

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Darlene Hulse

Hi, crime junkies. I'm your host, Ashley Flowers.
And I'm Brett.
And today's episode is gonna be a little bit,
maybe a lot of it different.
Yeah, that's a little bit of an understatement.
Yeah, so most of you all know that last month,
I was on the road doing a live show tour.
And it was actually for my other weekly show, The Deck.
But I was talking about a case that me and one of our reporters
have been on the ground investigating ourselves for a year.
So we called The Tour The Deck Investigates.
And the response has been overwhelming.
Yeah, so I saw the show in Indy,
and it was everything I expected, because I know you,
but I loved being in the room and feeling
and seeing how surprised people were by the content.
I mean, Ashley, the place was buzzing.
It was amazing. What I've been loving is, like,
after people leave the show, like, the responses,
people are like, I cannot get this case out of my head.
I can't stop thinking about it.
Someone said, like, I knew I was gonna get a good story,
but that was 10 times more content than I expected.
Totally.
But the problem was that 10 times more content
was just scraping the surface.
I mean, it's, like, not even half of the whole story.
So I knew I couldn't just leave this story out on the road.
Darlene, the case is about her, Darlene Hulse,
she deserves to have the whole world hear her story.
And she deserves to have the crime-junkie community
have her back and demand justice.
Because, Britt, again, you were there.
That is the thing about this case, right?
Justice is so stinking close,
and it's right there, all we need is your help to get it.
So what I've decided to do is put everything from tour
plus so much more into a 15-part limited series
called The Deck Investigates.
And what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna give you guys
the first three episodes of Darlene's story right here,
right now, in the crime-junkie feed.
And when you're hooked, when not if,
there will be 12 more episodes waiting for you

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right away to binge.

Or you can go listen to all of them
in the Deck Investigates feed right now.

So, without further ado.

Little over two years ago,

I came across an old news article.

It was about an old, unsolved murder
that I had never heard of in a tiny Indiana town
that I had only ever passed on my way to somewhere else.

When I reached out to the victim's daughter on Facebook,

I had no idea that I would spend the next two years
of my life living and breathing this case,
dumping every resource I had into solving it.

But that's precisely what happened.

I pulled in one of our reporters, Emily,
and basically made this her full-time job.

But even in the early days, I didn't know what this was.

We didn't set out to make a whole series about this case.

But the more we dug in, the more secrets we uncovered.

And the more secrets we uncovered,
the more holy shit moments we had.

Because not only does this 38-year-old cold case
have what it needs to get solved literally tomorrow,
but the person responsible may have been hiding
in plain sight all along.

Over the course of this series,

I'm gonna take you along as we hit the back roads
of Argus, Indiana, looking for evil truths.

The kind that you never expect to find
in small Midwestern towns.

And I'll take you along as we uncover facts
that have never been reported until now.

This is the untold story of Darlene Hulse,
the Four of Hearts from Indiana.

I'm Ashley Flowers, and this is The Deck Investigates.

Here's the story of Darlene Hulse, the Four of Hearts.

This is Episode One, Take a Bath.

On August 17th, 1984,

in a small middle-of-nowhere Indiana town called Argus,
eight-year-old Marie Hulse was at home
with her mom and two little sisters.

It was a Friday morning at the tail end of their summer break,
and since dad was at work,

Marie and her six-year-old sister, Melissa,

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were gonna have to tag along to their babysitter
's doctor's appointment in the nearby town of Plymouth.
Their mom, Darlene, told them to take a quick bath
and get washed up before they left,
while she got baby Kristen ready in the other room.
The two girls were waist-deep in water
when all of a sudden there was a knock at the front door.
Marie thought she heard their mom say something like,
she wasn't expecting a package or delivery
or she didn't order anything.
They tried to listen closer for more, but there weren't words.
Instead, there was weird noises coming from the front room of the house.
It was a sound Marie has never forgotten.
He was grunting and growling. I thought it was a puppy.
I thought my parents had literally got us a puppy.
I told Melissa that in the tub. I was like,
do you hear that? It's a dog.
And it was like growling and grunting.
Marie hopped out of the tub and she was so excited
about the idea of a new puppy
that she didn't even stop to dry off
or put on clothes before running down the hallway.
Their dad, Ron, had surprised them before with a new dog,
so this idea wasn't out of left field.
In fact, that exact week,
their dog, Ling, was at a breeder's house
for a consultation about puppy making.
The Hulses lived in a long one-story ranch-style house,
so when Marie got out of the tub,
she ran down the hallway toward the den where the front door was.
But when she rounded the corner, she froze
because there was no puppy,
just a man pushing her mom down on the floor.
He was on his knees straddling her mom Darlene
trying to put duct tape over her eyes and mouth.
In that moment, at eight years old,
Marie didn't know what was going on.
She didn't know this man and he wasn't saying anything.
He just continued grunting and growling.
Her baby sister, who was last in her mother's arms,
was nowhere to be found.
Through all the confusion, she knew something was wrong.
My mom was yelling,
don't hurt my babies, or something to that effect.

