

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / 303: Case 259: Jamie Lavis

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We are thrilled to announce that Case Far Presents, Crime Interrupted, has returned for a second season.

The first series of Crime Interrupted, researched and written by Vicky Petredis, delved into some of the biggest cases investigated by the Australian Federal Police, Australia's National Law Enforcement Agency.

Season 2 picks up West Season 1 left off,

featuring in-depth interviews with the officers who solved some of the AFP's most challenging cases.

Once again, we've been given exclusive access to their case vault,

so you can learn more about Biting Crime in Australia at a national level.

We have just released the final episode of Season 2, which focuses on an investigation dubbed Operation Collage.

When Intel was received that a boat with nearly half a tonne of cocaine was headed toward Australian waters,

the AFP, Customs and State Police monitored the journey and the transference of drugs to a smaller vessel.

What followed was a perilous five-day boat chase through the high seas.

All six episodes of Crime Interrupted, Season 2, are now ready for you to binge wherever you get your podcasts.

Our episodes deal with serious and often distressing incidents. If you feel at any time you need support, please contact your local Crisis Centre.

For suggested phone numbers for confidential support, please see the show notes for this episode on your app or on our website.

This episode was originally released on Casefile's Patreon, Apple Premium and Spotify Premium Feeds as an early bonus for our paid subscribers.

These episodes are designed to be slightly shorter, allowing us to cover a broader range of cases.

To receive these episodes early and ad-free, you can support Casefile on your preferred platform.

Today's episode involves crimes against children, and won't be suitable for all listeners.

Monday, May 5, 1997 was a public holiday in the United Kingdom.

With schools closed, eight-year-old Jamie Lavis could do whatever he pleased.

That morning, Jamie and his 11-year-old brother John left their house in the Manchester suburb of Openshore and headed out to play.

Even though it was cold and raining, Jamie and John weren't deterred.

They and many other children in the neighbourhood often played outdoors unsupervised for hours at a time.

There was never any sense that this might be dangerous.

The Lavis brothers headed to the local supermarket, a usual stop as Jamie was fond of lollies.

It was here where the two boys split up and went their separate ways.

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At around 3pm, John Lavis returned home for his afternoon tea.

Jamie didn't.

His family didn't worry at first, assuming that he'd lost track of time and was off with a friend somewhere.

Street-wise and confident, Jamie Lavis could get across town easily using the bus.

Yet, by dinnertime, Jamie was still absent.

Jamie was scared of the dark and always made sure to be home by dusk.

His mother, Karen Spooner, sent one of her daughters to go looking for him.

She couldn't find him.

By 8pm, Karen was shaking and distraught.

It was starting to get dark.

Just as Karen Spooner was beginning to worry, her partner returned home from work.

Karen and John Lavis had been together for almost two decades and had five children.

Jamie was their second youngest.

John told Karen not to worry, reassuring her that Jamie would surely be home soon.

But when another hour passed with no sign of the eight-year-old, John grew equally panicked.

Jamie was small and looked several years younger than he actually was.

Karen had to often buy him clothes that were made for five or six-year-olds.

If something had happened to Jamie, his family knew he wouldn't be able to fend for himself.

Karen and John headed out to search the streets for Jamie.

They visited places where he liked to play and checked some of his friends' houses.

There was no trace of him.

At around 10pm, Jamie's parents called the police.

Initially, it was speculated that Jamie might have run away from home.

Two days earlier on Saturday, May 3, he had gotten into trouble when he came home late with his pockets full of lollies.

This prompted his father to ground him all day Sunday.

Staying at home the entire day had been difficult for Jamie.

He hadn't wasted any time in racing out of the house first thing on Monday.

There were reports that Jamie had told some friends he wouldn't be staying at home because he didn't want to be grounded again.

Police officers said about looking for Jamie in places where they thought he might hide.

Openshore was one of Manchester's poorer neighbourhoods.

Its maze-like streets were lined with derelict terrace houses and factories.

