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for 50% off your first order with DoorDash. Our episodes deal with serious and often distressing incidents. If you feel at any time you need support, please contact your local crisis center. For suggested phone numbers for confidential support, please see the show notes for this episode on your app or on our website. February of 1960 was a cold month in the New Hampshire city of Manchester, and a thick blanket of snow covered the ground. On Tuesday, February 2, an employee of Manchester Waterworks headed out to Lake Massabasic to conduct a routine search of the area. The four-square-mile lake required close monitoring as it provided the city's drinking water. The employee noticed that one of the drainage holes from the reservoir wasn't flowing properly.

They got closer to get a better look and discovered that the drain was partially blocked by a red bag and a grey snow boot. Unsure what to make of the items, the employee turned them over to the police. Around the same time, police received a call from a local couple named Charles and Irene Valade. They were concerned as their 18-year-old daughter Sandra hadn't returned

home their previous evening. Sandra had spent part of the day at a local factory where she worked as a secretary. Afterwards, she visited the library, saw a movie, and attended a swimming class.

Around 9pm, Sandra boarded a bus to her parents' house and disembarked at the closest stop, approximately one mile from their property. The journey required her to walk down a dimly lit path near Lake Massabasic. She never made it home. Charles and Irene Valade was shown the red bag and snow boot found stuck in the drain off Lake Massabasic. They confirmed the items belonged to their daughter. A large-scale search for Sandra Valade commenced immediately.

200 volunteers and 60 troops from the National Guard braved the freezing conditions to search the heavily wooded area surrounding Lake Massabasic as a patrol plane flew overhead.

They were on the lookout for the colour red among the snowy landscape, as Sandra had been wearing a scarlet coloured blouse on the night she went missing.

Near the Lake Massabasic canal, they soon found another item, Sandra's coat.

The garment was stained with blood, with droplets littering the surrounding snow and trailing to a nearby road. By the time Sandra had been missing for nine days, warmer weather partially thought some of the heavy snow that blanketed the area.

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On Wednesday, February 10, a motorist was driving along a quiet road 10 miles south of Sandra's home.

All of a sudden, he noticed a flash of scarlet sticking out from a snow bank on the side of the road. The driver pulled over to investigate. On the other side of the snow bank, just a few feet from the road, Sandra Valade's body lay on its side, her severely bruised face buried in the snow. She still wore the scarlet blouse but was naked from the waist down. Investigators confirmed that Sandra's body had been concealed until a passing snow cloud had disturbed the snow around her earlier that day. The cold conditions had preserved her body enough for a pathologist to conclude that Sandra had been sexually assaulted, violently beaten, stabbed, and shot four times with a 22-colour bar rifle. Police believed that Sandra had likely accepted a lift home from the bus stop. She was then taken to the woods where Sandra was attacked and ultimately killed. Her body was then dragged to the snow bank where her killer attempted to bury her. He then discarded her belongings into the lake. In the woodland, approximately two miles away, investigators uncovered the knife used in the attack. It was surrounded by blood stains and clumps of Sandra's hair. The 22-colour bar rifle was nowhere to be found. Police believed the perpetrator was a local who was familiar with the quiet back roads where Sandra's body was found. On the night Sandra disappeared, a witness had been driving near the

canal when they saw a dark-coloured Chevrolet car driving along the aisle. The police found the icy road. The vehicle swerved into a snow bank where it got stuck momentarily before speeding away. The police appealed for anyone who had seen the Chevy to come forward.

Horrified locals rallied around Charles and Irene Valade. Their daughter's funeral was held at a local church on Friday, February 12, two days after her body was found. Officers attended to observe the large crowd on the lookout for any suspicious behaviour. One officer scant the cars parked at the church and noticed a black 1952 Chevrolet. The owner was a young man who was attending Sandra's funeral. The man was questioned in the back seat of his car before being arrested

and taken in for interrogation. He was later released without charge.

All other owners of black Chevrolets in the area were looked into, but cleared of any involvement.

The attorney general called Sandra Valade's death a barbaric slaying that could only be the product of some kind of human monster. He promised that no stone would be left unturned in finding Sandra's killer. Women and girls of Manchester were warned to stay indoors at night.

School dances and social events were cancelled. One of Sandra's friends who often accompanied her from the bus stop home received a phone call. The threatening voice on the other line simply said, you're next. Two weeks after Sandra Valade went missing, police were no closer to finding her killer. A \$1500 reward was offered by members of the community, but it didn't lead to any breakthroughs. The one year anniversary of the murder came and

went with no arrests. In February 1961, local authorities published an artist's sketch in the newspaper. This was collated from a couple who had come forward soon after Sandra's body was found to say they had seen a man and a woman struggling in a car on the night Sandra disappeared. The sketch depicted a young man in his 20s with a narrow face and a long hair.

The day the sketch was published, Sandra's mother received a phone call from an unknown male. He told her, so you got the picture in the paper, huh? You're next.

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Five months later in July, 20-year-old Ronnie Jenkins, not his real name, was receiving mental health treatment at the New Hampshire State Hospital in Manchester. Ronnie walked from the hospital grounds to an unattended office nearby. There he stole a .22 caliber rifle and walked nearly a mile to the state prison.

Aiming the gun at the guard tower, Ronnie fired several shots before dumping the rifle on the street. Nobody was injured and Ronnie Jenkins was picked up by police and returned to hospital. When being questioned, he made an unexpected confession. He killed Sandra Valade.

