

Parricide Podcast ◉
The Accomplice Pt. 2
Jessica Wiseman

Sherry: Welcome to the Parricide Podcast. I'm Sherry...

Marie: ...and I'm Marie. And this is Part 2 of our episode, The Accessory. If you have not listened to Part 1 of this episode, you need to go do so right now. If you don't, you will never ever figure out what is going on and why. The story of Chris gets messy really fast. Like, on the day he is born fast. And then it just gets messier.

Sherry: Who's Chris?

Marie: Well, you have to go listen to Part 1 to find out.

Sherry: That's right.

Marie: And it's important because it comes into play when Chris is trying to avoid execution. You also won't understand the significance of Jessica wearing a white dress to court. And you won't understand this riddle: When is your mother not your mother?

Sherry: When?

Marie: When she's your mother.

Sherry: What???(laughter)

Marie: See, I told you so. Now go listen now and we'll wait for you to catch up.

(theme music) Ring around the roses; a pocketful of posies; ashes, ashes; we all fall down.

Sherry: In our last episode, we took you right up to the point where Jessica had to make a decision. She was going to gain her freedom either way - and she could do it in a white dress or a black dress. It would really be best for everyone if she could convince the authorities to grant a marriage license to a 14-year-old without her parents' consent. But it didn't look as if that was going to happen – so, black dress it was.

On Tuesday night, Chris and Jessica continued privately preparing for Plan B. Jessica was going down some sort of mental checklist with Chris. She asked him if he had enough bullets, and together they went over the murderous plot. What they didn't count on was little Laney overhearing the entire conversation.

Marie: Why didn't Laney tell anyone?

Sherry: Imagine being a 12-year-old - who has Chris in charge of you - who overheard something like this. You don't live with your own parents; you live with your aunt and uncle - and they're out of town. And you overhear this at the kitchen table, knowing you weren't supposed to be listening.

Marie: That would be so scary.

Sherry: Um-hmm. It would be. And I don't think she was confident enough to realize it was real.

Marie: Yeah, she probably just thought they were complaining.

Sherry: Um-hmm. She was a 12-year-old kid. It was rather specific. It wasn't, 'Oh, I just want them dead.' They were very specific about what their plans were. But she, strangely, just kept her mouth shut.

Marie: I can understand why, though. She's very young; probably wasn't sure who to tell - or who would believe her.

Sherry: Um-hmm. And maybe she didn't even have friends there.

Marie: Probably.

Sherry: So, anyway, on Wednesday, November 7th, Chris and Jessica headed to the Middlesex County Courthouse (that was the local courthouse) hoping to get a marriage license despite the law. I think they were hoping Jessica's claims of pregnancy would be their ticket to marriage. They were, predictably, turned away.

This was probably their turning point; because the next thing they did was make the four-hour drive to Roanoke so Chris could cut the brake line of his Uncle Herbert's truck and pour dirt into the gas tank.

Marie: Oooo.

Sherry: Yeah. Jessica told her great-grandparents she was going with Chris to take his parents some spare clothes for their vacation. And - no idea what these grandparents were thinking - but they thought that seemed reasonable and told her okay. They made a trip out of this adventure; staying overnight before returning home the next day.

Marie: Hmm. So, it looks like his aunt and uncle were supposed to die, too?

Sherry: It appears so. Both of them later claimed that they were just trying to delay the return...

Marie: Hmm...by cutting the brake line.

Sherry: Um-hmm.

Marie: That doesn't sound like a delay. It sounds like a death. It seems like if you were trying to slow them down, you'd just slash their tires.

Sherry: Yeah. I agree with you. I've never heard of anyone saying, 'Oh, I wanted to delay them a bit, so I cut their brake lines.'

Marie: Yeah. That doesn't make any sense.

Sherry: No, it doesn't. Any more sense than the kids taking clothes to them on their last day.

Marie: Yeah. What about Lainey? Did she know about this murder attempt, too? She didn't appear to - or at least that never came out as such in public.

Anyway, J.B. and Kathy found out about this little out of town tryst. They weren't aware of the cut break lines and such, but they were finally working in concert for a change. They were both furious! Kathy

called the local police to report Chris and Jessica had run off together. Great-Grandma was involved in the mix here; because all of the drama was taking place at her house.

