

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / SERIAL KILLER: The Honolulu Strangler

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

And I'm Britt.

And the story I have for you today is about a reign of terror that plagued one of the most idyllic places in the world, a time when young women began disappearing one by one only to be found brutalized and tossed away by someone who couldn't see their humanity, because he had lost his own.

This is the story of the Honolulu Strangler.

The Honolulu Strangler

It's a Tuesday evening in January of 1986, when the Honolulu Police Department receives a report from local parents who say that their daughter is missing. Her name is Regina Sakamoto.

She's 17, and her frantic parents explained that the last time they saw her was around 8 that morning when she left for school, that she hadn't come home, and now they're convinced something is wrong.

Now, as far as I can tell, it seems like police do take the report, although I'm not sure how much they're able to actually do that night.

Okay, but at least they take it instead of telling her parents to wait.

Yeah, but any plan they may have had to hit the ground running the next morning gets derailed, or at least redirected, because they get another call.

This time, it's from a local fisherman who has found a body of a young woman floating in nearby Keihe Lagoon.

As soon as they arrive at the lagoon, it is clear that whoever she is, she didn't end up in the water by accident.

She is naked from the waist down with clear ligature marks around her neck.

Her hands are bound behind her back, and there's an electrical cord tied around one of her ankles.

And that cord has then been secured to the rocks along the shore.

Like, her body is basically tethered to the land.

That seems super intentional.

Like, her body was supposed to be discovered.

I think so, right.

So, they know it's Regina right away?

Well, not immediately,

because I'm not even sure that they got enough info that night before to know what Regina even looks like.

But this girl, I mean, she's young,

and it doesn't look like she's been in the water a long time.
Plus, what I've gathered from the research,
there aren't any other young women
who are missing from the area at this time.
So, things are matching up enough
that it's obviously the first thing that they're going to check.
So, police notify Regina's family of the discovery,
and once she's taken off site,
her mom is asked to come in and view the body.
And as soon as her mom sees her,
she is certain that is her daughter.
Once the identification is made,
an autopsy confirms what investigators suspected from the start,
that she died from ligature strangulation,
and she was sexually assaulted.
When investigators interview Regina's friends and family,
they're able to piece together a pretty clear timeline
of the morning that she was last seen.
She left her home to head to school around the usual time,
but then her boyfriend got a call from her
saying that she'd be late because she missed her bus.
And the Honolulu Star Bulletin reports
that investigators are able to confirm
that she did make that call from a payphone near her bus stop.
But she never showed up to school at all.
And I'm not sure if her friends were freaked out
or if her boyfriend thought it was odd that she never showed up,
but it doesn't seem like anyone was notified of her absence.
So it wasn't until she just didn't come home that night
that her parents became concerned.
Oh, so they didn't even know that she missed school
until after her body had been found?
Yeah, so this would have been totally out of the norm for her.
Like, this girl didn't skip school.
So, I mean, had someone alerted her family early on...
You know, like a school is supposed to.
Like, I hope they're supposed to.
Then, yeah, they would have had a head start
in knowing that something was up
and that they should have been looking for her earlier.
But for whatever reason,
no one seemed to sound the alarm bells.
And even now, no one can come up with a reason
why anyone would want to harm this sweet, shy teenager.

I mean, as they start looking into her life,
there didn't seem to be anyone with reason to want her dead.
And certainly no one who would be capable of killing her
in such a horrific way.
So this left investigators with one conclusion.
The same conclusion that crime scene texts
at the scene were coming to as well.
This was probably done by a stranger.
And it might not even have been the first time.
Because, you see, as they're processing the scene,
investigators started feeling a little bit of déjà vu.
Because this isn't the first young female
who's been murdered on the island of Oahu recently.
This isn't even the first young female
who's been found in Keihei Lagoon recently.
About seven months ago,
Honolulu PD had received a call
similar to the one they got that morning.
This one from a guy on his way to work,
because he had stumbled on a woman's body
at the water's edge.
Like Regina, this woman had been strangled with a ligature.
Her hands were bound behind her back.
And within a day, they were able to ID that woman
as 25-year-old Vicki Purdy.
And was Vicki tethered to a rock, too?
She wasn't, but she also wasn't completely submerged
in the water either.
Like the caller said,
she was more like on the shoreline of the lagoon.
According to reporting in the Honolulu advertiser,
it looked like her body had been basically
like pushed down the embankment and just kind of left there.
So I think the point is like she was still visible.
The same way that Regina was.
Now, even though there are all these similarities,
there were some little differences.
Like Vicki was older, she was married to an army pilot,
and she wasn't walking to a bus stop when she went missing.
But she did just vanish almost as quickly as Regina did.
According to her husband, Gary,
she had been out with friends the night of May 29th,
like she had so many times before.
And she was even supposed to be home early that night,

but she didn't show up at all.

