

Only the Good Kill Young? DiStefano - Romero

(intro music) Ring around the rosies, A pocket full of posies, Ashes, ashes we all fall down

Sherry: Today we thought we would do something a little different. We're going to talk about both the youngest and oldest parricide offenders in our research. Our files contain the information for people who have killed their parent, or parents, since 1985.

Marie: A quick heads up. This episode contains instances of violence - since we obviously will be talking about murder - selfishness, and a couple of naughty words.

Sherry: So, guess how old the oldest offender is?

Marie: I'm going to say 53.

Sherry: Nope. 71.

Marie: That is way too old..

Sherry: Well, imagine - her parent has to be at least 20 years older than that. And guess how young the youngest offender is?

Marie: Eleven.

Sherry: Eight.

Marie: Umm - on purpose?

Sherry: Yes! In fact, there are three offenders that are eight in our data set. We don't look at offenders who kill their parents on accident because we're looking at children who kill their parents with intention.

So, let's talk about the oldest first.

Marie: Okay, who is our oldest parricide offender?

Sherry: Our oldest parricide offender is Christine DiStefano Reynolds. She's 71 years old and she kills Gretchen DiStefano, her mother, who is 96. So, here's, kind of, the background.

Margareta Josephine Marie Caspary (Gretchen to most people) was a force to be reckoned with. Born three days after Christmas in 1917, she made her way in the world and fought for equal rights for women. She was an artist and she went to school to learn animation. If you've seen Disney's Fantasia, you've enjoyed some of her works.

Marie: Wait - so this is the woman who was killed?

Sherry: This is the woman who is killed. She was laid off by Disney after demanding fair wages and she joined a picket line to emphasize her demand. She began to draw fashion ads for Macy's department stores and eventually landed a prestigious job in what would now be the graphic arts department for the LA Times - where she says she learned to drink and swear because she worked only with men. This was back in the times when most women didn't work; and if they did work, they didn't work to develop careers for the most part. But her family was different. She had three sisters and one of them, Anita, was known as the Rebel Nun. She had single-handedly led a rebellion that created the largest mass exodus of nuns from the Roman Catholic church when the local Cardinal refused to lead his congregation in sanctioned reforms that would grant equal rights to the men

and women who were serving their church. The rebelling nuns went on to establish the Immaculate Heart Community, which is an unofficial communal community that worked to serve LA's poorest inhabitants.

Anyway. After working in the graphic arts department for several years, she met Mark DiStefano. She knew he was a keeper, so she married him. On July 24, 1943 they were blessed with their first child, Christine, and she gave up her job to stay home as a mother.

Marie: So, Christine is the one who grows up to murder her?

Sherry: Yes. Her oldest daughter.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: So, Christine's birth was followed by three more celebrated births producing Paul, Claudia, and Marie. Marie had been born with Cerebral Palsy and her parents were determined to keep her at home rather than institutionalize her.

Marie: So that was an unusual choice for the time, right?

Sherry: Yes, it was. They used to institutionalize children if they were high needs, unless the family felt strongly that they had the resources of time and money to take care of the child at home.

Marie: Okay. So, they had a certain degree of privilege. We know they had a certain degree of privilege just by the fact that they were able to keep their special needs child at home.

Sherry: Yes, absolutely. So, they were devout Catholics and she and Mark reared their children in the church. But Christine had other ideas. She was a free spirit in her growing up days; she was fun, and she was always into mischief, but she had a really disagreeable temperament.

Marie: She's not our first child with a disagreeable temperament, is she.

Sherry: No. She absolutely is not. And she especially resented her younger sister, Marie. She often complained that she couldn't bring her friends to the house because Marie was just too much of an embarrassment. Despite her negative views toward having her ill sister at home, Christine graduated from nursing school - and this could have led to a happy fulfilled life for her, but she became a heavy drinker at about 20 years old and she would spend her whole adulthood losing jobs, relationships, and opportunities for happiness as she descended into alcoholism. She did fall in love and have a son, but she never married; much to her mother's dismay.

Marie: Okay. So, she became a nurse and she just couldn't keep a job as a nurse.

Sherry: Right, She worked as a nurse for several years.

Marie: Okay. And do we know - did she have custody of her son? Because...

