

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

Tonight on Dateline.

Please, go to someone who just broke him out and shot me.

I'll never forget it till the day I die.

This home invasion, a young woman shot and killed, a man injured.

It was beyond tragic.

Did you feel for him?

Yes, I did.

What was Nick telling you?

That they pushed and pulled back and forth with a shotgun.

The gun went off.

I know I hit Heidi.

And she went straight down.

There's a lot of pain there.

There was a lot of pressure on the police department.

You guys essentially hit a brick wall.

Yeah, it was extremely frustrating trying to track down this intruder and figure out who had done this.

You're with a man whose wife had just been recently murdered.

You had a lot of questions.

Yeah, I think that anybody would.

I started to do my own investigating.

I feel like I don't know the full truth.

She made those recordings.

She risked a lot.

She wanted to know once and for all what happened to Heidi.

Who killed Heidi?

Secrets and lies in a Minnesota mystery.

I'm Lester Holt, and this is Dateline.

My NBC News colleague Blaine Alexander joins us tonight with 65 Seconds.

Sunday morning in St. Paul, Minnesota is so often a picture of peace.

But not that Sunday morning, April 25th, 2010.

The call came in just after 6.30 a.m.

State Patrol 9-1-1.

A young woman, Heidi Furkus, was on the line.

Someone's trying to break into my house.

What city are you in, St. Paul?

I'm in St. Paul.

Seconds later, there was a loud noise.

The call dropped.

Then, Heidi's husband, Nick, called 9-1-1.

Frantic.

9-1-1.

One of them has been shot.

So we're talking about a random shot.

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Wait, you've been shot?

Yes, please.

What's your name?

What?

Nick?

Nick?

Stay on the phone with me, okay?

You said your wife is shot also?

Yes.

She's not moving.

Oh, please.

Nick?

Nick, listen to me.

I've got help coming.

Please.

Please.

Seven minutes passed before officers went into the house with guns drawn.

The intruder was nowhere to be seen.

I got the call Sunday morning.

My boss told me that there had been a home invasion shooting.

St. Paul police sergeant Jim Gray raced to the scene.

How fresh was the scene at this point?

The officers who initially responded commented that they could smell the gunpowder in the air.

What do you remember when you first arrived here at this house?

Crime scene tape was up.

There was a lot of officers coming and going.

The St. Paul fire medics had already transported Nick to Regent's Hospital.

So by the time you got here,

Nick wasn't even in the house anymore?

No, he had been shot, so he was in a lot of pain.

He was quite hysterical.

Gray stepped inside the tidy entryway.

Just a few feet away was the shotgun that was used to shoot both Heidi and Nick laying on the ground.

And then if you look further into the house,

you can see towards the kitchen,

and then that's where Heidi was laying there.

What did you think when you first saw Heidi lying there on the ground?

It was beyond tragic.

Obviously it looked like they were sleeping, and they were woken up by this intruder

trying to gain entry into their house.

Heidi, just 25 years old, was dead.

Her last words uttered in panic.

Someone's trying to break into my house.

She was obviously scared.

You could hear it in her voice.

Anything about that call that stood out to you?

That's her last moments on this earth.

And we're trying to figure out who was responsible for that.

Gray figured an intruder might have seen the house as the perfect target.

It's got the enclosed porch in it,

which makes that if somebody was trying to attempt an entry into the house, it made it a little more difficult to see or hear if you were walking by.

Make it a little easier for somebody to possibly break into this house?

Yes.

He took a closer look and noticed tool marks on the door frame.

What sorts of evidence were you trying to lift from the house in that initial walkthrough?

You're obviously determining,

okay, we need the fingerprint and trying to get DNA evidence from the door, the door lock itself,

and then also get DNA evidence from that shotgun.

To try to locate this intruder.

When you did that, were you able to lift fingerprints from the shotgun, from the lock, from the door jam?

Yeah.

The manhunt was on.

Our main primary focus is trying to find that individual and get him into custody as quick as possible.

What were officers doing to find this guy?

The initial officers, along with the K-9 team, tried to track this intruder.

Then started knocking on the doors in the neighborhood

to see if anybody had seen or heard anybody running through the neighborhood.

But Gray was already facing tough odds.

While the house does sit on a main road,

an alleyway in the back was a perfect route for someone to escape.

Home security cameras were not common then.

And it was early on a Sunday.

A lot of people were either asleep or else just waking up.

The neighbors didn't have a lot of information for us.

We're kind of stuck.

Yes, stuck before we even got started.

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Maybe Nick could get the investigation unstuck.
He was at the hospital, alive,
getting treatment for a horrific looking wound,
telling investigators about his fight with the intruder.
The guy went off again and that's what I got him.
At the hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota,
Nick Furkis was getting urgent care for the shotgun blast
that tore through his thigh.
Even so, he fought through the pain to give investigators bits and pieces
about the intruder he said broke into his home.
He was a lot bigger than me.
When you guys shot, can you describe when you were wrestling with a gun with him?
It was stress.
He just came in and I tried to push him away.
That's when the gun went off and that's when Heidi fell down.
Just five miles from the hospital, Heidi's dad was arriving at church.
A grim-faced pastor who had been called by police was waiting.
The pastor had pulled him aside to let him know.
Heidi's dad called her brother Pete and his wife, Jolene.
I could tell something was not good. He was really upset.
What did he tell you?
He told us that there had been a home invasion at Heidi and Nick's house
and that they had both been shot and that Heidi was dead.
He told you Heidi was gone?
Yeah.
Did you even believe him in that moment?
No.
Heidi's close friend, Krista, got a call from her dad too.
He had told me that something had happened at the house
and that Heidi didn't make it.
This is somebody that you've known since your earliest memories?
I was in shock and I dropped the phone.
I was devastated. It didn't seem real.
Meanwhile, Sergeant Gray was busy ramping up his search for the killer
and learning more about the young couple.
They were in love?
They seem happy together?
Yes, very happy. Everybody we came into contact
had nothing but good things to say about both Heidi and Nick.
Growing up in St. Paul in the late 1980s,
Heidi was the youngest of three siblings and the only girl.
When people see Heidi, what's the first thing they notice about her?
I think her smile.
And she brought a lot of joy everywhere she went.

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She was always very caring, outgoing, quirky, spunky.
And with a maturity well beyond her years.
She always pushed us to think a little bit deeper.
What did family mean to her?
I would say Heidi put family before anything.
Pete found that out after he moved away from Minnesota.
Heidi wasn't happy and she let him know.
She wanted to have a little come to Jesus talk about that.
She thought she weren't spending enough time with the family.
Yeah, and kind of caught me off guard,
had my younger sister kind of calling me out.
Like she was getting you in line.
Oh yes, yeah.
Another centerpiece of Heidi's life was her deep Christian faith.
The faith that she had radiated to other people.
Did you see that drive her in a lot of the things that she did, that faith?
I did. She spent a lot of time in the youth group, Sunday school, volunteering.
It was while volunteering that Heidi met Nick,
the son of a successful local businessman with a home improvement company.
His desire to uplift everyone around him was at the heart of who he is.
Nick's longtime friend Preston.
Nick loves people and he's very good with people.
What types of things did he like growing up?
The outdoors, blue sky, nature.
An ideal companion on a fishing trip says Erica,
also in Nick's circle of close friends.
There were things I didn't want to do. I didn't want to touch the fish.
That was his job.
Nick and Heidi's relationship blossomed.
They were deeply in love and from very early on,
they were interested together in growing as a couple.
Heidi Marie Erickson.
After Heidi graduated from high school,
she began studying at the University of Northwestern in St. Paul,
taking courses in graphic design along with Bible and theology.
Krista took classes there too.
We were getting lunch together and she had told me during lunch
that he proposed.
Yes.
And she said yes.
Yes. She was very excited.
They tied the knot in 2005.
Nick was 22, Heidi just 20.
She ended up working with her dad at a financial services firm

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while Nick ran the carpet cleaning division of his dad's company.
Never too busy for others, says his friend Andrew.

