

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | CONDO KILLINGS

EP46 Transcript

COY COX: The big, glaring fact in this case is both Bill and Peggy had to die. There was plenty of opportunity to kill Bill by himself, if someone was angry at Bill. Same thing is true for Peggy. Well then, why would both of them have to die? That's the million-dollar question.

NARRATION:

ON A BEAUTIFUL SPRING MORNING IN THE HILLS OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY, BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR IS OFF TO CHURCH, WHERE SHE'S EXPECTING TO SEE HER PARENTS, BILL AND PEGGY, AS SHE DOES EVERY SUNDAY. FOR BETH AND HER FAMILY, CHURCH AND CARING FOR THE NEEDY ARE CENTRAL TO A RIGHTEOUS WAY OF LIFE. HOWEVER, ON THIS PARTICULAR SUNDAY, BETH COMES FACE TO FACE WITH THE UNHOLY TRUTH: THAT THE LOVE HER PARENTS SHOWED TO ALL HAS BEEN TRAGICALLY TURNED INSIDE OUT.

I'M STEVE FRENCH AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "THE CONDO KILLINGS."

ON SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2011, BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR GLANCES AROUND THE PEWS IN THE UNION BAPTIST CHURCH DURING THE 9AM SERVICE, WONDERING WHY HER PARENTS, BILL AND PEGGY, BOTH 74 YEARS OLD, AREN'T THERE. BETH HAD JUST SPOKEN TO HER MOTHER THE DAY BEFORE, WHO SAID SHE AND BILL WERE PLANNING TO ATTEND. WHEN THEY STILL HAVEN'T ARRIVED BY THE END OF THE SERVICE, BETH DECIDES TO GIVE THEM A CALL.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: I tried to get ahold of them two or three times and there was no answer to the house or their cell phones. Really didn't think a whole lot about it. Mom's dad was still alive, and he was 95. So, you know, I thought, you know, Pawpaw could be in the hospital, you know. Something could have happened to him or whatever, you know. They just didn't have a chance to call.

NARRATION:

BUT TWO HOURS LATER, BETH STILL HASN'T HEARD FROM HER PARENTS, SO SHE ASKS HER HUSBAND, CJ, TO SWING BY BILL AND PEGGY'S CONDO TO CHECK ON THEM AND MAKE SURE THEY'RE OKAY. BETH'S PHONE RINGS A FEW MINUTES LATER.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: My husband called wanting to know where I was, and he just told me I needed to get there. That it wasn't good, and that was what he told me, and we hung up. And then, when I pulled into their complex, their street was blocked off with the police. There was a police officer standing there that wouldn't... they had police tape up, and they wouldn't let me further in. And then my husband was walking toward me, and my husband's the one that told us what had happened. The only thing that my husband told me was that they were gone and that somebody had killed them. My knees buckled. I hit the ground, and my daughter walked across the street, and she collapsed over on the sidewalk. So, I told my husband, I said, "Just go deal with her." And that was pretty much... um...

NARRATION:

HOMICIDE DETECTIVE COY COX WITH THE BOONE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT ARRIVES AT THE CONDOMINIUM AND IS SHOCKED WHEN HE LEARNS THE IDENTITY OF THE VICTIMS.

COY COX: I knew Bill and Peggy Stephenson for most of my life. I went to school with their daughter, Beth, when we were in high school. Bill was one of the most loving, outgoing, giving people that I've ever come across.

NARRATION:

PUTTING HIS PERSONAL FEELINGS ASIDE, DETECTIVE COX ENTERS THE CONDO AND FINDS A HORRIFYING SCENE OF VIOLENCE.

COY COX: I can tell you that these were very brutal murders. There was a lot of hitting going on, and the cause of death for both Bill Stephenson and Peggy Stephenson is listed as sharp force and blunt force trauma. I can't say what kind of instruments were used.

NARRATION:

DETECTIVE COX IS CAREFUL NOT TO REVEAL TOO MUCH ABOUT WHAT INVESTIGATORS FOUND AT THE CRIME SCENE.