Sherry: I don't have a lot of information about her son. He somehow was shielded from the media - and I could find brief mentions of her son, but only in the context of Gretchen not being happy about her not marrying the father of her son.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: So anyway, Mark died in 2002. She continued to care for Marie as she grieved and kept Marie home. In July of 2005, Marie did die at age 51 and Christine had continued to openly resent the time and resources

invested in her care. In fact, Christine was quite bitter and blamed her hard luck directly on her mother's decision to provide family care for Marie.

Marie: So, did she feel like having Marie in her house took away attention or resources from her - or what was her problem?

Sherry: Yes. Marie was just an annoyance and she didn't want her there. She wanted to have a happy carefree life and felt that Marie was taking up attention, taking up money, - was just in her way - and this caused myriad tantrums; even after Marie's death. But before Marie died, Christine had been living back with Gretchen and her brother Paul and Marie - and sometime before Marie died Christine was already living back with Gretchen and her brother Paul and Marie. She threatened to kill everyone in the home. Paul had called 911 and subsequently pressed charges, and Gretchen was very angry about that. She wanted Paul to drop the charges, so he could help repair Christine's life. He dropped the charges - but Christine made no life changes.

Her mother would chide her for her lack of spouse and would try to convince her to come to mass with her. And Christine's resentment of her sister and of her mother just continued to grow as she continued drinking and arguing and destroying her own personal relationships - and she began to threaten Gretchen's life more and more often. She eventually found herself living alone in a cheap motel when her mother once more took pity on her and invited her to return to the home; against Paul's wishes.

Christine moved back into Gretchen's home about a year prior to the murder. Gretchen hoped Christine would take this chance to get back on her feet and dry out. But none of that happened. Where Gretchen was gracious, inspiring, and happy; her 70-year-old daughter was bitter, belligerent, entitled, and very ungrateful. At this point, she was drinking approximately a quart of vodka every day.

Marie: So, anybody who likes mason jars: imagine drinking a mason jar of vodka every day.

Sherry: Exactly. On August 28, 2014 everything seemed to be calm. There wasn't as much fighting. Paul had taken his mother to the grocery store that morning and when they returned Christine was sitting on the couch - kind of lolling about. It seemed that the house was finally going to enter a period of peace. Happy for the lack of friction, Paul went to his bedroom to work on his computer. Gretchen settled in to have a nice talk on the phone with her niece, when a drunken Christine slipped out to her car to retrieve her gun.

Christine shot her mother in the temple once, screaming "you effing bitch!" And then, upon seeing Paul run into the room, unapologetically proclaimed, "I shot the Bitch!" Paul ran to the neighbor's house and called 911. Christine also picked up a phone and dialed 911, saying, "Listen, I just shot my mother. I think she's dead and now I'm going to shoot myself, okay?" Of course she didn't. When the police arrived, they had to coax the gun from her hand. Upon noting that the gun was still loaded Christine looked at the officer and remarked, "Of course it is."

Marie: Okay. So, she's pretty surly. Even after the murder. Also, it sounds like really drunk.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: At first Christine tried to claim she murdered her mother to escape abuse. Friends and family noted that, although the incessant arguing was upsetting to everyone around them - both Gretchen and Christine had maintained that the bickering was not upsetting to them; it was simply how they related to each other. When

pressed on how Gretchen was abusive, Christine finally admitted and this is a quote, "I'm really having a hard time coming up with anything specific." At trial she admitted her allegations of abuse were untrue and meant to mitigate the trouble she was in.

Marie: Well, how was a 95 -year-old going to severely abuse her...

Sherry: 96

Marie: 96. I'm just saying that's pretty old to be abusive.

Sherry: I mean, you can be abusive at any age. But her mother was not abusive and, I mean, she admitted it eventually.

Marie: Yeah, that's true. It's just interesting to imagine because I'm trying to think of anybody I know who's 71; with their parents. You should be independent at that age. If your parents are abusive, you usually just you know, move out. You don't stay with them.

Sherry: You're right! So we get to her defense. Her attorney claimed that she was so drunk she didn't know what she was doing; that she must have blacked out. Alternatively, the defense claimed Christine was going to commit suicide, but she accidentally killed Gretchen instead.

Marie: That's kind of strange; given that she said 'I killed her' right after she was done killing her.

Sherry: Right! And she called her a nasty name, too.

Marie: Right.

Sherry: That's absolutely correct.

Marie: Well, okay. So the jury, I guess, shared my opinion. Because it took them less than four hours to find the now 72-year-old Christine DiStefano guilty of first-degree murder. She was sentenced to 25 years to life for committing first-degree murder with a 25-year gun enhancement. And I checked it out yesterday, her potential parole date is August 2039.

