

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF: Clarence Roberts

Hi, crime junkies. I'm your host, Ashley Flowers.
And I'm Britt.
And the story I have for you today is a baffling one.
It's about two crimes a decade apart
and the man at the center of both.
This is the story of Clarence Roberts.
I'm sure at least some of you listening have seen a house fire,
but if you haven't,
I think you can still appreciate how terrifying they can be.
They burn hot and fast.
And if you don't move quickly,
just about everything you own can be gone in a matter of minutes to hours.
Which is why when a woman named Ella is driving home one evening,
the distinct glow of flames catches her eye as she passes by her neighbor's house.
The flames are coming from the garage,
but there's no mistaking that the fire is already blazing.
She rushes home to call for help in its 1970s,
so way before cell phones,
even before 911 as we know it today,
so she calls the local police department
and then heads back to the scene of the fire.
And when she pulls up again,
she is horrified to find that the fire has spread from part of the garage
to the whole structure.
Oh my God, so it's spreading pretty quickly.
Is there anyone still inside the house?
Well, she can't tell.
I mean, there's no one standing outside
and she can't hear or see anyone like trying to get out.
But honestly, by the time the firefighters get there
and start fighting the blaze,
there's not much hope for survivors if there was someone inside.
All they can really hope for is that the owners,
which were a couple named Geneva and Clarence Roberts
and two of their sons,
they're just hoping that they're safe away from the garage
before the fire even started.
And thankfully, as they're putting the fire out,
two members of the Roberts family do show up.
It's Geneva and one of their sons, Lauren.
They say that they left the house at around 5 p.m.,
roughly an hour and 15 minutes
before their neighbor spotted the flames.
But the thing is, there's no sign of Clarence,

who they say had still been at the house when they left.
Thankfully, they know their other son is fine.
I couldn't find where he was at at the time of the fire,
but all I know is that he was out of the house,
so he was all well and good.
So that just leaves Clarence unaccounted for.
Right. By 7.45, the fire is out
and firefighters are sifting through the rubble of the garage.
And that's when one of them calls out that they found a body.
It's badly burned, I mean, beyond recognition.
But with every other member of the family accounted for,
there's really no question that it's probably Clarence.
Right.
Before anyone moves the body, the sheriff,
who, by the way, also happens to be Clarence's brother,
orders the body not to be touched,
because laying across the body,
charred and partially burned away,
are the remains of a shotgun.
So right away, even before the body is examined or moved,
this theory starts to form for many there at the scene.
They start to think that Clarence set the fire himself
and potentially died by suicide.
And to be fair, this isn't just being pulled out of thin air
or just because they see the rifle.
All of this is taking place in Nashville, Indiana,
which, Brett, I don't know if you have been there,
but I have.
It's this super small...
It's tiny.
Yeah, everyone knows everyone kind of town, even today.
And mostly everyone knew that Clarence
was having some pretty serious financial troubles.
He was known to live well above his means,
and he had two investment properties that both had failed.
Two of his cars had even been repossessed
just a month before.
So to sum there at the scene,
his death is a bit of a no-brainer.
He'd gotten so overwhelmed by his financial troubles
that he decided to take his life.
But brother slash sheriff Roberts isn't so sure.
For one, no one even knows for sure
that it is Clarence lying there in the rubble.

Like I said, the body is completely unrecognizable.
Yes, it's the most likely scenario,
but we don't know for sure.
And two, the position of the shotgun across the body
makes the sheriff slash brother question the idea of suicide.
Because, and not to get too graphic here,
if he had used a shotgun to take his life,
it more than likely wouldn't land across his chest
the way that they're finding it.
So the remains are eventually carefully removed
from the scene and sent off for an autopsy
where the coroner can hopefully establish a cause of death
and the official identity.
Now, while they're waiting on those results,
firefighters and police keep sifting through the debris.
They also call in artisan investigators
who determine that there is no way
the fire started accidentally.
One of the first things they find in the rubble,
call it evidence, if you will, is a Masonic ring.
Clarence was a proud member of the Freemasons
and the ring even has his name engraved on it.
They also find a belt buckle,
which Geneva and other members of his family confirm is his,
as well as a single tooth, which is sent off to the lab.
But here's where things get a little funky
when it comes to the reporting on this case,
because while most of my source material says
there aren't any shotgun shells at the scene,
some claim that there's at least one that's found,
which is obviously a huge discrepancy since,
like their theory hinges on him starting the fire
and then pulling the trigger.
And this isn't the only weird thing
that they may not have found,
because as the autopsy's going on,
the cause of death and identity of the man
are called into question.
The pathologist finds that the cause of death
was suffocation due to carbon monoxide poisoning,
likely from the fire.
So not a gunshot wound.
Right.
But he notes that there isn't any ash or smoke in the lungs,

which is typically seen with fire victims.
Although it's important to know it wouldn't be impossible
for him to have died in the fire
even without the lack of smoke or ash or whatever.
And he was in the garage with other cars,
so that could maybe have played a part too.
But this is all just speculation.
All the pathologist knows is that he has a deadly amount
of carbon monoxide in his blood
and the coroner doesn't find evidence of a gunshot wound.
Now, according to an article published in the Republic,
the top of the skull is missing,
which is unusual,
but it's actually found back at the scene of the fire,
which for a second you might be like,
oh, there was a gunshot.
That's why it's a part.
But even when it's found,
the top of the skull shows no evidence that it had been shot,
all the more confirmation.
But even though, like, you would expect,
oh, maybe, like, this is actually the proof
that he had been shot as well.
When they find the top of the skull,
there's no evidence on that part either
that he had been shot.
So, like, it's not clear why that part is removed.
So is there a chance he could have been shot somewhere else,
like, in the chest?
I didn't see anything about that in my research,
but I go back to, like, the fact that there was no shells.
And, again, why is the top of his skull
disconnected from his body?
Like, no.
Again, as far as I feel like if there was any proof
that he had been shot anywhere in his body,
that would be somewhere in the material, but it's not.
But, Britt, this is just the beginning,
because in addition to there being no evidence
that the man had been shot,
no one else isn't there.
Any of his teeth in his skull,
or his hands, or his feet.
What?

