

## [Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Pamela Butler and Marta Rodriguez

Hi, crime junkies. I'm your host Ashley Flowers.

And I'm Brett.

And the story I have for you today is about two women who were strangers in life, but who, despite disappearing decades apart, formed a kind of sisterhood in death. It's also about the families who refused to let their stories be buried.

These are the stories of Pamela Butler and Marta Rodriguez.

Music

It's late Saturday afternoon in Washington DC,

and Thelma Butler is waiting for her daughter Pamela, who everyone calls Pam.

She's supposed to pick her up for a dinner date.

Pam and her new boyfriend Jose are supposed to be taking Thelma to this DC staple called Ben's Chili Bowl for an early bird special.

But as the clock hits three and then ticks past, there's no sign of them.

Thelma waits patiently at first, then maybe a little less so.

But still, no Pam, no Jose.

And as the early darkness of winter starts to creep in,

Thelma's confusion gives way to concern.

Pam wouldn't leave her hanging like this, especially not today on Valentine's Day.

In fact, when Thelma realized their plans were on Valentine's Day,

she even double checked with Pam to make sure she wouldn't rather spend it alone with Jose.

But Thelma's a widow and Pam told her mom that she wanted to take her out on Valentine's Day.

I mean, that's the kind of daughter she is.

And if some last-minute issue popped up, she would have called.

Thelma is certain of that.

So she picks up her phone, dials Pam's home number, but no answer.

She dials her cell again, no answer.

And with every ring, her anxiety is growing.

So Thelma calls her son Derek, Pam's brother, hoping maybe he's spoken to her.

Now, when he picks up, he says that he hasn't heard from her either.

But he thinks his mom is probably overreacting.

Like, sure, Pam's usually punctual and conscientious.

She's your classic type A personality, but this is her first Valentine's Day with Jose.

They've only been dating since September.

And that early kind of romance can make anyone a little distracted, a little selfish even.

Besides, what's Thelma gonna do?

File a police report on her 47-year-old daughter for missing a dinner date?

And what year is this happening in?

2009.

Oh, yeah, I can hear that call now.

Hello, officer.

I'd like to report a crime.

My fully grown up, independent 47-year-old adult daughter stood me up for dinner.

Good luck getting the police on that case.

Yeah, that's what she's thinking.

So Thelma tries not to worry.  
If Derek is not concerned, maybe she shouldn't be either.  
She'll try again tomorrow.  
But when she still can't get ahold of Pam the next day after church,  
that nagging feeling is back.  
Now Derek still, sure, she's fine, but sometimes a mom just knows.  
Does Thelma try to get ahold of Jose?  
See if he knows anything?  
You know, I don't know that she has Jose's number.  
Like, I know they've been introduced.  
Pam brought him to the family's Thanksgiving dinner,  
maybe a few other holiday gatherings,  
but it seems like she doesn't know him all that well.  
Which I think an armchair detective can overanalyze,  
but literally I consider myself a well-seasoned crime junkie,  
and a few months ago I was losing it  
because I couldn't get ahold of my sister,  
and I realized that the guy that she had been dating  
for like months at that point,  
I had zero way to get ahold of him.  
No number, no social media.  
I was convinced he killed her.  
Spoiler alert, he didn't.  
And now I have all of his info,  
but the point being, it's actually not that weird to me.  
Though, safety note to all,  
even if a relationship is new, get the info.  
Promise not to be a weirdo and text and call their new beau,  
but like, new crime junkie role.  
Get the info.  
Anyway, when Tuesday rolls around  
and there's still no word from Pam,  
Thelma decides she's waited long enough.  
According to an episode of Dateline that aired in 2022,  
she asks her 19-year-old grandson, Brandon,  
to go to his aunt Pam's house with her  
to see if she's there, see if anything's up.  
And she wants Brandon there for a couple of reasons.  
One, if she's being honest with herself,  
she's scared of what she's gonna find.  
But two, Brandon actually lived with his aunt Pam recently,  
so he's still got a key to the house and the alarm code.  
Are they actually expecting Pam to be home, though?  
I'd assume Pam probably has a job