He was volunteering with Urban Homeworks
and he was on the board of a couple of different nonprofits
and taught some classes in the evenings
to people coming out of incarceration.

In 2007, Heidi and Nick bought a home
in an up-and-coming neighborhood of St. Paul.

So she was excited to get started on that.

I felt like a big first step in this new chapter.

Yes.

But Heidi was on edge about crime.

I think that was a concern of her in general,
you know, how we all have our own little personal fears.

Heidi told friends she wanted a new place,
somewhere she could feel safer.

She was a planner and started looking at apartments here in Minneapolis,
preparing for a new chapter.

They were looking to move so that they could start a family.

Did Heidi want to be a mom?

She did.

But in April 2010, those plans were in pieces
and Nick was in the hospital suffering from that gunshot wound.

In spite of his trauma,

he was about to sit down with Sergeant Gray,
determined to play his part in tracking down Heidi's killer.

He's a victim and also a living witness to this incident.

He's the key to this whole case.

Three hours after Heidi's death,

Nick Furkis had been treated for that close-range shotgun blast.

And even though he was hobbling on crutches,
he went straight to the St. Paul Police Department
to speak with investigator Jim Gray.

Did you feel for him?

Yes, I did.

Obviously, he's been through a traumatic incident
with his wife being shot and then him being shot as well.

I tried to put him at ease,

Gray began by asking Nick what he and Heidi did
the day before the shooting.

What time did you wake up on Saturday morning?

I think we got up around 10 a.m.

She went with one of her co-workers
and then they went shopping at the Mall of America.

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Nick said when Heidi got home,
they ordered burgers, delivery,
then watched the movie Avatar
and ended up going to sleep after midnight.
Did you lock up your phone?

No.

If I'm honest, I don't know if I remember
to throw the phone after the delivery.

I think I just shut the door.

At about 6 a.m. on Sunday,

Nick said he woke up.

So I got up and went and got a glass of water
from the bathroom.

Go back to sleep, just kind of fitfully sleep,
and then I hear our...

I heard the screen door open.

Nick told me he was going to sleep
and I heard the screen door open.

Nick told me he heard somebody fiddling
with the front door knob

and then he then woke up Heidi

and told her that somebody was trying to break into the house.

What happened after that?

Nick went and grabbed his shotgun
and he was storing in the closet of their bedroom,
loaded it with two shells,

and then he escorted Heidi down the stairs
as she's trying to call 911 on her cell phone.

So Heidi was going first down the stairs
and then he was following behind her.

Let's get out of here.

Why go to the garage?

Because that's where our car is.

Nick said they were passing through the entryway,
heading to the back door to escape
when the intruder pushed open the front door.

So I tried to shut the door shut,
but it gets forced open.

What did this guy look like?

He was a black guy with a dark hooded sweatshirt
that was drawn up pretty tight.

So how much did you weight?

Maybe it was \$2.15, \$2.20.

And more than six feet tall,

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Nick said the intruder, who was wearing gloves,
grabbed the shotgun.
At one point you pick up one of his crutches.
I wanted to have a better idea
how Nick and this intruder struggled over the shotgun.
What was Nick telling you?
That they pushed and pulled back and forth
with each other in the shotgun.
He pushes it up against my chest
and the gun went off.
I know it hit Heidi.
I don't know where it hit her, but I know it hit her.
She was running away and she went straight down.
And that's what went off the second time
and hit me in the leg.
After you get shot, what happens next?
She's gone.
He takes off.
I fall down. He's gone.
Nobody deserves anything at all like this.
And to be violated in your home like this
is just absolutely horrible.
As the nearly three-hour interview progressed,
Sergeant Gray switched gears
and asked Nick about his marriage.
Any problems you guys are going to have?
Just our level of intimacy and our relationship.
Are you stepping out at all by chance?
To other women?
Yeah.
No, absolutely not.
Any concerns that she was stepping out at all?
Absolutely not.
We had a lot of trust in that part of our relationship.
You guys got insurance policies on each other?
No, we don't.
You guys have any problems or anything like that?
Just the normal stuff like, you know,
stresses about finances.
Nick told the investigator he and Heidi,
like so many who had been beaten down
by the 2008 recession,
had gotten deep into debt
that their home had been foreclosed on

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and they'd been preparing to move out.
We're both kind of dealing with the shame of the whole thing
because we're embarrassed.
So embarrassed, he said,
that he and Heidi hadn't told anyone.
None of our parents are none of our friends.
No one knows about this except you and I.
And Heidi.
And Heidi.
That's right.
Still, despite all of the stress, he told Gray,
he and his wife were rock solid.
We're still best friends.
We're having a great time Saturday night.
During his interview, Nick seemed to be in denial.
He spoke about Heidi in the present tense
and seemed to avoid asking about her condition
until the interview was winding down.
Did he think there was a chance that his wife was still alive?
I think he was hoping.
I just want to know the final answer on Heidi.
Well, this is, you know, there's a couple parts of my job
that I really hate.
This is one of them.
She had made it.
I figured that.
He started crying a little bit
and it was at that time that I decided to take a little break
to let him obviously process that information.
Police often look at the husband first
and even though Nick had no criminal record
and had been shot himself,
Gray felt he had to ask the tough question.
If I don't ask that question,
I might not get another chance to ask it.
You decided to ask it?
Yes, I did.
Did you have anything to do with this?
No, absolutely not.
Okay, absolutely not.
As the interview wrapped up,
Nick's family was allowed into the room.
I can't believe he just got...
I hugged his mother,

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started crying in her arms for several minutes.

Lots of tears.

Yes, a lot of tears.

As emotional as he was,
after Nick left the police station,
he decided to do something extraordinary.
Something that would change the trajectory
of the entire investigation.

This is kind of your first big lead at this point.

Yes.

You now have somebody to look for.

Yes.

The Church.

Just outside St. Paul is Calvary Church.

It's large,

able to seat about 600 people.

But five days after Heidi's murder,
the church was overflowing.

How many people came to say goodbye?

I didn't even realize it till we walked out.

Heidi's friend, Krista.

The whole sanctuary was full,
and the lobby was full,
and down the hallways were full.

And it was all the people that she had impacted.

Was it amazing to you to see
how many people your friend had touched?

It was.

That was part of Heidi.

She was the best friend to a lot of people.

A church that, for years,
had given so much comfort and joy to Heidi's family,
was now holding so much of their pain.

