

The Starved Rock Murders with Andy Hale

Episode 13: Preamble

ANDY HALE: Welcome back to the Starved Rock murders with Andy Hale, a podcast where we are analyzing a tragic triple murder that took place over half a century ago, back in 1960 at the scenic Starved Rock state park located in LaSalle county, Illinois, where three women were brutally be bludgeon to death. My client Chester Weger was a 21 year old dishwasher at the Starved Rock lodge who was arrested for the brutal crimes convicted and served over 60 years in prison. Chester is currently 83 years old and out of prison on parole. We have been making the case on this podcast that Chester Weger was wrongfully convicted of these horrendous murders. Today we will be recapping the key points and discoveries we have made over the course of the last 12 episodes. We have a lot to talk about. Let's begin

(sound of eerie music begins to play)

ANDY HALE: In a criminal trial in the United States. The courts require that the jury find the accused be guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. It is the highest standard in the courts for evidence in the case of Chester Weger, can anyone who knows the facts of the case in good conscious say that they believe he committed these murders beyond a reasonable doubt, can any reasonable person who is presented with the fact that the tree branch was not the murder weapon? The twine found on the women didn't match. The twine found in the kitchen at the Starved Rock lodge where Chester worked a phone call was intercepted a week after the murders indicating other high ranking people had knowledge of a kid with bloody overalls in the trunk of a car and a thousand more details that contradict Chester Weger's confession possibly say that they believe beyond a reasonable doubt. That Chester Weger, is responsible for this brutal crime. The false narrative surrounding Chester Weger, constructed around a coarsed confession has been laid bare. This case like a jigsaw puzzle is made up of a thousand interlocking pieces. But when it comes to the state's official case against Chester Weger, every piece is jammed into place and forced to fit. And when a piece couldn't be forced to fit, it was fabricated to fit the result. Wasn't a puzzle solved, but a grotesque mosaic built on lies, manipulation and decades of deceit. The time has come over 60 years later to expose those lies into prove finally, the truth about the starved rock murders,

(music fades out)

Transition to conversation between hosts:

ANDY HALE: Whitney episode 13, I would've never, there'd be an episode 13. I don't know why when we started this, I thought, oh, maybe there's five or six or seven 13. And I feel like we could do another 13, but here we are. Yeah.

WHITNY BRAUN: I, I, I, I did not expect the wealth of information to come forward that has, uh, been provided by listeners to this podcast. And I'm, I'm so grateful for it

ANDY HALE: So much to talk about. So today I wanna cover three topics. I've got some additional thoughts on the smoking gun memo, the Lois Zelensek interview in the Palmatier brothers. I wanna talk about those March 20th handwritten notes. We've talked about them a lot. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I know there's an issue you've been really wanting to discuss about those notes. We get into that, and then I think we've only got one more episode after this Whitney, I think next week, I'd like to potentially, maybe just have a little conversation with Chester Weger and his sister mm-hmm <affirmative>. And so I wanna kind of do a top 25 hit list and just mention a lot of the highlights, cuz we've gone over points in episodes, but I wanna kind of tie it all together. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so, uh, are you ready to go? Is your seatbelt fastened?

WHITNY BRAUN: It is. I'm so ready.

ANDY HALE: All right. Let's start with the smoking gun memo. I have said this many times, you need to read documents over and over and over every time you read them, you get a little different perspective. I went back and I read that Lois Zelensek interview. That's two page police report, April 21st, 1960. I read it again just this morning. I literally just thought about this this morning. I read it like three more times. Here's the point I wanna make in reading that memo again and just for everybody out there, I think most people know what I'm talking about, but it's a, it's an interview with a telephone operator, Lois Zelensek who overhears two men talking about a conversation about a kid having bloody overalls in the trunk of a car who's worried about getting caught. And then the other party on the conversation says, well, just tell 'em to burn.

ANDY HALE: 'em the documents on our website. Read it, please. Please read it. It's the smoking gun. Okay. In reading that again, I think it's likely the Aurora caller from a payphone was not actually Glen Palmatier. Let me explain the call was placed from a Tavern in Aurora, Illinois. That was apparently owned by Glen Palmatier and the call was traced to Glen's brother William Palmatier in Peru, Illinois. Okay. I was simply initially assuming that the call was placed by Glen Palmatier, I think just because it was traced to his brother, but now the more I think about that, I don't think that's

the case. First we know from the newspaper articles that Glen Palmatier allegedly passed a polygraph exam about this phone call. And I think that could be because he didn't actually place the call. Maybe that's why he passed the polygraph. Maybe he actually didn't place that call to his brother.

ANDY HALE: Mm-hmm <affirmative>. The second point is I went back and read the memo and here's what jumped out at me when I reread it. Let me read this part. This is what Lois Zelensek is reporting to the police. The Aurora voice. I can't forget. It was a voice that gave the impression of an uneducated person, harsh deep voice, no softness in it at all limited vocabulary. Okay. Compare that to the way Lois Zelensek describes the LaSalle party's voice who's William Palmatier. She says the LaSalle voice is just a natural man's voice. Low soft sounded used to talking to people, a typical salesman's voice and manner of speech. Okay. So the Aurora man's voice is being reported as so distinctive a voice. She can't forget an uneducated person. This does not really sound like the little I know about Glen Palmatier, who we know was the police chief of Aurora in 1955 mm-hmm <affirmative> he later ran to be mayor of Aurora. It actually sounds more like the voice of some, like what I'll call thug kind of person, hoodlum kind of person, mob kind of person. Doesn't it sound more like that to you

WHITNY BRAUN: I've wrestled with that ever since the first time you showed me the memo and I guess here here's where I'm torn on it. I, I, I absolutely see what you're saying, but then I go back to like the trial transcripts of, um, the detectives in, uh, Chester's trial and their great and there grammar was atrocious. So I don't know. Right? I I'm a little torn on that one because I, you know, I took B in law enforcement at the time did not require formal education, but to your point, he did run for mayor. And you would assume you that would require a certain adeptness that public speaking. So I'm, I'm torn on this one. I'm completely torn.

