

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

Just a heads up, the following episode has brief mentions of suicide.

Please take care when listening.

If you're having suicidal thoughts or need someone to talk to, please call the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by dialing 988.

Previously, on the coldest case in Laramie.

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?

I just knew that they weren't looking in the right direction and they didn't have a fucking clue who did that because if they're sitting there doing all of this to us, they didn't know what they were doing.

They had no idea.

What kind of party were we having there?

We were just dancing around.

I do believe they were playing quarters when I first got there.

What's quarters?

No.

It was Shelly Promiscus.

And did she like sex out of guys?

No, we're looking for a moody.

Right after they said it was a crime scene, he literally saw half of Laramie police fanning up to the dorms.

They had football programs in their hand looking for guys.

They were just smashing up wherever we were.

I knew Jake Weidman before he confessed to killing Shelly.

Back when I was 15 years old, his locker was next to mine at Laramie High.

I remember him as a beanpole of a kid who sometimes buttoned his polo shirts up to the top button.

Quiet, gentle, smart, a great basketball player.

He was so trusted and so well thought of that he had been picked by classmates as a peer counselor, a keeper of other secrets.

He was also black, one of the few kids in school.

By Laramie standards, he had a famous father.

Author John Edgar Weidman taught at the university.

He was best known for writing a memoir about his brother, who had been convicted of murder.

All of us had watched Jake's dad talk about that on 60 Minutes.

But honestly, the thing that stuck with me most about Jake was how he used to stuff his uneaten lunches into his locker.

It smelled up the entire hallway.

I remember telling the principal on him.

In the summer of 1986, the year after Shelley was murdered, Jake did something horrific that landed him in jail in Flagstaff, Arizona.

That August, during a traveling summer camp trip for teenagers, he woke up in the middle

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

of the night, grabbed a hunting knife he had bought at a souvenir shop in Yellowstone National Park and stabbed his sleeping roommate, Eric Cain, twice in the chest.

Jake then fled.

After a nationwide manhunt, Jake eventually turned himself in and confessed.

He said the murder was neither premeditated nor provoked.

He only explained the stabbing as a, quote, results of a buildup of a lot of different emotions.

In other words, Jake had articulated no motive, no reason, which made the murder particularly chilling.

Jake had been in jail for a year, awaiting trial in Arizona for killing Eric when he asked to talk to the same local detective he had first confessed to.

This is going to be a tape interview with Jake White when taking place at the County Jail.

The date is May 20, 1987, time is 22, 31 hours.

Jake, I just received word from a lawyer tonight that you're one of the talks about the murder and the family why only is that true?

Jake asked to speak to the detective because he wanted to confess to killing a second person. Shelly Wiley.

Jake's story was that he'd been in an affair with Shelly.

He said she was about to reveal this to her boyfriend, Alan Griffin.

Scared about how that would play out, Jake said he went to her apartment.

When he got there, he got into an argument with Shelly.

And then he stabbed her three times.

He said he then left and walked home, leaving a decoy knife at the scene, throwing the real murder weapon into a dumpster.

Jake said he knew what the detective was referring to, the fire that was set in Shelly's apartment. That part, he said, wasn't him.

Jake got almost everything in his confession wrong.

He mentioned a fireplace that wasn't in Shelly's apartment.

He said the violence took place entirely inside.

Throughout this first interview, it seemed like Jake didn't even really know where Shelly lived.

The whole thing, the decoy knife, the affair when he was a gawky 15-year-old with a significantly older Shelly, it just didn't really add up.

It seemed to trouble the detective and Flagstaff too.

Flagstaff that he asked Jake why he was telling him this, whether he would ever admit to a crime he didn't commit.

Would you let me objection to talking to the detective and Larry Wyman that has investigated this case and has more facts than he can deny it?

No, I wouldn't.

So if I arranged a telephone call for you to talk to him, would you want him to do that?

Yeah, I'm wondering if he's there right now.

Sure, we just give me a 10 count.

I'm trying to get a reporter going and I don't think it's working too well.

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

Ready?

Uh-huh.

Can't see.

Jake then talked to Lieutenant Gary Poles, who was still in charge of the investigation in Laramie.

Yes, Jacob?

Yeah.

My name is Gary Fras.

I'm Lieutenant with the Laramie Army Police Department.

Okay.

How are you tonight?

Pretty good.

Okay.

