

THE UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | FLIRTING WITH DEATH

E72 Transcript

MONICA JOSEPH: I tried to call her when I found out that no one had heard from her, but nothing. And so, my mind's running 1,000 miles per minute trying to figure out where she's at. Why is she missing? What happened to her? Is she hurt? When I found out that her car was torched, I'm thinking, like, something bad happened to her.

NARRATION:

IT'S MONDAY, JULY 27th, 2020, AND 50-YEAR-OLD DIANA DAVIS IS TENDING TO HER PLANTS AT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN IN TACOMA, WASHINGTON. SHE SNAPS A PHOTO OF A LARGE TOMATO SHE'S GROWN AND SENDS IT TO HER BOYFRIEND, SAYING SHE PLANS TO BRING IT HOME FOR DINNER. BUT THAT EVENING, DIANA DOESN'T SHOW UP AND DOESN'T RESPOND TO TEXTS. IN FACT, THERE'S NO SIGN OF DIANA UNTIL TWO DAYS LATER, WHEN HER CAR IS FOUND IN A BACK ALLEY OF TACOMA, ON FIRE.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "FLIRTING WITH DEATH."

NARRATION:

ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 29th, 2020, AT 10:54PM, TACOMA POLICE OFFICERS ARE DISPATCHED TO A CAR FIRE IN A SMALL ALLEY JUST OUTSIDE OF DOWNTOWN. THERE THEY FIND A 2013 SILVER CHEVROLET IMPALA, FULLY ENGULFED IN FLAMES. THE VEHICLE'S OWNER IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND AND THE CAR IS MISSING ITS LICENSE PLATES, IMMEDIATELY RAISING SUSPICIONS THAT THIS FIRE WAS NO ACCIDENT.

JACK NASWORTHY: The fires seem to be originating from the rear seat area and trunk area. The fact that the vehicle fire originated in the back passenger compartment tells me that it's consistent with it being set by somebody. Most car fires start from the engine compartment. An officer located the vehicle VIN, and he checked the VIN, and that's when he found out that the vehicle's registered to a Diana Davis in Auburn, Washington. And so, the patrol officer at the time called Auburn PD to try to contact Diana Davis and it was at that time that a dispatcher told the officer, "That's unusual because earlier today we actually responded out to her address for a welfare check on her because family reported they haven't heard from her in a couple of days."

NARRATION:

IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF THURSDAY, JULY 30th, DETECTIVE JACK NASWORTHY IS CONTACTED BY THE OFFICERS WHO RESPONDED TO THE CAR FIRE. NASWORTHY IS A HOMICIDE DETECTIVE IN THE TACOMA, WASHINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT, WHO'S FREQUENTLY ASSIGNED

MISSING PERSONS CASES. HE GETS RIGHT TO WORK, CONTACTING DIANA'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND QUICKLY DISCOVERS THAT DIANA'S BEEN MISSING FOR THREE DAYS.

MONICA JOSEPH: When I found out that she was missing, somebody had called me and asked me have I seen her, and I told him, "No, I had not seen her or talked to her. Last time I would have talked to her would have been probably three or four days prior to that." I was concerned because not answering, that's just not her. She wouldn't just not answer. Even with me, she'd always get right back to me. She wouldn't just avoid her kids and not answer them as well.

NARRATION:

MONICA JOSEPH HAS BEEN ONE OF DIANA'S CLOSEST FRIENDS SINCE SHE WAS 13 YEARS OLD. SHE KNOWS BETTER THAN ANYONE THAT DIANA'S DISAPPEARANCE IS NOT TYPICAL AND IS EAGER TO HELP INVESTIGATORS. SHE DESCRIBES DIANA AS A SMALL, PRETTY WOMAN OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND KOREAN DESCENT WHO HAS TWO CHILDREN BY A FORMER PARTNER, A DAUGHTER AND A SON. DIANA LIVES BY HERSELF AND WORKS AS AN IN-HOME CAREGIVER. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE SEARCHES ONLINE DATING APPS FOR SOMEONE TO SHARE HER LIFE WITH.

