

[Transcript] The Coldest Case In Laramie / Episode 6

Previously, on the coldest case in Laramie.

Those dragon marks got pretty close to Dave's place, and it was a little bit of just real tiny splatter, like on the door.

That's mine.

What?

Well, that's your blood?

That's my blood.

If it's on his door, it's my blood.

We know who did this.

We just have to prove it.

He didn't see it coming, and they confronted him with all these lies about what the physical evidence was, and after seven hours.

According to the documents, during a police interview, Lam initially denied the homicide allegation, but later said, quote, Fred Lam did it, dot, dot, dot.

I'm not denying that I did it, quote, bottom line is, I killed a girl.

Wow.

I would say I am 99.9% sure Fred Lam murdered Shelley.

For decades, Shelley Wiley's case seemed to go very cold.

There was nothing much in the case file that indicated it was a high priority, not until Robert Terry came along.

Shortly after Terry took over Shelley's case in 2009, he started bringing in people police hadn't talked to in decades, not as suspects necessarily, but people who might have known something.

One of those people was Fred Lam.

Fred came from a very influential family in Laramie.

His parents were as close to Laramie royalty as you could get.

His mother was a respected elementary school teacher.

His father taught at the university for decades, even ran the school's civil engineering department, served a term in the Wyoming State House.

But Fred chose another path.

Straight out of high school, Fred enlisted in the Navy and went to Vietnam, where he lost some of his hearing.

After coming home, Fred became a cop, then a sheriff's deputy.

Shortly before Shelley was killed, Fred quit law enforcement and joined the National Guard full-time.

By the time Terry became a detective, Fred was working maintenance at the jail.

Like a lot of the cops in Laramie, Terry knew Fred.

He'd heard some of the stories about him.

He'd heard that Fred had served in the military, that he was a former Navy SEAL.

He'd heard about Fred's brush with Laramie fame as the only survivor of a plane crash, when a rescue mission for missing skiers went down in 1979.

Fred suffered a crushed hip and a broken back.

The other two men on board both died.

Terry knew Fred as a good old boy's good old boy.

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They liked to tell jokes, shoot the shit, hunt and fish.

When Terry brought Fred in for their first interview in 2009, it was the first time Fred had been asked about Shelley's murder in 24 years.

They ran through Fred's story of that early morning in 1985 again.

It was a friendly conversation, a relatively brief one.

Terry was just at the beginning of his investigation.

There was a lot of file left to sift through.

But Fred brought up something curious, something that wasn't in the case file I had, and that Terry also didn't seem to know about before the interview.

Fred talked about the results of the polygraph he said he took back in 1985.

I took it for Gary Pulse, who was in your position.

He said I was too truthful for his polygraph.

Because the uniqueness of my military position, there were questions that he had to ask directly that I had been committed or involved in.

Have you ever killed anybody?

Well, I thought I was in the military, I'm a teenager.

And I answered him and I knew Gary, I was extremely comfortable with him.

The other person that was giving him at that time was Glenn Bennett, who worked for the Sheriff's Department.

I recognize his name.

But they figured that Gary should give it to me because I had been away from him for 10 to 12 years and had been working directly with Bennett for quite a while.

So they had Gary do it so that there wouldn't have been a conflict.

I hate to use that word.

If Terry was extra suspicious about this conversation, it didn't show up in the case file.

At the end of the interview, he took a swab from inside of Fred's cheek for DNA.

But he seemed more interested in other leads.

He didn't compare Fred's DNA with any samples from the scene.

In 2009, Terry worked this case more than any detective had worked it in decades.

But he worked it in his spare time and he didn't work it for long.

Months after interviewing Fred, Terry was promoted to sergeant.

A new detective took over the case.

His theory seemed to be that Shelley might have been killed because she was on the wrong side of a cocaine deal.

A diversion of one of the first rumors about Shelley.

For years, detectives also tried to match swabs taken from the crime scene with their favorite suspects DNA.

And for years, they came up empty.

Until 2015, five and a half years after Robert Terry first swabbed Fred's cheek, lab techs tested Fred's DNA against blood found on the door of apartment number three.

Finally, they got a match.

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

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Not long after he got the match for Fred, Robert Terry took back the case.

He ordered more tests and he made plans for his second and final interview with Fred on August 17, 2016.

This interview was crucial.

Terry's one shot.

He wanted a confession.

The meeting took place in a small interrogation room at the station.

Pretty nondescript save for a patterned wall hanging in a circular table.