Tempers flared when the teens returned to Great-Grandma's house the morning after the trip. J.B. and Kathy yelled -and the teens remained resistant. J.B., in a heat of passion, insisted they break up; at one point yelling, "I'm gonna kill you!" if they didn't. Parental solidarity was a fragile state when it came to J.B. and Kathy. When the shouting was over and tempers had cooled, Kathy quietly told Jessica she would be restricted from seeing Chris for a few days. Remember, this is Thursday, okay?

Marie: Um-hmm.

Sherry: Everyone needed some time to cool down. Jessica agreed and everyone went their separate ways. Crisis averted, both J.B. and Kathy headed to work. Soon after that, Chris slipped into the house to spend some time with Jessica. And when Chris called Jessica the next day - which was Friday - Kathy suggested Jessica invite him over for Sunday dinner.

Marie: Hmm. Okay. That doesn't make sense.

Sherry: It doesn't make any sense at all. If you restrict her on Thursday and say, 'I don't want you seeing this boy at all.' And then back it off to say, 'Oh, well I think you won't see him for a few days.' You shouldn't be inviting him to Sunday dinner the very next day.

Marie: Yeah. That doesn't make sense at all.

Sherry: Um-mm. Not at all. But what Kathy didn't know, as she was making this suggestion, was that Chris and Jessica were on the phone talking about some complications in their murder plan. According to Chris' niece, Lainey, he had told her their aunt and uncle wouldn't be coming home that night because they'd had a little truck problem. This was on Thursday; the night they were expected to get back from their vacation.

Marie: Okay, that's a nice way to say they're probably never coming back.

Sherry: Um-hmm. But Uncle Herbert and Aunt Brenda were lucky, though. Herbert was a skilled driver and when he realized he didn't have any brakes as he drove down that winding mountain road, he used the parking brake to control for speed and looked for a place to land - instead of panicking. That's what saved their lives.

Marie: That is really quick thinking.

Sherry: I know! He's a really good driver. Lainey reports that Chris was pretty freaked out when they actually arrived home alive that evening with their truck repaired. This was part of the plan that had not gone as expected. Chris had gone to bed and *not* snuck over to Jessica's house as earlier planned.

Marie: So, they were trying to kill both of their parents on the same weekend, basically.

Sherry: Yes. That's exactly what it looks like. I know that Herbert and Brenda weren't Chris's parents, but they were the people who were trying to get him to be a good person.

Marie: Um-hmm. They were raising him at the time, at least.

Sherry: Right. They're his caretakers, for sure.

So, on Friday Jessica was angry when she called Chris. He hadn't come over as promised. After asking Chris to Sunday dinner - as suggested by her mom - Chris came over and picked up Jessica to go to the store. Remember, this is Friday - and they had spent the night together Wednesday night and been told not to see each other on Thursday.

Marie: Yeah. They're back together really fast.

Sherry: They're not apart. Ever!

As they shopped, they must have been talking about murder because later that evening Chris and Lainey went to the store to buy a loaf of bread. Chris asked his young cousin to deliver a note to Jessica at her house. The note read - and this is a quote – “Do you still want me to come over there tonight?”

He'd drawn these two little boxes labeled yes and no - like you do when you're in elementary school. And Jessica had returned the note with written instructions. “If my bedroom window is open, come in. If my window is down, the plan is off.” I know Lainey is reading these notes. I just can't imagine what's going through her mind.

But after dinner Chris and Lainey went for another drive - to look for a lost cat. During this drive, Chris wrote another note in an auto trader magazine and asked Lainey to deliver it to Jessica via her bedroom window. This note reassured Jessica that he was going to be there later that evening. Then he and Lainey went home, watched a movie with Brenda after seeing Herbert off to his night shift, and they all went to bed.

Sometime between 12:45 and 1:30 Chris, dressed head to toe in camouflage - and with his shotgun in hand - woke Lainey and asked her if she wanted to walk over to Jessica's with him. (This is according to some of the source reports. The court documents say that Lainey actually stayed in bed and talked to him before he left. But this is the story that most people have talked about, so I'm not sure which one is accurate.) But Lainey knew what was about to go down. She'd heard the conversations and, nevertheless, she reportedly pulled on her clothes and left with him.

