

[Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Chapter Five: Just Skate

On an evening in early December 2018,
the young CEO of a cryptocurrency exchange reportedly dies while on his honeymoon in India.
This death is not announced to customers for another month,
and when they're told Gerald Cotton is the only person to hold the passwords to their funds,
conspiracy theories grow, leaving some to wonder, could Gerald Cotton still be alive?
Honeymoon, moving the body, all the missing money, it was like, but what happened?
A death in crypto land.

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Hello?

Hi Rosemary?

Yeah?

It's Kathleen and Lisa.

We're on our way to come see you?

Yeah.

We're having a little bit of a hard time finding you, so we're right by the museum.

Uh, I'm on your left as you come towards my house,

but I'm just on the right between two stone gate posts with lions on them.

Lions at the gate.

That should have been our first clue.

Slow down.

There's first.

Oh, I see.

So, do we go through where the lions are?

Yes.

Yes.

The problem was we were looking for a house.

This is incredible.

Oh my gosh.

And this was a castle.

What are we here?

Like, out of a fairy tale.

Gray stone walls, a big turret covered in ivy.

How did we miss this?

I don't know.

Hi.

Were you lost for very long?

Not at all.

Okay, that's good.

Hi, Kathleen.

Hi, Kathleen.

Nice to meet you too.

I drove the four hours from Toronto to Brockville, Ontario with producer Lisa Gabriel

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to talk to former society columnist Rosemary Sexton about Barry and Honey Sherman.

I wanted to hear what was being said about them when they were alive and after they had died.

Can we take off the shoes?

After we finished gushing,

Rosemary offered us a tour of her castle.

I mean, why would we turn that down?

No, don't take off your shoes.

We enter the oak-paneled foyer.

It's about 13 feet high with a long winding staircase.

Think Downton Abbey if only one person lived there.

And if you look up above, we didn't know that those were there.

I noticed it was glass.

It's so beautiful.

Up in the coffered ceiling in each corner is a stained glass window lit from behind by the sun.

Where can we sit?

Rosemary didn't just write about the rich and glamorous.

She's one of them.

Today at 76, she's dressed like a chic coastal grandmother, camel-colored jersey with white jeans, four-inch heels, and a platinum blonde bob.

Maybe in here.

Okay.

Want to sit there and I'll just sit here?

Starting in the late 80s, when new money was everywhere,

Rosemary Sexton covered the lives of the rich and powerful.

And it was around this time that the Shermans were building

their fortune and finding their place in Toronto's high society.

You don't necessarily become part of this elite club

because you're rich.

Membership is more about giving your money away.

Generally, it means that you fundraise raising money for all sorts of causes.

Hospitals, charities, symphonies, operas.

And you get involved, first of all,

the women get involved with their committee work

and then they bring their husbands to the parties.

And then perhaps the husbands get involved

in donating some of their wealth.

And that's how you get on the party circuit.

And you mentioned wealth.

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So these are wealthy Torontonians.

Yes.

Yes, they are.

And Barry and Honey, of course, when I was writing, probably hadn't accumulated a lot of their wealth in the first stages.

But then they became extremely wealthy.

I think he was worth billions.

Once the Shermans started to make the money and started to become part of that world, how were people reacting to them?

What did people say about them?

I think they were quite well liked.

Barry was not outgoing and he was not a people person.

I'm sure he was with his business pals.

But within society,

he probably didn't make a big social effort.

But Honey was apparently very approachable and easygoing and fun to be with.

So she would pave the way in that regard.

And so the Toronto Society is ever on the alert for a new wealthy inductee into their midst, right?

So I'm sure once they found out about Barry and also how philanthropic he and Honey were, they probably welcomed them with open arms.

Honey especially.

She was the charity rainmaker.

If Barry was the bank, she was the teller.

First of all, they were Jewish and they gave to a lot of Jewish charities.

And I probably shouldn't say this,

but I think Jews often are more philanthropic than us Christians, right?

You can take that out if you want.

