

## **The Starved Rock Murders with Andy Hale**

### ***Episode 3: The Crime Scene (and why the evidence doesn't point to Chester)***

ANDY HALE: Welcome back to the Starved Rock Murders with Andy Hale, a podcast where we explore a triple homicide that occurred in the Starved Rock State Park in 1960. A brutal crime for which my client Chester Weger was convicted and spent over 60 years in prison. Today, we're going to discuss the unique crime scene evidence, questions that were answered and questions that remain unanswered. There's a lot to talk about. Let's begin.

*(sound of eerie music begins to play. The sound of footsteps walking through the snow)*

ANDY HALE: Imagine being any one of the members of law enforcement standing in Saint Louis Canyon on March 16th, 1960. These were small town cops who had spent most of their careers dealing with domestic disputes, bar brawls and livestock theft, suddenly sheriff Ray Eutsey, and his deputies detective Bill Dummett, a one-time Turkey farmer with no formal law enforcement training, were responsible for investigating the most high profile murder in the state's history. All three women seemed to have been left posed, their arms and legs were extended and spread out as if they were making snow angels but their undergarments were pulled down. Their wrists bound and their faces had been beaten so badly that they were unrecognizable. The sheer brutality suggests rage of a personal nature but this made no sense to anyone. These were respectable ladies from the suburbs, none of them had any enemies, who would do this?

What was the motive? Was this a sex-crazed offender gone berserk? Was this a spontaneous crime of passion and opportunity or a premeditated assassination? Presumably, these questions were swirling through the minds of the officers when state's attorney Harland Warren arrived on the scene. Wasting no time, he ordered state police to use propane torches to begin melting away the snow to look for evidence.

*(sound of police sirens and plow torch igniting)*

As he walked through the snow, he felt a large tree branch crunch underfoot. And as he would tell this story multiple times, he reached down, picked it up, saw blood on the branch and declared it was the murder weapon. The next day, Thursday, March 17th, 1960 law enforcement began questioning everyone who worked at the lodge. Nick Spiros, the owner of the lodge volunteered himself and his son George to be the first to be questioned and fingerprinted by police and

offer hair samples. Police would end up taking over 500 hair samples from employees and locals, including the Spiros family dog. Panicked travelers hearing of the murders called the lodge to cancel their reservations.

(sound of phone ringing)

The town's economy, which was driven by tourism, came to a grinding halt. Nick Spiros, who was arguably the most powerful and influential businessman in Lisle County, put up a \$5,000 cash reward for information leading to an arrest in the case. The crime scene provided more questions than answers but there was a tantalizing bit of evidence, in the clenched hand of Lillian Oetting were two strands of hair that didn't appear to belong to the victims. One hair was fine and light brown, the other strand was coarse and dark. Who did these hairs belong to? With an overwhelming amount of confusing evidence, the manhunt began

(music fades out)

*Transition to conversation between hosts:*

ANDY HALE: Whitney, we talked last episode about the crime scene, the way the bodies were discovered, the nature of the injuries. One thing we didn't talk about was the women being bound. I think that's important. So the women each had a twine around their wrists. So they were bound together at one point but then the twine had been cut. So let's pause there and talk about that. That again, to me is completely inconsistent with the Chester Weger narrative. So think about this. What he says in the confession is it's this botched robbery, he tries to the purse, it's not a purse, it's a camera strap. There's an argument. Everybody decides to go their own way. And then he claims that one of the women attacked him, which makes zero sense. But then you play this out. He fights this woman off, apparently kills her. And then says, because I killed her, I've got to kill other two so there's no witnesses.

All right. Under that scenario, there is no reason to bind anyone. There's no tying them up. There's no premeditation. He kills number one because she attacks him. And then because he is killed her, he's got to kill the other two. He's not going to tie him up. It's this spontaneous is frenzy, that like, "Oh I killed number one, I've got to kill two and three." You're not going to bind them and tie them up. So I just think another thing that's lost in the shuffle is the fact that the women had this twine around their wrists. Again, that was cut. Why is it cut? I mean, there's so much to talk about just with that.