COY COX: There are a lot of reasons why that we are keeping the particulars of this case close. There is one, maybe two people, outside of a few detectives, that know what happened. For that reason, we protect that information.

NARRATION:

BUT THERE ARE FACTS DISCOVERED FROM THIS INITIAL INVESTIGATION THAT DETECTIVE COX CAN REVEAL.

COY COX: There was a concrete pad that was kind of a back porch for the condominium unit for Bill and Peggy's condominium, and we had found the rear sliding door open, with the screen door closed. So, that was the access that we chose to use at that time. And the first victim that I encountered when I walked in the door — and I will not differentiate which victim was in which room — so, the first victim was located immediately in that room. There were no signs of life at all. It was very obvious that that victim was deceased.

NARRATION:

THE OTHER VICTIM IS FOUND ON THE FLOOR IN ANOTHER ROOM OF THE CONDO.

COY COX: One of the victims showed signs of struggle. The other victim did not show signs of struggle. And we believe, from the evidence we have, that the murders occurred between the hours of one and four in the early morning hours of May 29th, 2011. And we believe, within a very short period of time, seconds or minutes of each other. And we know this because one of the victims had a medical, I don't want to say too much here, but had a medical device that allowed us to know the exact time of death for that victim.

NARRATION:

AS DETECTIVES SURVEY THE CRIME SCENE, THEY CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE A CURIOUS CHAOS TO SEVERAL OF THE ROOMS, SUGGESTING THE KILLER OR KILLERS HAVE CONSCIOUSLY REARRANGED THE SCENE.

COY COX: There were things that were disturbed and moved and positioned, and I can't get specific on any of those, but I can tell you that normal things that you would find in your living room area were disturbed and moved and positioned in certain positions that was obvious that someone had moved them in this crime scene, and I'm always reluctant to say, "the crime scene." We actually did not have a crime scene in this case, in this murder. We had the scene that our perpetrator or perpetrators wanted us to find. So, we really didn't have *the* crime scene. We had *a* crime scene that was completely changed from its original condition at the time of the murders.

COY COX: There was so much that was done in each and every room of the condominium unit that were revealing immediately, things that were obviously set up, staged, around the victim in the room that seemed to serve no purpose as to going about the act of killing an individual, but just more or less leaving signs or things that you're supposed to interpret. I can tell you that there is a message that someone was trying to tell us. However, that message is known only to of them.

NARRATION:

THE ONE THING THAT'S PERFECTLY CLEAR IS THAT BILL AND PEGGY WERE TARGETED, SOMETHING THEIR DAUGHTER BETH TRIES TO MAKE SENSE OF.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: My parents didn't have any enemies. You know, everybody that they knew liked them. So, there were really no enemies that we knew of. My mom and dad, they were high school sweethearts. Soon as they got out of high school, dad went into the service, then they got married and started having a family. I have two older brothers, so I'm the youngest of the three of us. They were great parents. You know, we weren't wealthy, but we had what we needed. My dad was very fun-loving. He loved to joke. He liked to tease. He liked to aggravate. If he aggravated you, he liked you. Which, he aggravated everybody because he liked everybody. He was just very outgoing, never met a stranger. My mom was more reserved, kind of shy in a ways, but she was always there for him.

NARRATION:

FOR MOST OF THEIR LIVES, THE STEPHENSON'S LIVED OUT IN THE COUNTRY, MILES FROM THE CENTER OF TOWN, BUT WHEN THEIR KIDS LEFT THE NEST, THEY MADE THE MOVE TO A MORE SUBURBAN LIFESTYLE.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: They'd lived in the house that I grew up in and they decided to downsize, just because, you know, there was an acre of yard to be mowed and keeping the pool

clean, it just got to be too much for my dad, and that's when they moved into the condo in Florence. You know, just a nice little house for them, perfect for them.

NARRATION:

NO MATTER WHERE BILL AND PEGGY LIVED, THEIR FAITH REMAINED THE CORNERSTONE OF THEIR LIVES.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: Church was pretty much everything to them. It was very important to them and that's how they lived their lives. My dad was a deacon, and my mom played the organ. They would help anybody that they could and give the shirt off their back if they needed to. So, we have no clue who would want them dead.