Sherry: Oh my! Anyway, that is our oldest parricide offender.

Marie: That is one of the wilder stories.

Sherry: And one of the things that I think is interesting is that she hung on to her resentment; even after Marie was dead.

Marie: I think it's very disturbing you would be so angry at your parents for raising all of their children.

Sherry: We've both known people in the past who have a child who has disabilities who lives in the home. And usually that child helps the family come together as they love and care for that child who has extra needs.

Marie: Well, most children I've seen in families where there's a sibling - especially a younger sibling with a disability - they are proud of their parents for taking care of all of their children. And they're usually also helping to take care of their sibling.

Sherry: Right! I think it speaks a lot to how having a disagreeable temperament can really create a bad future for yourself; especially if you add alcohol.

Marie: Yeah. Between her resentment and her alcoholism, I can see where things went wrong.

Sherry: Yeah. So, let's take a break and then we'll talk about the youngest.

(musical interlude)

Marie: Okay. So, let's get back to it. You said there were three kids who tie for the youngest.

Sherry: Well, there are three kids who are parricide offenders since 1985 who are the youngest; at the age of eight. But let's go back a little bit further so that we can see how often eight-year-olds kill their parents. Our research - like I said - only goes back to 1985 and this is what I found. There are a few cases where an eight-year-old will kill mom on accident - by pointing a gun at her and pulling the trigger when he had no reason to believe there were bullets in the gun. I say "he" because it was always a boy who was doing that. Then there was a woman who decided that it was a great idea to let her eight-year-old son start the car and pull it out of the driveway. It was in Maryland, in 1984. Too late, she noticed her toddler was in the path of the car, so she made a leap to save the toddler. The car hit them both and pulled both her and the baby out into the street.

Marie: That's horrible!

Sherry: Yeah, the toddler lived but the mother did not. We don't really count that as killing his mother, either. That was just something I thought I would remark on.

Marie: Just some horrible accident. So, the other ones - they point a gun which they know is a real gun, but they think it's not loaded?

Sherry: So, all of those were accidents and I just mentioned those to show that there are children who kill their parents on accident. There's a child as young as three years old who shot their parent on accident. But then there were a couple of others.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: So, on April 22, 1935 eight-year-old Jackie Glenn Darden of Greenville, Texas shot his 33-year-old mother to death while sleepwalking. He somehow managed to locate the gun and shoot his mom without waking up - or so says his dad. The boy was found standing over his mother - who was Ivy Douthit Darden - sobbing, "I don't remember anything that happened." Jackie's 38-year-old dad, Sylvester Perry Darden, had recently quit a farm to start up a filling station. It appeared the three children slept with their parents in a set of twin beds. Jackie slept with his mother, while the older son, Gerald, slept with dad (along with an infant). Darden's father helpfully reported that Jackie Glenn had been playing a game of Desperado with several friends - wherein the children used sticks as guns - the day before. He also mentioned that he has been keeping the gun by his bedside because he'd noticed two suspicious men loitering in the neighborhood recently. He claimed he would unload the gun each morning; for safety reasons.

Marie: Okay, so that's incredibly suspicious - that he just started keeping the gun by his bedside recently. And then sleepwalking, an eight-year-old managed to not only like fire a gun, but to aim it at a person.

Sherry: Oh, get this! At the coroner's inquiry when Jackie Glenn was asked to cock the gun, he was unable to do it. But at trial he was able to easily do it. When he was at...well...let me back up a little bit. Jackie Glenn's brother, Gerald, testified at the Coroner's Inquiry, saying that he was awakened by his father the morning of the murder. His dad asked him to turn on the light. That was when he saw his younger brother standing in the room holding the gun, and his mother dead on the floor. His brother was standing, asleep with the gun in his hand. His

father shook him and slapped his face until he woke up. His dad, again, asked him what he was shooting at and Jackie said, "Nothing!." His dad asked him to run get help; so Gerald left the home at that time. They held a Coroner's Inquiry and Gerald admitted that his brother did walk in his sleep on occasion; but he had never seen his brother shoot a gun. They asked Jackie Glenn to pull back the lever on the gun at the Coroner's Inquiry - and he was unable to do it. Subsequently, they charged the father with murder and there was a trial.

Marie: That makes more sense.