Marie: I would not have. (laughter)

Sherry: I would not have, either. This would be a long walk, because instead of sleeping at her great-grandparents, tonight Jessica was sleeping at her parents' new home. About half a mile away.

The odd little duo headed down the road. At some point, Chris stopped to smoke a joint and handed Lainey the gun. As they continued down the winding unlit road. Lainey carried the shotgun while Chris expounded on how it would be different to be shooting people - instead of shooting game - and expressing his wonder over the fact that he would be shooting people he actually knew.

Marie: It kind of implies that he's shot people he doesn't know, doesn't it?

Sherry: It kind of does, but I don't think he had. I think he's just kind of stoned and rambling.

Marie: Yeah. But they reached the Wiseman's block and the dark figures stopped momentarily as Chris took the gun from Lainey and told her to go home. One figure turned back toward their home, crawled through a window, and went back to sleep. The other figure moved quietly and confidently toward the open window - to his future - shotgun in hand.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: When he got to the window, Chris tried to hoist himself up and into Jessica's bedroom - as he had a thousand times before. But this is yet another bedroom, and he couldn't quite make that higher window. So, he got a bucket from the garage, and made a less-than-ground entrance as he wiggled through the window. (giggles) Jessica quietly padded across the hall to retrieve her parents' stash box from their headboard.

Marie: So, a stash box holds, like, drugs and drug paraphernalia?

Sherry: Um-hmm. And during the early hours of the 10th, Chris and Jessica spent time together and started to create a robbery scene to cover for their murders. They were taking the contents of that stash box and spreading it around their room to attempt to make the upcoming murder look like a drug robbery gone wrong.

Marie: These parents must have been deep sleepers.

Sherry: They must have been. After spending a few hours together, Jessica decided it was time. Chris snuck over to the room and looked in - and said he couldn't really see them. So, Jessica turned on the bathroom light to better illuminate her parents as they slept. She turned on a fan to create white noise to conceal the noises of their preparation, and she put the family dog outside.

Shotgun at the ready Chris, crept into J.B. and Kathy's bedroom a couple of times - but claims he was struggling with what he was about to do. After trying to get Jessica to do the actual shooting, he shot them both. Once each in the head. The bullet meant for Kathy only grazed her; so, she hadn't died instantly. Chris skedaddled back to Jessica's room to celebrate their victory. and their elation was supplanted by panic when the couple heard some clamoring about in her parents' bedroom.

Chris jumped over the bed - to the other side of the bed, by the window - and said he wanted to escape but Jessica had shut that window and he didn't know how to get out.

Marie: Oh, my goodness.

Sherry: He's a runner.

Marie: He is.

Sherry: Her mother emerged, bloodied and dying, from her bedroom. Her only concern seemed to be to get to Jessica. She wanted to make sure she was okay, or perhaps save her.

And this is where the couple's stories diverge. When Chris confessed to the murders, he said he shot Kathy at Jessica's behest; as Kathy made her way into Jessica's room. But he later recanted. Chris didn't realize how much he had to lose if he was truly the one who took the final shot.

Marie: Oh.

Sherry: Just know that Chris initially said he'd shot the final shot at Jessica's explicit request. When he recanted, he said he'd hidden behind the bed - dropping the shotgun as he ran - and Jessica had picked up the gun and shot her mother. Jessica maintained that Chris raised his gun and shot her mother one more time. And she was relieved when her mother dropped to the ground. However, she did tell several of her friends at the reform school that she was the one who delivered the fatal shot.

Marie: Hmm.

Sherry: Anyway, more on that in a minute.

The kids were only halfway to home base at that point. Now they needed to set the stage that would keep them out of trouble. After sharing a few kisses and promises of a life together, they prepared to head to Chris's house. It's claimed they stepped over Kathy's body as they headed down the hall to the front door. But they didn't get any blood on their shoes or clothes - so I'm guessing they exited via that window. Old habits die hard, and a window exit would explain why there was no blood on even their shoes.

Marie: Yeah. That makes more sense.

Sherry: I think so, too. Hand in hand they made their way back to Chris's house, making plans. Once there, Chris crept into the house - it was about 4:00 am - and climbed into bed. And then Jessica sprang into action. She began banging on the door, screaming hysterically, and crying for help. Lainey must not have known about this part of their plan, because she seemed seriously surprised and shocked as Brenda called the police and Chris tried to calm a clearly hysterical Jessica - who claimed to have seen the faces of her dead parents.

