

DISPATCH: Hold on one second. All right. We'll get the cars rolling up there.

WITNESS: Thank you.

DISPATCH: Okay, if you hear anything else, give us a call back. All right?

WITNESS: All right.

DISPATCH: Okay, bye.

MICHAEL CRUGER: Approximately 7:30 or 7:40, I believe, the call came in — shots fired and a woman screaming.

NARRATION: IT'S MONDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 24TH, 2012, AND DETECTIVE MICHAEL CRUGER IS THE HOMICIDE INVESTIGATOR ON DUTY AT THE TOWN OF HAVERSTRAW POLICE DEPARTMENT IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK.

MICHAEL CRUGER: Our jurisdiction covers anywhere from million dollar homes to rural areas to urban areas. So, we have a little bit of everything. This area is actually in Stony Point, which is right on the border, and it's, very rural. A lot of wooded areas and the property itself foots right up against, uh, Harriman State Park, which is a humongous State Park. Acres and acres of wooded area. People in that area have been known to illegally hunt and that's why, a lot of times, shots fired in the area is common. But a woman screaming kinda made me think that something may be seriously going on up there. It was really my first major case, really my first case. When I arrived to the scene, there was dozens and dozens of police officers from all different jurisdictions there. They were searching the area when I got there. Two shotgun shells were found, some blood. We didn't know if we had a body. We didn't know we had a homicide. I sort of set up the crime scene tape where I thought the crime scene would be, and then, Tammy was found in the rear of the house, in the grass, deceased.

NARRATION: TAMMY PALMER, A 39-YEAR-OLD MOTHER OF TWO, IS DEAD FROM A GUNSHOT TO HER CHEST. HER SISTER, DENISE PANNIRELLO, GETS A DREADED CALL FROM ONE OF THEIR RELATIVES.

DENISE PANNIRELLO: She said, "Something happened to Tammy." I go, "What happened to Tammy?" and she goes, "Come up here right now." So, my son and I flew up there and we ran up the driveway and the cops were already there, and it was already taped off. Tammy was found in her backyard, shot

in her torso at close range. They feel what happened was, when Tammy was taking her kids down to the bus stop, Tammy was walking up the driveway and he ambushed her. And he shot once, he missed. Tammy started running. He shot again and he got her in her arm. So, he was hunting her down like an animal.

NARRATION: BERNADETTE PEREZ IS TAMMY'S LONGTIME FRIEND. THEY MET IN THE NINTH GRADE IN HIGH SCHOOL, WHEN THEY WERE ABOUT THIRTEEN YEARS OLD.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: We spent a lot of time together. We talked about our hopes and dreams. I was there before she met John, her husband, before her kids. He was her first boyfriend. Coincidentally my first boyfriend's name was John, too. So, we always used to make jokes about that. Tammy was a very funny, outgoing, happy person. She's a beautiful girl. Brown eyes, olive skin. And she didn't change that much from the time we were in high school to the time I saw her again. Tammy would still crack jokes. We'd still snicker. We would bump each other. We always had a good time and a good laugh. She was a really good, good person.

NARRATION: TAMMY LOVES HER TWO CHILDREN, ROSEMARIE WHO'S 16 AND JOHN, 12. BUT DESPITE ALL HER EFFORTS, HER MARRIAGE WITH CHILDHOOD SWEETHEART, JOHN PALMER, HAS FAILED.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: Tammy was done with the marriage and ready to move forward, be a single mother, just finally was sick and tired of being sick and tired. Mentally, I believe, she was preparing to put this chapter behind her and start a new chapter. Other doors had opened for her. There were other options for Tammy. The world was hers, kind of like a rebirth. And that got cut short and taken away from her. The day that Tammy got killed, it's one of those days where your heart is broken, but there's nothing that you can do.

NARRATION: AT THE TIME OF HER MURDER, TAMMY PALMER LIVES IN A TRAILER HOME ON A SPRAWLING PROPERTY OWNED BY HER FATHER-IN-LAW, EUGENE PALMER. SHE'S RECENTLY SEPARATED FROM HER HUSBAND, JOHN, AND THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME POLICE HAVE BEEN TO THIS ADDRESS.