So at first her husband tried paging her over and over and over again all night long, and he was getting no response.

So by the next morning, he reported her missing and hit the streets looking for her.

Now, unfortunately, it wasn't Vicki that he found that morning.

Instead, he found her car in a hotel parking lot, and it seemed to have been abandoned there with a mysterious new dent on it.

Was Vicki staying at the hotel, or had she stayed there?

No, so obviously there's no sign of her there where the car is found, and they even checked with the motel, and there was no record of her staying there or even spending time there.

So I think she maybe dropped her car there, like used the parking lot,

because police were able to track down a cab driver who said that he had dropped her off at her car in that parking lot at around midnight.

Now, about the same time Gary was finding her dented car, police were getting that report of a woman's body in KAHI Lagoon, and it was Vicki.

So at this point, we know that Vicki was strangled like Regina. They were both found around this lagoon, and their hands were bound.

That's a lot of similarities, but was Vicki sexually assaulted too?

Yeah, the Emmy suspects that she was as well.

But even when you say like they're bound up, it's even more specific than that,

because one of the details they end up uncovering, which I think becomes critical in solidifying a connection, is that investigators learn that the way their hands were bound and what they were bound with is exactly the same.

Which I'm guessing was unique enough to know.

Right, so they're actually both bound with paracord, which is pretty much what it sounds like,

this super durable kind of cord that's used in parachutes.

And that's actually notable as well,

because the Honolulu Airport is really close nearby.

But the problem is like what to make of that?

If anything, investigators aren't sure.

It's just something that they have

that hopefully will make more sense later.

And as far as like exactly how they were tied up or bound,

I'm not going to get too far into that,
because I think it's going to get confusing.
But according to an episode of the show,
Breaking Homicide on Discovery Plus,
it's a very distinct method.
So I think that that's the part that you need to know.
And it's worth noting that at the time of Vicki's murder
and even after they find Regina,
mention of the paracord was never made public.
And I think they're doing what we see all the time,
like holding back details so that way they can like,
you know, if someone confesses,
they've got this little bit of information,
or they can slowly release information like as they go.
And by the time they have the second one,
they're definitely not going to say anything now,
because I think they're being extra cautious
not to try and inspire any copycats.
Because they have to be thinking
they have a serial killer on their hands.
Well, here's the thing, like, not exactly.
Apparently there are actually disagreements about this
within the Honolulu PD at the time.
So as of right now, like at the time,
the company line is no,
the cases are probably not connected.
Because again, there are a couple little differences
and there was nothing connecting the two victims in life.
But that's not to say that they're like
ignoring the similarities.
But they're leaning towards the cases not being connected.
Just, I think they're thinking
it's just like this weird messed up coincidence, I guess.
I'm sorry, what does them not knowing each other
have anything to do with anything?
To me, that's like all the more reason
that this could be the work of a serial killer.
Well, either way,
their mindset is actually about to change real fast.
Because on February 1st,
investigators are called to the scene
of a third woman's body found
near Keahi Lagoon.
Yet again, there's no question this woman was murdered.

This time, the body is found wrapped in a tarp,
but investigators immediately notice some telltale signs.
Let me guess, her hands are bound behind her back
with paracord.

Bingo.

At this point, they start to confront a reality
that I think that they've just been avoiding.

It might be a serial killer in paradise.

So investigators form an official task force
by February 5th, and the same day,
they tentatively identify the most recent victim
as 21-year-old Denise Hughes.

They learn that Denise is married
to a sailor stationed at Pearl Harbor named Charles,
and she's been missing since January 30th.

Now, the night before, she had met up
with her husband for dinner on his ship
and then headed home at around 10 p.m.

Her husband tells investigators that he called Denise
on their home phone, I don't know,
an hour after she left just to make sure that she got there
because, hi, they're not oblivious to this scary sh**
that's been happening on Oahu.

