

THE UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | THE BODY IN CEDAR CREEK

EP70 Transcript

SANDRA HALSNE: The first autopsy said that he drowned in two inches of water. He had a couple contusions, but they didn't X-ray him. I think they were very quick to say that Tyler drowned. Mitch was like, "I'll be honest with you, this is probably just a bad thing happened to a really good person, a bad accident." But when he saw what I had, when he saw the photos I had, he was like, "Something's wrong here."

NARRATION:

IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT IN GALESBURG, ILLINOIS, 200 MILES WEST OF CHICAGO. TYLER SMITH IS OUT LATE, BAR HOPPING WITH SOME FRIENDS. HE'S JUST CELEBRATED HIS 23rd BIRTHDAY AND IS ABOUT TO MAKE A BIG MOVE TO SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, WHERE HE'LL BEGIN HIS CAREER AS A POLICE OFFICER — A LIFELONG DREAM OF HIS. BUT BEFORE HE HEADS TO CALIFORNIA, TYLER, WHO'S BEEN IN THE NATIONAL GUARD FOR ALMOST FIVE YEARS, IS SCHEDULED TO ATTEND A FINAL ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD DRILL BEING HELD IN MACOMB, 170 MILES FROM HIS HOME IN ROCHELLE. HE'S TO REPORT TO THE NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY AT 7:30AM, BUT TYLER NEVER SHOWS UP AND THE FRIENDS HE WAS WITH THE NIGHT BEFORE HAVE NO IDEA WHERE HE IS.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "THE BODY IN CEDAR CREEK."

NARRATION:

ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2018, SANDRA HALSNE SAYS GOOD-BYE TO HER SON, 23-YEAR-OLD TYLER SMITH, AS HE HEADS OFF TO PARTICIPATE IN A NATIONAL GUARD DRILL IN MACOMB, ILLINOIS, TWO HOURS AWAY FROM THEIR HOME IN ROCHELLE. SINCE THE DRILL BEGINS PROMPTLY AT 7:30 AM, TYLER PLANS TO SPEND THE NIGHT AT THE HOME OF ONE OF HIS DRILL MATES, EVAN, WHO LIVES IN GALESBURG, A TOWN CLOSER TO MACOMB. HE LEAVES HIS HOUSE AROUND 4:30 PM.

SANDRA HALSNE: I just said, "Make sure you call me when you make it." And he called me, and he called his dad, and he just said, "We're headed out to go get something to eat." And then, that was the last time I got to talk to him. On Saturday the 15th, I got a text message from this person Tyler was supposed to stay with, and he just said, "Can you call me at this number right away?" So, I called it, and he just said, "Have you heard from Tyler?" And I'm like, "No, isn't he at drill?" Like, I texted him a couple of times. He never read the text. It got delivered, but I figured he was at drill and busy. He would not miss this drill. He was very disciplined when it came to doing what he was supposed to be doing. But the sergeants tried to get a hold of him, he's not responding. I said, "Well, that makes me concerned because that's not Tyler." We were in a panic.

NARRATION:

SANDRA AND TYLER'S FATHER, KEITH SMITH, IMMEDIATELY HEAD FOR GALESBURG, DESPERATELY CALLING TYLER'S FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY TO SEE IF ANYONE'S HEARD FROM HIM. THEY SPEAK WITH EVAN, THE FRIEND TYLER WAS STAYING WITH IN GALESBURG, WHO EXPLAINS THAT WHEN HE WENT OUT DRINKING WITH TYLER THE NIGHT BEFORE, HE GOT SO DRUNK THAT HE DOESN'T REMEMBER HOW AND WHERE HE GOT SEPARATED FROM TYLER. WHEN HE WOKE UP AT HIS HOME THE NEXT

MORNING, IT WAS CLEAR THAT TYLER HADN'T MADE IT BACK TO THE HOUSE — HIS CAR WAS STILL IN THE DRIVEWAY AND HIS BAG WAS UNTOUCHED. EVAN ASSUMED TYLER HAD GONE MISSING AND CALLED THE GALESBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT AROUND 11AM THAT MORNING. LATER THAT SATURDAY, AT ABOUT 7PM, SANDRA AND KEITH ARRIVE IN GALESBURG AND HEAD STRAIGHT TO THE POLICE STATION, HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT TYLER'S BEEN LOCATED AND THAT HE'S OKAY.