Marie: That's horrible.

Sherry: I agree. Brenda unwittingly hauled those teens back to the scene of their crime, trying to make everyone available to everyone else. And Jessica told her story of hearing her parents fighting with a third mystery person just prior to hearing shots ring out.

Eventually Brenda toted both of the teens back to her house and gave each of them a valium.

Marie: As if they didn't have enough drugs on their own.

Sherry: I know, right! (chuckles) During that drive home was the first time Brenda had to wonder what had really happened, because Chris had leaned over and whispered in her ear, 'Do you think she did it?'

Chills ran up Brenda's spine. She responded, saying she didn't even want to think about that.

Marie: Why would Chris say that to his aunt?

Sherry: I'm not sure if he was trying to throw her under the bus? It seems like he was trying to set it up so he wouldn't be in trouble if they got caught; don't you think?

Marie: Yeah. Maybe.

Sherry: But anyway, back at the house the investigators worked carefully and methodically to get this case solved. They interviewed Jessica and noted that she fake-cried during the entire interview; as she recounted how her parents had been shot in the master bedroom - and how the last shot was made from the kitchen as the mysterious intruder made his exit. The police knew that final shot had been taken from Jessica's bedroom.

Being more experienced - and clever - than Jessica, the police looked at the discrepancies and figured it out pretty quickly. Dogs were brought in to try to track the gunman. They followed the very same path

Jessica purportedly followed when running for help; right to Chris's house. The bullets had been hand-packed; which is something Chris was wont to do.

They questioned Chris for the first time at two o'clock that afternoon - with both his Aunt Brenda and his mother present. Well, not his mother - you know who I mean. Anyway, they were at the aunt and uncle's house. Omitting the details of how he and Jessica had traveled to Roanoke to cut some brake lines, Chris told of how they had spent the night together in Richmond; causing Jessica's parents to put her on restriction. He claimed he hadn't seen nor heard from her since that day in her great-grandmother's driveway.

Marie: Hmm. That seems like something they could easily disprove.

Sherry: How?

Marie: Well, they had all those notes. I'm sure they were seen wherever they stayed...when they went up to cut the brake lines. And I'm sure that at some point, Grandma's going to switch sides and say, "Uh, well, no. They were running around trying to get married."

Sherry: I think so. At 7:00 p.m. the police again visited Jessica's great-grandmother's house to interview Jessica - because this is where she was now staying. Chris watched from the house - lights out behind him so he wouldn't be seen - as the police led Jessica to the patrol car for her interview. They asked her to recount her narrative of the murders and she complied. When she noted the killer had taken that final shot as he headed toward the kitchen, the officer stopped her and noted the final shot had come from her bedroom. She adamantly denied this until they shared their evidence with her and - just like that - Jessica remembered there was a man hiding by her bed. He had threatened to kill her if she told anyone about it, and she'd been afraid to mention him when the Investigator. Asked if the man crouched by her bed happened to be Chris, she emphatically denied it. Then he asked the next question: was she the killer? Jessica shouted, "No! How could you say anything like that?"

And she scooted out of that police car - running to her grandfather, who escorted her back into the house. But her ploy didn't work. After a brief conversation between the Investigator and her grandfather, Jessica found herself again in the police car - with her grandfather sitting beside her. After being read her Miranda Rights, Jessica admitted that Chris had snuck in her bedroom window on the night of the murders. She refused to admit whether or not he had brought a gun. She admitted that Chris had shot her parents. They'd left her parents on the floor and headed to Chris's house. Split up, so Chris could go to bed and Jessica could bang on the front door.

Then Jessica admitted Chris had shot her parents and had brought the shotgun with him. At that point, Jessica decided she needed to make a few demands of her own. She insisted on seeing Chris before going any further. The Investigators said, 'Yeah, no.' and terminated the interview.

