

[Transcript] Suspicion | The Billionaire Murders: The hunt for the killers of Honey and Barry Sherman / Loosening lips: What Sherman friends and family might be trying to hide (bonus episode)

Right. So, look, I do have a couple of, and I don't know, I don't think the people would be willing to speak with you necessarily, because I don't think they're comfortable with media. I do have a couple of extended quotes from people who are senior volunteers here at UJA. There's an unwritten rule. Reporters aren't supposed to talk about how they get the story. I'm going to break the rule in this episode. The voice you just heard is Stephen Shulman, at the time the senior VP Corporate Affairs for the United Jewish Appeal in Toronto. I'm asking for his help in interviewing people who knew Honey and Barry Sherman well. So these are quotes that you got not in anticipation of speaking with me, but just for the media. For the media, yeah, but I don't think the people would be willing to speak with you. Hang on, you're just giving me a printout of quotes? No interviews? What happened was that, you know, there were, basically, we want to, you know, everybody's looking for the kind of, well, there must be some, you know, some negative, some bad story. From the Toronto Star, I'm Kevin Donovan, and this is The Billionaire Murders, the hunt for the killers of Honey and Barry Sherman. Over the next few weeks, we're presenting several behind-the-scenes episodes, with content we think will further your understanding of this story. Our main series continues in April. Today, Loosening Lips. The issue, as Stephen explained, is that people were afraid of speaking, even saying nice things. It wasn't so much fear that they'd be targeted by unknown killers. It was that Sherman friends worried that if they told the full story of Barry and Honey, the media would focus on the negative and ignore the nice stuff. Reporters had an easier time getting to the Kennedys, a family rocked by so many tragedies over the years. Ultimately, I passed on Stephen's offer. That's because he asked me in writing to promise to never try and speak to the people who provided the quotes. That wasn't going to happen. I'm joined today by my producer, Raju Mudar. Raju, what do you think about Stephen's suggestion to me to promise to never speak to people who provided quotes? Well, I think as any journalist, we know we can't do that. And I also know that the start would never allow us to do that. So, Kevin, tell me a little bit more about this. What were people really afraid of? As I got to talk to people who knew Barry and Honey, I would hear stories from friends and friends and friends that Barry was a tough nut as a businessman sued everybody.

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I'd hear that Honey was a good fundraiser, but she was nasty to wait staff and even to close friends who she sometimes ignored at parties if she had her eyes set on a fundraising target on the other side of the room.

I think also that there was a concern on some organizations that had received a lot of money from the Sherman's generosity that if they were quoted in the newspaper that maybe that money would dry up, that maybe people would think, you know, you shouldn't be talking about the Sherman's, we're not going to give you any more money to your charity.

And the other thing I got a lot was a concern that I'd get to the bottom of some family issues, how Honey didn't really get along with the kids and Barry and the kids were in therapy for years just to try and get along.

So it really sounds like initially it was tough to get people to actually speak about them honestly. How did you get your foot in the door?

Frank D'Angelo.

Barry is not a quitter. Barry is not a type of guy to swim halfway across Lake Ontario, get tired and swim back. He's going to fuck and make it the other way, right?

And Aubrey Dan.

Quite a few people took advantage of Barry, I imagine, because his eye was not on the ball. He's deep in the litigation or deep on the development process. He's a typical mad scientist.

Frank and Aubrey sat down and talked to me. They told me their recollections and their thoughts about the Sherman's, particularly Barry. My goal was to get those two to trust me and have them introduce me to others who are close to Barry. Now Frank, he's the entrepreneur Barry funded for years and my colleague at the Star, Mary Armsby, connected me with him.

She knew him from a story she'd done years past. And Aubrey, he's from a rival pharmaceutical dynasty, the Dan family. But despite some acrimony over the years, Aubrey eventually connected with Barry and Honey over philanthropy. Another colleague at the Star, Victoria Gibson, she'd interviewed Aubrey in the early days of the investigation. And that helped me get in touch with him. Both Frank and Aubrey gave me their own take on Barry. But then they both said, you've got to talk to Jack K. Barry's second in command at Apatex and a close friend of almost four decades. They both made an introduction for me. Here's Aubrey. My approach would be is that you would like to share with him the straight goods. I think what you want to do is develop a relationship because Jack is one of the most straight shooter kind of guys, period.

And Frank. Okay, but listen, if Jack is loved to hear from him, I give you my word of honor.