SANDRA HALSNE: I walked in, and I went straight to the desk and I said, "I need to speak to an officer." They said, "Well, just have a seat and we'll get an officer out here to talk to you as soon as we can. They're busy," and I just said, "Okay." And so, we were just, I couldn't even sit. I was just pacing, standing, pacing and then a pizza delivery man walked in, and he asked how our night was and I'm just like, "Not good." And he just says, "Oh, I'm so sorry." He goes, "I hope it's not related to the body they just found in Cedar Fork Creek." And I lost it. I then knew. I just knew it. My heart sunk. I dropped to the floor. I was hysterical. And then that's when they came out and they got us and they put us back in a room and we had to wait several hours. They'd asked if Tyler had any tattoos. They asked if he had any birthmarks or any scars, and come to find out why there were no police is because they were all at the scene. My son was being found basically about the time we came into Galesburg.

NARRATION:

JUST A FEW BLOCKS FROM THE GALESBURG POLICE STATION, TYLER SMITH'S BODY HAS BEEN FOUND FACE DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF CEDAR CREEK, A DRAINAGE CANAL THAT RUNS THE LENGTH OF THE TOWN. IT'S THE WORST NEWS A PARENT CAN RECEIVE.

SANDRA HALSNE: We were very close. We had a huge bond, and he was my best friend. I was very proud of him. Tyler was mixed raced — half black, half white. He was good looking, handsome, muscular. Loved sports, and he loved to laugh, and he had friends of all walks of life, and he always tried to help when he could. Tyler always wanted to be in the military. He said he wanted to be an army guy, and he also wanted to be a police officer. When he first told me he was going to join the military, I was like, "You do realize you're my only child..." And he just smiled and just said, "Oh mom, it'll be fine," you know. And as he went through school, he continued to push that way and he even went to college and got a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and a minor in Homeland Security. He was also in the Army National Guard. That was just what he wanted to do and he was going to make it happen. He had huge, huge dreams.

NARRATION:

WHEN TYLER GRADUATED FROM WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY IN MAY OF 2018, HE HAD ALREADY TAKEN STEPS TO ACHIEVE HIS GOAL OF BECOMING A POLICE OFFICER.

SANDRA HALSNE: He researched all the areas and different police stations and he came up with San Jose, California. He was one out of 5000 applicants, and they only took 50, and he was hired. And he told me, he's like, "I'm going to be the top one. I work hard. This is what I want." Everything was completed and he had worked so hard to get where he was at.

NARRATION:

AFTER RECEIVING THE NEWS OF THEIR SON'S TRAGIC DEATH, SANDRA AND KEITH FIGHT BACK OVERWHELMING GRIEF TO SEARCH FOR ANSWERS. HOW DID THEIR SON DIE? THEY ARE TOLD BY LAW ENFORCEMENT THAT TYLER DROWNED IN THE SHALLOW WATER IN THE DRAINAGE DITCH, AS A RESULT OF BEING INTOXICATED, AND HIS MANNER OF DEATH IS RULED AN ACCIDENT, PENDING AN EXAMINATION BY THE MEDICAL EXAMINER.

SANDRA HALSNE: After they told me it was him out there, I said, "Well, I want to see him." And they said, "No, you can't see him." And they just said his whole body's evidence. It's zip tied and the coroner's going to be taking him to a forensic pathologist. I was not getting any details. They sent in three or four patrolmen and they gave me his wallet and they just said, "Are you guys okay to drive?" And I'm just like, "So now what? Who do I follow up with here, because something's wrong." And they just gave me two business cards and said call them tomorrow. One was the detective on Tyler's case, and one was the coroner.

