

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | THE PROFESSOR'S EXECUTION

EP55 Transcript

SANDRA LANGE: The only reason Matthew is dead is 'cuz somebody chose to kill him. They thought they had the right to do this, and they didn't. Evil is not supposed to win.

DAVID LANGE: They only have one conclusion and it's that he was scheduled to be executed.

NARRATION:

MATTHEW LANGE WAS A 37-YEAR-OLD COLLEGE PROFESSOR, THE FATHER OF A FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON, AND A MEMBER OF A CLOSE-KNIT FAMILY OF EDUCATORS, LIVING NEAR THE UPSCALE CHICAGO SUBURB OF NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS. TO EVERYONE WHO KNEW HIM, HE WAS A DEVOTED DAD AND SHINING ROLE MODEL FOR HIS STUDENTS. SO WHY WAS MATTHEW GUNNED DOWN OUTSIDE HIS SON'S SCHOOL? WHO WANTED HIM DEAD?

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "THE PROFESSOR'S EXECUTION."

IT'S THE EVENING OF FRIDAY, JANUARY 27TH, 2017 WHEN POLICE ARE NOTIFIED ABOUT AN EMERGENCY IN THE PARKING LOT OF THE SCULLEN MIDDLE SCHOOL LOCATED IN NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS.

ERIN GIBLER: The 911 call came into the Naperville Police dispatch center shortly after 7:00 PM. It was initially reported as a possible traffic accident with injuries.

NARRATION:

SERGEANT ERIN GIBLER IS WITH THE NAPERVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT. SHE WAS ON CALL THAT EVENING, AND ONE OF THE FIRST TO ARRIVE TO THE SCENE.

ERIN GIBLER: The subjects who contacted 911, they had seen Matthew's vehicle parked on the south side of the school with Matthew still seated in the vehicle. They approached the vehicle and attempted to speak to Matthew, and when they realized that he was injured, they went back into the school and contacted 911. Upon arrival of the first officers on scene, it was apparent that this was not a traffic crash. Matthew was still seated in the car when we arrived and suffered multiple gunshot wounds. He was then removed from the car by medical personnel and transported to Edward Hospital.

NARRATION:

BUT THERE'S NOTHING DOCTORS CAN DO. THE BULLET WOUNDS TO MATTHEW'S HEAD AND CHEST ARE FATAL, AND HE DIES BEFORE HE EVEN REACHES THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

ERIN GIBLER: In the very early stages of this investigation, I'm talking maybe the first 15 to 20 minutes, it was quite apparent that this was a homicide due to the shell casings being located outside of the vehicle, on the ground, and for the fact that no one else was struck. We had no

other subjects injured and we knew that it was not a suicide, and the strangest part of this case is that this crime appeared to be targeted.

NARRATION:

IT'S NOT LONG BEFORE NEWS CREWS CONVERGE ON THE CRIME SCENE, REPORTING THAT THERE'S BEEN A MURDER IN THE USUALLY VERY QUIET, VERY SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD OF NAPERVILLE. MATTHEW'S PARENTS, DAVID AND SANDRA LANGE, ARE GETTING READY FOR BED AND, AS USUAL, HAVE THE 10 O'CLOCK NEWS ON IN THE BACKGROUND.

DAVID LANGE: My wife and I were at home, and heard on the, on the news that there was a shooting at Scullen Middle School.

SANDRA LANGE: I was on the couch, out in the living room, and he came out and he said that there'd been a shooting at Scullen. Well, we knew instantly it had to be Matthew. I mean there was no doubt in our mind whatsoever.

DAVID LANGE: It was, you know, it's hard to explain. We just, we just knew. I got in the car and went to his condo while my wife stayed home.

SANDRA LANGE: I started trying to call Matthew on the phone and I, I don't know how many times I dialed it, but I dialed it and dialed it and no answer, no answer. So, then I thought, okay, I'll call the Naperville police. And I went through their whole spiel, you know, we heard there was a shooting. We have reason to believe it was our son. And she said, "If it had been your son, you would've been told already." And I hung up and I thought, she doesn't know what she's talking about.

DAVID LANGE: I got to his condo and he wasn't there, and I continued on to the school and I couldn't really get close 'cuz the police, there was a police officer kind of holding people back. And, and, I told him what my situation was and then I guess our worst fears were confirmed at that time. It was just hard to describe.

NARRATION:

DAVID LANGE IS GIVEN THE SHOCKING NEWS THAT HIS SON MATTHEW IS DEAD — THAT HE'S BEEN AMBUSHED WHILE SITTING IN HIS CAR.