From his darkened home, Chris saw the police car pull away from the house with Jessica still in it. It was about 9:00 p.m. now. He stood there a minute, calculating his options. His kind-of-not-really-but-sort-of mother, Margaret, (in true Margaret fashion) had already headed home. Brenda and Lainey were somewhere in the darkened house. He dialed Margaret and asked if he could come home. Moments later, the police were predictably being led in the door by Brenda as Chris sat and stared the television; not really enjoying the last few minutes on earth when he was actually free. They informed him that they had new evidence indicating he was responsible for the murders of J.B. and Kathy Wiseman. The

Investigator read him his Miranda Rights and Chris was signing his handwritten confession in less than an hour. According to the book, Anatomy of an Execution, these are Chris's words. The grammatical errors are those that he had left in his writing.

“We got in a little spat that I wasn't going to do it. I told her to do it. They wouldn't going to let us see each other permanently. She said, ‘If he gets up, he will kill us.’ For about 10 to 15 minutes, we sat talking about killing them. I fired the gun into their bedroom twice. I really couldn't see them. After that, I really don't remember. Her mom was coming in there. It didn't appear she had been wounded. Jessica said, “Oh, God. Please shoot her again.” I was laying on the floor on the opposite side of bed when her mother came in. Jessica was standing in front of the window when I shot her mother in the doorway. Then I asked Jessica if she regretted it. She said no - only hurting a lot of people. I guess her grandparents. That is when I shot.

Marie: That's horrible.

Sherry: I'm very sad.

Later Chris would recant his admission to making that final fatal shot saying, “I thought I would take the rap. I didn't know anything about Capital Punishment. I thought I would get 10 or 12 years in prison and at least she would come and see me.”

Marie: Oh. So, he's referring to the Virginia law that says that multiple murders committed in a single action can be prosecuted as Capital Murder. The judge would have had no choice but to sentence him to death if one of the two conditions were met, right?

Sherry: I think so. What were those conditions?

Marie: In Virginia, a jury must find at least one of two conditions met in order to impose the Death Penalty. Either 1) future dangerousness - the defendant would probably commit criminal acts of violence that would constitute a continuing serious threat to society, or 2) vileness - the defendant's conduct in committing the crime was outrageously or wantonly vile, horrible, or inhuman in that it involved torture, depravity of mind, or an aggravated battery to the victim. Because Chris shot her once - and then shot her again a short period of time later - he met the standard of Aggravated Battery.

Sherry: You said, wanton vileness?

Marie: Um-hmm.

Sherry: That reminded me of wonton soup. Can we get wonton soup after this?

Marie: Okay. (laughter) As long as it's large.

Sherry: Okay! Anyway, for tonight, Chris was taking the fall for everything. The Investigator had him get a few belongings together before heading to jail. He noted Chris' camo outfit strewn about his room and asked if that's what he'd worn while committing the murder - and Chris said yes. On his way to the police car, he walked by the vehicle in which Jessica was sitting. As he passed the open window, Jessica uttered the last words he would ever hear her say, “Chris, I'm sorry!”

Marie: That probably sounded pretty hollow ringing in his ears all the way to his death.

Sherry: I agree. So, what happened after that?

Marie: Well, in January of 1991 - two months after the murder, and at the age of 17 - Chris was certified as an adult. He would be facing adult consequences for his adult-sized crime. But Jessica was 14. Under Commonwealth Law children under the age of 15 couldn't be prosecuted as adults - any more than they could be married without parental consent. So, Jessica was to remain in the Juvenile System.

Sherry: Wow!

Marie: Um-hmm. Because she was only 14 years old, Jessica's case was handled in the Juvenile Court System. She showed up for her court in a pretty white dress and asking for a chance to meet with Chris during the first recess.

Sherry: Let me guess. Access denied.

Marie: Of course. She was found responsible on two counts of First-Degree Murder on June 26, 1991. She was sentenced to 18 months - or until her 21st birthday - all to be served in the Juvenile Corrections System. And this is when Jessica began to cry real tears.

Sherry: That happens so often. (sigh) If she was a good girl and behaved herself, does this mean she could have gotten out sooner?

Marie: Yes. The Juvenile System is all about rehabilitation. If they can get the child rehabilitated early, the child is released early. Jessica was held until July of 1997 - her 21st birthday - the maximum allowed by law. By law they couldn't hold her any longer, but I'm sure they wish they could.

Jessica moved in with her grandmother, worked to stabilize her life, and changed her name. She is said to be living somewhere in the Newport News area, but we weren't able to confirm that.