Sherry: It does! So, at the trial, Jackie was asked to testify. When they asked what happened, Jackie testified that he only remembered his father grabbing his arm and saying, "What are you shooting at?" He found himself standing about two feet away from the bed where his mother had been sleeping. He had a shotgun in his hand, but he did not recall hearing a gunshot. At trial, when they asked him to cock the gun, he was able to do it easily. This was the Defense, of course, who had asked him to do so. But then the Prosecution got a turn to question him, they asked him what happened the first time he was asked to cock the gun in the grand jury room and he admitted that, at that point, he couldn't do it. The Prosecutor asked him, "Well, what changed?" and Jackie admitted the defense team had had him over 10 times to learn how to do this before trial.

Marie: Oh, that is so shady!

Sherry: Very, very shady!

Marie: So, they just coached this little boy until they could try and use him to introduce reasonable doubt at his father's murder trial.

Sherry: Right! And Gerald also admitted that he had spent every day, but one day, at the Defense's office after his dad was charged with the murder.

Marie: That makes sense. They're trying to create an alternate story to try and get the jury to have some doubt about whether the husband killed the wife.

Sherry: Right!

Marie: Well, why would he have done it, though? Usually we're looking for motive. I mean, the twin beds may be his motive.

Sherry: Oh, I think the twin beds were because they had a lot of poverty. I think he had quit the farm and he was trying to start up this business - he had a young family. I never could confirm this, but it looked like they had a one-bedroom apartment; was all they could afford. And they had these two beds - which, again, was all they could afford - so they were splitting the family up that way to sleep. The Prosecution showed that Sylvester Darden had recently purchased life insurance for his wife and he'd also attempted to fraudulently obtain fire insurance on his mother-in-law's home - without her knowledge or consent.

Marie: So what? He was going to burn his mother-in-law?

Sherry: They couldn't prove that, but that is what they brought up at trial. Was that it looked like he was looking for some financial ways out of his problems.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: After considerable deliberation, Sylvester Darden was found not guilty during his jury trial because the jury couldn't meet the standard of proof; given that Jackie was a sleepwalker - is what they said.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: Sylvester went on to live a full, happy life and he died in July of 1970; after having remarried.

Marie: Okay, so he did successfully use 'well my son's a sleepwalker,' you know" to have enough reasonable doubt to get off.

Sherry: That's what it looks like. I think the man got away with murder - but that's only my opinion.

Marie: Okay. Well - and for reference - 1935 was a long time ago. This was right after the Great Depression um so obviously that's why it's not in our murder set, right?

Sherry: (laughter) Exactly. So...

Marie: Our data set...

Sherry: (laughter) ...murder set.

Marie: So, that's why it's not in our data set. (laughter)

Sherry: Exactly. So, let's talk about Stephen Schwab.

Marie: Schwab, Schwab (laughter) Schwab.

Sherry: Let's talk about Steven Schwab. Laverne Mardell Holzler-Schwab age 38 was shot and killed by her oldest son, eight-year-old Stephen, in Wenatchee, Washington on February 29, 1960. Not a lot is said about this third grader except that his IQ is 135 and he was mad because his mom made him go to bed early.

Marie: Why was he IQ-tested at 8 years old?

Sherry: I have no idea. I guess they thought he was special.

Marie: Well in my experience, the only kids who are getting IQ tested, are usually being tested for -let's just say being disruptive,

Sherry: Or - because they're showing exceptional brilliance and they're thinking about skipping a grade.

Marie: Oh, maybe that's it.

Sherry: So, one or the other. Anyway, he waited until the family was asleep and then he snuck into the master bedroom to murder his mother. Oh, and dad was Norman Lee Schwab. He was the former County Prosecutor. He was in the twin bed next to her and he lied to the Coroner's Jury in an attempt to cover up for his son.

Marie: Okay. So, this is the second twin bed story.

Sherry: Yeah.

Marie: I assumed in I love Lucy - and I've heard the twin beds were because of the censors. Was everyone sleeping in twin beds until the 90s?

Sherry: I don't think they were but I'm really not sure. I think it's odd that both of these boys killed parents in twin beds.

Marie: Yeah. Anyway, that's just odd.

Sherry: I think it's very odd. Okay, so that clears up all of the ones in the past.

Marie: So, we have two eight-year-olds who are not in our data set. One who probably didn't even do it- because he was sleepwalking - it looks like it was his dad. And then the other who - we don't know much about; other than he was bright...

Sherry: No. He was exceptionally bright with an IQ of 135.

Marie: That's true. The article for that was a trip it looked like um, kind of like a social bulletin: 'very smart boy does interesting thing' um instead of a crime report.