DAVID LANGE: The police described somebody coming and shooting through his driver's side window. And as Matt tried for the other door, someone went around to the other side and shot through the passenger window as well.

NARRATION:

OVERCOME WITH SORROW, DAVID CALLS HIS WIFE SANDRA, AND THE TWO ARE BROUGHT TO THE POLICE STATION. THEY SPEND HOURS WITH INVESTIGATORS, GIVING AS MUCH BACKGROUND ABOUT THEIR SON AS THEY CAN THROUGH THE HAZE OF THEIR GRIEF.

SANDRA LANGE: Matthew, he was about six feet tall, brown hair, blue eyes, kind of, well, I don't know how to describe him. He was just Matthew.

DAVID LANGE: He was a really happy child. He just enjoyed sports, playing basketball in our driveway with me. And he was in the band in high school, all throughout high school, played the trombone. And he just kind of, really always had a love for the theater, I guess. But he always liked to be the stage crew guy in, even in fifth grade, he liked to be behind the scenes and doing things. And he belonged to the stagehand union there, which took him around to a lot of different places, working shows in Chicago. And he really enjoyed working the theater.

NARRATION:

BESIDES HIS LOVE FOR THE THEATER, IN COLLEGE, MATTHEW DISCOVERED A PASSION FOR PSYCHOLOGY AND BECAME DOCTOR MATTHEW LANGE, RECEIVING HIS DOCTORATE FROM NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY IN 2015.

DAVID LANGE: Matthew was working at Lewis University in the Joliet area in Illinois. He always referred to that as his dream job. He was an assistant professor there in psychology and while he was at the university, he continued to work his stage crew jobs.

NARRATION:

IN 2006, AT THE AGE OF 26, MATTHEW WAS THOROUGHLY ENJOYING HIS CAREER AND HOBBIES AND HE'S STILL SINGLE. BUT THAT CHANGES WHEN HE RUNS INTO A FORMER STUDENT WHO INVITES HIM OUT FOR A CUP OF COFFEE. SHE'S AN ATTRACTIVE, SMART, AND QUIRKY RECENT IMMIGRANT FROM POLAND, LIVING WITH HER FAMILY IN NEARBY YORKVILLE.

DAVID LANGE: He really liked her. He said that, uh, she reminded him a lot of himself and that, you know, Matt kind of thought he was, he was kind of nerdy and silly. And so, he liked that about her as well. And they kind of got it together and started dating.

SANDRA LANGE: We really liked her. She was very nice to us. Her and Matthew got along really well. They joked a lot. They laughed a lot. They were really cute together.

DAVID LANGE: It took almost two years before they got engaged. And before they got married, the mother-in-law-to-be told Matthew, that his wife-to-be was here in the, uh, United States illegally but that they were working on it and it'd all be taken care of and straightened out, and there wouldn't be any problems whatsoever. So, this was, uh, a week before the wedding was to take place that he found this out.

NARRATION:

THEY WERE MARRIED IN SEPTEMBER OF 2009, AND TWO YEARS LATER MATT AND HIS BRIDE ANNOUNCE THEY'RE PREGNANT WITH THEIR FIRST CHILD — AND IT'S A BOY.

DAVID LANGE: They were very happy. Matthew was ecstatic. That's about all I can say. He just was over the top.

SANDRA LANGE: Anytime you would see Matthew looking at his son, he would have this little smile on his face. And you could just tell how much he loved his son.

DAVID LANGE: Matthew was a terrific father. I remember him saying how he, uh, often would sleep on the floor by his son's crib to help him get to sleep at night. He was just such a terrific father with his little boy.

NARRATION:

BUT SHORTLY AFTER THE BIRTH OF THEIR SON, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT MATTHEW'S WIFE'S IMMIGRATION STATUS IS NOT GOING TO EASILY BE RESOLVED. MATTHEW LEARNS THAT, BECAUSE HIS WIFE IS IN THE COUNTRY ILLEGALLY, EVEN AS HER HUSBAND, THERE'S LITTLE HE CAN DO TO KEEP HER IN THE U.S. SHE'LL HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY AND MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO RETURN FOR YEARS. WHAT MATTHEW DOESN'T KNOW AT THE TIME IS THAT THERE ARE LAWS THAT PROTECT IMMIGRANT SPOUSES WHO ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. SO, WHEN HIS WIFE SUDDENLY STARTS MAKING FALSE ACCUSATIONS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AGAINST HIM, HE'S SURPRISED AND CONFUSED. THEN, WHEN THE ACCUSATIONS SHOW NO SIGN OF STOPPING, THE MARRIAGE FALLS APART AND MATTHEW FILES FOR DIVORCE.

