

[Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 4

It just goes back to that dynamic of the relationships, like, oh, okay, Fred, thank you, we'll, uh, get a hold of you later, let me know when you get back, we'll go have a beer.

Previously on The Coldest Case in Laramie.

I remember it so well, I remember it like, like it was yesterday.

The detective was like, you don't worry about him, he's a police officer, you don't need to worry about him.

And when they told me that, I just came on good, I was like, what the hell are you talking about?

Well, they're assholes because they wouldn't really answer any of our questions.

I know that he did it, he did it. I mean, it was pervious hell.

He knows, he knows what they're gonna ask, and he just, he told them what he wanted them to know.

The case file Fred's lawyer gave me was sprawling.

Almost 8,000 pages of investigative reports.

Hundreds of photos.

More than 70 hours of audio and video interviews.

Bad Xeroxes and stapled on addendums and handwritten notes.

I stared at a poorly rendered drawing of Shelley's sweet dreams night shirt for a while.

In the earliest pages, I could see the police contending with the little they had to go on.

The fire destroyed a lot of potentially helpful evidence.

So did the attempt to contain it.

Shelley's body was burned.

Badly enough that it couldn't be a helpful source of leads, although it was clear she was naked.

Police took that, and the blood stains on her waterbed,

as signs that the attack might have started as a sexual assault in the bedroom.

Other evidence was found outside.

Behind the complex, someone had cut the phone lines to all five apartments.

And about 350 feet away, a distance slightly longer than a football field,

as a bloody matchbook with some kind of hand or fingerprint visible through the blood.

The matchbook was decorated with a train in the words Tank Town on the cover.

Police found it near several footprints and tire tracks left in the dirt.

And then there was the blood.

There were two large puddles on the sidewalk in front of the apartments.

In the middle of one, a broken serrated blade from a steak knife.

Nearby, bloody pieces of a broken vase.

The police figured that Shelley must have tried to escape at some point,

making her way from her apartment down the sidewalk before her attacker caught her.

He pulled her back toward her apartment, dragging her 44 feet down the sidewalk, and stabbed her, leaving the puddles.

The drag marks went over the top of a bloody boot print.

This was a clue too.

It suggested the killer had left it when he was dragging Shelley back to her apartment.

The blood trail on the sidewalk appeared to stop entirely at least 10 feet from the door to apartment number three.

Notably, the police did find a little more blood there, separated from the rest of the blood at the

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crime scene.

A few tiny flicks on the door of apartment number three.

Fred's friend's place where he was staying the night.

Police brought him in to answer questions about 11 hours after Shelley's murder.

The first recorded interview in the case file.

The date is the 20th of October, excuse me, 20 October 1985,

place Detective Graham's office present.

Fred Lamb and Rob Graham,

tried to find out what you know of what occurred out on Taylor Street this morning.

The mood of the interview was chummy.

Detective Rob Graham and Fred actually knew each other.

Graham seemed more interested in Fred as a witness than as a suspect.

So, when you start with last night, did you have a drill last night?

Right, we had a drill this weekend.

Fred said he spent the evening at the American Legion with a few of his buddies, including Dave Palmer,

his National Guard friend who rented apartment number three.

They were drinking beer and pop and I was drinking mostly Coke and about eight o'clock,

I decided to switch to Jack Daniels and Coke.

And I had five of those and it was about 10, 20 I left.

And the reason that I left was because I had seen an advertisement on TV that instead of Saturday Night Live,

they were having a championship wrestling.

Dave stuck around and eventually headed home with a woman.

So, Fred was alone for the night.

Either the advertisement was wrong or Fred misunderstood it.

But when he got to Dave's apartment, there was no championship wrestling.

Instead, Fred said he watched the second half of MASH and headed to bed.

The next thing that happened was I woke up and I remember, and this was awful crazy because I didn't wake up quickly,

but I distinctly remember somebody pounding or knocking on something, somebody pounding.

It felt like, you know, when a rowdy friend shows up, how they pound on the door.

And I can't tell you where it was at.

I can't tell you if it was in Dave's door number three or somewhere else in that convo.

And then I heard a female voice.

After the loud knocking, Fred said he heard what sounded like a woman's voice.

Not screaming exactly, but loud.