And she did, she got home safely.

But the next day, Charles gets a call from Denise's boss
asking why she's not at work.

So just like the other two victims,
it was like poof, she just vanished into thin air.

And then she shows up later in the same lagoon
found in a very similar way.

And what kind of transportation did she normally take?
What do you mean?

I mean, like to get to work.

I'm honestly not even sure if it really matters,
but like, we know Regina went missing waiting for a bus.
Vicki had her own car that got that mystery dent.

I'm just wondering if maybe there's more of a pattern
with Denise.

Oh, gotcha, gotcha.

Okay, so, um, yeah, even though all three
aren't exactly the same, I think you're right.

I mean, there's enough of a commonality that makes you wonder
if this guy is targeting women waiting alone
for some sort of rise out what you're saying.

Yeah.

Okay, so yeah, I, I'm not a hundred percent sure how Denise got home from dinner that night.

But what I do know to your point is that a bus is how she would have gotten to work the next morning.

Okay, so we know that Regina and Denise both used a bus, but that doesn't really fit with Vicki.

She had a car.

Yes.

But I mean, the thing is we know she didn't drive it, right?

Like it's still in the same parking lot she left it in with a dent.

Now, as far as I can tell, it's still operable, but maybe someone like use the dent to talk to her or like...

Or communicate a conversation, something like that.

Yeah.

Maybe convince her that like, oh, you shouldn't be driving that or maybe, you know, if she's, if she's parking somewhere and like taking a cab to go to wherever she was going with her friends, maybe, you know, did she drink and she didn't want to drive?

And I don't know.

I like, I wouldn't get too stuck on the buses.

I just think that like it's this idea of like, they're kind of in these like areas where they might be alone.

They might be needing to be transported from one place to another, I think is like the biggest connection.

And actually taking all of this into consideration, according to reporting in the Honolulu Star Bulletin by Catherine Enomoto, Honolulu police major, Chester Hughes issues a public warning at this point, advising local women to be super cautious and definitely not to accept rides from strangers.

But just two months later on April 2nd, it happens again.

The Honolulu PD gets another report of a woman's body being found.

This time, it's 25 year old Louise Medeiros.

In Keahi Lagoon?

Well, no, so this body actually isn't found in Keahi Lagoon, but she is found near water, just like the others.

She's actually found near the Waikeli stream, which runs under a freeway overpass.

And as far as investigators can tell, it looks like her body was dumped actually from the overpass, like plummeting the 95 feet to the area below.

Okay, so not the same location, but still in the water.
And if they're connecting her case,
then I'm guessing she has the other telltale signs of this killer.
You bet, she is partially nude,
her hands are bound behind her back,
and of course they're bound with paracord.
And even though Louise's body is found kind of away from the others,
like Vicki, Regina, and Denise,
obviously they're all found in the same lagoon,
that's a big lagoon.
They're still within like a couple of miles of each other.
But Louise is found about 12 miles away.
And even though Louise is found away,
like you're saying like they're connected by water,
I actually think they're connected by more than that.
So you've got Vicki, Regina, and Denise,
they're all found at the same lagoon
within a couple of miles of each other.
You've got Louise,
who's found at this other body of water 12 miles away,
but it's not just the idea of the water,
because whether it's the dump site or the victims themselves,
all of these cases almost seem to revolve
right around the Honolulu Airport.
I mean, Keahi Lagoon is like right there.
And investigators figure out that Louise hasn't been seen
since March 26th when she had taken a nighttime flight
back to Oahu after a family visit.
And what is so wild is like,
again, this wasn't a secret on the island,
and like knowing what had been going on in Honolulu,
her sisters actually begged her to just stay one more night.
Like come on, take a flight home tomorrow
because they didn't want her sitting out
waiting for a ride in the dark,
because by the way, she's three months pregnant.
So all the more reason they don't want her like getting in
super late, having to catch a ride from the airport
to her apartment when she landed.
But Louise was super anxious.
She wanted to get home to her other kids.
So she went ahead and left that night.
When you say she was going to catch a ride,
are we talking a bus like Regina,