NARRATION:

AS PART OF THEIR INVESTIGATION, DETECTIVES DO THEIR OWN CHECK OF THE VICTIMS' BACKGROUND, LOOKING FOR ANY SKELETONS IN THE STEPHENSON'S CLOSET.

COY COX: Doing the victimology, a lot that we have learned about Bill and Peggy was that Bill really didn't have any enemies. And I can tell you that I've worked many, many, many cases in my life, and you can always find someone, and we've looked high and low in this case. And we've pleaded with people to, "Hey, if you know of any confrontation that he had at any point with any anyone, come forward." And to be honest with you, that little block in our investigative file is just empty. We can't find anyone.

NARRATION:

AS DETECTIVES WALK AROUND THE CRIME SCENE, THEY MAKE NOTE THAT THE STEPHENSON'S CONDO IS ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF A FIVE-UNIT BUILDING AT THE QUIET END OF A LARGE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN FLORENCE, KENTUCKY — THE PERFECT LOCATION FOR A LATE-NIGHT ROBBERY OF AN ELDERLY COUPLE.

COY COX: The community where they lived, it has over a thousand single family residential homes, apartments, and condos. Bill and Peggy's condominium, they were located kind of on the backside of that community. And it was probably one of the most secluded units in the community, that very few people would even go down that street or even knew that it was back there.

NARRATION:

THE CONDOMINIUM'S SECURITY IS MODERN AND WELL MAINTAINED. THE ENTRANCE TO THE BUILDING REQUIRES A KEY CODE, AND THE FRONT DOOR HAS A WORKING LOCK. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE NO SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS ON THE BUILDING.

COY COX: The front main door to the residence, which actually opens from the hallway, was ajar, but it's very hard to say if there was forced entry. May 29th, 2011 was kind of a warmer day for that time of year. A lot of the other units had screens or windows open with screens in the windows and even their sliding glass doors, some of them were open. It's quite possible

that the back screen door was unlocked and simply just slid to the side and entry was made. And the first encounter with the first victim happened near that back screen door.

NARRATION:

DETECTIVES INTERVIEW ALL THE STEPHENSON'S NEIGHBORS, ASSUMING THAT SOMEONE IN THE CONDO COMPLEX MUST HAVE HEARD THE SOUND OF TWO VIOLENT MURDERS AND FURNITURE BEING MOVED AROUND IN THE QUIET OF THE NIGHT.

COY COX: No one heard any noises. And that's a little troubling, especially in a condo area. But we also believe that that lends toward an individual who knew this condominium unit so well that they could account for all of their activities and causing the least amount of noise. We believe there were at least two involved at the actual crime scene. Now were both of them doers in committing the murders? We're not real sure on that. However, there are other things that point to and lead us to believe that either the perpetrator, or perpetrators, were in there as much as six hours after the time of death.

NARRATION:

DETECTIVES SPEND HOURS CONDUCTING A THOROUGH FORENSIC ANALYSIS OF THE CRIME SCENE, LOOKING FOR ANYTHING THAT MIGHT LEAD THEM TO A SUSPECT.

COY COX: Polygraphs, fingerprints, DNA, photographs, we collected everything. We know that the murder weapons were not left at the residence. We believe that they were all brought to the residence by the perpetrator or perpetrators. And we know that there were several items that, if it was your typical murder or robbery, things that people would have taken of value, that they could have turned into cash very quickly, and those were not taken. And several of those things were right out in the open, including some cash money that was at the scene.