I remember hugs from friends and family
when we got married there,
and when Nick and Heidi got married there,
and on that day,
a lot of the same people were giving us hugs.
To come for you.

For the worst scenario.

Nick's friend, Preston,
recalls watching Nick put on a brave face
to put others at ease.

How was Nick that day?

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I know he spoke.
It was very difficult for him,
and what he wanted to do was just tell the story of Heidi.
And I think he did that quite well under the circumstances.
He does have a tremendous ability to say,
okay, this is what I need to do for the next hour.
And for the next hour,
I'm going to be what I need to be here.
And alone and private when he gets home,
something else.
He may break down.
Yes.
It was that emotional seesaw that worried Nick's family.
They thought, at the very least,
he should have legal counsel.
They hired attorney Joe Friedberg.
Take me back if you would.
Do you remember your first conversation with Nick?
It was unequivocal denial
of being involved in his wife's death,
other than as a co-victim and a witness.
Do you remember his demeanor in those early days?
How did he appear to you?
Appropriate with being a victim.
I think he was in shock.
His affect was flat at some times,
and other times he was very mournful
about the death of his wife,
who it's apparent he dearly loved.
To Friedberg, it was obvious.
Nick was in no state to talk with Sergeant Gray.
If you remember that he was shot,
violence and trauma
screws up people's memory and their perceptions.
I told him to be crazy if he talked to him again.
He wanted to continue cooperating with the police.
He wanted to keep talking.
Sure he did,
and it wasn't easy to convince him
not to continue with the police.
Friedberg says Nick grudgingly took his advice,
but insisted on helping in other ways.
When police asked for fingerprints and DNA,
Nick gave them.

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When they wanted him to sit down with a sketch artist,
he agreed to that too.

But Friedberg had some conditions.

I thought that was a good idea
as long as it wasn't the police sketch artist
because the cops would be there
and they would use that as another opportunity
to get into details and contradictions.

You thought they'd use that to question him?

They'd use it to question him,
and that's their job.

Instead, Friedberg and his team
reached out to Nancy Molner,
a veteran courtroom sketch artist.

He said, well, Nick is a client of ours,
and we'd like to have a sketch drawn of the suspect.

Nancy says she agreed to take the job,
in part, because she felt bad for Nick.

To me, he was a man who had just lost his wife
and was trying to help the police
to get this suspect, this intruder,
to get him captured.

You were thinking that you were helping them
solve this crime, possibly?

That's right.

Yep.

I was thinking that I was helping justice.

The session took place at Nancy's house.

As she worked at her easel,

Nick stood over her shoulder.

Again, he described the intruder as black,
around six feet tall, over 200 pounds,
and wearing a hoodie.

Nick told me that the eyes needed to be a certain way,
and that I didn't have them there yet.

Nick said they needed to be more wide open
than I had them.

He also wanted her to tweak a few key features,
like the man's nose and skin.

He asked for more age,
and that the skin was not smooth.

It was pockmarked and kind of rugged.

Very distinctive features.

Yes.

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Do you think that that helped make this portrait, make this sketch more recognizable?

That was the goal.

That this could be used to find a murderer?

Right.

The description he gave me would result in a sketch that the police department could use to find this person who did this terrible thing.

About two weeks after his wife's murder, Nick, still on crutches from his gunshot wound, came back to the police station and gave the sketch to Sergeant Gray.

How significant was that sketch in your investigation?

It was pretty imperative, the individual that we were looking for who was allegedly responsible for this crime.

And with that, Nick's lawyer said, that's it.

That's all Nick could offer to the investigation.

I almost had Twistie's arm to stop him from cooperating with the police.

He wanted to help?

Yes.

I told the police.

I'm making these decisions.

He's talked to you three times already.

That's enough.

He says his client needed to be left alone to heal, needed to surround himself with family and friends, old and new, including a woman who surprised just about everyone.

One of their best friends just died.

And here I come, I know enough to know that that was probably super hurtful and hard for them to watch.

Nick Furkis had just handed police a detailed sketch of the man he said attacked him and killed his wife Heidi roughly two weeks earlier.

Sergeant Jim Gray hoped it would lead to a break in the case.

It was released both in the print for the newspaper and then also released through the local news stations here in St. Paul.

Nick gave police this detailed sketch

of a black man in a hoodie.

Did that give them a sense of hope?

Her parents?

Yes.

They were looking at the sketch thinking,
okay, this is the person who might have killed their daughter.

Now Gray just had to wait for it to generate leads.

Meanwhile, Nick tried to put the whole investigation
on the back burner and focus on rebuilding his life.

How did he seem to be processing everything?

Quietly.

After Heidi's murder, Nick's closest friends say
the way he handled the tragedy was classic Nick in a crisis.

He put his head down and powered through.

He was grieving and he was grieving inside.

Is that characteristic of your friend?

That is.

Another of Nick and Heidi's friends came up with a plan to help him.

She knew that her best friend's husband was more than his wife, Heidi,
and Rachel, her younger sister, was in the process of divorce
and separation and just her own personal life.

Rachel Sanchez.

Erica says they encouraged Nick to spend time with Rachel.

She was also newly single and struggling after leaving a difficult marriage.

She needed to find her voice and in her finding her voice
was through this relationship, through this friendship.

What did Rachel represent for Nick?

What did Rachel bring to Nick?

I mean new life.

It made all of the feelings that him losing his wife,
losing Heidi, it gave him validity of I still am a human being.

You connected with Nick less than three months after his wife was killed.

This is Rachel.

Did he seem like somebody who was still very much in mourning?

He didn't talk about it much.

He was told that he wasn't allowed to talk about what happened,
so there wasn't really a question and answer ever.

Did you ever get the sense that maybe that was his trauma response
or how he was dealing with this loss?

Oh for sure.

I think that I didn't see anything of it.

So my perspective was all these people are dealing with this death
and some people deal with it differently than others.

As weeks passed, Rachel found herself quite unexpectedly falling in love.

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Was there ever a voice or a thought in the back of your head that said maybe it's too soon for him to be getting involved with somebody after his wife's death?

I think that more than anything it was other people saying that to me.

I was just like I don't understand why you're not happy that he's happy.

You were kind of defensive of what you guys had found with each other?

Yes.

And yet she says she couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt when she thought about Heidi's friends and family.

They were still grieving that and here I come and I know enough to know that that was probably super hurtful and hard for them to watch.

I didn't know what to make of it.

I probably just wasn't ready to go there, you know.

For you guys, was it painful to see Nick seemingly moving on with his life so soon after Heidi's death?

Yeah, it didn't feel fair, you know.

Down at the police station, Nick's new relationship certainly raised some eyebrows.

It was quite a surprise for us.

I figured, well, here's a person who just lost his wife.

I don't know if he's trying to find a replacement or if this is a rebound, that kind of a thing.

But Gray says it really didn't have any bearing on the investigation, which by that point was stagnating.

There were no fingerprints or DNA recovered from the crime scene, other than those belonging to Nick and Heidi,

and Nick's sketch, detailed as it was, did not generate a single useful lead.

I spent the next from the day of the murder until I left homicide, probably three months looking for that person.

All based on that sketch?

Correct.

We received a few tips, but nothing panned out, unfortunately.

Three months into the investigation, Gray moved to another division and handed over Heidi's case.