MICHAEL CRUGER: Majority of calls that the police department responded to at John and Tammy's residence were domestic incidents. Some were violent, some were not. Some were verbal. But there were several domestic incidents that they did respond to.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: What happened was, Tammy knew that John was cheating on her, and she finally said to him, "You know what? If that's what you want, go for it. But I want you to leave me money for these kids, because they're your kids." And John beat the crap out of her. He was beating her head into

the doorway back and forth. Tammy's daughter called the police. When the police came, they seen her injuries. They didn't need her to say, "I'm pressing charges." The police can do that in domestic violence cases, and that's what happened. He got an order of protection put on him, the property, and the kids for beating up Tammy that day.

MICHAEL CRUGER: Through the many domestic incidents involving Tammy and John, Tammy eventually had a order of protection filed against John, which basically said that John could not go on the property at all, or communicate with her.

NARRATION: THE PROTECTION ORDER ENRAGES EUGENE PALMER, TAMMY'S FATHER-IN-LAW. EUGENE OWNS THE FAMILY LAND AND LIVES ON ANOTHER PART OF THE SAME PROPERTY.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: Eugene felt that it was his property, how dare she kick his son off of his own property? But also, Eugene was a good old boy, to put it in those kind of terms. Where, if you were a woman, it doesn't matter what your husband does to you. Whether John was cheating on her, if John was hitting her, if John wasn't giving her money for the groceries? Well, according to Eugene Palmer, you're supposed to sit there with your hands folded and say, "Thank you, sir. Give me another."

MICHAEL CRUGER: I believe he took it very personal. I believe that really was, like, the last straw because they had had problems in the past, just because of the domestic problems between John and Tammy. So, Eugene and Tammy, for some period of time, didn't get along. And I believe the order of protection, really, was the beginning of the end for the whole situation. Tammy was small, small in stature but as far as everyone I speak to, um, she was very feisty. She didn't take nothing from anybody. She was very strong-willed person. The Friday before the homicide, Eugene and Tammy had an altercation on the property. The altercation led to one witness saying that he saw Eugene raise his hand to strike Tammy. Tammy's friend had come to pick her up in the meantime, and Tammy's friend had said that she had heard Eugene tell Tammy, "You're going to be out of here next week, one way or another."

NARRATION: ON MONDAY MORNING, EUGENE'S CHILLING THREAT BECOMES A REALITY WHEN TAMMY'S BODY LEAVES THE PALMER PROPERTY IN A CORONER'S VAN. BUT WAS EUGENE PALMER SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE FOR TAMMY'S MURDER?

MICHAEL CRUGER: Sometime after, as we were searching the area for clues, Elaine Babcock and her daughter came over.

NARRATION: ELAINE BABCOCK IS EUGENE'S SISTER AND SHE LIVES IN A HOME ON THE PROPERTY DIRECTLY ACROSS THE ROAD FROM HER BROTHER.

MICHAEL CRUGER: They had told us that Eugene Palmer, earlier, had come over to their house with some money in an envelope saying, "Pay my taxes. I just shot Tammy." And he also told her, "Give me one hour before you call the police to let me get away." And he drove his green pickup truck up the road, out of her view.

DENISE PANNIRELLO: I said, "No way. There's no way Eugene killed Tammy. There's no way." So then, I ran back up to the driveway. I started screaming and yelling at Tammy's husband, because I was blaming Tammy's husband, John, for all this. I was kicking him. I was spitting at him. It had to take five people to get me off of John, and he was crying.

NARRATION: POLICE DETERMINE THAT TAMMY'S HUSBAND JOHN LIKELY KNEW NOTHING ABOUT WHAT HIS FATHER HAD PLANNED. NOW, WITH ELAINE'S STATEMENT, AND THE EVIDENCE AT THE SCENE, DETECTIVE CRUGER IS ABLE TO PIECE TOGETHER EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED EARLIER THAT DAY.

MICHAEL CRUGER: Well that morning, like every morning, Tammy walks her children up to the bus stop. She walks up a long driveway to a main road where the bus picks up her children. Tammy walks back down to the driveway, to her house. According to the evidence that we found, it appears that Eugene was hiding in a wooded area on the side of the driveway, hidden, and shot one time at her. We believe that Eugene then approached the area that she was in, took another shot as Tammy ran around the back. That second shot, we believe, missed her. Tammy ran around the backyard, where she eventually collapsed, and Eugene stalked her, stood overtop of her, and put the last shot into her chest which ended up killing her.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: Eugene was hiding in the bushes like he was hunting her, like she was an animal, and he shot her.