and would be at work on a Tuesday.  
Well, good question.  
I mean, it is a normal work week.  
She should be at work,  
but yesterday was President's Day  
and she had planned to take off that Tuesday  
to give herself a long weekend.  
So they're thinking...  
Oh, so this week at least, she should be home.  
Right.  
But if she's home,  
why isn't she answering her phone or calling her mom back?  
When Thelma and Brandon get there,  
they immediately start noticing red flags,  
like there's mail piled up on the front porch.  
And even though the front door is locked,  
when Brandon unlocks it,  
they realize the alarms not set.  
But there's no sign of Pam  
and she wouldn't leave the house unarmed.  
Looking around the first floor,  
Thelma sees the shades on the dining room window  
are raised from the bottom.  
And I'm sure you're asking, like, so what?  
But apparently these shades can be lowered  
from the top or the bottom.  
I didn't know such a thing existed.  
You learn new things every day.  
But apparently, Pam only lowers them from the top.  
She doesn't want her neighbors peeking in.  
But she could have just been rushing around that morning,  
skip some things in her normal routine.  
Yeah, maybe that morning,  
but then if everything's fine,  
why has she been MIA before this?  
True.  
So as they keep going through the house,  
they look closer at the dining room window,  
the same one with the wonky shade.  
And they realize that window is unlocked.  
Pam would never leave her house unarmed,  
but leaving a window unlocked on the first floor of the house,  
like completely out of the question.  
Yeah.

So that's red flag four or five.  
And it just keeps getting worse  
the further they go into the house.  
I mean, the house is kind of a mess in Pam's office.  
Papers are even strewn all over,  
which for Pam,  
who Thelma lovingly calls a clean freak to the Washington Post,  
is even more cause for concern.  
And something else that stands out to them  
is this note that they find in her office.  
It's from Jose in what they assume to be his handwriting.  
And it says that he's stopped by.  
It's not dated or anything.  
So who knows how recent it is.  
I mean, what are the odds it's from any other time though?  
It sounds like Jose hasn't seen her either.  
Exactly.  
So they keep making their way through the house.  
When they get upstairs,  
they see something that would give any crime junkie full body chills.  
Pam's bed is stripped down to the mattress.  
The pillows and comforter are piled on the bedroom sofa,  
not folded or stacked, just piled.  
But it's what's not in that pile that stands out even more.  
The sheets.  
Thelma and Brandon scour the house top to bottom.  
Those sheets aren't anywhere.  
And they're sure the sheets aren't just being washed,  
like still in the dryer or something?  
No, they are sure.  
And apparently Pam's not the kind of person  
who would even leave her bed stripped.  
She'd either put on clean sheets  
while she was washing the dirty ones,  
or she'd put the dirty ones back on as soon as they were clean.  
And again, they're not like being clean.  
They check the washer.  
What she wouldn't do is wash the dirty sheets  
and then put them away in the linen closet,  
like with the bed unmade.  
Okay, not a good feeling with the bed sheets missing,  
but what about like the usual things we're looking for?  
Her keys, her car, purse, belongings, stuff like that.  
Well, according to reporting in the Washington Post

by Paul Duggan, her keys are gone, same with her cell phone.  
But both of her cars are in the driveway and garage.  
And Pam drives everywhere.  
So again, the thing is, if she's not there,  
one of those cars shouldn't be here either.  
Right.  
Now, nothing of value seems to be missing  
other than whatever cash and cards were in her wallet.  
So none of this is adding up.  
By this point, Thelma and Brandon  
aren't even pretending to worry about Pam's privacy.  
They are rifling through cabinets, flipping over cushions,  
and they've got zero hesitation about listening to Pam's voicemail.  
But when they hit play on the answering machine,  
they hear Jose's voice and their stomachs drop.  
From the voicemail, it sounds like Jose is looking for Pam too.  
And it's from the past few days  
when no one's been able to get ahold of her.  
So there's no hope that they just rode off into the sunset together?  
No, no.  
So by this point, Thelma is ready to report Pam missing.  
But just to be super, super sure before she does,  
she calls Pam's office.  
Maybe she changed her mind about working that day.  
I mean, it wouldn't explain literally anything they found in the house,  
why she's been MIA, but Thelma is desperate.  
Right.  
And when a staffer tells her that Pam didn't come in that day,  
that's it.  
Thelma calls Derek to tell him to get over to Pam's right away.  
And it's not long before they're calling police.  
While they're waiting, Brandon hops on Pam's computer  
because her family knows that she's got security cameras.  
And as that episode of Dateline shows,  
they don't just aim toward the front door.  
They cover almost the entire exterior of the house.  
Oh my God, I love this.  
I know, right?  
I mean, these are just ads, you guys.  
When we tell you to get a security system,  
we mean it from the bottom of our paranoid heart.  
Truly.  
We mean the security system, add on the cameras.  
But honestly, it's kind of wild that she has all of this