Yeah, this sent me spiraling,
because as I was researching this case,
I thought, okay, you know, what's the big deal?
I mean, at first, like, they could have been burned in the fire,
but they didn't totally add up,
so I asked you to do a bit of research
on how hot fires have to get to burn literal bone,
and explain what you found,
so I think the rest will start to make sense.
Yeah, so I took a deep dive into all things fire
and cremation, you know, super fun stuff,
and basically what I learned is that bones only burn
at, like, extremely high temperatures,
like, even higher than cremation temps,
which can range from 14 to 1,600 degrees Fahrenheit,
which, honestly, is a bonkers amount of heat.
I can't even fathom, but here's the thing,
house fires don't typically get that hot,
so there should be teeth and bone fragments in those remains.
Well, and the thing is, you would expect
that if his hands and feet burned, I mean, completely off,
the rest of him would, too, right?
Like, those bones aren't different
from the other bones in your body.
I mean, they are a little smaller.
I mean, we've seen in past cases that in natural decomposition,
there's usually more significant damage
to smaller extremities first, but...
And that's usually in the soft tissue, though,
or, like, when animals are, like, carrying them off,
and you're talking about what it takes
to actually get rid of human bone.
I don't think you see just hands and feet
just, like, poof, being gone,
and then the rest of the bones in the body
being completely intact.
It just doesn't add up.
True.
So if the hands and feet and most of the teeth are gone
and they're not in the garage,
then where are they?
Now, the coroner also finds that the body
is missing his right kidney,
and this man, whoever this man is, has an ulcer.

And what the coroner soon learns is that Clarence had never had surgery to have a kidney removed, and he wasn't known to have an ulcer. Now, could he have had an ulcer and no one knew? Maybe, but the lack of a kidney, that's harder to explain away. Okay, this feels kind of off the wall, but is it possible that the kidney could have just gotten damaged in the fire? Like, maybe there was more severe damage to the entire right side of his body, and the right kidney was a result of that? So that's actually something that ends up getting argued later, that the kidney isn't there because it burned. But to be honest, I haven't seen a detailed enough description to know if something like that is possible. Because again, you would think that you would see some severe damage on the other organs around the kidney, right? Right, like the right side of the intestines, the right lung, all that sort of stuff. Or burnt, yeah. But I don't see, again, not that it's not there, it's just there's no reporting about anything like that. Now, I know that was a lot, but there are two more things I have to tell you. So some blood samples were taken from the body and tested, and they find that the blood alcohol content is 0.15. So this sky that they found was pretty drunk when he died. The blood type also comes back as being AB. But when they compare that to Clarence's records from his time in the military, those records say that his blood type is just B. Then it's not Clarence. Well, that's the conclusion that the coroner comes to. And when the Brown County Sheriff's Department takes a look at all of this, they determine that they don't have enough evidence to 100% say that the victim is Clarence. But not everyone agrees. One of the first things authorities realize is that military records, especially back when Clarence would have served,

weren't always the most accurate.
So they work on tracking down some other records from him that might verify his blood type.
While they're doing that, investigators speak with Clarence's family, neighbors, friends, pretty much everyone they can to try and figure out his last known whereabouts.
Now, Geneva says that she was with Clarence most of the day of the fire, and that was November 18th. She and one of their sons then left between 5 and 6, depending on the source you read, to go get dinner. But both she and her son say that that evening everything seemed fine.
And yes, obviously they had stuff going on, like big picture in their family, their financial situation was stressful. But overall, the 18th she's saying, and the son's saying, it was like a normal day, and she didn't expect to come back and find their house completely destroyed.
Now, as far as they knew, Clarence had been alone the whole time they were gone. But in an article by Larry Incolingo for the Sunday Herald Times, one of their sons says that at least two other people told him that they saw someone driving away from the house just before the fire.
Someone they recognized.
But while they claim to have passed that info on to police, it doesn't seem like anything was done with it. But things just keep getting stranger here. Other people in town start coming forward and reporting sightings of a man who they think is Clarence just a day or two before the fire.
And obviously, like that's not weird, he lives in town. The weird part is there's this one story that really catches investigators' attention. So there's this clerk at a liquor store in town that reports that there was this older man, someone maybe like 65, and again, not Clarence, just some random dude, and he is shopping in the store when he has some kind of health crisis. This clerk thinks it was something like maybe diabetic shock.

So this ambulance is called to get this man to a hospital.
But before the ambulance showed up,
another man pulls up in a car
matching one of the cars that the Roberts owned,
and this guy inside the car looked an awful lot like Clarence.
So this Clarence-looking guy in the car
offered to just take this older man to the hospital,
which the man agreed to.
Like we could get things moving a lot faster, whatever.
So that he gets in, they drive off.
So are any of the family's vehicles missing?
One of them is,
and they suspect that one of his other sons has it.
So as far as they know,
like every car they have is accounted for.
So this car isn't missing,
even though this thing happened a couple of days ago.
But again, the weird part about this isn't necessarily the car.
The weird part is no one knows who this older man was.
And again, if this other guy is Clarence,
what everyone is saying is it doesn't seem like
Clarence knew this guy before this interaction.
He just appeared to offer him a ride and then leaves with him.
But then this older man and this Clarence-looking guy
are seen together again.
More people come forward and say that they saw Clarence
the early evening of the fire.
So this is like not right after he found the man
was going to take him to the hospital.
This is like a day or two later.
And they say that they see them together shortly
before everything went down,
this time in a restaurant in a nearby town.
So investigators are thinking,
okay, great, let's track down this older man
and see if he knows anything,
because maybe he was the last person with Clarence,
or at least had some kind of interaction with him
in like the days leading up to whatever happened in this house.
But the weird thing is,
they check all the hospitals in the area
and they can't find this guy.
In fact, no one matching the older man's description
had been in in the last few days.