According to Ronnie, he knew Sandra from school. On the night of Monday, February 1, 1960, he saw

her walking home from the bus stop and pulled over to offer her a lift. When Sandra refused, Ronnie became furious. He forced Sandra into his car where she resisted his physical advances. Enraged, Ronnie assaulted Sandra before shooting her with a stolen gun and dumping her body in the

snow. Investigators probed Ronnie for more details, but he couldn't offer any. They discounted him as a suspect, concluding he was a, quote, very disturbed individual who had likely made up the story to attract attention. The homicide investigation was back to square one.

Four years later, 14-year-old Manchester teen Pamela Mason was eager to make some extra pocket money. In early January 1964, she visited the local laundromat with her friend, Barbara.

The girls placed a flyer on the bulletin board inside, offering babysitting services to the local community. The flyer worked. Days later, on the afternoon of Monday, January 13, Barbara received a call. A softly-spoken man on the other line asked if she was available to babysit that afternoon. A blizzard was approaching, so Barbara turned the job down on account of the poor weather.

The man replied, I don't blame you. It's an awfully bad night for babysitting.

Barbara told the man to try asking Pamela Mason instead.

Pamela's mother, Joan, answered his call. The man asked Joan if her daughter was available to babysit for the night. He didn't introduce himself but said he lived up the road and promised to drive Pamela home by 9 p.m. Joan didn't allow Pamela to babysit for strangers, but she agreed that Pamela could do the job as long as the man's wife picked her up.

However, Pamela had yet to return home from school, so Joan told the man to call back a bit later.

Joan then got ready for work as a waitress. As she left, she ran into Pamela and told her not to leave for the job unless a woman showed up. Pamela replied, Oh, Mummy, don't worry.

When Joan returned home from work at 3 a.m., Pamela wasn't there. She often spent the night at a friend's house, so Joan wasn't overly concerned. But when Pamela didn't show up for school the next day, Joan became worried. She called the police to report her daughter missing, telling them about the babysitting call. She also reported receiving suspicious phone calls in the lead-up to Pamela's disappearance. The details of these calls weren't publicly released.

A massive search commenced. A neighbour had seen a car pull up at the Mason's house around 5.45 p.m. Pamela got in, but given the looming blizzard, they didn't get a good look at the driver or the vehicle. Neither Pamela's mother Joan nor her friend Barbara could provide much information about the mysterious caller. Joan described him as sounding between 20 and 30 years old.

Barbara had asked for his name, but he gave a weird-sounding laugh in response.

Police appealed to the public to help identify the caller, but two days passed with no sign of Pamela. Her mother pleaded for her safe return, saying, "Whoever you are, for God's sake,

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don't harm my baby. Let her come home to me. I have no money, but if you want money, I'll get it somewhere. God, let her be alive." On Saturday, January 18, five days after Pamela Mason went missing, a postal worker was sorting mail when he came across an unstamped empty envelope.

Written on it were the words, P. Mason, Pine Island Amusement Park.

Recognising the surname from the media coverage, the postal worker alerted police.

Officers visited the abandoned amusement park on the outskirts of Manchester.

They scoured the area, walking among the rides and empty stalls, but there was no sign of the missing teen.

Two days later, a truck driver was travelling along Manchester's Interstate Route 93 when he noticed a blue object lying in the snow. He continued onwards, but the following day, he passed by again and noticed the object was still there. This time, he pulled over to investigate. It was a schoolbook belonging to Pamela Mason. In the snow nearby, he found examination papers belonging to Pamela, as well as her handbag. Walking through the melting snow about 20 feet from the road, the driver then discovered Pamela's body. She was fully clothed and lying face down. An autopsy determined she'd been savagely beaten before being shot twice in the back of the head with a .22 calibre rifle. She'd also been stabbed four times in the back and once in the chest.

Her throat was cut, severing her jugular vein and windpipe. There were no stab wounds on Pamela's clothing, which indicated that she'd been naked when she was attacked and then redressed by her killer. Her underwear was missing, making it likely that a sexual assault had taken place. Forensic investigators estimated that Pamela Mason had been killed between 7 and 10 pm on the night she went missing. It was likely she'd been killed elsewhere before her body was dumped in the snow on the side of the road.

The similarities between Pamela's murder and that of Sandra Velarde four years earlier were too striking to ignore. The two crimes were, according to a medical examiner, nearly identical.

The Manchester Chief of Police told the Associated Press,

I'm very suspicious it could be the same person involved despite the four-year interlude.

Locals were urged to be on the lookout for abandoned cars or buildings that appear to have been recently disturbed. Desperate to solve both cases, a \$10,000 reward for information was offered by the governor. Once again, residents of Manchester were cloaked in terror.

The principal at Pamela's high school told the students,

I hope that this terrible tragedy will be a warning to all of you to be doubly careful in your undertakings.

53-year-old Rina Paquette lived on a farm in Manchester with her husband Arthur and their six children. Like many other locals, she'd been despondent over the news about Pamela Mason's murder.

Shortly after the teenager's body was found, Rina turned to Arthur and said,

I think I know who killed Pamela. Arthur scoffed. How could she know?

Rina replied, the killer's mother told me.

Rina worked at the laundromat where Pamela Mason and her friend Barbara had advertised their babysitting services. The flyer still remained pinned to the bulletin board.

The owner of the laundromat had recently called Rina to say that she suspected her son, 27-year-old Edward Coolidge, was responsible for the murders of both Pamela Mason and Sandra

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Velarde.

The two women weren't particularly close, but Rina believed Edward's mother confided in her because she didn't have the heart to turn her son into the authorities.