By 2012, two years had passed without an arrest.

Really, no developments at all.

Nick and Rachel's relationship had developed.

They quietly got married.

It was in his parents' backyard.

Some family, some friends.

It felt like beauty from ashes.

Like a phoenix rising.

Yeah, just like two horrible stories that now can have hope.

Rachel says she and Nick found their own version of domestic bliss.

We found a church that we loved and we would go Sundays and we had friends.

We had community within that church.

Did you feel like that kind of gave you guys a grounding, just a group around you?

Yeah, I mean, the people at my church were the ones that have always grounded me and stuck by

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and all of that.

A year after their wedding, the couple welcomed the first of their three children, Nick's friends, Brian and Dina.

Was Nick a good father?

Yes.

So good.

He looks them in the eye, spends time with them.

He loves to fish and so he taught his kids to fish and he found so much delight in watching them catch a fish.

But those closest to Nick were concerned for him, especially as more time passed without an arrest in Heidi's case.

His friend Eric says local media coverage often cast doubt on Nick's account of the murder.

Rachel would specifically tell us and other friends, like, hey, there's stories coming out just so you know.

And also, she would say, don't click on the story on the internet because the more clicks that come up, the higher the story goes on.

The more accusations.

The more attention.

Was she defending him?

Yeah.

Trying to shield him from any accusations?

She was trying to protect him.

Yeah, because the stories would put, you know, Nick in a bad light and she wholeheartedly believed that, no, he was incapable of doing this and didn't want that for Nick and for her and her family.

Heidi's family, on the other hand, didn't need sporadic news stories for painful reminders.

For them, the past was always present.

They were grieving a great deal and there was a lot of pressure on the police department to try to figure out who did this.

In 2012, two years after Heidi's murder, Sergeant Jake Peterson became the third police officer to lead the investigation.

Even though that sketch hadn't yielded any results, he thought it was still the best way to keep Heidi's case alive.

I wanted to continue running with that and that's one of the things that I did over the course of the next couple years

was try to get that sketch out into the public and is this a person in our community that we could be looking for?

So you guys really put a lot of effort in trying to get that sketch in front of as many eyes as you could at this point?

We did. We met with the news media regularly and we did frequent news releases with our local newspaper.

He says every year a few tips would trickle in. None panned out.

In 2015, on the fifth anniversary of Heidi's death, Peterson, his expectations low, once again

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released the sketch to the media.

And once again, his phone rang.

I remember it pretty clearly.

This time, the caller told Peterson she knew the man in the sketch.

It appeared Nick's detailed description of Heidi's killer was about to pay off.

It was fantastic. We thought maybe this was it. Maybe this was kind of that one puzzle piece that we were missing.

It was 2015, five years after Heidi's murder and for her family, five years of a tortured existence.

Nobody has been arrested. Nobody's been charged. Nobody's been found at fault for for killing your sister.

What are these days like for you, the not knowing?

Yeah, it felt helpless and frustrating kind of all together.

I think there was just a low grade anxiety about it to just the unfinishedness of it.

But I also feel like, you know, our faith really helped us along.

Sergeant Jake Peterson and his team were still working the case.

All they had was that intruder sketch, the one based on Nick's description.

One day, Peterson got a phone call from a woman.

And she'd said, are you the detective that's working on this case?

Said yes. She says, well, I know who is in that sketch. I know who that is.

What did you say when you heard that?

I was a little bit shocked at the time, but of course I grabbed my notepad and said, well, who are you?

You're madly scribbling.

Absolutely.

This is the first time in five years that you've gotten any sort of tip.

This is really the biggest tip you've gotten at this point.

Yes, it was.

And what did she tell you?

I met with her and she said, I know who's in the sketch. His name is Michael Pie.

I know him from the downtown St. Paul area.

She had very great detailed information and she was very certain of it.

How groundbreaking was this for you and for this investigation?

It was fantastic. We thought maybe this was it.

Maybe this was kind of that one puzzle piece that we were missing.

Finally, some good news for Heidi's family.

And I remember calling to say, hey, we got a good tip.

Like I couldn't wait to share it with them that the newspaper article had worked and maybe we had something.

Now Peterson had a new mission to find Michael Pie.

Did you go after this with everything that you had?

We started to immediately figure out who is Michael Pie and where is he and where can I find him and where can I talk to him?

What do you learn about him?

We have a database that shows us where people are at, what kind of crimes they've been convicted

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

of, what they look like and it was perfect.

He looked identical to the sketch and he'd been convicted of violent burglary crimes.

He had a pretty long rap sheet.

He did and we went to talk to him so that we could find out all about him and what he was doing on the morning that Heidi was killed.

Where did you find him?

We found him in the Department of Corrections.

He was locked up in jail and I went to interview him as soon as I could.

Pie was serving time for three counts of burglary and one count of kidnapping when the officers came to visit.

And how did that play out?

I think he was shocked to have a visitor.

We came unannounced and I'm sure that he had no idea why we were there.

And here we're wearing suits and we identify ourselves as homicide investigators from St. Paul.

So I think he was reeling from the get-go of why are these people here talking to me?

He heard homicide.

Absolutely.

So he was a little bit taken aback I think by it and we introduced ourselves and told him that we were investigating a case that happened in 2010 and started to learn a little bit about him.

Peterson says Pie gave him a rundown of his criminal history, his burglaries and how he did them.

In 2009, 2010, around that time period, he was breaking into homes when the people were there and he would pound on the doors and he would charge them and attack them and it was eerily similar.

Almost identical.

Almost identical to what had happened to Heidi.

Almost identical, except no one was killed in those robberies.

Even so, the more Peterson talked to Pie, the more he believed he had found his man, so he decided to try a little test.

During the interview I pulled out the sketch.

I had brought a copy with me, a full-size copy with me and I showed it to him.

What did he say when he looked at that picture?

He said, that's me.

Did that stop you in your tracks?

It was fantastic. It was just a lift of hope that you're on the right track here and this is what you live for as a homicide detective.

You look for these moments and these clues and these opportunities that now you can charge forward.

So you're sitting in the cell with this guy who is a dead ringer for this sketch.

Are you thinking, we did it. We got him.

Yeah.

Did they have him?

You're broken into homes. You've committed crimes.

Have you ever killed anybody?

When Sergeant Peterson first met Michael Pie, he thought he had finally found the man who killed Heidi Furkus.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

We went to meet him.

I was born and raised in Detroit.

Pie told us he grew up in a big family there with a fairly happy childhood.

But his life of crime, he says, started early.

From age 11, he was in and out of juvenile detention.

By the time you were 17, 18 years old, what did crimes look like for you then?

Yeah, it was armed robbery.

Armed robbery?

Yeah.

I only snatched the purse one time. I snatched the purse and got caught.

Pie served time for that robbery and others.

He says when he got out of prison and moved to St. Paul, he stayed on the right side of the law for about 15 years.

But by 2009, he was in his early 50s. Times were rough.

I lost my apartment. I lost my car.

And it was wintertime on the streets and I just went back to what I knew how to do.

That was home invasion.

So describe to me what that looked like.

I would go up to the door and if it had a screen door, I would cut the screen and unlock the latch and close the screen door back and then ring the doorbell.

So they would open up the front door thinking that the screen door is locked.

