

The Starved Rock Murders with Andy Hale

Episode 14: A Conversation with Chester

ANDY HALE: Welcome back to the Starved Rock murders with Andy Hale, a podcast where we have been 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 Lasal county, Illinois, where three women were brutally bludgeoned 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've been making the case on this podcast that Chester Weger was wrongfully convicted of these horrendous murders. And I think if you've listened to the prior 13 episodes, you'll understand. And I think agree with me that we have made a compelling case, an overwhelming case that Chester Weger had nothing to do with his Starved Rock murders. It's time to hear from Chester in mind. He's 83 years old. Bear in mind. He spent over 60 years in prison. He's still alive. He's still with us. Thank God. But I was out at his house recently sat around the kitchen table with Chester, his sister, Mary, his niece Nita. And we just talked about a variety of topics. I think you'll enjoy our conversation. There's a lot to listen to. Let's begin.

(sound of eerie music begins to play)

ANDY HALE: The biggest mistake anyone can make when it comes to the Starved Rock murders is to think that this is simply a tragic episode, relegated to an obscure chapter of 20th century history that no longer has any impact on any of our lives. Other than as intellectual fodder for a podcast, make no mistake. This case is far more relevant now than ever because 62 years after the crime, the man who was sentenced to life in prison for the murders is still alive. All the members of law enforcement who railroaded Chester are dead. All the jurors are gone. All the witnesses called to the stand have passed away. Chester's wife, parents, and many of his closest loved ones have been laid to rest. But Chester Weger has endured. Wrap your mind around the fact that when Chester Weger's freedom was taken from him in 1960, John F. Kennedy had just been elected president.

JOHN F. KENNEDY: This nation was founded by men of many nations...

ANDY HALE: Chester went away to prison before the civil rights act passed before NASA put a man on the moon, before the Watergate scandal, before Staved Rock wars opened in theaters before the personal computer, the internet, the cell phone, the smartphone and social media. 60 years Chester spent 60 years behind bars, six decades of a man's life spent in a cell. And when he was finally released on parole in February of 2020, it was into a world as alien

to him as life on Mars. But within three weeks of his re-entry into the world, the globe was gripped by a pandemic and Chester returned to a different form of prison.

NEWSCASTER: Stay at home, that is the order tonight from four state governors as the coronavirus....

ANDY HALE: Yet he has endured. And today, California, at the age of 83, he continues to hold onto hope that his name will be cleared and justice will finally be served. So make no mistake. This case is not simply a story of historical intrigue. This is a living, breathing active pursuit for justice and the man at the center of all this Chester Weger deserves to have his voice heard.

(music fades out)

Transition to conversation between Andy and Chester:

ANDY HALE: I'm gonna say my name. It's working. Go ahead and say your name.

CHESTER WEGER: Chester Weger.

ANDY HALE: Got it. Yep. Oh, it's so good to be here. I feel like I'm <laugh> I feel like I'm on a talk show. So I'm I'm I'm at Chester's kitchen table. Chester's to my right. Marry's to my left. Nita is right across from me. We all smiles on our faces. <laugh> did you, can you guys, can you believe that we're here doing this right? Um, Chester, you look like a movie star. You got a microphone there. You look like a movie star. I just wanna first tell you, can you hear me? Okay. I wanna tell you how proud I am of you because you're 83 years old today. Um, and seeing you here in front of me is amazing. And I am just so glad I got to know you sad. It's sad.

CHESTER WEGER: It,

ANDY HALE: I gotta take a pause. I wanna tell you, I love you.

CHESTER WEGER: Oh, that's true. Dream.

ANDY HALE: It's amazing. You're here. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get emotional. I went to do this, like just, you know, you've done so much for us. No, I know you have done so much. We're gonna get through it. We're gonna get through it. It's just, it's emotional, you know? Um, I had to get through that, but just seeing you here, so let's talk, um, let's start with just what it's been like, you got released on parole and you're living in this house now in Lasal Illinois. What is it like being out of prison?

CHESTER WEGER: It was wonderful. Oh gosh.

ANDY HALE: I mean, did you, it's hard, you know, we can never understand what you went through. Did you think there would be a day where you were here out and free, you know, with your, with your sister right here by your side?

CHESTER WEGER: I thought there would be. Cause you know, I understand I spent 60 years in prison and I knew I could have some,

ANDY HALE: How did you have the mental and physical strength to never give up hope?

CHESTER WEGER: I don't know. I used to read, read books and stuff like that kinda kept keep it off my mind.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. I mean, because you said you, you always kind of hope there'd be a day. You know, our work is not done yet because, uh, we're trying to get your conviction vacated and have the world know that you're innocent. Yes. Is that what you want? Yes,

CHESTER WEGER: Yes.

ANDY HALE: Um, you know, and Chester's always told me that, you know, he wants to clear his name and you want people to know you had nothing to do with that crime.

CHESTER WEGER: Yes.

ANDY HALE: Um, and we're gonna get that done. We're gonna get that done. Um, so I, I just admire, I mean, I think about your resilience over the years. Um, are you doing okay now, health wise?

CHESTER WEGER: No, I am. I got too many medical problems, you know?

ANDY HALE: Yeah.

CHESTER WEGER: Gotta ask me emphysema and I don't know what they call.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. Now you just had cataract surgery. Is it okay if I said that? Um, your eyesight's better now? Yes.

CHESTER WEGER: Yeah. Put it up a lot.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. And what is it like to, you know, being able to spend time with your sister and her husband, Ron and your nieces, Nita, and seeing your son and your daughter. I mean, what has that been like for you?

CHESTER WEGER: It's just wonderful. Can't I can't, I can explain how wonder wonderful is to be free. Mm-hmm

ANDY HALE: <affirmative> um, I I'm, I'm actually just kind of speechless because it's, it's hard to even talk about, you know? Um, but that's why I wanted to go back to your resilience over these years. And you know, when I first met you, you know, always saying you were innocent, that's how I first reached out to you when you know, all those years in the parole hearings, never expecting remorse cuz expressing remorse, cuz you didn't have anything to do with the crime. You know, when you were, let's go back in time when you're sitting in the courtroom in 1961 APAC courtroom and you know that the state wants to have the jury impose the death penalty. What were you feeling during the trial being there in court?

CHESTER WEGER: I can't explain. No, I just not. I had to go to trial, you know, I notice he would take me a trial and, and I knew I was innocent and I just prayed for the best.

ANDY HALE: And at that point were you, you hoping, you know, obviously you're hoping the jury will find you not guilty. Yes. And I've seen this before in other wrongful conviction cases, people are trusting the court system to get it right. And they don't always get it. Right. You know? And here they built this case against you when the jury came back and said guilty, what was going through your mind at that point?