The police knew that runaways sometimes moved into these abandoned buildings and remained undiscovered for ages.

Searching all of these along with other similar buildings across Greater Manchester was a mammoth task.

As time wore on, the police hosted a televised press conference to spread awareness of Jamie's disappearance.

At their request, Jamie's mother Karen joined them.

Grief stricken, Karen begged her son to come home.

She reassured him that he wasn't in any trouble and told him that his entire extended family was out looking for him.

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She asked anyone who might be looking after Jamie or feeding him to contact the police saying, Everybody's waiting for him to come home. We just want him home so we can love him.

But days continued to pass with no sign of Jamie Lavers.

The police search grew, with senior officers bringing in dog teams, mounted police and the forces helicopter to assist.

Divers searched the river Tame that snakes through Greater Manchester.

Soon, it had become the biggest police investigation the city had seen since the notorious Moors murders.

Covered in episode 49 of Case File, that case involved the abduction and murder of five children in and around Manchester during the 1960s.

Although three decades had passed since the Moors murders, the subject of a missing child brought back painful memories for residents of the area.

They turned out in droves to help find Jamie and were quick to report any possible sightings.

On Thursday, May 15, a week and a half after Jamie vanished, a witness reported seeing him with a young man who had a birthmark on his neck.

An artist's impression of the young man was drawn and distributed, but didn't result in any leads.

The Lavers family was thrown into upheaval in the wake of Jamie's disappearance.

His father John quit his job at Manchester Airport so he could dedicate more time to searching for his son.

Jamie's oldest sister, who was 15, dropped out of school so she could look after her other three siblings and the household.

This allowed her parents to pour all of their energy into finding Jamie.

Reports came through that Jamie might have been riding the city's 219 bus on the day he vanished. The 219 travelled east from Manchester's city centre.

It passed through open shore on its way to the town of Ashton Underline.

Jamie was known to ride the bus for fun.

He would board at a stop on Ashton Old Road, a bustling main street around the corner from the Lavers home on Buckley Street.

While searching for her brother, 12-year-old Jane Lavers spoke to a local bus driver named Darren Vickers.

He'd been behind the wheel of the 219 on May 5.

Darren had recalled a young boy boarding his bus from the Ashton Old Road stop at around 10.30am that day.

He wouldn't happen to be wearing a dark blue Reebok tracksuit, would he? Darren asked.

Jane confirmed that Jamie had been.

The fact that Darren knew the brand of tracksuit indicated that he had likely seen Jamie, as that detail hadn't been widely known.

For some reason, the little boy had introduced himself as Dale.

Jamie had a day-saver ticket, which allowed for unlimited travel throughout the course of a single day.

He sat near the front of the bus and mostly looked out of the window quietly.

Sometimes he chatted to Darren or a few of the other passengers.

Jamie travelled across the city, disembarking at Ashton Underline Station at the end of the line.

He got back on the bus when Darren was headed back to the city centre and rode back and forth

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across town like this for several hours.

He told Darren he had nothing better to do, and as he had an all-day ticket, Darren saw no problem in letting him do so.

A few other passengers confirmed that they'd also seen Jamie on the bus.

But no one knew where he might have gone after he eventually disembarked for good.

Darren Vickers told Jane he would phone the police to pass this information along.

He also visited Jamie's parents at home to share what he knew.

Despite this major lead, weeks went by with no news of Jamie Lavers.

Approximately 300 sightings of the young boy were reported by members of the public, but the police only had confidence in three of these.

None of them had occurred after Monday, May 5, the day he'd disappeared.

By mid-June, it had been a month and a half since he vanished.

Around this time, investigators were able to track down some CCTV footage that confirmed witness accounts.

Jamie Lavers had been at Ashton Underline bus station on the morning of Monday, May 5.

Ashton Underline was the last stop on Route 219.

Security cameras there had captured Jamie wandering around that station, then boarding the bus again as it prepared to return to Manchester.