because I know it's pretty common for people to have,  
I mean, these days like ring doorbells.  
Again, you get the cameras with your security systems.  
It's kind of the minimum at this point.  
But keep in mind, again, we're 2009,  
so most people don't have a home security system with cameras.  
But our girl Pam does.  
However, there's a problem.  
Even though the cameras cover almost the whole exterior of the house.  
Know the one place they don't cover.  
That side with that open window.  
Yep.  
That feels way too convenient for me.  
Same.  
But they still want to see if there's anything else on the footage.  
So Brandon pulls up the past six days of security footage  
and starts scanning through it because it could be,  
should be a roadmap to Pam's disappearance.  
I mean, the front door and the back door are both covered.  
And that's what really matters, right?  
But what he sees is strange to say the least.  
Here's the rundown.  
So Pam gets home from work the evening of Thursday, February 12th,  
and Jose is already waiting to be let inside.  
On Friday, a hand is seen reaching out the front door to grab the mail.  
And Pam doesn't leave the house Friday,  
but that's to be expected.  
Friday are her days off from work.  
But Jose does leave Friday morning and then comes back that night  
carrying gifts, Valentine's Day gifts, I assume.  
And from there on out, up until Tuesday,  
when Pam's family and investigators start arriving,  
the only person seen coming and going from the house is Jose.  
I mean, there is a mailman and a UPS guy who drops stuff off,  
but neither of them stick around and definitely don't go into the house.  
Wait, hold on.  
If Jose is waiting outside for Pam on Thursday evening,  
how is he getting in and out of the house all weekend long  
when we're pretty sure Pam isn't there?  
Well, that's the strange part, right?  
So she should be there.  
We haven't seen her leave.  
I mean, the only reason we believe she's not there  
is that her family hasn't gotten ahold of her and she's not there now.

Well, and Jose left her note and that voicemail trying to find her.  
So he knows she's not there.  
Does the footage show how he's getting in?  
Like, is he being led in by someone?  
The door is just unlocked.  
Does he have a key?  
So in the footage after he's led in by her on Thursday,  
the rest of the time he's for sure using a key.  
So he leaves Friday night.  
He comes and goes on Saturday, comes and goes again on, like, Monday.  
Sometimes he's lugging large garbage bags of something.  
Whoa, I'm sorry.  
Lugging large garbage bags?  
No.  
Time to find Jose.  
Yes, because along with the large garbage bags,  
at one point he's even carrying a white bucket filled full of cleaning supplies,  
at least according to two reports in the Washington Post.  
This is a dumb question, but are we thinking the garbage bags  
are just cleaning up some kind of normal mess or...  
I know where you're going with this,  
but actually according to Brandon, again, her nephew,  
these garbage bags aren't big enough or they don't even look heavy enough  
to contain a body or parts or, again, wherever I know your head is going.  
And investigators eventually say the same thing.  
I mean, Pam is petite, she's a fit woman,  
but even taking that into account, like, no.  
Okay, but not to get too graphic,  
but people don't always dispose of a body in one piece.  
Very true, but we're gonna have to put a pin in that  
because I need to talk about the other stuff that's going on.  
So while Brandon's scanning through this footage,  
investigators from the Metropolitan Police Department  
are processing the scene.  
And really, they're trying to find a scene to process  
because even with all the tools and technology at their disposal,  
even with evidence texts tearing the house apart inch by inch,  
there's zero indication a crime even occurred here.  
Just like what Thelma and Brandon observed,  
no signs of forest entry except for that open window,  
which isn't forced open, there's no sign of a struggle,  
no visible bloodstains, but no sign of a cleanup either.  
Basically, no indication that anything happened to Pam at all.  
It's a total mystery.

But if there is no sign of a cleanup,  
then what were all those cleaning supplies for?

I don't know.

At this point, no one does.

Okay, but we know something bad happened here.

Pam goes in the house and then just never comes out,  
but Jose is in and out a ton.

So where exactly is Jose?

I mean, make him start talking.

Bingo.

And according to a timeline on Pam's case  
published by The Washington Post,  
even though Thelma doesn't have Jose's number,  
Pam's brother Derek does, or at least he's able to find it.  
So he calls Jose and asks if he knows where Pam is  
and if he's talked to her.

Jose says no, he hasn't heard from her since Friday,  
which was the night before Valentine's Day.

And that was the night he says Pam broke up with him.

Broke up with him?

I, what?

You didn't mention they weren't together anymore.

Yeah, well, neither did Pam.

Like this is news to Derek.

So he asks if he can come over and talk in person.

And Jose says, sure, here's my address.

I'll see you in a few.

So do we have any sort of timeline  
for when he left those voicemails and that note?

Well, remember the note wasn't dated,  
but the voicemails were all from the weekend  
after Jose says Pam broke up with him.

So she breaks up with you on Friday  
and then you're just in and out of her house  
cleaning and looking for her?

Only Jose has the answer to that.

So Derek drives to the address Jose gave him  
and it's this apartment building.

And when he walks into the lobby, Jose meets him there,  
but that's not where they end up chatting  
because Derek asked to go up to his apartment  
and Jose is like, okay, sure, whatever.