CHESTER WEGER: I don't know. Like I said, it's been so long ago that, you know, I'd be sick off, off and on. I just can't have trouble remembering, you know, but I, uh, like I said, I was innocent and then, uh, always knew that they'd be, they I'd be able to,

ANDY HALE: That day's coming, that day's coming, my friend, uh, we're gonna, we're gonna be there. I'm gonna be there with you when we prove your innocence, it's coming. You're gonna get that. Uh, we we've made incredible progress. Um, in being 21 years old and then going into the prison system, did you learn at some point how to adjust to being in prison? Yes. How do you, how do you kinda learn how to survive in there?

CHESTER WEGER: I just watch shutter guys, you know, and look what they were doing, you know, guys that I knew and just went along with them. And,

ANDY HALE: And do you, you know, when you're in prison, it's, it's, it's just hard to probably explain just to survive and I mean, were there gangs in prison you had to navigate? Yes. And how do you deal with that?

CHESTER WEGER: It stayed away from 'em

ANDY HALE: And

CHESTER WEGER: Told to stay away from me. Mm-hmm <affirmative>

ANDY HALE: And, and, and what's the like, what's the food like? I mean, when you're just what's prison, food, like

CHESTER WEGER: Prison, food was all right. It was, they, they serve good food there.

ANDY HALE: Okay.

CHESTER WEGER: At times, you know, they had some, uh, real good meals there.

ANDY HALE: Okay. Well that's good

CHESTER WEGER: To hear, especially at the holidays.

ANDY HALE: Oh, you get special meals on the holidays. Yeah. What about healthcare? I mean, I know when I talked to you, you were having some issues and they weren't always being addressed. What was the healthcare like in this prison?

CHESTER WEGER: Health, healthcare was, uh, is all right. You know? I mean, they done the best they could, you know, when, uh, a lot of times you go and tell 'em there's something wrong and it took, 'em a long time to be able to, to get the examine me and stuff. And you know, they'd be filled, filled up in that and I'd have to wait.

ANDY HALE: You know, I wanna tell you a story. I don't know if I ever shared this with you. I represent, there was another guy helped get outta prison. His name was Terrence Haynes. He was based at a Kankakee. We got his conviction vacated. After 22 years, he was in prison. I forget which prison it was. He was just a seller two down from you. Okay. And he remembered you. And he told me a few stories where he said, the guards gave you a hard time. They broke your TV or they stole your TV. He remembered this.

CHESTER WEGER: Yeah. There was couple guards that, none that stuff, you know, it wasn't all the guards, just a couple,

ANDY HALE: You know, I, I found it incredible. He remembered you. And he said, I remember the guards messing with him. They would, they took his TV or they broke his TV. So I guess there's good ample guards and there's bad. Yeah. That's I see, you know, I couldn't believe that he actually remembered you like that. Um, how would you spend your time in prison? How did you like what I don't what I'm so impressed with. How were you able to not completely lose your mind in there?

CHESTER WEGER: Well, I tried to keep my mind occupied. Like I said, I, I done a lot of reading and that I was painting at that time. I could see the paint and stuff and that I was painting pictures of that. Just keep my mind off of it.

ANDY HALE: And, and for people out there, you know, who, who may not know Chester, uh, did some incredible paintings while in prison. Uh, I've got one that I made a copy of. Um, where did you learn to paint?

CHESTER WEGER: I don't know. I just picked it

ANDY HALE: Up self-taught

CHESTER WEGER: I just picked it up. It just started drawing and you know, and then it started painting.

ANDY HALE: And where would you get, how would you get the paint supplies

CHESTER WEGER: I buy

ANDY HALE: 'em yes. In like the commissary? Yes. Um, it's great that they would provide that, that kind of an outlet to provide, um, painting supplies. Was that one of your favorite things to do in prison? Yes. Um, and did you paint when you paint, when you were younger, were you into painting when you were like growing up?

CHESTER WEGER:

No, I, I just painted in prison. Uh that's the only time I painted.

ANDY HALE: What did you like as, as, as a boy growing up, were you, uh, were you into hunting and fishing? Did you like those kinds of things?

CHESTER WEGER: As I liked the hunt and fish,

ANDY HALE: Tell me about like fishing, where would you go fishing? Growing up?

CHESTER WEGER: Right in my backyard, the Vermillion river was real close. My parents' house. I'd go fishing there.

ANDY HALE: And what would you, uh, what would you use for bait and what would you catch?

CHESTER WEGER: I could use mostly worms. I catch, uh, white, like it's, uh, white bass in, I don't know, crappies and carp. All kinds of fish.

ANDY HALE: And are you able, were you able to like, you'd catch 'em and then you could, you could like eat 'em clean 'em and eat 'em. Yeah, like

CHESTER WEGER: Clean, medium.

ANDY HALE: Um, and would you fish anywhere else?

CHESTER WEGER: I fish in, uh, deer park lake

ANDY HALE: Would. And, and, uh, what kind of things would you hunt? What, what kind of, uh,

CHESTER WEGER: Raccoons? Mostly.

ANDY HALE: How would you catch raccoons?

CHESTER WEGER: Racoons rabbits Abbots tree in the tree with dogs. And they'd shoot 'em with rifle. I said, uh, my father used to sell the pelts on them.

ANDY HALE: Your father would sell the pelts? Yes. Of what animals?

CHESTER WEGER:

Raccoons.

ANDY HALE: Oh, he would sell those? Yes. Where would you sell? 'em at

CHESTER WEGER: The, uh, for, for priors.

ANDY HALE: Oh, okay. Tell me what your parents, your, your parents were like growing up, what they did, what they did for a living. Your dad was a painter. My

CHESTER WEGER: Father was a painter. My mother was invaded to the lodge, the Starved Rock lodge.

ANDY HALE: What kind of painting did your dad do?

CHESTER WEGER: Steeples Jack worked real high painting.

ANDY HALE: Oh, so like steeples of like churches

CHESTER WEGER: Steep Jack was? Yes. Wow. Bridge churches, church, steepes, steepes like that. What churches got.

ANDY HALE: And your mom worked at the lodge? Yes. And what did she do there?

CHESTER WEGER: She made

ANDY HALE: And made the lodge?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes.

ANDY HALE: And when you were growing up, where, where did you live?
Growing up

CHESTER WEGER: In Les

ANDY HALE: How far were you from Starved Rock at that

CHESTER WEGER: 0.3 miles.

ANDY HALE: Oh, so you were real close after you, you know, in 1960.
Um, did you, at some point then go work with your dad painting? Yes.
Tell me what you did, kind of things you did. I

CHESTER WEGER: I, uh, painted bridges with him.

ANDY HALE: Painted bridges? Yes. Did you paint steeples at all too?

CHESTER WEGER: I uh steep painted church, couple church steeples. Hmm.
But mostly bridges. I, I work on bridges.

ANDY HALE: How do you, how would you paint bridges? Like how would,
how do you, how do you make sure it's safe?