Jake repeated his story to Lieutenant Poles with the same inaccuracies, the same hard to believe details.

In Poles' voice, I could hear skepticism of Jake's story.

Poles told Jake that he needed to do more investigating to figure out whether Jake was telling the truth and whether charges would be filed.

But that didn't happen.

Hours after Poles heard Jake's paper-thin story, Poles charged Jake with Shelley's murder.

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.

Jake is part of a collection of newsletters just for our Time subscribers.

Sign up for watching and browse all of our newsletters at [mytimes.com slash subscriber newsletters](https://mytimes.com/subscriber-newsletters).

Jake Wideman's confession in 1987 didn't actually go anywhere.

He never got as far as entering a plea.

Evidence contradicted his confession.

But the charges against him hung on the books for more than three years.

During that whole time, the file basically stalled out.

Nobody did much work on the Shelley Wiley case.

I had heard the outlines of all of this before.

I knew about Jake's confession and that nothing ever happened with the charges.

But the why of it had always bugged me.

So I reached out to Jake.

This call will be recorded and subject to monitoring at any time.

Thank you for using IC Solutions.

Thirty-five years on, he is still in an Arizona prison for killing his former roommate, Eric Cain.

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

You may begin speaking now.

Hey.

Hi.

How are you?

Good.

Good.

Good.

So I wanted to start by, you know, taking you back to where you were at the time, you know, where you were in Laramie.

Did you know Shelley at all or did you know of her?

I couldn't.

You know, I just have heard rumors when the crime occurred was the first time I actually remember hearing her name.

And people in the high school were talking about the case and talking about the fact that she had been killed.

And that was my first encounter with her name.

I mean, it's just, to be quite honest, Kim, it's a really, really difficult and painful thing to look back on and to get back in touch with.

And, you know, I was trying to do that this morning in anticipation of our call, just kind of put myself back in that time, and I was still dealing with the mental illness and the neurological disorder that I'd had since I was a kid.

The, of course, the crime that I committed in Arizona had exacerbated everything, but there was also a lot of shame and a lot of guilt, both from knowing what I had done, that I'd taken the life of Eric Cain and also from things that had happened many, many years before.

And by that time in 1987, a little over a year after I'd been jailed, I think I had attempted suicide.

I know I'd attempted multiple times, and I was just overwhelmingly self-destructive, and I was looking for a way out to take my life.

And at that time, after the first couple of suicide attempts, they had put me in a cell in the jail, which was right down in the booking area, and had a great big window where they could easily look in on me.

So it was almost like a permanent kind of suicide watch.

So I knew that there was no way I could get away with actually killing myself, and so I thought about, you know, what I could do, and I remembered the showy Wiley crime.

I figured that to that point that they probably hadn't found a suspect yet, because they didn't find one in the immediate aftermath.

And so I figured that the fact that I had committed this crime in Arizona would make me a credible suspect, and I figured confessing to this crime in Wyoming would be the cherry on top of the cake that would almost guarantee that I would get the death penalty either in Wyoming or in Arizona if I was then guilty of two murders.

And that was going to be my way out, so it was essentially a suicide attempt by proxy.

And so I had convinced myself that this was the only way.

There was this weird nervousness that I wouldn't be believed.

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

And so when I was thinking about what story to tell, I kind of tried to make it as detailed as possible, and as I could sense that maybe I had gotten some things wrong just by kind of a skeptical tone of voice on the part of Detective Poles, I got more and more anxious and more and more desperate to kind of convince him, no, no, this was me.

And just feeling deflated, which may sound like a strange thing to feel at that time, but thinking to myself, this isn't working.

He's not believing me.

He's trying to believe me.

He needs a suspect.

I think part of him wanted this to be true because they needed to close the case, but there was just not the credibility there that he needed to believe me.

And afterwards, after the interview, when I'm back in my cell, thinking about it and reflecting on it, I literally started to cry, and I fell into this kind of temporary black hole where I thought, how am I going to escape myself?

So, he leaves, and you think I have failed, right?

When do you find out that he's actually, you know, bought what you're selling?

Not until, I know it was my attorneys who told me that I had actually been charged, and I was like, okay, whatever he may not have believed, he believed me enough to charge me.

I mean, I was immediately excited, and I had every intention of, as soon as they took me up to Wyoming for arraignment, I was going to plead guilty right then and there, and not even allow any space for, you know, a longer investigation, which might uncover the fact that I didn't do it, or, you know, any kind of a trial or any kind of an evidentiary hearing.