Okay, but I will set something up for you this week. Not too long after that,

Jack K agreed to meet. We began with two lengthy sessions in his office at Apatex.

Actually, it was Barry's office. Jack, who took over running the firm after Barry died, had moved into Barry's office, which rankled Jonathan, Barry's son. Now, a year later, Jonathan would fire Jack and march him out the Apatex store one year and a day after the murders. No gold watch or party for Jack who had served Jonathan's father since the early 1980s.

On my preliminary meetings with Jack, he told me about his friend Barry and gave me an extensive briefing on the generic pharmaceutical business. I think the fact that I endured these briefings, well, kind of made him like me and trust me. What else came of that?

So much. Jack was super helpful in putting me in touch with other people that he thought

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would help me understand his friend's life and story. He put me in touch with Jeremy Desai, who was the CEO at the time of Apatex, a scientist, a businessman who Barry had headhunted. He arranged for me to sit down at Jeremy's home and hear his take on Barry's brilliance and generosity. Also, Joel Ulster, who was Barry's best friend, he had been really concerned about talking to me. He didn't feel comfortable doing it. For him, it wasn't because anybody was telling him not to talk. He was just so upset at the loss of his friend since they were in high school that he didn't think he could talk without crying. And eventually, with the help of Jack Kay sending him an email, I find myself on a plane to New York and I'm sitting with Joel and visited him a couple of times just to get from him what Barry was like as a kid and a young business person. And he's probably my favorite person I met in the story, Joel Ulster, because he's just such an honest, genuine person with his own really interesting life story. This is me practicing what I call relationship journalism, a reporter getting to talk to one person, developing their trust, and then that person then helping them with a relationship with another person. And if you do it well, and I'm still learning how to do it well, I suppose after almost 40 years, you meet more and more people that way. It's all about building trust.

Was there anything particular that you used as a calling card?

Particularly in the early days, I would be trying to get people to talk to me.

Jack Kay is a good example of this. I get to Jack Kay through Frank D'Angelo.

What Frank told Jack was, you should talk to this guy because he's the guy who did the story at the Toronto Star about how Barry was really murdered. It wasn't a murderous suicide. I used that a lot and I guess calling card is a good way to describe it because I want to show to people that I'm a serious journalist. I'm really trying to get at the true story and, hey, here's an example where all the other media were reporting sources saying it was a murderous suicide and I took the story with, of course, the help of the Toronto Star in a completely different direction, causing the police to actually pay attention to the second pathologist's results and they come out with a press conference saying that it's a double murder. I've got the byline on that story. I did all the research. I would send it to people and say, if you're trying to decide whether you should talk to me, I just want you to know that I was the person who did that story and I care about getting it right. Okay. That was Barry. What about Honey?

Honey was much more difficult to crack as a person. I was well into talking to the Jeremy DeSise and Jack Kays and Joel Alsters and I still hadn't spoken to anybody really who was close to Honey. Eventually I got a, I would call it sort of an audience with Senator Linda Frum who agreed to talk to me and tell me some of her stories about her good friend Honey and they're really nice stories and I thought she delivered them really thoughtfully. Yeah, so that was a time that she suddenly started to remember me and so we became sort of friendly after that but I really became friends with her after that campaign. But then subsequently once we did become very, very good friends, I saw that many people had this complaint about her that she wouldn't remember them

and people would say to me, oh, your friend Honey, you know, I've met her six times and she doesn't know who I am and then I realized she was almost at a level of a politician. She met so many people in her life and people like me or in calling the guys, I knew the feelings I had taken offense when I first met her as well. Once I was in her circle and I saw people come up to her

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and everybody wanted a piece of her. I still wanted to get to the people who all describe as Honey's girlfriends, the people that she hung around with, played cards with, went on golfing trips with and with the Linda's help and the help of a kind of a mutual friend, I was able to get to the golf girls who are two women, Dalia Solomon and the late Anita Franklin and I started hearing stories of a recent trip with two of her girlfriends, a road trip in Honey's old Lexus SUV, lots of golf and quite honestly some pretty funny shopping stories. We were just brutally honest with each other too. When we would go clothes shopping, clothes shopping, it fits. It doesn't fit. It fits and then she'd come over and she'd stretch it out. Oh she's doing that. Oh yeah. Like I go Honey, it doesn't fit. Yes it does and she'd come over and she'd stretch it. Is it stuff that's on you or on her? On me. And stuff that was on her she would always buy. She'd make it fit. She'd make it fit. She would buy sizes too small and then it got sold and I would say Honey, it's up your ass. Honey, you can't. So she stopped asking me if she's not even gonna ask you if it fits. She'd just buy it. She'd buy it anyways. We'll be right back.

