

Blood Town S1-E1

Mother's Day Murder

[00:00:00] **Penny:** [Women singing] On Mother's Day of 2019, the Baldwin County Sheriff's office was dispatched to assist with a 43-year-old female drowning victim in a hot tub. Marianne Shockley was found unresponsive when officials arrived and both she and the two men performing CPR on her were naked. Curiously, Marianne was bleeding profusely from her head yet had no pulse.

The man who placed the 911 call was 69-year-old Clark Heindel of Milledgeville, Georgia, and the other man [00:01:00] was 41-year-old Marcus Lillard, Marianne's boyfriend. Once Marianne was determined to be deceased, Lillard was placed in the back of a patrol car while Heindel was allowed to remain on his porch.

Soon, Heindel disappeared from the front porch and apparently walked into his master bathroom and committed suicide by shotgun to his head. Lillard voluntarily surrendered his cell phone and Marianne's. Investigators determined that texts and calls had been placed beginning around 11 or 11:30, approximately two hours before the 911 call, soliciting advice on how to save a life and perform CPR. The 911 call wasn't placed until 1:06 AM. Marianne Shockley's boyfriend Marcus [00:02:00] Lillard was charged with three felony counts of murder by strangulation, concealing a death, and aggravated assault.

He remains without bond in middle Georgia.

I'm Penny Dearmin, and this is Blood Town.

I was born in Northern California, but I moved to Colorado after I got married, and I lived there for 14 years until I moved to Georgia so that I could get my graduate degree in creative writing. In Milledgeville, for three years, on the front porch of this little yellow house, I wrote my thesis. So, when the Mother's Day murder [00:03:00] happened just up the road, I couldn't stop reading about it.

It seemed like everyone was reading about it and talking about it. And I want to read you some of those headlines to give you an idea of the coverage. "One of the strangest cases: a dead professor, a hot tub, and a suicide baffled police. Hot tub murder leads to witness suicide and boyfriend's arrest. A dead professor, two naked men, and a suicide.

It's one of the strangest cases that we've ever worked. Georgia hot tub homicide, suicide leads to one man being charged with murder. Professor dies in friend's hot tub, prompting him to kill himself and her boyfriend to be arrested."

The Mother's Day murder is not an abstract news event to me. I know exactly where the [00:04:00] road is where Marianne was murdered.

I did not know her personally, but I'm also a college Professor. I teach English; she was an entomology Professor, and I'm also a single mother. I'm doing this podcast because I need to

know what happened to her. I want people to see past the hot tub headlines and know that she was a real person, and that she did not deserve to die.

In this season of Blood Town, I hope you'll join me as I chronicle the case as it unfolds in real time. I'm not from the South. It could be a hard place to understand, even when you live here and even harder to explain to listeners elsewhere. I asked my friend Jim Owens to join me on this podcast to explain the history of Blood Town. [00:05:00] He's from Alabama, and it's from his little yellow house and his front porch that I came to understand the South and know about the Mother's Day murder. We first met in graduate school. He had already lived in Milledgeville for a year before I got here. Here he is reading from his essay about Blood Town.

Jim: Once I heard Milledgeville described as the most beautiful but saddest place in Georgia.

In Milledgeville from 2013 to 2018, I lived atop a high Hill outside the town. From my porch, I could see for miles. In the evenings, I'd watched the sun set across pastureland where a man grew hay for a living. Beyond the hay fields, deer grazed near a silver river called the Oconee, and beyond the Oconee that was the town of Milledgeville. No artist has ever painted who could have duplicated just one of the sunsets in [00:06:00] oil or any media. For five years, day after day, year after year, I'd watch the perfect painted sky fade into darkness, leaving a cluster of electric lights in the distance where Milledgeville emerged in sparkles from the blankness of night. Before sundown and before the world grew dark, I learned to call Milledgeville a different name.

I called it Blood Town after learning about its history and its bloody past. In the darkness after night fell, I did not dare call it Blood Town though. Like the students I taught at the college downtown had called it Milly, when it was dark, I would call it Milly in hopes that the gentler jovial name would pacify it somehow, and the old town and I could become friends, but things didn't turn out that way.

Penny: Jim, thanks for reading that for us. And I think our listeners are probably wondering at this point, where is Blood [00:07:00] Town?

Jim: Blood Town is Milledgeville, Georgia just about an hour and a half Southeast of Atlanta into the interior of middle Georgia. What's called middle Georgia.

Penny: Okay. And in Milledgeville, there are two colleges.

So, what else can you tell our listeners about the town so they can understand what it looks like and feels like?

Jim: Kind of an important thing to know about Milledgeville, having been the former capital of Georgia pre-reconstruction, before the capital was moved to Atlanta. Milledgeville is where the articles of secession were signed for Georgia to join the Confederacy.

After the Civil War was lost, the Confederates then, a big push was what to do with the former capital, because it was dying without the hub of [00:08:00] the legislature being

there. So, they moved in time, both Georgia Military College, as well as Georgia College. Now they've gone through many names.