CHESTER WEGER: I don't know. Climb up to little rafters under the
bridge and pitch paint. Mm-hmm, <affirmative> hang onto the rafters
and that

ANDY HALE: And your parents. So when you were your criminal trial was
in 1961. Um, do you remember when, uh, about when your parents
passed? When that was?

CHESTER WEGER: I don't know, but they passed while I was locked up.

ANDY HALE: So you basically, while you were in prison, my dad died,
you lost your dad and your mom? Yes.

CHESTER WEGER: My father died first and my mother died a few years
later.

ANDY HALE: Were you able to go to their funerals?

CHESTER WEGER: Not that I know of.

ANDY HALE: And when you, when you were first arrested, you had two kids, right? When you, when you first got arrested, you had a little boy, uh, yes. Your son, your son, Johnny. Sure. And, and, and you weren't able to see your, your kids at that point either. Then after you got, after you got locked up, is that right?

CHESTER WEGER: They come near to visit CBE and they made my relatives bring to CBE once in a while. I just bought the only time I get to see him though.

ANDY HALE: Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So your, it was hard to see your family and your, and your kids. Yes. Would you, would you write each other

CHESTER WEGER: Yes.

ANDY HALE: Write letters?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes. I would write.

ANDY HALE: And that's hard too, because not only on you, but then you've got these kids who grew up without a father who's not around. Do you have any other, any other memories of prison or things that kind of got you through it? Or, you know, you talked about the painting and

CHESTER WEGER: No, there's just paintings that I just, like I said, I tried to keep my mind off my case and yeah. And, uh, my painting or reading that I could do that, you know,

ANDY HALE: You never gave up hope.

CHESTER WEGER: No,

ANDY HALE: That's amazing. After all those years? Yes. And how old are you today?

CHESTER WEGER: 82.

ANDY HALE: When's your birthday?

CHESTER WEGER: March of third.

ANDY HALE: So you just turned

CHESTER WEGER: 83 now, 83 I'm I'm sorry. I, I lose time over this date.

ANDY HALE: You got another 20 years to go? No, youve got another 20 years to go. I'm gonna be at your a hundred and third birthday. Yeah.

Cause you know, you're, uh, you're strong physically and mentally. Um, what would be, you know, right now, you know, you're, you're renting this house in lasal. You've got your sister here and her husband, you know, I know your niece's caring, step by and you get a lot of family love and support. What would you like to be if you really, if you really could go anywhere, what would you like? Where would you kind of like to live? What kind of a place would you like to be at?

CHESTER WEGER: I'm not, I'm not really particular. As long as it's lasal county, I'm not, I'm not particular.

ANDY HALE: Would you like to have a little stream you could in,

CHESTER WEGER: Well, I'd like to be by, by me, closer to stream, you know? But other than that, I'm on, I'm on.

ANDY HALE: Would you still like to fish? Would you still be in fishing? I think you and I gotta go fishing sometime. That's what we need to do. What now being, you know, being out now. And even though you said the prison food, wasn't bad, which I'm glad to hear. What, what are some of your favorite things now that you like to eat?

CHESTER WEGER: I'm not really particular. I like

ANDY HALE: You got a sweet tooth at

CHESTER WEGER: All. I mostly anything

ANDY HALE: I kind of heard. You might like ice cream.

CHESTER WEGER: I like ice cream and I, I like, I love bro. Uh, broccoli.

ANDY HALE: Broccoli. Yeah. What about, um, any sweets? Do you like any sweets?

CHESTER WEGER: I, I ate, uh, Starling Mins and stuff like that. I'm whatever

ANDY HALE: I heard you like, I'm looking at a little box, uh, you know, need to show me hostess, frosted Chuck with donuts.

CHESTER WEGER: Shit. All right.

ANDY HALE: <laugh> must sound look pretty good. Uh, I think, I think, uh, you've been busted here with your, your, your little donut supply. Um, I'm, I'm just, I wanna say again, you know, to go through six decades of striving to prove your innocence. Um, do you feel like we're getting close? Yes, I do. Um, and what's important to you just

for everybody to know that you're innocent? Yes. We've made a lot of progress. We've made a lot of progress. We've just got one more hurdle. We've got some DNA testing to come back. Um, did the prison offer, did it have a library?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes.

ANDY HALE: Were you able to go in there and, and read? Yes. Did you try to educate yourself on the law?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes, I did.

ANDY HALE: To help you with your case? Yes. What kind of things would you do?

CHESTER WEGER: I'd draw for law and stuff like that? Uh, mostly I'd done law work for other guys as my other guys, much as I could do for him

ANDY HALE: Trying to help other people. Yes.

CHESTER WEGER: I mean, I was not really good with the law, but at least I guys took court and then under sentence and that they were having trouble getting the court.

ANDY HALE: So you were trying to help other people with their cases as well? Yes. Okay. That's amazing. And that's gotta be so hard to do. Um, you had a typewriter to it at some point. And did what happened with that?

CHESTER WEGER: Guards Broke it,

ANDY HALE: They broke it? Yes. How did it work with, um, the meals? What, what, like what time would breakfast be

CHESTER WEGER: Seven o'clock

ANDY HALE: And if you weren't ready, I mean, do you have to be like, how did it work in terms of like timing and everything you

CHESTER WEGER: Had to be ready to go when they called, called you to go <inaudible>,

ANDY HALE: You know, that guy was telling you about Terrence Haynes. He told me another story too. Not only that they broke your TV, he told me something. I'm trying to remember this. Exactly. It was like, I think you were sick or having some kind of health issue and they wouldn't even let somebody bring a tray back for you. Would they not do that?

CHESTER WEGER: I was sick and that I, uh, had double pneumonia had, uh, I had to stay in my room. I, I, I was sick to go to Shaha and, uh, there was days where the guards wouldn't let, bring me no food in. Yes mm-hmm <affirmative> did you? It wasn't, it wasn't all the time I was sick. It was just at times, you know,

ANDY HALE: Did you have any big health issues while in prison? You talked about having pneumonia. Were you, do you have any other bouts where you had some serious illnesses?

CHESTER WEGER: Just a, that that's all I know.

ANDY HALE: Do you have an issue with your, your foot or your leg?

CHESTER WEGER: Well, it was sore, you know, I don't, I never complained about that. And, uh, they never done a lot for that and, uh, they just examining that was about it.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. Yeah. Um,

CHESTER WEGER: I busted my hand in boxing, whatever. And then, uh, they, they they'd repair that already.

ANDY HALE: So when you got released from prison on parole, you first went to the St Leonard's house. Is that right in Chicago? Did you know some people there from that you'd been in prison with?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes, I did.

ANDY HALE: Did people reach out to you and, and, and, and were the people you were friendly with?