As a Jew, I accept that we're more generous.

Okay, I'm glad that you're a Jewish too.

So I think you are more generous actually with your charities.

But I also think that Barry was a very focused person

and that he made sure that the charities

he gave to were part of the Jewish community

who would note that and maybe feel beholden to him.

And that it would burnish his name in the Jewish community and therefore help his business interests.

What also meant a lot to the Shermans

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was seeing their names on things like rooms of art galleries and wings of hospitals and old age homes. Honey and Barry moved in rarefied circles. So when did you hear about the murder? Tell me about that. Actually it was in December, wasn't it? So I would have been in Florida and I got calls and emails from friends of mine who thought I would be interested just because it was a well-known Toronto wealthy philanthropist and they were so shocked by the deaths and I was so shocked by the deaths. It's very strange that someone could go into their house and murder them and get away with it, isn't it? It seems very, very strange that nobody has been caught. Welcome to the no good, terribly kind, wonderful lives and tragic deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman. I'm your host, Kathleen Goltar. And this is chapter five, Just Skate. Honey Sherman's story often gets overshadowed by the dark dramas that surrounded Barry. And those who we spoke to off the record agreed that there was very little out there about Honey that wasn't an addendum to her husband. She doesn't even have her own Wikipedia page. Barry sure does and at last count, there were 82 footnote citations. Not only is there very little out there about Honey herself, it was really hard to get anyone close to her to speak to us. You were the eternal party animal and you wouldn't let anything get in the way of having a good time. We all know that you suffered pain from arthritis. In fact, we called you the bionic woman because of all your replacement parts. But after every surgery, you would come out dancing, even if you needed the help of your super trendy hiking sticks. This is Honey and Barry's only son, Jonathan, speaking at their funeral. There were not a lot of private moments or particularly personal reflections shared during this very public event. But Jonathan spoke about a mother who attended every parent teacher interview, who drove her four kids to endless practices

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and who organized carpooling.
He described a woman who was fun,
outgoing, and the life of the party.
One of my fondest memories was watching hip hop Honey
dancing with the stars to raise money for Baycrest.
Baycrest Center is one of Canada's preeminent
medical research facilities focused on aging.
And it was one of Honey's favorite causes.
Over the years, she raised millions of dollars for them.
Winning that award stands out amongst all the others
because I know how physically grueling that was for you
and how strong you were.
In 2010, Honey participated
in a sort of Dancing with the Stars fundraiser for Baycrest.
There's this wonderful video of her practicing
with her professional dance partner.
In it, she looks fit and strong.
We really wanted to play this for you,
but Baycrest wouldn't give us permission.
No one at the center would even talk to us.
I find it a little odd that they would refuse to talk about Honey,
a woman who did so much for them.
What risks do they face?
But getting anyone to talk about Honey was really hard.
Even in life, Barry, who had lots to say about his business,
philosophies, his thoughts on God and human existence,
had almost nothing to say in his memoir about his wife of 46 years.
In August 1970, I met Honey Reich.
On July 2nd, 1971, we were married by a judge at York County Courthouse.
I find it disheartening that Barry makes a point in his book
to discount the role that Honey played in his life.
You've heard this before, but I feel like it's worth repeating.
The fact that I make little mention of my wife and children
should not be taken as suggesting that they're not important to my life,
as that would be anything but true.
However, it seems to me that information about my family
is likely to be of less interest to a reader
than my observations relating to philosophy, Canadian politics,
and the pharmaceutical industry.
Barry not only ignores Honey in his autobiography,
but he says little about her anywhere.
And in what we can find, he's commenting on her philanthropy,
just like everyone else.

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It's unfortunate and unfair that the majority of stories being told are about Barry, so we're going to do our best to try and paint a picture of Honey here. This is a podcast, right?

It is, yes.

So I don't have to worry about my teacher.

You're not going to help you in real life.

We have a whole bunch of play.

We could do it in here, we could do it in the family room, just somewhere where you and I can sit.