I look back on my first interview with them in Dalia's home as being a real turning point in understanding Honey because they had gone away with Honey just shortly before the murders. They went on a long driving trip and Honey's battered old Lexus SUV down to play golf for a few days. You know this is a billionaire who could have bought a plane to fly down there but they're in her Lexus. They're all pooling money for gas. They all are in a condo, three bedrooms. Honey as always figures a way to make sure that she, Honey, gets the smallest of the three rooms and this is not a palace that they're staying in. It's just a condo like we'd rent if we were going away on a trip. And they start telling these stories and all about how Honey has this bag of newspapers including newspaper called The Toronto Star that she would take away with her because she felt she didn't have time to read the paper during the week and so she'd go on a trip with a bag of newspapers and she'd just sit there reading stuff and then they would tell me stories of Honey going to India and she would carry around a box of power bars and give them to people on the street which is kind of a maybe an odd thing to do but it's just because she felt she wanted to give stuff away to people and she didn't want to give them money.

Anyway, this is this satchel of interesting stories about her which to me helped readers and listeners of this podcast understand who she was as a person and yeah, she could be tough on people. Yeah, she could walk into a ballroom where she's doing a big fundraiser and she'd walk past really good friends of hers because her target was set on somebody who had \$5 million in his or her pocket and her friends with why is she ignoring me but that's because she's Honey the fundraiser at that moment. So, I mean, she's a human being just like Barry. They had foibles, there's good about them, bad about them, people were nervous about me focusing only on the bad. How did that experience make you feel like finally speaking to people about Honey?

First, happy, pleased to hear that human side, those funny and nice stories, the real stories about a person but when I think of it now, I get a little angry, angry that those around the Shermans are a pretty distrustful bunch. The ones who broke with the group and spoke, well, they showed a lot of bravery because I'm not sure that their circle of friends was really that pleased. I do think that some of them, they were not ostracized but I think they got some heat for speaking out but then putting aside these sort of funny and human stories, I think back and I do recall with some happiness a really sweet time in that chat with the two

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women that I referred to as the golf girls and it's when they told me a story and then they told me how their nickname was Thelma, Thelma and Louise and how they were planning more trips as

a threesome. Then, of course, Honey is murdered and a year and a bit ago Anita Franklin died and now only Dahlia's left. I've got a clip here of Dahlia that day during my interview in her living room invoking a Yiddish expression. Man plans, God laughs. That's what you say.

So Kevin, what about the family? How'd you get in with them?

In later episodes, you'll hear more from some of the kids and Sherman relatives but it took a while.

It was much harder than getting to their friends. Jonathan, a very honey son, he initially agreed to speak with me for my book on the case but he attached some strings, some pretty unusual strings from my point of view. Here's what Jonathan's email to me said. If you hear my extra inflection, it's because he uses all caps in some places. From Jonathan Sherman, after careful consideration, I am willing to meet with you in person. Our meeting will be conditional upon you accepting the following terms. One, you may take notes but you will not digitally record me. Two, you will leave all electronic equipment, phone included, at home or in your car. Three, you will send me a comprehensive list of questions 48 hours prior to our meeting so I may have time to consider

what I will and will not address. Four, along with the fun and positive stories you are putting in the book, you will disclose to me all of the negative stories and allow me an opportunity to respond. Five, my name will not appear in your book unless you receive explicit written permission from me for each and every reference to my name. If I do not approve, you will remove not only my name but the entire sentence, paragraph or chapter that refers to me at my sole and absolute discretion. If these terms are acceptable to you, please do the following. One, reply to my email confirming that you accept my terms. Two, print my email initial beside each of my five terms, scan and return from my records. So what did you do? I told Jonathan that no self-respecting journalists would agree to these terms. Certainly the Toronto Star would not allow me to do that even if I had suggested I should talk to him under these terms. It would be two years before I sat down with him. I had a lot of questions to ask him but had to be content for two years with some email and letter exchanges back and forth and with his comments at the funeral, some of them were heartwarming and some in my opinion were downright odd, like this one about honey. To my mother, you were always such a good sport and so animated. You were my first golf partner

and the only witness to my only hole in one. Well dad was there but he was buried in his briefcase, I'm sure. Although I was only about 10 years old, I remember how proud and excited you were for me

and if anyone else has ever played golf with honey or been on the same golf courses her at the same time, you'll know what I mean when I say that everybody was hearing about my hole in one.

