

## THE UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | ISLAND JUSTICE

### Ep 58 Transcript

ANDREA GIBBON: Desiree always said to me she would die young. She says, "I don't think it's a car accident, Mom, but it's gonna be tragic. I'm gonna die when I'm young, so you gotta be prepared. Just know that it's gonna happen." And I used to tell her, "Des, don't talk like that. A mother doesn't bury her child. It's not right."

NARRATION:

IT'S THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2017. THANKSGIVING EVENING. 26-YEAR-OLD DESIREE GIBBON IS ON VACATION IN MONTEGO BAY, JAMAICA, STAYING AT HER GRANDMOTHER'S BED-AND-BREAKFAST. AT ABOUT 11:30 PM SHE HEADS DOWNSTAIRS, TELLING THE SECURITY GUARD SHE'LL BE RIGHT BACK, BUT SHE NEVER RETURNS. THREE DAYS LATER, HER BODY IS DISCOVERED AT THE SIDE OF AN ABANDONED JUNGLE ROAD. NOW, OVER FIVE YEARS LATER, DESIREE'S MOTHER, ANDREA, IS STILL SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO HER DAUGHTER THAT DARK NOVEMBER NIGHT.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "ISLAND JUSTICE."

NARRATION:

ON TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 28, 2017, ANDREA GIBBON IS ABOUT TO BEGIN A MEETING IN A CONFERENCE ROOM AT THE LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY WHERE SHE WORKS IN QUEENS, NEW YORK. AS SHE TAKES A SEAT, HER CELL PHONE RINGS. IT'S A JAMAICAN NUMBER AND SHE ASSUMES IT'S HER DAUGHTER DESIREE, WHO'S BEEN VACATIONING IN MONTEGO BAY FOR THE PAST MONTH. SHE HASN'T SPOKEN TO HER IN ABOUT FIVE DAYS AND THEY ALWAYS KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH.

ANDREA GIBBON: I spoke to her last about 9:30 PM. And, you know, I asked her how the day was. She told me they did have a Thanksgiving dinner and a lot of her family came that she hadn't met before. I didn't speak to her again after we said our goodbyes for the night, didn't hear from her on Friday. But I was not worried, because in my recollection, there were sometimes a day or two would go by and we didn't physically speak.

NARRATION:

ANDREA PICKS UP THE PHONE EXPECTING TO HEAR HER DAUGHTER'S SWEET VOICE, BUT INSTEAD SHE'S SURPRISED TO HEAR THE GRUFF TONE OF HER HUSBAND'S BROTHER, CLAUDE, WHO RUNS THE BED AND BREAKFAST IN MONTEGO BAY, WHERE DESIREE HAS BEEN STAYING.

ANDREA GIBBON: And I hear her uncle and he is like, "Uh, yeah, are you at work?" I'm like, "Yes." And he's like, "I need you to go home and call me back on this number. Something has happened." And I'm like, "What? Where is Desiree?" He said, "Just go home and call me." My first reaction was maybe they had a fight, because they were not getting along. So, then I text my husband and I said to him, "Your brother just called me. Where is Desiree? What is going on?" So, then he sends me a text message and the text read, "My mother just told me they fucking killed my daughter." I'm sitting in this meeting,

nothing is registering, and I'm looking around. I can't breathe. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do.

NARRATION:

ANDREA LEAVES WORK IN A DAZE AND HEADS TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW'S NEW YORK HOME WHERE THE FAMILY IS STARTING TO GATHER. WHEN SHE WALKS IN THE DOOR, HER HUSBAND HANDS HER HIS PHONE.

ANDREA GIBBON: There was a detective on the phone. And the detective said to me, "Good morning, Mrs. Gibbon, how are you?" I'm like, "Don't ask me how I am. How is my daughter?" They told me somebody murdered her. What happened? He says, "Yes, that is true. We found your daughter on the side of the street, in the bush with her throat cut."

NARRATION:

ANDREA CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT SHE'S HEARING. SHE HAD JUST SPOKEN TO DESIREE A FEW DAYS BEFORE. HOW CAN HER BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER BE DEAD?