MONICA JOSEPH: She was private, but she shared her dating experience with me. She'd show me pictures of them and ask me what I thought about this one, what I thought about that one, and the last couple years that we spent, she wasn't in any serious relationship. She was just trying to find the right man for her. She was looking for love. She was looking for someone that she could spend the rest of her life with. And so, she did some online dating at different dating sites. And so, I would say, she probably, at least minimum, she got to a point where she was going on at least one or two dates a week, and she had been dating for years and just never could find the right man.

NARRATION:

IN MARCH OF 2020, THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC HITS AND, LIKE MUCH OF THE WORLD, DIANA BECOMES RECLUSIVE. SHE CUTS BACK ON HER WORK SCHEDULE AND AVOIDS CROWDS OF PEOPLE AND SOCIAL GATHERINGS, EVEN MISSING HER CLOSE FRIEND MONICA'S 50TH BIRTHDAY PARTY.

MONICA JOSEPH: During COVID, she didn't want to have anything to do with dating. She told me she was going to take a break from it because she was very afraid of COVID. It was really scary around that time. And so, she was kind of still on the sites, kind of like, you know, looking around and you know, seeing who was contacting her. But she didn't want to go out on any dates at all. However, she did meet someone on there that was pretty persistent, I'd say. He was an attorney. Diana only dated, for the most part, businessmen and Diana was the type of person that she didn't like being alone. And so, she kind of connected with him that way. I think once they got to knowing each other, she started

liking him and she did tell me that she was going to try to work on a relationship with him. I'm not positive how committed he was. I mean, they hadn't been together that long.

NARRATION:

DIANA'S CURRENT BOYFRIEND WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO CONTACT THE AUTHORITIES, SUSPECTING THAT SHE MIGHT BE MISSING. HE WAS ALSO ONE OF THE LAST PEOPLE TO HAVE COMMUNICATED WITH DIANA, MAKING HIM AN EARLY PERSON OF INTEREST.

JACK NASWORTHY: July 27th, the day she disappeared, she had gone up to work for a short time period. She had come back to Tacoma, back to her boyfriend's house, dropped off a house plant and then she said she was going to go to the community garden, which is located in the North End of Tacoma. In the community garden she had been working on, we did locate a witness who confirmed, "Yes, Diana was here. I know Diana. She was working on her tomato plants." And she had taken a picture of one of her tomatoes and sent it via text to her current boyfriend basically saying, "Hey, how about I take this tomato and we eat it tonight?" And he responded, "Hey, sounds great." So, kind of giving him the impression that she was coming home. And that's the last text message that she sent out or responded to.

NARRATION:

WHEN DIANA DOESN'T SHOW UP FOR DINNER, HER BOYFRIEND IS ONE OF THE FIRST TO REACH OUT TO FAMILY AND REQUESTS A WELFARE CHECK AT HER APARTMENT. BUT WHEN HE'S QUESTIONED BY THE POLICE, IT'S LEARNED THAT HE AND DIANA HAD A DISAGREEMENT ABOUT THEIR COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER THE NIGHT BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED.

JACK NASWORTHY: She had talked about the possibility of marriage, and he made it very clear to her he wasn't interested in marriage. He intended on starting or continuing to date other women, and he told her, "You're free to date other guys." Basically, the impression I got was, he had made it clear to Diana that, "We're just having fun. This isn't serious." Obviously, that's something that she wasn't anticipating. She wanted to get married.

NARRATION:

DESPITE THEIR DIFFERING VIEWS ON COMMITMENT, DIANA'S BOYFRIEND CLAIMS THE DISCUSSION WAS AMICABLE. NEVERTHELESS, DETECTIVE NASWORTHY BEGINS A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION OF HIM.