And despite canvassing the surrounding neighborhoods,
no one can identify this guy.

I mean, all I can think of is,
what are the chances this guy had type AB blood
and only one kidney?

That's the million dollar question.

Investigators start to wonder if the man from the fire
is this same older man that Clarence was seen with,
someone he said he was going to drive to the hospital
but clearly never made it.

Yeah, but that leaves another million dollar question.

If this older guy died in the fire,
then where the hell is Clarence?

No one knows.

But some start to speculate that he may have killed that man,
planted the ring and the belt buckle
to make people think it was him and then went into hiding.
And when investigators take a deeper look at his finances,
that theory doesn't seem totally out of left field.

Like I said,
the family had been in some financial trouble for a while.

But despite owing money to several banks in the area
that totaled about \$200,000,
he owned six cars and kept up with his payments
to three different life insurance policies.

And those policies to which Geneva was the beneficiary
totaled about \$850,000.

Which is a lot of money in general,
but I mean back in what, 1970?

Yeah, big money.

So this is where the idea that it's not Clarence in the house
really starts to pick up steam.

Some believe that he faked his own death
to get the insurance money.

But without the identity of the man found in the garage,
no one seems to be able to say for sure.

Well, wouldn't his wife have to be in on it
if she's the one who's collecting the money?

Probably, but not necessarily.

And is the insurance company paying out right away?

No, they won't pay out until it's proven
that Clarence was the one who died in the fire
and they have an actual death certificate for him.

So this kind of just leaves everyone

with this central question,
trying to figure out this person's identity.
An article in the Rushville Republican reports
that Geneva believes that the man is Clarence,
as does apparently now the coroner.
They're basically like, look, he was supposed to be at the house.
We know he was having financial troubles.
Maybe it all just became too much.
Is there any hang up about the missing hands and feet, though?
Like, I can't stop thinking about that.
It seems like no.
Again, like, science to me, like the things you explained
says it's not possible,
but everyone, at least back then,
seems to just ride it off to them burning up in the fire.
So, like, it's not something that people were getting hung up on,
as far as I can tell,
even though to me it seems superficial.
Though I will say we're not the only ones, right?
So, the coroner and Geneva might be on the same page at this point,
but the Indiana State Police are saying,
okay, that guy was definitely not Clarence,
because they took blood samples from Geneva and the children.
So, like, forget these military records we can't find.
We're just gonna, like, check your bloodline.
And while I'm not sure what blood types they all have,
they were basically able to determine by looking at them
that there is no way a man with AB blood
could be the father of these kids.
So, that's that, then. Part of the mystery is solved.
Not according to Geneva and other members of the Roberts family.
They are convinced that the body is Clarence.
And this kicks off a massively strained relationship
between the Roberts family and investigators,
because while Geneva and her family try to collect
on the life insurance,
investigators are hung up on another aspect of the mystery,
that ring.
Because just like we get hung up on the fact
that bones don't just, like, in your hand disappear
when the rest doesn't,
they're hung up on the fact that the ring didn't melt in the blaze.
And I want to get a little sciency again, so bear with me.
But police consult a jeweler who estimates

that this ring would melt at about 1,450 degrees Fahrenheit.

Now, did the fire actually get that hot?

Maybe, maybe not.

But if you're trying to say, right, like, their whole logic is the hands and the feet just, poof, disappear

because it was so hot,

but then the ring didn't burn

because we don't know if it got that hot,

it doesn't work, right?

Right.

The ring can't exist if the hands and feet don't exist.

Right.

The ring was either placed there after the fire, which doesn't make sense,

or he was dismembered.

Like, like you said,

like the bones being gone in the fire doesn't make sense.

Right.

But this is all the evidence they have to work with.

They've gotten everything they're going to get from the body.

So on November 21st,

this body is buried without a death certificate

confirming their identity.

So not to be too graphic,

but exactly how much of the rest of his body was left.

Like you said, he was unrecognizable,

but they were still able to pull blood,

realize an organ was missing, stuff like that.

I'm just, I'm trying to figure out exactly

what they had to work with.

And the answer, the short answer is I don't know.

I couldn't find exactly how much of the body was still intact.

Again, we know the hands and feet are gone,

but I know there's a torso.

I know there's a head,

or at least most of his head are still there,

but I don't know as far as like skin, muscle, tissue.

There's no like detailed description of what was actually left.

I hate to keep coming back to this,

but the hands and feet,

if he really was dismembered,

what would the point be?

Like to get rid of fingerprints for the hands

and maybe this guy had a different shoe size than Clarence?

Maybe.

I guess I don't like, I don't get that because you would think that with the fire, it would have at least damaged the skin, right?

Like we're not saying that it burns bones, but I would imagine that the skin would start to melt and fingerprints would have been unrecognizable.

At least very difficult, yeah.

Yeah, but I don't know if this was like just a measure taken or, or what?

I don't, I truly don't know.

Right.

Anyway, police put their efforts into finding Clarence since they believe that he wasn't the one in the fire.

And at this point in our story, it's like early December.