Arthur questioned why Edward's mother would single her out specifically. Rina responded, it's because he killed one of the girls in our pigsty.

The pigsty on the Paquette farm had been built about half a mile away from the farmhouse, so the residents didn't have to endure the smell. However, in recent years, the pigsty had been empty.

Arthur found the idea preposterous. He didn't want Rina to get involved.

But over the following days, Edward Coolidge's mother kept calling. She told Rina that Edward was unaccounted for on the night of Pamela's murder. Edward visited his mother at the laundromat often and she believed he had seen Pamela's details and copied them down.

Unable to deal with the mounting pressure, Rina Paquette called the local police to pass on what she knew. Two detectives visited Rina at her farm to interview her.

Two days later on Monday, February 3, 1964, Rina's 15-year-old son Danny Paquette awoke with a fright at 10am. Rina was meant to wake him up early for a doctor's appointment, but Danny had overslept. He climbed out of bed and went looking for his mother. The farmhouse was empty, with Danny's father and siblings having left hours earlier.

Danny ran outside in the freezing cold and over to the barn. There was no sign of his mother anywhere. Unsure what to do, Danny called his police officer uncle who lived nearby.

Together, they searched the house and barn. When they reached the end of the barnyard, Danny noticed something in the distance. Smoke was coming from the back of the Paquette farm, about half a mile away. Danny and his uncle trudged through the thick snow until they reached the area that was on fire. The blaze was coming from the interior of the pigsty.

Two logs had been propped up against the door to prevent it being opened from the inside.

Danny's uncle kicked the logs away and pulled open the door.

Danny followed, ignoring his uncle's instructions to stay back.

In the center of the pigsty, Reena Paquette was lying on her back, wearing a thin dress and slippers. Her body had been set on fire. The ground around Reena's body was blackened, but the fire hadn't spread to the surrounding building.

A coroner concluded that Reena had doused herself in a flammable liquid before lying down in a bed of straw and setting it on fire.

The local newspaper reported that Reena Paquette took her life because she was depressed over the murders of Pamela Mason and President John F. Kennedy, who had been assassinated three months

earlier. The Attorney General acknowledged that Reena had made a recent tip-off about Pamela Mason's killer, but clarified, quote, there doesn't appear to be any connection between Mrs. Paquette's case and the murder of Pamela Mason. There is no basis for any of her suspicions which were made in a rambling way in numerous telephone calls to the police.

I am satisfied the evidence that she suicided is conclusive.

Reena's family were outraged. They refused to believe that Reena was depressed or would have taken her own life. Not only was she a devout Catholic who considered suicide a sin, there were simply too many unanswered questions. If Reena had doused herself in flammable liquid, why wasn't a container of liquid found at the scene? If she'd voluntarily walked the half-mile

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from the farmhouse to the pig's die, why was she only wearing a light dress and slippers in the heavy snow? Furthermore, why had two logs been propped up against the outside of the door? It would have been impossible for Reena to do this from inside the pig's die.

It also seemed highly suspicious that Reena had voiced her concerns about the pig's die being a crime scene, only to be found dead there herself days later. The Paquette family believed that Reena was already deceased when she was set alight. She was found lying flat on her back in a position that indicated she wasn't suffering as the flames burnt her body.

Reena's husband Arthur told reporters,

I still believe that she was murdered and that her death was definitely connected with the Pamela Mason case. Even some of the officers who worked on the case doubted that Reena had killed herself. One later told the New Hampshire Union leader newspaper that they were ordered to forget their suspicions, adding, they even threatened those who questioned

the autopsy, saying they would be in very deep trouble if they pressed it further.

Reena was laid to rest at a simple ceremony attended by her close friends and family.

When the Paquettes returned to the farmhouse, they noticed another cloud of smoke rising from the back of their property. Someone had set the pig's die on fire again.

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Unbeknown to Rena Pequette, her colleague's son Edward Coolidge was already a person of interest in the Pamela Mason case before she phoned in her concerns. On the night the teenager went missing, two men had noticed a 1951 Pontiac sedan parked around 100 yards from where Pamela's

body was eventually found. They approached the vehicle's driver's side window to see if the occupants needed any help. A man was sitting in the driver's seat. He appeared nervous and refused to look at them, instead staring straight ahead and saying he didn't need assistance. When Pamela Mason's body was discovered, the man reported this incident to the police in case it held significance. Owners of Pontiac sedans were looked into, leading police to 27-year-old bakery delivery driver Edward Coolidge, who was married with an infant daughter.

On the night of Pamela's disappearance, Coolidge's neighbour visited to play cards with his wife. Coolidge was absent from 5-11pm. When he returned home, his trousers were wet to the knees. Coolidge offered no explanation, only saying, I feel lousy. He then went to have a bath.

The following day, Coolidge told a co-worker he'd been out having an affair and needed an alibi. When Pamela's body was found, Coolidge told the co-worker, I really need that alibi now.

Edward Coolidge was questioned on Tuesday, January 28, 1964, just days before investigators visited

the Paquette farm to speak with Rena. When asked about his whereabouts on the night that Pamela Mason went missing, Coolidge first claimed that he'd been out shopping. He then changed his alibi and said he'd been having an extra marital affair. He then changed his story again, saying he was out playing cards. Police asked Coolidge to hand over any firearms he owned.

He presented the officers with three, but a search of his home turned up one more, a 22 caliber rifle. Edward Coolidge reluctantly participated in a light detector test,

but the results were inconclusive. Without enough evidence to charge him,

he was free to leave the station. The following day, Rena Paquette was found dead in the pig's diet. Investigators refused to entertain the theory that Coolidge could have killed Rena.

