

[Transcript] Strangeland / Ep 14 of 14: Six Years Later

Our conversation with Craig leaves me spinning for a few reasons.

First, he says he saw another man at the Nara's house the day of the murders.

Second, Craig says that law enforcement treated him like a suspect in the case.

And third, he claims that police made a big mistake when they released Honu so quickly after questioning him.

You know what they told me? Oh, we can't find him. He's not answering the phone.

They say that he already fled America. He already hopped on planes.

Honu going back to India was a rumor that circulated throughout Maple Shade.

Reporters at the time had a lot of questions about Honu's movements.

If he still had his passport, he'd be facing travel restrictions.

So we check property records to try to track him down.

Turns out he didn't move to India, but he did leave Maple Shade shortly after the murders.

First, moving to a home about 60 miles northeast in Piscataway, New Jersey.

Then, by the fall of 2017, he relocated across the country to Colorado.

Honu settled in the suburban town of Parker, Colorado, just about 40 minutes from Denver.

In 2020, he brought a house there.

Honu has ignored our many attempts to reach him. We've called, emailed and messaged, and we haven't got a single response. So it's time to try face-to-face.

Our reporter Betsy Shepard books a plane ticket and heads to Colorado.

I touch down in Denver, grab my rental car and make a beeline for Parker.

There are a few hours of daylight left, and I want to catch a glimpse of Honu's new home.

Your destination is on the left.

I slow the car to a crawl to try and read the addresses.

Honu lives in one of those big planned developments, where every house is a slight variation on the one next to it.

A collage of beige and white paint.

The only unique flourishes come from flower beds and yard art.

Honu's house has none of this.

There are no signs that someone lives there. It's not personalized. There are no decorations.

I don't see any porch furniture or any decor.

I park a few houses down from Honu's so I can see his garage and front door.

Everything is so clean. There's not one piece of litter on the sidewalks.

Most cars are parked in driveways or garages, so even the streets seem tidy and quiet.

You can hear fallen leaves as they skitter down the street.

My plan is to approach Honu as he comes out of the house, but hours pass and I see no signs of Honu.

Is it possible I missed him? Maybe he's out of town.

I stay until 9 o'clock and then go check into my hotel.

But the next morning, there's a glimmer of hope.

I get an early start, about 5.30 am, and make the short drive back to Honu's.

The sun is just coming up. It's dark along the highway, but there are little sprinkles of lights here and there.

Looks like maybe some office parks. There's really not a whole lot out here.

When I make it to Honu's, something is different.

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Okay, this is it. I'm parked out here and there's a light on upstairs.

It looks like someone is home.

I'm Betsy Shepard. I'm Tinku Ray.

And I'm Ben Adair. You're listening to Strangeland, Season 2, Murder in Maple Shade.

Episode 14. Six years later.

It's after 7 and the sun is up. I can see a little bit more of Honu's house.

The original real estate listing for Honu's house says it's a four bedroom, four bath home, more than 4,000 square feet.

It has stainless steel appliances, an abundance of granite, and a gourmet kitchen that, quote, wows. The home definitely seems like it was designed for a family. It's very spacious and it would be a lot of space for one person.

It's interesting to compare that to Honu's life in Fox Meadow, where he lived in a one bedroom apartment, 600 square feet, with his wife and child.

Well, Betsy's sitting in the car. We're looking online to see what digital breadcrumbs Honu's left around the internet.

Looks like he's got a Pinterest account, which is mostly infographics on leadership and how to be a boss.

We also find a profile that looks like it belongs to him on Goodreads, that site where users keep track of their reading list and review books.

The reading choices line up with what we found on Honu's other social media profiles, which often include self-help tips and inspirational posts.

When we first find Honu's Goodreads page, there are only a few titles listed. Two of them are from a series called Alpha Male.

One subtitled, quote, The Seven Laws of Power, Mindset and Psychology of Success, Manipulation, Persuasion, Neurolinguistic Programming Secrets,

Analyze and Influence Anyone, Hypnosis Mastery, Emotional Intelligence, Win as a Real Alpha Man.

Yeah, that's all part of the title.

Here's a snippet from the book's first chapter, which talks about finding ways to control people without resorting to violence, which may be a tough lesson for some people to learn.

Quote, Have you watched a movie where someone is being held at gunpoint or being threatened by a knife?

This sort of power is known as coercive power, and it works by use of fear, but you can show coercive power without the use of a gun or a knife.

Unquote. A few weeks later, when we go back to recheck his Goodreads page, the alpha male books have been removed.