Bernie Farber was a little reluctant to talk to us at first about Honey, but after a lifetime of public advocacy,

he has a comfort level with journalists that a lot of people don't have.

My name is Bernie Farber.

I am the, well, I was the CEO of Canadian Jewish Congress for its last almost nine years of existence,

but I worked with them from 1984 to 2011.

Honey had a particular fondness, obviously, for survivors and wanted to do, you know, work on their behalf,

wanted to ensure that they were properly taken care of, properly honored, properly respected.

She was kind of ferocious.

And she was very vocal on virtually every committee that she, when Honey was in a committee meeting,

you knew Honey was in a committee meeting.

When Honey agreed with you, the world was on your side and you couldn't do anything wrong.

When she disagreed, she would let you know, and preferably you did it Honey's way.

Bernie doesn't feel comfortable calling Honey a friend.

She was more of a partner in philanthropy,

but he did get to know her well enough

to understand where her motivation for giving came from.

My recollection of discussing it occasionally with Honey is that she didn't have much of a memory of the DP camp itself.

Displaced persons camps or DP camps were set up across Europe to give safe harbor to those who couldn't go home.

The Holocaust was a connection that Bernie could understand because it's his story too.

Because I think we were both children of survivors,

she really had this sort of love for her parents

and she talked about her parents all the time,

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what they gave her, what they meant to her,
the love she had for them and them for her.

If we shared anything,
it was that understanding of what European parents
who survived the unimaginable did for their children.
It's a thread that runs through a lot of Jewish families,
including mine.

The trauma of our grandparents or for Honey, her parents
continues to be a strong force that we all feel.

We just deal with it in different ways.

For Honey, it was the focus of her philanthropic work.

We were survivors of the Holocaust, my family.

At their funeral, Honey's younger sister, Mary Schekman,
talked about their early days,

how after World War II,

their parents ended up in a displaced persons camp in Austria,
where Honey Reich was born.

My sister wasn't just my sister,
for all of those of you who knew us.

She was my best friend and she was my other half.

We completed each other's sentences
and we never went anywhere without the other.

Mary talked about growing up in a very strict home,
a family that came to Canada as poor immigrants.

When we were really young,

Honey and I didn't know we were poor.

Our parents bought a house
and rented out every square inch of it.

There was our bedroom,

but we didn't know it was a hallway with two folds of cots.

And no matter what, Honey never forgot how lucky we were
that it didn't matter how much you had,

you had to give back, you had to be happy,

and you had to love family.

And she did.

My sister took care of me my whole life.

They all carried this trauma with them.

And there is a weird and awful irony
that her violent death harkens back to the trauma
that her own family experienced.

I mean, it's awful.

I remember when I first heard the news,
that's the first thing I think about it is,

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that's not right.

The whole thing is just not right.

Bernie says that Honey and Barry's deaths still especially haunt the Jewish community.

It's kind of like the Kennedy assassination.

Everybody remembers what they were doing, where they were, how shocked they were.

And that shock has dissipated.

You know, why?

Because nobody knows really what happened.

I don't know of anybody who has worked in the Jewish community in some form or another that the Shermans haven't touched.

And so it will remain that elusive mystery until it is solved.

And I'm not sure it'll ever be solved.

Up until now, when we've looked at the deaths, we focused on Barry being the target.

Was it a big pharma deal gone bad?

His legendary litigiousness.

Or was it someone in the family?

All these theories are motivated more or less by money.

But what if it was more personal?

Could someone have wanted them both dead?

One odd fact that's been reported about Honey is that she died without a will.

I know lots of people put off writing a will,

but this is a billionaire family with an army of financial advisors and estate planners.

How could this have been overlooked?

And then there is this curious clue from the crime scene.

Honey had some marks on her face and Barry did not.

This information came to light after their bodies were found, but police have said little else since.

Was she hit?

Did she fall?

I will say that she had a huge heart, but she was a ball buster.

Aubrey Dan's connection to the Shermans goes way back.