For example, Georgia College was Georgia State College for Women, which is where Flannery O'Connor went to school. Georgia Military College was Middle Georgia Military and Agricultural college. However, there's also a third institution there, which is Central State Hospital, which was at one time what many believe to be the world's largest mental institutions.

Penny: Milledgeville is not a very big town, so I imagine a large proportion of the population was represented by that many mental patients at this hospital.

Jim: Yeah. At one time being the world's largest, the number of patients was [00:09:00] astronomical and Milledgeville came to be known as its very name came to be synonymous with insane.

Penny: That's a great segue as we go into the insane details of the case. I'd like for us to listen to a news clip from a local news station out of Macon, which is just about 45 minutes away from Milledgeville. Let's listen to that and then I'll ask some more questions.

[New Clip Follows]

Reporter: When first responders first got to this driveway, they thought they were responding to a drowning, but Sheriff Masee says what they found at the top of this road was much more sinister.

Masee: It's one of the strangest cases that we've, that we've ever worked.

Reporter: According to an incident report from the Baldwin County Sheriff's office, deputies went to this secluded home on Watson Reynolds road after the property owner Clark Heindel called [00:10:00] 911 to report a woman unresponsive in a hot tub. When deputies got there, they found two men, Heindel and Marcus Lillard, doing CPR on UGA Professor Marianne Shockley. Baldwin County Sheriff Bill Masee says the first responders thought things were out of place.

Masee: Our people already thought it was sort of a bizarre scene. Strange, a little different.

Reporter: Detectives made contact with Heindel and Lillard and separated them. Sometime after, Masee says Heindel shot and killed himself inside his house. And on Monday, Masee announced another twist in the case.

Masee: Through autopsy results, we have found out this was not a drowning. This was a true murder by strangulation.

Reporter: Marcus Lillard was charged with Shockley's murder and concealing it.

Masee: The concealing charge of the death occurs from Mr. Lillard making calls two hours prior to the 911 calls.

Reporter: Those calls, Massee said, were of Lillard asking people for advice on how to resuscitate someone. Why didn't he call 911 right away? Like so many other [00:11:00] questions in this case, Massee says, so far, they're unresolved.

[News Clip Ends]

Penny: I'd like for us to focus on Clark Heindel, and I want to get your thoughts about his suicide.

Jim: Well, one of the, I think one of the biggest questions like Sheriff Massee said is at a crime scene when there's a dead body, and there's a suspect. And what would obviously be two suspects; I would think that anybody living, and there's a dead body, both people would be a suspect. However, Clark Heindel was allowed to remain on the front porch. Clearly without supervision, [he] had enough time to get inside his house, going into the [00:12:00] master bathroom, which I'm assuming there's not a gun in the master bathroom, so he had to have time to find the gun, which was probably in the bedroom. However, this is just more time and curiously, write a suicide note. It's a lengthy suicide note. So, that much time. Well, I would assume to be, I'm no policemen, but what I would assume to be as a person of interest at the very least.

Penny: A witness, right?

Jim: If nothing but a witness or, yeah, it's a huge question.

Well, it's pretty unusual that a man who would be a suspect, a witness, a person of interest, Clark Heindel is allowed the time at his own residence where it's a murder scene to find a gun, unsupervised, and then to use it [00:13:00] against himself because he could have used it on anybody that night.

Penny: That's a really good point to think about as we move forward into our future episodes, one of which will be on Clark Heindel. And we'll discuss that suicide note in depth and what we know the content to be. And talk about some more [about] whether suicide is potentially an admission of some kind of guilt.

We don't know if it was— we don't know what the guilt would be over, but I don't know that you can make a blanket statement that it's not an admission of guilt any more than we could make the statement that it is.

Jim: Well, we would have to assume that this individual was so distraught that something like this could happen at his house that [00:14:00] facing the consequences of inquest or blame or the many things that would come were inevitable in such a such situation that he just simply didn't want to face that.

Penny: The narrative we're being told is that Clark was not a suspect. He was not a person of interest. He was just a witness waiting on the front porch to give his statement to the detectives.

Jim: I believe so. And it's not a not an accusation against anyone else, except for it's the fact that Marianne Shockley is dead with no answers, and it seems like she's a side note to the events of that night, which I just find really sad.

[00:15:00] **Penny:** Yeah.

Jim: I mean, it was a tragic night; however, perhaps a mistake was made. Clark was able to go inside and commit suicide. However, none of these things are getting to what happened to Marianne Shockley.

Penny: I really appreciate you coming on and talking to us and reading from your essay and look forward to having you join us as we explore who murdered Marianne Shockley

Jim: Well, I really appreciate the opportunity to help you find these questions out and appreciate the time.

Penny: Great. Well, thanks for listening. If you enjoy this episode, we hope that you will subscribe, and we look forward to bringing you another episode very soon. [00:16:00].