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She was screaming.
She was, y'all, she was flailing.
Like, I'm talking like...
I know she scratched him.
I know that she got pieces of him,
and he was dragging her by her hair.
Completely terrified,
little Marie started screaming
and she ran towards the kitchen phone.
This was 1984,
so not only was there no 911 system yet
in Marshall County, Indiana,
the Hulses had a rotary phone.
But Marie knew she needed to call for help,
so she started that slow-circle dial
of one of the only phone numbers she had memorized,
her Aunt Nancy's.
He was already coming around the corner.
But I did get through.
I got a busy signal.
As the busy tone beeped in her ear,
Marie looked up,
just as the man came around the corner,
dragging her mom by the hair behind him.
I just remember him coming towards me
and ripping the phone out and me thinking,
he's gonna get me now.
He's gonna get me.
And I think that's when she said she...
to run, run.
But it was so jarbled, you know?
It was just chaos.
And he never spoke a word.
I do remember that. He never spoke.
In that moment,
she got a really good look at the guy.
He was skinny, but not scrawny,
and clean cut with blondish two-toned hair
combed over to one side.
The guy was wearing normal clothes,
like a brown shirt with stripes
and tan-colored pants and brown shoes.
Marie remembers in that moment
thinking that this guy didn't look

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like a super scary person,
but because he was hurting her mom,
he must have been a bad guy.
Just when he tried to grab Marie,
Darlene screamed for Marie to run.
I remember her saying,
don't hurt my babies.
And she was screaming,
like blood-curdling screams while she was fighting.
So there were grunts,
and it was just like surreal.
It was completely surreal.
By that point, Marie knew they were in serious danger,
and she had to get her sister before running for help.
Now, this all went down in just a matter of seconds.
So six-year-old Melissa was just getting out of the bathtub
when she heard Marie come back down the hallway.
But instead of announcing or introducing a new puppy,
Marie was frantic.
She came back and she was like,
no, get out now, get out now.
You're the one that told me something wasn't right,
and I had to leave.
After alerting her sister,
Marie took off, back down the hallway,
and went in and out the back door that led outside.
And Melissa, not knowing what was the matter,
ran toward the front door.
When she rounded the corner,
she saw the man pinning her mom down on the carpet,
and he was hovered over Darlene
in a way that put his back towards Melissa.
But Darlene started screaming at Melissa to get out,
and the man turned around and spotted her.
I just remember him looking at me as I ran out the door,
like never lunged for me,
or nothing.
But he was on his knees.
So when I first looked down the hall,
I want to say I saw just the top of his head.
And then when I came out, then he hooked up.
The man didn't say anything to Melissa either.
She remembered his face being totally expressionless.
The only one speaking any words was Darlene.

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Yeah, she just kept saying, Melissa, get out.
And then just let the children go.
That's all she said.
Still completely naked and soaking wet,
the girls ran from their house to the dirt and gravel road,
passing a car that they didn't recognize
parked in their driveway.
I remember turning around and looking at the car.
I looked at it because I was looking to see
if Melissa was following me.
Or the guy.
I remember turning around looking, thinking,
is he going to follow me?
So I remember looking at it.
It was a huge clunker of a car.
Dirty and green with rust all across the bottom.
And it was pulled right up into the driveway.
Marie noticed that it had big round taillights
and a big long body with a big trunk.
And she remembers thinking that it looked old.
Like, you know how in the mid-80s cars were pretty boxy,
but their bodies were smaller than cars
that were made in the 70s that were basically
just massive boats on wheels?
Well, that's what Marie saw.
A massive, rusty, ugly boat of a car
that was chalky green.
Like, not just in color, but the paint job itself was bad.
To Marie's relief, as she was running
and looking back at the car,
she spotted her sister coming out the front door.
I do remember seeing Melissa run behind me.
I saw her, and I thought, I'm going to get there faster.
I've got to get there faster.
And Melissa was screaming, crying,
but I could see her and see we weren't allowed
to cross the road.
And I do remember thinking, I don't have any clothes on.
I don't have any clothes on.
I don't have any clothes on.
I don't have any clothes on.
I remember thinking, I don't have any clothes on.
And this is not even hurting my feet.