The footage was timestamped at 11.20am, placing him there roughly 50 minutes after he first caught the 219 bus.

The grainy footage was shown on television news.

This evidence of the last known movements of the missing boy reminded the public of another case that had horrified England.

Four years earlier in 1993, a toddler named James Bolger had gone missing from a shopping centre in Merseyside, about 33 miles west of Manchester.

Security footage from the centre would reveal he had been abducted by two 10-year-old boys, one leading James away by the hand.

James Bolger's body was found days later near railway tracks.

He had been tortured and murdered by the other children.

This case had scandalised the country.

Now they had another Northern case with grainy video evidence that was eerily familiar.

Newspaper headlines compared the footage to that from the James Bolger case, but there was one clear difference between the two.

No one was captured taking Jamie Lavers away.

Despite this, police were growing increasingly certain that they weren't dealing with the missing person's case.

They believed that Jamie had been abducted and murdered.

They told Jamie's parents that although they were still endeavouring to find their son, the chances that he was alive were highly doubtful.

Karen Spooner and John Lavers refused to accept this.

They held out hope that Jamie was still alive somewhere, possibly being held by somebody.

In one conversation with the journalists, Karen stated,

He's a lovable little rogue, constantly talking. I don't want to think the worst.

Part of me thinks he's not coming home. Part of me wants him to come home.

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We're going out searching every day and every night.

A reenactment of Jamie's last movements were filmed for the television program Crime File.

Members of Jamie's family participated in the reenactment, including his brother John.

The episode of Crime File aired on Tuesday, June 24, almost two months after Jamie vanished.

Tips began to trickle in.

One in particular caught police attention.

A member of the public reported that Jamie's body had been buried in a shallow grave.

The grave lay in a 190-acre wooded area called Bogart Holecloth, located five and a half miles north of Openshore.

Police prepared to embark on a thorough search of the area.

On Friday, June 27, more than 100 officers assembled along with dog teams and an underwater search unit.

The plan was to comb Bogart Holecloth inch by inch.

Officers walked across the park in lines scouring the dense undergrowth and probing the soil with rods.

Thermal imaging equipment was also used in an attempt to find any possible human remains.

The search continued over the weekend and through to the end of Monday.

It yielded no results.

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with many attending for less than the cost of a state university and less debt after graduation. Scholarships are still available. Find your purpose at gcu.edu/slash/myoffer.

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Despite failing to find Jamie Lavers, investigators remained convinced that he was dead and his body had been dumped somewhere.

Not only that, they even had a suspect in their sights.

From the beginning, they had been suspicious of Darren Vickers, the man who had come forward to say Jamie had been a passenger on his bus.

He was the last person with a confirmed sighting of Jamie after all, but there was something else.

In the aftermath of Jamie's disappearance, Darren Vickers had grown unusually close to the Lavers family.

Early in the case, Darren Vickers visited the Lavers family to offer to help them search for Jamie. They gratefully accepted.

Darren was 27 years old with a partner and four children of his own, but he was soon spending much of his time helping out the Laverses.

He did more than just comb the streets looking for Jamie.

Anything that Karen and John needed at any time of day or night, Darren would give them.

He lent them his car so they could travel further to look for Jamie and also joined them in searches up to 15 miles away from home.

He waited with the couple by soup wagons for the needy in case Jamie showed up there in search of food,

and sometimes he minded their other children so they could focus solely on Jamie.

The sudden media attention was also upsetting and overwhelming for Karen and John, so Darren assisted by acting as their spokesperson.

He made repeated appeals for information on television and in newspapers while holding up a photograph of Jamie flashing a mischievous smile.

He echoed the Lavers' conviction that Jamie was very likely still alive.

He also participated in the filmed re-enactment for Crime File.

Karen would later describe Darren Vickers as their tower of strength.

He offered them help and hope when it felt like both were in short supply.

Police questioned Darren Vickers in the early days of their investigation.