CHESTER WEGER: Oh, they thank me for, for helping with that. You know, like I said about the only thing I'd done was got, got guys to court, never were having trouble getting to court. And that that's about all I, I had done, you know, I mean, I never really knew the law to all that law. Yeah. Oh

ANDY HALE: Yeah. Um, how is it now? Day to day? I mean, is it, is it, does the time go by, is it going, you know, in terms of like your, your days now, the

CHESTER WEGER: Time by real fast though. Yeah. I

ANDY HALE: Mean, what about, you know, when you, so you went into prison in 1961, you come out 2020, you know, uh, you know, 2020. So did the world seem a lot different to you when you got out?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes. Yes.

ANDY HALE: I mean, talk about some of that. Everything,

CHESTER WEGER: Everything changed, everything changed,

ANDY HALE: Cell phones,

CHESTER WEGER: Every places they, they were, uh, I went to, when I was in, uh, all three men, they were gone, gone and everything. That's why it really hurt. Yeah. You know, not being able to go to places I went to be before I was locked up.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. So when you got out, did it seem like the world was going at a faster pace? Yes. All the tech technology. Did you wind up getting a phone when

CHESTER WEGER: You got out? Yes. Yes. I got a phone.

ANDY HALE: I mean, I can't even work this phone, this recording device. You saw me today. It took me 15 minutes to figure out how to push, press record today. Um, so have you been able to try to like, at least do some of the technology stuff?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes,

ANDY HALE: Because, uh, that to me is a challenge. Um, and you've still got the love and support of your family. So who do you, who do you still see in your life?

CHESTER WEGER: I see, uh, my sisters, my nieces, and my son, my daughter.

ANDY HALE: And what's it like spending time with them?

CHESTER WEGER: It's wonderful.

ANDY HALE: I can only imagine. I can only imagine. Um, let's do this. Let's pass the microphone over to Mary. Um, can you just stay here and sit here though? Still a ginger. All right. So that mic, you gotta be by your mouth there. Yeah, right there. Let's see. Talk. And I wanna test it, although <laugh> put it a little closer. Pardon? Put the mic a little. There you go. So tell me your name,

MARY PRUITT: Mary Pruitt.

ANDY HALE: You are what? Relation to Chester?

MARY PRUITT: Sister.

ANDY HALE: Older or younger?

MARY PRUITT: Younger.

ANDY HALE: So Chester said he's 83 years old today, right? How old are you?

MARY PRUITT: 80.

ANDY HALE: 80. So growing up when Chester was arrested, he was 21, right? He and you would've been 18, 18. And in 1960, what were you doing? Were you working?

MARY PRUITT: I was working at west clocks

ANDY HALE: At west clocks. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Did you ever work at the lodge?

MARY PRUITT: Yes.

ANDY HALE: When was that?

MARY PRUITT: Um, summers, um, between, between, um, like our school off our summers and I worked in the kitchen and I did dried dishes.

ANDY HALE: Tell me a little bit about your parents. What were they like?

MARY PRUITT: Um, my dad was a painter, like my brother said my mother was a maid. She worked at different places. Um, she did work at the lodge at one time, but she worked at other places also. And, um, uh, she's always been a maid and my dad has always been a painter and, um, he was a seasonal painter. Sometimes he got to work in the winter, but it wasn't always in the winter. It was mostly spring until cold weather. Yeah. But, um,

ANDY HALE: How, how many siblings did you have?

MARY PRUITT: I have, I have two older sisters then my brother and then me and two younger sisters. Okay.

ANDY HALE: And tell me about the house. Describe the house you all grew up in

MARY PRUITT: The house that we grew up in? Yeah. Okay. It wasn't modern way back then. There was other people that houses weren't modern. We had a two bedroom house we had, um, when everybody was home, cuz there is nine years difference between me and my oldest

sister. So by the time we were growing up, they were gone. My two older sisters were gone. So, um, mom and dad had a bedroom and me and my two younger sisters shared a bedroom. And then my brother had, um, I don't know which we always called it a sofa bed. And it was in the dining room, uh, between two windows and it, uh, pulled out the bottom, pulled out and then you put the top mattress on the, on the pullout Springs. And that's where my brother slept was in the dining room.

ANDY HALE: That's where Chester

MARY PRUITT: Was Uhhuh.

ANDY HALE: And I like, even now you call him, how do you refer to him? You refer to him as what?

MARY PRUITT: My brother,

ANDY HALE: You call him brother. Yeah. I love that. I, I always hear you say, brother said, this brother said that

MARY PRUITT: He's my brother and I love him.

ANDY HALE: We, we, we, we, we love him so much. What has it been like for you being able to stay here with him in this house? He's outta prison. He's still on parole. His conviction's still, we haven't vacated yet, but being able to spend time with him now every day, what has that been like for

MARY PRUITT: You? Well, like when we do dishes, we don't have a dishwasher here. So, um, Ron was down with a sciatic nerve and he could hardly walk and he was my dish dryer. So I said, brother, you wanna come and dry dishes? And he said, sure. And so like this, even, even, even with the girls here, me and brother still does dishes

ANDY HALE: Together. You're putting him to work. Yep. I'm looking over at

MARY PRUITT: You and he does not complain. And when you cook for him, <laugh> when you

ANDY HALE: Cook for you. Can't see. But he's, he's, he's, he's smiling right now. Um, so we only have two microphones, so yep. He doesn't have one right now, but uh, you gotta earn your keep young man. That's what she's saying. You gotta earn your keep here. So

MARY PRUITT: No, it just makes me happy that he's with me. And he's doing things with me like this morning we were doing dishes and I said to him, I said, brother, this reminds me of when we were kids

because I'd have to wash dishes and brother would have to dry dishes. And I said, it feels so good to be able to do things with you again,

ANDY HALE: Just to spend every day with him. Yeah.

MARY PRUITT: Just to do dishes, even

ANDY HALE: The little things in life. Yeah.

MARY PRUITT: Right. And when Ron was down, he carried my laundry basket from downstairs, uh, upstairs from down to down here. And um, he's Al even with his eyes that he's not supposed to lift, we have to get on to him. No, you can't do that brother because you're not supposed to lift yet because we want the surgery to be good, but he's always willing to be there to help.

ANDY HALE: You know what I noticed about Chester. I mean, I'm not trying to embarrass you Chester, but I never met anybody with a bigger heart. Oh. And I'll tell you a story. You know, when I would go visit Chester at St. Leonard's house, when he first got out on parole, I took him to the grocery store to buy some things. He made sure we bought snacks for the women who worked in the kitchen. Right. We bought other little snacks for, you know, people. He was rooming with, uh, he would stop at that little corner store down the block and buy things for people. Never about him. Always thinking about somebody else got the biggest heart in the world. Must have got that from your parents

MARY PRUITT: At Christmas time. One year, this is when he was out his first Christmas. Uh, we didn't get to spend it with him, but he went somewhere and he bought eight watches and gave them to people that was with him in, in the home.