Video captures all seven hours, two minutes and 29 seconds of it, beginning with the niceties.

You're obviously not under arrest.

You drove down here on your own, came down, but since I'm going to ask you some questions here at the police department, I'd like to value your rights more as a formality if you're okay with that.

Yeah.

Okay.

This is in 2009 too, so it's pretty, pretty much going.

Fred is 67 years old, bald with a pot belly, wearing a green shirt, jeans, and a khaki vest.

You wouldn't think twice if you saw him with a fishing pole in his hands.

He looks relaxed, leaning forward onto the table.

Terry is on the other side.

He looks younger than his 39 years, wears a blue dress shirt and a tie, like he's on the management track at a men's warehouse, except that he has a gun in his side holster and handcuffs tucked into the back of his slacks.

He's got a couple of binders and photos with him.

The case file.

So I thought we could just start with kind of like the basics.

I've got the story, I think, you know, what was going on, but maybe you can just tell me your own words, what was going on that day, you know, and I'm hoping that since we've talked before, you know, seven years ago now, you know, that, you know, I'm not lying to you, you know, as I'm talking to you.

Yeah.

Okay.

From the beginning, Terry makes a very particular choice.

He signals that he isn't talking to Fred as a witness to a crime or as a suspect.

He's talking to Fred as a former cop, a colleague of sorts.

And that's why we're here, you know, we got figured this out.

You were there.

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You're my best friend.

You're my ally in this.

Okay.

They went through the story again.

What Fred remembered from that early morning in 1985, what he did after he heard knocks on his door and someone shouting fire.

Terry was friendly, but probing.

He asked Fred about the layout of the apartment where he stayed that night, what he wore, and where he parked his truck.

Fred's version of events didn't change much from his previous interviews, except for one key detail.

In the past, Fred said that when he heard a woman's screams, he didn't react much at first.

In this interview, he said that after he heard knocks on the door and realized a fire was raging nearby, he hopped into his truck to go find a pay phone to call for help.

Only, by the time he got to the pay phone, he heard sirens, so he doubled back and parked a couple of blocks away from the apartment.

Oh, you parked on Monroe Street.

Where Terry Miners place this?

I'm sorry?

You parked on Monroe Street.

Terry seemed excited about this, suggested to Fred that he parked on Monroe Street.

This is important because Monroe Street happens to be where the bloody match book and footprints were found.

Fred initially agrees that, yes, that's right.

That's where he parked, before backing off, saying he isn't so sure.

No, I was parked over here, you get myself straight here.

Fred said he was getting muddled about the layout of the streets around the apartment.

He got turned around enough that he asked Terry for a city map.

Yeah, we can get you one of those.

Yeah, I am really, really confused.

Well, we don't want to confuse you, Fred, I want to clarify today.

Well, that's what I'm trying to get except my own mind.

Terry got him the map.

Fred turned it around for a bit, and Terry tried to get him to confirm that it was Monroe Street where he parked.

But Fred never really commits, blames his bad memory.

I should say that witnesses at the scene in 1985 mentioned Fred sticking around the apartment as police and firefighters arrived.

A couple of people even mentioned his truck being in the parking lot as the fire was going.

If he did move his truck early that morning and park it over on Monroe Street, it's a little unclear when he would have had the time to do it.

In any case, they go back and forth on this for a little while longer before Terry finally asked Fred about the blood on the door.

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Back in 1985, Fred told police that his blood got on the door when he knocked his bloody knuckle on it a few days before Shelley's murder.

Which even back then, the state lab guys said didn't make sense.

Now Terry actually had Fred stand up and re-enact the whole thing with a bottle of water and a prop door.

Okay, so you're on a porch.

Those spots come like this, right?

According to our picture, I think that would, is that about what you think?

I don't think so, I think the water's a little thinner than blood.

That's true.

It's probably going to run a little bit.

Dots.

Yeah, you do.

And then you've got the long streets and the Comet Trail.

I can't see where it land out, but the last one should have a Comet tail on it.

An hour and a half into the interview, Terry turned to what kind of shoes Fred was wearing.

Fred had told him he was dressed in his National Guard gear that morning, which included a pair of jump boots made with a waterproof material called Corfam.

So Terry started taking up pictures of the crime scene, flipping through ones taken just outside of Shelley's apartment, including one picture of a bloody boot print.

I know walking back and forth is probably evident that you had to walk through that scene at some point, whether it was dark or what.

Yeah.

So I'd have been focused on that, not paying attention to what the hell I could have walked on the road.

You're not going across gravel.