Chris' attorney tried to get his confession thrown out; claiming he was questioned without an attorney or a parent present. His attorney also claimed the confession was taken under duress because poor Chris - almost 20 hours later - was still under the effects of drugs and alcohol and had only had about two hours of sleep in the past 40 hours

Sherry: At a disadvantage because he'd been up all night scheming to murder the people he confessed to killing?

Marie: Um-hmm. But they had to try.

Sherry: I guess so.

Marie: Chris' Defense Attorney had a scathingly brilliant idea. At his suggestion, Chris entered his plea of guilty for the murder of J.B. Wiseman. Then his defense team asked for all the other charges to be dismissed, because Chris - by being tried - was being subjected to double jeopardy.

Sherry: That's not right, is it?

Marie: No. I can imagine the judge shaking his head of this harebrained scheme. He chastised the Defense Team for their naivete; saying they had wasted valuable time that could have been spent developing a real defense. Motion denied. And Chris' Capital Murder trial began on August 21, 1991.

He insisted that Jessica was the one who took that final shot; killing her mother. Jessica's testimony and his initial confession worked against him. The trial was fairly straightforward. His confession was not thrown out and he was convicted of First-Degree Murder for killing J.B. Wiseman and Capital Murder for killing Kathy Wiseman. During allocution Chris told the court, "I'm sorry. I made a mistake. I ask the Court to spare my life."

Sherry: Not, 'I'm sorry I killed these people. I ask the family to forgive me?'

Marie: No. He was worried about himself.

Sherry: These two kids are quite...

Marie: ...callous?

Sherry: Yes.

Marie: Um-hmm. The judge sentenced him to execution - based on the Capital Murder conviction - and 65 years - life for the First-Degree Murder charge. At the time, you couldn't sentence a defendant to Life Without Parole. You either sentenced them to execution - if they could meet one of the two factors - or they got a parole date.

Jessica had been out of custody for two years when Chris was preparing to die by lethal injection for the first time. Still unwilling to take responsibility for her part in the murder she said, "After hearing what the media had to say, it's obvious that their only goal after all these years is still to sell a paper. I do not deny my involvement, but I totally disagree with what the media is saying. I've never killed anyone, nor have I manipulated anyone to do it for me."

Sherry: Wow!

Marie: Yeah. And since that portion of her statement is a bald-faced lie, we will not include her statement in totality here. Because she *did* murder her parents - with Chris acting as her agent. And she was convicted of murdering her parents.

Sherry: That's true.

Marie: As Chris sat on death row waiting to be executed, his birth mom, Margaret, came to visit him. So did his dad and stepmom - and his wife.

Sherry: Wait, his wife?

Marie: Yeah. One of the girls, Glenda, from his high school had been crushing on him at the time of the murders. But he hadn't really given her the time of day. According to the Daily Press, she'd even given an interview for the local papers saying every girl in the area was in love with him because of his good looks and self-assured style.

Sherry: Wow!

Marie: Yeah. She admitted that she was still in love with him, despite the recent charges of murder. She wrote to him while he was in prison and, when she was old enough, she started visiting him in prison. They married on February 17, 1999. They weren't allowed to consummate their marriage, but they were allowed to kiss; and Glenda thought it was heavenly. They were allowed a two-hour contact visit prior to the scheduled execution. And the prison gave him his requested last meal of fried chicken and apple pie.

He'd been so afraid to die. And seeing his family had been nice - and depressing - but that execution was temporarily stayed just five hours prior to the scheduled time. Chris didn't get his hopes up, though. The Governor hadn't commuted his sentence, so he was just going to have to go through all of this again.

Sherry: Why was it stayed?

Marie: The Virginia Supreme Court had recently handed down a decision stating that both parents must be notified when a minor is arrested and being transferred into Adult Court. The attorneys for this case were pretty sure it would be a real mess to untangle. They argued that Robert Thomas was not notified when his son was arrested; so, all the court proceedings were null and void.

Sherry: Seriously? That's weird. I mean, Robert Thomas hasn't been his father at all. And Robert Thomas isn't his father at this point.

Marie: Exactly.

Sherry: Well, let's walk our listeners through this - just in case they don't understand why he is not his father.