WHITNY BRAUN: There's two ways to look at the twine. Either it was used to restrain them, which doesn't make sense with Chester's official narrative at all his, his confession doesn't, it does not make sense that he would restrain them. If it's not used for restraint, then I have wondered, was it used as of a means by which to drag the bodies? Were their hands tied so that whoever moved them in the cave could use that as a fulcrum point to tie their wrists and then grab onto their wrists and drag them? But either way, neither of those scenarios match with what Chester's saying. And again, that got just completely glossed over in the trial, the finger is missing. And the purpose of the twine is also completely glossed over.

ANDY HALE: I think they tried to make a big deal of the twine. And I thought there was this very amateurish attempt to say, "Oh, the twine is similar to the twine used in the kitchen of the Starved Rock Lodge."

WHITNY BRAUN: For what?

ANDY HALE: That was complete speculation. My understanding from looking at the evidence and in the physical evidence, there is a lot of twine that was collected from various sources at the lodge and from various third parties, there was never any authoritative expert testimony linking that twine to the lodge. And even if it did Chester Weger, he's not the only person that works at the lodge. There is hundreds of people that work at the lodge. So I don't even think it matters at the end of the day if the twine came from the lodge or if it didn't. But my point is the fact that the women were bound with twine is not consistent with Chester Weger's confession.

It just doesn't make any sense that Chester Weger is going to bind those ladies under his version of what he allegedly said happened. Let me pivot to another point that I think is so significant. There are two types of hair found on the women in their hands, presumably from the offender or offenders, there are two types of hair, two colors of hair. This is widely reported in newspaper articles back at the time. There were numerous strands of hair found clenched in Mrs Oetting's fist. If there are two types of hair found what the articles say back in 1960 is, they're looking for two killers. I mean, that's what they say. We're looking for two different people because we found two different types of hair. They even said they went so far in the articles to say it looked like the hair of a younger person and the hair of an older person.

Okay. Again, why is that not being talked about more? It's a multiple killer scenario and what we know and this may be the biggest point I make on this entire podcast and I could talk for days about it. There

is actually a report, there is a hair found on the glove of Ms Murphy. It's the light colored hair because there were two types of hair found, light colored and dark. They take the light hair and they send it to the Washington University medical school to be analyzed. And there is a report, there is a written report from late November that comes back and says that light colored hair is dissimilar to Chester Weger and the three victims. It is not Chester Weger. That to me in that report, doesn't surface at trial. It wasn't produced, it didn't have to be produced because of the Brady law that said back at the time in 1960, the Supreme court had not yet decided Brady versus Maryland, which says that the state has to turn over all potential exculpatory information.

So the state did not have to tell Chester Weger, "Hey, you know what? We tested this hair and it's not yours but we're not going to tell you that." There's no report, I saw testing the dark-colored hair. And you know why I think that is? Because they know Chester Weger doesn't have dark-colored hair so they don't test it because that wouldn't have been his hair either. So the fact that there's two different hairs found on the victims, the light-colored hair is not Chester's, to me alone, would've been reasonable doubt in a trial today.

WHITNY BRAUN: This is just a little point of interest. There are two suspects from the list of pretty strong candidates who had course dark hair, who were actually celebrated for their heads of course dark hair and that is George Spiros and Gerald Nemke. And yet neither of them had their hair tested.

ANDY HALE: I just find this hair evidence stunning. I mean and here's another point that is really significant. Nobody can claim now, you cannot say, "Oh well that hair was insignificant." No, no, no, no, no, no. It was so significant that the state sent it to the Washington University medical school to be analyzed and a report was issued. Why did they do that? Because they thought A, it was materially relevant to the crime scene and they thought it was the offender's hair. So I'm not even going to hear any argument now that hair, or doesn't matter. When it doesn't come back to Chester, you'll want to hear all the people say, "Oh well who cares? How important was the hair?" Oh, well, what so important that they tested it had a report issued because they thought it was from the offender.

And so the fact it's not Chester's, we know that and there is not even a report about the dark course hairs that are found. I mean, that is, it's a bombshell. I mean, when I saw that Washington University medical report, which is dated in November of 1960, Chester Weger's confession is November, basically 16th, 17th. This report is I believe it was November 23rd. All right. So within days

of the alleged confession, they have a report that the hair found in Ms Murphy is not Chester Weger's,

ANDY HALE: But you know what? It was too late. It was too late because they couldn't just change things. They had a confession from Chester Weger. So what are they going to do? What they did was, what they should have done was, they should have said, "Oh wow, may be this confession is not legit." But you know what? In my opinion, they knew that, they knew it wasn't legit. They knew it had been coerced and they just stayed the course. They went with the confession story, despite not only knowing that in my opinion, it was coerced but also now knowing factually that the hair found on Ms. Murphy is not from Chester Weger. Shame on all of them.