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I had a, because I always try to walk without shoes or whatever.
And I remember thinking, this isn't even hurting.
I can run faster than I've ever ran before.
I remember thinking that.
They had turned right out of the house,
running down the road toward the next crossing,
which was this busy highway.
They were headed to their grandparents' house
who lived just on the other side.
We're eight and six.
We're going across the road.
And I remember thinking, I'm going to get in trouble.
Nope, I got to go.
And I just took off across the road.
They knew that's where they needed to go for help.
Marie says that as she's running to her grandparents,
she felt like she was flying.
We were fastest lightning, okay?
When you know the distance between there does not take,
but just like two, three minutes if you're running fast.
Marie got to her grandparents' house first
and relief flooded her when she spotted her grandma Doris.
Grandma was in the window.
You need to have those wind chimes because they didn't have air.
And I remember the wind chimes and she was standing at the sink
and I said, someone's hurting mom.
You need to call.
And she's like, what?
She didn't even, I was talking too fast.
And she just couldn't, she couldn't understand it.
I was like, someone has mom.
And she just couldn't process what I was saying.
I was like, call the police.
She goes, I don't understand.
I was like, call the police.
Meanwhile, Melissa had almost caught up to Marie.
But when she got to the edge of Highway 31,
there was a car coming.
So she had to stop and let them pass.
And I wonder about this person a lot if they're still out there.
If they even knew what they saw that day.
A six-year-old girl, wet, naked, crying barefoot,
standing on a dirt road at the edge of a highway.
Would things have been different if they would have stopped?

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Would we still be asking the questions that we are today?
Unfortunately, unless they come forward, we may never know.
That car went by and Melissa darted across the highway
to meet Marie and her grandma just as Doris
was dialing the number for the Marshall County Police Department.
Doris relayed to police what her granddaughters told her.
And the police dispatched the closest unit
to get to the whole home as soon as possible
for an armed robbery in progress.
Doris stayed on the phone with them
while Marie and Melissa propped themselves
in their grandparents' front window
to watch for police to go save their mother.
And then I remember her being on the phone with the police
and because it was a dirt road.
We heard the police cars come
and we were watching out the window
and they went past the road and she went nuts.
I do remember that.
She's like, no, and she's on the phone.
She's like, you've missed it, you've missed it.
You've just passed the road.
Then do you remember seeing them come,
like circle back and go back down the correct road?
I do, but then my grandmother pulled me away from the window.
Do you think she was coming to the realization of
how serious it was?
She asked me where Kristen was
and I didn't know.
And I got really scared that I was in trouble
because I didn't know where you were.
I just remember the primary concern
is where is Kristen.
And then I think Melissa knew more about that
because she was the last one to run out.
Kristen, who is almost in her 40s today,
doesn't remember anything about that day
because she was still in diapers.
But her sisters have struggled with the fact
that they couldn't find her.
I'll never forget one time Melissa said
the one thing that she regrets was not getting me,
not grabbing me when they were running out.
With Darlene and baby Kristen at the house

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with a crazed man, Doris didn't know what to think.
She knew something was wrong based on what her granddaughters
were able to relay through SOBS,
but she couldn't have known the horror that awaited.
Marie was hopeful that she had run so damn fast
that her mom and baby sister would be okay.
I mean, it happened so fast.
And so all of a sudden just a million people
were at my grandparents' house.
And cops were there, and I just remember them saying,
the baby's been found, but the mom is not there.
I'm going to take you into the crime scene
and the search for Darlene in Episode 2,
A Stranger's Wrath.
You can listen to that after the break.
Everett Fish was the reserve officer who passed 20B Road.
The dirt roads off the highway aren't well marked,
and it's easy to do.
I even missed it my first time up there.
It took about 0.2 seconds for him to realize what he'd done
and make a U-turn back toward the Hulse House,
which was just a stone's throw away from the highway
with a cornfield and a barn between.
The first thing Officer Fish did when he pulled up
was look for any cars or suspicious activity.
And keep in mind, Officer Fish didn't know much yet.
He'd just been told that there was possibly an armed robbery
at the house with a woman inside.
When he finally pulled up, he didn't see any cars at the house,
so he got on his radio and relayed that to Marshall County authorities.
Then Officer Fish got out of his police car,
grabbed his shotgun from the backseat,
and as he walked toward the house, he noticed something.
On the ground in front of the house was blood,
a long trail of it that led from the driveway
right up to the front door.
That's when he got back on his radio and was like,
hey, whatever this was, it's more than that now.
And it's not looking good, so I'm going to need some backup.
And just then, he heard something so foreign in that moment,
the last thing he ever expected to hear.
It was a baby crying.
Officer Fish approached the front door,
and before opening it, he called out, announcing himself as police.