And I would just rush in there and tie them up and rob them.

Would you ever bring guns in when you do this?

No, no, never.

Pie was in the middle of serving a 10 and a half year prison sentence when the officers came to visit.

Now this is familiar to you.

Yeah, that's me.

Is that you?

When you saw that sketch back in 2015, when police laid that down in front of you, what did you think?

When they put it on the table, I said, that's me, but what y'all trying to do? Give me another case or something?

But there's no denying that that was your face.

No, no doubt. No doubt. No doubt.

Them eyes, them eyes just look, and that's crazy.

And your nose is spot on.

Yeah, yeah.

Did you think that they were talking about another home invasion or something that you had done in the past?

I didn't know, but I knew it was something that I hadn't did because they said it was a murder involved.

And I said, well, I ain't killing nobody.

That's exactly what he said. He said, that's me, but I didn't kill anybody. I never killed anybody.

But Peterson wasn't convinced. He couldn't ignore the sketch or Pie's criminal history.

We started to dig more into Michael and find out more about him, and we discovered a major problem.

He was locked up in jail the day that Heidi was killed.

He couldn't have done it.

He couldn't have done it.

And I remember we actually wanted to double check with the jail records because I just couldn't believe that he was really locked up at that time.

He really had the perfect alibi.

There was nothing we could do about it. He could not have done this.

So in an ironic way, the fact that he was in prison in April of 2010, possibly saved his life.

Absolutely. Absolutely it did.

And kept him from being blamed or wrongly accused or wrongly charged for this crime.

Do you think about what would have happened if you were not in prison when that murder happened?

Yeah, yeah. I'd have been locked up and everybody would be talking about, you know Mike did that.

You think you'd still be in prison today?

Yeah, and it wouldn't get out. I'd probably be in there the rest of my life.

Instead, when Michael Pie walked out of prison in 2017, he never looked back.

He says he looked to God, joining a Christian ministry in St. Paul and turning his life around.

Do you feel like a whole new person?

Oh, I am a new person.

Peterson felt terrible that the wrong guy almost took the fall.

And the whole Michael Pie episode was a tough setback for his investigation.

It was really disappointing. It was really sad.

But it did lead to a sort of breakthrough, as he started wondering more and more about the person who led them to Michael Pie in the first place.

Why does somebody release a sketch that looks identical to somebody committing crimes in the community?

Why would you do that or where would you get that sketch from?

So that kind of opened up a whole new door.

Your mind shifted to Nick?

Correct.

I know that the guy in the sketch was locked up at the time of this. He wasn't involved in this crime in any way.

Peterson's thoughts turned to Nick.

You released a sketch of an innocent black man who was locked up at the time of this killing.

Nick still wasn't talking, but Peterson learned something interesting.

It turned out in the months before Heidi's death, Pie's crimes had been in the news.

The investigator suspected that Nick saw those stories and Pie's mug shots and hatched a plan to frame Pie.

Did you feel that Nick had led you down this five-year path to nowhere?

I think that's what we all thought, is we were chasing a ghost that didn't exist.

And so now our efforts need to change and go a different direction.

But as Peterson shifted his focus to Nick, he found himself hitting the same roadblocks.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

We had all the physical evidence that we were always going to have.
We had no contact with Nick, we had no contact with his family, and we were still left holding nothing.
Peterson worked on the case for four more years until he was promoted out of the homicide unit to commander.
A new lead investigator was brought in.
What I hoped to do was bring it to a conclusion.
That was Sergeant Nicky Sypes.
You are the fourth detective to take this case.
Correct.
Three others had been working this for almost a decade.
Did you think that you could solve this case?
To be honest, I always thought the case was solved.
So you thought you already knew who did it?
I believed I did.
Who?
I believe Nick Furkis killed his wife.
She wasn't alone.
Both Gray and Peterson thought the same thing.
They just hadn't been able to prove it.
You really felt a personal connection to this case.
I did.
I really had a problem with the idea that there was no justice in this case and that someone could do this and just be walking around and living their life.
It became very important just for the sake of giving the family a sense of closure.
When Sergeant Sypes went to speak with Heidi's family, they told her they'd had questions about Nick from the beginning.
I think what we've been taught our whole lives of thinking the best of people, we didn't want it to be Nick.
But you already had your suspicions.
We had our suspicions.
And Heidi's family had some advice for the investigator.
Follow the money or the lack of it.
Remember, when Nick spoke to police, he told them about the financial problems he and Heidi were having.
It's a hard place for us before it goes down our house.
Not only that, they were due to be evicted at 12 noon the day after Heidi's murder.
Nick told police he and Heidi were embarrassed and kept the news from their loved ones.
None of our parents are none of our friends.
No one knows about this except you and Heidi.
And Heidi.
That's right.
Heidi's family told Sergeant Sypes that when they learned about the foreclosure after Heidi's death, it was a huge red flag.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

Super shocking.

When you heard that, did that change your thoughts of Nick?

Yes.

That wouldn't be something that she would be able to keep to herself.

She would have told you, her parents, family, somebody.

Correct.

That was a line in the sand moment for sure.

A line in the sand.

What's more, they say if she knew about the eviction coming the next day,

Heidi the planner would have packed everything up to move out.

But nothing was packed.

All their clothes were still in the closet.

Sypes says she went through Heidi's texts and emails to Nick in the days before the murder.

When you examine that and you see that between a husband and a wife who are losing their home, that there is no communication about moving.

Moving is not something you do on a whim.

Right.

Right?

So we were looking for even these tiniest little clues to say, well, did she know something was up?

And we just couldn't find them.

What we could see is that she had knowledge there was something wrong financially with their bank accounts.

We could see that, but we could also see her asking him to take care of it over and over.

And what did that tell you about their relationship, about the way that they interacted?

It told me everything I needed to know in the fact that Nick was handling the finances.

He was telling Heidi what he wanted her to know.

And she believed him.

He was her husband.

They were young.

They were in love.

She had no reason to doubt him.

No reason to doubt him.

Once you got all of that information, what did that tell you?

How did that impact your investigation?

It confirmed to me that Heidi did not know about the mortgage and the foreclosure and the eviction.

And this just pokes holes in Nick's story.

Correct.

Sypes was just getting started.

And then in 2020, barely a year after she took on the case, the investigator heard some big news.

Nick and his second wife, Rachel, had recently divorced.

What do you decide to do?

Oh, I want to talk to Rachel.

Immediately.

I want to do that more than breathe.

Yes.

Talk to her.

Hear what she had to say.

Well, now that I know that they're divorced, she's going to be my best person to get some insight into Nick and who he has been for the last 10 years.

Still, Sypes didn't know if Rachel would even give her the time of day.

But the investigator went by her home, left a business card, and to Sypes's surprise, Rachel called and agreed to a meeting.

So she came in in the evening and we spent a couple hours talking.

Sounded like she had a story to tell.

Yeah, right.

And she tells me the story.

You know, I'm blown away now.

Sergeant Nicky Sypes had finally scored a key interview that could possibly jumpstart her investigation into Heidi's murder.

Nick Furkus' ex-wife, Rachel, was talking.

Rachel is a, she's a truth teller.

I mean, she will tell you that herself.

She is a truth teller.