WHITNY BRAUN: There's no report for the dark hair. I wonder if there was. The conspiracy theorist in me wonders if there was. And that just in the intervening 60 years, that conveniently found its way out of the official records because maybe it implicated someone who law enforcement did not want implicated.

ANDY HALE: Excellent point.

WHITNY BRAUN: That's what tickles the back of my brain. That why would you send one hair sample and not both to Washington University? I mean, it's not like the shipping cost was so extensive I mean, it's a strand of hair.

ANDY HALE: I mean, I think the answer to that though is pretty obvious from my standpoint, I think at this point, they are looking at Chester Weger. They start basically, I mean, Chester Weger becomes the suspect in September. They're trying to break him down in September and October. So I don't think they wanted to send a dark hair to be tested. I think it would've all been part of a same report. And my suspicious personal opinion is, they didn't send the dark hair to be tested because they weren't on a mission to find out who committed that dark care. But let me talk about another thing, which is how Chester Weger gets on their radar screen from his conversation with George Spiros. I mean, this is back early on in the case. We are in March and April when these conversations are happening and there's a report that is so flimsy, for George Spiros to say, "Well, I don't know why I put Chester and Stanley there. It just seems they were the ones." Are you kidding me?

I mean, does that have an ounce of credibility for George Spiros? Who himself is a suspect, to say, I mean to come back later after never having said this initially to come back later and say, "I don't know why I put those guys there. It just seems like they were the ones." How laughable is that? That, that changes anything. If to me, all

that should have done was made George Spiros more of a suspect. And it's no credibility with Chester Weger and Stanley Tucker to say it that way.

WHITNY BRAUN: Interesting because he says that after he makes this strange call to the police a couple days before where he's talking about seeing Indians, native Americans in the park, having killed the deer, which there haven't been native Americans in Starved Rock for over a century at this point. And so he's obviously having some strange imagination or fugue state conversation with the police. So they call him in and then he tells them the story that he may or may not have seen Chester and Stanley. "Oh yeah. I'm pretty sure it was them. I'm not really even sure of reality." But the cops go, "Oh, this is a straight shooter. Let's take his telling of what he saw. Yeah, this, this is the guy who's, who's in control of his faculties. Let's run with his narrative." And that's how we arrive at Chester and Stanley.

ANDY HALE: Well, and he's saying it, I mean, they write the report this way. They say it exactly like this, "I don't know why I put them there. It just seems they were the ones." I mean, that's, what you had a dream? I mean, we're going to go with that. So I just found that to be incredible. And I think what has to be noted is, initially I will say this, I think there were parts of the investigation that were very, very good. And I thought there were parts that were very bad. This is local law enforcement, had never dealt with anything like this before. There was criticism for the FBI not getting involved. There were talks about bringing the FBI and they were not. But here everybody at the lodge, who worked at the lodge was polygraphed in the initial weeks after the crime, which is a good thing.

All right, that's a good thing. We now know polygraphs aren't reliable. They're not admissible in court. That would've been even more so in 1960. But here's my takeaway Chester Weger is given multiple polygraphs in the initial weeks after the crime, like everybody else. All right. And he passed them all. He passed them all. It's not like you said, "Well, Chester, Weger got on our radar screen because he failed the initial polygraph or he failed two polygraphs." He passed them all like most other people did. So why, tell me, why is he being taken to Chicago for another polygraph in late September? Okay. He's passed all the polygraphs. He's passed three or four. Why are we giving him a fifth?

And then he is taken Chicago and oh, he failed, really? I'm very, very skeptical of that. And then and we're going to talk about this in future episodes. We're going to talk about false confessions and the confession. But we know on that car ride home from Chicago is

when Chester Weger is threatened with death. But the point I just simply wanted to make is, Chester Weger passed all the initial polygraphs. He was not a suspect initially, there was nothing, no credible evidence linking him to the scene, no physical evidence, nothing linking Chester Weger to that crime scene.

WHITNY BRAUN: Well, it's interesting because George Spiros is the prime suspect until suddenly he's not. And there's nothing that really removes him as a candidate for having committed this crime other than police just seem to stop investigating him.