Marie: Okay. It's kind of complicated; it all stayed very convoluted.

So, Chris was born to Margaret Thomas and her ex-husband Robert Thomas. But his Birth Certificate listed his grandparents, Herbert and Virginia, as his parents. Despite being the only people named on the birth certificate, Herbert and Virginia decided to formally adopt him in 1982; which his parents agreed to. But they both stipulated that they regained their parental rights at the deaths of Herbert and Virginia.

Sherry: Well, that wouldn't work. When you terminate your Parental Rights - which both of his natural parents did - there are no givebacks. That's not the way it works.

Marie: You're right. His parents were dead. Margaret and Robert had no ownership privileges over him regardless of what his family had informally decided to do with him. And that is what the courts decided. Saying, "We find no merit in Thomas's contention that the consent forms executed by his biological parents imposed limiting conditions on the adoption which resulted in their resuming the status of parents when the adoptive parents died. The final adoption order unconditionally divested the biological parents of all legal rights with respect to Thomas."

Chris's second contention was also addressed. Chris had asserted that if he had no parents at the time of the Juvenile Court proceedings, there was a jurisdictional defect in the transfer proceedings - because a person required to be summoned (i.e., the legal guardian or guardian ad litem) was not notified. The Courts noted that after his parents had died - even if the schools couldn't understand this nuance, the Courts had it down cold - that Chris didn't have any guardians any more than he had extra parents.

Sherry: Exactly!

Marie: Yeah. It's very complicated, but it becomes very simple when you realize that he's basically an unparented child. There's no one who has rights over him.

Sherry: That's right.

Marie: And this is because nothing was filed with the Courts. Chris had no legal guardian in place at the time of his arrest and the statute did not require one be assigned to him. So, the courts having notified his ex-mother, Margaret, and his aunt and uncle who had been caring for him was more than enough notice of the transfer from the Juvenile System into the Adult System. His appeal was denied - and Chris realized he could have simply refused to live with his biological mother all those years ago. He could have saved himself a ton of grief.

Sherry: And that is the tragedy.

Marie: Isn't that sad?

Sherry: It is very sad.

Marie: His execution was next scheduled for January 10, 2000 - the day we talked about at the beginning of this episode. He thought back to that night when he was 17 years old - and thought he was just at the beginning of everything getting good. Now he knew better.

He didn't hear from Jessica. He never heard from Jessica. He was still trying to figure out what had happened there - and why everything ended so abruptly after the murders. Four days before the planned execution, he granted an interview with Dennis Bernstein of Pacific News Service. He said he wasn't bitter about Jessica, but it really bugged him that she only served seven years for this thing they had done together. He noted that she is now out there living her life, while he was here - four days away from execution - paying the ultimate price for what they'd done.

He spent the day much like all convicts who have lived out their days on Death Row; wondering if they were really going to die. He didn't make a formal statement just prior to his execution - but Jessica was definitely on his mind as he ate his last meal of fried chicken and apple pie. Chris waxed philosophical when it came time for the impending execution and the possibility of another stay - maybe even a commutation. He said, "I think Monday will be a glorious day whatever way it goes. If it's commuted, I get some sort of life back. If it's not commuted, then I move on to another life. I believe death is only the beginning." He was pronounced dead at 9:03 p.m.

Since these murders there have been a lot of changes to Virginia's laws. As of July 1, 1994, kids as young as 14 could be waived into Adult Court on January 1, 1996. The Commonwealth abolished parole and - like we talked about in our episode, Life After Life - in 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that the execution of people who were under the age of 18 at the time of their crimes violates the Federal Constitutional guarantee against cruel and unusual punishments.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: We'd like to thank the Daily Press, Findlaw.com, the book - Anatomy of an Execution by Todd C. Peppers and Laura Trevvett Anderson - which is an excellent book. You should read it. We'd also like to thank the Strange Encounters and True Crime Videocast, Pacific News Service, Amnesty.org, and - of course - Jade Brown for the music.

Marie: And a million thanks to our listeners! We recently picked up a ton of new listeners and we thank you all for sharing our podcast with your friends. It makes our hearts happy.

Sherry: This has been the Parricide Podcast. And remember.

Marie: Always sleep with one eye open.

(musical outro: Ashes, ashes; we all fall down.