At first he didn't think much of it.

There was always some kind of noise around Dave's apartment on the weekend.

But he figured he should give it a look.

So he got up and poked his head out.

Everything was quiet, so I just closed the door.

And since Dave wasn't there, I went over to his stereo and turned on the alarm clock.

I was thinking about going back to sleep.

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I thought she had to shift to five o'clock.
Another half hour of sleep.
I was like, we'll just get up.
And when it took my morning leak and came in and was sitting down, putting my uniform back on, I heard a vehicle drive up from the Hornstart apartment and somebody screaming fire, fire, fire.
So I ran to the door and opened it up.
And there were three male subjects there running up and down the complex screaming fire, fire.
Do I have a telephone?
And I looked out and saw the flames coming out of apartment number one.
I didn't know it was apartment number one at that time,
but I saw the flames down at that end of the building.
So I ran inside and grabbed the telephone and got absolutely nothing.
The phone was just a slap in the air there.
The kid came running back to the door and he says, do you have any towels or anything?
And so I said to the people out of the apartment, he says, I don't know, I think so.
So I told him that the bathroom was at the end of the hall to get towels or whatever he needed out of the first bedroom on the right, which is where Dave sleeps.
And I started towards the apartment.
As I was going towards the apartment, I noticed that somewhere in the vicinity of number two, there looked like to be a puddle of blood about a unit worth of blood in size.
And so I stepped to my right so that I wouldn't walk over it and walk down the gravel.
Right in front of the door to number one was another puddle of blood.
I would say one and a half units in size, a damn good size puddle.
It was bigger than that first one where I lay out, but I don't half again if not twice as big.
At that time, I noticed that there were drag marks from the pool of blood,
and then there was a drag mark that didn't go up the staircase,
kind of kitty corner, and into the door.
And at that time, I heard the first unit sign.
And so I just walked back up to Dave's apartment to see if he needed to make sure it wasn't burning.
And then Officer Avery showed up and asked me what I knew of it,
and then I showed him what showed him the blood.
One other thing I did, I believe, was Officer Avery requested that I cut the power.
I knew where it was.
While we were going over that crime scene,
one of those drag marks got pretty close to Dave's place,
and there was a little bit of this real tiny splatter on the door.
That's mine.
Well, it's your blood? That's my blood.
And it's on his door, it's my blood.
It was just a little, you know, just...
That was when I was hunting.
And my dog was giving me a bunch of crap,
so I reached in the back of the truck and smacked him and cut this enough along his collar.
And that would have been the 12th, the 13th, and the 14th when I was still coming.

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I'm 30 when I went over.
I usually ring these doorbells and hit the door.
And then beam-bomb, beam-bomb.
And when I wrapped the door once, I must have caught that damn scab.
Because I went like that.
His porch light was on and I saw a splatter on the door.
I looked at my knuckle and it was bleeding.
So on the door, I can't say it's on my blood,
but there is some of my blood on the door.
I couldn't even say how many drops.
Okay. What blood type do you think, Fred?
I'm sorry?
What's your blood type?
Because they're gonna...
I'm sure they picked that up.
A positive.
A positive?
Yeah, I don't want to type in your blood.
Oh.
Please don't.
Tess would soon show two types of blood at the crime scene.
Type O, which met Shelley.
And type A, which was found at several spots,
including a trace amount on the matchbook
350 feet from Shelley's apartment.
Fred's interview didn't go on much longer than this.
The whole thing lasted about 35 minutes.
He mentioned that he had guard duty the next day
and would be heading to Arkansas for training.
He'd be gone a couple of weeks.
But just before the interview ended,
Detective Graham and Fred had a small exchange.
Looking at the case file,
it seemed to indicate where the investigation was headed.
Well, you know, if I'm hearing people talk in the amour,
apparently this chick ran with a pretty heavy crowd.
Fred says,
you know, I'm now hearing people talk in the amour.
Apparently this chick ran with a pretty heavy crowd.
They weren't the salt of the earth types.
They weren't the salt of the earth types.
Not caught up with her.
Well, it might have caught up with her,
Detective Graham responds.