ANDY HALE: Oh my gosh. Yeah.

MARY PRUITT: Tell me, he's never, he's never been stingy. He's never been stingy.

ANDY HALE: Tell me what it's been like. Did you ever really think that, you know, cuz he's, you know, he gets arrested in 1960, the trials in 1961, the 1970s go by the 1980s go by the 1990s, go by the two thousands. Go by 2000 tens. Go by where in 2020, did you ever think you'd be sitting here across the table from your brother, seeing him in person out of prison. Did you, did you, did you think you'd have that day?

MARY PRUITT: I never gave up hope. I never gave up hope. We've always prayed about it. And you don't know when, but each parole hearing, you know, there was more that was voting to let 'em out and as

ANDY HALE: Time went on. Yeah,

MARY PRUITT: Mm-hmm <affirmative> there was um, some board members that was just awesome and told us we were doing the right thing to keep coming to the parole hearings. And my brother always has always claimed his innocence. And he said even all the time he was in prison, he said, he said, I'll never stop fighting. He said, I'll fight it until I, the day I die,

ANDY HALE: You know? And that's amazing to hear. And like I told him, I'm looking at him when I'm telling him this. That's why he's still here.

MARY PRUITT: That's right.

ANDY HALE: As strong as he is.

MARY PRUITT: That's right.

ANDY HALE: That's that, that was all what kind of toll, you know, obviously the toll to Chester is unimaginable, but what did you see the impact it had on your parents?

MARY PRUITT: Oh my mom and dad both took it hard. And my dad, oh, when trial was, um, I guess my mom is the strongest one in our family because my dad had to stop going to trial. He couldn't, he couldn't handle it. He had a bad heart and he just, he couldn't handle it. But my mother and Joanne never missed a day. I was always there. Um, my mom was the strongest. She was the strongest,

ANDY HALE: You know, I've got some of these old pictures from the trial and there's one that just, you can feel the emotion it's of your parents in court. Right. Just sitting there together and you can just see on their faces, you know, how the pain right. And what they would've had to go through and how hard that was. Um, what do you think has kept your brother going over all these years? How do you, how do you, how do you, I mean, it's remarkable. We're sitting here today at this table,

MARY PRUITT: Right? Well, you know, like when, when he was in prison, like when, when he was at St. Leonard's when he come out and we were there with him, we got to stay a couple days with him. We didn't stay right there, but we were there and we would get up early in the morning. And after he had breakfast, sometimes we'd even go to breakfast. Um, and we'd go to lunch with him. They would tell us that we could go to lunch. And it was amazing. Like the first, the first Saturday after he was out, I believe was on his Saturday. There was so many inmates that heard that he was out of prison. And of course they must have been in the Chicago area because we had so many people, so many guys come in and say that they, um, how much he had

helped them file papers. One guy. And I can't remember the name. And of course he knew 'em all one guy was in solitaire. They were in solitaire together. And brother told him what papers he needed to fill out. And this guy came, he was outta prison and he came and he told brother, he told the story right there. And he told brother thanked him about helping him to know what papers to fill out so that he could file him. And brother helped him fill him out.

ANDY HALE: Did you stay in touch with Chester over, um, over the years he was in prison. Did you, did you yes. Did you correspond with him? Yes.

MARY PRUITT: Um, I always wrote and sent cards and we sent pictures and um, and then when we found out that we could go through pen, is it pen pal, PayPal, PayPal that you could, um, you could put money on your, you could call this number and put money in the JPay, uh, JPay. Is that what it was? Yeah. Anyhow. Um, you can tell, I don't know, electronics very good. Anyhow. I would do that. And so, um, he would call, he would call our home phone and if he didn't call me every week, he called his daughter, Becky, and then Becky would call me if he called her and I'd call Becky if he called me. And so it was, we were always in touch with him.

ANDY HALE: When did you lose your mom? And when did you lose your

MARY PRUITT: Dad? I lost my dad in 92 and I lost my mom in 2001.

ANDY HALE: So think about that in 92, your, your dad, you know, 30 more years Chester in prison, your mom, you know, 30 plus that I wish they could see you guys together right

MARY PRUITT: Now. You know, my dad, my dad was a talker and my dad would always tell my mom one day, we're gonna see our son walking down the road. He's coming home. And the day that he got out, I looked up and I said, mom and dad, he's finally coming home. They always look for that day. And he did not go to their funerals. Um, I called and the warden would let him call me back. And he said that he wasn't coming home to no funerals because he knew that the press would bombard him. And he didn't want to cause any commotion at mom and dad's funeral. Mm.

ANDY HALE: I wish, you know, they're looking down right now. Your mom and dad are looking down right now and they got smiles and their faces. I know Chester, your parents are proud of you. We're not done yet. You know, we've got, we got more work to do, but we have made so much progress in proving Chester's innocence. Uh, we, we are, we've made incredible progress. We gotta stay the course and keep, keep the fight. We're not done yet. But tell me what it was like having Christmas together.

MARY PRUITT: Oh, it was, it was awesome. Um, our family, our, my family, my family, Ron and my kids. We've always, um, we've always had everybody come home except Nita. Doesn't get to always come home cuz she's so far away. So we are so used to having a house full of people during holiday. And this is any holiday. Any, any holiday is always home. And when the, when my, when my, um, kids were small, I would have them pick a meal that they wanted and what kind of dessert. And they would tell me, and that was their birthday meal. And that when, from my kids to my grandkids, same thing, and we've got six grandkids and it was always a house full of people. Now it's, it's kids, our, our kids, grandkids and great grandkids. And so the house is full and it was, um, always like that growing up.

MARY PRUITT: And that's how it was here at Christmas time. It was, I got, he got to decorate. We had pictures of him helping me and Ron decorate the tree and, and he, and he helped us decorate the tree. And then he got tired and he said, well, I'm gonna go sit for a while. I said, that's fine. If you get tired, you know, you go sit. And so our tree was here in the dining room, in the, in the bay window. And, uh, not, not five minutes had went by and he was back and I said, are you okay? He said, yep. He said, I'm gonna finish decorating the tree. So he put the, he put a star on the top of the tree that my mother had. It was, we had old decorations.

ANDY HALE: Did you enjoy Christmas?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes.

ANDY HALE: Did you decorate the tree?

CHESTER WEGER: Yes, I did.

ANDY HALE: What do you wanna say to your brother right now?

MARY PRUITT: We had a lot of fun decorating it. Didn't we brother, we did that. What did you do?

CHESTER WEGER: Just, uh, decorated to decorated with put bulbs on there. Little pasties and whatever.

MARY PRUITT: And what'd you put on the top of the tree

CHESTER WEGER: Across

MARY PRUITT: Mama star. Yeah. We had a star. That was my mother's and we brought it Nita, brought a Christmas tree from Texas <laugh> we had so much fun and, and we always, we always do say, I love you. We do. So,

ANDY HALE: Uh, what do you wanna say

MARY PRUITT: To your brother? Oh, I love him now. I, I, I tell him that many times a day.