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But there was no response, just more crying.
Fish knew he couldn't wait.
He threw open the front door and stepped inside.
This is Episode 2, A Stranger's Wrath.
Officer Fish was shocked when he opened the door
and found a crying baby in just a diaper and covered in blood.
But not her blood, it seemed.
You see, Officer Fish was also a trained EMT,
so he was able to discern just by doing a once-over.
The baby was okay.
Yes, she was covered in blood,
but she didn't have any obvious wounds
and there didn't seem to be any fresh bleeding.
He also thought it was a good sign that she was crying
because that meant she was breathing fine.
But just to be safe, he radioed for an ambulance to come right away,
both for the baby and for whoever was taken out of the home
if they could find them.
And Fish knew they needed to find them soon.
Just from the looks of things, that person lost a lot of blood.
They had to be seriously hurt if not already dead.
The blood trail he found outside extended into the house,
from the front door to the living room carpet.
That's where the brunt of the attack seemed to have taken place,
because there were streaks and small pools of blood in the carpet,
as well as smears on the slate tile by a wood stove near the front entrance.
And a struggle had clearly taken place
because the stove's fireplace tools were scattered on the floor.
Within about three minutes, Lieutenant Ed Criswell from the Sheriff's Office
and Indiana State Police Trooper Dan Ringer got there.
Lieutenant Criswell took baby Kristen outside to meet the EMS crew.
And together, Ringer and Officer Fish started through the house
with guns drawn to see if anyone else was inside.
They checked every inch of the house.
The bathroom, bedrooms, closets, laundry room, kitchen,
even the basement, all clear.
Once they gave that all clear inside, other police units arrived
and checked the outside of the home, looking for any one or anything.
But the outside left more clues than in,
because the blood trail stopped right at the driveway
where a car would have been parked.
And beyond the driveway in the road, there was a skid mark pointing eastbound,
which is the opposite direction of the highway
and the opposite direction that the girls ran in.

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If you leave the whole house going that way, it doesn't really lead to anything. I mean, if you look at the road from the house, all you can see are trees and fields. There aren't any other houses. But if you take that road, it just takes you east and then south, and then eventually feeds you out onto another highway, 110, which if you wanted, you can take 110 right back to 31. And you can basically do a big square. While some officers and detectives were formulating a plan for how they were going to track down the vehicle and bring Darlene home, others were charged with finding Darlene's husband, Ron Hulse. They phoned him at Young Door, which was a door manufacturing company in the neighboring town of Plymouth. And police basically just said something had happened at his house, and they were sending a unit to come get him. Now, if they were coming to get him, Ron knew that it was bad. So while he waited, he called his parents' house. I mean, they lived just a stone's throw away, so surely they knew it was happening. His mom, Doris, answered, and she told him that the kids were okay, but that police couldn't find Darlene. I remember my dad coming through the door and him just sobbing. Like, they've got a finder, they've got a finder, and he just kept mumbling stuff over and over again. Like, he was just crying, absolutely crying. And I just remember my dad saying, we're going to do everything we can to get her back. We're going to get her back. We're going to find her. We're going to find her. And he's like, I remember he said to me, I would give up everything if we could find your mom, because I would give up all of this. I would give up everything I have to find your mom. Why would they not find? I did not even process that it was more than that. I didn't get that she was in humongous danger. I didn't get that she could go away and not come back. It never really crossed my mind. Seeing their dad, who was usually so reserved and in control, break down like that was scary for the girls. I mean, again, they were so little and they were confused. And on top of all of that, they were uncomfortable. There were police showing up at their grandparents' house wanting to talk to them about what had happened. And there were also all these grown men standing around, asking them questions and they just wanted to go home and put on some damn clothes. That feeling of being scared and vulnerable haunted them for a long time. We were like, we need clothes. I had a blanket on and I had nightmares for a very long time about going places without clothes on.

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Marie and Melissa told police what the man looked like and described his car and pretty soon there were dozens of law enforcement agents out searching for a green or bluish green early 70s rusty car with a blonde man driving.

And that was the first issue.

What in the world color was this car?

And I know it sounds simple, but Marie and Melissa each saw something slightly different.

Marie called the car green and Melissa called it more blue.

Other witnesses that they would eventually talk to say light green, maybe dark green with a light top.

I've spent more time thinking about this car than I'd like to admit.

But I think it bothers me so much because it seems so straightforward.

Was it blue or was it green?

I really focus on what the girl said.

A lot of people try and discount their recollection or will tell you to take their accounts with a grain of salt

because they were so young and traumatized.

But I believe that car is burned into their brains.

Just how is it burned in in two different colors?

One of us said it was like a pea green and the other one said it was more like a blue green color from day one.

And I don't know how that happened.

I don't know how that frustrates me to this day that we couldn't agree on the color.

Noah could have solved this whole color mystery.

Not some fancy equipment.

Run of the mill paint swatches.

And so last year, that is exactly what we used to get to the bottom of this 38-year-old enduring mystery.

Last time Emily met with Marie, Melissa, and Kristen, they were talking about this.

About how they both saw something different.

Marie actually whipped out one of those paint swatch fan decks from her utility room and they found the exact color that they both remember.

Now their memory hadn't changed.

That was the color and they both saw the same color.

It's teal green.

The problem is that Melissa sees that color as a shade of blue and Marie sees that as a shade of green.

We actually took a picture of the color that they agreed on and you can see that on our website.

But this provided a ton of clarity about the actual color of the suspect's car.

Unfortunately, no one thought to do that in 1984.

So in the bulletin that went out to the area, police called the car blue-green.

That bulletin also included other details that the girls remembered about the rust and the old age of the car as well.

By mid-morning, dozens of officers were looking for that car and that man.