And Steve Wilson reports for the Daily Journal that police suspect that Clarence,

not only is he missing,

but he probably had something to do with the mystery man's death and they obviously want to talk to him.

And even if he didn't kill the man,

Arson was committed,

so they want to question him about that too.

And is the family cooperating?

Well, they are, but keep in mind,

they're still fighting their own battle for Clarence's life insurance

and, and them and investigators are kind of on opposite sides of this.

And it's actually during this kind of stalemate

that investigators get word that a man matching Clarence's description was seen in Indianapolis on December 4th, robbing a bank.

Now this guy had handed a printed out note to a teller

without showing a weapon and made them give him over \$8,000 in cash.

No one was harmed during this,

but somehow someone makes the connection between this bank robber and Clarence.

And I guess the resemblance is like uncanny.

The Brown County Democrat reports that the FBI comes in to investigate the bank robbery.

They take surveillance photos from the bank robber,

like they drive them an hour or so, whatever, to Nashville.

And then without any context, they just start asking people like,

hey, look at this picture. Do you know this guy?

And most people are like, yeah, that looks like Clarence.

Whoa. He's suspecting a bank robbery now too?

Yeah. And look, the FBI is not investigating the whole fire situation.

They're just on the bank robbery case.

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And they say that they have other suspects.

Again, I'm not even sure how Clarence like came on the radar for this.

Yeah. Okay. Let me get this straight.

With the fire, the theories are that he either died by suicide or he faked his own death for the insurance money, right?

Right.

So why would dude need to rob a bank if he's getting all that insurance money?

Or is it likely just because the insurance company isn't paying up yet?

Well, and probably, right?

Like we know there is no money.

So if that was the plan, it hasn't come through yet.

Or maybe he's just running away to start over

and he needed money to get by and he was going to leave all that money to his family who maybe had no idea what was actually going on.

And to be completely honest, the whole bank robbery theory actually kind of fizzles out after a while.

And I'm not sure if it actually ever got solved.

But what I do know is that police start surveillance on the Roberts family.

Just in case they really did have something to do with the fire and just in case Clarence might pop back up.

But the surveillance does not go over well with the family.

Like clearly they're not doing this covertly.

And Geneva and her sons feel that it's a major invasion of privacy, especially since they're grieving and fighting this insurance battle.

I mean, yeah, I can understand where they're coming from, especially if they really had no knowledge that this was going to happen.

Totally.

But by mid-December, the question of the mystery man's identity still hasn't been answered.

So investigators decide to exhume him to run just a few more tests.

While they're waiting on that, investigators learn that the arson wasn't the only crime in Nashville back in November.

You see, just a day after the fire, a woman went to an art class being held at a local high school and had this terrifying encounter with a man who might have had a connection to the fire.

The woman left the art class at about 9.50pm and walked by herself to her car.

She got in just fine, but before she could start it,

someone who was waiting in her back seat hit her over the head with something heavy.

As a young girl, that was one of the first rules I learned.

You always check the back seat.

You check the back seat, you watch your car with your keys through your knuckles.

It's like the stuff we're taught we have to do just to exist, right?

Anyway, this woman says that she got a decent look at this man and estimated that he was in his early 20s.

He had a cast on his arm and what looked like a nylon stocking over his face,

giving him a super creepy blank expression.

He took a stocking and wrapped it around her neck trying to strangle her,

but she fought for her life and eventually managed to get her car door open.

She rolled out and once she was out of his reach, the man got out too and just ran.

Carolyn Pickering reported for the Indianapolis Star

that this woman went straight to the sheriff's office to tell them what happened.

But out of this whole terrifying encounter,

one of the things that stuck out to her the most was the way that this man smelled.

She described it like fuel or some other petroleum product, like it was really strong.

And she actually found a small can of something possibly left by the man

in her backseat that smelled the same way.

Now that can was taken to the sheriff's office

and while I can't find anything about whether this attack or was ever found,

the strong petroleum smell catches the attention of investigators on Clarence's case

because the arson investigators believe that a petroleum based product

was used as an accelerant in the Roberts garage.

But other than that smell, there really is no other connection

between the assault in the parking lot and the fire.

But it's just a weird enough coincidence,

especially like the timing of it all that investigators take note of it.

But like I said, it seems like the investigation into this man fizzles out

because I can't find anything else about him.

Honestly, unless I'm missing something, it doesn't really feel connected.

I mean, Clarence isn't a known sexual predator hunting down women,

which is what that feels like.

Yeah. I mean, all we know is at worst, he might be a bank robber and or a fraudster.

Yeah. I can't find any record of him having a criminal history

for this type of like predatory behavior with women.

Again, I mean, if you're going to say he staged all of this,

maybe he killed a man to do that.

But whatever was happening with that woman seemed a little sexually motivated

and obviously that's speculation, but I couldn't find anything like that in his past.

And did they ever find out what was in that can that was left in the backseat?

Not that I can tell.

At the end of the day, it seems again, like just completely unrelated.

But I mean, I included it because again, what are the odds, you know,

like in especially in a small town?

I want to say that, but the more I work on cases in small towns,

it's like this weird stuff is happening all the time that you think is connected

and maybe ends up not being.

I don't know.

So if you fast forward to December 21st,

that man, the one that was buried, who we don't still have an identity for is exhumed

and a second autopsy begins.

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And as that's happening, the disagreement over the identity of this man just keeps going. Like for instance, one of the theories is that the blood type changed because of the heat from the fire.

Ashley, biology like math was not a strong subject for me, but I'm pretty sure that's not how that works.

I'll tell you what I found because you're not wrong.

I found one article in the International Journal of Legal Medicine

because like, again, I'm not going to be like, yeah, sure, I believe you.