I was going to, of course, stall that by immediately pleading guilty, and that, of course, never happened.

I got taken to Wyoming, never got arraigned, but that was my intention.

I feel awful about what I pushed Ellie's family through, and I never took the time or the opportunity to apologize to them, and for a while, I was told not to by my lawyers and my family for legal reasons, but that's not an excuse.

I felt at different times a desire to reach out to them and apologize, and I never did, and that was purely selfish, and I just, I feel terrible about what I put them through both for those three-plus years, but also in the years since by not giving them at least the clarity of having a letter from me apologizing and explaining why I did what I did. Over a year of conversations, Jake Weidman told me a lot about his angst and alienation in high school, about his guilt over killing Eric Cain.

Court records told me more.

Assorted psychologists and psychiatrists had diagnosed Jake with a variety of conditions, schizotypal personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, atypical conduct disorder, and eventually temporal lobe syndrome.

There's no consensus.

Regardless, Jake was found competent to stand trial as an adult in the murder of Eric Cain. After initially wanting to die, Jake decided to live.

To avoid the death penalty, he agreed to a plea deal of life in prison with the possibility

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

of parole after 25 years, but as Jake became eligible for parole, Shelley's murder and the doubt around it hung over his hearings.

Even though the state of Wyoming said Jake was no longer a viable suspect in Shelley's murder and dropped the charges, the case had never been solved, so therefore, maybe he did do it.

That was the insinuation anyway.

In 2016, Jake had his seventh parole hearing.

He was released on house arrest with an ankle bracelet.

One of the conditions for his release was meeting with a specific psychologist.

Although Jake traded emails and left voicemail messages for the therapist, the two didn't meet.

So nine months after being released, Jake was arrested for failing to make that appointment.

He's been back in prison ever since.

Jake has had a lot of time to process what he's done and the effect it's had on other people.

He was forthcoming about it in our conversations, even when I could tell it was hard for him.

But in all of our talks, there was one place Jake just wouldn't go.

The only thing I really don't want to talk about and, you know, that I would hope you'd avoid asking me about is the whole Angelo situation.

The whole Angelo situation.

When Jake made his false confession in 1987, he wasn't just implicating himself.

Jake's initial strategy was claiming responsibility for killing Shelley, while professing ignorance about who set the fire afterward.

That didn't work for Lieutenant Poles.

Poles wanted a name.

So after some prodding, Jake gave him one, Angelo Garcia.

Jake said that Angelo was responsible for the fire, a co-conspirator in Shelley's murder.

The one thing Jake would tell me about this is that he didn't know Angelo.

He just heard his name around town as a bad kid.

Poles knew Angelo well for a lot of the same reasons.

Angelo was interviewed by the police before in the first week of the investigation.

He was a usual suspect in town, and he hung around with Larry Montez.

He was actually at that party, the one where Larry stole their friend Eddie's car and disappeared.

In that first recorded interview, Angelo had an alibi.

He sounded cooperative, talking about how Larry had gone missing.

But two years later, within hours of Jake's confession, and with no other evidence, Poles brought Angelo in again.

What I desire to do, Angelo, is question you in regard to the homicide of Shelley Wiley.

And before I ask you any questions, this is a criminal matter.

I'm going to advise you of your constitutional rights, okay?

Who in the fuck is Jacob?

Well, we're hoping that you can help us with that a little bit, okay?

Who's Jacob?

I don't know Jacob.

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

I'm fucking pissed off.

Okay, just keep cool.

You know?

I don't have any fucking terms right now.

This is a very serious charge.

Do we realize that?

No shit.

And I don't want to be fucking blamed for the fucking shit.

Okay.

Let's talk about it.

Are you willing to talk with me?

I'm not going to fucking jail for it because I didn't do the fucking shit, all right?

You ain't under fucking spamming, too.

I'm trying to.

But I'm not going to get back at you.

Let me give you a thing to say.

I hope you do.

If I'm having a night in fucking doom.

Well, don't understand me wrong.

You're under arrest at this time.

I don't understand you, man.

Okay.

All right.

Okay.

Angela, are you acquainted with Shelly Wiley?

I never even knew the chick.

You never knew her?

Besides, besides the woman, Laurie, her sister.

What was your relationship with her?

I knew that.