ANDY HALE: Well, I think that's a good point. Let me, let me continue with a few little things that jumped out. So if we C if we stay with that, that Lois Zelensek memo, here's some other things noted in there. She says the Aurora party gave the impression that he was reporting to the boss. And as to the LaSalle party said, he seemed to be the dominant one of the two. Okay. So if the call was actually placed by Glen Palmatier, I don't think it's likely he'd come across as reporting to the boss.

WHITNY BRAUN: Sure. That's true.

ANDY HALE: And I don't think the call would seem like the LaSalle party was the dominant one. It would just be two brothers. Yeah. Talking, you know, when I reread that, it seems much more likely to

me now that the Aurora party was this kind of hoodlum type of person, this kind of, you know, you know, I'll just say like hoodlum mm-hmm, <affirmative> kind of guy uneducated. And I don't think the brothers would have that different, true, super different kind of voices. I don't think you you'd have two brothers and one is, comes off. Like she says, it's so distinctive. She'll never forget it. Mm-hmm <affirmative> says it's uneducated limited vocabulary and the other brother has a completely different way about him. It just struck me as this is not Glen Palmatier. And so that really, when I read this this morning, I'm like, I don't think this is Glen Palmatier mm-hmm <affirmative> calling William Palmatier.

ANDY HALE: It's some other guy in Aurora who is more like, let's just say, let's get some little mob guy connected guy, some hoodlum guy. Yeah. Reporting to the boss. Okay. Now an important point. This does not mean that Glen Palmatier is off the hook. Not at all. I still think he has knowledge of this plan. He has knowledge of this issue. The call is being placed from a payphone in Glen Palmatier's Tavern. Okay. So that's yeah, that's no coincidence. And so I think all this means is that we've now expanded our list of people involved in the Starved Rock murders, two, at least four people, one the kid with the bloody overalls in the trunk of the car, to this Aurora person, what I'll call like this, this hoodlum type person, uh, with a distinctive voice. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, uh, who places the call Glen Palmatier in Aurora and William Palmatier in LaSalle Peru.

ANDY HALE: So I think we'd now have at least four people that we know were involved in this. And I think we also need to note, we've seen no evidence that William Palmatier ever took and passed a polygraph. I wonder if William Palmier got cleared simply because his brother Glen passed the polygraph and then they just said, oh, okay, well, these brothers are cleared. And the thing about that is William Palmatier. When you look at this Lois Zelensek memo and when they trace the call, he is the one that clearly has been caught with his hand in the cookie jar, because the call is traced to his house yeah. To his house. So even if Glen Palmier did not place that call, and even if Glen Palmatier passed a polygraph about that call, the police still need to put the full court, press on William Palmatier and find out everything they can about that call, who placed the call to him.

ANDY HALE: Who's the kid with the bloody overalls in the trunk of the car, who had he been talking to in the week before and after the Starved Rock murders. Did he have some kind of car dealership? Remember how Lois Zelensek says she overheard talk about a mm-hmm <affirmative> a car transaction. Yeah. Did he have some kind of car transaction going on at the time on and on and on again? Why not interrogate him for hours instead of Chester Weger, let's interrogate William Palmatier every day over and over for hours. Let's get to the bottom of that. Let's put surveillance on him, you know? And by the

way, you still need to interrogate Glen Palmatier about this issue. He's not off the hook. You have to know, like, were you in the Tavern that night on 21st, when that call was placed to your brother, were you working mm-hmm <affirmative> uh, who was, who was in the bar that night?

ANDY HALE: Who was bartending, who was managing, you know, who was there? Uh, who were your brother's friends in Aurora? Does your brother William know people in Aurora? I mean, there's think of all the things you could ask, both those brothers. So my main takeaway that I wanted to just make on this episode is when I read that memo again, it really strikes me. Now. I feel pretty confidently that that call it's being placed by somebody in Aurora, in Glen Palmatier's Tavern, but it's not Glen Palmatier. Mm-hmm, <affirmative> Glen Palmatier's aware of the whole thing, but it's somebody else. So we now have another person I believe. Yeah, we can add to the mix. I'll just call it the guy who made the phone call. Okay. Yeah. So that's, that's what my gut's telling me very strongly.

WHITNY BRAUN: And I wanna be clear. I am agreeing with you. I'm just leaving a small crack in the door. I'm just leaving the door slightly open. Only based on the knowledge that a lot of the other guys in law enforcement, in that era that we've seen trial transcripts from have really terrible grammar. But I agree with you. It does seem unlikely. It does seem unlikely because he was aid to the mayor. He, he would, he held so many municipal positions that it would seem that he would be a man of, um, of strong communication abilities. So I, I, I do agree with you. I'm just, I'm just leaving the door, open a sliver. That's all I'm saying.