And it states that blood and DNA are believed to no longer be traceable after exposure to temperatures of a thousand degrees Celsius

or over 1800 degrees Fahrenheit.

Okay.

But they got a blood type for the body.

And traceable is totally different than blood types like getting hot and changing.

Yeah. Again, you're not wrong.

I wanted to find like any kind of possibility, like where are you coming up with?

It's a stretch to connect them, but I get it.

Yes, yes.

So that's their argument for right now.

Now, as the new year comes around, Geneva is eventually given a polygraph.

And while I'm not sure what she's asked, I do know that she passes.

I mean, I think we can guess at some of the questions.

If she knew the fire was going to happen, where Clarence is.

Yeah.

Things that would indicate that she was in on it, right?

Probably, right.

Now finally, the second autopsy and the tests are completed.

And on January 21st, the coroner files a death certificate finally.

But the death certificate is filed under the name John Doe, not Clarence Roberts.

I thought the coroner was on Geneva's side.

He was.

But now he's convinced that the man found in the garage isn't Clarence.

And I think there are a few reasons for this, not all of which he releases at the time.

But one of the things he does point to is the tooth that was found.

Oh my God.

I completely forgot about the tooth.

Why hadn't they tested it ages ago?

Yeah, I don't know.

Again, 70s.

I don't know what testing they can do with it, but there obviously was something, right?

Because now he looks at Clarence's dental records.

And what he notices is that he had a tooth pulled way back in 1964, so like six years prior.

And the tooth that they found with the skull, though notably not attached or in the skull, is the same tooth that Clarence shouldn't have.

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Oh, so it's a plant.

Yeah, you would think this would wreck any chance Geneva has at getting that insurance money. But she still files a claim with them anyway, which of course they refute.

And this long legal battle ensues between Geneva and the insurance companies.

I'm not going to take you through every single detail, but these are the highlights.

Geneva continues to seek the life insurance benefits and also sues Indianapolis Newspapers Inc. for 1.5 million in libel damages for claims made by the Indianapolis Star.

Now, full disclosure, I'm not sure what ends up happening with that suit, but she does go hard trying to get the life insurance.

And while all this is happening, several lenders from which Clarence borrowed about \$130,000 are trying to get their money back, too, by foreclosing on two other homes that he had owned.

What a mess.

It really is.

And she's still going back and forth with investigators, too, insisting that this mystery man is her husband.

She even goes as far as accusing them of withholding evidence like these X-rays of the mystery man that had been taken and apparently compared to X-rays Clarence had gotten two years before the fire.

And these X-rays, I think she wants them because when they were compared, it was determined that they weren't a match.

It's like one of the things that they're using to say that.

But she's not convinced.

And she asks for the coroner to convene a coroner's jury to just take a fresh look.

Like, somehow, she thinks things have gotten all corrupt, basically.

But the coroner refuses to do that.

He's basically like, listen, with everything I have, like I made the determination I did, if there's new evidence or if I'm ordered to do so, then I'll do it.

But without anything else, like, no, the answer is no.

And that's how it goes for years.

In November of 1973, so three years after the fire, the Indiana State Police step in and just do a review of the case.

And they actually seem to make some major headway.

According to an article for the Republic by Parker Sands, the Indiana State Police claim that the difference in the blood types is just a simple clerical error from the military.

So we're going all the way back to that.

Oh my God.

Yeah, apparently writing down the wrong blood type was more common than you'd think.

And so now, all these years later, they're chalking all of that up to the blood type.

And they also look at those X-rays that were called into question.

But unlike before, the ISP investigators now think that they look the same.

And so three years later, now they're saying the mystery man is Clarence.

What? How is that even possible?

I mean, how can they be looking at the exact same X-rays and have two totally different outcomes?

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I don't know.

And even the blood thing, like if he got written down wrong, what about all that testing they did with his kids to be like, there's no way someone with AB blood could be the father.

I don't know.

But even put the X-rays aside, put the blood aside, ISP seems to be convinced it is him now for a totally different reason. They announced that Clarence's wallet was found in the house after the fire. And he had a card with a bunch of emergency info on it, like his wife's name, doctor's name, all of that.

And he had also on this card written down his blood type, which was AB.

I'm sorry. How was this missed back in the initial investigation?

I have no freaking idea. I don't know.

I mean, I guess there's a chance that it wasn't missed and it was just discounted.

Maybe. This is the part of the story where things get a little fuzzy.

It's a lot of big reveals all at once with like zero explanation of how they got there.

But basically the director of the ISP lab comes forward and accuses investigators of ordering him to throw away evidence after the fire, which obviously gets denied.

And it's this whole messy back and forth that doesn't really result in anything.

But I think it just goes to show you that the original investigation was not up to par.

Uh, yeah. That seems to be an understatement.

Uh-huh. And there is one more breakthrough from ISP.

They announced that they've identified the older man Clarence was seen with before the fire. What?

According to Carolyn Pickering's reporting for the Indianapolis Star, his name is John Cupsilitus.

He's experiencing homelessness and hasn't been seen since the fire.

And he was identified when ISP found his mugshot and canvassed the area, asking people if they recognized him.

How did they even make that connection?

That's the thing is I told you I've got a lot of big reveals, no background information.

They're not super transparent about the details of their investigation.

It's just announced again all at once.

We found the guy, not him, the end.

So what was this guy's blood type?

They actually do check it and this guy's blood type is type O.

But the problem is they're getting this from his military records from the time that he served in the Navy.

Oh my God.

Right, which is I'm like, you just said that you can't count on those.

If we can't count on those, then why are we even saying it?

Just say we don't know.

Exactly.