NARRATION:

IF THE MURDER ISN'T A ROBBERY GONE TERRIBLY WRONG, THEN WHAT IS THE REASON FOR SUCH A BRUTAL ASSAULT AGAINST A COUPLE LIKE BILL AND PEGGY STEPHENSON? THE SAVAGERY SUGGESTS EITHER A VERY PERSONAL ATTACK, DRIVEN BY A FIERCE HATRED OF THE COUPLE, OR A MURDER OF OPPORTUNITY BY A DERANGED KILLER. INVESTIGATORS KNOW THAT BILL WAS ACTIVE IN HIS CHURCH, DOING MISSIONARY WORK AFTER HE RETIRED FROM HIS JOB SELLING INSURANCE IN 2008. BILL WOULD DELIVER FOOD AND CLOTHING THROUGHOUT EASTERN KENTUCKY AND ENCOUNTERED MANY STRANGERS ALONG THE WAY, AND BILL CONTRIBUTED TO FOUNDING A MINISTRY CALLED A "TRUCKER'S CHAPEL," TO GIVE LONG-HAUL TRUCKERS A PLACE TO STOP FOR A SUNDAY SERVICE.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: The Trucker's Chapel was run out of the TA truck stop in Florence where they had a trailer that they converted into a small church, you know, just paneled the walls and put carpeting in, and they had chairs. And every Sunday they would have church service there for truckers, you know, that were away from home and couldn't go to their own church. At least they had a church to go to if they wanted to.

COY COX: Bill would show up there every Sunday morning and would get on the CB radio and invite them to come, you know, to the service and hear the gospel preached.

NARRATION:

THE ITINERANT NATURE OF THE TRUCKER'S LIFE OBVIOUSLY POSES A RISK OF BILL ENCOUNTERING THE WRONG KIND OF PERSON ON THEIR WAY THROUGH TOWN.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: My dad met with, oh gosh, different people every day. You know, especially on Sundays at the truck stop. But my mom had a rule that he was not allowed to bring anyone home, nobody, and he abided by that. He didn't bring people home.

NARRATION:

COULD ONE OF THESE TRUCKERS HAVE FOLLOWED BILL HOME AFTER A SUNDAY SERVICE, THEN WAITED FOR THE RIGHT TIME TO STRIKE? IT'S A SCENARIO THAT QUICKLY LEADS TO A SUSPECT.

COY COX: Early in the case, we had some information from the truck stop that someone had been to the truck stop one day, a dark-haired gentleman, banging on the doors, looking for Bill frantically, banging on the, uh, chapel doors. So, we then started doing sweeps. We started looking at individuals, truck drivers, who would make deliveries, and that number grew really, really fast, and we would go out and start trying to interview them as they would come back maybe the next week to make the deliveries and, and ask them to cooperate and to give us their DNA and fingerprints and to allow us to interview them. And, without exception, everyone in the trucking industry has cooperated with us and gave us their DNA.

NARRATION:

THE INVESTIGATION COMES UP EMPTY-HANDED, AS DOES THE SEARCH FOR LEADS INTO WHY SOMEONE WOULD WANT TO KILL BILL OR, FOR THAT MATTER, WHY SOMEONE WOULD WANT PEGGY DEAD, WHICH LEADS INVESTIGATORS TO THEIR MOST CONVINCING THEORY ABOUT THIS DOUBLE HOMICIDE.

COY COX: A lot of people ask, what is the motive? What is the motive for killing Bill and Peggy? And then they kind of get frustrated and confused when I look at them and say, "The motive is easy. The motive was murder." In that, Bill and Peggy both had to die. Because anyone who wanted to kill Bill only, to kill Bill by himself, if someone was angry at Bill, had lots of opportunity to do that without complicating that murder with having another person in the condominium unit, or other people inside the complex. Same thing is true for Peggy, because while Bill was gone all day long and everyone else in the condo would've been gone to work, in the condominium unit, they could have come in and killed Peggy by herself.

NARRATION:

BUT THE KILLERS DIDN'T ISOLATE THEIR VICTIMS. THEY FOUND A TIME AND PLACE WHERE THEY COULD MURDER BOTH BILL AND PEGGY, KNOWING FULL WELL THE GAMBLE THEY WERE TAKING.

COY COX: This kind of murder, and for it to happen the way that it happened, it involves risk. Obviously, this is a condominium with folks living next door. The murderer or murderers picked a time of day where most people are home at that time of the morning and they're either asleep or, you know, getting ready to go to sleep. So that means there's not a lot of ambient noise in their condo. But also, if someone is, you know, if they're going to murder someone and rob or do whatever they're going to do, once they murder someone, they're going to get out of dodge. They've accomplished their mission, they go away. But not in this case. So, you have a very high risk of getting caught because there are so many people around. And then you also have the comfort that they had to have to stay in there, hours after the murder of these victims, which just, again, adds to the complexity of the case.