But more importantly, Darlene.

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At the same time they were searching, technicians were collecting evidence from the whole home. They recovered some bloody rocks near the front stoop.

On the front porch, they found some hair, a piece of gray duct tape on the front step, a white sock, and just inside the door was a Nike tennis shoe and another piece of duct tape.

In the dining room, they collected a smock that had seemingly been ripped off Darlene in the struggle.

One of the buttons had flung over by the baby's crib that was set up in the front room.

In the kitchen, investigators found the phone cord that had been pulled out of the wall receiver.

They dusted for fingerprints on the phone receiver itself but came up with nothing.

The bedrooms were mostly undisturbed except for one small blood spot on Darlene's bed, which was photographed and attributed to Kristen looking around the house for her mother when she was left alone.

They moved on to the fireplace tools that were strewn about the front entrance of the house and that's when they noticed something that they hadn't before.

A part of the fireplace poker was missing.

You know how wood fire stoves come with basically this like carousel of tools?

There's usually a shovel, a broom, tongs, poker, maybe a hook?

Well, the rod part of the poker was gone.

Their assumption was that the poker was potentially what Darlene had been hit with.

Now this was just a guess.

The girls had run from the house before the man ever hit their mother and she wasn't bleeding when they left.

But if the officers were betting men, they would have put money on it.

This meant that the killer hadn't come with a weapon.

This was a crime of opportunity or even if something was planned, what was planned wasn't murder.

Things had clearly gotten out of control.

Darlene surprised her attacker with more than he was bargaining for when he barged in.

And she must have made him angry.

Because what he was able to do to her in the few minutes between the girls running from the home and the attacker fleeing with Darlene spoke volumes and they had to find her now.

But in a town of 1,500 people, the places in a salient could have taken Darlene were limited.

Police went scouring nearby fields and checking under bridges while other officers went knocking on doors.

The early canvas efforts were tricky because as I said, the Hulses didn't have any super close neighbors.

So state and county law enforcement had to widen their radius to within a few miles of the Hulse home.

And they worked to talk to anyone within that bubble.

Most people hadn't seen or heard anything unusual that morning.

A few people mentioned a book salesman who had been frequenting the area.

Sometimes they added a detail about a green car, but that was the only stranger they encountered in recent weeks.

Police also asked Ron to come to the house to look around and see if anything of value was missing.

They wanted to know what exactly they were dealing with because there's a difference between a

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robbery gone wrong
and a crazed abductor on the loose snatching housewives.
I'm sure it was awful for Ron to see his home with blood all over the carpet.
But he said that the only thing missing was the fireplace poker and of course his wife.
Everything else was still there, even the cash that had been left sitting out on the piano.
While he was there, Ron was able to grab some overnight clothes for his daughter since they'd all probably have to stay with his parents for a while.
And speaking of his parents, back at their house, police interviewed his dad Harvey Holtz who said that this whole thing was even more shocking to him
because he had just seen Darlene and the girls that very morning at like 8.45 when he biked over to drop off some mushy bananas for baby Kristen.
This actually helped police with their timeline because that meant that the man showed up and likely attacked Darlene
at some time between 9 when Harvey left and 9.30 when the girls showed up at their grandparents' house.
Harvey said that he hadn't noticed anything unusual and that things seemed totally normal when he was there.
He said he biked home, got in his car and went to work after that.
Evening was rolling in and the searches for Darlene hadn't turned up anything, not her, not the suspect.
But at around 6, Indiana State Police announced that they had stopped a blonde man driving a green Pontiac Grand Prix.
Officers went and actually got Ron, Marie and Melissa and immediately took them to the ISP post in Peru, Indiana to get a look at this guy in his car.
But the girls said nope, that wasn't the green clunker they saw outside their house and the guy wasn't the one that they saw knelt over their mother growling.
Police knew their best bet would be to put out a picture of the suspect rather than bringing every blonde-haired man driving a green car down to their station.
So that same night they took Marie and Melissa to the South Bend Police Department to make an artist's sketch of the suspect.
It was all day long. Someone else would pull me aside and say, OK, Marie, let's go over this again. OK, look at this. I cannot tell you how many times we had to go into the police station and look at picture books.
They were lined up in like those plastic folder things and we would just flip, flip.
And then Dad's like, OK, we're going to do something fun. And I was like, what?
And he's like, we're going to go to a person who sketches people and artists.
And I was like, that's not fun. It was a woman who drew like amazing stuff.
And she's like, OK, so when you look at these eyes, what were the shape of his eyes?
And I remember like lines of eyes, lines of noses, lines of mouths.
I remember his eyes, but beyond that and the color of his hair and stuff, I couldn't really.
And then when she got done, the picture did look similar.
So I was like, oh, that was neat that you were able to do that.
Yeah, but it was constant. It was all the time.
And they would bribe me with coax, which I never drank coax.

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And so I remember I don't want any more coax.