or is she hitchhiking, taking a cab,
having a friend pick her up?
It was a bus.
And she even told her sisters that was her plan.
So we've got another woman who is waiting for a bus.
And I know she was waiting for a bus
because investigators are able to track down witnesses
who say that they saw her at a bus stop
near the airport that night.
I get that it's a central, interesting location,
but I don't know how significant the airport connection is
if it's even a connection at all.
Like maybe this guy is just going anywhere.
People need rides.
Yeah, I mean, who knows how much is around there.
I actually lean kind of like you.
I think whoever this guy is is finding women
who are in a vulnerable position and somehow getting them
to like get in the car with him for whatever reason.
Which makes me think they got to be looking
for like not the creep, right?
Like someone who seems quote unquote normal or looks safe.
A person who's not going to raise any red flags to a woman
alone trying to find transportation.
Well, yeah.
And take note crime junkies.
I think this is a lesson you all know.
We, I think, learned it from Bundy.
But looks can be very deceiving.
Though that being said, they're not necessarily sure
if that's the case yet.
Because these women might not be going with him willingly.
We don't have a ton of witnesses who see them getting into cars.
So far, no witnesses who see them getting into a car.
So he could be using force.
Maybe he pulls a gun on them and nobody sees that.
But you are keying on to something important
because it's around this time that people in the community
start wondering if the killer in Honolulu could actually be
the Green River Killer who just found maybe new hunting grounds.
Let's talk about a blaster that passed.
We covered the Green River Killer in what?
Like 2018?
Yeah, that was like one of the early on episodes.

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I think it was like May of 2018.
So what's the connection there?
Because he exclusively targeted sex workers, right?
Which isn't the case here.
Yes.
OK, so you're right.
And what the connection is isn't super clear.
I think it just goes back to the transportation of it all.
Like somehow this guy is getting women to go with him.
Yes, in Seattle, they were all sex workers.
So that's why they were getting in his car.
But here it seems like the killer is finding opportunities
when rides are needed.
And it feels loose.
Don't get me wrong.
But I'm bringing it up because former FBI profiler,
Mary Ellen O'Toole, explains in an episode of Breaking Homicide
that it's also notable that bodies of water are involved
in both sets of cases.
Again, that could just be a coincidence.
I mean, water destroys evidence, right?
You don't have to be an expert in forensics to know that.
Oh, well, and who's to say that the Honolulu perp isn't just
a copycat of the Green River killer?
Again, just going off memory here.
But I don't think Paracord was used in the Green River killer case.
No, no, it wasn't.
But, you know, new place, slightly new MO.
We know killers evolve, I don't know.
I think the most compelling thing in bringing all this up
or maybe why it got brought up at the time
is the timing of it all.
Like, I mean, you know, the Green River killer case
is huge national news at the time.
Even if you lived on an island,
you knew about the Green River killer.
So when those killings basically just stopped in 1984
and then all of a sudden women in your area start dying in...
In 1985?
See, you get it.
But huge disclaimer here.
The Honolulu PD aren't saying anything about a connection.
So this is just a theory that you, me, and the public
is coming up with?

Kinda, but actually it's a little more legit than that.
Like, the commander of the Green River task force in Seattle says that he received multiple calls from members of the Honolulu task force, but he's not very open about whether those calls are them trying to figure out if the Green River killer is their guy or if they're just maybe seeking guidance from a task force that's worked a similar case very recently. But either way, the Honolulu task force, what's weird to me is they won't even confirm that these calls happen. Which seems silly. Yeah, if you're like, hey, we've never dealt with this, they are actively dealing with it. We're like comparing notes. Seems like something you could say. Yeah, we're working with guys who have done this before too. Seems like something that's okay to disclose, but whatever. Yeah, and I think what feels like contradictions, even though that's not necessarily the right word, I just can't think of the right word, but maybe the disconnect is that they're just trying to play this down, right? So if it's not, we're just comparing notes. It's like, hey, we don't know, we're willing to try anything, but we don't want to get you guys in the public talking. And maybe that was the best thing to do, because even though it appears like they explored this, just to be sure, it seems like investigators on both task force are on the same page that Seattle's killings and Honolulu's killings aren't connected. So I get what they were doing, like why get the public all worked up, you know? Now, Green River Killer connection or not, like clockwork, just a little under a month after Louise's body is found, another woman vanishes. This time, it's 36 year old Linda Pesci. And as you can imagine, everyone is on high alert at this point. So even though they haven't located her or her remains, when they find her Toyota abandoned on Nimitz Highway the night of April 30th, they see nothing but giant red flags. You know, it seems like whoever is killing these women is escalating. I wasn't keeping super close track of all the dates, but you said there was seven months between the first two victims