This was despite the fact that the day before Rena died, Coolidge had allegedly cornered her at the laundromat. Aware that she told the police of her suspicions, the two had a heated argument, and Rena left in distress. She also received threatening phone calls in the days before her death, although the contents of these calls are not publicly known.

Still suspicious of Edward Coolidge's potential involvement in Pamela Mason's murder, police conducted a search of his car. Inside, they found a pair of bloodstained

underwear confirmed to belong to Pamela. Two weeks after Rena Paquette's death,

a grand jury indicted Edward Coolidge for the abduction and first-degree murder of Pamela Mason.

Given the similarities between the two cases, Coolidge was also indicted to stand trial for the murder of Sandra Valade. A ballistics expert confirmed that bullets used in the attacks against both Pamela and Sandra were a 100% match to the .22 caliber rifle taken from Coolidge's home.

The trial for Pamela Mason's case began in May 1964.

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Edward Coolidge took the stand to proclaim his innocence. When asked why he had changed his alibi so many times, he replied, because I was scared, and that's the truth. I was so nervous that I did not know what I was saying. It took just over four hours for the all-male jury to find Edward Coolidge guilty. He went visibly pale and began trembling as the verdict was delivered. Despite being eligible for the death penalty, the judge sentenced Coolidge to life imprisonment. Outside, a crowd of 1,000 Manchester locals had gathered. As Coolidge was led from the courtroom, angry citizens called him an animal, screaming that he, quote, should have been hung. A reporter asked if he had anything to say. Coolidge looked at him, a cigarette hanging from his mouth, and muttered, talk to my lawyers. As detailed in the book *Our Little Secret* by Kevin Flynn and Rebecca LaVoy, the Attorney General didn't bring forward the indictment for Sandra Valade's murder. When asked why, he explained, we already got Coolidge for one. No need to get him for two. While Edward Coolidge served his life sentence, the Pequette family struggled to come to terms with Reena's death and the feeling of injustice. They were convinced that Coolidge had killed Reena for implicating him in Pamela Mason's murder, and that authorities had downplayed it to avoid further public hysteria. Danny Pequette, who had found his mother's burning body, continued to be haunted by the case. He tried to move on with his life, eventually enlisting in the military and marrying a woman named Denise. Danny officially adopted Denise's one-year-old daughter, Melanie, and the couple went on to have two more children. But by 1980, their marriage had fallen apart. Denise prevented Danny from seeing his children, which sent him into a fury. A physical altercation ensued, prompting Denise to apply for a restraining order and file for divorce. Danny violated the restraining order and threatened to kill Denise. At a subsequent hearing, he attempted to attack a bailiff. As a result, he was sent to hospital to receive mental health treatment. There, he was questioned extensively about his mother Reena's death and underwent hypnosis to revisit the morning that Reena died. Danny suddenly recalled a previously unknown detail. On the morning of Monday, February 3, 1964, he'd woken to the sound of his mother arguing with someone. Danny went to investigate. Reena was standing at the bottom of the stairs with a man in a white uniform, the same kind that Edward Coolidge wore on his bakery delivery route. Scared, Danny ran back to his room. Although there was no evidence to support this repressed memory, it strengthened the Paquette family's belief that Coolidge had killed Reena. Danny planned to write to Coolidge in prison and later confront him in person in the hope he would finally admit his involvement. When Danny was discharged from hospital in 1981, his ex-wife Denise feared for the safety of herself and her children. They fled to Alaska without telling Danny where they were going, and he lost contact with his children altogether. Things didn't get any easier for Danny. Danny. Shortly after his release from hospital, he was riding a motorbike with his new girlfriend on the back when a car pulled out in front of them. Danny was lucky to walk away with minor injuries, but his girlfriend died in the crash. By 1985, things had taken a positive turn for Danny Paquette. The 36-year-old welder by trade was living in Hooksett, a small town less than 10 miles north of Manchester. The house was on an 11-acre property surrounded by woodland, which allowed Danny to run his own welding business and restore cars and motorcycles



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in his spare time. Scrap metal, spare tires, and other car parts littered the yard, along with large welded sculptures. Danny was a talented artist, and passing motorists often pulled over to take photos of his work. He had plans to one day sell his art and donate the money to the Boston Children's Hospital. On the morning of Saturday, November 9, 1985, Danny walked down to the large shed on his property to begin work for the day.

He was joined by a friend who was conducting some car repairs. Danny also employed a local 17-year-old

named Cort to help him with odd jobs. At 11am, Cort showed up and began helping Danny to weld a metal plate on a bulldozer, which was located outside of the shed. Danny then sent Cort into the shed to mix and paint while he continued to work on the bulldozer. Shortly after, Cort was heading back outside when a large cracking sound pierced the air. Danny Pickett was lying flat on his back in front of the bulldozer, his welding torch still on in his hands. Panicked, Cort raced back inside the shed and summoned Danny's friend. Thinking that Danny had been electrocuted, Cort ran to call 911. Danny's friend then commenced CPR. As he pushed on Danny's chest,

he noticed blood beginning to seep out under his hands. He opened Danny's shirt.

That's when he realized Danny hadn't been electrocuted. He'd been shot.

An autopsy determined Danny had been killed by a single gunshot wound fired from a distance of at least 200 yards. The bullet had entered through the center of Danny's chest and exited from his left shoulder, indicating the shooter had fired from a lower point to where Danny had been standing. Either they had a fantastic aim and could hit a very small target from a great distance, or it had been a freak accident.