But you just remember weird stuff like that.

And I was freezing so cold in all of those places.

That was my memory of it.

We have that original sketch and you can see it on our website, thedeckpodcast.com.

What they really focused in on for the sketch were the light eyes.

Also the fact that Marie and Melissa both remembered him having a distinct thin and long nose, a narrow face and light combed over hair, which the girls described as streaky.

And the way it got reported back in the day was that he had black streaks in his hair.

This is something that I also became obsessed over because it seemed so distinct.

But when we talked to them today, they said, no, it was more like it was two-toned, like someone who had been out in the sun and it looked highlighted.

The other thing that they were both adamant about is that he was clean-shaven with no facial hair whatsoever.

By the time Ron and the girls got back to his parents' house, it was dark out.

And the searches for Darlene were wrapping up for the night.

All the law enforcement agencies from state, county and local met at the Argus Police Department to make a plan for the next morning.

Even two FBI agents from the South Bend Field Office came down to help with the kidnapping aspect of the investigation.

It's hard to imagine what that first night was like for Darlene's family.

Ron must have felt totally helpless and just distraught from the thought of his wife being either held hostage by some crazy guy or alone and injured somewhere or even worse.

And thoughts about the scary man kept running through Marie and Melissa's minds.

They had just witnessed such a horrific, life-altering tragedy in the safety of their own home, watching a stranger hurt their loving mom and protector.

Their sense of safety had been shattered.

And as they tried to go to bed that night, praying that their mother would be there when they woke up,

one terrifying thought kept them awake.

What if the man came back for them?

Well, Dad did the best he could to make it okay.

He just kept saying things like, we're going to have new carpet.

You're going to love it. I picked out a new carpet.

And he assured us that just like lightning's not going to strike the same place twice, that he's like, now this is not ever going to happen to you again.

This will never happen to you again.

You don't have to worry about that anymore.

This doesn't usually happen to anybody.

The chances of it happening again, it's not going to.

And so we just kind of held on to that, that he's not going to come back.

That would be stupid.

Ron was right. He didn't come back.

But neither would their mother.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Darlene Hulse

As they laid tucked into bed that night, unbeknownst to them, Darlene was lying just six miles away. That's next on episode three, The Wooded Path.

You can listen to that after the break.

Walter Grossnickel finally had some free time on Saturday, August 18, 1984, to make the hour long drive from his house in North Manchester, Indiana to Argus to check out some land

that he'd been interested in buying for his timber operations.

This was actually the second time he had driven there to have a look.

But he wanted to double check the trees on the plot before he moved forward with actually buying it. Since Walter wasn't from Argus, he didn't realize that there was a massive manhunt going on near his destination.

Nor was he aware that a mother of three had been abducted the day before, just a few miles away, and was still missing.

You could call it happenstance, or fate.

The Marshall County prosecutor calls it divine intervention.

But many believed Darlene would have never been found had it not been for Walter's timber search in the woods that day,

or his subsequent call to police.

This is Episode 3, The Wooded Path.

When police got Walter's call at around 2.30, the lead investigators were just wrapping up a press conference in Plymouth at the Marshall County Police Department.

They announced to the reporters that they were looking for a blonde man driving a four-door, blue-green car with rust along the bottom.

They asked reporters to tell their readers and listeners to call the Indiana State Police or the Marshall County Police Department with any tips.

By this point, Marshall County and state police were heading up the search together, with officers from Argus PD assisting with manpower.

Just as the press was leaving, Sergeant Dave Yocollet with Marshall County came running in to advise ISP troopers that a body had been found in the southern part of the county off Olive Trail.

Several troopers and local officers headed straight to the scene, getting there at about 2.45.

When they parked and got out of their cars, they noticed a cut in the fence leading to the woods.

It's how Walter had actually gotten into the woods to begin with.

What you're about to hear is a reenactment of Sergeant Yocollet's interview with Walter at the scene.

I came up on this place where the fence was partially cut, so I climbed over and I just walked in a few feet, parted the brush and just happened to look up and I seen this form laying there.

And I just turned and I run to the road. At that time, a farmer was coming down probably a couple hundred feet away with his tractor and I flagged him down.

So we went to the neighbors and called the police.

Okay, Gail, you was just checking the property just to buy lumber out of it?

To buy the whole thing, 20 acres.

Okay. Had you been down here before checking on it?

Yeah, my wife was here last week one night.

So you, again, you was just driving down here just trying to find a place to park, to cross and go

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Darlene Hulse

look?

Yeah, there's a place way at the north end. I wanted to go back there in the swamp to see if there might be any springs.

So I had the idea of maybe putting a pond in there if I buy it.

There's a swamp area back here, is it?

Yeah.

So you found this low spot and that's when you just got out and you was going to walk across there?

Yes, it's back towards the back there.

Okay.

Back toward the south end of the woods.

Okay. How far into the woods from the road did you get into before you noticed this body?

Oh, you was there.