Laurie and her were sisters, but fuck, I never even spoke to the chick or not.

As far as much as Jacob, where the fuck Jacob is, I don't even know who the fucking talent is, either.

Laurie Weidman was a resident of Laramie.

He's what we call a mulatto.

He's a kind of a half-white black kid that is currently in Arizona right now.

He says, you torched the place, Angela.

You were with him.

Well, that's true.

If that wasn't true, why would he be saying that?

I don't know, man.

You don't even know him.

He says he knows you.

I talked to him at midnight this morning and interviewed the man for two and a half hours,

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

and he says you were with him.

Did you ever go to Sheikies?

You know where Sheikies used to be?

Yeah.

Well, the building is still there, but it's a, what, the prairie scooter?

Jacob Weidman told me that you picked him up there that night at approximately 10.30 p.m.

He flittered advised me that you made a rain mist with him at the park at about 11 a.m. that day to do that, to pick him up.

This dude's fucking crazy.

I don't know where he's coming with the information, Angela, but that's exactly what he told me.

I think, you know, you realize that I'm being up front with you, and I'm telling you exactly what the information is that we know.

Hey, I ain't got enough time, man.

I gave you all the information I had, and I'm trying to straighten out my shit here, and you guys don't want me to try to...

Yeah, we're not trying to do anything to you.

We're just trying to get to the facts, okay?

And right now, we've got information that this person is telling us that you're involved in the murder and the fire that killed Shelley Riley.

That's a capital offense.

You don't realize it.

It's a death penalty offense.

No, sir.

That is exactly right.

Now, they haven't executed anybody in the state of Wyoming for many years, but there's people on death row awaiting execution.

What happens if, like, say, if somebody's innocent, and they put them away for so many years, and they come back out and get evidence and shit, or what could happen?

If I have information pertaining to that, I don't want to put an innocent person in jail.

That's right.

I have a duty to do that, you know, to protect you as well as anybody else.

I ain't going to jail just because some chump says it was me.

Well, that's exactly what has been said, Angelo.

Do you know who killed Shelley Riley?

I sure don't.

If I knew it, I'd probably tell you right now.

Well, I said, I told you, we've had lots of sources come in and tell us that you're responsible for killing Shelley Riley.

Is there any truth to that?

It's completely false, but I did not touch the chick.

I didn't even know the chick.

Why should I kill the chick?

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

I may be crazy, but I'm not insane.

Yeah.

I'm not saying you're right.

My idea is going to make me go insane, so I'm serious.

What can you help us out about?

Why would this Jacob Wyman be telling us, telling me specifically that you set that house on fire?

I don't know, sir.

If I knew, if I knew why this guy's trying to set me up, I'd probably tie you, but I don't know why.

Okay.

I'll terminate the interview at 4.05 p.m.

After Lieutenant Poles interrogated him, Angelo was actually briefly charged with arson and murder.

I didn't know Angelo Garcia back when I lived in Laramie, but I knew of him.

He was a few years older than me, but had dropped out of school in junior high.

Angelo was known mostly for smoking weed, getting in fights, throwing parties, and dating younger girls.

He had a hair-triggered temper and a long-running beef with law enforcement.

One example, after police brought him into jail in a minor violation a few months before this interview, Angelo had slammed his head against the wall, breaking the sheetrock.

Rather than get him help, authorities charged him with a crime, destroying property.

Angelo met me at a basement Airbnb in Laramie.

He was short and wiry, with a graying flat top and a goatee.

He dressed casual, jeans and a black sweatshirt with white prayer hands on it.

He seemed guarded at first, but open to talking.

I introduced him to my dog Lucy.

She was clearly excited to see him.

From the police files, I knew Angelo had nothing to do with Shelley's murder.

He was alibi'd from the very start, but he was arrested anyway.

His name splashed all over the front page of the local paper.

In a case where there had been three arrests made in 37 years, Angelo stood out to me as the most arbitrary, the most avoidable.

So what is this like being accused of this thing that you have no idea what they're talking about?

What is this like for you?

I mean, at first, I mean, it's like, whatever, I'll go down, you know, you need to question me, no problem.

But you know, when they started telling me all this stuff that we're going to do the death penalty, this and that, you start saying, whoa, I mean, I didn't do this, you know.

I never had nothing to do with it.

I wasn't there, nothing, you know.

So.

Do you remember where you were that night?

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

Oh yeah.