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I don't want to kill this tape recorder at 4.13 p.m.
It's still 20.
I'm Margaret Lyons.
I'm a TV critic for The New York Times
and a writer for The Times newsletter called Watching.
To create this newsletter,
my colleagues and I step through hundreds of movies and shows
so we can help you find something you'll love.
Sign up and we'll email you our best recommendations
four times a week
so you can get a quick fix on TV tonight
or binge all weekend.
Watching is part of a collection of newsletters
just for our time subscribers.
Sign up for watching
and browse all of our newsletters
at The Times dot com slash subscriber newsletters.
After that first interview with Fred,
the Laramie Police Department
spoke with the people in Shelly's life.
Family, friends, former roommates,
coworkers, ex-boyfriends.
And in these interviews,
they started focusing on certain aspects of Shelly's life
in what sometimes felt like a pretty ham-handed way.
In these conversations and in tips that came in,
the police collected many facts about Shelly.
There were a lot of rumors mixed in there, too.
That Shelly was part of a drug deal gone wrong,
that a satanic cult could be involved.
And in these conversations,
the police collected many facts about Shelly.
There were a lot of rumors mixed in there, too.
That Shelly was part of a drug deal gone wrong,
that a satanic cult could be involved.
That she was at a party the night she was killed
where someone had threatened to kill her.
I followed the pinball of their inquiry,
spoke to as many of their targets as I could.
I know she was a popular girl.
I know that about that.
Did she seem to concentrate on the black athletes
or was she friends with all of them?
Detectives initially seemed to focus on Shelly's relationships

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at the University of Wyoming.
They'd heard, for example,
that she was friendly with members of the football team.
One name in particular kept coming up.
Alan Griffin.
Police couldn't find Alan the Sunday Shelly was killed.
So that day, all officers in the Laramie area
were told to be on the lookout for him and his vehicle.
For security reasons, this was passed from officer to officer,
not over the radio, but by word of mouth.
They eventually found him.
Three days after Shelly's murder,
police brought him in for questioning.
At the time, Alan was a star-wide receiver
for the University of Wyoming Cowboys.
He told police that he and Shelly met at a baseball game in 1981.
How much did you actually date her in 1981?
Was it a relationship that kind of grew
as it was longer that you knew each other
or was it just an occasional type thing?
It was more of an occasional thing,
definitely an occasional thing.
How about during the 1982 school year?
Did you still continue being friends?
Yeah, we were friends.
That's about it.
What happened when you came back to school?
Anything in particular?
Did you ever date 1982?
Date her? Yeah.
No.
I think we need to clarify that
they get on the same page about the word date.
I understand that.
I figured I considered dating
just going out and having a good time with people.
No, we never...
What do you define as a date, I guess?
Well, a date going out
and I don't think we ever went out on a set date
and say, I'll pick you up at seven
and we'll do this and do this and do that.
It wasn't like that.
It was more of a spontaneous thing.

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I'd either just like call her and say,
you want to come over, you want to get together
or it'd be like I'd see her somewhere
and then we'd like to get together.
Yeah, I have no calls with that.
I think we're on the same line really.
I just considered just going out and having a good time,
whether it's spontaneous or what are you doing next Friday?
Nobody can do it.
Can you give me a list in your mind
of other acquaintances that you might be friends with?
I realize that you're kind of a popular young lady.
That's such that you could probably help me
if we can compile a list of who she's acquainted with.
Well, I really don't...
I mean, the only people I knew
that she hung around with was her roommate Michelle
and Michelle's boyfriend
and I guess maybe some people that she worked with.
Like I said, if we talked about it at all,
the only thing she ever told me was that she would stay after work
and have a couple drinks at the bar.
How about other black athletes, Ellen?
As far as knowing her or...
Knowing or going out with her?
I don't know of any that went out with her.
I'm pretty sure there's a couple of guys that know her.
What are some of your interests?
What do you guys like to do when you're together?
It would be to long.
The only thing we ever did together was have sex.
That was about...
It was when we were together.
I mean, that was about the extent of things.
It was only, like, just a casual high vibe.
You know, one of the things I anticipate getting into, of course,
it's interesting in regards that we don't know what a motive is
for this incident, of course.
You know, there's no doubt in my mind this is a homicide
and a very brutal killing.
Since you mentioned the sex, I was going to get into that.
Do you feel uncomfortable talking about that subject?
I think you'd be in a better position
than any of the family would whatsoever

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because it's private life.