ANDY HALE: And, and again, when you hear that, she's saying Lois Zelensek is saying, it sounds like he's reporting to the boss,

WHITNY BRAUN: Yea

ANDY HALE: Boss. Yeah. It sounds like, you know, I, I, I said before, I'm, I'm binging Sopranos right now, my wife and I, it sounds like a Sopranos kind of thing. Where a low level guy is calling Tony to tell Tony soprano, this is what's going on. Yeah. And Tony just says, tell him to burn him. Very matter of factly mm-hmm <affirmative> it's business. And then they move on to talk about other things. Yeah. This wasn't some alarming call. These guys were just talking very casually. She notes that in the memo. So I just wanted to point that out and people can draw their own conclusions. I urge everybody to read it and people may disagree with me. But I think now that I've read it again, I'm surprised I didn't, this didn't hit me initially. Cuz when I read it now, this really makes much more sense to me.

ANDY HALE: And it makes sense why Glen Palmatier then passes the polygraph. Okay. Mm-hmm <affirmative> technically he didn't make the call, but that does not mean he doesn't know anything about this. There is no evidence that the police did any investigation of this issue or these brothers. I haven't seen any and this was, and still is the smoking gun memo. It is. And we're still trying to find out as much as we can about the Palmatier brothers. So please, if you know anything, reach out to us, we need your help. All right. Topic two, we have talked many times about these handwritten notes. These were produced to me in response to a freedom of information act, request their handwritten notes. We don't know exactly who wrote them. It's it's one of two things. It's either like the LaSalle county Sheriff's office or the state's attorney's office, you know? Uh, but they are entitled meeting of it says 3 ,20, 60 7:00 PM. Okay. Now there's a part of these notes. I know you have really there's there's been itching to talk about this. I'm gonna turn the floor over to you. Tell me what really strikes you about these notes that you think uh, needs to be discussed.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah. So I had seen these notes months and months and months ago and I initially sort of dismissed them as being mislabeled. So, so just, uh, uh, insight into how I do my research. I go through every document I can find and I create a massive spreadsheet and I put everything down by time and, and I, I dated date stamp it and I'd seen these notes and I thought, well, this, this can't be right. Right. March 20th, 1960 7:00 PM because, okay, I'm gonna read the notes back to you and you tell me why the timing seems off. All right. Picking up. Defendant is the first is the first point. Okay. Then seven points are listed below one notify sheriff in chief two take handwritten statement have doctor look at defendant before and after three take photos showing no duress four reenact crime at scene movies by Dummit five take before Sexton or go, which, uh, would be the justice of the piece or the police magistrate for arraignment six take to KGL for psycho exam. That's that's Dr. Meyer KGL who, who worked for the state? Uh, who did the psychological evaluation? Seven take defendant to motel or hotel. Okay. Taking the date out of the equation. When would you have guessed this would've been written? What does this describe to you, Andy? Right?

ANDY HALE: Absolutely. Like, like November 17th, 1960 after Chester has this.

WHITNY BRAUN: Thank you.

ANDY HALE: Yes.

WHITNY BRAUN: Thank you.

WHITNY BRAUN: You. This is a blow by blow of exactly how they got Chester to confess. Right. It's I mean, down to the point of five, take to Sexton or go right. Take to the justice of the piece, the guy that issues fishing licenses or the police magistrate for arraignment. Why not a higher ranking judge for the crime of the century, right? Why is that outlined in 0.5, take defendant to motel or hotel. Why not the police station? Right? Take, uh, dumb it out to the scene for the reenactment. I mean, it's, it's just, it's two spot on and this is what, this is what, what I feel in my gut. Please feel free to tell me I'm I'm insane, but the date, which meant nothing to me prior to a month ago, but March 20th, 1960 at 7:00 PM that Chicago Tribune article, the big writeup that's mentioned in the Zelensek memo, the big, the murders that are written up that is release that goes to print on March 21st, 1960.

WHITNY BRAUN: Am I correct?

ANDY HALE: Yes.

WHITNY BRAUN: Which means they would have known this information, right? They would've known already. There was a police informant who was an auto dealer who happened to be driving by who saw people at the scene that would've been known to the police by March 20th. If it is, if it is then in the paper the next day on the 21st, I think local law enforcement knew that bill Palmatier knew what was going on here. And I think they went, oh no, we cannot go down that road. We need to figure out how to solve this and not involve Palmatier. How do we do that? I think this is an outline for how to find a Patsy because it's just too spot on. It is two spot on to me. 7:00 PM on March 20th, 1960. Am I crazy Andy?

ANDY HALE: <laugh> no, I, I I'm kind of speechless because what you're saying makes some sense it's it's stunning to think about. And just to be clear, these are literally seven numbered sentences. You're right. It's one through seven. It's a plan. And like you said, we've seen this before and we thought there is absolutely zero chance. The date's wrong. The date's not wrong, Whitney. You're right. This is all happening on March 20th, 1960 at a seven o'clock meeting. And it's consistent cuz the bottom half of the page are things that are being reported on March 20th about mm-hmm <affirmative> the twine being loose around the, the risks of Ms. Murphy and Miss Oetting, not leaving marks 20 strand twine, 10 strand twine. These are all things that are being reported at that time. What? I don't know. The only thing I, I may kind of question is, I don't know if it is an outline for a Patsy for somebody to place us on or did they actually have a defendant? Did they actually have somebody in mind? Yeah. On March 20th. And so they wrote up this plan. I, you know, I don't know. I mean, I think it's one of the two,

WHITNY BRAUN: I, I mean, this is why I don't think that they had a defendant yet because if they had a defendant, they felt really strongly about why would they be going to the justice of the peace. Right. Cause that's always struck me as sort of an odd part of the story of, of why, you know, why get a midnight warrant from the justice of the peace. If you were really confident about who your defendant potentially was or who your, who your suspect was that that bothers me. It could probably be explained, but it just gets me, uh, as something that feels very suspicious.