and now we only have one.
Yeah, and now we have four victims in three and a half months.
So you're right, like it's getting quicker and quicker in between.
Now, even though police are suspecting a connection right away,
while Linda is still missing, there was some messiness
at the start of the search for her.
You see, Linda's roommate reported her missing
the same night that her car was found,
and it took about a day for investigators to realize
that there was a connection between this missing woman
and a car that was found.
So after initially impounding the car,
they have to actually bring it back the next day
to the spot where it had been abandoned.
And they do this just so they can stop passing drivers
and we're talking like hundreds of them
and ask anyone if they had seen the car or the driver
or anything the night Linda went missing.
That's creative, I guess.
That's actually some pretty decent due diligence.
Truly, I mean, I actually really like this tactic
and I think it just shows you how desperate they are
to catch this guy and fast.
And their efforts pay off.
According to reporting by Will Hoover in the Honolulu Advertiser,
multiple witnesses confirmed that,
yeah, they saw Linda's car on the side of Nimitz Highway
that night with its flashers on.
So her car breaks down
and now all of a sudden she needs a ride.
Yeah, probably.
The one small issue, I couldn't actually find anything
in the research about what was wrong with her car
when they actually examined it.
Like, was it actually broken down? Was it operable?
But I know she had car trouble before.
So I'm assuming it's some kind of mechanical issue.
But yeah, her car's broken down.
Maybe she's looking for a ride or again,
maybe she's just vulnerable.
But Britt, are you ready for our second crossover moment today?
Obviously.
What do you remember about Lisa Al?
Oh, she went missing from Honolulu in,

I want to say the early 80s, right?

Mm-hmm.

And her car was found abandoned or something.

Yeah, so it was 1982 and yes,

car's abandoned on the side of the road or whatever.

Okay, so I want to say she left her boyfriend's house,

maybe her boyfriend's sister's place,

and then just poof, disappeared on the drive home.

And when her roommate called a boyfriend,

and was like, hey, Lisa never made it back,

he like took what would have been her drive home

and found her car.

And then her body was found,

I want to say fully nude and like tossed down

an embankment on the side of like this mountain road.

True crime, Junkie. That was a great memory.

Good.

Isn't it like, I always tell people like,

I feel like I have the like details

of these cases locked in my brain forever.

Like they live in me.

But the thing from that case,

do you remember what the prevailing theory was?

Like her case is still unsolved,

but where we kind of ended at the end of that episode was that...

Oh, so didn't they kind of land on the theory that

maybe she was pulled over and then abducted

either by a cop or someone impersonating cop?

Some sort of like authority figure that Lisa would have trusted.

And Ashley, now I see where you're going with this

because weren't they having issues with people impersonating cops

and making traffic stops?

Like this is a consistent thing at the time.

Yes, they were having a huge issue with that.

Because if you remember in Lisa's case,

witnesses even say that they had seen her

during what looked like a traffic stop.

And multiple suspects were considered.

An actual cop who'd been convicted

on sexual assault charges against a teenager was looked into.

There's a couple of guys who were out there,

we know impersonating cops.

And then of course we know they looked into Lisa's boyfriend.

But again, in her case, there were no arrests.

So are you saying investigators think that Lisa might have been one of this guy's earlier victims?

Or just that this was like a known problem by 82?

Which means by the time these women are murdered, this whole traffic stop ruse was like in full swing.

Yes, so more of the latter.

Because this goes back to what you were getting at earlier.

None of the victims appear to have been like snatch off the street against their will.

Or at least, again, we don't have anyone saying that that's what happened.

So maybe we're dealing with an impersonator.

But if we're going to compare it to Lisa's case,

I don't want to say that they're connected because there is one big difference.

Lisa's purse with her wallet and all of that stuff were found in her car.

Linda's wasn't.

So Major Hughes says it's more likely Linda's car had an issue.

And she had grabbed her keys and her purse and started walking.

Maybe heading to either a nearby gas station or a bus stop.

Again, we have a bus stop.

And they think that they're looking for a guy who's just charming enough to convince these women that he's not a threat.

He'll get them to their destinations safely.