We keep poking around to see what we can find out about Honu's new job, what hours he keeps, if he works from home or goes into the office.

Okay, it's 9.38, still no sign of Honu, no movement in the house, and all of the blinds are closed, so I can't tell if he is there.

Maybe he left for the office before I got here.

So I dig up Honu's work number and start dialing.

Sorry, Honu mounts around here. Is not available. Record your message at the tone.

No answer, but I'm able to pinpoint his work site through the area code. It's tied to Anglewood, a nearby town that's home to charter corporate offices.

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I make note of the address and return my attention to Honu's house.

It's 5.24, the sun is starting to set and he hasn't left the house yet, so just still camping out here, hoping that he'll run an errand or go to the gym or meet up with some friends.

It's 7.01, I'm still parked in front of Honu's house and it's 8.07 and still no Honu sightings, but it's 9.01 and it's eerily quiet in Honu's neighborhood.

Around 10 o'clock I head back to the hotel and I decide that tomorrow, no matter what, I'm done waiting.

So before sunrise the next morning, I'm back on the road.

The route to Honu's has become routine at this point, but the fact that I haven't seen him leave the house even once,

and all the time I've been here, that strikes me as unusual.

Although it does track with what we heard from Honu's old neighbors at Vox Meadow, that the naras kept a very low profile.

Again, the morning passes unremarkably. Honu's neighborhood slowly comes to life as families head to work in school.

But still, no Honu. By noon, I'm running out of patience.

It's time to resort to plan B, which is to walk up onto Honu's front porch, knock on his door, and see if he'll answer.

I don't want it to be confrontational, of course, but there is always that possibility.

Alright, it's now or never.

What happens at Honu's house is coming up next after the break.

I knock and wait.

Silence.

I notice that Honu has a ring, one of those doorbells with the built-in camera that you can access from anywhere.

So I turn to that next.

Still nothing.

So we look straight into the ring's camera and start talking.

I'm not sure if Honu can hear me, but it's worth a shot.

Hi, Honu. I'm a reporter. I'm with a team that's investigating what happened to your wife and son. And we've reached out to you several times, but we want to make sure that our message has gotten through to you.

We would really love to speak to you to find out more about your family and what happened the night they were murdered.

I'm going to leave my contact information here with you at the door.

But then, right as I'm about to slide my handwritten note under the door, the door opens.

A woman is standing there, an Indian woman who looks to be in her 30s.

She cracks the door just wide enough for me to see her.

We're doing a story on what happened to his family, and we're trying to get justice for Sasi and Anish, his wife and son.

And we'd like to include his voice because some people have pointed the finger at him, and we are trying to make sure that he has an opportunity to tell us his side of the story.

No, he's not there.

He's not here?

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No.

He's not here at the house?

No.

The woman backs away slowly as I talk. She looks surprised, or maybe shocked, by what I've just said about Honu.

Do you know how we can reach him?

No.

And how do you know Honu?

Yeah, he's like, you know, we're in different villages.

Okay, so you're from Andhra Pradesh?

Yeah.

She's barefoot, wearing pajama pants and a t-shirt with a simple gold band on her ring finger.

She speaks in a gentle whisper and seems not entirely comfortable communicating in English.

She reminds me of how neighbors describe Sasi, quiet, and often wearing pajamas.

Where is Honu?

He went to office.

He went to the office?

Yeah.

So I hand the letter to the woman and ask her to give it to Honu.

It includes my contact info and a clear outline of what we'd like to speak about.

I head straight from Honu's home to the nearby charter corporate office.

It's a giant telecommunications firm, and according to online sources, Honu's a director there.

A move up the corporate ladder from his prior role as a senior associate at Comcast.

His new office is boxy and nondescript.

I open the door to the visitor entrance and head inside.

Hello.

Hi, is Honu Nara in?

Honu Nara.

Do you know how to spell the last name?

Yeah, it's N-A-R-R-A.

Is that it? Just N-A-R-R-K-C. Were you looking for Honu?

Yes.

Show us he's out of the office until the 11th.

He's out of the office until the 11th.

Okay.

All right.

Thank you so much for your help.

Appreciate it.

So Honu was not at the office after all.

It seems like he's dodging us.

But why?

In the end, we never get a chance to talk to Honu face to face.

But we now know beyond any doubt that Honu has received our message.

And his silence is its own kind of response.

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Honu has elected not to participate in our investigation, not to share any memories of Sassi and Anish, and not to respond to allegations that he may somehow be involved in the murders of his wife and son.

At this point, we don't know if anyone will ever be arrested for these murders.

We're wondering why.