JACK NASWORTHY: Her current boyfriend at the time of her disappearance is a criminal defense attorney in Pierce County. He does do a number of homicide cases. I had met him previously. He was very cooperative. He came in, gave a full statement. He even voluntarily gave me copies of receipts

that he had the day she disappeared, showing he was at a store grocery shopping on July 27th. He provided me alibis of people that were with him over the next three days, that I verified. And I also served a search warrant on his cell phone provider, got his cell phone records, and he is able to show that he was either at his house or at his office in Tacoma from July 27, 28th, 29th, 30th. And he had been working from home because the COVID. He also, on his own, took a polygraph examination. He was truthful that he was not responsible for the disappearance of Diana Davis.

NARRATION:

NASWORTHY SHIFTS HIS FOCUS TO COLLECTING ANY SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE AND LOCATION DATA HE CAN RETRIEVE FROM DIANA'S PHONE, HOPING TO TRACK HER MOVEMENTS AFTER SHE LEFT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN.

JACK NASWORTHY: We found video surveillance that actually shows her driving her car, and she's alone. And we continue watching the car. We don't see anybody following her. And then, she ended up at a hardware store. Specifically, it's an agricultural store. So, they have a number of stuff for gardens. So, from 5PM to 5:50, she spends the entire time inside the Ace Hardware. We contacted Ace Hardware and talked to the employee that was working that day, and she actually remembered seeing Diana in there. She was able to identify her with a picture that we had. And she said, "Well, you know, it really stood out to me because she wandered around for about 45 minutes in our store." And it's not a real big hardware store. This is something that, in 10 minutes, you've seen everything that's in the store. And the employee specifically said it was kind of strange, because she felt like she was just there killing time. And then after she leaves the store, she immediately drives south, where she gets on the freeway. And she gets on the freeway and does not stop, continues northbound I-5, all the way into Seattle, when her phone turns off, never turned back on again. Her phone was last active on July 27th at 7:46PM, and it was in South Seattle, near Lumina Field.

NARRATION:

INVESTIGATORS CANVASS THE AREA BUT FIND NO SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE OF DIANA'S CAR. IT SEEMS SHE SIMPLY VANISHED. WHY DID DIANA'S PHONE SUDDENLY TURN OFF AT THAT LOCATION?

JACK NASWORTHY: I did have information from her friends and family that it was fairly normal of her, when she was either at work, or she's going to meet somebody, she would actually turn off her cell phone so she wouldn't get interrupted. She wouldn't just put it on silent, or set it down, she would actually turn it off. So that's why, initially, a lot her friends and family weren't real concerned.

NARRATION:

NO ONE THAT INVESTIGATORS SPEAK WITH HAS ANY IDEA WHY DIANA WOULD HAVE GONE TO SEATTLE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

MONICA JOSEPH: I can't imagine why she would be in Seattle. Absolutely no reason. Unless they have actual footage of her being in Seattle, not just her cell phone pinged there or found there, if there's no footage showing that she was in Seattle, I don't believe she was there. Maybe the perpetrator or perpetrators who took her had her cell phone there. If she was there, is she hurt? Was she alive? Because I know, because of COVID, she didn't want to have any parts of being around crowds of people. She was just that afraid of getting COVID and dying.

NARRATION:

WHILE INVESTIGATORS FOCUS ON THE AREA IN SEATTLE WHERE DIANA'S PHONE WAS LAST ACTIVE, FRIENDS AND FAMILY SCOUR THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF TACOMA LOOKING FOR DIANA OR ANYONE WHO MIGHT HAVE SEEN HER. THEN, SEVEN DAYS AFTER HER CAR WAS FOUND TORCHED, A PHONE CALL COMES IN FROM A WOODED AREA CALLED SNOQUALMIE PASS, AN HOUR AND 20 MINUTES NORTH OF TACOMA.