Sherry: Right. Okay, so let's get into the ones that are in the data set.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: So, there are three. Because of the ages of these children, I'm not sharing the children's names in the first two. We'll tell you about the murders and then I think you'll understand what the difference is.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: Okay? So, the first murder occurred in Wisconsin. There was a mother with five children trying to take a nap in March of 2011. Her eight-year-old son was impatiently waiting for some attention and he needed his next dose of medicine. He'd already had some problems - and one of them was starting fires. That's why he was on medication. When he couldn't wake her up, he decided to really get her attention, so he started a little fire in her purse. But the fire seemed to have a life of its own and his mother died in the subsequent blaze. He was determined to be too young to be charged.

Marie: That one's really sad, actually. Maybe he didn't even mean for her to die, he just had a kind of pyromania.

Sherry: Right. This one almost falls in the area of accidental - but isn't accidental - because he intentionally set a fire and they had been working with him to not set fires.

Marie: And at eight, you know the fires are dangerous.

Sherry: Right. But this is a little guy who is now growing up and trying to have a good life - and that's why I'm not sharing his name.

Marie: Okay. How about our second little murderer?

Sherry: Okay. The second child was in Pennsylvania. This boy was a good kid. He was an avid reader, a good student, and a really good son. He loved his dad despite the fact that dad was an alcoholic and really quite a jealous and mean drunk. He and his dad spent a lot of time together - fishing and participating in the boy's Little League games.

In March of 1990, he fell asleep on the couch. His parents had been out drinking and when they got home, they left him sleeping on the couch and they went to bed. His father, jealous of another man in the community, started fighting with his wife. He choked her to unconsciousness and then slapped her face to revive her. Next, he dragged his wife out - it was about 2:30 in the morning - to a friend's house to ascertain whether the two of them had had an affair. When his drunken quest failed - the person refused to answer their door - he returned

home but he couldn't find his front door key. He again berated his wife and began to choke her on the front porch. The mother was screaming for help as she lost consciousness.

The boy woke with a start. His dad had put a gun to his mom's head a couple of months ago and this time he was afraid his dad really would kill her. So, he ran to the kitchen and he got a knife. Then he opened the front door and yelled at his dad to stop - but his dad ignored him. He stabbed his dad once from behind; trying to get dad to stop choking his now-unconscious mother. At the coroner's inquest, his mom testified when I came to, my husband said "Our child stabbed me." She reached out and grabbed a baseball bat and hid him on the head to keep him from going after their son. And she told her son to run for help. He obediently ran to the neighbors and called 911. In the meantime, his mom escaped to a neighbor's house. It was determined the dad's death was caused by a single stab wound. The knife had ruptured the dad's aorta. The Coroner's Inquest determined that this was justifiable homicide and no charges were filed.

Marie: I think that that was a sound decision. It sounds like this was self-defense and defense of another.

Sherry: Right - and a very tragic story.

Marie: It is sad! I think it's really sad that he was close with his father um but that he was so abusive that he ended up having to kill him.

Sherry: Yes. And this is a case where there was abuse - but it was abuse within the family; not abuse upon the child.

Marie: But it still has quite an effect on the child.

Sherry: Oh, it definitely does. And sadly, the one stab the boy made...

Marie: The one stab wound - is what killed the father?

Sherry: Yes. Because it cut his aorta.

Marie: It's terrible.

Sherry: Yes. And again that's - I think you understand now why I'm not sharing the names of those two boys.

Marie: It makes sense.

Sherry: There's another boy. He's eight years old and I will share his name - mostly because his name was plastered all over the media and probably people have already heard about him and that is Christian Ryan Romero.

Marie: I have heard of him.

Sherry: Yes, so Arizona - Vincent Romero was 29 years old. He had a lot on his mind as he returned home from work on November 5, 2008. He talked to his roommate and carpool friend, Timothy Romans, (who was age 39) as they drove home. Vincent had to figure out the weekend. His ex would be coming to take his boy for visitation. His son, Christian, was a worry, too. Christian kept misbehaving, lying, and not doing his work for school. He was trying to figure out what to do; because spankings just were not cutting it. They were not getting through to this boy. The men also talked about the drama at work.

After pulling his truck into their gravel driveway, Vincent went to find his son to see how his day was and Timothy headed into the yard to call his wife. They were having marital problems and that's why he was crashing here at his friend, Vincent's, house. Vincent found his young eight-year-old wielding a 22-caliber rifle. The last thing Vincent saw was Christian taking aim at him. Christian started shooting: one...two...three...four...five shots were fired. He had to reload the gun each time. Then Christian called for Timothy Romans. "Tim, I need you to come here. Something's wrong with dad!"