ANDREA GIBBON: Desiree was a petite little thing. She was about five foot two, maybe 110 pounds. Her personality was, you know, 10 times the size that she was. She was a social butterfly. She wanted to make people happy and make them laugh, and she had the best sense of humor and just all around, that shining light when she walked in the room. Desiree was about a year and a half when we were stopped in the street, in the city, and was approached by this talent scout. They literally signed her right on the spot. She started working by the next day.

NARRATION:

FOR OVER 20 YEARS, DESIREE WORKED AS A MODEL AND AN ACTRESS IN MULTIPLE PRINT ADS AND ON THE TV SERIES "BLUES CLUES." BUT WHEN SHE REACHED HER MID-20S, SHE BEGAN TO RETHINK HER CAREER PATH.

ANDREA GIBBON: As she got older, having done this in front of the camera, she kind of shifted and thought that she really wanted to make documentaries, and she always said that if any job she could have in this lifetime, it would be Anthony Bourdain's job. She wanted to travel to all parts of the world and just do exactly what he did — experience the culture and bring it back home and share it with people.

NARRATION:

DESIREE HAS MADE PLANS TO ATTEND FILM SCHOOL IN EUROPE, BUT BEFORE BEGINNING THAT NEXT PHASE OF HER LIFE, SHE DECIDES TO UNWIND FOR A MONTH ON THE ISLAND OF JAMAICA, WHERE HER FAMILY OWNS A SMALL HOTEL CALLED THE GIBB CHATEAU THAT'S RUN BY HER UNCLE. IT'S A PLACE DESIREE OFTEN VISITED AS A CHILD.

ANDREA GIBBON: She was not a stranger to Jamaica. She knew the area. She knew people. She had family members down there, and it seemed that the more she went out of the hotel, to the downtown

area, the more people she would meet and, because she was such a ray of sunshine, people were attracted to her, just on the personality and, you know, how she treated people, and she was so happy.

NEWS REPORT: The family of model and aspiring filmmaker Desiree Gibbon is in their Queens home without closure. The 26-year-old's body is 1500 miles away in Jamaica where she was found murdered in a small town outside the resort her grandmother owns in Montego Bay.

MARY MURPHY: It was shortly after Thanksgiving in 2017. We saw this beautiful photo on the front page of the daily news.

NARRATION:

MARY MURPHY IS AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER AT PIX11 NEWS IN NEW YORK CITY.

MARY MURPHY: It was Desiree Gibbon from Queens, 26 years old, really stunning. She was a biracial model. She grew up in the same town that I did. She went to Catholic school like I did. So, I was intrigued by this case from the beginning, and I wanted to know what happened to a young woman in paradise. Montego Bay is a very popular tourist destination for Americans and people from other parts of the world. Desiree arrived there October 20th, 2017. Her plan was to stay for about a month. Desiree was in Jamaica for about three weeks before she was murdered. She had made plans to return home about a week later. So, by the time her mother and father found out that she had been killed, it was just a few days before she was supposed to return home to Queens.

NARRATION:

THE SATURDAY AFTER ANDREA AND HER HUSBAND GAIRY HEAR THE DEVASTATING NEWS THAT THEIR DAUGHTER HAS BEEN MURDERED, THEY GET ON THE NEXT FLIGHT TO JAMAICA. THEY WANT ANSWERS, BUT ENCOUNTER ROADBLOCKS AT EVERY TURN.

ANDREA GIBBON: When we got there, I was told that the waiting list for autopsy was, I think, two months. It's a small island and they only have one pathologist for the whole island for autopsies, and I said, "This is impossible. It cannot be. I'm not waiting two months for an autopsy for this American child who was killed in Jamaica." So, we made some phone calls, spoke to the embassy. The embassy was able to expedite her autopsy for the next week. But, before the autopsy could begin, we had to go identify her body. And they took me over to where there was a body in a black bag, and it was unzipped just below the chin. So, you couldn't see anything more than that. And I could see some strings of hair hanging out and I'm looking at this person who looked like an old lady, really dark-skinned black, with orange curly pieces of hair. And I said, "Where's Desiree? Take me to my daughter." And they're going, "Mrs. Gibbon, this is your daughter." So, I'm looking at her nose and you know, she had a really distinguished nose, like you couldn't miss it. And then I'm looking at her ears. I'm going, "Oh my God. This is Desiree." And from what I understood, I sat outside rocking back and forth for like two hours.