And although they don't know it yet,

Linda's case is about to give them not one, not two, but three massive breaks that will all point them in the exact same direction.

Now, the first break they get is from their roadblocks on Nimitz Highway.

According to the book Honolulu Homicide, multiple witnesses state that they saw what's described as a quote, light-colored cargo van that was parked near Linda's car.

The van might or might not have had lettering on the rear window, which to me is kind of here and there right now.

So what investigators do is they eventually put out a sketch, not of a suspect, but of the suspect's van.

Though that's not to say that they don't have a general description of the suspect.

They just don't put anything out.

What they know, though, based on witness reports actually goes to bolster the profile they receive

from the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit.

Specifically, they're looking for a white guy,
late 30s to early 40s, possibly no criminal record,
might be having relationship issues
and is familiar with the area like he probably lives
or works nearby.

Now, big break number two comes to them via a psychic,
maybe.

Okay, I'm listening.

So on May 2, investigators get a tip from this guy
named Howard Gay, saying that he had discovered bones
on Sand Island, which is this mostly uninhabited island
near Kahe Lagoon.

Why was this guy traipsing around an uninhabited island
in the first place?

Well, he says he had been told by a psychic
that Linda's body was there.

So here's where I'd like to point out the fine line
between crime junkie and potential suspect.

Like, sir, why are you contacting a psychic
about a missing woman you have no connection to?

Yeah, it is a very, very fine line.

But investigators are desperate.

They're like, great, we'll take our leads
however we can get them.

So they send a team out to look
and Howard leads them straight to a pile of bones,
which to everyone's disappointment turns out to be pig bones.
But investigators aren't about to look this gift horse
in the mouth.

So they take their time and they decide to just look around
Sand Island to see if they can find maybe anything else.

And good old Howard even hangs around and helps,
but they don't find anything useful
and just kind of chalk it all up to a loss

until they get a call the very next day
from someone out on none other than Sand Island
and this call leads them directly to Linda's body
just about somewhere between 75 and maybe 150 yards away
from where the pig bones had been.

Now, when they find her, she is naked
and her arms are bound behind her back
with none other than paracord.

Now, oddly enough, investigators realize Howard,

the guy who directed them to the pig bones,
he had like diligently avoided this specific location
the day before when he's like, you know, trying to help them.

And once they find Linda's body,
they realize he almost like purposefully avoided
the spot where her body was found.

Wow, how weird.

Calling it now, something is up with Howard.

Listen, you're not wrong.

Stay with me here.

Because during this time period,
investigators are searching basically any location
they can as associated with Linda, including her office.
Now, Linda's in sales and just the past January,
she had started targeting the area around the airport
and it's in Linda's office that investigators
get their last big break.

According to Honolulu homicide,
they find a notepad Linda had used for work.

And on this notepad, they find a name and a number.

And Britt, what name do you suppose is on the notepad?

Shot in the dark.

Howard Gay.

Howard.

Gay.

So it seems that in the very recent past,
Linda had tried to sell Howard a pager,
which, you know, he might have needed
for like his personal life or work.

His work at a company that was located right near the airport,
called Flying Tiger Cargo Company,
who gave him access to a company vehicle,
more specifically, a white cargo van.

That, up until recently, had his company's insignia
on the rear window.

Shut the front door.

Yeah, I'm not going to lie,
this timeline is a little unclear to me,
but investigators basically go on to like put Howard
under surveillance.

And what I do know is that by the time
the van sketch is released on May 5th,
investigators have already watched Howard
scrape the freaking insignia off the back

of his on-the-nose exactly what you're looking for
white cargo van.
I mean, this is the guy, right?
This has to be the guy.
Investigators sure think so.
And there's more that makes him look
like an even better suspect.
The medical examiner had been able to obtain
semen samples from some of the victims.
And what immediately stood out was how few sperm
there were in these samples.
Like in some samples, we're talking just a few.
And in at least one sample, there was none.
So right away, they're thinking that this semen
came from a guy who either has reproductive issues
or who's had a recent vasectomy.
And your dude, Howard, had had a vasectomy.
Now, I'm not sure when this tidbit came
to investigators' attention, because I actually
didn't find it in any of the source material.
It was just in that Breaking Homicide episode
that aired in 2018.
But I know that when the host of that show
reached out to his ex-wife, she confirms
that Howard did have a vasectomy.
And also something weird, she kind of bizarrely
says that she doesn't think Howard's the guy,
but by the way, we had a strange relationship.
So I don't know, maybe take that with a grain of salt.
Okay, what kind of strange?
According to what she said, I guess he and his ex-wife
lived in California with their two sons until like 1980
when he was transferred to Hawaii.
And to be clear, like she is his ex-wife now,
but at the time they're still married.
But like Howard moves to Hawaii,
but his wife and kids stay behind in California.
And this one time, probably thinking he was lonely,
she decided to like take the boys to Hawaii to surprise him,
which I think would be a great surprise for most husbands
and dads who are away from their family.
But when they showed up, Howard was pissed.
Like what?
He made them stay in a hotel