JACK NASWORTHY: On Wednesday, August 5, at about 3pm, I received a phone call from a detective with the King County Sheriff's Office. He told me, "Hey, we are on a Found Human Remains call near Snoqualmie Pass and this person kind of matches the description of Diana Davis." The scene itself was at the bottom of an exit ramp, and it was about 25 yards into the woods. In this case, at about noon, a woman who was going there to walk her dogs parked her car, got out, and one of her dogs, upon being led out of the car, immediately ran into the woods. She chased after the dog and the dog went straight to the human remains and found a partially buried body. The lower half of the body was completely buried in dirt, and then the upper half of the body was exposed. Many people think that you just go out and bury a body without understanding how much work that is, especially up in this area. And so, not surprisingly, the hole that was dug was only about six inches deep. And then this person put Diana's body into this and then covered her up with dirt, debris and sticks and left her there. So, I went up to this location and was present for the retrieval of her body. Her upper half of the body, the part that was exposed, that was outside of the dirt, was extremely decomposed. Because of animal activity, identification of her was difficult. However, as they continued the recovery process, as they got the dirt off her, her lower half of her body was fairly well open and I saw a couple of very distinct tattoos on her leg that I recognized as belonging to Diana Davis. The initial assessment by the medical examiner investigator that came out, she'd probably been there since July 27th. Probably very shortly after she disappeared, within the next few hours, she was buried.

MONICA JOSEPH: When I had heard that they had found her body, it was kind of really devastating. She was dumped in a shallow grave. I was thinking, why here? Why this location? It's like somebody was passing by and decided to drop her off and keep going. I was thinking to myself, her car's torched down in Tacoma, her body's found here. Nobody knew anything. It was just odd.

JACK NASWORTHY: The next day I went to the King County Medical Examiner's Office for her postmortem examination. The forensics anthropologist determined that cause of death was multiple blunt force injuries to the face consistent with a hammer. This is a high level of violence, this homicide, to strike a woman in the face with a hammer multiple times to kill her. This is not a, any kind of an accident. Even shooting somebody, there's a disassociation with a firearm. This is something that's up close and personal. And I do think some kind of sexual assault probably did occur, even though we don't have the physical evidence to show it. The decomposition made that very difficult. One of her fingernails, we did recover a partial DNA. It is not enough to enter into CODIS. But it is enough for a one-to-one comparison, and we did the one-to-one comparison with the current boyfriend when he provided the DNA sample, and he was eliminated as a contributor. Obviously, investigation is ongoing. We're looking at doing other things with the DNA.

NARRATION:

WHY DID DIANA'S BODY END UP SO FAR AWAY FROM TACOMA WHERE HER CAR WAS FOUND TORCHED? INVESTIGATORS HAVE A THEORY THAT SUGGESTS THAT DIANA MAY HAVE KNOWN HER KILLER.

JACK NASWORTHY: The fact that her car ended up in an alley in downtown Tacoma, burned up, why would this person take a risk of driving the car all the way back to Tacoma when they could have just set it on fire in Seattle? And then we would never know about it until she has been reported missing. So, that also tells me that this person knew she was from Tacoma and probably, my opinion is, that they would have had been pretty familiar with Tacoma too. There's cameras everywhere, especially in a downtown area. And where this particular alley was, there was nothing in the area. There were no other buildings. And so, this person would have to be comfortable enough to drive that vehicle to that location to set it on fire. Of course, is there a chance that she had a random encounter with somebody that simply attacked her and kidnapped her? I'll never rule that out as a possibility. If this is a complete stranger, why didn't he just push the body out of the car in an alley somewhere, you know, in the middle of the night? He could have left her in the car and then just set the car on fire, and why did he go this far out of the way to Snoqualmie Pass, a fairly long distance away down, you know, a US Forest service road, to dispose of the body? That's another reason why I think this is somebody that knows her.

NARRATION:

DIANA'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS ASK DETECTIVE NASWORTHY TO QUESTION AN EX-BOYFRIEND. THE COUPLE HAD DATED AND BROKEN UP YEARS BEFORE HER MURDER, BUT FRIENDS BELIEVE HIS BEHAVIOR AFTER THEIR BREAKUP MAKES HIM A STRONG SUSPECT.