Marie: Oh my goodness! Can you imagine running in there, thinking that maybe he's had a stroke or something? It's like - well there sure is something wrong with him - you shot him.

Sherry: That's right. There are five bullets in him. And Timothy, who was still outside on the phone with his wife (and this is why we know what happened and know that Christian called him) cut off his phone call and hurried into the house; only to encounter the same fate as Vincent.

Marie: Wait, so he called him in there? He trapped him!

Sherry: Yes, yes. He ambushed both of these men.

Marie: That's terrible! Why didn't he just let Tim live?

Sherry: I'm not sure. At first Christian did what he did best. He lied about who shot his dad. His initial story was that he got off the school bus and he wandered around the neighborhood for about an hour and a half because his stepmother wasn't home that evening. And when he got home, he noted a white car speeding away from the house and he found Mr. Roman's dead on the front porch. Proceeding into the house and up the stairs, he said he found his dad dead and lying on the floor. He kicked him with his foot a little and he waited around the house for about half an hour, and then he went to a neighbor's house to report what he'd found. But this story quickly fell apart.

Marie: Well, first of all it doesn't make any sense. If you find someone dead on your front porch, you usually call the police immediately. You don't kick your dying father. You go - like you encounter your dad - he's been shot, and you kick him with your foot?

Sherry: You don't even make it up the stairs when you find the dead person on the front porch.

Marie: And then if you do make it up the stairs - you think your dad is dying - you don't sit around for half an hour.

Sherry: Right. So, the police took him in for questioning as - not a person of interest - but as a witness. They really did not think an eight-year-old was capable of committing these murders.

Marie: Which makes sense! It happens very rarely.

Sherry: You're right! After trying out several versions of lies that might get him out of trouble, Christian finally confessed. Here, we have part of the audio clip from the interrogation - when Christian finally admits that he shot both of them.

(Audio Clip)

Christian: So, then I went inside, and I saw my dad upstairs. I saw a bunch of blood - like a puddle of blood around his head.

Investigator: Did you go anywhere else in the house?

Christian: No. I went upstairs, and I'd fallen - and then then I cried right there, and I was laying down like this – crying - on the ground.

Investigator: Um, who would you think might have done that?

Christian: I don't know. Someone bad, though. There's some people down the street that are pretty - pretty bad people; always smoking and driving pretty fast down the road in a blue car.

Investigator: When you shoot a gun um some of the powder comes off of it and comes onto clothes. Were any guns shot yesterday?

Christian: Um I don't know? Maybe they shot it in the house. And I was wearing the same clothes and maybe it got on my clothes. Because those guys could have shot in the house and it could've smoked. And I could have walked into it.

Investigator: So, we wouldn't find a whole bunch on your clothes yesterday?

Christian: I don't know, but I wasn't shooting any guns.

Investigator: If you shot a gun yesterday, it would be important that you told us that you shot the gun, because we're going to find out. So, we...

Christian: I...I think...I might have shot the gun.

Investigator: ...and we make a promise to each other that we're only going to tell the truth. Did you shoot your dad?

Christian: I think so.

Investigator: Did you shoot him because you were mad at him?

Christian: I think so.

Investigator: You think so? Well how often do you get in trouble?

Christian: Most of the time.

Investigator: You get into trouble a lot? For what kinds of stuff, Honey?

Christian: For lying.

Investigator: For lying? Okay. But you told the truth right now, didn't you? You're a good kid, you know that? Do ya?

Christian: I went upstairs, and I saw my dad. And then I got the gun. And then I fired it at my dad, and he was on the ground and then um I reloaded it.

Investigator: How many times do you think you fired the gun?

Christian: I think twice.

Investigator: How many times did that gun shoot him?

Christian: I think...twice. I think um I think I shot my dad because he was suffering with me. I uh he was suffering so I might have shot him.

Marie: Wow, that was really shocking. Even knowing what we're going to hear, uh it's really shocking. Just for someone that young to be talking about this horrible thing; much less to have done this horrible thing.

Sherry: His voice is such a little boy.

Marie: I know! He's all, I can say is so young!