Like Bernie Farber, he wouldn't call himself a close personal friend of Honey, but he says they grew closer through their philanthropic efforts.

Aubrey's father, Leslie Dan, owned Nova Farm, one of Canada's earliest makers of generic drugs.

And Leslie was a contemporary and a competitor of Lou Winter, Barry Sherman's uncle.

Lou was the person who started Empire Labs,

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the company that Barry would eventually buy.

These gentlemen who were the ones that began the generic drug business, they were the outsiders.

They really were the pioneers to the pharmaceutical sector.

Aubrey met Barry while working for his dad, and their relationship was purely business until years later, when Aubrey met Honey.

This was gotta be around maybe 2003, 2004.

What happened was that together we identified one organization called JAX, which stands for Jewish Addiction Center.

So I felt my connection with Honey is that we both collaborated together for a philanthropic cause.

Then from there, whether we go to just say to political functions, we see each other, it turned out that I belong to the same golf club.

And when my membership was announced, she was the first person to reach out to congratulate me.

So, and can we develop a really nice relationship?

Aubrey says he was in awe of Honey's relentlessness.

She would chase down people to give money.

She arm-twist them.

But she always did it from a perspective of helping different organizations.

That was a huge driving point.

She was social with her friends, with her sister.

The two of them were incredibly tight.

Barry family orientated from that perspective.

But she was always down to earth.

Whenever she would see me, she'd give me a big hug.

So she was very personable that way.

She didn't flaunt it, or some people would flaunt it.

She was one who was very, very aware of the dollar, which is good.

She didn't lose that perspective.

Today, Aubrey Dan is better known for producing plays.

And even here on stage, there's a connection to the Shermans.

The biggest show that I produced was a show called Jersey Boys.

It was at the Toronto Center for the Arts.

And now called the Main Stage.

But before it was the Main Stage, it was called the Apatex Stage.

And it was a donation made by Honey and Barry Sherman.

The fact is that she would have the choice to do whatever she wants to do for her life.

And she chose to really make a positive difference.

And she did.

The two of them have a very significant legacy.

And their legacy is making huge contributions to the community.

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Aubrey's description of Honey as no nonsense was pretty consistent. Murray Rubin, who you may remember as a friend and old client of Barry's, didn't have a lot to say about Honey. But his wife, Rhoda, remembered her this way. She was quite something. She was a very open person. And whatever you heard from her was the truth, what she felt. She had health issues. She had a lot of arthritis. She would call up or I would call. And how you doing? Fine. Never once did she complain about anything relating to her and her health. And she had plenty to complain about. So she, and she was very outgoing, a little brash, but, you know, and as she always said, what she felt, she was very open that way. Yeah. We did talk to a few people who knew Honey, but wouldn't go on the record. One person said she could be loud and obnoxious. And more than one person used the word bitch to describe her. Yet another told us that if she entered her favorite hair salon and someone was in her regular chair, that person would be moved very quickly. But the story that I found most revealing was told by her sister Mary at Honey's funeral. I had a tendency to break my bones and my sister was always in charge of taking care of me. And one time we went skating and there was the guard around the rink. And I guess I went off and I hurt my leg. And I went to my sister and I said, honey, my leg hurts. She was terrified that our parents would get angry at her. So she said, you're fine, skate. And I said, it hurts. And my leg was blowing up and she said, you're fine, skate. Finally, somebody stopped and said, I think there's something wrong with your sister. And paramedics came and I had a multiple fracture and she had made me skate for 15 minutes. On a broken leg. And that became one of our go-to stories because we always laughed. And when things would happen, she'd say, don't worry about it, just skate. I have a younger sister too. And I'm sure that she could tell a story or two about me being rather mean to her as we grew up. But this story seems like such an odd choice for someone's eulogy. We would love to have talked to Mary about all of this. And we did ask for an interview, but she never returned our calls. Well, they were opposites in some respects. This is Bloomberg reporter Matthew Campbell. Barry was very dour, not humorless, but very, very serious.