MONICA JOSEPH: They did break up and it got to the point where he wanted to pursue her. He wanted a relationship, and she was just not interested at some point. And so, he got to the point where he was stalking her. She'd be at home and he's driving by her house a couple times a day to see if she's at home. Calling her, leaving messages, showing up at her apartment unannounced, looking for her. In the beginning, it was kind of like, yeah, you know, she didn't seem too concerned about it. But when it kept going on for periods of time, then it became an issue. We'd be talking on the phone, and she'd be like, such and such just drove by, and then I tell her to call the police or go get a restraining order.

NARRATION:

WHEN DIANA WAS DISCOVERED MISSING, HER EX-BOYFRIEND WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE THE FAMILY CONTACTED, LOOKING FOR ANSWERS, CERTAIN THAT HE MUST BE INVOLVED.

JACK NASWORTHY: Diana's brother and his wife actually went to the ex-boyfriend's house, which is not too far away from the community garden, to confront him. The family is very concerned about how he acted when they responded there. He initially wouldn't come to the door, looked out the window, saw them out on the doorstep, refused to answer until they started yelling in saying, "We're not leaving. You need to tell us where Diana is." He finally answered the door and told 'em, "I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't seen Diana in two months." And so, they left and it was about two hours after that that her car was located on fire. So, obviously both myself and the family were looking very hard at the ex-boyfriend as being responsible for this. Once we're starting to look at the case, myself and another detective went up to his residence to talk to him, to see if he's willing to come to police headquarters and make a statement. And he said no. He wasn't gonna talk to us, and closed the door on us. So, for a while, obviously we strongly suspected him. However, we did find a neighbor very close by who had a surveillance video that filmed the front of his street, right in front of his residence, the ex-boyfriend, and it would capture his vehicles coming and going, and him walking out. And we reviewed several days' worth of that video and the ex-boyfriend never leaves on these dates. He never left his residence on July 27th, when Diana was driving to Seattle. He was never anywhere near the hardware store. I did write a search warrant for the ex-boyfriend's cell phone records as well. I was able to, based on his cell phone activity, verify he stayed home the day that Diana disappeared, never went to Snoqualmie Pass where her body was eventually found, and he never went to downtown Tacoma the night of the arson fire of her car.

NARRATION:

WITH THE INVESTIGATION OF THE EX-BOYFRIEND AT A DEAD END, DETECTIVE NASWORTHY FINDS HIMSELF LOOKING FOR OTHER POTENTIAL LEADS. USING THE FEW DETAILS AVAILABLE TO HIM, HE CONSTRUCTS A GENERAL PROFILE OF WHO HIS SUSPECT MIGHT BE.

JACK NASWORTHY: There's no way to say whether it was a crime of opportunity or premeditated, but certainly the steps that the person went through both to later dispose of Diana's body and to destroy the evidence, he went through a lot of thought to get to this point. I think that somebody would have to be very comfortable with being out in the woods. This particular location, I think you would have had to have been there before. You don't find this by accident. So, I think this is somebody that's an outdoors type person that they go hunting, or maybe they go hiking a lot, go camping. The other thing about Diana that all the friends and family mentioned, and I was able to verify, Diana only went after what they called "professional men." She would only date attorneys. She'd only date pilots, or successful businessman. So, I think it was this would be a professional person that would have been very comfortable out in the outdoors.

NARRATION:

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT DIANA MET SOMEONE IN THE PARKING LOT OF THE HARDWARE STORE. THERE WAS NO SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE TO SAY WHETHER SHE LEFT ALONE OR NOT, BUT OTHER DETAILS SURROUNDING DIANA'S DISAPPEARANCE LEAD DETECTIVE NASWORTHY TO SUSPECT THAT DIANA WAS TRAVELING TO SEATTLE TO MEET SOMEONE THERE.