And over the course of their conversation,  
Derek gets the sense that Jose is just as worried



about Pam as everyone else is.

But when he asks why Pam broke off their relationship, the explanation he's given is weird.

Jose says that they broke up because Pam was jealous, not of like an ex-girlfriend or anything, but because Jose was still talking to his ex's daughter.

Excuse me, sir, what kind of conversations are you having with your ex's daughter that are making your girlfriend jealous?

My thoughts exactly.

Now, to be fair, I don't know who this ex is or how old the daughter is supposed to be, how long the relationship was, or what his relationship with that daughter was.

So maybe like there's context we're missing.

And Jose ends up giving multiple explanations for why he and that ex broke up.

So there's just a lot we don't know.

Either way, I'm not sure Derek is quite as weird out as we are, but he also is not done with Jose, not yet.

He looks him square in the face and tells him to strip.

Like, take off your clothes.

He wants to see if Jose has any new cuts or scratches, basically signs of a recent physical altercation.

And Jose does it.

I mean, down to his underwear.

I am both super uncomfortable and super impressed.

Girl same, but Jose's clean.

No cuts, no scratches, no bruises, nothing.

But Derek's still not done.

And he starts going through Jose's stuff, opening closets, looking in drawers, peeking under furniture.

And he's trying to accomplish a couple of things here.

I mean, one, he wants to see if Jose's hiding anything physically, a weapon or evidence or whatever.

But he's also kind of just messing with Jose's head.

He wants to gauge his reaction.

And the whole time, Jose is totally chill.

Just sits back and lets Derek do his thing.

He's not defensive.

He's not secretive.

He's fine.

And after about two hours of questioning, Derek leaves, no closer to finding his sister.

Does Jose give a good reason as to why he was going in and out of the house after they broke up, or honestly, even how?

I know that was my big question too,

but I'm not sure Derek asks about that stuff yet.

But honestly, he might not even know about that at that point.

The timeline of who knows what when isn't totally clear here.

So it's totally possible that Brandon is still scanning through the camera footage while Derek is dealing with Jose.

You know what I mean?

Got it.

So I'm sure everything is like super chaotic like this early on.

But either way, as Derek's walking out,

according to reporting by Mark Seagraves and Derek Ward for NBC Washington, something's nagging at him.

Something Jose said.

It's just like playing in his head on repeat.

Or maybe it's not so much what he said,

but rather how he said it.

Because when Jose was swearing up and down that he didn't hurt pan, that he'd never hurt pan, he said,

and this is a quote according to Derek.

He said, I loved your sister.

Loved past tense.

Maybe he's just using past tense because they broke up.

Maybe.

But if she broke up with him like within the last few days, it just feels off to Derek.

Yeah, but it's not exactly a smoking gun.

Well, no, but there is no smoking gun figuratively or literally.

They don't have a weapon.

They don't have a crime scene.

And they still don't have a clue where Pam could be.

So all investigators are left to do is start digging into Pam's life.

And as they do, they learn that Jose isn't the only one who may have had an issue with her.

Remember how I said that her nephew Brandon lived with Pam for a while and then he moved out recently?

Well, when he's talking to investigators,

they learn that Pam had actually asked him to leave.

Apparently she was frustrated about money

and didn't think that Brandon was like carrying his weight.

And Brandon's not the only family member Pam's had money issues with.

Investigators learn that Pam and her brother Derek own at least one property together, possibly more.

It's this rental property, I think.

And one of the family members tells them that Pam wasn't happy about how Derek was managing it and she won it out, which might not be a huge red flag on its own.

But when they look at who's a named beneficiary in her will, there is one name that sticks out.

Oh my God, it's Derek.

Derek.

And so things get kind of tense between Derek and the investigators.

They interview him numerous times

because according to that Dateline episode,

they say that he's the only one

with anything to gain from Pam's disappearance.

And they use that in their interviews.

They tell him it's not looking good for him

and it gets under his skin.

Okay, but obvious fact, Derek's not on that security footage and neither is Brandon, right?

It's Jose.

Jose is carrying garbage bags of God knows what while Pam is nowhere to be seen.

I get money being a motive.

It's a strong motive even, especially in 2009

when like, hi, recession, everyone's watching their investments and like savings and property values go up in smoke.

But I'm going to be honest, I'm still betting on Jose.

Yeah, and if you feel like that now, just wait.

Investigators may pull some good cop, bad cop stuff with Derek, especially when he becomes kind of a thorn in their side trying to ramp up the public pressure on Pam's case.

But their focus is more on Jose than anyone else from the get-go.

But when investigators ask him about those garbage bags, Jose's got an explanation for them.