I mean, that's, we're not, we're not in the evidence safeguarding mode.

We're thinking fire, safety, life-saving, that's something criminal that happened.

So I'm not cognizant of even paying attention to what I'm doing.

And that's important.

I mean, that's.

With few exceptions, police officers are allowed to exaggerate and lie in interviews.

Murder Laramie detective who worked this case even falsely told a woman that her fingerprint had been found on the bloody matchbook.

So here, Terry didn't actually know what kind of boot prints are in the picture he's showing Fred.

From the file, it's clear that lab techs never matched the print with a specific type.

And they never got Fred's boots to compare them to, only snap photos of them.

The murder was in October in Laramie.

Hard to believe Fred was the only person wearing boots.

Does that look pretty familiar to you?

Oh yeah.

That's a heel.

That looks like a core family heel print.

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Looks like it to me.

Because about an hour later, Terry moved on to asking Fred about the fire.

I don't have too much experience in like arson stuff, but like the accelerant used in there, you know, we know that it was obviously highly flammable.

What would you have used?

I mean, to make something burn that hot that quick.

What would I have used?

In a panic mode or a plan mode?

Well, in this case, I mean, it's panic.

It's something that's probably done after the fact, obviously, not thinking too clearly.

The closest sort of gasoline I could find, usually a lawnmower gas can, or some gas can sit in out somewhere, would have been my guess.

At this point, Terry really only had one piece of solid evidence tying Fred to the scene of the crime.

He had confirmation that Fred's DNA matched the blood on the door of apartment number three, but nothing else.

His blood wasn't found inside of Shelley's apartment.

Yet Fred seemed to believe everything that Terry said, or even implied.

I mean, obviously we did a lot of blood typing back in the day.

So there was O and A. Those are the two contributors to the blood in this case.

A is you, O is her.

So that's how it's been kind of, I guess, broken down in there.

And so all the A's we tried to then get the DNA on, you know, to eliminate and or include you.

Yeah, no, not to.

So that's kind of how we went about it.

Just to be kind of upfront with you, every swab we've tested.

They pretty much took about as many swabs as I would today.

I might have taken a few more, but pretty much anywhere there was blood, they swabbed it to reference sample.

They swabbed that door.

So they got all those blood samples off the door, pillowcase, check for any biologicals on that, swabs from the wall, ran all that stuff.

So we're pretty much done with that.

There were about five swabs that had a typing on it, type A, which was you.

Yeah.

Any reason why that would happen?

I mean, she's O. This is blood evidence, not.

I don't know.

I honestly don't know.

So as you'd guess, most of them swabs are Shelly's.

She was the main bleeder.

She was injured naturally, severely.

So she's the main bleeder at all.

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The ones that weren't hers, the door, for example, that wasn't hers.

The vase and some other swabs weren't hers.

We've been talking thread for two and a half hours, and I'm not real sure if your memory is better today or if your memory was better then.

And there's certain things I wouldn't expect you to remember in my new details.

So I think you're telling me the truth on the blood's on the door, and I think that blood belongs to who we're looking for, Fred.

What do you think?

I mean, because it's on the door, it's fresh, it's in the proximity of the crime scene, and it's not the victims.

So I'm thinking that, and I'm getting that result, but when I told you today we're going to solve this, and I mean that, we're going to solve it.

I hope so.

We are, Fred.

There's two important dates in this case, October 20, 1985, and August 17, 2016, today.

So first important dates when it happened, second important day is the day that we figured out who did it, and so I want to talk to you about that.

I need to talk to you about, you know, why this happened, why you were there.

I want to hear the story.

I don't care how bad it looks, how bad it sounds, Fred, your blood, your blood's at the crime scene, sir.

There ain't no goddamn way that I did it.

How the blood there got on the door.

I honestly can't answer that, but I don't kill people.

There is no way in God's green earth that I fucking did this.

Fred, I'm not saying you kill people, I'm saying you did this one event, this is the end.

No, absolutely not.

It is impossible.

It's not impossible.

I was at the club, I had a few beers, I went to Dave's house, I laid down on the couch,

I heard noise outside, I opened the door, I looked out, there was nothing there.

I will admit that I had been drinking, but no, no, absolutely fucking not.

I know you're telling me that, but the evidence doesn't match that, okay?

I'm not here because I'm guessing.

Absolutely impossible.

It's not impossible.

I told you the goal today is for the closure, alright?

I didn't do it, there's nothing to close, I'm not the person.

Your boot prints are in the blood.