Danny had been killed on the first day of the hunting season. The area around his house was a popular hunting spot. There was also a quarry located one mile from Danny's home where hunters were known to fire test rounds into a gravel pit. This led detectives to consider that Danny might have been shot accidentally. They urged anyone who had been hunting in the area to come forward. A neighbor reported seeing cars parked at a nearby hiking trail on the day Danny was shot, and unidentified footprints were found leading into the woods 80 yards from Danny's shed. But it couldn't be ascertained whether these held significance to the investigation.

Detectives scoured Danny's property. With such a vast area to cover, they were unable to locate the bullet that killed him. Without it, they had very little to go on.

Coincidentally, a local man had been traveling overhead in a hot air balloon at the exact time Danny was killed and had been filming the journey. He provided police with a videotape giving them a complete bird's-eye view of Danny's property. Detectives watched the tape with interest.

No people were visible in the footage, and tall trees obscured some of the view.

As promising as it had seemed, the footage offered no leads.

3 days after Danny Pickett's death, a telephone maintenance worker received a call out to check the phone lines on the street where Danny lived. Some other residents had complained that their lines had been out of service over the past few days. The maintenance worker tested the telephone poles. All were working except one, which was positioned directly at the front of Danny's home. The maintenance worker climbed to the top of the pole to get a closer look. Contained in the plastic covering of the wires was a red and white 270-colour bullet.

A ballistics expert determined it was the bullet that killed Danny Pickett.

The red and white colouring was caused by blood and bone fragments.

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Over the following days, detectives interviewed hunters in the area, many of whom turned over their guns for testing. None were a match to the bullet. Some doubted whether a hunter would choose the area around Danny's house. It was surrounded by mud, sand and gravel and wasn't known to attract much game. A conservation officer said, I'd be very surprised to find anybody there hunting. If I were going hunting in that general area, that's probably the last place I'd go. It became more likely that Danny's death had been the result of a homicide. But 12 days passed with very few leads, leaving investigators scratching their heads. Danny's brother, Victor Pickett, remained optimistic, telling the Concord Monitor, somehow, someday, we will have an answer as to what went down on the day he was killed. A year after Danny Pickett's death, detectives were no closer to solving his case. They followed all sorts of leads, but to no result. Victor refused to give up hope. He told reporters, I've been out there to Danny's property. I've been up and down on my hands and knees. I was looking for anything that didn't grow there. Shell casings, a piece of paper, a cigarette butt, anything. Victor had a growing suspicion that his brother's death was related to the pigsty fire that killed their mother, Reena, nearly 20 years earlier. In October 1990, he appeared on the popular television program Unsolved Mysteries to raise his concerns that both Reena and Danny Pickett had been murdered. A ballistics expert said, I've been out there looking for anything that didn't grow there. A ballistics expert agreed, saying it was impossible that Danny had been killed by a stray bullet. While Victor continued to search for answers, convicted killer Edward Coolidge sat in a jail cell. His time in prison had been eventful. Seven years into his life sentence, he appealed his case on the grounds that the search of his vehicle that uncovered Pamela Mason's bloody underwear had been unconstitutional. The search warrant had been signed off by the Attorney General, who later became the lead prosecutor at Coolidge's murder trial. The Constitution maintained that whoever signed off on the warrant needed to be a neutral and detached magistrate. In June 1971, the Supreme Court agreed that the search had violated the Fourth Amendment. In a landmark decision, Edward Coolidge was awarded a retrial. However, several key witnesses in the Pamela Mason case had since passed away. The state offered Coolidge a deal instead. Plead guilty to second degree murder, and they'd downgrade his life sentence to 25 to 40 years jail, including time already served. Coolidge agreed. Although Edward Coolidge was still behind bars at the time Danny Pickett was shot, Victor Pickett was convinced he was somehow responsible. Perhaps Coolidge had taken a hit out on Danny to keep him quiet about what he saw on the morning his mother was killed. After serving 27 years in jail, Edward Coolidge walked free from prison in March 1991, at the age of 53. The anger from the community was so extreme that Coolidge was released on the condition that he never returned to New Hampshire. Pamela Mason's father told the Boston Globe, wherever Coolidge goes, I'll find him. Then I'll saturate the community so they know what kind of guy he is. They say time heals all wounds. That's baloney. I am going to make his life as miserable as he has made mine. The unsolved mystery segment didn't generate any worthwhile leads in either of the Pickett cases, but authorities did agree that Reena's body could be exhumed to allow for another autopsy to be conducted. 27 years had passed since Reena's death, and they hoped this would put her family's concerns to rest once and for all. It was a bittersweet moment for Victor Pickett, who told the Associated Press,

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for every member of this family, this was an unwanted thing. We didn't want to have to go to this extreme. On Wednesday, November 13, 1991, the Pickett family watched as Reena's coffin was exhumed from St. Joseph Cemetery. Convinced further testing would one day be necessary, her husband Arthur had insisted that Reena be placed in a black body bag inside a sealed casket and then into a vault. Because of this, her remains were still in fairly good condition. However, Arthur had since passed away without receiving any answers about his wife's mysterious death. The state medical examiner conducted an autopsy and compared it to the original findings. He agreed that Reena's death had been caused by fire. However, he believed that Reena was unconscious when her body was set alight. The original autopsy report also contained a detail that Reena's family had been unaware of. At the time of her death, traces of semen were found on her body. Reena's husband Arthur was never questioned to confirm whether the two had been intimate around the time of her death. Was it possible that Reena had also been raped? The medical examiner found the case deeply troubling. He told the New Hampshire Union leader, Arthur, I cannot sustain suicide as a manner of death. I do not see any way this can be called a suicide. He changed Reena's official cause of death to indeterminate.