He said he was practically living with Pam before they broke up.

He had a lot of stuff to get out of her house, which could make sense,

but I'm not sure he has an explanation

when a cadaver dog hits on the back passenger seat and trunk of his car

within the first two weeks of the investigation.

Ashley, way to bury the lead there.

And it gets worse than that

because cadaver dogs also hit on multiple locations

in and around Pam's home.

The washer and dryer, a blanket in the garage, Pam's Jaguar.

Wait, wait, wait.

Why are they having cadaver dogs come out in the first place?

Do they find something that makes them think Pam's deceased?

They don't, but by day two,

looking at everything they know about Pam,

everything her family's telling them,

the surveillance footage,

I mean, they're already working the case as a homicide.

So their next step is to search Jose's apartment

and seize some items for testing,

like clothes and electronics, stuff like that.

But it doesn't seem like investigators do much with this.

Like, I can't find any information about any testing or results.

And they also bring Jose in for multiple interviews

and have him come to take a polygraph.

But he eventually stops cooperating,

starting just before that polygraph is supposed to begin.

And he voluntarily comes to the station.

He got completely wired up

and then rips all of the wires off

and storms out screaming obscenities.

Could he look more suspicious?

I know.

After that, he goes to the media

saying that he's sick of investigators trying to get him

to confess to something he didn't do

and he wants everyone to know it.

And he says he knows what they,

they meaning investigators and Pam's family,

think he did.

According to an interview,

Jose gives to Paul Duggan with the Washington Post,

they think he's some kind of Houdini,

making bodies disappear.

They believe he killed Pam

and wrapped her body up in those bedsheets,

probably shoved her in a trash bag as best he could,

hoisted her out that dining room window

on the only side of the house

that doesn't have security camera coverage,

snuck back in the house and left through the front door

to make sure the cameras caught him leaving

and then drove off with her body in his trunk.  
But Jose, he would never do those things, he says.  
Thanks for that very specific hypothetical play-by-play, dude.  
Yeah, I know, right?  
And listen, I'm sure police already had a theory  
that someone took her out that window before this,  
but I just had this vision of investigators  
like literally taking notes while he's talking,  
like hoisted her body out of the dining room window.  
Yes, yes, makes sense.  
Like you gave them, I don't know, it was wild.  
Yeah, which by the way,  
I don't think we've touched on this yet  
and I guess it's kind of implied,  
but like whoever killed Pam knew her pretty well,  
like was familiar enough with her place  
to know that the only area her cameras didn't cover  
was this one window.  
Oh, no doubt, but I mean, remember, that's not just Jose.  
And actually, investigators receive  
a couple of anonymous text messages  
pointing the finger square at Derek.  
And they're kind of vague just basically  
that Derek and Pam aren't as close as Derek wants you to think  
and Derek has everyone fooled and...  
Okay, but nothing about what might have happened  
where Pam might be, you know, nothing actually useful.  
No, nothing like that.  
And I'm sorry, these messages seem really convenient  
for our man Jose Houdini over here, if you ask me.  
I mean, they're anonymous as if they could come from anyone.  
Like maybe someone wanting to deflect attention from Jose.  
Maybe Jose himself.  
Yeah, I agree.  
It's suspicious, but I don't know that it matters  
because like nothing really comes from them  
as far as I can tell.  
And Britt, I think this is going to make your blood boil,  
but despite all of Jose's sketchy behavior,  
the investigation pretty much stalls out at this point.  
What?  
Which is mind-blowing in retrospect,  
but also really mind-blowing to Pam's family in real time.  
I mean, they can't help but wonder if investigators

wouldn't be pursuing Pam's case more diligently if it was, you know, getting the kind of sustained national media coverage that Gabby Petito got or Lacey Peterson, Natalie Holloway. You know, if investigators were feeling a lot of pressure from the public to solve the case, which at that point they weren't, and the family does their best to try and attract that kind of attention with the help from the Black and Missing Foundation, which you guys, if you don't remember, is a nonprofit that tries to garner awareness for cases involving missing persons of color and they provide support to their families. So along with that organization, they hold a vigil on the first anniversary and on the second and all the anniversaries after that. But as the years roll by, more and more it seems like investigators are just counting on Pam's remains to be discovered to move the case forward. Paul Duggan says in one of his articles, quote, their best hope, I think, is that her remains will eventually turn up and yield new evidence. Okay, we know nobody cases are difficult. Really, really difficult. But I feel like let's wait while discoverable evidence degrades day by day by day, feels like a super passive strategy for solving a pretty likely homicide. Especially when you say they collected things from Jose, but may or may not have tested them. Yeah, you're not wrong. And to be fair, I don't know that they didn't test them. I just think nothing came from it or they didn't publicize anything that came from it at least. Yeah, and I can't say I'm shocked either, considering nothing came from the cadaver dog sitting on Jose's fricking trunk. Yeah, and it's wild, right? Like considering the footage that they have. Yeah, I just... Unless she is still in the house,

which she is very much not, right?