ANDY HALE: You know, Whitney, it is really hitting me now, like a ton of bricks. What you're saying, I, you have said this to me before and it never really, really quite resonated with me. I'm like, ah, I don't really know. I don't, I hear what you're saying. Maybe, you know what, now that I hear you say it and I'm looking at the document right now, it, it absolutely does look like kind of the outline of this is how we're gonna do it. This is how we're gonna basically pin it on somebody because you wouldn't write it in this way. Like it's very, very like defensive mm-hmm <affirmative> trying to justify what they're going to do. So for instance, you know, take photos, showing no duress, you know, we're gonna reenact the crime scene and have Dummit take movies and have, you know, Dr. Gulia do a psycho exam.

ANDY HALE: Like you're, you're really trying to bootstrap and justify what you have done to make it look legit. If you actually had a real defendant, let's say there's somebody that we're told, Hey, John Q public is the guy that, you know, we told committed these crimes. You'd simply arrest him. Yeah. You know? And it'd be like, okay, now we're, we're gonna move on. You wouldn't have to write out this plan. The plan is to justify something that you're not comfortable with. Yes. The plan is to justify something that is not actually legitimate. So you know what, Whitney? Wow. I kudos to you. I think you're absolutely right. I, I had not seen it this way, but that actually makes a lot of sense. But the date is shocking March 20th.

WHITNY BRAUN: This is why I know in a, I mean, there's many reasons why we know that this is an accurate dating on the document, but I feel embarrassed. I initially dismissed this document. I didn't put it in my big outline of dates and times because I thought, oh shoot, this is after they've already arrested Chester. This is a document of how they arrested Chester. Chester's name is not mentioned anywhere on here, by the way, this seven point outline does not say Chester's name, but I dismissed it. And then, and then it dawned on me, well, wait, March 20th, 19, let's just say they got the year wrong. 1961. Well they're, they're already well into the trial and, and on their way to conviction. So it's not, it's not misdated no. And then when we've become aware of the Zelensek memo and the Palmatier's and the big write up in the newspaper with this police informant being mentioned on March 21st, the next morning, it made me go back to this

document and think, well, the night before at 7:00 PM, the powers that be in local law enforcement were sitting down and handwriting a plan for how to convict someone, how to convict someone the night before that big newspaper article.

ANDY HALE: Uh, this is hard. I'm speechless. I, I normally, I normally am not speechless. I, I really am like, I'm looking at the document right now, as I say this and what you say makes a lot of sense. And that's, if you're right, that is pretty, pretty stunning, but I don't see a better, more logical explanation. I don't, you know, my only other explanation was they had a person in mind. You wouldn't write it all out this way. No, there'd be no need to write it all out this way. You, you, you just wouldn't, you know, this is written out where you've got, it's like written out in the abstract. Here's how we're going to do it, you know? Yes. Not in a, not like we've got somebody. Well,

WHITNY BRAUN: Let's just say that they had someone, right. Let's say they had their eyes on a suspect. Why? Okay. If you, if you got a strong suspect, why do you need to take them to a motel or hotel to cross examine them or to interrogate them rather? Why, why, why does that need to even be in there in addition to all these other elements like that feels to me like coercive behavior?

ANDY HALE: Well, I think the stronger point is this, you don't say picking up defendant, you say picking up insert name of who the person is picking up John Smith.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yea

ANDY HALE: <laugh> picking up whoever its picking up, you know, pick, put the person's name in there, pick up John Smith. You know, and arrest him, you know, like, and have his address, have his birthdate have where he lives. You know? I mean, so just generically saying defendant, uh, and it's, you know, just for people, if they look at this document, those were posted on the website, the triangle symbol is kind of the legal symbol for defendant. So that's what that means. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so they're just using the generic symbol of defendant. Yeah. They're not, you wouldn't use that term for a particular person. So Whitney, this, you <laugh>. Oh my gosh. I think this is a huge, huge point you just hit on. Wow. Uh I'm so glad I finally let you talk about this. You've been bringing this up for weeks, so thank God we had this discussion. I think you're absolutely right. There's there's something to this holy cow.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah. And it bothers me too. I I'll stop hammering on this one, but uh, reenact crime scene movies by Dummit, that bothers me too, because let's just say me too, the person confesses you've got physical evidence. Why do you need amateur Bill Dummit out there

with his camera , I mean videotaping this, like that just feels weird to me. And we know that he has this pattern of conveniently arranging evidence, you know, uh, for his own means. And that the, the, the addition of 0.4 in there of movies by dumb, it bothers me to no end

ANDY HALE: Well again, uh, and I'm shaking my head agreeing with you as, as you were saying that these are not things you would write down. No. If you had just a legitimate person you've arrested, who committed the crime, you're only doing this to create a sense of legitimacy for something that you know is illegitimate. Mm-hmm <affirmative> like when you, when you're already thinking like, well we better just convince people. We gotta reenact the crime and have dumb it, film it. You are so worried. Like me doth protests too much. You're so worried. Yeah. Cause you know, you know, this is a nonsense confession. You got the, you got a person that's not legitimate. So you're taking these steps to make it look like it is legit. So I, I think you have made a very powerful case and I'm gonna continue to, to noodle on this Whitney, cuz I really haven't thought about it much, but you're right. You are absolutely right. We may not be done talking about this. I'm so glad you raised it.