The year after Reena Pequette's body was exhumed, the Pequette family appeared on a New Hampshire talk show hosted by local media personality Cathy Burnham. They were joined by Richard Barron, a family friend who had paid for Reena's exhumation. They reiterated their belief that the deaths of Reena and Danny were connected and pleaded for anyone with information to come forward.

A week later, Richard Barron received two anonymous letters from two different authors. As detailed in our little secret, one read in part,

Something has been eating away at me, but I have been afraid to step forward. Seeing the pain the family is suffering persuaded me to do so.

The family is wrong to conclude that Danny Pequette's death is connected to his mother's death. Case file will be back shortly. Thank you for supporting us by listening to this episode's sponsors. One of the most exciting things about the new year is that you have no idea what adventures are in store for you. From new travel experiences to new jobs or picking up new skills, there's no better way to prepare for 2023 than by learning a new language with Babbel. Babbel is the language learning app that sold more than 10 million subscriptions. Thanks to Babbel's addictively fun and easy bite-sized language lessons, you can feel confident no matter where the new year takes you. Case file team member Holly uses Babbel to brush up on her Latin American Spanish. She loves the speech recognition technology that helps to improve her accent and pronunciation. And because Babbel lessons were created by over 150 language experts and voiced by real native speakers, Holly is learning conversations that are actually useful in real-world scenarios. Babbel has 14 different languages to choose from and you only need 10 minutes to complete a lesson.

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In Bakersfield, California in 1991, two boys stumbled upon a grisly discovery,

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the murdered body of a young woman. In the Shadows is the new podcast from Wondery Plus and Case File Presents, which follows the ensuing 32-year ordeal to uncover those responsible for the crime and bring them to justice. During the investigation of In the Shadows, several individuals revealed shocking information previously unknown to authorities. Ultimately, this new insight turned everything on its head.

The first episode of In the Shadows is available wherever you get your podcasts.

You can listen to the rest of the series ad-free only on Wondery Plus. Join Wondery Plus in the Wondery app or on Apple podcasts and take advantage of their seven-day free trial.

Stay tuned to hear the trailer at the end of today's episode.

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The second letter revealed,

I am dumbfounded as to how the case is still unsolved. It is a bad example to the many young people who know the facts about this murder. It is common knowledge in Hopkinson that a young man named Eric Windhurst shot Danny Paquette with his father's 270 rifle. Eric Windhurst has misled the police very successfully. It is said that he keeps his friends quiet on his dealings through charm, through intimidation, and through threats.

The New Hampshire State Police went about verifying the accuracy of the letters.

At the time Danny Paquette was killed, Eric Windhurst had been a 17-year-old high school student in Hopkinson, North Hampshire. It was a small town with a population of around 4,000 people and located approximately 15 miles north of Danny's home.

Eric was a popular and friendly teen with piercing blue eyes and dark wavy hair.

He came from a wealthy family who owned property throughout Hopkinson.

In the years since graduating high school, Eric Windhurst had enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, but he was medically discharged due to being severely allergic to ant bites.

He moved to Colorado in 1989, where he was arrested for second degree burglary after stealing some cases of beer from a restaurant. He received six months probation and a fine.

Other than that, his record was unblemished.

Investigators tracked Eric Windhurst down to question him about Danny Paquette's shooting, but under advice from his lawyers, he invoked his right to remain silent.

Police interviewed Eric's father, who handed over his Ruger rifle. It was compared against the bullet taken from the telephone pole outside Danny Paquette's home, but it wasn't a match.

There was still one lead worth pursuing.

Both letters implicating Eric Windhurst in the murder of Danny Paquette

gave the reason for the shooting. After Danny's ex-wife Denise relocated to Alaska with their three children, they never saw Danny again. They didn't even attend his funeral.

But unbeknown to Danny, in the year before his death,

his 15-year-old stepdaughter Melanie had been living just 15 miles away.

Melanie's maternal aunt and uncle lived in Hopkinson, and they had invited Melanie to stay with them for summer vacation. The couple were financially well off with distinguished careers.

This was in stark contrast to Melanie's life in Alaska, where her mother Denise worked hard just to make ends meet. Melanie loved her vacation to Hopkinson so much that when she returned to Alaska, she asked Denise if she could move there.

Hopkinson High School had a good academic reputation, and it would provide her the

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opportunity to make new friends. Denise agreed, and in late August of 1985, three months before Danny Paquette's death, Melanie moved in permanently with her aunt and uncle.

Melanie hadn't seen Danny for four years, and she wanted nothing to do with him. The move was kept secret, but Melanie and Denise worried what Danny would do if he found out. Regardless, Melanie adjusted fairly well to life in Hopkinson. She made friends easily, and was proud to become the only girl to play on the high school soccer team. Melanie particularly hit it off with a fellow soccer player, 17-year-old Eric Winterst. He and Melanie started spending lots of time together, and it wasn't long before Melanie developed romantic feelings for her new friend. Eric really cared about Melanie, but told his friends that he thought of her more as a little sister, a sister he needed to protect at all costs. Melanie Paquette had since lost contact with Eric Winterst. She had gotten married and moved to California. When investigators tracked her down in 1992, she said she was too busy looking after her young children to answer any questions.

Instead, an officer sent her a series of questions regarding Danny's death.