I was pretty straightforward about saying, listen, I'm not a bitter ex-wife to sit here and tell you how I feel about it.

I have a lot of feelings about it.

I have my own experiences.

Rachel told the investigator about falling in love with Nick, marrying him and raising three kids, all in the aftermath of Heidi's murder.

For years, Rachel had been Nick's biggest defender as the cloud of suspicion lingered over him.

But as time went on, Rachel says she started to notice something about Nick.

I started to see lying consistently happen.

She says at first they were small lies, like when Nick would say he ate dinner at home, but she found fast food containers in his car.

It just seemed so bizarre to me.

The times I confronted him were probably around 15 to 20 times.

Of the small, of the small things.

And there were times where I knew he was lying and I was just like, I can't prove it.

How did that make you feel?

Insecure?

You know, like questioning who you're married to.

And it sounds dramatic, but to me, I think being trustworthy is a huge piece in any marriage.

That's the father of your kids that, you know, that you've trusted with your stuff.

You want to be able to trust that person.

And I was beginning to question that.

That trust for Nick was faltering.

Yeah.

Rachel says many of Nick's little lies had to do with money.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

When they first got married, Nick told her he'd had financial problems in the past, but assured her he'd gotten out of debt.
You thought, hey, he's come through and he's kind of beat that part of his past now. It's better now.
Yeah, I thought that.
But now she was starting to wonder.
And so I started to do my own investigating.
Like, what else could there be if there's so many of these lies?
What else could there be?
And I would get collection calls and I would confront him about those and he would, you know, lie about those.
Like financial collection.
Yeah, that we were in collections.
And he would, I remember hearing one of his excuses and it was somebody else's fault. It was always somebody else's fault.
It was, you know, I tried to call them, but they wouldn't call back.
And if anybody's been in collections, you know that you don't have a hard time getting a hold of them because they will get a hold of you every single day until you pay, because that's how it works. And so that seemed off to me.
Rachel says she kept investigating, trying to find out what else Nick might have been hiding and found a series of unpaid bills that Nick had tucked away.
Then came the big discovery.
I found a letter in his top drawer that said that we didn't pay our property taxes and that our house was going to be foreclosed on in 2020 if we didn't pay them.
What did you think when you saw that your house was facing foreclosure?
I was terrified because I honestly, I'm naïve to how any of that works because I literally had never had a credit card in my life.
I only used the money that I've earned and I didn't do the house process.
I don't know a lot of that stuff, but I knew foreclosure isn't good and I knew that not paying your bills isn't good.
As Sergeant Sypes listened to Rachel, she began piecing it all together.
When you look at this pattern of, you know, financial issues, lies, does this shed new light on your investigation into Heidi's death?
Well, absolutely. It was just such a roadmap to us that we were on the right track, right?
Like, he's done, I mean, to me, I probably had almost as big of an epiphany as she did, right, when she finds that I'm like, oh my gosh, he did this a second time?
Like, now we have a pattern. This wasn't just something that happened.
Heidi, it just reaffirms everything to me that I believe to be true up until then, that he did this on his own to Heidi, that Heidi didn't know because now he's done it on his own to Rachel and Rachel didn't know.
Rachel told the investigator she could see the similarities too.
Knowing what had happened to Heidi, Rachel was in a panic.
I was stressed. I couldn't believe that was what it came to because I knew about, you know, his finances with Heidi

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

and I don't believe she knew.

And to me, this just showed all of that she's not here anymore and I'm sitting here dealing with the same things or similar things that she did.

And now what? I've got three kids. I mean, it was stressful.

It was not a fun discovery.

Did you start to feel scared for your safety?

I did. There's so many thoughts in my head.

The things that reel in your mind when you discover something like that, it was a whirlwind.

A whirlwind, she says, that took her to a dark place.

I'm questioning whether he killed somebody or not

and I personally can't live knowing that I'm questioning that.

Rachel told Sypes that after she found those documents, she took the kids and left their home to stay with her sister.

But there was something Rachel had not told Sypes.

She had documented Nick's lies so friends and family would believe her.

I didn't want to be the victim of something anymore.

Rachel had confronted Nick and secretly recorded him.

Why didn't you tell me that?

I've never heard that once in my life.

And for investigators, those recordings would be a goldmine.

Rachel Furchus's story and its similarity to Heidi's was riveting to Sergeant Sypes.

But the investigator needed more to arrest Nick.

So Sypes turned to the FBI to help her figure out exactly what happened inside the house that Sunday morning.

The FBI was beyond helpful with the resources that we would have not had access to otherwise.

First, FBI agents focused on Heidi's 911 call.

State Patrol 911.

They enhanced the audio and the new audio told a different story.

There's Heidi's panicked voice, then the sound of a gunshot and a scream.

But in the background, nothing.

Sypes says that told her everything.

Where is the struggle between him and this intruder?

There's no Heidi run, there's no, no, get out of my house.

There's nothing to precipitate that shotgun blast.

And that to me is more indicative of Nick Furchus stepping out behind his wife, raising the shotgun and shooting her.

The investigator's suspicion grew when she used a scale model created by the FBI to take a closer look at the story Nick told police.

So this figure represents Heidi, the light blue, the dark blue represents Nick and then the gray represents the alleged intruder.

And then this is approximately where he and the intruder struggled.

Right in front of the table.

Correct.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

In the photos, you're able to see that there were a lot of items on this table to include a set of candlesticks, stainless steel water bottle, even a receipt and none of that was disturbed.

I actually was brought to the home just to see it myself.

Ramsey County Prosecutor Elizabeth Lammon.

And when you step in, you do not appreciate how tiny that space is and how it would have been impossible to have a life and death struggle with a shotgun in that table that's in that entryway, not being knocked over.

For investigators, the FBI's analysis of the crime was the missing piece in a decade long puzzle.

It proved to them, once and for all, there was no intruder.

Finally, the prosecutor was ready to charge Nick with intentionally killing Heidi.

I said, we cannot wait any longer.

We got to get it together.

We have to charge immediately.

This man cannot be on the street anymore.

On May 19th, 2021, just before dawn, a SWAT team moved in and arrested Nick Furkis for murder.

But so many years after Heidi was killed, the case wasn't a slam dunk.

What were some of the weaknesses?

One is the question everyone asks, right? What took so long?

So just the sheer passage of time was an obstacle.

Exactly.

People who had just moved on weren't available to come testify.

For a variety of reasons, yes.

Then, six months later, the case got a massive boost when Rachel Furkis called Sergeant Sykes to tell her something she hadn't told her before.

When she called you that day, what did she tell you?

She said, I have these recordings that I think you should hear.

And I was like, okay, how quickly can you get them to me?

I want to believe you. I really do.

It turned out in 2018, after Rachel left Nick, she decided to confront him about their finances, Nick's lies, and Heidi's murder.

This is really hard.

And record it all.

Why was it so important for you to have recordings of these conversations?

I didn't know how he would respond, and if there was going to be a confession, then I would have it.

Did you feel that you could be putting yourself at risk by confronting him?

I think before the conversations I did, but going into them, there was something in me that was so determined to be strong for myself for once that I wasn't scared in the moment.

Did you struggle with whether or not to turn over those recordings?

The recordings were just pieces of my story that I was handing over.