They held him for a total of 24 hours, which caused his partner and children a great deal of distress.

The Lavers' were also distraught to hear that the man who'd been their strongest ally since Jamie vanished was being treated like a suspect.

As far as Karen was concerned, the police had drawn a total blank on her son's case and had arrested Darren out of desperation and on a whim.

They were relieved when they found out that he was being released.

With no actual evidence that Darren had taken or harmed Jamie, they had to let him go without charge.

The Lavers' family were among the supporters waiting for Darren outside of the police station.

They threw him a celebratory party upon his release.

The police didn't give up, though. Next, they searched Darren's home as well as his vehicle.

Although nothing turned up in the house, investigators thought they'd finally solved the case when

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they discovered a blood stain in the back seat of his car.

They took DNA samples from Jamie's parents to compare with the stain, but it turned out to have come from a nosebleed suffered by one of Darren's children.

Having his home searched was too much for Darren. At this point, he took sick leave from his job and his relationship with his partner fell apart.

Suddenly, he found himself in need of a new place to live.

Karen Spooner and John Lavers invited him to move into their home.

After everything Darren had done for them, they were more than happy to offer him a place to stay.

Karen and John slept downstairs in the living room so that Darren could have the main bedroom.

He helped out by caring for the couple's other four children and taking them swimming.

Darren, Karen and John had grown so close that Darren asked the couple to be godparents to the baby his now ex-partner was expecting.

When the media caught wind of the suspicion surrounding Darren Vickers, articles were published that detailed his arrest and the police search of his property.

Darren addressed the suspicions head-on by reaching out to various publications, radio networks and television stations.

In a television interview that was filmed in the Lavers home, Karen sat next to Darren as he defended himself.

He pointed out that it was only because he'd come forward to report seeing Jamie on his bus that the police had any leads in the first place.

I thought I did the right decent thing in letting them know that I'd seen him on the day, but I'd never have thought I'd have been arrested on suspicion of his abduction.

I think it's just a joke and I've got the backing of the Lavers family, relations, everybody.

During one interview, a photograph was taken of Darren sitting between Karen and John on a sofa.

The couple's expressions were mournful and Darren's arms were slung over their shoulders as they leaned towards him. His face was blank.

The seriousness of the situation was undercut by Darren's choice of attire for the candid photo shoot.

While Karen and John were both fully dressed, Darren was only wearing trousers and was naked from the waist up.

Speaking with the Guardian, Darren said he believed Jamie was still alive, stating,

Someone is definitely holding him somewhere. I think he's just too scared to come home.

Whoever has taken him could have told him that if he goes home he could be taken away from his parents.

A child of that age doesn't know what to think. He's very easily led.

At times I wish I could just turn the clock back to that bank holiday Monday and that the boy had stayed at home here.

Greater Manchester Police were finding the Jamie Lavers investigation especially difficult.

Ordinarily they like to work closely with victims' families and keep them informed of any updates in the case.

But this was proving difficult when the person they suspected had become a trusted member of the family's clan.

The truth was there were multiple reasons detectives had been led in a particular direction from the start.

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When Jamie's sister Jane had first encountered Darren Vickers, he'd promised to phone the police and let them know that the eight-year-old had been on his bus that day.

But he never did. Instead, the police had followed up with him one week later after they heard he'd encountered Jamie.

Other witnesses who had seen Jamie on Darren's bus confirmed elements of his account.

However, they also described a very different scene than Darren.

Jamie Lavers hadn't been sitting quietly and staring out the window like any other passenger.

He had been running up and down the aisle and acting as a sort of assistant to Darren.

Jamie handed out passengers tickets from the driver's cabin, sorted their change, and was even permitted to change the bus's gears while Darren was driving.

A couple of people reported that as Jamie took hold of the gear stick, the vehicle began swaying and then briefly mounted the curb.

All of the passengers jolted forward.

In the words of the lead investigator Roy Rainford, Darren Vickers had made that bus like a playground.