It seems so stinking clear.

But despite the family's best efforts,  
Pam's case just sits on a shelf,  
gathering dust.

By 2016, Detective Mitch Cradle,  
who's been working the case for years,  
is either set to retire or already retired  
based on the source that you read.

And he's just as frustrated as Pam's family is  
by the lack of progress.

He's always felt her case wasn't getting the resources  
that it needed or deserved.

When a judge declares Pam legally dead  
in July of 2016 at the family's request,  
Detective Cradle lobbies his boss  
to assign someone new to the case,  
someone who can focus just on Pam's case.

Because for as long as he's been on it,  
he has been working like a full roster of other cases too.

Right.

When his lobbying works,  
veteran cold case detective Mike Fulton  
is brought on to work Pam's case full time.

He spends the first few months of 2017  
retreading old ground.

His gut is that Brandon was never a real person of interest,  
but he wanted to dig a little deeper into Derek.

Soon enough though,

I mean, he comes to the same conclusion with Derek.

I mean, hello, that's because Jose is our guy.

Jose has always been our guy.

And you are preaching to the choir.

When Detective Fulton reexamines the old security footage,  
he sees things straight off the bat that don't add up,  
including new things that no one else seemed to have noticed.

For one, Pam had motion sensor lights outside,  
but in the footage,

the lights weren't activating when they should,  
almost like the sensors had been tampered with or something.  
Like maybe the guy who spent three days hauling garbage bags  
and cleaning supplies out of a likely crime scene  
preferred to operate under the cover of darkness.

Detective Fulton also swears he can see Pam's key chain

in Jose's hand as he comes and goes.  
But Jose had always told investigators  
he was using his own set of keys,  
a set of keys Pam's family never believed  
she would have given him in the first place.  
I mean, I'm just learning about this case today,  
and even to me, the key thing made no sense from the start.  
Dude was waiting outside in February.  
He obviously didn't have his own set.  
And certainly not after they break up, right?  
Right. No.  
Right, like he waits for her outside, he comes in,  
she breaks up with him and hands him a set of keys.  
And here's the key. Yeah, I don't think so.  
So now that Pam's case is being actively worked,  
Detective Fulton is able to uncover  
a lot of useful information in pretty short order,  
including some information from a new witness.  
Whoa, a witness?  
It's a witness, not to Pam's death, though.  
A witness to Jose's long history of violence against women.  
This witness is Jose's adult son, Hansel.  
Jose had Hansel with his first wife, Marta.  
And Marta, well, Marta also disappeared  
under mysterious circumstances in 1989.  
Two whole decades before Pam.  
And what Hansel tells investigators about his dad  
is enough to unravel a lifetime of violence and abuse.  
Detective Fulton learns that Jose met Marta  
in Puerto Rico during his military service.  
They had a son together named Hansel  
and settled in Arlington, Virginia.  
But when Jose was redeployed this time to Central America,  
he met and married another woman named Guadalupe in Panama.  
Now, he brought Guadalupe back to the U.S.,  
settling her somewhere in the D.C. area as well.  
Guadalupe knew nothing of Marta or Hansel,  
and for a while, Marta didn't know anything of Guadalupe,  
or the son she had with Jose either.  
So this dude had two separate families at the same time  
in the same metro area?  
Yeah, bold, right?  
Yeah.  
According to that episode of Dateline,



## [Transcript] Crime Junkie / MURDERED: Pamela Butler and Marta Rodriguez

Marta eventually figured it out,  
because there's no way you can keep a charade like that going on forever.  
Yeah.

Now, Hansel was about four years old at the time  
and was living with Marta's family in Puerto Rico,  
and Marta ended things with Jose.

She got an apartment with roommates,  
got a job at a psychiatric hospital,  
even got a new boyfriend she really liked.  
But Jose wasn't about to let his wife walk away.  
Even though he had a whole other wife...

Hmm.

Jose started following Marta everywhere,  
to the point where he was full-on stalking her.

I mean, she was terrified,  
and she had every reason to be.

Especially when Jose straight up abducted her one day in 1989,  
held her captive in an Arlington hotel room for two days,  
tied her up with rope and duct tape,  
beat her up and sexually assaulted her over and over.

It was certain she was going to die.

So when she saw a tiny opportunity to escape,  
she knew she had to take it.

And she was able to get all the way out to the street  
before Jose caught up with her,  
grabbed her by her hair,  
trying to drag her into a wooded area nearby.