It wasn't Heidi's story. It was my story, and it looked similar.

You made choices to lead me to this, like to make me question.

I feel like you had to have known that the choices you were making about with your money would have caught up with you.

I am, yeah. Okay. Keep going.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

She started with the unpaid bills at home. Nick fessed up. He deceived her.
I never paid our 2060 property taxes, because we were, in that week, struggling really hard.
And I didn't have the guts to talk to anybody about it, and I ignored it.
So Rachel wondered, had Nick also lied back in 2010 about his and Heidi's finances and losing their home?
I feel like you haven't given me the details that are important.
That's such a fuzzy, fuzzy, fuzzy, fuzzy time for me. I don't have vivid memories from back then.
See, that's what doesn't make sense, because you did. When you talked about it, it was detailed of what happened.
You keep saying that, but that's not true.
Her parents didn't know, and her friends didn't. Nobody knew. That's just so bizarre to me.
Heidi and I decided together that we would figure this out together, because for two reasons.
We thought we could, and the other reason is because we were embarrassed.
That's when Rachel got to the heart of it.
I do not want to think these things. I don't.
But that your actions have caused me to just distrust you completely makes me think...
That I could murder my wife.
That you could lie about something.
That I could murder my wife.
Yes.
Poor him.
There was a lot of silence.
Because what I wanted was, okay, if I'm going to say this to you, try and prove me wrong.
Even if you have, you know, bitterness or resentment with somebody, you don't want to believe they killed somebody.
So I wanted him to convince me otherwise, but it just wasn't happening.
I feel like you're so shocked for me thinking this.
But yet you made choices to lead me to this.
Intellectually, I understand what you are saying.
I don't, I don't know.
There are a hundred things going through my mind right now.
Are you wanting to say more?
I don't know.
I probably need to go.
When you listen to the totality of those recordings, what is it that really kind of was pivotal in this?
It was Nick's failure to deny killing Heidi.
He's evasive.
What he does is, you know, I'm not sure about Heidi.
You think I killed her?
He doesn't say I didn't kill her.
He basically just repeats back to her the things she says to him.
Armed with Rachel's recordings, the prosecutor was confident she could convict Nick Furkis of murder.
But Nick's defense team was ready with a blow that threatened the prosecution's case.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

For 12 years, Nick Furkis insisted he'd had nothing to do with murdering his wife, Heidi. As his case headed to trial, he faced life behind bars if convicted.

Show of hands, going into the trial, who believed that Nick was going to be exonerated?

I did.

Yeah.

Nick's friend, Emily.

In order to believe that Nick did this, you have to believe that a good man with no history of violence killed the woman who he loved more than anything for no reason at all.

And that's what Nick's lawyer, Joe Friedberg, wanted a jury to see.

He recruited defense attorney, Robert Richmond, and together they landed their first punch.

In a pretrial hearing, they argued Rachel's whole story about Nick and her recordings didn't prove that he murdered Heidi and were too prejudicial.

The judge agreed and ruled Rachel could not testify.

How big was that for you?

It was very important because it really had nothing to do with this case.

Did you feel like you were being silenced?

Yes, 100 percent, because that's what I knew they wanted.

They didn't want my testimony in that trial.

It didn't feel good.

On top of that, the judge ruled Michael Pye's story and that sketch were also inadmissible.

In January 2023, Nick Furkus went on trial.

Prosecutors Rachel Crocker and Elizabeth Lamin laid out their case.

They argued Nick killed Heidi, shot himself, and blamed the whole thing on a fictional intruder.

We were trying to disprove Nicholas's story about this alleged intruder.

He pushes it up against my chest and the gun went off.

One of the things that was a crucial piece of evidence was your initial conversation with him.

It was one of the foundations to build the rest of the case,

showing that obviously things could not have taken place the way Nick told me back in 2010.

Remember, Nick told police he was awakened by the sound of an intruder pushing at the front door.

Prosecutors said that wasn't possible and played a test conducted back in 2010.

When Sergeant Gray tried that door, officers in the upstairs bedroom couldn't hear a sound.

But you had doubts about that from the beginning.

Yes, yes, we did.

Nick's story about a struggle in the entryway, likewise, didn't make sense, said the prosecution, and they wheeled out that scale model created by the FBI.

Essentially, you wanted to transport the jury into that house.

Yeah, I actually made a motion to physically transport them, but that wasn't going.

They couldn't take a field trip to the house, but this was the next best thing for them to feel this space.

It wasn't just the undisturbed items on the table, or that there was no sound of a struggle in Heidi's 911 call.

Someone turned it right into my home.

An FBI analysis showed the shot that killed Heidi was fired from shoulder height.

And it was at the same height and the same angle as if you were actually standing and shooting a

target.

It didn't indicate somebody who was struggling. It didn't indicate a gun that was going up and down and being tussled over.

No.

That fed the prosecution's broader theory that Nick planned to kill Heidi.

We think it's possible that maybe Nick Furkis did wake Heidi up, tell her about this alleged intruder, but that he was then downstairs waiting for her.

That he didn't actually walk down with her at the same time.

That he was surprised when she walked down the stairs and he found her on the phone.

He then became aware she was talking to someone and maybe didn't know who.

They argued he shot her while she was still on the line,

then picked up her phone and scrolled through it to see who she'd been talking to.

The evidence does show that he looked at the previously dialed numbers on her phone.

The prosecutor said Nick then shot himself and made his own frantic call to 911.

His hysteria, said prosecutors, was all in act.

Just hours later in his police interview, he was calm, almost nonchalant.

And when the jury was reacting to those moments, it really confirmed for us that they were getting it and that they were starting to doubt Nick Furkis.

Krista also testified about Nick's deceit, saying he duped Heidi into believing they had a bright future.

She was making plans, thinking that they still owned a home. She didn't mention anything about her foreclosure.

Their home had already been foreclosed upon.

Right. I don't think she had any idea.

So much of this case comes down to what did Heidi know and what did she not know.

Right.

And you had to comb through every piece of paper, every file, anything that could have possibly given her any indication of what was going on.

Yes.

They said the fact that Heidi didn't sign any foreclosure documents, didn't show up for an eviction hearing and didn't tell her family and friends was proof she had no idea.

Along with the emails and texts between Heidi and Nick that made no mention of moving out of their home.

Not about finding a storage unit. Not about where are we going to sleep tomorrow.

Not about, hey, honey, can you pick up some packaging tape on the way home from work?

The prosecutor said Nick's lies were about to be exposed and that became his motive for murder.

Rather than face humiliation, he killed his wife, shot himself and blamed an intruder.

All to appear as if he were a victim.

You're asking a jury to believe that this man who, while accounts as an upstanding member of the church,

a devoted husband, would rather shoot and kill his wife in cold blood than face shame.

That's a pretty tall hill to climb.

I mean, that was a concern.

This isn't about insurance money. This isn't about another lover.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

At the end, it comes down to embarrassment.

It certainly involves embarrassment, but I think that it really comes down to just that exposure of who Nick Fergus really was.

He presents himself as this incredibly competent, calm, moral, supportive, loving husband, but in fact, he's a narcissist, a liar, someone who's full of shame and guilt.

After 10 days of testimony, the prosecution rested.

Now it was time for the defense.