She had any quirks when it came to sex?

No.

How about any homosexual tendencies?

I'm not saying that there are any.

I'm just asking in regards to sexual habits.

As far as...

Do you have any knowledge of her having any homosexual tendencies?

No. I have no idea.

I would seriously doubt it, but I don't know for sure.

Okay, well, I'm not making those allegations.

I'll give you all I'm just asking because

no, either heterosexual or homosexual type things is coming up.

What kind of reputation does she have?

You know, you look at a rather attractive white girl,

and it's kind of out of character,

and I'm not trying to be prejudiced or anything,

but I want you to realize that one of the things we're looking at is unusual for...

Well, I'm not saying it's unusual.

I think it's a rather natural thing,

but when you have a white, fairly attractive student dating

or just acquaintances with blacks,

some people seem to frown on that

and it seems to stick in their minds for some reason.

Did you ever have any difficulties with the parents

in regards to the relationship with them?

The police took fingerprints and blood from Alan.

Combed his pubic hair, too.

From the beginning, when the police approached him at his apartment,

Alan said that he had an alibi.

He had spent the night in Laramie with another woman.

That eventually checked out.

Alan Griffin lives in Washington State now.

He's a basketball coach and a high school teacher.

I tracked him down because I wanted to know his reaction to being a suspect back in 1985.

I had absolutely nothing to hide.

It wasn't like I was concerned.

It was just like I would have had back then

a much higher regard for law enforcement than I do now.

And I would have definitely back then.

I just did whatever they asked me to do.

I learned that Alan didn't really know much about the investigation.

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Definitely didn't know that he was a suspect.
Considering how large Alan loomed in the early parts of the case file,
it was surprising to me how much of a mystery Shelly was to him.
I just remember how she was the best way to describe her.
She was cool to hang out with just low key.
Didn't talk a whole lot, but she was a pretty young lady.
And when she smiled and it was real, it was just awesome.
She had an awesome smile.
But like I said, she didn't talk much.
She could be in a room and nobody even noticed.
She wasn't loud.
She would intentionally, I think, as I got to know her,
she would intentionally probably want to just fade into the background
and not be noticed.
But she was friendly, genuine.
Yeah, she's cool.
In the police interviews, Shelly's family and friends
talked about how much she liked Alan.
They seemed to think it had been a serious relationship,
or at least that Shelly wanted it to be one.
One ex-boyfriend mentioned that Shelly had, quote,
quite a newspaper collection of his outstanding feats and whatnot.
Alan was in the dark about all that, too.
I mean, it's surprising.
I wouldn't...
It just was...
This is going to sound really weird, but it wasn't...
It was just safe.
Friends with benefits.
It's kind of surprising that she had more feelings than that
than what I'm aware of.
Talking to Alan, it felt like he was looking back
at this period of his life through the eyes of an adult,
maybe for the first time,
that he was considering how young they both were,
how immature he was back then,
that he was realizing how much growing up he got to do,
that Shelly didn't.
The sad part about it is,
a so shallow mind in self-centered...
That only thing I was really thinking about is,
I mean, I had to...
It was game day,
so I borrowed a friend's car

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to go to the funeral,
and I was just thinking about it, just got it, you know.
I hope this doesn't last long.
Sat in the back,
if I remember correctly, it was pretty crowded
in the little church, it had like an A-frame.
I didn't realize
how our dad must have been feeling,
how our brothers were feeling.
It didn't really like...
I didn't think like that then,
because I was thinking about not being late for the game,
because I knew how my coach was.
If I was late, I wouldn't have played,
so I was thinking more like that.
I was kind of disappointed
that that's what I was thinking,
but that's just the truth.
That's about all that I remember.
It was just like...
I was only thinking about me.

...