WHITNY BRAUN: I'll end on this point. Just it's bothered me to know when, because I dismissed it for so long shame on me. I dismissed it and I thought, oh this is misstated because it is a frigging play by play of how Chester was picked up for this crime. Yeah. No. And shame on me for not for not putting the pieces together sooner.

ANDY HALE: No, no. Don't feel guilty. I was in the same boat. I, it didn't hit me either until literally right now. I just kind of, you know, I always read it kind of like just with the November time period in mind. Yeah. I never got my mind wrapped around that. This is March 20th, 1960 at a seven o'clock meeting. They're mapping this out right. Then they're mapping it out within days.

WHITNY BRAUN: Mapping it completely.

ANDY HALE: Wow. Is there anything else you wanna say about it? Should we just let that sink in?

WHITNY BRAUN: I will let that marinate for a while. I'll let that marinate with everybody.

ANDY HALE: Holy cow. All right. Last topic. You know, we have made so many points over the course of these prior 12 episodes that I wanna kind of do a top 25 list where we walk through the points and kind of do it all together so people can hear and we have more than 25, but these are just the 25 that kind of, you know, come to mind right now as kind of the main ones and the obvious ones. Can we go through our top 25 hit list right now?

WHITNY BRAUN: I would love to.

ANDY HALE: All right. I will start. Let's just take turns. I'll start. Number one. I love talking about it. You know what I mean? To say the Lois Zelensek memo, it's the smoking gun 100%. Can't believe we found it. Can't believe it's out there. It is a foundation to the entire case. It is the foundation. Everything is connected to that. That's where it all starts. The smoking gun memo. That is just huge. And I could talk about it for another 10 episodes. Just that memo. You know how I'm, how obsessed I am about it. So that's number one in my voice.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yes. So for me, number two, absolutely has to be the Hennepin man. Uh, this man who comes forward, who knew Smokey Ronna, we can verify that he knew Smokey Ronna's kids. He tells an absurdly detailed story. He is incredibly thoughtful in his delivery of all this information he's credible. And I think that, uh, the information that he brings forward, it's so telling and interesting that I, I mean, to me, it has to rank in at number two,

ANDY HALE: I'm gonna dovetail on that with number three and talk about how, you know, in both stories again, when we spoke to the man from Hennepin, we were not aware of the Lois Zelensek memo and what was in there. And how I said this before in the Hennepin man story, Smokey Ronna does not immediately get rid of the bloody mm-hmm <affirmative> clothes in the trunk of the car. There's this delay, there's this pause. He's not sure what to do with the black smoke. And so if you look at the Lois Zelensek memo, March 21st call five days after the bodies are found, the guy still hasn't get rid of the bloody clothes in the trunk of the car. He still has 'em in the trunk of the car. He's not sure what to do. He's getting anxious. So it just completely fits together like a hand in a glove in both stories. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, you've got this weird little detail that the bloody clothes are not disposed of immediately. I think that's a significant piece of corroboration. That's my number three.

WHITNY BRAUN: Then for number four, I'm gonna put forth, uh, the fact that the tree limb was clearly not the murder weapon. I mean, if you take nothing away from this podcast, you should at least remember that fact, right? That, that tree limb, that, that everything was built around this tree limb. And yet they knew within a very short period of time after the murders that tree limb could not have been the murder weapon,

ANDY HALE: Huge point

WHITNY BRAUN: To me, it's number four,

ANDY HALE: Number five, I'll call it the 10 ply twine it's reported in these handwritten notes. There's 10 ply twine found at the crime scene. There is no 10 ply twine found at the Starved Rock lodge. There is nothing in the trial about 10 ply twine. They tried to make it sound like the twine came from the kitchen. The kitchen didn't have at the lodge. Didn't have 10 ply twine, the state misrepresented, the twine evidence. I go back to 10 ply, 10 P 10 ply twin. I think it's a huge point.

WHITNY BRAUN: Then on the topic of twine that I'm gonna say number six has to be the fact that the twine was cut in two different ways. One with a straight edge and one with a rated blade, one person would not use two different knives to cut twine. That doesn't make any sense, which means at minimum, there had to at least be two different knives, potentially wielded by two different people at that crime scene.

ANDY HALE: Excellent point. Number seven, I mean, this could be number one. I I'm calling it number seven. It could be number one. Yeah. The Washington university medical school report dated November 23rd, 1960. When they took a hair found on Mrs. Murphy's glove that they thought was so significant and related to the crime scene, they shipped it out to the Washington university medical school to analyze it. They compared it to the victims and they compared it to Chester Weger's own head hair and it was dissimilar mm-hmm <affirmative> basically, you know, they were saying it was not a match Chester didn't have that report. Obviously it wasn't produced to him that had been a huge piece of evidence at trial, but what a bombshell, yeah. That there's a piece of evidence they test from the crime scene hair. That's not Chester Weger's huge point. I've got that at number seven.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah. And, and still all these years later, it bothers me to know in that this happened pre Brady and that Chester could never have had access to that document. That bothers me to end and I'll, I'll leave it there. I think then, then going on to, to 0.8, uh, I would say the reward money. It is such a, a disturbing ethics violation that the state's attorney who actually wasn't even the state's attorney by the time this went to trial, the lead detectives, the polygraph operator all were financially rewarded with monies raised by the victim's family and Nick Spirros and other other sources. They were financially rewarded for doing the job they were already commissioned to do by the people of the state of Illinois. And they got money for securing a conviction and it bothers me and I'll scream about it from the rooftops. Uh, as long as I live,