NARRATION:

WHEN THE RESULTS OF THE AUTOPSY COME IN, IT'S CONFIRMED THAT TYLER WAS INTOXICATED WHEN HE DIED. HIS BLOOD ALCOHOL WAS 0.246, THREE TIMES THE LEGAL LIMIT. THIS SUPPORTS THE DETECTIVE'S THEORY THAT THE YOUNG MAN WAS DRINKING WITH FRIENDS, GOT LOST, AND THEN PASSED OUT IN THE CREEK AND DROWNED. TO SANDRA, THE STORY DOESN'T FIT WITH TYLER'S TYPICAL SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY, BUT SHE HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO ACCEPT THE THEORY AND PROCEED WITH HER SON'S FUNERAL.

SANDRA HALSNE: I never got to see Tyler until he was embalmed and in his casket. When I got to see him the very first time, his cheek looked like it was four times the size it should be and he had scratches all over his face. He had scratches all over his hands and, what I could see, he had injuries.

NARRATION:

SEEING THE BATTERED CONDITION OF HER SON'S BODY, SANDRA REALIZES THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT'S "ACCIDENT" THEORY DOESN'T MAKE SENSE AND SHE REQUESTS THE PHOTOS FROM TYLER'S AUTOPSY.

SANDRA HALSNE: After I saw photos, I'm like, he's got injuries on both sides of his head. He had several injuries that weren't mentioned on his autopsy. Like, what's going on here? And they're just like, "Oh, that's just from decomposition, blah, blah, blah." I said, "No, that's not decomp. Those are injuries." Come to find out, nobody went to his autopsy. The detective didn't go. The coroner didn't go, and the pathologist was told he was found in a creek. And I'm assuming, just thought he drowned. So, she did, like, a 30-minute autopsy on him. They didn't X-Ray him. They didn't take samples from under his nails. She didn't even test the water to see if it came from where he was found. His clothes got thrown away, because no detective came to his autopsy to get that as evidence. It's just like, they completely just said he drowned. That's it, move on with your life. And, you know, sorry.

NARRATION:

BUT SANDRA CAN'T MOVE ON. WITH SO MANY QUESTIONS LEFT UNANSWERED, SHE DECIDES TO TAKE THE INVESTIGATION INTO HER OWN HANDS.

SANDRA HALSNE: So, I went to the police station and said, "Can we get a warrant for his phone records, his phone location records, because I can't get them. They have to come from the police or a judge from a warrant." And they're like, "No." And I said, "Why not? They're only good for a year. His location history could even give us more of a better timeline." The police, they were not interested. They were bound and determined that this was, just, he drowned and that was it. They weren't going to do any more. At that point, I was like, "I want to FOIA everything you have. I want pictures. I want scene pictures. I want everything."

NARRATION:

WITH THE HELP OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, ALSO KNOWN AS FOIA, SANDRA COLLECTS POLICE FILES, PHONE RECORDS, AND BANK INFORMATION AND USES IT ALL TO RETRACE TYLER'S MOVEMENTS THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 14, STARTING WITH HIS ARRIVAL IN GALESBURG AROUND 6PM. SOON AFTER ARRIVING, TYLER HITS THE TOWN WITH EVAN AND EVAN'S COUSIN, ROBBIE.

SANDRA HALSNE: They were at Buffalo Wild Wings around seven o'clock, eating. I know that's to be true because I know the contents in his stomach from his autopsy was Buffalo Wild Wings. I know that they met at a bar because his cousin said they met there first.

NARRATION:

THEY LEFT A BAR AROUND 10:30 PM, THEN AT 10:42 PM WENT TO A WELLS FARGO ATM, WHERE TYLER WITHDREW \$100 FROM HIS ACCOUNT. BUT WHEN TYLER WAS FOUND, HE ONLY HAD \$70 IN HIS WALLET. SO WHERE DID THE REST OF THE MONEY GO? IS IT POSSIBLE TYLER WAS ROBBED AFTER HE LEFT THE ATM AND THAT AN ALTERCATION LED TO HIS DEATH? SANDRA ASKS POLICE TO GET A WARRANT FOR THE ATM VIDEO TO SEE WHO TYLER WAS WITH WHEN HE WITHDREW THE CASH.

SANDRA HALSNE: He called me and said, "Hey, Tyler's not on this video." And I said, "He has to be. I have the timestamp. I have the correct account. I have the correct bank. I have everything." And he's like, you know, "Come on back here. I'll prove it to you. I'll pop the disc in my computer. We'll look at it together." So, we're sitting there in his office and he's like, "I don't know what you guys want me to do. Your son drowned." And as soon as he said that, here comes Tyler and the two people who he was with that night.