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I had a number of people say things to me, you know, variations that there was never any small talk with him.
It was just all business all the time.
She, on the other hand, was quite a bit more outgoing, much more comfortable in social settings. She was at every charity event in the city very enthusiastically.
She had a wide circle of affectionate friends.
And so they were kind of temperamental opposites in a way, although it seemed to work for them, notwithstanding the fact that there had been, you know, certainly claims, you know, their marriage was not so happy.
It did last an incredibly long time.
So it seemed like something was working.
It was something that Bernie Farber saw, too.
Barry was quiet, withdrawn, sometimes little ornery.
So when we sat with Barry and Honey, Honey was never at the table.
She was going on the table, the table, talking and telling stories and joking.
Barry was always at the table, just sat there.
You know, he wasn't the kind of guy that was going to go and put himself out.
I kind of felt that sometimes he was there because he had to be there.
And we chatted, you know, we talked.
He wasn't always easy to talk to.
You know, you had to sometimes draw things out from, especially if he didn't know you all that well.
But, you know, over time, and I was there a long time, you know, we just got to talk.
When we combed through police documents, it's clear that police were asking a lot of questions about Honey as well as Barry.
They wanted to know what their marriage was like.
They probed Honey's relationship with her children and looked into our financial records.
All of this was included in what's known as an ITO, an information to obtain.
Basically, the cops write them up when they want to judge to grant them a search warrant.
Following a legal challenge by media outlets, the Supreme Court of Canada ordered the ITO's unsealed.
Here are some of the things that we were able to learn.
Police sought Honey's credit card and phone bills.
Quote, banking records from the time after her death will show if any other persons had access to her accounts, which could reveal a motive for murder.
Regarding her family, Honey's personal assistant told police that there were, quote, tensions between Honey and her children.
Reporter Matthew Campbell heard the same thing.
The relationships had been somewhat strained at times, that there had been some issues, although, you know, never to the point of a real rupture.
It doesn't sound like Jonathan and his mother were very close.
He told police that he couldn't remember the last time he spoke to her, and that they mostly communicated through email.
And Kaelin, their youngest daughter, told police that all the siblings

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were closer to their father than their mother.

Ted Florence, Barry's nephew, noted that he didn't believe Honey was very accepting of her son Jonathan's, quote, gay lifestyle, but that she had, quote, dealt with it.

There were also lots of comments about their marriage.

It sounded pretty tumultuous, as their daughter Lauren told police that her parents were the swearing and screaming type.

Jonathan told police that his parents had a private relationship and a public one.

In public, they were the world's greatest power couple.

In private, they didn't get along.

They slept in different rooms, although it's not clear if that was because of their relationship or Barry's snoring.

Their daughter Lauren did say that in their last years, her parents did seem to have gotten closer and had been fighting less.

And others told police that after almost 50 years, the Sherman's marriage was pretty typical.

That's certainly how Barry's longtime lawyer, Shashank Apati, would describe it.

Honey and Barry had what I would call a normal relationship as a husband and wife.

Did they have issues?

Probably, right?

But Barry is going to whack Honey when he literally had every lawyer at his arsenal or disposal to just get a divorce, right?

And like so many marriages, money seemed to be a source of that friction.

I sensed there was always that tension, even though it was unwritten, between where Honey wanted to kind of control more of the spend on the kids.

And Barry was like, oh, they're my kids.

I got to give them whatever they want, because that's what dads do, right?

We bend over backwards to make sure that we give our kids anything that they need to succeed.

And Honey was like, well, you know, they shouldn't get as much, or maybe they need to work for it a little bit more and have more of a plan.

At the end of her life, Honey wasn't just busy with her charity work and her kids and her grandkids.

She was busy building their new home.

The Shermans bought their house on Old Colony Road in 1985.

And don't get me wrong, it was a big house.

It just wasn't ostentatious.

When he died and they said that they went over to his mansion, Barry never had a mansion.

He had a big house.

But this new one, it was a mansion.