ANDY HALE: It's absolutely stunning. And in fact, I've talked about that continuing legal education DVD from 2010, I've watched it many times. Even the former prosecutor, Tony Raccuglia says, you know, talks in me about how improper it was for those guys to get the

reward money. There is no defense, zero, no of these guys getting the reward money. Uh, it is so improper. We <laugh>, like I said, I wanna scream about that one too. Uh it's yeah. Unbelievable. Number nine. This is another one of my obsessions, Mrs. Murphy's missing fingertip. What the heck is going on? The handwritten notes talk about, they have no explanation for it. Nobody wants to talk about it. It is something we can't explain. I think it is weird. It is a huge point. And I, I just cannot overstate how I think it just has some other meaning that we don't know some other meaning mm-hmm <affirmative>, but it's not random. It's not coincidence. It was done for reason, but it's a, it's a big point. Yeah.

WHITNY BRAUN: Uh, then I'm gonna go on to, to point 10 and say what bothers me so much about Chester's confession and his subsequent trial and conviction is that if we go back to the handwritten notes that were obtained from the estate of Harlan Warren, after his death, his notes from the time of the investigation, he writes, or someone writes on documents that are in his possession, commence psychological warfare. So there is a known element amongst law enforcement, uh, that they're going to just basically bully right. And abuse and attack and, and put Chester under duress until they get what they want out of him. So for me, that's that's point 10

ANDY HALE: <laugh> that's their plan. I mean, yeah.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah.

ANDY HALE: Number 11. I'm gonna continue with Mrs. Murphy. She also had the autopsy said soiled clothing. I couple that with those weird interrogation questions to Chester, whether he defecated or urinated in any of the victims. And she also had that vaginal injury that you note in last episode to the exterior of, of, you know, her vaginal area mm-hmm <affirmative> and Chester was asked, do you kick any of them in the crotch? I think we just have to note Mrs. Murphy's the only person in those three areas, missing fingertips, soiled clothing, vaginal injury, very, very weird and suspicious.

ANDY HALE: Then, you know, point 12 I think is, is kind of a part and parcel of commencing psychological warfare against Chester, but it's that he was placed under 24 hour surveillance. They just hammered this guy. They picked him up from work. They took him home. They parked outside his house. I mean, that is just it's too much. I'm sorry. It's abusive conduct by law enforcement.

ANDY HALE: They even said at trial, it started in like early October and it went through the day before he confessed, you know? So it worked

WHITNY BRAUN: Insane. It worked, it worked, but, uh, it's, it's just so wrong to me. And,

ANDY HALE: And let me number 13. I mean, these, we're just kind of, I, I think at this point we just gotta say it's kind of a random order cuz you cannot. Yeah. There's none that are less important or more important than any other. They're all so important. Absolutely. So number 13, I've got how Tony Raccuglia, the former prosecutor called it an absolutely ridiculous confession, which it was everybody knew. It was absolutely ridiculous and made no sense. And when we talk about in episode six, how Tony Raccuglia says, you know, it was an absolutely ridiculous confession and they went to trial, you know, knowing it was absolutely ridiculous. That's just a stunning admission and incredible point.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah. We know that it doesn't make any sense, but we're gonna just, we're just gonna ask for the death penalty even though yeah. What we know at the trial makes no sense, but yeah, whatever, we're just gonna go for the death penalty, cuz that makes the most sense to us in this moment. Yeah. Whatever, any, I just it's I'll start screaming. I gotta move on to the next point. Otherwise I'm just gonna be angry for the rest of the day. Yeah. Uh, so point 14 to me is, um, the minute spots of blood on Chester's jacket. As I have said, uh, as we, as we both talked about on prior episodes, uh, the injuries described in this case are so gruesome that there is just simply no way that someone could just have a tiny spray, little spattering of blood on them and have murdered these women in the manner that was supposedly the official story. It just, it makes no sense. And then to have that jacket with minute spots of blood on it, then be loaned out to Chester's wife and she wears it to the laundry bath. I, this jacket was not worn by the person who perpetrated these crimes. I'll die on that hill. That's that's my point 14.

ANDY HALE: I agree with you. Point 15. I'm gonna stick with the Anthony Raccuglia, Tony Raccuglia comments where he said at that 2010 continuing legal education seminar. I think this was actually the most stunning thing he said that he expected. He actually expected was not surprised that there'd be a confession based on the amount of like psychological pressure that was exerted by Dummit Hess. Like yeah. You would expect somebody to confess like, oh, okay. I would've expected there to be a confession. And by the way, what he got was an absolutely ridiculous confession. Okay. But to know that so much psychological pressure was put on that you're like, yeah, yeah, I'm kind of, I kind of thought somebody would confess under those circumstances. I thought was a stunning admission.

WHITNY BRAUN: I'm gonna stay on my, my ethics soapbox here. Uh, when we move into point, uh, 16 Dummit threatened Chester on that car ride to Chicago with riding this under bolt. He threatened him with the

death penalty. It's it's just part and parcel of this psychological warfare, this consistent duress. It's so inappropriate and this man got money, right? He got money for this and he threatened Chester with riding the Thunderbolt. And then I think, you know, just thought he was, uh, above the law that he could say this to Chester Chester would, would confess. And that there'd be no recourse. There'd be no recourse for this comment made in the back of the car.