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But despite all of this, even though they seem like they're really trying to make a case that it's him, they still don't issue a death certificate naming Clarence as the deceased

because there are still some investigators who believe that the man who died in the fire isn't him.

I guess my question is why though?

It feels like everything that the investigators are believing and pointing to at this point is kind of saying the case is closed.

Right.

So again, not that I like put a lot of stock in some of the stuff they're saying because it's, I feel like, pretty...

But the direction that they're going doesn't make sense to continue.

Yeah, they keep saying like, we're confident.

We're confident.

Well, everything kind of blows up when not long after ISP makes this whole announcement, John Cuppsilus is found and investigators determine that he's not the guy Clarence was seen with. He wasn't even in town.

So the mystery just continues for years.

Five years after the fire, they finally convene a grand jury and multiple people are called to testify, including Geneva, two of her sons, the coroner, some investigators, officials at both the state and local level

and an insurance representative because Geneva is still five years later trying to get that insurance money.

Now, the final report is sealed and we don't know what exactly was discussed.

But just over a month later in January, this is now 1976, Clarence is indicted on charges of murder and kidnapping.

So we're back on the Clarence didn't die in the fire train.

Right.

They're going ahead with the idea that he likely abducted the older man that he was seen with, killed him and set the fire to either start a new life or try and get that insurance money.

And once this is announced, tips start rolling in.

According to Glenn Rutherford's reporting for the Courier Journal, police get word that he's been spotted in Switzerland, Cuba, Mexico, Austria, Germany, Canada, Missouri, Texas, even Alaska.

Two people who knew him even say that they saw Clarence in 1974 and 75, once even with another woman.

And all of these sightings are obviously devastating to Geneva's case against the insurance companies and she ends up losing her long battle.

She appeals the judge's decisions, but a different judge ultimately sides with the insurance companies too.

And honestly, that seems to be that.

The identity of the corpse and the other man from the liquor store are still up in the air.

And it seems like this case will never be solved until police start getting word that someone's been lurking around Geneva's house.

Do you sometimes wish for someone on your side who understands you better than anyone else?

Someone who wants to take you on the most beautiful adventure of your life?

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We're not talking about online dating, we're talking about online business. Did you know that many well-known German brands use Shopify? Shopify is the trading platform that revolutionizes millions of companies worldwide. With Shopify, you can set up your online shop by hand. There are no programs or design knowledge required. Thanks to its efficient design and intuitive integration with social media and online markets, you can buy and sell your products via several channels like Instagram and Ebay. Shopify offers you the tools you need to build and grow your online business. Everything from a single trust-based platform. Try Shopify free of charge and start your business idea at shoppify.de.com. Simply enter shoppify.de.com. Designed for Germany, owned by Shopify.

Toward the end of 1980, police hear that several of Geneva's friends and neighbors have seen a man in the woods behind her home or crouching in a ditch. And whenever someone seems to spot this guy, he turns away and heads back toward her house, which is obviously super creepy.

Yeah.

But even Geneva's acting strange too. For instance, whenever she has friends over, she never lets them go inside. They always just like stay out on the porch, which could just mean that she wants some privacy. But it's strange enough that when police hear about this, their minds immediately jump to one thing, clearance. Maybe she just has a new boyfriend. I mean, a creepy one, but a boyfriend all the same.

Well, TBD.

So what they do is they decide to set up surveillance around her house just to try and find out. Now they're there for three days, three nights, and they photograph everyone who comes in and comes out, but they don't see anyone who matches Clarence's description. So they decide to stop the surveillance. But I'm sure they wish they wouldn't have, because on the night of November 29, 1980, another fire blazes. This time inside Geneva's home. It's spotted by one of Geneva's nephews, who immediately calls the sheriff's department. Firefighters get there just after midnight, but there's not much they can do. The fire has already destroyed most of the house. And according to an article by David Bowman for the Republic, by the time they get it under control, there is no hope that anyone inside could have survived. And sure enough, they find a woman's body on a cot in the living room. She is badly burned, but much like the fire 10 years before,

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everyone's pretty sure they know who it is.
Geneva, because there's no one else it could be, right?
Well, with the track record we have here,
I wouldn't be assuming anything.
Yeah, that's true.
Police and firefighters search the rubble,
looking for anything that might have started the fire.
But a few hours later, they make another discovery.
It's another body.
This one is a man laying in a storage area also badly burned.
According to an article by Bruce C. Smith or the Indianapolis Star,
the limbs on this man have been burned pretty much completely off,
except for a single arm that's trapped under the remains,
kind of like curled up against the body.
Now, this guy isn't identifiable there at the scene,
so he is taken along with the woman's body for an autopsy.
What are the chances that this man is Clarence?
I think that's the question in the back of everyone's minds.
Now, obviously they don't know for sure that it's him,
but since investigators already suspected that he was alive,
he was maybe back living with her, who knows?
As the autopsies get underway,
authorities at the scene of the fire search for what could have started it,
and they determine that much like 10 years ago,
an accelerant was used to ignite and spread the fire.
They find evidence that gasoline had been spread
throughout the majority of the house,
and gas cans are found as they sift through the rubble.
But Bill Pittman reports for the Indianapolis News
that the start of the fire was definitely in the living room,
where the body that's assumed to be Geneva was found.
And that's not the only take,
because another reporter claims that the fire started closer
to what is assumed to be the body of this guy,
TBD, maybe Clarence, and they think that fire burned hotter.
They also find two guns in this search of the house,
a .22 caliber rifle and a .38 caliber revolver.
But before you even get flashbacks to the Robert's last fire,
neither gun was found near the bodies.
Now, by this point, autopsies have been completed.
The woman's body is 100% confirmed to be Geneva,
and the pathologist says that there are, quote,
significant similarities between those X-rays of Clarence
and X-rays taken of this man in the fire.