When Fred's defense attorney handed me the case file,
he had mentioned that the police response
to Shelley's murder was sexist and racist.
I heard that in the interviews
and I saw it in the paths the detectives went down in their investigation.
They didn't stop with Alan Griffin, someone they knew Shelley had a relationship with.
Instead, they went after a lot of the black players on the University of Wyoming football team.
So, explain to me, did you know Shelley at all?
Not at all.
Had you ever even met her?
Might have seen her.
But I mean, didn't know her from what kind of thing.
Eric Porter was also on the team.
Played both ways, linebacker and running back.
Some safety thrown in there too.
He came to Wyoming from San Diego and remembers the culture shock of arriving.
The fights with the largely white wrestling team.
The bar he remembers locals banning the football team from.
Eric says he held out on giving his blood and fingerprints to the police for a while.
He still remembers how they sprung into action shortly after Shelley's murder.
What do you remember about being called in and about them actually getting you into the police station?

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When I finally came back to Wyoming and submitted to it, the cocky-ass attitude and they were finally got me to do it.
It was like we finally got this knif.
That was their attitude.
That was their attitude.
And I hated that I had to submit to get peace.
They just wouldn't leave me alone.
And my mom finally said, hey, they're not going to stop.
You didn't do nothing.
So just give them just give them something there.
And then maybe they made the deal with my mom.
And I'm like, mom, if they don't stop, I need you to give me a turn.
And my sister worked for the phone company and she promised that they didn't stop.
She would hire her turn.
This is still got me emotional right now.
During the first week of the investigation, the University of Wyoming football team theory didn't go much of anywhere.
But it's clear from the case file that the police were simultaneously pursuing another lead.
What kind of party were we having there?
The party with all this dancing and quartering was happening at a ramshackle house about three blocks from Shelly's apartment on the night she was killed.
The crowd of about 15 was mostly current and former Laramie High and junior high students.
Shelly wasn't there.
She was at home drinking tea with a friend.
But the party seemed to peak the cops interest.
Police already knew some of the party goers.
Young Hispanic men who had lots of run-ins with the cops already.
Some of the usual suspects in town.
Both the party and Shelly's apartment were on the west side of Laramie, which was less a census designated place than it was literally the wrong side of the tracks.
The railroad divided it from Laramie proper.
The west side had a few fancy homes, but for the most part it was poorer.
It's where you'd find auto repair yards, tire shops, and mobile homes.
A lot of the Hispanic population of Laramie lived there too, including one attendee of the party, Vaughn Neubauer's favorite alternate suspect, Larry Montes.
As Vaughn told me, Larry had stolen a car during the party and then he'd gotten missing for a few hours,
right in the window of time when Shelly was killed.
I was assigned that right there.
You are represented by your attorney, Cal LaRuca,
and we've already discussed the fact that we are not interested in the unauthorized use of a vehicle.
Okay, that's all we're concerned about is this homicide.
Vaughn had told me that Larry had gone to Rock River

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because of some girly at a crush on.

That wasn't quite right.

Larry was actually visiting his ex-girlfriend, Summer Stevenson, who lived just outside of Laramie about a half hour away from Rock River.

He was right about Larry's alibi though, and how bizarre it was.

Larry said that after he stole the car, he grabbed a hot dog and a slurpee from a convenience store. From there, he drove to Summer's house, where he slipped into her room and found her asleep.

So I just sat around and just watched her and drank my slurpee.

And then I got up, because I started seeing daylight.

And I said, I'll get his car back.

I had him in about four, four-thirty between her and I left.

By the time they brought him in, the police had heard a bunch of suspicious things about Larry from that night, that he had cuts on his face, that his glasses were missing, that he was wearing a different coat than he'd worn at the party, that he was acting strange.

This was important. I want you to think about it before you answer it.

When you went back to the house to the party, by what time was that?

It had been about five, five-fifteen.

Okay. It took me a while to get out there.

All right. You know the girl that was killed?

Not really.

All right. Have you ever been over to that apartment there?

I don't know where it is.

You don't know what the apartment said?

So in other words, if I were to check fingerprints, I should find your fingerprints with you.

In the house?

Yeah. No. Okay.

Did you ever hear anyone say that you did it?

No. Did you know what people have been saying that you did it?

Is there any reason why people would think that you did it?

Yeah, because I have a record.

You have a record?

Yeah. Any other reason?

No. I'm not that kind of dude.

You tell me why I'm talking to you.

Your police officer, why am I talking to Larry Montes?

Well, because he was around and was seeing him crying.

Yeah. What else?

And he's missing for two to three, four hours.

We don't know where he's at, which is about the time the guy got killed.