At times, Darren was seen ruffling Jamie's hair and he gave the boy 50p to buy a drink.

The pair seemed so close that some passengers assumed Darren was Jamie's father.

One woman asked Jamie, Are you having a day out with your dad?

Jamie had rolled his eyes at Darren, then turned back to the woman and said, No, with my uncle.

And despite Darren claiming that Jamie had a day saver ticket, police knew that those tickets were only issued to adults, not children.

The detective's suspicions had only deepened when they reviewed the CCTV footage captured at Ashton Underline Bus Station at 11.20am that day.

At some points, the footage showed Jamie on his own, but then Darren Vickers had wandered into the frame.

He traipsed after Jamie and ruffled the boy's hair, as passengers had seen him do.

Then the two re-bordered the bus together. Darren Vickers hadn't told investigators about this.

When detectives interviewed Darren about the events of the day, he acknowledged that Jamie hadn't just ridden the bus for a little while, then disembarked by himself.

He'd been on the bus for six hours, riding back and forth across the route as Darren completed his shift.

Darren said that when his shift was over, he'd offered to give Jamie a lift home from the bus depot as it was raining.

He said it wasn't a bother as his house was only three streets away from Jamie's.

According to Darren, Jamie claimed he couldn't go home as his parents weren't there, so Darren dropped him near his grandmother's house instead.

According to Darren, something must have happened to Jamie after this.

Detectives didn't believe this story at all.

If Darren had taken Jamie to his grandmother's house, why hadn't the boy ever made it there?

Digging into Darren Vickers, the police learned that he'd only been hired as a bus driver a few days before Jamie went missing.

The investigators obtained his CV from the bus company and examined it closely.

A number of people were listed as referees, individuals who Darren had chosen to be his character references.

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But when the police tried tracking these people down, they discovered that almost all of them were made up.

Only one of the referees was real.

It was a convicted child molester.

Investigators believed that Darren Vickers was a pedophile who had seized an opportunity when Jamie Lavers boarded his bus on Monday May 5, 1997.

He had groomed the eight-year-old throughout the course of his shift by allowing Jamie to participate in the running of the bus.

This would have been especially appealing to Jamie, who was known to love buses.

Police believed that after his shift ended, Darren had abducted Jamie, molested him, and then killed him.

But without a body, they had no way of proving this.

The police were equally suspicious of Darren's behavior in the wake of Jamie's disappearance.

Although he had come forward to report Jamie boarding his bus, he hadn't done so until other witnesses had already said they'd seen the same thing.

And instead of going to the police, Darren Vickers had approached Jamie's family directly and made himself invaluable to them.

His fixation with the Laverses had become so strong that he wound up neglecting his own children and lost his new job after taking too much time off to search.

Although investigators were convinced that Jamie was dead, sightings of the boy continued to trickle in.

The police followed up every one.

On several occasions throughout the investigation, they had been surprised by Darren and Jamie's mother Karen turning up at locations where someone had just phoned in a suspected sighting.

They often got there before the detectives did.

It turned out that Darren had purchased the police scanner. He listened to it constantly, keeping an ear out for anything related to Jamie's case.

The police believed Darren was using the Laverses to gain inside information about the investigation.

It was also a way to convince them he couldn't be the culprit.

By September 1997, four months had passed since Jamie Lavers had disappeared.

Detectives decided to turn their attention from Darren Vickers to those around him.

Towards the end of the month, they brought in his sister, mother, and his pregnant ex-partner for questioning.

Three other associates of Darren were also arrested, including two close friends.

The six individuals were asked about alibis they had provided for him and threatened with charges of conspiracy to bevert the course of justice.

Although there were inconsistencies in their stories, the arrests didn't lead to the smoking gun investigators needed.

All six were released a few days later.

Around this time, two teenagers came forward to police with a disturbing story.

According to the adolescents, a man in his twenties had recently taken them to a sprawling 161 hectare park called Reddishvale.