ANDY HALE: Well and here's another thing, one of the things we didn't talk about with the crime scene, that is something we should mention now is, another interesting fact again, it looks small at first blush but I think it's actually very significant is, there are these Red orlon fibers found on the victims. Red orlon fibers, orlon was an artificial fiber at the time, it was, I think fairly new. Chester Weger is wearing blue jeans and a buck skin jacket that day. He has nothing on that has a red orlon.

If you look at those reports with George Spiros, they are collecting, he's got several sweaters, red sweaters or sweaters that have a red fiber in there. And the reports mention they are collecting these red fibers from George Spiros' sweaters. I think the reports conclude the red fibers from the crime scene were not similar to his sweaters but there was one of the sweaters that he claimed either he didn't have or it wasn't produced because he said it was similar to a sweater he already turned over. So it's not completely buttoned down whether those red fibers could be matched to George Spiros. But my point is there is absolutely nothing linking Chester Weger to these red fibers but there were memos where they're investigating George Spiros about the red fibers.

WHITNY BRAUN: I've got a lot more to say about George Spiros. But on the fibers, I am really fascinated by those because red Orlon fibers were as you said, largely used in making faux wool products in the 1960s, which could be used to make sweaters but they were also used for the interiors of GM cars. Red Orlon fibers made up the interiors of GM cars. And I've often wondered as well, if those fibers didn't come out of a vehicle, if perhaps those women got to the canyon by means of a car, as opposed to being dragged there, having been on the footpath, is it possible that somebody detained them elsewhere, they were restrained elsewhere and then driven to the canyon and dragged into the canyon and that's how the red fibers got on them? And I think there are so many questions in my mind about these red fibers.

ANDY HALE: Yeah. And it's just another point where, I mean, if you had a scorecard, the scorecard has, there's nothing about Chester

weger that connects to the red fibers. We talked about the women being bound. We talked about they being a crime of passion and the number of blows in the stage crime scene, all we're doing is we're checking, we're putting all the things in the column of other people. We've got nothing in the Chester Weger column. If you look at the physical evidence and if this crime happened today, there would be a much more comprehensive physical evidence investigation. But I got to say, I will tell you this. We fought and fought with the Will County state's attorney's office to get access to the physical evidence. They first did not want us to even look at it.

And we finally got permission to look at it. And then we finally got permission to test it. I will tell you this. I was shocked at how good the condition of the evidence was. There were all kinds of fibers and hairs preserved on slides. There was all kinds of evidence labeled and hair samples from numerous other people. I mean, for 1960's standards, I do think there was a pretty good collection of physical evidence there, much better then I was expecting. None of that evidence links to Chester Weger. We're testing this evidence. Now we're going to get some answers about some of these other hairs, but nothing, there was no obvious connections to him. We know that the hair tested at Wash U is not his. We know that the red fibers aren't linked to his clothes, to his jeans or to his buck skin jacket.

So the physical evidence at this point is inconsistent with Chester Weger. And it's also inconsistent with his confession. So that's where we're at as we sit here in episode three, digging into this case. So Whitney we talked about the women being bound, being inconsistent with Chester Weger's confession, we talked about two different types of hair found on the victims. One, which we proved is not Chester Weger's. The other is a dark hair, which can't be his. We've talked about this flimsy way Chester Weger gets implicated by George Spiros. And we've talked about these red Orlon fibers. I think what we need to dig into next time is if not Chester, who? Who are some of the other suspects? Who would've had a motive to do this? Why were these women killed? And I'm looking forward to having that discussion with you in the next episode.

WHITNY BRAUN: Can't wait.

*(music begins to play)*

ANDY HALE: Thank you everyone for tuning into this episode of the Starved Rock Murders with Andy Hale. We've laid out some of the key evidence in the case. There's going to be a lot more evidence we're going to talk about. For more information on today's episode, you can visit our website, [andyhalepodcast.com](http://andyhalepodcast.com). We are posting documents,



photos and other information, if you want even more detail. You can also email us if you have any information on the S Starved Rock murders, anything you heard, anything you know or if you know somebody that you think is wrongfully convicted, reach out, we'd love to hear about it. If you're enjoying our show, please subscribe, rate and review us wherever you get your podcasts. This show is produced in collaboration with Phineas Ellis. Sound designed by Studio D and hosted by myself and Whitney Braun. We'll see you next time.

*(music fades out)*