NARRATION:

THE VIDEO CONFIRMS THAT TYLER WAS STILL WITH EVAN AND ROBBIE AT THE ATM AT 10:42 AND THERE'S NO SIGN OF AN ALTERCATION. AT AROUND 11 PM, EVAN AND ROBBIE REMEMBER BEING ASKED TO LEAVE A BAR FOR BEING TOO DRUNK. ROBBIE SAYS THAT AT THAT POINT, HE PARTED WAYS WITH EVAN AND TYLER AND REMEMBERS GIVING EVAN'S KEYS TO TYLER TO MAKE SURE EVAN WOULDN'T TRY TO DRIVE HOME DRUNK. THOSE KEYS WERE LATER FOUND ON TYLER'S BODY.

SANDRA HALSNE: So according to Robbie, they all walked back to their vehicles and Robbie said that he remembers he left Tyler and Evan as they were walking to Evan's car, but Evan doesn't remember any of that. And so, did Evan leave him? Did they get separated at that point? Did they split up because he was drunk and he wanted to drive? How they got separated, I'm not sure if we'll ever know. Tyler was

lost. He was walking in the complete wrong direction that he should have been. Tyler did not know Galesburg at all. He'd never been there before. He didn't know where he was at, and he was intoxicated.

NARRATION:

BASED ON PHONE RECORDS, AT AROUND 11:30 PM TYLER REALIZED THAT HE WAS LOST. HE TEXTED A FRIEND IN MACOMB, ASKING FOR HIS ADDRESS, APPARENTLY FORGETTING THAT MACOMB IS NEARLY AN HOUR AWAY FROM GALESBURG. THE FRIEND SENT HIS ADDRESS AT 11:38 PM, AND TYLER REPLIED AT 11:40 THAT HE WAS ON HIS WAY. AT 11:50, TYLER SENT A FEW RANDOM SNAPCHAT MESSAGES THAT APPEAR TO BE A MISTAKE AND AT 11:54, SOME FRIENDS REPLIED TO HIS SNAPCHATS AND ATTEMPTED TO CALL HIM, BUT HE DIDN'T RESPOND. AT SOME POINT IN THE EVENING, EVAN MANAGED TO MAKE HIS WAY BACK HOME. WHEN EVAN'S MOTHER ASKED WHY TYLER WASN'T WITH HIM, EVAN SAID TYLER WAS WITH ROBBIE, THEN PROCEEDED TO PASS OUT ON THE COUCH.

SANDRA HALSNE: There was no activity after that until 5:30am when Evan woke up and he went with his mom to his car looking for Tyler, thinking maybe he was just sleeping in the car, because Tyler had his keys. Evan called Tyler at 5:38am, 5:45am. Tyler never respond. Evan texts Tyler at 6:21am. Tyler did not read the text, and then Evan reports him missing. At 11:31, police leave a message on Tyler's phone. He doesn't respond, and at 6:57pm on Saturday, the 15th, a 911 call was placed saying they found a body in a creek.

NARRATION:

FOR SEVEN MONTHS AFTER TYLER'S DEATH, SANDRA TRIES TO PIECE TOGETHER AS MUCH INFORMATION AS SHE CAN, BUT SOON REALIZES SHE NEEDS AN EXPERT'S HELP. THROUGH A FRIEND, SHE FINDS HOMICIDE DETECTIVE MITCH DRAKE, WHO HAS RECENTLY RETIRED FROM THE EAST HAZEL CREST POLICE DEPARTMENT JUST SOUTH OF CHICAGO. MITCH WORKED AS A POLICE OFFICER THERE FOR 35 YEARS AND SPENT EIGHT YEARS OF HIS CAREER INVESTIGATING HOMICIDES AND CHILD PREDATOR CASES.