NARRATION: AFTER EXECUTING THE MOTHER OF HIS GRANDCHILDREN AT POINT BLANK RANGE, EUGENE GOES HOME TO GET SOME MONEY.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: He then brought that money to his sister and asked his sister, "Can you please pay my taxes because I just shot the bitch. Give me an hour head start."

DENISE PANNIRELLO: Eugene really, really must have hated my sister to do what he did. And what right does Eugene have to take a life? He has no right to take anybody's life. I can't even fathom what she was going through, what was going through her mind, how scared she was. And she was trying to get away and she couldn't get away.

NARRATION: POLICE BEGIN A MASSIVE MANHUNT FOR EUGENE PALMER, BUT HE HAS AN HOUR-LONG HEAD START BECAUSE HIS FAMILY DID NOT REPORT THE MURDER.

MICHAEL CRUGER: If they would have called right away, there's a very good chance that, if we would have known what we're looking for, had a vehicle, had some kind of information or direction of flight, we would have had him that day. After we spoke to Elaine Babcock, we realized that Eugene was our suspect. We knew Eugene's truck, the description of it, the license plate. So, we gave that to the state police and other agencies to be on the lookout for that vehicle. We did some road stops. We checked the area in the direction that he traveled, and we begin to search the wooded area as well.

NARRATION: THE SEARCH IS HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT HARRIMAN STATE PARK IS A MASSIVE STRETCH OF FOREST LAND AND EUGENE, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, IS A SKILLED OUTDOORSMAN WITH EXPERIENCE SURVIVING IN THE WILDERNESS.

MICHAEL CRUGER: The entire first day, we searched wooded areas. We searched different locations. Then it got too dark, 'course we ended the search for the night. We began in the morning again, early in the morning. The next day, we found his vehicle. His vehicle was approximately 1/8 of a mile from his house, off the roadway, about 100 yards into the woods. A lot of the local people there said that, years ago, people used to hide stolen cars in there, because no one could find it. Eugene's pickup truck had a cap on top of it. The back was left open. There was nothing in it. It was empty. At that point, what we did is we called for a tracking dog, a bloodhound.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: And that's where the story gets to be an unsolved mystery, because some people believe he got out of the Jeep and he went wandering through the Harriman State Park. I don't believe that Eugene Palmer drove his truck up to the Harriman State Park and decided he wanted to take a nature hike. I believe somebody was waiting for him, or he may have had another vehicle parked there. Eugene knew the woods like the back of his hand. He was a woodsman.

MICHAEL CRUGER: The dog tracked to the middle of a roadway and gave the sign to the handler that the track ended right there in the middle of the roadway. What that pretty much told us, after we found this out, is that there was possibly a vehicle that was waiting there, or someone was in a vehicle waiting there from that roadway, since it ended right on the road. I believe the fact that he hid the vehicle off the roadway, sitting so close to his home, gave us the extra time that he needed to get away. The entire time we were looking for a green truck and we had other agencies looking for a green truck with Eugene Palmer's plate. Meanwhile, the truck was an eighth of mile away, right in the wooded area.

NEWSCAST: Now to a week-long manhunt in upstate New York for a man suspected of killing his own daughter-in-law. Police believe he fled to a nearby state park and is now in hiding.

NEWSCAST: Flyers bearing Eugene Palmer's face are posted around New York's Harriman State Park, a reminder for visitors to watch out for the man police say is armed and dangerous.

NARRATION: AS THE HUNT FOR EUGENE DRAGS ON, TAMMY'S FAMILY IS LEFT TO GRIEVE THEIR PAINFUL LOSS.

NEWSCAST: Family members hugged one another as tears rolled down their faces as the coffin of Tammy Palmer was slowly brought into St. Gregory Barbarigo church here in Garnerville, Rockland County.

BERNADETTE PEREZ: Tammy had a beautiful funeral. It was very sad. It was very sad. And the kids really broke down that day. And you can stand there, and you can empathize. You can feel terrible, but there was not a damn thing you could do. There was nothing you could do to make those kids feel better. You, it's not like you could rub them on the back and say, "It's gonna be okay. Don't worry." You can't because, to this day, they're living with it. Until the day they die, they're gonna live with the hole in their heart.

NARRATION: SEVERAL WEEKS INTO THE SEARCH FOR EUGENE PALMER, THERE'S WIDE SPECULATION ABOUT HIS WHEREABOUTS AND WHETHER HE'S EVEN ALIVE. EUGENE'S SISTER, ELAINE BABCOCK SPEAKS TO THE MEDIA.