NARRATION:

IT ISN'T UNTIL THE GIBBON FAMILY FINALLY RECEIVES A COPY OF THE PATHOLOGY REPORT THAT THEY LEARN THE SHOCKING DETAILS OF DESIREE'S VICIOUS MURDER.

ANDREA GIBBON: They had actually severed her spinal cord when they cut her neck. They do think it's a left-hand person that did it, from the way that they observed the cut. There was definitely a struggle. She had defensive wounds on her. She had knife marks on her forearms and on her hands. It appears that she was killed execution style because she, from what they were telling me, was down on her knees, cause her knees were all, like, graveled up. She was not sexually assaulted.

MARY MURPHY: This was not a typical strangulation or just a beating. The report apparently indicated that the wound to the neck was like a chop wound. So, who knows what was used? Was it an ax? Was it a machete?

NARRATION:

THE GIBBONS ARE HORRIFIED. WHO COULD POSSIBLY DO THIS TO THEIR DAUGHTER? THEY REACH OUT TO THE LOCAL DETECTIVES AND ARE TOLD THEY HAVE NO ANSWERS YET, AND THEY ARE UNWILLING TO SHARE ANY INFORMATION THEY DO HAVE. SO, ANDREA STARTS SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS ON HER OWN.

ANDREA GIBBON: We went to the surveillance video of the hotel to kind of track Desiree's last movements. We saw her come down from her hotel room at 11:25 PM. We watched her come out of her room, go down the stairs, go down the corridor, and stop at the security desk. And you could see her on her phone, which appeared to be her iPhone, and she kept looking out the door, looking at her phone, talking to the security guard. And she was there maybe, I don't know, a minute or so. She ended up going back up to her room, and she came back down at 11:27. And when she came back down, the only difference in her attire at that time is that she put on a pair of clear sunglasses on the top of her head. She said to the guard, "Oh, I'll be right back." She walked out the door. She walked to the end of the driveway, and she made a left and, again, she's walking like not a care in the world.

MARY MURPHY: What we're being told is that any other camera in the area did not pick up her movement, which seems curious to me, because certainly there were a lot of surveillance cameras around in 2017. We don't know if she was pulled into a car. We don't know what happened after she made that left turn, and the authorities have not been forthcoming about that. All the authorities are telling us is that eyewitnesses do not have much information to offer in terms of where she went and why she ended up four miles away in heavy brush in St. James parish. The place where Desiree's body was found is called Anchovy, and it's a small area, about four miles from Montego Bay. And her mother has pointed out that this is not a place where Desiree would've been hanging out.

ANDREA GIBBON: She didn't have any ID on her. The only thing that was found at the scene with her body was the one flip flop. The other flip flop is missing. The sunglasses were missing. The iPhone is missing. When they took pictures of her at the site, I believe it was just with her clothes on, her shirt and her shorts.

MARY MURPHY: When Desiree was found, no one knew who she was. They just knew she was badly, badly beaten and nearly decapitated. So, what happened was, the local police there took a photograph of Desiree, her dead body. That photograph of Desiree was taken around to all the local hotels. And

finally, someone arrived at Gibb Chateau, and I believe it was her uncle who identified her through the photograph.

**NARRATION:**

**AT THE GIBB CHATEAU, WHERE DESIREE WAS STAYING, THE GIBBONS SEARCH THEIR DAUGHTER'S ROOM LOOKING FOR ANY CLUE THAT MIGHT HELP WITH THE INVESTIGATION.**

**ANDREA GIBBON:** There was a duffle bag in her bathroom. And in that duffle bag, as I was cleaning it out, there was a cell phone. I'm like, oh my God, this is the cell phone that she bought in Jamaica because she did buy a local cell phone. I used my phone and took a picture of everything in that phone. So, all the incoming numbers, the outgoing numbers, whatever messages I saw there, and then we did call the detective and say, "Listen, we found one of her cell phones, in her room." So, he says, "Oh, okay, we'll come over and we'll pick it up." And he said to me that it would be sent to Kingston, for their laboratory in Kingston to review it. Later, I said, "What about the cell phone I gave you? What did you do with that information? Did you contact the people in there? I gave you names, there were phone numbers." Kingston said it, the phone was empty. There was nothing there. I said, "That's not true because I have all the pictures from that phone." So, I sent him all those pictures with all the phone numbers, the people's name. Everything. Still nothing.