and wouldn't even show them the house that he lived in.
And he's like forced them to go back to California
like two days later.
Cool, cool, cool.
And when was that?
That, I actually don't know.
It's a great question.
All the source material says is that he was transferred
to Hawaii in 1980.
So it could have been any time after that.
Regardless, that sounds super sketch.
I think so too.
And according to Honolulu Homicide,
both his ex-wife and some ex-girlfriends
describe him to investigators as like a smooth talker
who, by the way, likes to have sex with women
whose hands are bound behind their back.
Yeah, and Britt, investigators even find out
from the current girlfriend
that Howard often stormed out when they fought
and some of those fights coincided with the killings.
Oh my God.
And there is the fact that an eyewitness
actually ID'd him in a lineup
as the guy she saw with Linda
the night that Linda went missing.
But she says that she was so scared
that she didn't even come forward
for like two whole months.
Okay, I think it's time for an arrest now.
And they actually do arrest him at that point.
The problem is, when they take their case to prosecutors
and ask them to seek an indictment,
prosecutors decline the case.
What?
What about that old saying,
you can get a grand jury to indict a ham sandwich?
This guy is at least a ham sandwich.
Yeah, this guy's like a full Christmas dinner, I think.
But apparently prosecutors feel like
while they probably could get an indictment,
they don't have enough to prove their case
beyond a reasonable doubt.
And that's a legit reason to decline a case, right?

Like, I mean, that's the burden of proof.
You want them to want that.
And if the case is weak, they take it to a jury,
Howard's acquitted, that's game over.
He's free and clear if he's the one that actually did it
because of double jeopardy.
They can never go back for it.
Okay, but actually, don't they theoretically have
like five separate cases here?
You make a good point.
So yes, so investigators even try and bring this up too?
Yeah, they have five separate chances.
Yeah, like let's try with one and then we can like,
no, we can never try them for that one again,
but we've got these other shots.
And specifically, they're like, everyone is agreeing.
Like Linda's case is the strongest.
So why not go with the strongest case?
Even if it's a total Hail Mary,
which based on the evidence,
I'm not sure that I would call it a Hail Mary,
and we can get this guy off the streets.
But for some reason, the prosecutors are like really hung up
on wanting to charge all of the cases at the same time.
So hung up on this that they, what?
Just let him go?
Well, convinced enough that they,
yeah, potentially will let him walk the streets again.
But while they have him, at least now,
they bring him into the criminal investigation division
at the Honolulu PD to be questioned.
And he's held for about 10 hours.
And during these 10 hours,
I mean, investigators only become more convinced of his guilt.
Major Louis Souza,
one of the lead investigators on the task force,
says that his body language is as Howard is interrogated.
And obviously they're watching through like mirrored glass.
And they say that his body language almost screams guilt,
like zero eye contact,
arms crossed over his chest like super defensive.
And surprisingly, Howard agrees to take a polygraph,
which he does not pass.
Hmm, does not pass.

That's not super clear.
Is that doesn't pass as in fails
or doesn't pass as in it's inconclusive?
Does it pass like, does it matter?
Like, we know they're kind of BS.
But to answer your question,
there are discrepancies in the source material.
So breaking homicide says the results are inconclusive,
while Honolulu homicide says that he straight up fails.
So again, it's a polygraph at the end of the day,
taking a grain of salt.
And at the very least,
he didn't pass with flying colors.
Right.
Now, where things don't quite go as planned
is investigators get Howard's consent to search his house,
his fan, his workplace, all the things.
But the thing is they don't find anything.
But Major Sousa feels as though investigators have him
just on the cusp of a confession
when they're forced to end the interrogation.
Forced to end?
Why'd they have to stop?
Did he lawyer up or something?
Kind of.
And this is actually a big source of frustration
for Major Sousa even decades later
when like they're talking about it.
Basically what happens is they give Howard a break
after like seven or eight hours of questioning,
mostly because Major Sousa is concerned
a confession could be perceived as coerced if they don't.
So they take Howard back to this like cell block
to rest for a little bit,
which again, kudos to investigators
and making sure they're doing things right.
There are plenty of investigators
who would just take the confession
anyway they could get it.
You know what I mean?
Totally.
So anyways, while he's back there resting,
this call comes in from an attorney
who asks to talk to Howard