ELAINE BABCOCK: Well, where he parked his truck, up on top of the hill, I don't think he made it too far from where the truck was. His health wasn't good. His heart, especially. I don't think he made it too far.

NEWSCAST: Many can't believe he hasn't been found. Others wonder if he's still alive, after rumors he died in the woods.

LOCAL: I think he's out of the area. Is he dead? I don't know. He did have healthcare issues. So, I don't know, but I don't think he's around here any longer.

NARRATION: RUMORS CIRCULATE THAT EUGENE TOOK HIS RIFLE INTO THE WOODS AND COMMITTED SUICIDE DEEP INSIDE HARRIMAN STATE PARK.

MICHAEL CRUGER: No, Eugene Palmer, according to this investigation, was not the type of person that would kill themselves in the woods, or anywhere. Through the investigation, people had told us

Eugene looked down upon people who committed suicide. He believes that they're cowards, and he was adamant and very strong, that that was a very strong belief of his. So, we know that he wouldn't kill himself in the woods. Eugene Palmer had some heart problems and diabetes. Some physicians that we spoke to early on said that his conditions weren't that bad. It could be regulated. It's very frustrating that Eugene is out there in the world somewhere, living his life. And, you know, he took a life. No one gets to play God in this world. He did. He needs to pay, come to justice. He needs to pay for what he did. It's just very frustrating.

NARRATION: THE SEARCH FOR EUGENE PALMER STRETCHES FROM WEEKS INTO MONTHS. HE'S CHARGED WITH THE MURDER OF TAMMY AND UNLAWFUL FLIGHT TO AVOID PROSECUTION.

JUSTIN GRAY: The case of Eugene Palmer, I think, is one of the more heinous crimes that you can really imagine in terms of the premeditation.

NARRATION: IN 2019, FBI SPECIAL AGENT JUSTIN GRAY IS ASSIGNED THE TASK OF BRINGING EUGENE PALMER TO JUSTICE.

JUSTIN GRAY: We've always felt that somebody out there helped him that day. We've always felt that somebody out there knows more than what they're telling us. The more we keep pushing to keep this story alive, and keep it out there, the more tips that come in, and so that's where my job comes in.

NARRATION: THE FBI DECIDES TO TAKE THE SEARCH TO ANOTHER LEVEL.

NEWSCAST: It was a grisly murder almost seven years ago — a 39-year-old woman shot and killed in a Rockland County home. Today, her father-in-law, Eugene Palmer was placed on the FBI Top 10 Most Wanted list.

JUSTIN GRAY: In mid-2019 was when the decision was made to add Eugene Palmer to the FBI's Top 10 Most Wanted list, and that's when the reward for information leading to his capture was increased to \$100,000. If you know where Eugene is, and you want the \$100,000, but you don't want your name out there. That's perfectly fine. You can remain 100% anonymous. What we always say when, when someone asks me, "Where should we look for Eugene Palmer?" I always say he's going to be somewhere rural. He's going to be somewhere where there's not going to be a lot of people around. And in addition, he was very into the amateur racing scene. He's probably going to be somewhere that's near a racetrack, because I don't think he would give up that hobby strictly for hiding. I think that he would still be around those kinds of places, if given the opportunity, especially in areas where it's not so heavily populated, or in an area that, maybe they know that this is Eugene Palmer, and they just simply don't care.



NARRATION: ACCORDING TO SPECIAL AGENT GRAY, ONE OF THE MOST CREDIBLE TIPS THAT COMES IN PLACES EUGENE SOMEWHERE FURTHER NORTH, IN UPSTATE NEW YORK.

JUSTIN GRAY: The Palmer family started moving north, started moving to Sullivan county after the murder. The Palmer's own several plots of land up in Sullivan County. So that's something that interested us greatly. And then, as for if he's died since, if the Palmer family comes forward tomorrow, and says, "Here's proof that Eugene Palmer is dead," and gives that to me, you're never gonna hear from me again. Ever. Because my job is to find Eugene Palmer. And that's it. So, if he's dead, and the family wants me off their back, if the family wants Detective Cruger, and the Haverstraw Police Department, and the FBI off their back, and the public off their back, then, then show me he's dead. But until you do, I'm going to be out there looking for him.

NARRATION: DETECTIVE MICHAEL CRUGER IS CONVINCED EUGENE IS ALIVE, IN HIDING, AND GETTING ASSISTANCE FROM SOMEONE.