Okay, but the X-rays kind of seem to be BS to me.
The last time people went back and forth on them,
some said they didn't match, some said they might.
I'm not going to put much stock in that.
Yeah, I'm kind of with you.
I feel like everything we've got in this case,
people have gone back and forth on,
and I'm like, you can no longer point to that
and have an argument because you've played it both ways too many times.
Yeah, there's holes poked in everything.
Now, what happens next is basically a flip of what happened 10 years before.
This time, you have most of the investigators believe this is Clarence,
while the rest of the Roberts family doesn't think that this is him.
I don't love asking this question,
but what's the blood type of the man who was found this time?
I had the same question,
and so I feverishly tried to find the answer,
but I couldn't find anything about this second man's blood type.
What?
Yeah.
That was like the thing, the big thing last time.
I know, I know.
You think that'd be the first thing they check,
the only thing that's out there?
Oh my God.
Well, and honestly, I'm sure they do check the type.
I just haven't seen it reported on.
Either way, the pathologist, the coroner, investigators,
pretty much everyone's convinced that this is Clarence,
and I wonder if part of them is like,
okay, well, you know, 10 years ago or now,
one of them's bound to be him, like the, yeah, I don't know.
Eventually it has to be Clarence?
I don't know.
The identity question isn't the only eerie similarity
between the fire 10 years ago in this one.
The autopsy finds that Geneva and,
we're going to call him Clarence,
because that's what they're calling him,
Clarence's cause of death was carbon monoxide poisoning,
and both had super high levels of alcohol in their blood.
Like Geneva clocked in at 0.3, and Clarence was like 0.2.
However, unlike the last fire,
the autopsy has findings of carbon residue in their lungs,

which means that both were still breathing at the time the fire started.

Their skulls are also intact, unlike the previous victim, and they don't have any evidence of any other injuries. So what do they think happened in that house?

Well, they don't really know, at least not yet, but there are some clues.

For instance, as investigators keep going over the scene, they notice that there is a lot less debris and rubble where Geneva's body was found than there is near Clarence's body. And according to an article in Brown County Democrat by Helen Ayers, this tells them that Clarence probably wasn't there the whole time the fire was burning.

So he was just up and walking around?

Well, not necessarily.

Investigators theorize that Clarence might have been upstairs when the fire started, and as it burned, his body fell through the floor, landing on top of the debris that was already there.

So she died downstairs, he died upstairs?

That seems most likely based on what we have.

But that still doesn't really answer any questions.

Who started the fire?

Well, an episode of Unsolved Mysteries states that there is a clear path that the accelerant follows from Geneva's bed to the room that Clarence was found in and into the hallway, then eventually out the back door.

So because of this, at least initially, the Brown County prosecutor says he believes there was a third person involved.

A third person that was seen lurking around the house?

I don't think that's what they're thinking

because I think they're still thinking that was Clarence.

Although, you know, the family is really vocal with their disagreement.

They say that Geneva had been seeing someone, like, off and on for the last few years,

and while it doesn't seem like any of them ever, like, met the guy, Clarence's sister did overhear Geneva talking to this guy before, and she said when she heard the voice of this person, it didn't sound like Clarence.

Okay, but it's been 10 years.

He might not sound the same.

Maybe, but either way, investigators aren't buying it.

They are sure that the man in the second fire is Clarence.

But even though they're considering one mystery as solved, now there are so many more questions because they still don't know who the first man in that first fire was or how the second fire started. And I wish I had more information about this second investigation, but this is where a lot of the reporting just drops off. There are still efforts to identify the first victim, and over the years, there are a few prospects, I would call them, but, like, none of them really pan out. There was one more grand jury that convened in 1983 to review the case, and in the ensuing report, they basically say that the mystery will likely never be solved. They concluded that the initial investigation back in 1970 was subpar and evidence was likely lost or not preserved well enough to be of any use. And as for the second fire, they determined that Geneva was 100% murdered, but Clarence's death may have been accidental, insinuating that maybe he was the one to set the fire or, at the very least, he was part of the plot, and he ended up dying accidentally. So what? That's it? That's it? I couldn't find if there have been any more recent updates, like if investigators today have considered using more modern tools. Like, I keep thinking about genetic genealogy to try and identify that first guy, but, I mean, at least to me, this seems like a case that could benefit from something like that. There's so many tools now where we don't have to guess about blood type or did someone write it wrong or how did the hands burn? Like, let's just freaking test some stuff. Right. And what about the rapper's kids? Were they at the home during the second fire? Where are they now? No, so in the first fire, like, one of the sons had moved out, I think. Remember, Geneva was with the other one. And then by the time this second fire starts, no one was, like, living in the house with Geneva. And as far as I can tell, I think it's safe to say that police never investigated them as having anything to do with the death of either their mom or dad.