DAVID LANGE: It took a couple years, took August of '13 to October of '15 for the divorce to become finalized. The divorce was a very challenging time in Matt's life. He just handled himself so well. When the divorce was finalized, it was shared custody, and Matthew was given power over making the educational decisions for his son. And also, he was in charge of making any medical or psychological decisions for his son. My son's ex-wife, I think it's safe to say she was very unhappy, and her family was unhappy as well. They did not get what they envisioned, I think, at the start of this.

NARRATION:

AS PART OF THEIR CUSTODY AGREEMENT, MATTHEW AND HIS EX-WIFE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO PICK UP THEIR SON OR DROP HIM OFF AT EACH OTHER'S HOMES. THE "HAND OFF" NEEDS TO HAPPEN IN A PUBLIC PLACE, USUALLY THE PARKING LOT OF THE LOCAL POLICE STATION. BUT THERE'S ONE EXCEPTION TO THAT RULE. EVERY OTHER FRIDAY NIGHT, MATTHEW PICKS UP HIS SON DIRECTLY FROM THE LOCATION WHERE THE BOY ATTENDS A POLISH CULTURAL CLASS.

DAVID LANGE: Our grandson was in the Polish Cultural School since he was two years old. My son's ex-wife was from Poland and was allowed the one item of Polish education, which was the Polish Cultural School. She felt that Polish culture was important for them to maintain with their son and Matthew had no objection to it. He was fine with it.

NARRATION:

THE POLISH CULTURAL SCHOOL CONVENES EVERY FRIDAY EVENING ON THE CAMPUS OF THE SCULLEN MIDDLE SCHOOL BETWEEN THE HOURS OF FIVE AND EIGHT. BECAUSE HIS SON IS SO YOUNG, ONLY FOUR YEARS OLD, MATTHEW PICKS HIM UP EARLY EVERY OTHER FRIDAY FOR HIS WEEKEND VISITATION, ALWAYS AT 7 PM. FRIDAY, JANUARY 27TH, 2017, IS THE BEGINNING OF

MATTHEW'S VISITATION WEEKEND AND, AS USUAL, HE'S MADE PLANS FOR THINGS THEY'LL DO TOGETHER, WHICH INCLUDE A VISIT TO A HOUSE MATTHEW HAS JUST PURCHASED.

SANDRA LANGE: Matthew, we'd seen the Thursday before the Friday he was murdered, and we had lunch together and he was so excited. He was talking about going to do the walkthrough on Sunday and he was just really excited about it and that's the last time we saw him.

ERIN GIBLER: On that particular Friday, Matthew worked that day. He left work. He came home. He followed his normal routine of going to the gym, going to grocery store, kind of getting ready for that weekend with his son and left his house at the normal time to pick his son up.

DAVID LANGE: He was always there probably about quarter to seven, 10 to seven. He was like clockwork. He was always in the same spot, ready to walk in at seven o'clock and get his son.

NARRATION:

ON THIS PARTICULAR FRIDAY EVENING, THERE ARE AN UNUSUAL NUMBER OF CARS PARKED ON THE CAMPUS. THE SCHOOL IS HOLDING GRANDPARENT'S NIGHT AND BY 7 PM, AROUND 150 PEOPLE ARE GATHERED INSIDE THE SCHOOL'S GYMNASIUM FOR THE EVENT. NO ONE IS OUTSIDE IN THE PARKING LOT WHEN MATTHEW ARRIVES.

ERIN GIBLER: On that particular night, it was January 27th at seven o'clock at night in Chicago. So, it was very cold. It was windy and it was dark. It's not very well lit there in the parking lot, and Matthew Lange's vehicle was parked on the south side of this middle school, probably 50 to 60 feet from the front door.

NARRATION:

ACCORDING TO POLICE, WHILE THE FESTIVITIES ARE GOING ON INSIDE THE SCHOOL, MATTHEW IS PATIENTLY WAITING IN HIS CAR, UNAWARE THAT A SHOOTER... OR SHOOTERS, ARE WALKING UP BEHIND HIM. THEY FIRE THEIR FIRST ROUNDS, SHATTERING THE DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW. DESPITE BEING HIT, MATTHEW MANAGES TO PULL HIMSELF TOWARD THE PASSENGER'S SEAT IN THE CAR, BUT THE KILLER IS ALREADY THERE, FIRING THROUGH THE WINDOW, HITTING MATTHEW SEVERAL MORE TIMES. INVESTIGATORS ARE OPTIMISTIC THAT BY QUESTIONING THE 150 PEOPLE ATTENDING THE EVENT THAT NIGHT, THEY'LL FIND SOMEONE WHO WITNESSED THE AMBUSH OR HEARD THE RAPID FIRE OF BULLETS.