Located in Greater Manchester's Tame Valley, Reddishvale features wooded areas as well as a golf

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club, walking paths, and river views.

For some reason, the man had taken the teens to the park in the middle of the night.

He tried to lead them away from a path and into a densely wooded area near the golf course.

The man turned to the two reluctant teenagers and showed them a photograph he was holding.

It showed Jamie Lavers.

Then the man pointed up ahead and remarked,

I think that's him.

He invited them both to come with him for a closer look, then turned to keep walking into the thicket.

The teenagers couldn't see anything in the area where the man had gestured, but they were still terrified.

Instead of joining him, they made an excuse and ran away.

When the teenagers went to the police with this story, they said that they'd recently recognised the man.

They had been watching television when his face appeared on the news giving an interview.

It was bus driver Darren Vickers.

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It was soon discovered that Darren had also led two more children to the same area of the same park.

Investigators decided to pounce before anyone else was hurt.

Darren Vickers had a series of outstanding driving offences which were enough for police to hold him for up to 10 weeks.

They also felt they had enough circumstantial evidence to charge him with the Jamie Lavers'

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abduction.

In mid-October, Darren Vickers was arrested for a second time.

Meanwhile, a meticulous search of Reddishvale Park got underway on Thursday, October 23.

With some help from their teenage witnesses, police traced the route where Darren had led them.

The spot that he'd pointed out was a particularly dense wooded area with lots of undergrowth.

Navigating the scrub was difficult, but about half a mile off the path in a small clearing, officers spotted something.

It was a tarpaulin.

Lying beneath the canvas material, they discovered a pair of dark blue child-sized tracksuit pants and a child's green wax jacket.

The clothing matched what Jamie Lavers had been wearing on the day he vanished.

The clothes were carefully packed up and taken back to the police station to be forensically examined.

Because the clothing was wet from having been out in the elements, police laid them out to dry before they were studied.

As the tracksuit pants were unraveled, something fell out of them.

It was the lower part of a small jawbone.

A fingertip search of the remaining wooded area uncovered more bones.

Scattered throughout the location were parts of a child's torso.

The body had been dismembered and there was no trace of the head or limbs.

DNA testing of some milk teeth that were recovered revealed that the remains belonged to Jamie Lavers.

Police theorized that Darren Vickers had visited the location repeatedly as Jamie's body decomposed.

While it seemed likely that some of the boy's body had been scavenged by animals, investigators suspected that Darren had carried parts away as well.

This was most likely done to prevent Jamie from being found.

Due to the dense nature of the woods, the detectives firmly believed that Jamie had been assaulted, murdered and dismembered in the location where he was found.

The thick brush that led to the clearing had to be navigated using both hands.

It would have been near impossible for Darren Vickers to have done so if he was carrying a body as well.

Another reason they suspected that he had repeatedly visited the site was because he wanted to relive his crimes.

When investigators informed Karen Spooner that the human remains recovered from Reddish Vale belonged to Jamie, she responded by stating,

No, it's not.

It seemed impossible that detectives could know her son was dead from milk teeth alone.

Even though Karen confirmed that the clothing found was Jamie's, it would take her months to accept the truth.

She couldn't believe that anyone would treat a child so callously or that Jamie could be gone when she never got to say goodbye.

Jamie's father, John, was also in a state of disbelief.

Darren had been so helpful to them in searching non-stop for Jamie.

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John had believed in him entirely.

One of Jamie's sisters covered her ears when her parents were told that Jamie was dead.

She didn't want to hear what the police were saying or to hear her parents crying.

For hours afterwards, the house echoed with the sobs of her mother and father.

Add to the Lavis family's pain, they now had confirmation that the person they had welcomed into their home was responsible for their grief.

Not only that, but Darren Vickers might have been poised to strike again.

While he had ignored Jamie's two sisters during the time he'd spent with the Lavis family, he had showered 11-year-old John with attention.