MITCH DRAKE: I had a really big preconceived notion that it was going to be a 'bad things sometimes happen to good people', and you know, the parent's probably not accepting that it was a accidental death. But we agreed to meet with the parents and they had amassed just a incredible amount of information. They had complete crime scene photos. They had all the police reports. They had the complete autopsy photos, which I couldn't imagine a family having to look at that on their son. They laid it all out to us. But I was, again, I was skeptical. And I spent probably the first month just verifying everything that they said was true. And I would say, to Sandy and Keith's credit, is they have never told me one thing that's even close to being untrue. And that's very unusual in my line of work. So, after I looked over the case and verified it, I knew that, from my experience, that there really hadn't been any type of investigation done at all on the death investigation, and I decided to look into it.

NARRATION:

MITCH STARTS BY INTERVIEWING EVAN, THE LAST PERSON KNOWN TO HAVE SEEN TYLER.

MITCH DRAKE: He absolutely says that he can't remember what happened. I have years of interview experience. I don't think he's being deceptive. I think it may be possible that he feels extremely guilty. I mean, he's got a tattoo of Tyler's name on his arm. I talked to Evan's mother, who said basically the same thing. I personally do not consider Evan a suspect in anything.

NARRATION:

NEXT, MITCH DOES HIS OWN REVIEW OF THE AUTOPSY AND AGREES WITH SANDRA'S CONCLUSION THAT THE EXAMINATION WAS RUSHED, LASTING ONLY 30 MINUTES, WHICH IS FAR SHORTER THAN ANY AUTOPSY HE'S EVER WITNESSED. AS MITCH LOOKS INTO OTHER INFORMATION FROM THE INVESTIGATION, HE QUICKLY REALIZES THAT IT'S NOT JUST THE AUTOPSY THAT WAS RUSHED.

MITCH DRAKE: The police department didn't follow any established protocols. They had not done any type of investigation as far as asking for a crime scene tech to come out to process the scene. They put down markers in the crime scene photos, but didn't take any measurements. They had non-police personnel, volunteer firemen, come in and had them roll the body over to get the ID and articles from the clothing before any pictures were taken, and didn't log the people that were in and out of the crime scene. They did no canvass of the area for any potential witnesses. They made no attempt to contact businesses or anything to obtain video. There was no notes taken of the crime scene, no samples taken of the water or soil. It was just routine stuff that you do on every death investigation that was completely overlooked and not done.

NARRATION:

AS PART OF HIS INVESTIGATION, MITCH GOES TO GALESBURG, TO TAKE A LOOK AT THE CEDAR CREEK DRAINAGE DITCH, WHERE TYLER'S BODY WAS FOUND. HE WANTS TO UNDERSTAND EXACTLY HOW THE POLICE CONCLUDED THAT TYLER'S DEATH WAS AN ACCIDENT.

MITCH DRAKE: The police department's theory was that he was drunk, and he went in from an access point probably about 250 yards further down, in which he would have had to have basically got down on his rear end and slid down to get down into it, and then walk back the opposite way from the downtown area, leaned up against the wall, and then fell forward into the water. And to me, that was just ludicrous.

NARRATION:

A FEW KEY DETAILS IMMEDIATELY STRIKE MITCH AS INCONSISTENT WITH THE POLICE'S THEORY. FIRST, TYLER'S HANDS WERE LAYING STRAIGHT BY HIS SIDES, WHICH WOULD INDICATE HE MADE NO EFFORT TO STOP HIMSELF FROM FALLING FORWARD. SECOND, HIS SHOES WERE WHITE AND STILL RELATIVELY DIRT FREE, WHICH SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THE CASE GIVEN HOW DIRTY THE DRAINAGE DITCH WAS. THAT ONLY LEAVES THE POSSIBILITY THAT TYLER LANDED IN THE CREEK BY FALLING FROM THE TOP OF THE CONCRETE WALL, NOT WALKING DOWN THE DITCH.

MITCH DRAKE: I actually walked down into the drainage canal and been in and out of there numerous times. This concrete drainage canal has almost a sheer wall that goes up about 16 feet. And then there's a rail above that to prevent people from walking off of it that goes up probably another three feet. His feet, looking at the photographs, are probably within an inch to three inches from that wall. If

someone jumps or just falls forward from that height, his feet aren't going to be a couple inches away from that wall. It did not seem likely at all that he jumped or went over there willingly. He most likely was unconscious, or already dead, when he was flipped over that railing. All indications to me was that he was on top and he probably was picked up and flipped over that railing in a somersault motion, which would put his feet where they were.