We were drinking, playing quarters, I was a little drunk and I fell asleep and they woke me up.

I said, Larry stole the lady's car, we need to go look for him.

So we went driving around looking for Larry, couldn't find him anywhere.

Get back to the house that we're partying at and Larry was hiding my uncle's car.

Why he was hiding, I don't know, because, you know, he brought the car back.

Why he had a change of clothes, I don't know.

Why he didn't have any glasses on, I don't know.

So, you know, that always made me think what's going on.

But I don't know.

He had something to do with this.

I don't know.

You know, it'll be like me accusing him like they did to me.

But I always thought that, I don't know.

I looked back then, I looked for answers, I couldn't find any, you know, I lived with Montez for a while because I didn't know where to be.

You know, he was always my friend, but I, you know, it's, I can't accuse somebody because I know the hurt that it, it does to you, you know.

Do you ever remember even meeting Jake Weidman?

I don't even, I don't even think I met him, I don't even think I know this kid, you know what I mean?

It's like, who is he?

I don't even know.

So, I know, you know, I, his brother was in my grade and I knew him when he played basketball, but I don't even remember which one was which, so, you know, I just don't know the kid.

Why do you think he would have named you like this?

I have no idea.

I have no idea.

No.

Did he even do it?

No.

I don't know.

I know.

No, I mean, like, he's been very much ruled out and he himself has said that, like, he was lying and he just was saying this because he wanted to die, you know, because he'd already been arrested on this murder charge in Arizona because he had killed a kid down there.

He definitely did that and that, like, he just sort of made this decision to confess to this case and, you know, I can't seem to get an answer out of him because I'm talking to him about, like, why did you finger this guy?

What he said was that he just had heard your name around as being, like, a bad kid, you know?

You know, I was a good fighter back in the day, you know, and, you know, that's just the way we grew up on the West Side, everybody who always wanted to see who was the baddest

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

and whatever.

And so I was a good fighter.

So what?

You know?

What's that got to do with anything?

You know?

Do you remember when you found out about the guy being arrested, like, five years ago?

Oh, man, my cousin Rita, she sent me a message on my phone and she goes, uh, look at let me know, okay, what is she talking about?

So I look on there and, you know, they had lamb, whatever, you know, okay.

So I started crying.

It was so much happiness.

They finally caught him.

That was, that was the happiest day of my life.

I told my family, well, you know what, it was one of their own, you know, one of their own, and just, it just made me so happy that they finally caught somebody, you know.

I called my mom up right away.

They caught, they caught the murderer, mom.

What did she say?

She didn't know what to say.

Do you think she had believed you did it before?

Probably.

I don't know.

She never talked to you.

You never talked to her about that.

She knows you're upset and needs to give you some comfort.

That's good.

Not many, many people know how to do that.

Two days after Angela was charged with murder and arson, Jake talked to Lieutenant Poles again.

After learning about the charges against Angelo, Jake told Poles that Angelo wasn't involved.

It took another couple of days for the charges against Angelo to be dropped.

He spent the whole time in jail.

For a few years after, Angelo had a rough go of it.

He piled up more criminal charges, never quite got his feet on the ground, did work-a-day jobs in construction or restaurants mostly.

But eventually he got his life together, got married, had eight kids, found God.

After the charges were eventually dropped against Jake, the investigation into who killed Shelley Wiley was back at square one.

By this point, Poles was leaving the case behind him.

He had just been elected sheriff.

Pole for Poles was his campaign slogan.

The case passed to another detective in 1991.

I started reading through everything that the new detective did next.

## [Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 5

I could see that he pursued various theories over the next dozen or so years.

He looked at Jake again.

He looked particularly hard at the long-haul trucker who'd confessed to 70 rapes, and then a man who had killed and raped a co-worker's roommate in a town about 300 miles from Laramie.

No theory panned out.

Looking through the case file, it seemed like the new detective wasn't dedicating much time to the case.

He wasn't doing fresh interviews.

He didn't appear to be revisiting what the police may have missed.

The investigation started to resemble more of a training exercise than an open case.

A couple of boxes of files handed over to a succession of new detectives with a shrug.

Sure, give it a spin.

Everyone else has.

It took almost 30 years for another arrest to be made in the case.

For another new detective to take a closer look at the file and see something the others hadn't.

Almost 30 years to arrive back at the crime scene and reconsider the question.

What about Fred Lam?