and the younger recruits supervising him
let him take the call
to the everlasting chagrin of Major Sousa
because while they for sure would have had to let Howard
consult with an attorney if he requested one,
he hadn't requested one.
The attorney...
This is the other way around.
Yeah, the attorney requested to speak with him
at apparently his girlfriend's request
and she instructs him not to answer any more questions
which is when this like chasm develops
between investigators and prosecutors
because at this point,
they've got to either put up or shut up.
Now that Howard's no longer answering questions,
he's either got to be charged
or he's got to be released
and prosecutors won't charge him
not with what they have.
And so, I mean, in an instant,
just like that,
the investigation starts to fall apart.
Within a few months,
the task force is cut in half.
A month after that, it is disbanded altogether.
Now that being said, investigators aren't just ready
to let Howard loose in the community
so they keep him under surveillance for a while.
According to Honolulu Homicide,
quote,
members of the task force took on a new chore,
tailing him, tracking his movements.
The police were close to him around the clock
at his home and business.
Wherever he went, HPD officers went.
When he went on trips to the mainland,
so did police.
When he left the state, HPD notified the police
in the city to which he moved, end quote.
So he leaves Hawaii just pieces out permanently?
He does.
And as far as anyone can tell,
there are no suspected victims

in any of the other cities that he moves to.
And there were a few other cities he moves to.
Like, dude gets around.
He makes his way up the East Coast,
visits Europe, lands somewhere in the Midwest by 2002.
And Major Sousa says that they keep an eye on him
the whole way through.
Because to be clear, everyone involved in this case
wholeheartedly believes that he was their guy.
Like even the prosecutors who wouldn't bring charges.
There are theories about why he stopped.
If he stopped.
If he was the killer in the first place.
One theory goes like this.
In June of 1986, a pretty soon after the last murder in Oahu,
his son pulled over on the side of the road
to help a stranded motorist whose car was stalled.
And while he was trying to help this motorist,
an oncoming vehicle struck and killed him.
That's so eerie.
This guy who is thought to be a suspect in cases
where women in need of assistance or transportation
are taken advantage of and murdered
loses his son who's helping someone in need of transportation.
Does Howard take that as a sign from the universe or something?
Maybe.
You could say a couple things.
He gets lost in his own grief.
Does it make him realize what he's done to other people?
I highly doubt that.
Again, if it was him.
What I know is that apparently in response to losing his son,
Howard finds God, says he becomes this born-again Christian,
and so maybe it's his faith that does it.
If that's if, you know, if there's so many ifs.
Now, Howard has since passed away,
but he does have a surviving son out there.
So in my mind, this case could still be solved.
And I don't know why it's not being looked at again.
And in my mind, I mean, it's not even just these handful of cases.
There's potential that investigators could connect additional cold cases
to him in the process or rule him out.
For the life of me, I don't know why further DNA testing hasn't been pursued.
We know we have this semen.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / SERIAL KILLER: The Honolulu Strangler

Yes, he is deceased if you don't want to exhume him.

Like would his son give a sample?

Like we don't have to be ending this episode wondering.

And I would assume the families would want to know one son for all because if not him, then who?

Then who?

So for now, the prevailing theory is that it was him.

And maybe that's why.

Maybe they're so certain that they don't feel the need to.

I never tend to agree with so certain you don't feel the need to back that up.

I always wonder why.

Yeah.

If it was him, maybe, just maybe this spiritual awakening proved strong enough to quell his desire to kill again.

Or again, if it was him, maybe he just never got caught again.

You can find all the source material for this episode on our website 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.

Let's get started.

Crimejunkie is an audio check production.

So what do you think, Chuck?

Do you approve?