MICHAEL CRUGER: I'm almost positive that there are people that do know and are helping him. He definitely needs some help. I believe he's being taken care of, money-wise and medicine-wise. For eight years, we have not gained one bit of evidence that he did die in the woods, other than the fact of certain people saying that that's where he went. As a matter of fact, we have more evidence that he didn't die in the woods. That's something that I obviously can't tell you.

NARRATION: THAT EVIDENCE IS SOMETHING POLICE HAVE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL TO THIS DAY.

JUSTIN GRAY: In terms of the Palmer family trying to live with this on their conscience, and try to justify the, what their father or what their family member did, the only thing I can really point to is that the Palmer children, and the Palmer family, grew up on this compound, basically. It had several properties that the Palmer family lived on, and Eugene Palmer was the patriarch. They worshipped him. Everything he said was right. What he says goes. And I think that, when you grow up in this kind of sheltered environment, where there is one person who makes all these decisions, who is never wrong, that's got to shape your mindset and your experiences. And so, when that person goes out and does something like this, you're going to perhaps try and find a way to say, "Well, no, he, he had to do this. He had to do that." So that's the only reasoning I could ever come up with for why the Palmer family would willfully choose to protect him.

NARRATION: DETECTIVE CRUGER REMAINS 100% COMMITTED TO SOLVING THIS CASE — THE FIRST AND TOUGHEST OF HIS CAREER.

MICHAEL CRUGER: This is probably the hardest case I ever had, you know, in my career. Some are easier than others. Some are difficult, but this, by far, is the most time consuming, and this is the case that you think about a night when you're in bed, and you think about, "What didn't I do that I should have done?" It's one step at a time, one lead at a time, one clue at a time, one interview at a time. It eventually will lead us to catching him.

NARRATION: TAMMY'S CLOSE FRIEND BERNADETTE HAS SEEN FIRSTHAND THE PAIN INFLICTED ON TAMMY'S CHILDREN, WHO LOST THEIR MOTHER AT THE HAND OF THEIR GRANDFATHER.

BERNADETTE PEREZ:-The hardest part about Tammy being murdered is she now has two children that have to grow up without a mother. Her daughter has two children that now are growing up without their grandmother. And we all are losing out on a wonderful person whose life got cut short because somebody wanted to play God. Because Eugene was unhappy with the fact that a woman talked back, and how dare a woman challenge her son who was beating her? How dare she? And that's why we're here. I just want everyone to know she was a great mother. She really was a great mom.

NARRATION: TAMMY'S SISTER DENISE SWEARS SHE WILL NEVER GIVE UP HOPE THAT EUGENE PALMER WILL BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.

DENISE PANNIRELLO: I never fathomed in my life that my family and I would go through this. Yes, you see it on TV every day, and we would watch the news and we say, "What a shame. I feel for that family," so on and so forth. But when it happens to you, it really hits home. It really does. What bothers me the most is, that day, me thinking about her running for her life, and what was going through her mind. Was she trying to get out of there? Was she trying to run? I would lay in bed and say to myself, "Tammy, you could have went this way. You could have went that way." Just her screaming, and reliving that day, what she went through. My sister did not deserve to die that way. Nobody deserves to die the way my sister died.

NARRATION: EUGENE PALMER WOULD NOW BE IN HIS EARLY 80'S, AND IS APPROXIMATELY FIVE FOOT 10 INCHES TALL, WITH BROWN EYES AND GRAY HAIR. HE IS AN EXPERIENCED HUNTER AND AN AVID OUTDOORSMAN WITH AN INTEREST IN CARS AND AUTO RACING. EUGENE PALMER'S MOST DISTINGUISHABLE FEATURE IS A HIGHLY DEFORMED LEFT THUMB — IT IS A SMALLER NUBBED THUMB THAT COMES TO A POINT. IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE LOCATION OF EUGENE PALMER, PLEASE CALL THE FBI AT 1-800-CALL-FBI, THE HAVERSTRAW POLICE AT 845-942-3730, OR GO TO [UNSOLVED.COM](http://UNSOLVED.COM).

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

BRANDY FULKERSON: My first instinct, like, when I walked into the house is it was inviting, but then as night came and it got darker, the house was more intense. It made a lot of noise all the time. There was always something going on. But every time that we would go, there would be a completely different feeling behind it.

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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, Paige Hymson and Paul Yates. The Story Producer for this episode was Ann Toler, and it was edited by Paul Yates.

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THANKS FOR LISTENING TO EPISODE 28 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.