Your boot prints are in the blood.

That is correct.

I walked down there, I admit that.

I showed you the pictures.

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I showed you, your boot prints are in the blood, you said, yep, that's mine.
That would be 100% a Corphan boot.
What I didn't tell you, Fred, is there's blood on top of that boot mark.
When you get blood on top of that boot mark, that tells us a lot of stuff.
That tells us that you walked in the blood.
Later on, blood was transposed on top of that heel impression.
That's exactly what happened.
The blood in that heel impression comes back to Shelly Warren.
And I was the only one wearing Corphan?
At the time of this murder, at this scene, yeah.
That's what you told me.
I did walk down there, I did look at it, I didn't pay any attention to the blood.
I went around the corner in the back.
I know.
I didn't do it.
All stuff you didn't mention in 1985.
I didn't do it.
All stuff you did not mention in 1985.
I didn't do it.
I understand you're saying that.
I didn't do it.
I get it.
You know, in 1985, you gave a pretty detailed statement on how blood would end up in the
crime scene shot that they find it.
The blood spattered expert that looked at the door blood also agrees.
Your story that you gave in 1985 about how the blood got there?
Absolutely impossible.
A farce.
A lie.
It didn't happen that way.
Unfortunately, the officers in 1985 believed you.
They believed you because they were friends with you.
No, I didn't do it.
You cannot make something happen that didn't happen.
Chris, you can't convince me you didn't do it.
Because I'm-
I'm finding that out.
I mean that's rather obvious.
I'm objective.
I can only go off what the evidence shows, unlike you.
That's what I'm not lying on.
I understand.
I'm not lying upon the evidence.
I understand.

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The evidence does not lie.

No.

The evidence points directly to you.

That is what it is.

I didn't do it.

You were in her apartment.

You were in her bedroom.

I was.

Absolutely.

No.

Absolutely not.

Fred, we got blood in the bedroom too.

Blood on the carpet in the bedroom.

Who's got a little fucking house, dude?

No.

Ever, ever.

Yeah.

I'm sorry, that is a lie.

No.

Fred, you're lying to me.

No.

You were just straight lying.

That- there's her blood, again, on her carpet next to her bed, and a bloody water bed, by the way.

Fred, this started in the bedroom.

No.

Where did it start then?

It didn't.

I did not do it.

I wasn't there.

You were in her apartment.

You were fucking three asleep.

Maybe for a while, but you weren't asleep the whole time.

Well, then I woke me up when I heard voices.

But beyond that, I was in that apartment, zonked out, out cold.

I didn't do it.

I have absolutely, emphatically no memory of doing something that heinous, if I did, have a memory of it, it would bug me to death.

I have no memory of it.

If I did do it and I did not do it, I know, and that is common, and I'm with you on that.

For a while in this interview between Detective Terry and Fred Lam, the main theme was Terry accusing Fred denying, almost on a loop.

But now, almost four hours in, there was a little crack.

It's subtle, but it's there.

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Fred had gone from saying, I didn't do it, to, I don't remember doing it.
This isn't just going to end, because even if I die, if I drop this case and I go get hit by a car or die.
Don't do that.
There's going to be another detective that's going to pick this up.
That's the way it works nowadays, Fred.
No, I understand.
Everybody, Fred, knows what happened.
It's just time to hear it from you.
I don't have anything.
I don't.
If I did do it, I don't remember.
Fine, fine.
I can live with that.
I live with that.
You don't remember.
I live with that.
I can go to bed tonight, at least knowing that you are making progress.
You're making progress.
I don't know where we go from here.
I don't know what the, if there is a defense mechanism, how to turn that the fuck off.
I have not a clue.
Maybe I'm fucking screwy as people think I am.
I don't know.
Well, I can tell you something.
Maybe I'm going to have a bubble off and just don't know it.
Right now, you've got to help Fred.
You got to, man.
There's nothing to help.
I didn't try to do it.
Fred, today is the day to help Fred.
This is it.
I didn't do it.
You did, Fred.
I didn't do it.
You did, by all aspects.
I didn't do it.
I'm sorry.
I'm not trying to make your life difficult.
It's not my life.
You're making it difficult.
Do it.
It's not my life.
You're making it difficult.