So we review what we've learned about the case and consult a criminologist about the likelihood of charges ever being filed.

I'm Wendy Raggetsy.

I have spent my entire career studying violent crime, most specifically homicide, and most particularly within that topic, homicide investigations.

Wendy Raggetsy is the department chair for criminology and criminal justice at the University of South Carolina.

The NARA case has strong pluses and minuses going for and against its solvability.

So let's review it by category.

First, the crime itself.

A mother and child stabbed to death in their home.

Wendy says that excessive violence, like the multiple slash wounds on Sassi and Anish, usually means the attacker is someone close to the victims.

Intimate partner homicides are typically easier for police to solve than acquaintance and stranger homicides.

Sassi and Anish were stabbed, which means their killer would have been in close proximity to them during the attack, which increases the odds of forensic evidence being left behind, say DNA under the victim's fingernails or blood splatter getting on the perpetrator's clothing.

The other reason why we see a higher likelihood of solvability with contact weapons is that we see those kinds of weapons tend to be used more in cases where the victim and the perpetrator know one another.

Again, pointing to a known rather than anonymous perpetrator.

Another plus for investigators is the location inside the home.

This means that the crime scene was contained with evidence that's easier to collect versus, say, outside on the street or in a park.

We know from a Burlington County report that investigators confiscated a bunch of electronic evidence

from the NARA's house, cell phones, computers.

But the prosecutor's office wouldn't respond to our questions about what else was collected at the crime scene.

What forensic evidence.

We do know that neighbors reported seeing Hanyu putting a lot of stuff in the trash within days after the murders.

Even the mattress where one witness, Crystal White, saw Hanyu's body.

I think it was like two days later and they were just throwing everything out.

They were just carpeting everything. They were just throwing everything out.

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They were putting all the stuff in the dumpster, the bed, everything.
It's mind blowing.

You got all the stuff outside the dumpster that has blood on it.

All the little toys, it got blood on it.

You know, I go to pick my trash out and it's flying everywhere.

Why I've taken my trash out and I see toys with blood on it from the crime scene which shouldn't have been tampered with.

Everything they put out was basically the kids and hers.

So what did police collectors forensic evidence?

What DNA did they find?

What got tested?

We don't know, but we do know it seems like there's a lot they didn't do.

There are other mistakes made right from the beginning of this investigation.

Like the fact that Sasi's time of death was listed on her autopsy and death certificate as 3.30pm.

But we know that Sasi was alive at 4.30pm when she picked a niche up from school.

So what does a mistake like this made by a first responder at the start of an investigation say about a crime's solvability?

Wendy says what detectives do in the first 48 hours is critical.

There's this huge drop off in the clearance curve that occurs after just a very short passage of time.

With the evidence now long gone and ours apartment repainted for new tenants, this case rests pretty squarely on the witnesses.

The cooperation of witnesses is still one of the strongest predictors of homicide case clearance.

This case does have witnesses, people like Craig.

I seen them the same day they died.

I was the last person seen walking in that unit.

My throat was real bright and that crushed me.

But the overall demographics of Fox Meadow means there are probably a lot of witnesses who didn't come forward.

And when you have situations of homicides occurring within an immigrant community, where you have residents who maybe don't speak English, that can certainly impede communications with law enforcement and can also contribute to a culture of unwillingness to talk to the police.

We encounter that a lot in our reporting.

Many Fox Meadow residents declined to talk to us saying they didn't speak English.

Others said no thanks because they were afraid that speaking to us might jeopardize their visa status.

Then there's that fear of retaliation, which Wendy says is especially common in high crime areas with lots of residential turnover,

both of which describe Fox Meadow apartments.

When you have an unstable neighborhood, then residents may feel that they're going to be in harm's way

if they share information with police.

That's why Craig said he didn't want to talk to police and he's not the only one that told us that.

You don't want to get involved in anything, you don't want to know anything.