Yeah, but how far?

What did you say?

Take me out of the branches down so I could see.

Let's put it this way. How close to the body did you get?

I don't know, 20 feet maybe. I just happened to look up and see the form laying out there and I just turned and run back.

You knew what it was right away?

Well, I knew. I didn't know.

No, it was a body.

Yeah, I knew it was a body.

Okay.

But I didn't know what.

Is there anything about that body? Did you see any clothes on the body?

No, I didn't pay no attention. I just seen something there and I took off and run.

Then you drove back up the road, met the farmer?

Yeah, just a little ways right there and I met him.

Okay. Okay. And that's when you went with him and made the phone call?

Yeah.

Did you, Gail, notice any traffic or anything else up and down the road here?

Well, I've been up here about an hour talking to these people in this house right there, you know.

From Chicago and I don't think there'd been a car went by.

Okay, Gail, thank you. The time is now 3.15 p.m.

Okay.

Edges of the fence where the cuts had been made were rusty, which made police think that it wasn't a fresh cut.

Once they crossed over the fence, there were drag marks that they followed back into the woods, beyond a ditch and to a tree.

And there, about 75 feet from the road, was a woman's body.

She was laying on her back with one arm down by her side and the other bent up over her head.

She had on one Nike tennis shoe, which looked like the mate to the shoe investigators had found at Darlene's house the day before.

She was also still wearing a light green pullover sweater and a green skirt, but both were sort of

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Darlene Hulse

pushed up on her body.

Her shirt was also pushed down off one shoulder and it was pushed up so high on her torso that one of her breasts was almost exposed, but not quite.

Same with her skirt.

The skirt that if she was standing, it would have been down almost to her knees, but when she was found, it was pushed way up on her thighs, but not quite exposing her underwear.

Her dark brown hair was matted with blood and there were obvious open wounds on her head and face and additional cuts and bruises on her neck, arms, fingers and legs.

When officers knelt down beside her to get a good look at her face, she stared back at them, eyes wide open.

Even through the maggots, there was absolutely no doubt that it was Darlene.

While Sergeant Yokulet took Walter back to the station to get his boot print for possible elimination purposes, other authorities radioed for a corner and crime scene technicians to respond to the scene to take some photos and search the woods for any other clues.

It was notable to them that whoever killed Darlene didn't attempt to cover her body with brush or leaves or anything.

This scene was in pretty dense woods, so if the person had wanted to conceal her body, they could have done it pretty easily.

I mean, there were leaves all over the ground, but her killer did position her body behind a tree. So while she wasn't too far from Olive Trail, if you were standing on the road looking in, you wouldn't have been able to see her.

Barry Dunlap, a deputy coroner for Marshall County, arrived and was briefed before he took photos of her body and the woods, and then he worked with ISP's crime scene text to process the scene. They searched and searched for the missing fireplace poker rot, hoping to find it near Darlene's body, but no such luck.

In fact, they didn't find any other evidence in the woods.

Prepared to take Darlene's body to the morgue in Plymouth, other officers were sent to break the horrible news to Ron and his family, who were still at the grandparents' house, hoping and praying and believing that Darlene would be found safe.

An eight-year-old Marie really did believe that her mom would come back, mostly because she had seen the man who attacked her mom, and she was like, well, he was a stranger, and why would a stranger want to hurt my mom?

It's that kind of kid logic that I sometimes wish adults could apply to situations more often.

But in her mind, it made no sense that this perfect stranger would have any reason to take her mom away.

So when the cops came to tell the whole family that Darlene had been found dead, it was hard for the girls to even understand.

I'm sure it was so confusing and scary. Do you remember anyone having those conversations with you?

The only person that did was my maternal grandmother, called her Grandma Jolly, and she was the one who got it and made me understand that she may not be coming back, because that was her daughter.

And she just would cry a lot, and she's like, I remember her saying, I'm going to get you some counseling. I'm going to get you some counseling.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Darlene Hulse

And I thought, why would I go to counseling? I don't even know what you're talking about. But everyone else was very hesitant to say there were no words, really, just hugging.

I don't remember someone really sitting me down and saying, OK, this is what we're going to do now. They were just hugging and crying, a lot of crying. That's all I remember.

When Marie finally did understand the gravity of the situation that her mom wouldn't be coming home, the overwhelming feeling she had, even at eight, was guilt.

I felt so bad because I kept on replaying it over in my mind and thinking what I could have done differently. And I knew my dad had a gun in the back of his closet.

And I just kept thinking to myself, I should have run the other way.

I felt so guilty that I didn't do something to stop him. In my eight-year-old, I mean, now I'm realizing that I could not have done that.

But in my eight-year-old self, I thought I should have just gun and got that gun. But I was thinking I was panicking.

I don't even like thinking about what might have happened had the girls stayed and tried to defend their mom.

As a mother myself now, I believe the one ounce of peace that Darlene got in her death was that she protected her children.