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What's going to be difficult, Fred, is where we go after here.
And they're going to hear a story.
Oh, yeah.
And they're going to hear it either from me or from you.
Well, I'll tell them.
You're going to tell them now you didn't do it.
And I don't know why.
I have no idea.
Oh, jeez.
I don't want to say that the evidence points out that I did it.
But I don't remember.
The evidence points that you did it.
Exactly.
The evidence points that you did it.
So when you tell a rational person that the evidence points that you did it, that you don't remember, that's not you taking responsibility.
I don't.
I'm telling you, I don't remember.
I didn't do it.
Well, don't remember is different than didn't do it.
I understand.
OK.
If you're worried about the repercussion, which I think you are, and that's why you don't want to tell them.
Go on me.
I know.
But the repercussion is there.
It's already there.
Yeah.
It's going to happen.
Thing is, it's the character of the man, Fred.
I can't remember if I did anything.
I'm not being...
I'm not being honest with you.
I don't remember if I did anything.
So how am I going to explain this to the people that you love?
How am I going to explain this?
To my wife?
Yeah.
I'll explain it to her.
You're going to explain that?
All the evidence, the DNA and everything points to the fact that I did it.
I cannot refute that evidence.
I mean, it's pretty cut and dried when you get down.

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Blood type is shaky, but DNA is almost an absolute.
But to my mind, I didn't do it.
You're obviously in denial, Fred.
Oh, obviously.
You were denying.
I can tell you that.
I mean, if you handed me this case file on somebody else, I'd be right where you're at right now.
No doubt about it, because that says emphatically that I did it, but I don't remember if I did anything.
And until I figure out, or if I remember it, how can I tell you when I did it?
Because then you're going to say, well, I did this, I did that.
That's fine.
And you're going to find out that the weed doesn't match up.
That's fine.
You have all of that.
I don't remember.
If I did anything, I do not remember.
So where do we go from here?
I honestly don't know.
I guess the ball's pretty much in your court.
If the preponderance evidence says I did it, it should go to the courts.
And you said the preponderance of the evidence said you did it.
Yeah, I understand that.
What do you want me to tell people?
What the book said, Fred Lynn did it.
Pretty much bottom line thing.
It happened.
The bottom line is I killed a girl from the evidence presented, and where it goes from here is up to the county attorney and you and everybody else.
Am I doing the right thing if I arrest you on this crime?
Absolutely.
That's what the book says.
Okay.
Absolutely.
You're a good cop.
Be proud, dammit.
Thank you.
Most people would have looked at it and said, pfft, and thrown it back on the shelf.
Well, I'm not a lost reward for that because I didn't.
That's not what I'm supposed to say.
It's just under the circumstances.
It's quite a compliment.
It's a beautiful compliment, and you deserve it.

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Thank you.

Now if you want me to jump up and down and say, you dirty rat, and crummy bat, you're dead.

Sometimes I make me feel better about my job.

I'm going to be honest with you, Fred, I'm glad the case is over.

I've lost so much sleep over this in the last couple of years, and I'm nothing in this equation.

Now, we've both got to move forward to the best of our abilities.

That's right.

Is there anything else, Fred?

I think right now, all fuck would be appropriate.

The interview ended.

Fred called his wife and son, and told them that he was being arrested for the Wiley murder.

Are you sitting down?

Although he messed up Shelley's first name, calling her Sharon.

Fred handed over his pen, billfold, keys, glasses, and false teeth.

He faced the wall and held his hands behind his back.

Terry cuffed him, then let him out of the room.

I'd watched this interview on my laptop in an Airbnb near my mom's house in Arizona.

She and I hung out there, mostly to avoid our 18 cats.

Don't ask.

After the video ended, I closed my computer.

I'd heard from so many people that Fred Lam was guilty, that this interrogation more or less confirmed it.

But I saw something else playing out.

Terry was implying the existence of way more evidence than there was in the file I'd read.

The blood at the scene, the boot print.

Fred seemed to take Terry's word for all of it, believing that the police wouldn't lie to him.

He was, after all, one of them.

Terry's affidavit of probable cause included several quotes from Fred.

Quote, Fred Lam did it.

Dot, dot, dot.

I'm not denying that I did it.

And quote, bottom line is, I killed a girl.

I'd been listening for them the whole time.

And sure, they were there.

But they weren't exactly in context.

More like sentence fragments rearranged to appear more damning than they were.

If I'd done that in a news story, I'd be out of a job.

The case had pretty much taken over the Airbnb living room at this point.

Old police reports and Laramie yearbooks surrounded me.

My mom had, of course, not read any of the case file that I had.

Didn't have the background on the evidence.

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But she had caught snippets of the interrogation as it played for my computer.
Enough at least to offer a verdict to me, unprompted.
Fred seemed pretty guilty to her.