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I try to stay inside because you never know what's going to happen.
A lot of people have that no snitch mentality or they get scared to say anything.
Out of concern for their own safety, self-preservation, it's easier to say,
no, I did not hear anything, I did not see anything.
Finally, the factor that's probably the biggest minus for this case and the part that's the most tragic.
As far as we can tell, Susie had few friends.
She was isolated with her family living far away.
So there's really been no one advocating for her, pressuring investigators to solve the case
and speaking publicly to keep media attention on the unsolved murders.
We know as both investigators and listeners of true crime podcasts,
it's often a family member or close friend of the victim that keeps the detective work alive.
Long after police have abandoned it.
If you have a case that's high profile or you have families that are demanding justice
and keeping stories about the homicide in the public domain,
that can certainly exercise an impact on police practices or procedures.
Wendy says that although there's few stats on this,
anecdotal evidence shows that high profile cases do attract more police resources.
Sometimes through its influence on how, for example,
the prosecutor's office or local political figures like city council members
or the mayor and the kind of pressure that they might exert on law enforcement agencies
to be able to solve that crime.
When homicide cases do get traction after years of dormancy,
Wendy says it's usually the result of a new tip.
So next, we call up the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office
to share all the information we've uncovered during our reporting
in the hope that maybe we found something they overlooked.
That's coming up after the break.
After nearly a year of reporting this story,
it's time to call the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office one final time.
The lawsuit we'd filed against them for violating New Jersey's Open Public Records Act
did get us the autopsy reports, but little else.
And besides the one sit-down meeting they had with us to read those old outdated press releases,
they've provided us with no information about the case.
This whole time, they've been claiming this is an open and active investigation
and using that as a reason to keep any and all information they've collected under lock and key.
Burlington County Prosecutor's Office, please leave your name and a message and I'll return your
call.
Thank you.
Predictably enough, they don't answer my call.
So I go to the source and reach out to lead detective Brian Cunningham.
You've reached detective Sergeant Brian Cunningham at the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office.
I'm currently out and returning.
He doesn't pick up either.
I leave both the same message.

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Hi there. This is Tinku Ray calling.

You may remember me as one of the journalists who's been looking into the murders of Satikala and Anishnara.

We are wrapping up our investigation and have found what we believe to be new leads in the case. And we would really appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you and go over them.

Please give me a call back as soon as possible. We'd really appreciate that.

They don't schedule a meeting with us, which, based on our experience, shouldn't surprise us.

Yet somehow, it still does.

Because if the Nara case is in fact active, like they say, it seems like they'd be eager to hear about leads we've turned up during our investigation.

After all, it's now been six years since Lassie and Anish were killed.

The case is still unsolved.

But after our year of researching their deaths, interviewing witnesses, and reviewing public documents,

we have a better understanding of why.

In short, deficiencies in the investigation.

The investigation by the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office.

They told us that after initial interviews with detectives, there was little to no follow-up.

Like Crystal, who says she told them puzzling details about the crime scene, such as the white powder on the floor and around the vents.

I said, there's this white stuff coming, like, floating in the air in their apartment because it's all over my shoes.

I said, that's not normal. And they dismissed it, I believe.

He didn't write it down.

Crystal also told investigators about the mystery woman who showed up at the crime scene before first responders arrived.

Against Crystal's warnings, the woman walked to the bedroom and upon seeing the bodies, showed little emotional reaction.

Crystal says police dismissed this woman as a family friend.

We later ID'd this woman as the same person Lassie mentioned in her letter to her family.

Deepa Ajit, who Lassie said was having an affair with Hanu.

Deepa also appears to be the woman who Hanu picked up every morning before work, and the one who helped him clean out the apartment following the murder.

Was she ever investigated? We don't know.

And then there's Thurman, the neighbor who witnessed the Nara family dynamics.

He says he tried to share information with police, but they weren't interested in hearing it.

Every day, five o'clock, you would hear him down there screaming.

It was always in their language.

I don't speak their language, but you can tell it was not nothing nice.

And then there's Craig, a major eyewitness who says police treated him like suspect number one.

He said he saw someone go into the Nara's house the afternoon of the murders, and that he recognized this someone as a man who Hanu regularly spent time with.

Craig eventually agreed to work with a police sketch artist to help ID this man.

But then Craig says law enforcement didn't follow up. The sketch never got made.

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And there's one other oddity Craig said he reported that day.

He says that Hanu was home for a full 10 to 15 minutes before he came outside his apartment and began yelling, reacting to the violence seen inside.

What took so long?

Burlington County has told us many times and in many ways that the Nara case is an open and active investigation.

But they won't tell us what they're actually doing to solve it.

And during our only in-person meeting with investigators, they seemed surprised we decided to focus on the Nara case at all.

I'm curious how this got on your radar in the first place.

Well, so we primarily do look into cold cases and...

Nobody would rather try and find Margaret Fox.

I don't know Margaret Fox.

It's a missing person's case.

In fact, it's a high-profile cold case about a 14-year-old named Margaret Fox who went missing in Burlington County in 1974.

Fox is white and her case has been investigated on and off for nearly 50 years.

Don't Susie and Anish deserve the same attention.

They're probably still there, Fox.