CHESTER WEGER: I thought you be.

MARY PRUITT: Yeah. I, I, when he's tucked in bed at night, Ron gets him ready for bed and always say, goodnight, brother, I love you. And he always says, I love you too, sis.

ANDY HALE: What do you say to her? I love her too.

MARY PRUITT: Yeah.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. Do you have any other, any other memories of like what it was like sitting through the trial? You know, just being there every day. What was going through the family that time?

MARY PRUITT: You know, during, during the trial I worked at, we clocks and I had nobody. I had nobody give me any problem at that factory. Everybody was so nice. And, uh, they would ask me how, how the family was doing or how my brother was doing. And, you know, I, I never had any trouble with anybody, but I know I was older than my two younger sisters. And my two younger sisters had a hard time at school. And I know it was what their parents had said that my two younger sisters had a harder time. But during the trial, um, you know, you try to be strong for my mom and dad because they were really having it hard. They were really having it hard. And, uh, and Joanne was having it hard. And she was, you know, when my brother was in the military, um, we did things together.

ANDY HALE: What happened, you know, when Chester went into prison, his kids were how old.

MARY PRUITT: Um, Becky was probably about three and Johnny was like about on a year and a half one.

ANDY HALE: So what happened to the kids?

MARY PRUITT: Well, their mother, their mother, um, they lived, um, here in Lasal and they moved to Oglebay. We would go pick up the kids, uh, Eric, Joan, and we would spend time with 'em we'd spend time. And I just gave Becky a, a photo album. Uh, I had was cleaning out all of our pictures and I thought, I'll just give pictures to every family that, that belongs to. And I came across pictures when they were small and probably they don't probably have pictures like that. And I put 'em in an album and I gave them to Becky. I gave them to Becky. Uh, we had a horse named star and she was telling her husband, Kevin, that she remembered a horse that she used to ride on. And, and I don't know how long ago that was. She told Kevin because in the photo album was Becky on the horse and she called me, he was

here on Monday and she called me Monday night. She said, I really had a crying JAG. She said, those pictures really brought back a lot of memories.

ANDY HALE: What did you notice? I mean, it, it had to be hard for the kids, for Chester's kids growing up as they get to be, you know, teenagers, young adults and going on with their life. They've got their dad in prison. Who's been convicted of this horrible crime. I mean, what did you see in terms of how their difficulties were?

MARY PRUITT: Well, you know, there's always a strong one and there's always a weak one, and this is how I saw it. Becky was a strong one and Becky's got a mouth and she'll tell you today, she's got a mouth and don't push Becky because she's gonna open her up her mouth and she's gonna put you in her place. And she has told me things about that. And Johnny, Johnny was a weaker one and

ANDY HALE: Just harder for him to deal with

MARY PRUITT: It. It's really hard. It's it's it was hard. Yeah. It was hard for both of them when they, when he got out, because they both cried. They, I mean, they just hung onto him and cried. And Johnny, you know, Johnny has never had a dad, right. He's never had a dad, even though his mother remarried, he he's never had a dad. What we know what a dad is, a dad cares for you and loves you and protects you. And those kids haven't had that.

ANDY HALE: Let's um, you had some great things to say, let's pass it to Nita for a minute. So can you introduce yourself?

NITA FREEMAN: Uh, my name is Nita Freeman and I'm Che, um, I call him uncle lotto. Um, I'm his

ANDY HALE: Niece, you know, whenever we talk, wanna start, keep your microphone by your mouth. Okay. Whenever we talk, you know, I, I would, I told my wife, it's like, you know, it's uncle Otto. It is, you know, it's uncle Otto, it's uncle Otto, mm-hmm <affirmative>. And, um, I love that name. Um, you know, I met you when I started to represent Chester, you know, you and your sister, I've been so impressed with you and your sister, your mom been there for uncle OTO every day, never gave up hope that support and love. How would you describe what the family has been through all these years, you know, and, and kind of like leading to where we're at now?

NITA FREEMAN: Well, um, we grew, we we've always known uncle OTO. I mean, my mom has never hidden anything from us. So we grew up knowing that he was in prison. Um, our family has always believed in his innocence, um, just digging in. So mom had a lot of paperwork, um, back in the early two thousands because we were older. We had kids, you know, so we had time to kind of do our own research, met a couple people along the way, um, that kind of lost it. Um, but they did do,

you know, like Bob Petri, when Bob Petri helped or was around, we actually, you know, got some good information from him and then fast forward to, you know, going starting, we could start going because we were monetarily, okay. Now that we can start going every year or every three years to his parole hearing.

NITA FREEMAN: And then it went to every year. Um, and it was, it was something that we did ev every time. And so, um, fast forward again, we went through many different innocence projects within the state of Illinois. The case was always too big, except for one decided to maybe look into it. And they decided to say, or they ended up saying we would have to put our whole staff on it. And we unfortunately can't do that because we have other clients that we have to help. So went through a couple, um, different new lawyers that were making it and are starting to make it with, through the symposium. We went to the symposium that was back in 2010 and it, it just got too big. Nobody we couldn't find help. I mean, and through the years he had actually written different lawyers trying to get help. Nobody was willing to help. And the year that we didn't go was in 2017, I think it was. And you showed up <laugh>. Oh. And, um, so then that's when the momentum, you know, because we were, we were at a loss, you know, we would never give up, but it was like, where do we go from here? So, um,

ANDY HALE: It's amazing. You never gave up. I mean, did you think you'd be sitting here now again, we got work to do the conviction. Hasn't been vacated yet, but Chester's out yeah. On parole, you know, living here. Did you, did you think you'd get to this point? We,

NITA FREEMAN: I did. I did a hundred percent because in 2000, I think it was an eight. I know this is kind of weird. Um, but I went to church one night and they always say, you know, give God a word, you know, give God a word and we'll see if it's confirmed, you know? And so I said, you know what? I want, I want the preacher to say vindication. That's what I want that word. And halfway through it. It wasn't anything about the, it wasn't anything about the service. He said the word vindication. Wow. I, and, and I know it's coming, wow. We just have to be patient. It's always in God's time. You know, there's, we would've never met you if it was earlier, you know, there, we wouldn't have met a lot of people through this case with Sandra bland and you know, that, you know, become family, friends now, you know,

ANDY HALE: Talk about a little bit, the love and support you've seen in this family over the

NITA FREEMAN: Years. Oh my gosh. You know, we never give up on each other, Carrie. And I both say we would not be able to do it with each other without each other, because it's so much work and it's so worth it, because what he went through is nothing. What we have, what we've

gone through, not even close, even though it's hard, it's, it's so worth

ANDY HALE: It. Well, I love seeing the, the love and support your family. Has you and your sister, your mom, you know, um, Ron Chester here, uh, a lot of people get outta prison. I've had other people get out and they don't have that family network. They don't have the love and support, and it's hard enough getting outta prison after and having to adjust. But if you don't have a, a network of, of people there, mm-hmm, <affirmative> the love and support. It's so difficult. You guys have that

NITA FREEMAN:

Now with, when we went to, because he was in two halfway houses, um, they have both had said that to us. You know, we cannot believe the show of family here for him. It's just, it's, it's nonexistent. You know, even when we take him to his doctor's offices or go to different many different doctor, I think he's got up to eight right now, eight different doctors. Um,

ANDY HALE: He's seen eight different doctors.