ANDY HALE: Can you imagine being arrested for a crime? You didn't commit and law enforcement telling you they're gonna seek to kill you. Mm-hmm they're gonna seek to kill you. Okay. I mean, can you even put yourself in those shoes? I mean the pressure that, that would've been on anybody. Oh my God. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I'm gonna continue. That was number 17. Not only did deputy Dummit threaten Chester with the electric chair. He did something that arguably was worse. He went into a court of law under oath and he lied about it. He committed perjury. I'm not saying that simply because Chester Weger said Dummit said those things assistant state's attorney, Craig Armstrong was in the car and he said Dummit said those things. So check mate. We know he said those Dummit lied about it. That's the kind of person we we're dealing with. Not only did Dummit make the threats. He lied about it at the criminal trial, which was just egregious misconduct, you know.

WHITNY BRAUN: Kudos to Armstrong because I'm sure he did not win any friends for his honesty, but kudos to him for being, um, forthright about it. So, uh, you know, applause there. Okay. So point 18 for me, these mysterious red orlon fibers, we've got, uh, transfer fibers found at the crime scene. These red Orlon fibers that are identified, none of the women are wearing red Orlon fabric. Chester was not wearing red orlon. Where did it come from? It was used. This is what we know about red orlon. It was used to make blankets and as a synthetic wool substitute, what else do we know about red orlon? Red orlon burns slowly because it is a petroleum based product. And when it puts off a smoke, that smoke is black. And that returns us up to what we had said was 0.2, the Hennapin man who said there was, uh, fear on the part of smoke Iona regarding burning the evidence because it would put off black smoke. So I think that is a point worth remembering.

ANDY HALE: And I, when you said this, initially I never put two and two together that the blankets which would have this red orlon could cause the black smoke. I didn't know that. So that is such an insightful point. You raise number 19, I'm gonna continue with Dummit. Not only did he lie in Chester's case, but we talked about how, in that other case, we got an affidavit from that LaSalle county state's attorney, where there was another guy who claimed Dummit showed him crime scene photographs in order to get him to confess, you know, Chester said that Dummit denied it. They got a search

warrant. They opened Dummit's desk. And they found the photographs in his desk that he had lied about. I mean, oh my God, are you kidding me? I mean, so this guy has a pattern of misconduct. I don't trust anything he has done or did in the case at all. It's a stain on the entire case. So that's a huge point,

WHITNY BRAUN: You know, Dummit is no longer living, but the fact that Dummit existed and that that behavior was allowed to play out for as many years as it did, should keep people awake at night. I mean, that is terrifying that someone in a position of authority and law enforcement could do those things.

ANDY HALE: Well, one other thing, you know, uh, in that continuing legal education seminar, uh, Tony Raccuglia talks about how it was a bad investigation. I can't tell you how many people have told me dumb. It was a bad kind of dirty deputy. I've had that anecdotally from so many people tell me that. Yeah, I we've got proof of it, but this guy, his fingerprints are all over this case. As I note Chester's attorney John McNamara, I thought very powerfully said about the confession, this ridiculous confession is the work of Bill Dummit, that's what it is.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah. So I'm gonna move on to also mention, um, a detail that, uh, was overlooked by me for a long time. Um, you, you know, you picked up on it and pointed it out. Uh, George Sparrows, uh, who was a suspect, but I think we've, we've kind of ruled him out in our discussions in this podcast. He told police that he saw two cars near the mouth of St. Louis canyon and five men. And, and I, I dismissed that for a really long time. And I think that is an important point because that two car and five man scenario that George Sparrows describes is so similar to what the man from Hennepin describes that smokey RO told him that I think we, we cannot, we cannot disregard that fact, that fact has to, has to live prominently in our minds.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. That's point number 20. And like you say, it's another example where when you look back at a document, it has more of a context, you know, when you first read it, you're not aware of the Hennepin man. So you just kinda read it. Now, when you read it, knowing what the Hennepin man has said, you're like, oh my gosh, this just kind of jives completely. Number 21, Chester passed six polygraph exams prior to being taken Chicago in late September for another one past six, oh, now we're gonna take him. And he failed the seventh one. Really? You know, how many were given to William Palmatier? Any Chester passed six? I mean, it's just, it's just unbelievable Whitney to know what this guy went through past all those polygraph exams. And then they're still looking at him in September. Let's just do the chronology once.

ANDY HALE: Glen Palmatier is cleared in early September. Oh. Now in late September, Harlem Warren wants to drag Chester Weger to Chicago for another polygraph, and then the surveillance begins and then they get their confession. Case closed. That's number 21. Let me, can I continue with one more that I think about, please do I'll take, uh, 22, this letter sent to sheriff Ray Utzi back in April of 1960, where his friend is raising questions that he thinks need to be answered by sheriff Ray Utzi. And, and one of the questions was, were any of the husbands running around with some other babe who wanted at least one of the wives out of the way and had to kill all of them to get it done? I think that is a question that this person was raising the sheriff Ray Utzi. That is a legitimate question that has to be answered. I think a lot of times we're afraid to go there. We're afraid to go there and we can't be, that is a valid question. It's a valid question. The detectives need to look into, it's a valid question. Anybody trying to get the truth needs to look into, we can't ignore it.

WHITNY BRAUN: So let's now move on to point 23 and answer, perhaps the question posed in, in, in number 22, which is, was one of the husbands running around with some babe. Now this is what we do know. We do know that within two years of the murders, Robert Murphy, Francis Murphy's husband married his secretary, a woman named Marion Anderson. Now that on its surface may not be that intriguing, but let's go back in time two years and note the fact that she gave birth to a baby boy with no father listed on the birth registry two months before the women were killed. So two months before the murders married Anderson, secretary of Robert Murphy, who later becomes his wife gives birth to a baby boy. And then two years later, Robert Murphy not only marries her, adopts the child, he takes his name and he raises him as his own. So I just feel like that cannot be ignored, do with it what you will, but I cannot ignore that fact.