Sherry: Right, so after they had talked to him - this is what he told them. Tired of being spanked, Christian had made a secret promise to himself. He was not going to tolerate being spanked any more than 100 times. Enough was enough. From that date forward, he had kept a tally sheet - carefully marking down each spanking he received from his father for bad behavior. He received his hundredth and final spanking on November 4th. So, he shot his dad on the 5th. After finally confessing to the truth he buried his head into the hood of his jacket and said, "I'm going to go to juvie."

Christian eventually pled guilty to negligent homicide of Timothy Romans under the Juvenile system in a plea deal.

Marie: The charges for his father's murder were dropped and he was placed under judicial supervision until he came of age - so 18 years old. He was sent to residential treatment and was required to appear for judicial reviews at ages 12, 15, and 18. He was released from residential treatment early and sent to the foster care system. But at that point he had to fight for the legal right to attend public schools because, at age 15, people were worried about his hot temper and his tendency towards violence.

Now, that didn't go away after he killed his father. Post-conviction, he had also threatened to kill a therapist; he had shoved a therapist against a wall; he had run away; and he had destroyed property.

Sherry: My.

Marie: He continued to have a lot of problems despite being in residential treatment. So, he did eventually encounter a counselor who really did help him turn his life around.

Sherry: Good!

Marie: Yeah. And then he was released from custody on his 18th birthday in 2017.

Sherry: Ah. So, I did look him up recently just to see what was happening with him - but it looks like he is on track to a good life and doing quite well.

Marie: Oh, good! I'm glad that he was able to turn it around.

Sherry: Right. I am, too.

Marie: Okay. So, do you want to talk about - I know that spanking is kind of a hot topic, um - some people say it's always abuse, some people say it's never abuse, some people say it depends on the circumstance - so was Christian abused?

Sherry: What do you think? He was spanked; we know he was spanked.

Marie: You want my personal opinion?

Sherry: Yeah.

Marie: Well, in my opinion, I think it's really easy for spanking to turn into abuse - because you're trying to use corporal punishment at a time when you, yourself are very frustrated. And, I think parents - I've seen a lot of parents who believe that spanking is a way to instill discipline; but the problem with spanking is it has diminishing rewards - because it's not shocking to your child to be hit if you hit them every week.

Sherry: That's true. A lot of times - spanking is very difficult to talk about because spanking has been, traditionally, a way to discipline a child - and spanking can mean many things. Some people call it a spanking when they take a belt - they take the buckle and smack the kid on the on the behind with the buckle several times in a fit of anger - it can be anything from that to a light swat on the butt. So, I think it's difficult to talk about spanking and really decide what is a spanking or not. In this case the parents had a rule, he would receive one spot on the butt for each day he failed to bring his school papers home. So, I don't think they were hitting him in anger. I think that they were going: one - Monday; two - Tuesday; three - Wednesday; and I don't think it rises to the level of abuse in any court in America.

So, the police did investigate the home - upon hearing about the spanking police did investigate the home for signs of abuse and found nothing that would have warranted charges. The reason he was not bringing his school papers home was because he was supposed to bring home a Daily Behavioral Report Card because he was having problems at school.

Marie: Okay. So, he didn't just have problems at home; he had behavioral problems at school, at home. and then later on in the residential treatment center.

Sherry: That's right. So, he had some growing up he had to do.

Marie: He did. He probably was a very unique eight-year-old because even most adults do not lie in wait.

Sherry: So talk about Lying In Wait a little bit - what does it mean? And why is - Lying In Wait is also ambushing, right?

Marie: It's a kind of a hunting tactic; and you don't see it very often because most people who murder - or even assault other people - it's not like um the gang movies you see. It's not this elaborate plan; they're usually angry, and they attack someone.

Sherry: So, more of a crime of passion?

Marie: Um, yeah. Usually. Or they just have gotten in a fight and they are fighting and kill them on accident almost. But Lying In Wait is - like this boy did - when he was sitting in the house with a gun and called someone in. When he called Timothy in and then shot him? That's Lying In Wait. If you hide in a dark alley, knowing that someone usually walks down this alley, and jump them - that's Lying In Wait.

Sherry: So, we had one little boy who killed his mother in her sleep. And then this little boy who ambushed his father and someone else. Tell me what you see - why is one more egregious than the other?

Marie: Okay, well, the first one killing her in her sleep um.... ugh.... these boys both seem to be - feeling aggression toward their parent because of their parent's role as a disciplinarian. Um, but the first boy is killing more like a child generally does. I don't know how to say it, other than that.

Sherry: Oh, like, like there's a power differential?