**NARRATION:**

**ACCORDING TO THE JAMAICAN AUTHORITIES, THEIR SEARCH OF DESIREE'S CELL PHONE RECORDS HAS NOT PROVIDED ANY CLUES THAT COULD HELP THE INVESTIGATION.**

**NEWS REPORT:** The mother of the American woman who was found in bushes near Long Hills St. James two Saturdays ago says she's angry with the Jamaican government for what happened to her daughter. Andrea Gibbon says she's still seeking answers as to why her daughter, 26-year-old Desiree Gibbon was murdered on the island she loved.

**NARRATION:**

**ANDREA PRESSURES THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR ANY INFORMATION THEY HAVE THAT WILL GIVE THEM AN IDEA ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THEIR DAUGHTER, BUT DETECTIVES STILL REFUSE TO SHARE ANY LEADS. AFTER TWO WEEKS, THE GIBBONS RETURN TO NEW YORK WITH DESIREE'S BODY AND PERSONAL BELONGINGS, BUT WITH NO ANSWERS.**

**ANDREA GIBBON:** The police don't really have a theory when they just say that either she knew something, or she overheard something, or maybe somebody wanted her to do something that she didn't wanna do, like maybe come, you know, travel with something back to New York and she refused.

**MARY MURPHY:** The mother and the father were desperate for answers because the Jamaican authorities were not very forthcoming. After a few weeks, I was able to get through to one of the investigators in the major crimes division. You know, we heard the typical thing. "We don't wanna compromise the investigation. It's still very early." So, it was very hard to get any information.

NARRATION:

26-YEAR-OLD DESIREE GIBBON IS BURIED A WEEK AFTER HER BODY RETURNS TO NEW YORK.

ANDREA GIBBON: There are people that came for her services from all over the world that she had met. There's so many people that came, they shut down the funeral home. They gave no other services that day, only Desiree's service. They had blocked off streets.

NARRATION:

IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOW DESIREE'S BURIAL, ANDREA CONTINUES HER QUEST FOR ANSWERS BUT FINDS COMMUNICATION WITH JAMAICAN AUTHORITIES EVEN MORE CHALLENGING FROM NEW YORK. THEN, A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE MURDER, ANDREA'S SISTER, PEGGY, RECEIVES A CHILLING PHONE CALL. THE NAME ON THE SCREEN IS "DESIREE GIBBON" AND THE CALL IS FROM DESIREE'S IPHONE, WHICH NO ONE HAS SEEN SINCE THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED.

MARY MURPHY: Desiree was apparently using two phones. She had a local phone for Jamaica West Indies, and then she had an international number on her iPhone. The iPhone was never recovered. Peggy answered the phone and no one was speaking on the other end. And then hours later, that same night, about 11:30, the phone rang again. And it said Desi again, so someone had Desiree's cell phone weeks after the murder.

NARRATION:

BUT WHO HAS HER CELL PHONE, AND WHO WOULD WANT TO KILL DESIREE?

ANDREA GIBBON: My first thought is that her uncle killed her. He was not nice to her when she went down there. It became a fight every day that he was not treating her nice. She couldn't have the light on. She couldn't go in the kitchen and get her own food. She couldn't go to the linen and get her own linens. So it was just very, very bizarre. There were a number of times that I had to call her grandmother up here and I said, "Listen, tell your son to leave my daughter alone. She is 26 years old. He's not her father. Why is he torturing her?" His mother spoke to him, and he said, "Listen, while Desi's down there, teach her the hotel. Let her, teach her the office, teach her the business." So, he had gotten very upset and he said to his mother, "Well, just give the hotel to Desiree then." And Desiree was like, "Mom, he's so outta control. I don't want this little hotel. I don't want anything to do with it. I don't plan to live here. I'm just on a vacation." So, you know, we had felt then he became very jealous of her in that maybe his mother thought that, at some point in time, that she would leave this place to Desiree. I will tell you that, since Desiree's funeral, I have not heard from anybody in my husband's family, even though they have tremendous amount of family and people they know down there. Nobody has lifted a finger. Nobody has placed a phone call. Nobody has assisted with anything. Initially, my husband was also suspicious of his brother from conversations him and I had. He will deny that now. He will say, "No, I never thought that," but he originally did.