Melanie returned her answers a week later. In response to the question of whether Eric Winterst had any reason to shoot Danny, Melanie wrote,

In my opinion, he did not have any reason to shoot Danny.

Without any physical evidence to corroborate the rumors, the police couldn't press charges.

Over a year later, in October 1993, a New Hampshire journalist named Michael Manzo was writing an article about a murder trial. The case was only solved because a witness had given police the name of the killer. The story had a profound effect on Michael. Once he finished writing the article, he called the police and told them that Melanie Paquette was his college girlfriend. In September 1988, she confided in him that she and Eric Winterst had killed Danny Paquette.

Michael offered to call Melanie on a tapped line to see if he could get her to confess.

It had been a long time since the two had spoken.

After exchanging pleasantries, Michael broached the subject of Danny's death.

Melanie denied ever having the conversation, telling Michael that she was in a dark place when they were dating and often made up stories for attention.

Unable to get any information out of her, the case went cold once again.

Eleven years went by before the New Hampshire State Police were awarded additional funding that allowed them to reopen the case. In July 2004, two officers knocked on Melanie's door.

By this point, she had relocated to Idaho, had five children, and was a devout Mormon.

It had been almost 20 years since Danny Paquette was killed.

Melanie agreed to accompany the officers to the station to answer some questions.

When they asked her to take a polygraph, Melanie's face went pale. She nonetheless agreed.

As the technician hooked her up to the machine, she became visibly anxious.

She asked if she could have a moment to say a prayer.

The technician agreed and left the room. When he returned, Melanie was crying.

She said she was finally ready to tell the truth.

As a new student at Hopkinson High School, Melanie was relieved for Eric Winterst's friendship.

As the two became closer, Melanie confided in Eric about a secret she'd been keeping

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since she was nine years old. Her stepfather Danny Paquette had sexually abused her, repeatedly, until her family fled to Alaska when Melanie was 11.

Melanie told Eric that after Danny raped her, he would hold a gun to her head and pull the trigger. She never knew if the gun was loaded or not.

Danny used this to keep Melanie quiet, threatening to kill her if she spoke out.

He also forced her to hang from a chin-up bar and threatened to burn her with his welder's torch if she let go. Sometimes he forced Melanie to watch while he killed small animals.

Eric Winterst was outraged and devastated for his friend.

Melanie's suffering also hit close to home, as Eric's father had sexually assaulted his step-sisters when Eric was just a child. Too young to act on the abuse at the time,

Eric channelled all of his anger onto Danny Paquette.

In early November 1985, Eric was sitting with a friend in the school gymnasium when he called Melanie over. In a harsh divorce, he said,

We've been talking about the situation with your stepfather. Do you want him dead?

Melanie replied, Yeah, I want him dead.

Days later, on the morning of Saturday, November 9, Eric Winterst phoned Melanie with an announcement. He was going to Danny Paquette's home to kill him.

Melanie pleaded to go with him.

Eric didn't know what Danny looked like, so he agreed. He drove over to Melanie's house in his Volkswagen Rabbit. Melanie told her aunt and uncle the pair were going to a high school hockey game. They then drove the 15 miles to Danny's house. Along the way, they stopped at a gas station.

As detailed in the book *Our Little Secret*, the attendant who topped up the gas noticed a rifle in the back of Eric's car. He remarked to Eric that it was a good day for hunting.

Once they arrived on Danny Street, Eric parked his car further down in an area hidden by bushes and covered his license plates with mud. He and Melanie then walked through the neighbouring woods until they arrived at Danny Paquette's property. They sat on a stone wall concealed by woodland. Melanie could see Danny working in his yard and she pointed him out to Eric.

Eric popped a stick of chewing gum into his mouth and the pair sat in silence.

As Eric chewed, he turned to Melanie and said,

When my gum runs out of flavour, I'm going to do it.

Eric left Melanie and walked to the treeline on Danny's property.

The shell of an old car sat a few feet away. Eric crawled up to the car and rested his rifle on the hood. He could see Danny working on the bulldozer approximately 300 yards in the distance.

Eric took aim. He was an expert marksman. He fired and watched as Danny fell to the ground.

The pair ran back to Eric's car and drove past Danny's house, trying not to draw attention to themselves. They went to a nearby Burger King restaurant to kill time. If anyone later asked, their plan was to say they were at the hockey game. A friend of Eric's had promised to verify their alibi. Over the next few days, Melanie expected the police to come looking for her. But days turned into weeks and nothing happened. Seven weeks after Danny was killed, detectives finally interviewed

Melanie and Eric. They both stuck to their false alibi, which Eric's friend corroborated.

Meanwhile, rumours spread throughout Eric's group of friends that he had killed Danny Pickett as an act of vigilantism for abusing Melanie. Some wrestled with the idea of turning Eric in, but ultimately no one went to the police, with many believing that Danny Pickett's murder was

justified.

After finally revealing the truth to the police, Melanie agreed to call Eric Winterst in a bid to corroborate her story. Although they hadn't spoken in many years, he seemed pleased to hear from her. As detailed in *Our Little Secret*, Melanie told Eric that investigators were on their way to Idaho to speak with her. She didn't know whether to cooperate with them or not. Eric advised Melanie to get a lawyer and said he didn't want to speak about it over the phone. He offered to get on a plane and speak to Melanie in person.

Melanie said, I'm really sick of this. Eric replied, Yeah, well I am too. I've tried just to live my life every day and live it as well as I possibly can. Not a day goes by I don't think about all this. Not a day goes by I don't think about you and how you're doing.

Melanie said she was going to tell the investigators that Eric had killed Danny.