NARRATION:

LOOKING AT THE SCENE, MITCH ALSO CAN'T HELP BUT QUESTION THE THEORY THAT TYLER DIED FROM DROWNING. THERE WAS ONLY A TRICKLE OF WATER IN THE DITCH AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH AND TYLER'S HEAD WASN'T SUBMERGED IN THE WATER.

MITCH DRAKE: At the time that he died, at the deepest point, it probably was three inches, and there was no water at all from his feet all the way up to, basically, his neck. His head was laying sideways and the water did not even reach the level of his nostrils and his clothes were dry all the way from the shoulders down. His cell phone, as a matter of fact, was in his front pocket, and that still functions. And of course, his body wasn't found for about 16-17 hours after he probably went in. But there was no rain or anything to indicate that the level of the water would've changed significantly.

NARRATION:

TYLER'S CELL PHONE PROVES TO BE A CRITICAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION. WITH FULL ACCESS TO ALL THE DATA, MITCH AND SANDRA ARE ABLE TO ACCESS THE PHONE'S HEALTH APP, WHICH LOGGED TYLER'S STEPS ON THE NIGHT OF HIS DEATH.

MITCH DRAKE: If you do a little math, you can calculate a person's step distance and the frequency. So, I took that iPhone and I examined it and, the last 476 feet, his strides were longer, they were quicker, and they were stutter steps compared to the 3,000 feet before that. So, my conclusion on that was he was confronted by somebody and that he had either fought or ran or struggled with someone that last 476 feet until he got to the railing.

NARRATION:

AS MITCH GATHERS MORE DATA, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT THE POLICE ACCOUNT OF TYLER'S DEATH IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE EVIDENCE, WHICH MEANS THERE'S A STRONG POSSIBILITY HIS DEATH WAS NOT A TRAGIC ACCIDENT.

MITCH DRAKE: The most logical theory that I had was that he had gotten down to the area that dead ends by the railroad bed, went through that gate, and cut somewhat at an angle across the railroad tracks and went over that railing, and that's where he came to rest. Now, everything else was a mystery. Why did he walk down that way? Why would he had went around a fence like that? My first glance was that this was very unusual, and even an intoxicated person would not choose that route to go unless he was forced. This young man, Tyler, was trained. He was in infantry in the army. He had been trained in hand-to-hand combat, and when he was found, his phone was in his pocket. Well, the first thing that someone who is trained does, if he has something in his hands and he's confronted, he clears his hands. He either throws it or he shoves it in a pocket. So, the fact that the phone was found in his pocket is telling to me.

NARRATION:

PRIOR TO MITCH DRAKE COMING ON THE CASE, SANDRA SCoured THE AREA WHERE TYLER'S BODY WAS FOUND, HOPING TO FIND SECURITY FOOTAGE AT A LOCAL BUSINESS THAT MIGHT SHOW TYLER. TWO BLOCKS AWAY, A CASEY'S MARKET HAPPENED TO HAVE A SECURITY CAMERA POINTED TOWARDS THE ROAD.

SANDRA HALSNE: I went to a Casey's and said, "Hey, do you have any video or anything?" He said, "Yeah, we keep six months." I said, "Would you be willing to give me video?" And he said, "Yeah," and he downloaded it, put it on a flash drive for me. And I sat and watched six hours of video, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, there's Tyler." I saw Tyler walking past Casey's. He's walking alone. He was walking fine. He wasn't stumbling.

MITCH DRAKE: When the family started pressing this situation, the lead detective told them that they had checked for video in the area, and they had talked to people about video, and they'd been all around there. And the family went back and found that, in fact, they hadn't. And just about a block further down was a business that had a camera, and the detective told them, "Oh, yeah, I checked there and the camera wasn't working." And when the family went there, guy told him, he said, "No one's ever been here to talk to me other than you, and my camera works fine." And the unfortunate part is, that's about where I think he would have been confronted by some people. And that video was recorded over every seven days. And even though the owner gave the video up voluntarily to be analyzed, you know, there was nothing that could be recovered by that time. It had been recorded over too many times. I find that the Galesburg police department, when they lied to the family, was probably the most egregious thing that they did. That's something you never do. You don't ever tell a victim's family or a victim that you've done something that you didn't do.