ANDY HALE: No, I think it's a question that has to be looked at. We cannot ignore it. It deserves attention. It deserves further investigation. It is a legitimate avenue of investigation and it's something we all need to take a closer look at number 24, Nancy Porter, this juror who it was reported in that Chicago Tribune article who always regretted her verdict. But what, what she said in there, not only that, but this is the part I wanna make for number 24. She said that the law enforcement person in charge of like sequestering, those female jurors shared information with them about Chester Weger that was that didn't come up in the trial. I mean, are you kidding me? That is so outrageous. And so egregious, it is an automatic grounds for a mistrial and a new trial. If that would've come to light. I mean, that is just shocking misconduct to think that that happened. And why are they doing that? Are they that worried? I mean, they're, that's how I think worried they were that they were gonna lose cuz they knew the whole case was phony. Baloney. That to

me was shocking. When I heard her say that they tampered with the jury, that's my number 24. You got one more.

WHITNY BRAUN: I do. And I, I, to me, this is the most kind of telling fact of the entire trial that in light of jury tampering in light of a confession, in light of the state, throwing everything they had at this case, these jurors who were asked to impose the death penalty said, no, we know he confessed. We know we've heard these terrible things from the bailiff. Yeah. We've heard your entire case. State of Illinois. We're still not confident. So just on the off chance that he's in fact innocent, let's not kill him. So we're gonna go with life in prison and not the death penalty. So to me, that is just so telling of people who do not think he is guilty, but don't know how to resolve this problem other than to just go, all right, guilty life in prison. Maybe it'll sort itself out. We all have to go back to work case closed.

ANDY HALE: Absolutely. You've got these three women bludgeon to death and these are all jurors who were pre-qualified. They were not opposed to the death penalty. Yeah. You know, so they were willing to impose it and not to impose a death penalty. There was real doubts there that's 25 Whitney that's that's our top 25 and yeah, I'm sure there's probably another 25 that we could do another top 25 list. Make it top 50. Yeah. <laugh> got easily. Another 25 points. Probably a lot of people at home are like, well, what about this point? What about that point? I'm sure we missed several things that could have been on this list. These are the ones that jumped out to me, but I've got one more. I've got a bonus one. And the bonus one is this it's, it's the fact that as I talk about in episode six, those 25 points, if you just listen to those Whitney, I mean, can you really make a case that Chester Weger committed these, this triple murder?

WHITNY BRAUN: I can't

ANDY HALE: Can you make a credible persuasive case? No, you cannot. All you've got is the confession. That's all you've got. And my, my bonus point is all the factors that we know lead to wrongful confessions are present. You've got the threat of death. You've got psychological pressure. You've got somebody who's young, you've got somebody of a limited education. All these things are coming to bear. All the factors that we know cause false confessions are present in this case. And I think it shows you, we have the foundation clearly for a false confession. And that's the only evidence people can talk about to claim Chester Weger involved is the alleged confession that Tony Raccuglia said was absolutely ridiculous. You know? So that's the top 25 with a bonus. Oh my gosh. When I go back through that, Whitney, I mean we just, what a powerful, powerful case that Chester Weger was wrongfully convicted.

ANDY HALE: I mean, that is just a stunningly powerful case. If I was doing a PowerPoint closing argument to the jury, I mean, it to me is so strong. I would call it. I always people that tried cases with me know the phrase I like to use is checkmate. It'd be checkmate. It's checkmate all those points. Oh my gosh. Well that's episode 13 next week, everybody. I think it's our last episode. Uh, it's sad Whitney. I'm I'm gonna miss doing this. I think it's our last episode until we report on the DNA results in late July, unless we have a break or new development, that's why you need to subscribe to the podcast. Cause we very well may in the next couple months, get new information, drop a new episode with, with some new information, a new development or a break. Um, but barring that I think next week is going to be it. And I'm hoping we can maybe have a little bit of a discussion with Chester Weger and his sister, maybe his niece. I think that'll be a nice way to wrap things up. So these two months are gonna fly by until we get the DNA results at the end of July, by then I am looking forward to having one more episode Whitney, and I'm looking forward to kind of wrapping things up with you and then coming back in July and talking about the DNA results.

WHITNY BRAUN: Yeah, same here. And it will not fly by for me, Andy, every, every moment will be agony until we get these DNA results.

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ANDY HALE: Fair enough. Fair enough.

(music fades out)

ANDY HALE: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Starved Rock Murders with Andy Hale. What a journey this has been the last 13 weeks have flown by. We have one more special episode next Thursday until we take a break to await the DNA results in late July. But if there are any new developments or big breaks in the case between now and late July, we will drop a new episode. So if you haven't done so already, you're gonna wanna subscribe to our podcast and make sure you don't miss anything. Please visit our website andyhalepodcast.com where each week we are posting the documents and newspaper articles that we discussed during each episode. If you know anything about the Starved Rock Murders, please email us. No tip or information is too small. It all matters. We need your help. And if you know anyone that you think was wrongfully convicted, if there's another Chester Weger out there, reach out. We would love to hear about that as well. If you enjoy today's episode, please subscribe, rate and review us wherever you get your podcasts. Your reviews and ratings means so much to Whitney and me. This show was produced in collaboration with Phineas Ellis sound designed by studio D design content and promotion by Bell + Ivy and hosted by myself and Whitney Braun. We'll see you next time.