ERIN GIBLER: This is a middle school in a very good, safe community outside of Chicago, and we really are relying on the fact that we could find a subject who saw or heard something. They would've all been gathered in the gymnasium of the school, which was on the opposite end of the school where Matthew Lange's car was parked. We took statements from subjects if they did hear or see anything, and then we followed up with all 150 of those subjects. But we got very limited information from the subjects at the school.

DAVID LANGE: The police said they interviewed over a hundred people. They checked for camera footage, like Ring doorbells or whatever in the neighborhood, but there was nothing that showed up on anybody's cameras. So, it was very disappointing that nothing came up.

NARRATION:

WITH NO SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE OR WITNESSES WHO SAW OR HEARD THE CRIME, DETECTIVES DIVE INTO DETAILS OF MATTHEW'S BACKGROUND BY INTERVIEWING FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND CO-WORKERS.

ERIN GIBLER: Through our research on his background, he did not owe anyone money. He did not have a gambling, alcohol, or drug problem. He was a father, a son, a brother, a friend, and a professor at a local university who also worked part-time at a theater. This was not your typical violent crime victim. One of the theories we explored was the idea that this could have been a robbery or a carjacking attempt, but through our investigation, we had learned that Matthew Lange never carried large amounts of cash on him, and he drove a very simple Hyundai, nothing flashy, and he was still using an iPod to listen to music in his car and had a flip phone. That did not sound like someone who would be targeted for a robbery or a carjacking. We have investigated if there was a student or a colleague that was angry with Matthew about something, if he was dating anyone, or had dated someone that could have done this, but all of those theories have led us nowhere. He had never been in a physical fight. This is a guy who pretty much led a life by the book.

NARRATION:

AFTER RULING OUT MOST THEORIES, POLICE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT MATTHEW'S MURDER WAS CALCULATED, PREMEDITATED — AND PERSONAL.

ERIN GIBLER: We don't know if Matthew Lange knew his assailant or saw his assailant coming. We believe that this was an intentional and deliberate act.

SANDRA LANGE: The police, right away, said it was targeted, that it was not a random shooting. We feel that it was probably a hired person to come shoot Matthew.

NARRATION:

IN THEIR INTERVIEWS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, INVESTIGATORS HOPE TO IDENTIFY SOMEONE WHO MIGHT HAVE MOTIVE FOR MURDER. THEY LEARN THAT IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO THE SHOOTING, MATTHEW ACTUALLY EXPRESSED CONCERN FOR HIS SAFETY.

DAVID LANGE: He was unsettled that he kept thinking something was going to happen. He didn't know who or what, but Matthew took to putting a brace on his door at the condo in the few months before the murder happened. And we, we asked him and was there any break-ins in the area he was concerned about or...? No, he just was "starting to feel a bit unsafe," he said.

SANDRA LANGE: We had been concerned about Matthew's safety. We know he had concerns. We had talked to Matthew about being safe and we worried about things happening to him.

Make sure you're watching. Come home a different way all the time. Don't take the same route. I know he was concerned about it.

ERIN GIBLER: While speaking to numerous people that he was friends with and that he worked with at the theater, we learned that he would talk about his lengthy divorce and child custody battle with his ex-wife, and we know that it frustrated and angered his ex-wife and her family. And that Matthew had expressed that he was fearful of his ex-wife and her family.

NARRATION:

BUT WHY THE CONCERN? THE DIVORCE IS NOW TWO YEARS IN THE PAST AND THE CUSTODY DISPUTES HAVE BEEN SETTLED.

SANDRA LANGE: Matthew was in the process of purchasing a house for him and his son. They were both very excited about this. They had gone on house hunts together and the purchase was gonna be in just a few weeks.

NARRATION:

THE HOUSE MATTHEW WAS PLANNING TO BUY WAS IN OSWEGO, ABOUT 20 MINUTES AWAY FROM HIS EX-WIFE'S HOME. HE PLANNED TO ENROLL HIS SON IN KINDERGARTEN AT THE LOCAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND ACCORDING TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS, MATTHEW'S EX-WIFE WAS NOT HAPPY ABOUT THAT DECISION.