And as far as where they are now,
I know the oldest son died actually in 2011.
I think there are even potentially more than just the two that got talked about,
but I couldn't find anything else.
They may still be alive.
I don't know if they've kind of accepted what happened
or if they're still pushing for answers all these years later.
It's a big question mark.
Again, after that grand jury in, like, 1980-something,
it's just been a blank.
So I know all of that was a lot,
and the fact that it is unsolved is so frustrating.
But no matter what happened,
whether Clarence died in the first fire or the second,
whether he had anything to do with either,
he and Geneva likely still have a family around today.
They deserve to know what happened to their loved ones.
And I think there's a family out there
who deserves to know who that first man was.
And at the very least,
I think that's the question we have to answer.
You can find all the source material for this episode on our website,
crimejunkiepodcast.com.
And be sure to follow us on Instagram at [crimejunkiepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/crimejunkiepodcast).
Britt and I are actually off next week.
We will be back the following week with a brand new episode.
But make sure to stick around for the good segment.
All right, crime junkies, we're back with some good
to hopefully help end your month on a brighter note.
I love these.
I know.
And as always,
don't forget you can submit a story of your own to the Good Segments page,
which you can find on our website, crimejunkiepodcast.com,
as well as in our show notes for this episode.
Britt, I'm going to hand it over to you.
Okay, here we go.
My name is Becky.
I'm 36 years old and I live in the UK.
I've been listening to your podcast around the start of lockdown,
and I have to admit it got me through a large portion of it.
I've always enjoyed how you convey a story
and the true kindness that is behind every podcast.
But in 2021, you both had a part in saving my life.

I met my ex-husband in 2016.
It was a very brutal relationship.
From listening to your podcast,
I learned things which sound like common sense,
but I generally wouldn't have thought of.
Things like writing down passwords,
information about relationships, et cetera.
In August 2020,
my ex-husband, who had been in prison since 2018,
manipulated his way into my life again.
He had been abusive for years,
but I believed he may have changed.
It wasn't long before the abuse started again,
but this time,
I was armed with the advice you give all the time,
an if-I-go-missing book.
I didn't go missing,
but having this is what has secured his conviction.
I started to record all the threats he made.
I kept a day-by-day journal of events.
I wrote down all the places he ever mentioned
as places he would dump my body.
I gave the passwords to accounts
that had backups of photos and my phones.
I wrote about the methods he talked about
when he told me he'd kill me.
In July 2021, he finally tried to kill me.
Obviously, he didn't succeed,
but he argued that I was lying
and he didn't cut a hair on my head.
He'd always deleted or factory reset my phone once a week,
thinking this would stop police getting
any evidence I was building.
When, in fact, in my safe at home,
I had a file that was getting bigger and bigger
and was there to help convict him if I ended up dead.
I had saved this stuff
to make sure he didn't get away with murdering me,
and in the end, it's what helped convict him.
That is wild.
All of the hairs on the back of my neck are standing up.
I know.
I mean, I'm just like, again,
it is so hard to leave when you're in those situations,

so I don't want anyone thinking like,
oh, don't take notes, just like walk up.
It's not easy.

No.

And of course, like, after we received this message,
our team immediately reaches out to Becky,
thanking her for sharing her story with us,
letting her know how glad we all are that she's safe.
And we received an amazing reply from her
that we can't not share.

So, Ashley, want to read it?

I actually didn't see this reply until just now.

It's awesome.

It's so good.

Okay, so she said,

I want people to know the advice given by Ashley and Britt
can save lives, even here in good old England.

The judge even mentioned the podcast in his sentencing remarks.

He said, quote,

if it hadn't been for the words and advice
given by the podcast in question,

I have no doubt you would have carried out your plan.

End quote.

And it's true, she says.

That's unbelievable.

And I know this segment isn't profit of the month anymore,
but at the end of her message,

Becky tied in the good that her pups have done,
and I wouldn't forgive myself if we didn't include them.

So she wrote,

would I possibly be able to give a little update,
which includes a pup?

In the aftermath of the situation,

I met a wonderful man who is perfect,

and I also got an emotional support pup called Karen.

She's a Chihuahua cross Jack Russell who lives up to her name.

She's bossy and adorable,

and has continued to keep me alive.

I've attached a picture of Karen,

my support dog using my elderly ex support dog as a comfy bed.

That beautiful white girl is Elsa,

a German shepherd who spent her life working in hospitals
and schools helping children with disabilities

cope in new situations.

So for those of you who want to see Karen and Elsa,
you can find a photo of Becky's puppets in our blog post for this month,
which you can find on the Good Segments page of our website.
Guys, you have to check out the pictures.
They are adorable.
Adorable.
And at the end of the segment,
we actually want to leave you with one last message that Becky sent
in that she specifically wanted you guys to hear.
I've been chatting with my partner Christian
about what happened with my ex,
and he's reminded me of a big point,
which I think would be helpful for people to know.
He was able to stalk me and see where I was living at all times when I left,
because he'd made a joint bank account online,
which I wasn't aware of.
Then anytime I moved,
he could automatically see my new address
because our credit reports were linked due to the joint bank account.
Please let your listeners know that in the UK, this is possible.
I'm trying to get my local lawmakers to get it changed,
but I'm not getting much support.
I'm not sure how credit reports work in the US,
but in the UK,
it is definitely something that is shown on credit reports.
So I urge all your listeners to check their credit reports
and make sure you know everything on there.
Devious people have devious ways of finding you.
You heard Becky.
That's like the best advice I've heard,
and not something I ever knew,
so we'll start including that.
I was talking to my husband about this,
and he was like, yeah,
to pull up credit report,
like all you'd need is some basic information and a social.
A lot of times,
a significant other might have access to that,
maybe not all the time,
but snapping a picture on their phone of that,
having access to it, keeping it,
and being able to track you down.
Yeah, and that's not even like,
I mean, you could just look it up.

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Again, if you have a stalker,
if you are in an abusive relationship
trying to get away from that person,
this is great advice to know that,
again, I don't know if you can stop anything from your credit report
being shown,
but to know that that's out there,
I think that helps you protect yourself even more.
Great advice, Becky.
Definitely.
Crime junkie is an audio check production.
So, what do you think, Chuck?
Do you approve?
If you have any questions,
please feel free to post them in the comments.
In the next episode,
visit [shoppify.de slash cell 23](https://shoppify.de/cell23).
Made for Germany.
Ready made by Shoppify.