NITA FREEMAN: He's seeing eight different doctors right now

ANDY HALE: For all his different issues.

NITA FREEMAN: Exactly, exactly. You know, we're trying to clean up what this, what, what,

ANDY HALE: Well, what's amazing is, and that's, I think one of the real benefits of, of being out, uh, as much as, you know, in prison, they try to do their best. Right. Um, it's overwhelming and you don't get, obviously the quality of medical care you can get on the outside. So without getting into the details, has Chester been able to see doctors and kind of get his health in a better place?

NITA FREEMAN: Yes. So we are, um, we are going to, yes. So anytime that, you know, there's a little hiccup in the road, like a red flag saying, okay, well this, something else may be happening. So let's get hemorrhage for, to another doctor. And so they're, you know, they're kind of piggybacking on each other. Um, I do know, like when he did say the, you know, the state, they can do what they can with what they have. And I, and I do know that they do get to see outside doctors, but the problem is the doctor has to accept the inmate to come because they have to wear SHA. They have to wear chains and shackles, and then they're scaring their patients off. So a lot of, a lot of outside doctors won't

ANDY HALE: Tell me just a few of, of whatever you feel, you know, you feel like you can say, now that Chester's been out and, you know,

health obviously is his number one priority, you know, you're 83. You wanna live as long as you can now. Exactly. Um, tell me about some of the things you've been able to, you know, doctors have been able to help accomplish with Chester. Yeah.

NITA FREEMAN: Okay. So right now, what we have accomplished with him is he, well, we gave him a bucket list. We asked him for kind of a bucket list of what he wants done. And so, um, he said he wanted his eyes done and he wanted new dentures. Fantastic. And so he got, he, the first thing he got done was his dentures. So he's had dentures for a little while and he's able to eat meat and, you know, stuff now. And then he wanted his cataracts done. And that took quite a while because the waiting list is so long. So he's had both of those done. And then, um, right now we're working on some other things

ANDY HALE: Still. That's great to hear. I'm, I'm so happy to hear it. I'm so proud of him. I'm so impressed with the whole family. Uh, I'm so blessed that I met all of you. It's changed my life. It's amazing. Uh, it's just, it's just a blessing, um, sitting here in this little kitchen table with, with all you today, uh, I, I just feel so blessed to be a part of this, you know, and, uh, I love all you.

NITA FREEMAN: Well, we love you too. We would be so lost without you and Celeste. You guys are our rock, you know, and we wouldn't have gotten as far as we, he wouldn't have, we, we had been so close two times at the parole hearings, they were tied. And the year before, um, the year before you guys came, the president actually said, does anybody wanna change their vote? Mm-hmm <affirmative> and nobody did. And so we thought nobody's gonna wanna be the person that lets Chester figure out

ANDY HALE: Well, you know, the hard part is cuz I, you know, I've been lucky enough to help a couple other people get outta prison, clef, Heidelberg, and Peoria. After 47 years, Terrence Haynes, Kankakei. After 22 years, we had, um, L story Simon. You know, part of that documentary movie is 16 years and it is really, really hard to prove your innocence. Once you're convicted, it's really hard to undo it and to prove your innocence. And it's particularly hard, incredibly harder as time goes by as the years passed and the case gets colder and colder people die, memories, fade people care less each year. It gets nearly impossible to. So to think that we are, in my opinion, so close making, incredible progress where we're at now, just waiting for this DNA testing. It's remarkable, the journey that we've been on. Um, and I feel it.

ANDY HALE: I feel it. And I want to have an update hopefully where we can finally completely put this to bed, prove Chester's innocence, exonerate him, get his reputation back. And I gotta tell you, like I told you, when I first got here today doing the podcast, I have had nothing but love. So many people have reached out from the Illinois valley area whose parents grew up knowing, you know, we ran the local

grocery store. My mom worked at the lodge or we had another little business and we knew the Weger family. And my parents always felt Chester was innocence. And we always believed in him. I've had so much outpoint of love like that. People supporting what we're doing. I just, it's been amazing. It's been so heartwarming. Let's give the microphone back to Chester for one more time. I imagine you missed, you missed your kids almost years. Um, and I want you to know that we're there for you. We're gonna, we're gonna see this to the very end and we want you to have your day where we can vacate your conviction, exonerate you and show everybody that you've been innocent all these years. Yes. Are you looking forward to that day? Yes, I am. We're gonna get there. We're gonna get there. Um, well I love, I love all you guys. And anything else you wanna say to your sister and to uh, Nita?

CHESTER WEGER: No, I'm good. Okay. I just love you both.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. And we love you too.

CHESTER WEGER: I wanna thank you for everything, you know?

ANDY HALE: And uh, it's been a pleasure. You, I mean, first of all, you're welcome. But uh, I have really gotten so much out of this. You've changed my life. You have changed my life. Uh, this has been, it hasn't been worked in the sense it's been rewarding and passionate, you know, to have a just cause that you believe in. I'm so lucky to get the opportunity to do that. So most people don't and like I said, we still have one more chapter in this book that we've gotta get to, but we're gonna get to it. And so I look forward to, I know you just had your birthday. I look forward to your 84th birthday. I want you to start making out your birthday list for me. Okay. My admire. And I want you to make out your Christmas list for me. What, what are you gonna get me for Christmas?

CHESTER WEGER: I don't know

ANDY HALE: How, what do you want for Christmas?

CHESTER WEGER: And then I, I don't care. I just glad to be home. Be able to spend Christmas from,

ANDY HALE: We're glad to have you home. God bless you.

CHESTER WEGER: What do you going for Christmas?

ANDY HALE: Uh, what do I want for Christmas? He's smiling. Got him to smile at, you know, I get like I get <laugh> you're you're laughing and it's funny which people could see you as you get older. I'm like you, there's nothing I need, you know, there's okay. Cookies for Christmas. You know what? You know what that's I'll take. I will take

home baked cookies all day. That's what I would love. What day? Christmas? What did you do at Christmas? Something do you baked?

CHESTER WEGER: I ain't didn really bake my help. Decorate. Hmm. Oh, cookie.