Oh my God.

And I don't think there was any doubt in her mind  
what the outcome would be if he got her into those woods.

But just then, when I'm sure she was losing all hope,  
a car slammed on its brakes.

And she probably thought she was hallucinating  
when she saw an Arlington cop running at her and Jose  
at full speed.

But she wasn't.

And this cop, a former beat cop named Officer Sutton,  
tackled Jose and put him in handcuffs.

And when he asked her what was going on,  
she told him her whole harrowing story.

When Officer Sutton checked out Jose's car,  
the duct tape and rope were just there,  
sitting out in plain view, visible through the window.

Once Jose was in custody facing charges of misdemeanor assault

and battery and felony abduction,  
he made a bone-chilling statement to police.  
According to reporting by Keith L. Alexander and Peter Herman,  
Jose said, quote,  
I'd rather see her dead than be with someone else.  
And Marta, she said basically the same thing.  
When she was formally interviewed about this whole incident,  
she told cops that not only would Jose kill her,  
but he'd kill them too.  
But I guess I'm confused.  
Was her going missing like those two days  
he kept her tied up in the motel room?  
Or is she still missing when Hansel comes forward  
to talk to these detectives in 2017?  
Both.  
So Jose kidnapped her and held her in that hotel room, right?  
And Officer Sutton just happened to roll up  
exactly at the right moment to intervene.  
But the charges related to that kidnapping  
ended up being dropped when Marta didn't appear in court to testify.  
And I know this is all a little confusing,  
but it's not that Marta was missing yet.  
The impression I get is like so many victims of domestic violence,  
she was too scared to show up.  
But that was for good reason,  
because Jose may not be a lot of things,  
but on his threats against Marta,  
he was a man of his word.  
He would see Marta dead rather than let her be with anyone else.  
So it was around a week after that court date  
that her roommate reported her missing.  
And this time she was never seen again.  
So how did none of this come up  
in the years Pam's case was going cold?  
I have no idea.  
But I think it had to have been maybe a jurisdictional issue,  
because everything with Marta took place in Virginia  
and Pam disappeared from DC,  
though obviously that's not an excuse.  
I mean, it's not exactly a secret to DC investigators  
that there are a whole bunch of Virginia and Maryland cities  
bordering DC, each with their own local department.  
So I mean, maybe they didn't have reason to go asking around.  
Maybe they didn't look deeply into his background.

I don't know.

Somehow Jose just skated under the radar in Marta's disappearance and it never came up in Pam's.

So after Marta disappeared, Jose brought Hansel back to the States to live with him and Guadalupe and their son together.

What did Hansel think happened to his mother?

Well, originally, Jose told him that she had run off with some drug dealers just abandoning him, which he actually believed for a long time.

Okay, now I'm worried about Guadalupe.

Did she make it out alive?

Well, she did.

Although Hansel says there were times when he thought neither he nor Guadalupe were gonna survive.

For instance, he describes one incident when he was maybe 10 or 11 and he said he could hear his dad screaming at Guadalupe that he was gonna kill her.

When he saw Jose hold a gun to her head while she begged for her life, he was certain they were all gonna die.

But the most critical thing Hansel shares with Detective Fulton, which investigators describe in that Washington Post article as quote, a key building block in a case based largely on circumstantial evidence, is a different childhood memory, a memory of hiding in his father's library, searching for refuge from Jose's rage when he came across a piece of paper that would throw his entire world off its axis.

There, in his father's handwriting, was a confession of sorts.

It said quote, I, Jose Rodriguez, am responsible for Marta's disappearance.

What, he just wrote it out like that and left it around for his kid to find?

He did.

And Hansel's story leads Detective Fulton down this terrible rabbit hole of even more victims of Jose's abuse. Victims who tell him stories of kidnapping and sexual assault and death threats.

One victim even says he threatened to sexually assault her three-year-old. Jesus Christ, this guy is just like a total monster. How did he even make it in this world for so long? That's a great having question. But, however, he managed, and there's kind of a poetry in it being his and Marta's son who provides the puzzle piece that finally allows investigators to get some kind of justice for Pam. Because once Detective Fulton hears all of this and grasps the depth of Jose's violence, it finally happens. In April of 2017, the DC Metropolitan Police Department announces that Jose has been taken into custody and charged with first-degree murder in the 2009 disappearance of Pam Butler. And as your daughter's favorite song goes, it's about damn time. Truly. And Derek says the same thing. But when Detective Fulton calls him at 3 a.m. after the arrest, which at this point hasn't even been publicized yet, all Derek can register is relief. In reporting by Sam Ford with ABC7, Derek says of Detective Fulton, quote, he said, I just want to call you and let you know. We locked him up tonight. And that was probably one of the best feelings I've had in my life. Although Jose is indicted for first-degree murder in Pam's case, he eventually pleads guilty to second-degree murder, and he is sentenced to 12 years in prison. So, after all that, he only gets 12 freaking years? Well, hold your horses, even though 12 years is a criminally short amount of time, Jose has more poetic justice coming his way. And, well, justice justice coming his way as well. As part of his plea deal,