NARRATION:

THROUGHOUT THE FIRST YEAR OF THE INVESTIGATION, OTHER POTENTIAL SUSPECTS EMERGED.

MARY MURPHY: There was a man in a nightclub who had met Desiree and shown some interest in her. And apparently, she politely declined to date him. And then, she continued talking with another group of men and women. Did he have something to do with this?

ANDREA GIBBON: He is the heir to one of the beef patty chains down there, very wealthy. He was a nice guy. So, I don't know. I don't know if there's more to that or not, because again, the police won't share anything because these people are considered, they are called The Elite, and they are protected.

MARY MURPHY: There are so many unanswered questions, but certainly that's what makes this case so intriguing.

NARRATION:

TWO YEARS AFTER DESIREE'S DEATH, MARY MURPHY LEARNS FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES THAT DNA FROM TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE WAS FOUND ON DESIREE'S BODY.

MARY MURPHY: I did reach the major crimes division in Jamaica West Indies, near Montego Bay, and one of the inspectors there told me, "This is still very much an active investigation." And he confirmed the information about one male and one female DNA being found on the body. So that suggests a man and a woman were involved with this murder. Other than that, not much information has been given.

NARRATION:

BUT IF A MAN AND A WOMAN WERE INVOLVED IN DESIREE'S DEATH, WHAT WAS THEIR MOTIVE?

MARY MURPHY: Desiree's mother seems to feel that she was deliberately lured out of the hotel by someone who was very angry with her or perhaps jealous.

ANDREA GIBBON: I just feel like this was something that was precalculated. It was cold. It was a planned out. And I think they came with the intent to kill her that night.

MARY MURPHY: I have done other stories about Americans who went to Jamaica on holiday that ended up dead. Sometimes there was jealousy over real estate, over inheritances. Maybe some women were jealous of Desiree's beauty. You know, there could be this rivalry between New Yorkers with Jamaican roots and people that have lived on the island their whole life. What I've done is mostly on the New York end of things. I've tried to keep the case in the public arena by calling Jamaica West Indies, by letting the local authorities know that we care about this New Yorker who was killed and has still not received justice. I have managed to get through to the major crimes division a few times, but I do find that they don't wanna talk too much about the case. I've been covering crime for more than 30 years in New York City, so I've dealt a lot with big city justice. But in this case, I believe that Desiree's family is dealing with island justice. And I think there are a lot of relationships there between law enforcement and the locals, and relationships might be what's dictating the course of this investigation. I'm not sure that there's a will to solve the case. I don't know who the prime suspect is. If the prime suspect has a friend in the police department, could that dictate how this case is going to be investigated? I just think island justice works a lot different than big city justice. I just don't know how

much they want this case to stay alive, because hearing about a beautiful New York woman murdered there is not in the best interest of tourism.

ANDREA GIBBON: Everybody's life has gone on since Desiree was murdered, but I'm still stuck on that Thanksgiving Day in 2017 that I learned that my first-born child has been murdered. So, it's very difficult. At this point, I need answers. I need peace. I need to know who killed Desiree. I just really need to know.

NARRATION:

DESIREE GIBBON WAS FOUND MURDERED IN ANCHOVY, JAMAICA ON NOVEMBER 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2017. THERE IS A \$10,000 REWARD FOR ANY INFORMATION THAT LEADS TO THE CAPTURE OF DESIREE GIBBON'S KILLER OR KILLERS. IF YOU HAVE ANY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THIS CASE, PLEASE SUBMIT A TIP AT UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

SUZIE: I didn't talk about this to anybody until I was 50. And I didn't tell my family. I didn't tell my husband. I didn't tell my friends. I've kept this to myself, because people would call you crazy. This is so personal. I mean, who wants to go up to somebody and say, "Hey, yeah, I think aliens may have gestated something in my body." That sounds nuts.

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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 58 of Unsolved Mysteries.