ERIN GIBLER: Matthew's ex-wife was interviewed on scene. She did provide detailed background information on their relationship and current status, but she and her family have not been cooperative since that initial interview at the school. There are some people in the family that have provided statements to us throughout the investigation, more early on than later, but most of the family members have been uncooperative since the initial stages of this investigation.

NARRATION:

THE LANGE FAMILY AND POLICE CONTINUE TO HOPE THAT AFTER FIVE YEARS, SOMEONE WILL FINALLY COME FORWARD WITH A LEAD, TO CLOSE THE BOOKS ON THIS CASE.

ERIN GIBLER: We believe that somebody in that school, or several people in that school, may have seen or heard something that they have not reported yet. We don't know if that's due to fear, or their culture, or even sometimes through our investigations, we run across witnesses that don't report something, 'cuz they feel like, "Oh, somebody else already reported that." We have realized and learned through the last five years of this investigation that the Polish community is extremely tight knit, and that night was extremely frightening for a lot of them that were there at the school, and that some people at the school are just scared to come forward with information when they already know there was one homicide that took place. We want to assure them not to be afraid and know that they can come forward and remain anonymous and that it is the right time to come forward and help us solve this senseless crime. It's been a long five years and I know the answers are out there. And when I speak with the

Langes, I can feel their heart break every single time I tell them that we don't have information, or that we aren't ready to solve this case.

NARRATION:

SINCE MATTHEW'S DEATH, DAVID AND SANDRA LANGE HAVE BEEN SEEING THEIR GRANDSON FOR A FEW HOURS EVERY OTHER SUNDAY. IT'S AN IMPORTANT TIME FOR THEM, NOT ONLY TO STAY CONNECTED TO THEIR GRANDCHILD, BUT TO HELP KEEP MATTHEW'S MEMORY ALIVE FOR HIS SON.

DAVID LANGE: He's nine and a half now, and when we look at our grandson, he reminds us so much of Matthew, just the way he conducts himself, things he says, his sense of humor. He had just been told that Daddy went to the stars. So, you know, for a four-and-a-half-year-old, that's probably all he needed to hear. I said, "That's right, he's up in the sky now watching over you." And then he asked me, "Am I going to the stars?" And I said, "Oh, no. Not now. Daddy's gonna take care of you and watch over you and make sure everything works out for you." We have kept Matthew alive as well as we possibly can. My wife and I have made a number of picture books for him. We called it Remembering Daddy. He's read that a couple of times.

SANDRA LANGE: Matthew's birthday is in June and so is Father's Day. So, each year we do get balloons and we write little messages and we send them off. It's just a little ceremony. He just writes one or two little sentences, and that's what we do once a year.

NARRATION:

SANDRA AND DAVID LANGE HOPE THAT SOMEDAY THEIR GRANDSON WILL FINALLY KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS FATHER.

DAVID LANGE: We lost Matthew, uh, January 27th of '17. It's extremely hard. I still have nights where I just replay it. Just hard to sleep some nights. We definitely believe there are people who know things that happened that night. Why and how and who, and we just hope that somebody's gonna get a conscience eventually. If somebody out there is listening that knows what happened to Matthew, just please come forward. Please just tell the police what you know. It's so important. Not for us, but for his son to maybe have some closure someday.

SANDRA LANGE: Evil is not supposed to win. The only reason Matthew is dead is 'cuz somebody chose to kill him. And they thought they had the right to do this, and they didn't. They need to be arrested, so we need any help we can get. Just one tip could do it.

NARRATION:

MATTHEW LANGE WAS SHOT AND KILLED ON JANUARY 27TH, 2017 IN THE PARKING LOT NEAR THE SCULLEN MIDDLE SCHOOL IN NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS AROUND 7PM. HE WAS SITTING IN HIS SILVER 2013 HYUNDAI ELANTRA AT THE TIME OF THE SHOOTING. THERE IS CURRENTLY A \$50,000 REWARD FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST AND CONVICTION OF THE PERSON OR PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR MATTHEW LANGE'S DEATH. IF YOU HAVE ANY

INFORMATION ABOUT THE MURDER OF MATTHEW LANGE, PLEASE CALL THE NAPERVILLE CRIME STOPPERS TIP LINE AT (630) 420-6006 OR CONTACT UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

JAMIE PULLEY: From the very moment that mom called me and, uh, told me that Tabitha didn't make it to school that day, I knew something was wrong because Tabitha followed the rules. Come straight home, go straight to the bus. In that current moment, I felt that she was taken, and she wasn't taken by good people.

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Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13, an Audacy company.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 55 of Unsolved Mysteries.