Dad wasn't thrilled to learn about the tradition of buying all the drinks in the clubhouse but he gladly paid it. On another trip skiing in Vermont, you let me choose the next run after spending all morning on the greens and blues. So when I picked the black run directly below the chairlift, you were reluctantly gung-ho. I'll never forget watching you wipe out on the first turn and slide down the entire run for everyone to see. It was effing hilarious

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until you made me march up and collect all your gear.

So Kevin, after talking to his friends and making in rows there, what were you looking for from the family? Well, one of the things that the police have said throughout my investigation is that the estate of Bairian Honey Sherman is part of their case. It's embedded in the case and not suggesting that anybody in particular is involved but I wanted to know about the billions and where they were going and I wanted to know who the three sisters and Jonathan, the son, wanted to know who they were. I also wanted to know where they were in the lead up to the murders

and just to get a sense of them. And I must say I was fascinated and am fascinated to this day about the effect of enormous wealth on people. Barry had, I could say conservatively \$4 billion but sources inside his empire have told me it's closer to \$10 billion. That's a lot of money and I was curious to see the family dynamics and was hoping to get, which I eventually do get and we'll talk about this in a later episode, a sense of really how unhappy that home was. And one of the reasons was that Honey was tough on the kids and Barry was a softie and how Barry dealt with the kids is to give them money and Honey didn't like that. So I wanted to get the kids to tell me about their life growing up, which it may be surprising to know for non-journalists but that's actually a normal thing that happens when we're investigating a case where there's been a death. Family talks and one of the things that I was always suspicious about is how hard it was to get the Sherman family to talk. One of the things about people having a lot of money is that they pay for lawyers. Kevin, you've actually got a lot of information through going to the court and finding out certain things from documents. Now I think the family has been sort of against that. What information have you learned over time by going to the courts and unsealing documents? Yeah, the family has never taken a position on me getting the search warrant documents they certainly

objected to and fought us tooth and nail related to the estate documents, which we had quite a bit of success eventually in getting. When it comes to these estate documents, what I wanted to know is who gets what? Barry is a billionaire. Who did he leave his money to? I had a sense that it was to the four kids but I wondered if there was money left to charity. I wondered if there were other members of the family who were provided some money or maybe some friends or business people. But when it comes to the search warrant, which is a case that I'm still fighting to this day, I wanted to find out what people said to police in those early days. In these search warrant documents, they're just filled with witness statements, hundreds of statements from family and friends and business associates to the police. I've interviewed many of those people myself. I wanted to compare what they say to the police to what they said to me.

What about Barry and Honey's siblings? What did you learn from them?

Barry's sister, Sandra, she never agreed to speak to me. She's politely declined. She's deferring to the children. But I've had extensive and ongoing communication with Mary, Honey's sister and best friend by all accounts. I'll get into that in a later episode. But just like just like Jonathan, Mary wanted to lay down some ground rules. After a lot of back and forth by email, I was summoned one September to her beautiful house in Forest Hill. Actually, it was Frank D'Angelo who helped me get this interview. I arrived in the pouring rain. She's told me by text to enter through a back door. The sense I had was this was the servant's entrance.

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Now, Mary appears in the glass of the door and puts her finger to her lips. She whispers and I can hear her Jonathan's listening and takes me out into the back patio. Walking through the kitchen, I spot on the counter a printout of a nondisclosure agreement with my name on it. There's a pen beside the document, I guess for me to sign. I look at Mary and I say, Mary, I'm sorry, but I'm sorry, but I'm not signing that. Let's talk. And we did for close to five hours. Now, as I leave, Mary lets me out the front door. We pass what I can only describe as a game of throne's dining room.

It's long, it's palatial. We've just been talking about how angry she is that the Sherman kids have cut her off after Barry and Honey were murdered. So, Mary turns to me and says, you can tell when it's solved. What's done? The money. Why? No curtains, no finished.

Next time on The Billionaire Murders, wannabe lawyer.

The Billionaire Murders, the hunt for the killers of Honey and Barry Sherman, is written and narrated by me, Kevin Donovan. It was produced by Sean Pattenden, Raju Mudar, Alexis Green and JP Fozo. Additional production from Brian Bradley and Crawford Blair.

Look out for my book, The Billionaire Murders, and coming later this year, The Crave Documentary by the same name.