You know, when I would be talking to all these people here in the last few days,

I'm concerned that we've learned stuff like you've been getting into other people's homes that we didn't know about.

Don't excite me because we're being pretty open here.

I mean, the people that have talked to me have identified you as being that person.

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I mean, there's no doubt in the mind that they knew who it was, and they didn't talk to you or confronted you or by it. I'm just trying to tell you like it is. That's all. And I know that you and your friends on the west side are very tight. You're a very select group of people. You don't think so? Well, then us white folks think that you are, okay? Okay. Well, we just think that you're just your own little group. Like you got the cowboys or the Mexicans or whatever else the metal has, whatever they call them, not that familiar with all the groups that we've got. But all that peer pressure that's there has a bad effect on kids. You got kids that are drinking, doing drugs, having sex with girls and stuff like that when they're really, really young, and all sorts of problems. Breaking in the home, stealing shit, the joblifting, all that stuff that goes in there. This homicide that took place, it's got a lot of people in this community scared. A lot of people that didn't even know this guy. A lot of people who live in, a lot of people who live in there are saying, yeah, you know, I came to Larry because I didn't want to live in Chicago or Denver where this happens all the time. They're here because they figured this was a nice quiet town. And now they're thinking, we've got some damn demon out here. He's killing burner people, stabbing them, beating them, and doing all this sort of shit. So it's just, it's no fun for me or anybody else. I'll get off my soapbox. We need to get this other stuff down. Police looked at Larry Montez for a few more days. They confirmed that Larry had been in a fight a week before, possibly explaining his bruises. They talked to Summer Stevenson, his ex, and when asked whether she knew Larry, said simply, unfortunately. Summer didn't really remember Larry stopping by to watch her sleep, but Larry had engaged in such stalkery before. And Summer's sister did find a big gulp cup on the dresser, with eye still inside. The police seemed to rule Larry out after giving him a polygraph. He was one of four men who took a lie detector test in the first month of the investigation. Police said Larry's results couldn't be scored as conclusively truthful, but quote, there is no strong indication that would tend to show deception. Given the fact that polygraphs generally aren't allowed as evidence in court, I didn't make much of those results. Other results seem more clear cut to me. It's not just that this investigation seemed to corral the relatively few people of color in town into its dragnet. It's that it seemed to linger there, burrowing in deeper than even the most charitable reading of the evidence called for. I did a tally.

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Of the 39 men who initially gave fingerprints or blood samples,
25 of them were black or Hispanic, more than half.
In a town where nine out of 10 people were white.
Contrary to the description of Shelly's family and friends,
and even detective Robert Terry, the police did give Fred a second look.
Ten days after the murder, someone from the state lab told police that Fred's story
of how his blood got on the door of apartment number three,
that he knocked on the door a few days before the murder and broke open a scab.
It didn't match the spatter pattern.
Detectives called Fred back in after he got back from his trip to Arkansas.
But without much urgency, they took a blood sample and fingerprints,
but never looked in his actual home for evidence.
It took them almost two months to look inside apartment number three,
where he was stained the night of Shelly's murder.
Fred did agree to take a polygraph,
showing that the police seemed to be treating him as a suspect, but that was pretty much the end of
it.
And what I can only interpret is a sign of how little they regarded him seriously.
The results from that polygraph never even made it into the case file.
With their initial leads fizzling, the police started going broad.
Over the next year and a half, they surveyed all the barber and beauty shops in town,
checking if anyone had come in with burns or singed hair.
They followed up on tips from the crime stopper's phone line and pursued leads.
Police interviewed a guy who talked to Shelly once in an aerobics class,
another man who Shelly had dated in high school,
who had started a few fires and lived two hours away.
They called in a man who'd come onto their radar because of a recent arrest
for practicing as a ninja in public.
They looked for men with nicknames, the spook, described as a shady guy with a pale complexion
and sandy hair, who haunted the library, and the guardian, a regular customer at Shelly's
restaurant, who supposedly looked out for her.
All that effort didn't produce anything resembling a bona fide lead.
Police were more or less spinning in circles until almost two years after the murder,
when they finally got a break.
A call from a detective in Flagstaff, Arizona, who relayed a message.
Someone had confessed to killing Shelly Wiley.