All she cared about in that moment was her girls. It was the only thing she said, don't hurt my babies. She told her girls to run. She kept them safe.

Marie and Melissa gave their mother a gift by listening to her one final time.

As the wholesome came to terms with Darlene's death, family members rallied around Ron to help care for the girls.

And Marie and Melissa teamed up to help take care of their baby sister. A welcome distraction, maybe. But they were also just so relieved that she was okay.

Kristen, I don't remember Kristen like wanting anybody else but Melissa and I. I mean, she was just with us all the time after that. I mean, we fed her, we bathed her, we changed her, we did everything for her.

Family members also stepped in to help Ron make funeral arrangements for Darlene. And all of this was happening as police prepared for a massive manhunt and they shifted to a homicide investigation.

A crazed killer was on the loose and two days after Darlene's abduction on August 19th, police were no closer to finding him.

But that morning was Darlene's autopsy and investigators were hoping the information they were going to get from that would help them understand the why behind it all.

It was becoming more and more difficult for them to reassure the community about their own safety and they didn't even know why Darlene's killer showed up to her house in the first place.

Even though the scene didn't really support robbery as a motive, police kept leaning that way until something else told them otherwise.

The autopsy was performed Sunday morning at Memorial Hospital in South Bend by Dr. Rick Hoover, which is a name that you might recognize if you also listened to counterclock season three. Also present at the autopsy were a few ISP troopers, Marshall County officers and the prosecutor at the time, Fred Jones.

One of the first things Dr. Hoover noted in the autopsy report was Darlene's clothing and the areas where blood was concentrated on her skirt, shirt and underwear.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Darlene Hulse

A few small hairs and fibers were found on her clothes so they bagged those along with her clothes and fingernail clippings, all as evidence.

Even though she was only missing and likely in the woods for about 30 hours, rigor mortis had started to set in and leividity showed that she had likely been lying on her back in the woods since the time she died.

Darlene's left hand was injured, which looked like defensive wounds.

And there were seven lacerations on her head that Dr. Hoover said were caused by a quote, long narrow type of instrument, a.k.a. the fireplace poker.

Dr. Hoover noted in his report that Darlene's skull wasn't fractured and her brain didn't show any evidence of additional trauma or hemorrhage.

He also noted some injuries to her legs, arms and neck, but some of those injuries Dr. Hoover thought Darlene probably received after she was already dead.

Hoover concluded that her cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head and he determined that her manner of death was homicide.

Dr. Hoover's findings also stated that Darlene was not sexually assaulted, which is surprising considering everything we know so far, right?

Considering her skirt and shirt were pushed way up when she was found.

Considering that nothing was taken from the home and this man seemingly came with duct tape for her.

Hoover's reports say they did a sexual assault kit, but there isn't any information in the report about what type of testing they did.

What we've come to learn is that in 1984 it could have been one of several different tests, some of which were super detailed and others were kind of superficial.

But Dr. Hoover seemed certain that she wasn't sexually assaulted.

He also said that Darlene likely died sometime between 8.30 a.m. and noon on Friday, August 17.

But we know that was probably after nine since Ron's dad had been there dropping off bananas just before nine.

As these findings made their way back to the Argus community, the story of Darlene's murder was all over the news.

From the small local newspapers to radio broadcasts and even the TV stations in South Bend, which meant that calls were pouring in.

Most of them were various sightings of green four-door cars, which sort of became a wild goose chase for police.

But there was one very interesting tip that seemed super relevant.

An Argus man named Alex Long called police and said that he had seen the news about Darlene Hulse,

and in hindsight he realized that he had been driving by her home right around 9.30 a.m. on the day that she was abducted.

Alex lived one road over from the Hulses, and he was headed to Plymouth that morning when he passed their home.

He said that he saw a four-door, blue-green, early 70s Bonneville-type car with round headlights parked outside their house.

But not in the driveway where Marie and Melissa would see it just moments later when they would eventually go running from the home.

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He said that the car was parked out front, like on the road.

He said what he noticed about the car was that it was in bad shape with rust on it.

And he saw a man sitting in the driver's seat who had a big pointy nose, blond, slick back hair, and he was wearing a collared shirt.

He said the man looked to be in his 20s.

Now the other interesting thing that Alex noted was that the car seemed to have had a homemade paint job,

which is very consistent with the chalky bad paint job that Marie described.

This was the same car. This guy had been parked out front.

Was he watching her through the open curtains in the window?

Was he working up the courage to do whatever it was he had planned? Police still didn't know.

Investigators met that night to debrief on everything that they learned from the autopsy and the other details that Alex had provided about their suspect in his car.

But at around 10.30 p.m., just as the police were wrapping up a game plan to ramp up their manhunt the following day, another call came in.

The call was from a man who said that his friend might have had something to do with Darlene's murder.

That's next in Episode 4 They Left Town. You can listen to that right now.

This is an ongoing investigation and you aren't going to want to miss a single update.

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