JACK NASWORTHY: So, she takes a picture of this tomato, sends it to her current boyfriend, tells him basically, "Hey, we're going to cook this tonight." And then she leaves it there. She never intended to go back to the boyfriend's house at night. I think she intended to meet somebody to spend the night with them to say, "Hey, just like you said, I'm dating other men now." And so, I think that the fact that she left, she was killing time. And then all the sudden, she leaves, gets in her car, drives straight to Seattle. I think she's supposed to meet somebody up in Seattle at a particular time. She was waiting until it got close to that and she drove all the way up there, turned off her phone when she went to meet this person. I think that she didn't want to talk to anybody to tell them, "This is what's going on. This is where I'm at." When she went to meet this person, then something horrible happened.

MONICA JOSEPH: Unless they can prove that she was in a chat room, and it shows that she actually went there to meet up with someone, I'm not really sure that she was going on dates. The guy that she was seeing currently, he was lucky that she went out on a date with him. So, to jump on a dating site and say, "Okay, well, I'm gonna go out on a date..." that part just doesn't make sense because of COVID. I strongly feel like it had to have been someone that she'd known, because she's not going to go meet a stranger.

NARRATION:

NASWORTHY CAN'T RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT A STRANGER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DIANA'S MURDER, SO HE STARTS DIGGING DEEPER INTO HER ONLINE PRESENCE FOR POSSIBLE LEADS.

JACK NASWORTHY: I did find out that Diana had a history of meeting men on various dating websites. I contacted Match.com at the suggestion of Diana's current boyfriend, who told me that that's where they had met. I did serve a search warrant on Match.com, and they did let me know that she had not used Match.com since she met her current boyfriend. There's also some other websites. Diana Davis had a history of being into what's referred to as kink lifestyle. So, she was into bondage, and there are bondage websites that she would go into to meet people. And I did locate one of those websites, and I served a search warrant on that website to try to get information. However, none of them really gave me the information I was looking for. My opinion is still that the person that did this is into the same kind of lifestyles, as far as the kink or the bondage and domination. And if she is specifically targeting men who are into bondage, then that could be a potential dangerous lifestyle for her. It's a bothersome case. This is one where it's definitely a whodunnit. I put in a tremendous amount of effort to it and I'm at a dead end. And for all intents and purposes, you know, Diana led a nice lifestyle. She was not in-involved in drug activity. She was not a criminal. She didn't have any bad associations to get mixed up in anything, but I do think there is a potential of a serial nature of this kind of case, clearly. And so that's always been one of my concerns is that somebody else, similar to this, it will happen to them.

MONICA JOSEPH: It just doesn't quite make sense, because if you keep trying to put the pieces together, you're never going to figure it out. That's how senseless it was. I'm never going to let this go. Never. Not until they find the persons and get them and arrest them, because she didn't deserve this. She was full of life. She loved everybody. I don't think that she had an evil bone in her body. I really don't. And I will not rest until she gets justice. Justice for her kids, for her, her family and her friends and everybody that loved her. I believe somebody knows something, and it's just a matter of time. Anything that happens in the dark will come to light. I'm a true believer in that.

NARRATION:

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THE MURDER OF DIANA DAVIS, PLEASE CALL CRIMESTOPPERS AT 1-800-222-TIPS OR SUBMIT A TIP AT UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES:

KIM SINK: The fire was out, of course, already and the EMTs were there. The fire department was still there. The next thing you know, you see all kinds of police and the coroner and, you know, after a while, you know something's wrong. Ronli's Daddy kept saying, "Oh, she left a candle burning, or whatever," and I said, "No, Robby, that's not what it is. Something is wrong."

—

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

It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran.

Produced by Christine Lenig, Courtney Ennis, Bill Schultz, and Paul Yates.

The Story Producer for this episode was Ann Toler, and it was edited by Ryan Dann.

From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil and Andy Jaskiewicz.

Production support by Sean Cherry, Ian Mandt, and Ava Feneberger.

Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay.

Publicity by Moira Curran, Josefina Francis, and Hillary Schupf.

The original theme music was composed by Gary Malkin and Michael Boyd.

Thanks for listening to Episode 72 of Unsolved Mysteries.