NARRATION:

MITCH AND SANDRA AMASS AS MUCH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS THEY CAN, BUT EVENTUALLY RUN OUT OF AVENUES TO INVESTIGATE ON THEIR OWN. MITCH SUGGESTS THAT THE NEXT STEP IS TO EXHUME TYLER'S BODY AND PERFORM A SECOND AUTOPSY, WHICH COULD DETERMINE WHETHER TYLER WAS IN AN ALTERCATION PRIOR TO HIS DEATH. THE STATE POLICE OF ILLINOIS ALSO AGREE TO TAKE A LOOK AT THE CASE AND BE PRESENT FOR THE SECOND AUTOPSY. IF THE MANNER OF DEATH CAN BE CHANGED FROM ACCIDENT TO HOMICIDE, IT COULD TRIGGER A MORE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION.

MITCH DRAKE: The second autopsy revealed a lot more information than the first one did. And as far as the cause of death goes, I can't comment on that because it's up to the coroner to put down the cause of death. The reason that the results of the second autopsy, they're withholding information from it is quite frankly the lack of physical evidence, because of the evidence being destroyed or returned. If, in fact, they do make an arrest on this, there's certain things revealed in the autopsy that only the offender would know. So that's the reason for keeping the information close to the chest.

NARRATION:

WITH THE NEW AUTOPSY RESULTS IN HAND, THE ILLINOIS STATE POLICE MAKE GOOD ON THEIR PROMISE TO OPEN AN INVESTIGATION. THIS POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IS THE PRODUCT OF NEARLY TWO YEARS OF HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION ON THE PART OF TYLER'S MOTHER AND RETIRED DETECTIVE MITCH DRAKE, WHO REMAINS IN CONTACT WITH INVESTIGATORS.

MITCH DRAKE: This is the only case I've looked into since I've retired. I think this took a hold of me because of the family, their passion, their honesty, their straightforwardness. You know, no one would help these people. The best possible outcome for me would be that someone is successfully prosecuted for this crime and held to account. The best possibility would be that they get peace from it. In my opinion, the greatest tragedy in this case is that the parents may get a lot of answers they were seeking, but if the best possible outcome of this occurs, I still feel that they are still going to feel empty because they've lost their son, who they both just absolutely adored. And I think that no matter what occurs, that's always going to be there.

NARRATION:

THE PROCESS OF EXHUMING TYLER'S BODY MAY HAVE HELPED LAUNCH A NEW INVESTIGATION, BUT IT CAME AT A HEAVY EMOTIONAL COST TO SANDRA, WHO WAS FORCED TO RELIVE THE MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCE OF HER LIFE — BURYING HER SON.

SANDRA HALSNE: He was exhumed, and he was re-buried all in one day. And that was the last thing I wanted to do. I did not want to have to do that, but we had no closure. He deserved justice, and Tyler was a good person and whoever did this to him, I felt, needed to be held accountable and I was not going to stop. I'm not stopping until I find out. I don't care if I have to do this till the day I die. I will never give up and I just hope and pray that somebody will finally come forward and do the right thing, and just give our family some peace. You know, give this kid that served our country some justice.

NARRATION:

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEATH OF TYLER SMITH, PLEASE CONTACT THE ILLINOIS STATE POLICE ZONE 2 INVESTIGATIONS AT 815-632-4010 EXT. 230 OR SUBMIT A TIP AT UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES:

CORY BROWN: It appeared like the motorcycle was pushed off the side of the road. Mr. Kope's body was a quarter mile away from where the motorcycle was located. So right off the bat, you're thinking this isn't normal. Why are you a quarter mile away from your motorcycle? Why is your helmet a half a mile, at least, from where his body was? And why is his cell phone another quarter mile away the opposite direction? It's just one of those things we can't explain at this point in time.

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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 70 of Unsolved Mysteries.