Darren had bought John a new bike and shoes.

This special treatment was eerily similar to the way he'd groomed Jamie for hours on the bus.

It emerged that Darren had also taken John for rides across town on buses.

John looked quite similar to Jamie.

His presence on the city's buses had led to members of the public phoning in incorrect sightings of Jamie.

Detectives believed that Darren did this to intentionally throw the investigation off track.

On one occasion, Darren had even taken John Lavis to Reddishvale.

Sitting John down on a tree stump, Darren had given him a cigarette and then he stated,

This is where your Jamie is, and if you don't behave yourself, I'll throw you in.

Darren Vickers was charged with the murder of Jamie Lavis.

While he was on remand, he penned a 15-page statement which he gave to the police.

The document was a confession of sorts.

He claimed that Jamie had stayed on the bus until the end of his shift.

As Darren had prepared to garage the bus, Jamie began playing with its ticket machine.

I'm not sure where it went wrong.

Jamie was starting to mess with the ticket machine.

I told him, Don't, you'll jam it.

I raised my left hand and hit him on the side of the head.

I looked around and to break hard because a car was turning right.

When I hit him, Jamie fell back, hitting his head on the luggage rack.

Darren claimed that Jamie then fell forward, knocking his head a second time and falling into the well of the bus's exit doors.

I said, Sorry Jamie, are you okay?

His eyes were closed.

I couldn't find a pulse.

I started to panic bad.

Christ, I've killed him.

Darren Vickers claimed that after his shift, he left his bus at the depot and drove home with the Jamie's body stashed in his car.

As the house next door to his was empty, he put Jamie's body in there.

Then he took his partner and children over to his parents' house.

Once they were out of the way, he transferred Jamie's body back to his car.

He then took it to Reddishvale, where he dumped it.

The confession concluded, quote,

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I did not mean for anything like this to happen.

I'm sorry, but I hope now that this is an end to all this.

Darren Vickers was adamant that Jamie's death was an accident.

Investigators dismissed the confession as yet another lie he'd concocted to save face.

Not long after confessing, Darren Vickers told investigators that he would plead guilty to spare Jamie's family further suffering.

But he soon retracted his confession and reneged on this promise, instead opting to go to trial.

The seven-week trial began in early March 1999, almost two years after Jamie was killed.

With no forensic evidence tying Darren to the crime and the method of murder unknown, the prosecution relied heavily on Darren's bizarre behavior as evidence of guilt.

Darren took the stand in his own defense and presented the jury with yet another version of events.

He implicated Jamie's father, John Lavers, in Jamie's murder, claiming that John had a violent streak.

Darren also said that five days after Jamie disappeared, he and Jamie's mother had started a sexual relationship.

The two had been searching a park together when Karen told Darren that she found him attractive.

It was obvious what she was on about, Darren stated.

There was no harm in what we were doing, there was no harm in it at all. It was between ourselves.

Darren claimed that the next time the two were alone together, they had sex again.

He said that in total they'd been intimate together 11 times.

At the time of the trial, Karen Spooner was pregnant again.

Darren Vickers claimed that the baby was his.

Karen was forced to take a blood test to prove that her longtime partner John was actually the baby's father.

When she took the stand, she was clear that she'd never had any kind of romantic relationship with Darren Vickers.

Quote,

I've been with my partner nearly 18 years. I've never had any cause to go behind his back.

Darren Vickers' latest lies traumatized the Lavers family further.

His claims were splashed across tabloids. People whispered behind their backs, and graffiti was scrawled in the Lavers' neighborhood that accused Karen of sleeping with her son's murderer.

Karen Spooner had her integrity questioned, and John Lavers was in total shock that anyone would accuse him of being violent towards his children.

As his daughter Nicola told the television program Real Crime Crocodile Tears, he worshipped his kids.

Lead investigator Roy Rainford attributed the outrageous claims to Darren Vickers' desire for control. Quote,

He's a control freak. He was controlling the family, he was controlling the media, and he was trying to control our inquiries. Right up to the end.