When he reacted calmly, she asked why he wasn't freaking out.

Eric explained, I've been scared about this my whole life. Maybe I've lived with this so long I'm at peace with whatever happens. It's out of my hands.

Melanie called Eric a few more times. Despite her attempts to elicit a confession,

Eric Wintourst wasn't talking. Investigators would have to use another tactic.

They travelled across the country to speak with those who knew Eric in high school.

Once his former friends learned that Melanie had confessed,

the walls of silence came crumbling down.

The fact that Eric had killed Danny Pickett was an open secret.

In fact, Eric would tell new friends and lovers about what he'd done.

He allegedly told a girlfriend that after shooting Danny, he chopped the gun into pieces and scattered them along a drive to Colorado.

Others who knew admitted they hadn't come forward out of fear that Eric would retaliate violently.

Years after Danny was killed, Eric confided in his friend Thea about his role in the murder.

Thea wrote about Eric's confession in her personal diary, unsure whether to believe it.

I thought I knew him so well. How could he live with himself? she wrote, before conceding.

I want to take the only way out and just forget about it. Assume it's just a rumor.

But what if it's true?

Eric Winters was arrested in December 2005.

Two days later, a grand jury formally charged him with first-degree murder.

He pleaded not guilty, but changed his mind when offered a plea bargain.

By pleading guilty to the lesser charge of second-degree murder, he avoided going to trial.

Eric Winters was sentenced to serve 15 to 36 years at the New Hampshire State Prison.

At the hearing, Eric turned to the Paquette family and said,

I have no words to express how sorry I am for what I've done.

I just hope someday that you can forgive me.

A victim impact statement read on behalf of Danny's sister said,

Were it in my power, I would have everyone that was part of this 21-year secret,

some would say cover-up, be standing beside Mr Eric Winters to share in his guilt and sentencing.

The question remained, what to do with Melanie?

In December 2006, she faced a hearing to determine an appropriate punishment.

Throughout the investigation, Melanie had maintained that she didn't believe

Eric was serious about his plan to kill Danny.

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Despite being at the scene of the crime and withholding the truth for almost two decades, Melanie faced no charges relating to the murder of Danny Paquette. Instead, for lying on the written questionnaire that was sent out in 1992, she was charged with felony hindering apprehension. Danny's family were outraged. A majority of them refused to believe that Danny was an abuser. Melanie had admitted to making up other stories in her teenage years, including telling people that she had cancer. Some of the Paquette's believed her claims of sexual assault were another false fabrication. A victim impact statement read by one of Danny's nieces said, We're here because you convinced a human being to murder another human being. You used 21 years of our suffering to build a life. You orchestrated this murder. Without you, there wouldn't have been a murder. Melanie pleaded guilty to the charge. Her attorney requested that any sentence be suspended due to the emotional and physical abuse Melanie had suffered at the hands of her adoptive father. The presiding judge doubted Melanie's claims that she didn't know Eric was going to go through with the shooting. He said, I guess I have real difficulty in accepting the idea that at some point the lights didn't go on. He sentenced Melanie to three to six years in prison, adding, My heart goes out to your family. It is clear you have done some tremendous things with your life since this tragedy. In October 2020, Eric Wintourst was up for parole after serving 15 years. Victor Paquette appeared in his online parole hearing, in which he held up a photo of Danny for Eric to see. Look familiar, he said. Is this the man you saw in your rifle shot? I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.



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Let me help you with this.

Loving brother, respected and well-liked businessman, and most of all, a loving and caring father.

To the anguish of the Paquette family, Eric Wintourst was granted parole.

He eventually resettled in his hometown of Hopkinson, New Hampshire, where he was generally welcomed by the public.

Eric. Many thought he had served enough time, while others continued to believe the crime was justified. Eric's father died in July 2016. No charges

were ever brought against him for the alleged sexual abuse of his stepdaughters, as the statute of limitations had run out before the allegations were brought to light.

In writing his book, *Our Little Secret*, author Kevin Flynn visited Eric Winters in prison.

Eric showed great remorse over his actions, telling Flynn,

Every adult, every person in Melanie's life failed her from the moment she was born, until the day I met her. Did I do the right thing? Of course not.

For me, I was rescuing a friend, stepping up to the plate when no one else would. And I can't tell you enough. It was the biggest mistake of my life.

Eric Winters' involvement in Danny Pickett's death proved once and for all there was no connection between Danny's death and that of his mother, Rena.

At the time Rena died, the prime suspect Edward Coolidge was under such intense police observation

that some believe there was no way he could have killed her.

To this day, the truth about Rena Pickett's death remains a mystery.

On a chilly night in 1991, a group of teenagers gathered in their usual hangout, a barren stretch of desert next to a busy highway near Bakersfield, California. A dismal spot littered with trash and shell casings. By nightfall, it turned into a sort of lovers lane where high school kids drank and smoked. When two boys left their group and headed into the darkness, they came upon a horrific scene, the body of a young woman murdered just hours before. This 1991 murder made news headlines for years as it shocked and divided a quiet working class community.

Of course I knew about Maria's case. Everyone in Bakersfield knows about Maria's case.

Justice took its course in a twisted and controversial case that captivated many. But what if the real killer were yet to be discovered? In this series, we will hear brand new clues

interview people that have never spoken publicly before and discover family secrets that shed light on who may have killed Maria Rodriguez and why. I kind of want all of our families

hidden secrets and all of the dark past. I want it to come out to light. I'm Octavia

McHenry for Case File Presents, and this is *In the Shadows*, the story of Maria Rodriguez.