ANDY HALE: You decorated the Christmas cookies. Did you also help eat? 'em <laugh> well, here's here's the plan. I want to come out next Christmas. We're gonna, we're gonna DEC, could we decorate cookies together? Yeah. And then save some for me to eat some cookies together. Okay. All right. All right. That's a deal. That's a plan. That's a wrap folks. All right,

ANDY HALE: Whitney. What a journey this has been, I wanted to tell you how much I have enjoyed doing this podcast with you. You have been amazing. And I, I can't tell you how much, uh, I have enjoyed it, how much I have learned how much progress we have made way, way exceeded all my expectations in every facet that I can imagine.

WHITNY BRAUN: I feel the same way. And I just can't thank you enough for inviting me to be, to be part of this. And then just, I, I think I can't really put into words how special this, this story has been, right? The story of Chester, the story of, of this saga and being able to be part of it and keep investigating and getting closer and closer to the truth has been, I think one of the, the, the coolest experiences of my life. And so I thank you for that opportunity and for well, and for tackling this case in the first place. If, if you hadn't introduced me to this case, I would've maybe gone the rest of my life, unaware of it.

ANDY HALE: Well, it's like we took a route 66 road trip, right. From Chicago to LA. And about halfway along the way we found the lowest Len memo, the smoking gun. Yeah. That was a game changer when I look back on it. And I think about that, and I think about the man from Hennepin and all the other things we've learned, it's emotional for me. And it's incredible. We still have more work to do. But when I look back on the last 13 episodes, everything we've talked about how we started on episode one and you know where we are today. It's incredible where we are today. I mean, I feel it. Do you feel it?

WHITNY BRAUN: I feel it because you know, the crazy thing about, about doing this podcast is it has allowed me, I think, to finally have a sense of what happened. You know, there's still more that we need to know, but I think prior to finding the Selencik memo right prior to the story from the man from Hennepin, I, I had a lot of theories as to what I thought happened. Uh, I didn't feel like I had a strong sense of, of what the truth really was. And I feel like now we're like we're knocking on the door of it. And, and I, I, it just still gets me that after all the thousands of pages that you and I have both sifted through that, that you found that, that one, right. That Selencik memo, and it just suddenly made everything else make

more sense. Like the handwritten notes, the, the newspaper articles, it just, it was like this strange catalyst for just kind of formulating conclusions about all this different information. And I, I, I just, I'm, I'm, I'm shocked that you found that needle in the haystack,

ANDY HALE: It was a needle in a haystack, and there might still be some twists and turns. I mean, I think that smoking gun memo, I think it proves alone that proves Chester had nothing to do with this putting aside the other 50 reasons we have, but we haven't connected all the dots with Glen Palmatier, William Palmatier, the guy with the distinctive voice in the Aurora Tavern who has limited education of vocabulary. I mean, who that is, there's there's, I think there's some more shocking twists and turns. Uh, we may or may not find them out. I hope we do. We're gonna keep working on the case. And as I've said, barring some new developments. We're gonna sit tight until we come back in late July to discuss the DNA results. But Whitney, we've got some other exciting news to share. We're gonna be hosting a season two, but the season two podcast is not gonna simply tell a true crime story.

ANDY HALE: Rather, our goal is to solve an egregious murderer using the airwaves. We wanna call on all the armchair detectives and locals in the area to listen and help us solve this murder. In this case, as I've discussed with you, Whitney, it has a personal connection for me. Let me give a little bit of the backstory. I had a friend of mine reach out to me for help in 2018, my friend's brother, 57 year old, Dr. George Cronus left Chicago to visit his 79 acre ranch in rural rains county, Texas. It was his happy place. He liked to go hunting there. George had not been down to the ranch in a few years. And when he arrived to his surprise, it looked like someone was living on the property after calling his wife to tell her what he had encountered. No one heard from him. Again, later that night, a neighbor called 9 1 1 after seeing a fire on George's property.

ANDY HALE: When the police and fire arrived, the ranch was burned to the ground. And George was found on the ground dead with burns over 50% of his body, but there was no smoke in his lungs. And you know, I know we're gonna talk about this unite, cuz you've got a medical background. There was no smoke in his lungs. George didn't die from the fire yet. The case still hasn't been classified as a homicide by the reigns county, Texas Sheriff's office. So my goal Whitney is to you and I together again, season two, a different kind of podcast. Our goal here is gonna be to solve this murder and to bring some justice to the Cronus family. There's a murderer out there. Make no mistake. There is a murderer out there. We need to find out who it is. So Whitney, like I said, this is a case it's got a personal connection to me cuz this friend of mine reached out. But it's a case I've talked about with you. And what were your first thoughts when I told you about the case?

WHITNY BRAUN: Well, frankly, the first time you told me about it, I thought you were describing the plot to an Elmore Leonard novel. I mean it just, it had this, uh, it had this cast of characters of uh, uh, small town folks, doctor from the big city, you know, murder in the Heartland of Texas. I mean everything about this case is confusing, intriguing, and just, I mean, it's just, it's just so interesting and upsetting that it's still not been solved and I can't, I cannot wait to dig into it.

ANDY HALE: Me too. I cannot wait to start dissecting it and to try to solve it. Yeah. Bring justice for the Cronus family. Oh my gosh. If we can do that. I, I just, that would be it for me. I, I, I feel like, you know that in Chester, I, I, I would just drop the mic and uh, <laugh>, I'll just, you know, I'll just become a beekeeper and uh,

WHITNY BRAUN: No, no, no, no,

ANDY HALE: No, I don't. I don't need to do anything else.

WHITNY BRAUN: Nope. The problem is is, is there are way too many other cases out there that that need the same, the same treatment, right? I mean, there's just too many of these. There are too many of these and we won't, uh, we won't be stopping well, at least I'm not allowing you to stop. Right.

(music begins to play)

ANDY HALE: <laugh> well, I am looking forward to season two. I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to season two.

WHITNY BRAUN: Same here.

(music fades out)

ANDY HALE: Season two, we'll launch on this same feed. So you're in the right spot. And if you haven't done so already, you're gonna wanna subscribe. So you don't miss any episodes. We're gonna be releasing a trailer soon. And we hope to release our first episode of season two in late June. So stay tuned. We need your help. Thanks for listening to this episode of the Starved Rock miners with Andy Hale, please visit our website AndyHalePodcast.com. As we are posting a bunch of photos, we took a Chester's house during my recent visit. I think you really like seeing these photos. If you know anything about the Starved Rock murders, please email us. No tip or information is too small. We're still working on the case. We're still investigating. We're not gonna stop. And if you know anyone that you think was wrongfully convicted, if there's another Chester Weger out there, please reach out. We'd love to hear about it. If you enjoy today's podcast, please subscribe, rate and review us wherever you

get your podcast. It's especially important now to subscribe. So you don't miss any new episodes we might drop. If we get a new development, your reviews and ratings mean so much to Whitney and me. This show is 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.