After deliberating for two days, the jury of nine women and three men unanimously declared Darren Vickers guilty.

Karen Spooner cried as the verdict was delivered.

The judge sentenced Darren to life for murder and an additional four years for the abduction of Jamie, with a minimum of 25 years.

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The judge described Darren Vickers' crimes as truly wicked, and noted that he'd told lies with frills on throughout the investigation and the trial.

The two teenagers who had come forward to report Darren Vickers to police were praised by the judge. Each were rewarded £150 from public funds.

At court, Karen Spooner said,

Justice has been done today for Jamie. Hopefully now he can rest in peace.

No child deserves to die the way Jamie died, and hopefully now Darren Vickers is in prison. Children in Manchester will be safer.

Less than 24 hours after he was convicted, Darren Vickers requested to speak with the case's lead investigator, Roy Rainford.

Four days later, the detective visited him in prison.

Through tears, Darren admitted that the police had gotten it right. He had abducted, sexually assaulted, and murdered Jamie Lavis.

Darren also withdrew his allegations against Jamie's father.

He gave a similar, though less emotional confession to fellow prisoners.

He admitted to a cellmate that he'd sexually abused Jamie on his bus before, quote, swiping out at the boy when he went to pocket some cash.

Darren Vickers told other inmates that he and some friends used to hang around near group homes for disadvantaged children in the hopes of propositioning minors, stating,

They will do anything for money.

The confession given to Roy Rainford would be taken into account when the time came for Darren Vickers to apply for parole.

His long-awaited admission brought some relief to the Lavis family.

Speaking with the journalists, Karen Spooner said,

It shows he has a conscience. I'm sure he has done it for his own reasons, but it means a lot to us.

This will totally clear John's name.

Darren Vickers has attempted to appeal his conviction twice since 1999.

In 2005, a story broke in which his mother Wendy claimed there was new evidence and that Darren had an alibi for May 5, 1997.

She said that his prison confession was false and he'd made it up to prevent her, his ex-partner, his sister and two friends from having to go to court themselves.

All had been charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Investigators believed they had all cooked up a plan together to lie for Darren Vickers.

The group were found not guilty of the charges, but Darren's bids to appeal his conviction have both failed.

As of late 2022, he remains incarcerated in a maximum security prison.

In November 2022, news broke that Darren, now aged 56, may be free within several months.

In February 2023, the parole board will consider his application for release.

During the hearing, the board will consider the risk he may pose to the community if allowed out.

One police officer who worked closely with the Lavis family during the investigation told the Manchester Evening News, quote,

Vickers will be a danger to children for the rest of his life. He can never be rehabilitated in my opinion.

Jamie Lavis' loved ones had to wait for more than a year after he went missing before they could lay

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him to rest.

In the years since he was killed, his family visited his graveside regularly.

In the documentary Somebody's Daughter, Somebody's Son, one of Jamie's sisters said she tried to cope by focusing on her family and keeping Jamie's memory alive.

She refused to waste time thinking about Darren Vickers, stating,

He doesn't deserve my thoughts.

Karen Spoonar told producers for the television program Real Crime Crocodile Tears that whenever she visited Jamie for his birthday or at Christmas, she would reflect on how wrong it was.

Instead of being able to buy him toys and presents, she had to buy him flowers and ornaments for his headstone.

Karen wrote poetry to express her grief, though she found reading the poems allowed too painful.

One poem that she wrote for Jamie reads,

For all the precious gifts in life, however great and small, to have you as my son was the greatest gift of all.

Your smile is gone forever, your hand I cannot touch. I will never lose a memory of the son I love so much.

I unfold the big 7.6 inch screen of my new Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 5.

I love you, James. I've always loved you.

And Big Bobby also gets big feelings. Good for you, James. You deserve it.

Get your Galaxy Z Fold 5 now at the Samsung Experience Store at Americana at brand.

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