None of those stuff they're just circling around trying to figure out the days that case gets solved because we just lifted the heads or whatever.

The mom is probably just about to get away with the murder.

What's that?

At the end of our investigation, we did receive one additional statement from the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office.

After we emailed them our fact-check memo and again invited them to comment on any part of this case,

they sent us the following statement.

I'm going to read it in its entirety.

In other words, it's all grossly inaccurate, they say,

but they also won't point out a single factual mistake.

So no comment six years ago when this investigation started and reporters wanted to know what was being done.

No comment when we first reached out and they told us this investigation was open and active.

And even with all the new information we found, all the potential leads and witnesses we've interviewed,

no comment again today.

While no criminal charges have been filed against anyone in relation to this case, the civil proceedings over the rights to Sussie's estate have taken a surprising turn.

Judge Dow, the New Jersey Superior Court judge overseeing the lawsuit between Honu and Sussie's family,

has decided not to enforce the current settlement,

which would have earmarked 70% of Sussie's \$1.2 million estate for Honu and 30% for Sussie's mom.

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So it's back to the drawing board for both parties.
They must continue negotiations until they can agree and finalize a settlement.
Or the judge can decide to order a civil trial instead,
in which case the slayer statute would take center stage,
and Honu's liability as it relates to the murders of Sussie and Anish would be fair game.
Attorneys on both sides could present their case.
This would open the door to all types of potential evidence being introduced on the record and an open court.
Honu's fight for Sussie's estate seems to be one of his few remaining connections to Burlington County.
He's living a brand new life far away from Maple Shade and far different than Fox Meadow.
He no longer shares a small one-bedroom apartment with his wife and son,
where they lived together for nine years in a neighborhood that's chaotic and crime-ridden.
Honu's new home in Parker, Colorado is palatial compared to his old one.
It's full of big and brand new things, shiny appliances, carpets without stains.
In fact, his entire neighborhood looks how a new car smells.
Honu bought his house in 2020 for about \$600,000, and it's already appreciated in value by nearly \$200,000.
It's crisply painted, well-maintained with a neatly manicured front lawn.
Meanwhile, back in Maple Shade, Anisha's memorial garden, lovingly built by teachers and friends, often goes untended,
and the school it was built on is now closed.
It just feels so weird because you see it just slowly fading away.
This is one of Anisha's classmates.
Every time I see that, it just hurts a little. If I could, I would want to fix it back up, but we just don't.
It's difficult to look at Honu's new life and not think about Sasin Anisha's absence from it.
The future, they'll never get to live.
I just feel sad that there's not any answers because there's no pressure to keep the case going.
That's how I feel.
This is Anisha's teacher, Kelly Canavan.
When you contact me, I was so happy to just hear his name and just that someone cares enough to talk about it,
you know, because it feels like it just slipped through the cracks almost, and it shouldn't.
Sasin never got the chance to buy that house in America like she wanted.
Anisha's plans were cut short too. No medical school like his mom had hoped, no middle school for that matter.
And based on everything we've learned about him, there were nothing but opportunities ahead.
Here's Anisha again, reciting his poem, Dreams.
If you believe you can achieve, if you work hard enough, their results will come.
Stay focused, stay true, stay positive, but dream big.
There is no statute of limitations on homicide.
There is still a \$25,000 reward on the table for information related to this case, and someone out there knows something.
Now is the time to speak up.

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If you have any information related to the murders of Sasikala and Anishnara, please go to our website, strangelandpodcast.com, where you can find our tip line and email address.

You can also reach the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office at 609-265-5035.

We'll put that number and a few others from their office up at strangelandpodcast.com.

Any new leads could bring new life to this case.

This has been Strange Land Season 2, Murder in Maple Shade.

I'm Benadare.

And I'm Tinkure.

Strange Land is an audio Chuck original, produced by Western Sound, hosted by me, Tinkure, and Benadare.

Strange Land is created by Benadare.

Executive producers are Ashley Flowers and Delia D'Ambra for Audio Chuck, and me, Benadare, for Western Sound.

Strange Land Season 2, Murder in Maple Shade, was written by Betsy Shepherd and Haley Fox.

Betsy was our lead reporter and producer, Haley's our showrunner.

Original composition and sound design by Alex McGinnis.

The Season 2 production team includes Sarah Deely, Sabrina Fang, Savannah Wright, Nicole McNulty, Stella Hartman, and Colin McNulty.

Lots more about our investigation, including photos from the story and behind-the-scenes content at our website, strangelandpodcast.com.

We're also on Instagram, at Strange Land Pod, all one word.

So what do you think Chuck do you approve?