COY COX: We have profiled this case to many, many agencies, including the FBI, to all kinds of profilers, and everyone very much agrees with that statement, that this is someone who knows or was closely related to Bill and Peggy. So, all of these things together, along with the acts that were committed during the murder, which we cannot talk about, those are very indicative of someone who had a lot of personal feelings toward Bill and Peggy Stephenson.

NARRATION:

WITH THE POOL OF POSSIBLE SUSPECTS GETTING SMALLER AND SMALLER, BOONE COUNTY SHERIFFS INVESTIGATORS FOCUS ON THE STEPHENSON'S EXTENDED FAMILY.

COY COX: So, Bill and Peggy were murdered by someone that we believe they knew or knew them very well, or was very familiar with Bill and Peggy's habits, and we had lots of interviews to do just from figuring out who was doing life with Bill and Peggy every day. You know, maybe people they were taken to the grocery store or maybe people that were working in the ministry with Bill, so that opened up a lot of doors. And we had received from some information from folks close to the investigation that they described to two men who were, I don't want to say distant relation, but they weren't close relation, and uh, that they possibly were our suspects. They had committed crimes in another state, very serious crimes and had been in prison for quite some time, but both were out. And one of them actually had been in the Northern Kentucky area, where he is supposed to be reporting parole. We located these two individuals. We were able to determine, through written records, that they were both in another state at the time of the murders.

NARRATION:

MANY OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE BEEN INTERVIEWED, AND SEVERAL LEADS HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED, BUT DETECTIVES STILL CAN'T BUILD A STRONG ENOUGH CASE AGAINST ONE PARTICULAR SUSPECT.

COY COX: The part that makes this case difficult to solve is the fact that, typically when you have a murder case, and in my other murder cases, you can kind of look at it and go, "Okay, I think I can kind see why this happened." And you just kind of have to prove A) what happened, and B) who did it. In this case, because of the complexity of it, rather than just saying, "Okay,

we have to determine what happened and who did it,” we have to determine what happened, who did it, and how do we overcome what they have made it look like happened? And who they made it look like did it?

NARRATION:

INVESTIGATORS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO DO THAT FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS, BUT STILL HAVEN'T GIVEN UP.

COY COX: This case is definitely not a cold case. It is an old case. It's 10 years old at this point in time, but it definitely is not a cold case. We are committed to getting this case solved. This homicide case is one that has been very troubling and sticks with our community each and every day. I can tell you, it has physically, emotionally, and mentally taken a toll on these family members. And each of them, you know, they have a different way of coping with it, but it's changed all of their lives. And in this case, that's the difficult part.

BETH STEPHENSON-VICTOR: The toll it has taken is, speaking for myself, I'm much more cautious as to who I talk to and what I do. Just within the last two years, I've been able to keep our blinds open in our living room at home. I haven't been able to do that for a long time. And to sit there with the blinds open is a big deal. And it just really, it wears you down. It just, it just really wears you down. But I think the case will be solved. It's just going to take the right person hearing something, hearing someone say something, even if they think it doesn't mean anything. It's just going to take one person calling in and giving that tip. That's all it's going to take.

COY COX: Someone out there knows something. Just give us a call. There's a family that is hurting and prays day in and day out that they will have answers in this case. And that's what we're hoping for.

NARRATION:

THE MURDER OF BILL AND PEGGY STEPHENSON ON MAY 29TH, 2011 IN FLORENCE, KENTUCKY HAS REMAINED UNSOLVED FOR MORE THAN A DECADE. THE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT, AND THE STEPHENSON FAMILY NEEDS YOUR HELP. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THESE HOMICIDES, PLEASE CONTACT THE BOONE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE AT 859-334-8496, OR GO TO UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

ASHLEY STILSON: She just walked from school back to her apartment and something happened, and then she was gone. She's still gone and there's still no answers, and that's hard.

Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13. It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 46 of Unsolved Mysteries.