he has to admit what happened that night with Pam,  
which is pretty much what we suspected,  
what Jose denied all along.  
He says that Pam either insulted him  
or tried to break up with him,  
and he was so overtaken by rage  
that he completely lost his sh\*\*.  
He says he punched her in the face,  
and when she dropped to the floor,  
he climbed on top of her,  
put his hands around her neck,  
and squeezed the life out of her.  
Then he turned off the sensors on the outdoor lighting  
and used the dining room window to get her body out.  
But one of the key terms of Jose's plea deal,  
and this is the part that's the most important  
to Derek and Thelma,  
is that he has to lead investigators to Pam's remains,  
which he says he buried on a median  
between the northbound and southbound lanes of I-95.  
And Britt, as if all the loss and disappointment  
over the years hasn't been enough,  
Derek and Thelma are heartbroken  
when the search team discovers  
that the median where Pam's body was buried  
has been surfaced over in road improvements.  
So her body is never actually recovered.  
But can't they just dig up the road?  
No, I mean, if you've ever been to the DC,  
Maryland, Virginia area,  
this is one of the most traveled highways  
in the United States, it's massive.  
This wouldn't be some little side road,  
and apparently there's just no way to safely do it.  
But, and there is a big but,  
as they're searching for Pam's body,  
a member of the search team has this major light bulb moment  
flashing back to memories of a woman's remains  
being discovered on that median of I-95  
not far from this site back in 1991.  
Now those remains had never been identified,  
and that case of the Jane Doe went cold.  
Obviously they're not Pam's,  
she didn't disappear until 2009.

But almost on a lark,  
investigators decide to compare Hansel's DNA  
to a sample from their 1991 Jane Doe.  
I just got chills, it's Marta.  
You know, Derek is still crushed  
that Pam's body has never recovered,  
and he feels cheated that Jose was able  
to keep his plea deal despite this.  
But this, the search for his sister  
leading to the discovery of Jose's first victim,  
it almost gives him another chance  
to seek justice for Pam.  
So for the next two years,  
Derek makes it his personal mission  
to deliver justice to Hansel  
that his family didn't quite get.  
And although he's fighting for Pam and for Marta,  
for all of Jose's victims really,  
he's also fighting for every missing person of color  
whose case deserves just as much attention,  
just as many resources,  
just as much closure as anyone else's.  
And for the families and the loved ones  
left behind to pick up the pieces.  
He calls the prosecutor's office,  
he meets with the prosecutor,  
he even shows up at the prosecutor's office  
with a media scrum.  
Day in and day out,  
Derek publicly demands that Jose  
face prosecution for Marta's murder,  
because if anyone knows how critical  
public scrutiny and pressure are  
to the criminal justice system, it's Derek.  
In reporting for NBC Washington  
by David Culver and Gina Cook,  
Derek says of his meetings  
with the Stafford County attorney, quote,  
one of the things that I really want him to know  
is that, you know,  
this is a person of color that went missing,  
and too often we don't do anything about it.  
When Jose is finally charged  
with first degree murder in Marta's case in 2019,

it is a personal victory for Derek.  
And when he pleads guilty to second degree murder  
and is sentenced to the maximum of 40 years,  
it brings Derek and his family a level of peace  
that they were denied in Pam's case.  
But that wasn't the end of Derek's story.  
He now serves on the board  
of the Black and Missing Foundation.  
You guys, I can't emphasize this enough.  
This organization does so many important things,  
so much critical work.  
We've worked with them before,  
and if you want to learn more about them  
or the ways that you can support them,  
you can visit [blackandmissinginc.com](http://blackandmissinginc.com).  
I'll link out to it in the show notes.  
Derek's work with the foundation  
is just the latest stage of the promise  
that he made to Pam so long ago.  
While they were watching a true crime program together  
of all things,  
Pam told him that if anything ever happened to her,  
if she ever went missing,  
to never stop looking for her.  
And he didn't.  
In a lot of ways, he still hasn't.  
You can find all the source material  
for this episode on our website  
[crimejunkiepodcast.com](http://crimejunkiepodcast.com)  
And you can follow us on Instagram  
at [crimejunkiepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/crimejunkiepodcast).  
We'll be back next week with a brand new episode.  
So, what do you think, Chuck?  
Do you approve?