We've seen the drawings.

It was going to be more than 12,000 square feet, with a gym, a car lift in the garage, and an indoor pool with retractable skylights.

And the last time anyone saw the couple alive was at Barry's office, discussing this house.

According to police reports, Honey drove over to the Apatex office on the evening of December 13th,

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where she and Barry had a meeting with the builders.
They were about to break ground on their \$20 million home.
The house was Honey's passion project.
It was to be built in another very wealthy area of Toronto called Forest Hill,
a neighborhood that was a lot closer to the kids and the grandkids.
And from what we've been able to gather, Barry was not keen to build this house,
nor spend the substantial amount of money it was going to cost.
According to police reports, Barry had little to do with it,
except when big financial decisions needed to be made.
One of the builders police interviewed said that Barry made a comment that he didn't want to move,
and that it was a source of tension for the couple.
He says that Barry wondered out loud why Honey wanted to build such a big house
when he probably only had 10 years left to live.
This house, it was going to reflect their wealth in standing in the world.
But they died before construction ever began.
And then this is the library, right?
Oh, wow.
We're back with Rosemary Sexton.
Edward and I had a fire here every night in the winter, fall and spring,
before we went to Florida, because that's a really nice fireplace.
Really warm. It really warms everything up.
It should. The fireplace is almost big enough to stand up in.
Wow. So this is what a view.
Now, we put in my husband and I put in all these windows.
They were tiny little windows.
Can I look at the view?
Yeah, sure.
Wonderful. That's the Thousand Islands we're looking at, eh?
Yes, that's me. That's called the Three Sisters.
Rosemary had already retired from the society pages when the Shermans died.
So she didn't cover their massive funeral,
attended by so many people that would have appeared in her columns.
But she was moved enough to write about them anyway.
When I heard about the Sherman's shocking murders,
I, like many Canadians, was horrified.
The way they died was hard to bear thinking about.
Because of the billions that Barry Sherman made,
he was fairly well known to Toronto Society,
which is always on high alert for the next wealthy benefactor or donor.
Barry Sherman had a reputation for being a workaholic and extremely hard-nosed.
Honey, on the other hand, was more approachable and outgoing.
Honey might swoop in and take various committee chairman women out
for, say, a fancy lunch and to thank them for their contributions and hard work.

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She would order expensive items on the menu and toast her guests with high-priced wines, and then they wouldn't see her again for another year or two, and she would reappear briefly to bestow more largesse.

They were not your run-of-the-mill movers and shakers in the fundraising world, but rather distant stars who dropped in and out when it pleased them to do so.

Or should I say when it pleased Barry?

Because Barry ran the show.

He was autocratic and domineering, and there is no evidence to suggest he behaved any differently with members of his own family.

Rosemary has thought about the theory that maybe Honey was also targeted.

She certainly rubs people the wrong way,

and at times did have a strained relationship with her children and her husband.

But in the end, Rosemary still believes that it was Barry the killers were after.

Unfortunately, Honey, his life partner and loyal companion was also a victim of the dire punishment which surely was primarily directed towards her husband.

Unfortunately, the poetic justice meted out so cruelly,

and ended the life of his loyal wife and helpmate,

who one might argue was collateral damage.

I think it all leads back to his business dealings,

and how hard-nosed, and how he ran roughshod over everybody.

And if you live by the sword, you die by the sword.

Next time on the No Good, Terribly Kind,

Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman.

This is a perfect storm of conspiracy theory.

It's got all the ingredients, none of the answers.

Total vacuum of information and a complete list of all of the big players who people blame conspiracies on.

This episode was written and produced by me, Kathleen Goltar, and Michelle Shepard.

Lisa Gabriel is our producer.

It was executive produced by Charlie Webster, along with Lisa Gabriel and myself.

Andrea Varsany is our associate producer.

Our technician is Laura Antonelli, sound design and mixing by Reza Daya.

The role of Barry Sherman is played by Saul Rubinik.

Stuart Cox is the executive producer for Antica.

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