Marie: Yeah! Usually a smaller murderer is going to - of any age and of any relationship - the smaller murderer is going to do it with poison, when the person is asleep, when the other person is not looking at them. It's very unusual for someone who has such a huge size and overall power differential to Lie-In-Wait; to sit there and wait for dad to come home and shoot him and then shoot another grown man. I am glad to hear that he's doing well - but I am fascinated with the idea that a child this young who is this calculating who's made this really solid plan and killed two men, grew up to not be violent. Grew up to not have a serious criminal career. And of the two boys, that's the one who I would guess was smarter.

Sherry: That would make sense.

Marie: What do you think?

Sherry: He's more calculating, for sure.

Marie: He is! He really planned that!

Sherry: I kind of feel like Lying in Wait shows a larger degree of planning and a larger confidence in your own power. Yes. You're taking them by surprise, but you have really thought this out and planned it.

Marie: It is. It's a very confident move.

Sherry: Right. When you are killing someone - they're in their sleep I think you are tacitly acknowledging your lack of power.

Marie: Yeah, the idea that if they were fully alert and um aware of you, that you couldn't do it.

Sherry: Right. Anyway. We just thought we'd talk about that.

Marie: It's very interesting. Okay. So, let's talk about some statistics. We've given some great examples for our listeners, but it wouldn't be the Parricide Podcast without some statistics. So, let's talk about the killers. So, I have wondered - are you more likely to kill your parents when you are a child or when you are an adult?

Sherry: That's a really good question! I looked at our data set; we have 2 345 cases in our data set at this point. Fifty percent of them were aged 25 and younger: those are youthful parricide offenders. And 50% were older than or equal to the age of 25.

Marie: So...neither. You're equally likely to do it when you are youthful - probably living with or at least partially dependent on your parents. And when you are an adult; and probably independent.

Sherry: Um, and we'll have to look at some of those cases to get a feel for them.

Marie: I think, I always assumed that youthful offenders would be more likely to kill their parents.

Sherry: Me, too!

Marie: So, let's talk about gender differences. Are your daughters or your sons more of a threat to your life?

Sherry: That is also a very good question! And I split that up. At first, I looked - and it said about 14 percent of the parricide offenders are female - and that would leave 86 percent of them being male: or the majority being males. But I split it up between Youthful Offenders and Adult Offenders to see if there were any differences. We have 1,179 Youthful Offenders and 14 percent of them were female: 86 percent of them were male. So that's exactly the same.

And of the adult offenders, we had an N (which means total cases) of 1,166 - and we had 13 percent that were female and 87 percent that were male. So, it's really about the same across the board - 50/50 for adult versus child killing their parents. And about 14 percent of the females are going to commit the offense and 86 percent of the males.

Marie: So, the vast majority of the time it's going to be your son who kills you.

Sherry: I don't have a son, so it won't be my son!

Marie: Not you! Well, I think that's interesting though because there's this big preference for sons in our society. But anyone listening to this: you probably are going to want a daughter if you have the option.

Sherry: That might be a way to think about it!

Marie: Um, I love to hear about parricide because I'm always um thinking about family structure and kind of the ways it goes wrong. And I think this is the biggest way that - like, the most dysfunctional your family can be is if one of you kills the other, right?

Sherry: Right - I agree. Well, thanks for listening! And we hope you learned something. We'd like to thank Jade Brown for our theme music and the Pittsburgh Press, the Times, the Brownsville Herald, the Kansas City Star, the Marshall News, the Tribune, and the Fort Worth Star for a variety of information and photos that we used for this show. You can see the photos at our website at parricide.org.

Marie: We'd love to hear your thoughts on this episode. Also, we're still putting the finishing touches on our episode list. Thank you to those of you who have already made suggestions! And if you know of a parricide that you would like to see covered here, please send us the name of the parricide offender and we'll add it to our list. Feel free to join our discussions on Instagram at ParricidePodcast; Facebook Parasite Podcast; or by writing to us at - you guessed it - parricidepodcast@parricide.org. And if you like the podcast, please subscribe and share it with your friends!

Dr. Sherry Thompson is currently the Director of the Parricide Prevention Institute. She received her Doctorate, as well as her Master of Public Administration from the University of Utah.

Sherry: If you're subscribed to our podcast, you'll be the first to know when we drop the next episode. We anticipate releasing it two weeks from today, Tuesday April 6th. Until next time!

Marie: Goodbye!

(Musical Theme) Ashes, ashes we all fall down.