What story were you trying to tell to the jury?

What picture were you trying to paint here?

The story was the same story that Nick had told the police.

Everyone who knew them knew that Nick and Heidi loved each other, and Nick had no reason to kill his wife.

I was confident because it is the state's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

And we don't think that they negated that there was an intruder who shot his wife.

The defense attorney said those tool marks on the door frame indicated an intruder.

And as for that undisturbed table, how do you explain that?

Is it possible that the struggle could have happened three or four feet away from the front table?

Yes.

By the way, four body-armored armed policemen came charging through that door and the table wasn't disturbed.

The defense called a neighbor to the stand.

He told police back in 2010 that he'd heard a gunshot that morning, then a voice.

What he heard after one of the shots was a male voice say, either you shot her or you shot me.

If he's telling the truth and he has no reason to lie, there was another person there.

He was consistent with the evidence, consistent with what the next door neighbor heard, consistent with the tool marks on the door which reflect someone trying to break in.

What's more, they argue Nick couldn't possibly have murdered Heidi and made it look like a home invasion because he didn't have enough time.

After Heidi was shot, they said Nick didn't stage a crime scene.

After he'd wounded and traumatized, he tried to call for help

and accidentally dialed numbers in Heidi's recent calls list until he eventually reached 911.

He was shot and it was a very painful wound.

He's also in complete shock because of the apparent death of his wife.

He had gone and turned her over on the floor.

You can tell by his emotional reaction on the telephone.

It always sounded genuine to me.

Finally, as to the state's theory of motive, Friedberg said that didn't make sense either.

Heidi would have known about the eviction.

Can you imagine how many telephone calls those banks must have made during this time period?

She would have had to consciously avoid the notifications that came out

and there would be no reason for her to do that.

If she was aware, why wouldn't there have been signatures?

Why wouldn't she have been present at hearings?

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

There was no hearing at which she was required to be present and so she wasn't.
There was no document that she was required to sign and so he signed.
The defense closed with this.
Nick loved Heidi. He needed her.
Nick's situation did not become better because Heidi was dead.
It did not cause an influx of cash to Nick.
It did not prevent the foreclosure.
He still had to move out of his house but now he didn't have his life partner to do it with.
After seeing the defense poke holes in the prosecution's case,
Sergeant Sypes was nervous, wondering if she had done enough for Heidi's family.
I had a couple of moments where I felt like, have I now set these people up
to believe that we're going to get justice and what if it fails?
And that was very overwhelming at times.
As the defense rested, prosecutors would have one last chance to sway the jury.
They decided on a bold move that could either help win the case or completely backfire.
In February 2023, as Nick Furkis' murder trial reached its climax,
prosecutors had the final say in closing arguments.
They attacked the defense's argument that Nick didn't have enough time to commit the crime
by trying to prove he did.
I think the most important thing for a jury is to answer the most obvious questions
that they're going to have.
In this case, is there enough time for what the state says happened to have happened?
They focused on the alleged window of the murder,
the 65 seconds between the end of Heidi's 911 call and the beginning of Nick's.
You hear 65 seconds and it sounds like a very, very short amount of time,
especially to do something so awful.
So Rachel Cronker decided to reenact the crime right there in the courtroom.
The move was highly risky because she hadn't rehearsed it
and if she got it wrong, it could upend her case.
There were no cameras in the court,
so the prosecutor showed us what she did when she stepped in front of the jury.
I demonstrated as if I were Nick Furkis having a gun.
Raised level towards where an imaginary Heidi would be down the hallway
and when that gunshot went off, Elizabeth started the time clock.
So that clock starts and what did you do?
So the clock starts, I put the gun down,
walked down to where Heidi would have been on the ground,
bent down, turned her body over,
feel for a pulse, then take her phone, which she had used to call 911,
scroll through it, which is what the evidence indicated,
put it in my pocket and then come back to the door,
grab the shotgun that had been left,
brace against the door, hold the shotgun and fire that shot into the left thigh.
And all of that was in less than 65 seconds.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

It was in much less. There was plenty of time for that to occur.

And then he calls 911.

And then he calls 911.

And with that, the jury started deliberations.

Pete and Jolene wondered if the prosecution had done enough.

We've gotten far enough along in all of this to know that there's so much that's just outside of our control that we had to be open to the possibility that it may not go our way.

Were you nervous that he might go free?

Yeah. That was definitely a thought of ours.

About four and a half hours later,

the jurors filed back into the courtroom with their verdict.

Pete and Jolene held their breath.

Yeah, it was intense. You could hear a pin drop.

It was so quiet in there.

Nearly 13 years after Heidi was killed in her home,

the judge read the jury's decision.

Nick Furkis was found guilty of first and second degree murder.

Are there any words for that moment when you finally heard the words guilty?

Grateful.

Yeah, definitely grateful. Yeah.

Well, there are a lot of hugs, a lot of tears that day.

There were. We got onto the elevator with the Erickson's.

You know, they started to cry and we did too.

I normally don't do that, but in that particular moment, it just kind of came out.

There was just a real shared sense of relief and just a weight being lifted.

It felt very real at that point.

Ultimately, it will probably be the most important thing that I do in my career.

Bringing justice to Heidi.

Yes, and I hope Heidi knew it happened.

Nick's close friends were deeply shaken by the verdict and are standing by him.

I think some of our tears are from a place where when we believe Nick is innocent.

Two months later at his sentencing hearing, Nick Furkis continued to deny he killed Heidi.

I do maintain and will maintain to my dying breath my innocence of this crime.

Pete spoke for Heidi's loved ones about the years of painful memories.

The truth is we've relived them every single day since April 25th, 2010.

Every birthday, every holiday, each and every family gathering,

we recount our memories of Heidi over and over and over again.

And while there are plenty of good ones, the evil end to her story has always cast a shadow over what would otherwise be bright.

I think my mom said something to the fact that we were all given a sentence of life without Heidi.

And I think to me that says it perfectly.

I wanted them to know we're all missing out on an amazing person, an exceptional person.

I'll ask you, Mr. Furkis, to please rise.

[Transcript] Dateline NBC / 65 Seconds

On April 13th, 2023, Nick Furkis was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Were you angry at Nick Furkis for creating that sketch of you, for essentially pointing the finger at you?

Actually, I was.

But then the thought came, I have to forgive Nick because God forgave me.

So if I want God's forgiveness, I got to forgive everybody who did something wrong to me.

So I'm good, you know.

I want him to do his time because he did the crime, you know, so that's all.

You're not upset at him today?

You had to let it go.

I did let it go.

Nick Furkis is appealing his conviction.

He declined our interview request.

As for Heidi's family, they say they feel a burden lifted, a sense of freedom,

a chance to celebrate that joyful, adventurous, and creative spirit, the spirit of Heidi.

I feel like this gives us a new opportunity to move forward and just give our focus to Heidi.

Being that light in your family.

She always looked for the best in everything she did and the best that everyone else did.

And, yeah, I miss that about her.

That was something that no one else had.

Yeah, and I can't be replaced.

That's all for this edition of Dateline.

We'll see you again Thursday at 10, 9 central.

And of course, I'll see you each weeknight for NBC Nightly News.

I'm Lester Holt for all of us at NBC News.

Good night.