

Episode 3 Pt. 2: Twice Adopted, Once Murdered - Larry Swartz

(musical introduction) Ring around the rosies, A pocket full of posies, Ashes, ashes we all fall down.

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

Marie: ...and I'm Marie...

Sherry: ...and today we're covering Part 2 of the Robert Lee and Katherine Ann Schwartz murders. If you haven't listened to Part 1, I can't encourage you enough to go back and listen right now - so you're all caught up with the details of this case. It's super important! Do you want to give our listeners a quick synopsis of what was covered last time, Marie?

Marie: Sure! But first, listener, could I ask a favor of you? Please take a moment and click follow on our podcast and leave a five-star review if you like our show. This is very important as we need support if we're going to continue bringing quality episodes to you in the future. Thank you!

Okay, so last time we learned about Bob and Katie Swartz. They were a very religious couple who met and fell in love in college. When they got married, they were committed pro-life activists and they liked to picket Planned Parenthood facilities every Saturday. When they found they couldn't have children, they decided to adopt. So, they first adopted Larry; who had been through six years of trauma and rejection. He was polite, acquiescent, and tended to hold everything in. Then two years later, they adopted his brother, Michael. Michael had also been through a lot in his short eight years. Temperamentally, though, he was very different from Larry. Where Larry tended to bottle up his feelings and behave, Michael let everyone know that he didn't care about them or what they thought - and the mischief he got into turned into actual legal problems as he got older. So, by the age of 14 he was sent to live at a residential treatment center; as his parents hoped he would be able to turn his life around and have a good life.

I don't think that these parents understood how difficult it was going to be to have two boys who were the same age with very different backgrounds and temperaments and issues. So, although they adjusted their high expectations and worked hard to succeed with the boys, the cards were stacked against them from the beginning. Then in December of 1983, Michael found himself locked up in the psychiatric ward after being arrested for pulling a knife on one of the counselors at a runaway shelter. He had been court ordered an observation and assessment. And where Michael is is very important; because of what happens next.

Sherry: On January 17th a 9-1-1 phone call was made at 7 a.m. Larry Swartz was calling to report he and his young sister had found his parents bloody and dead. Larry and Annie met the emergency response team at their front door. Larry was calm, cool, and collected. He informed them his little sister, Annie, woke him up when she couldn't find her parents. Larry started checking the house and calling out for his parents when something out back caught his eye. He looked out the kitchen window and realized his mother was out there, lying in the snow. So, he called 9-1-1 immediately. The responding police found Bob downstairs in his office - which was a room off of the family room. He had been stabbed 17 times. At least three of the wounds were fatal: one to each carotid artery and one that had severed a vein that carried blood to his heart. He appeared to have been taken by surprise.

Kay was indeed in the backyard next to the pool - just a few feet away from the sliding glass door that led to the basement entrance. Except for one green knee sock bunched at the ankle, she was naked. She had been stabbed seven times in the neck mostly to the right side. In the front, a more horrific injury across the top of her head appeared to have been made by a much larger and heavier object - and that was the wound that killed her. The legs on both bodies appeared to have been positioned spread-eagle style.

Marie: I think this would be equal parts horrifying and confusing.

Sherry: Right. So, investigators were called to the scene and they noticed that nothing of value was missing from the house - and they did notice a bunch of paperwork regarding Michael's current legal problems were sitting there in open view. They found a still-bloody wood splitting maul that had been hurled into a wooded area behind the house.

Marie: Okay. How did they know that it had been thrown into the woods?

Sherry: Because there was fresh fallen snow and it was lying on top of the snow with no footprints around it.

Marie: Okay. So, someone had tossed it thinking it wouldn't be found in the woods.

Sherry: Right right. There was also a bloody palm print that had left a clear palm print on the trim of the sliding door that led to the backyard - and there were shoe prints in the blood soaked snow around Kay's body - with a very definitive pattern on the footprints.

Marie: Okay. So, they had some good evidence between a palm mark and shoe impressions and also a murder weapon.

Sherry: Absolutely. And there were drag marks that indicated Kay may have been dragged into the backyard after she either died or lost consciousness. But the drag marks didn't start where the blood started so - the - there was a blood-soaked chair where they were sure that an attack had taken place and then a clear path and then some strange bloody track marks that had indicated dragging near the door. So, they weren't really sure what had happened there.

Marie: Yeah. It's hard to get the story of what happened with Kay. Even with the snow to show them the movements.

Sherry: Right. Curiously they also found Kay's footed pajamas in a heap in the backyard. A closer inspection revealed a green knee sock concealed in one of the legs of the pajamas.

Marie: Okay. So, does it look like she pulled them off herself? at that point?

Sherry: At that point, I'm not sure they weren't 100 percent sure what happened - but you could tell that it had happened in haste. That's all they knew - was something had happened to her clothing, it had come off, and...it had...they had been hastily removed.

Marie: And the pajamas were bloody, so she...they'd been taken off or she'd taken them off *after* she'd been stabbed?

Sherry: Right.

Marie: At least once.

Sherry: Right. They also discovered wet, bloody shoes in the house - that were identified by Annie as Larry's - along with a batch of just-washed clothing in the washing machine. And those clothing also belonged to Larry.

Marie: And Annie's the younger sister. How old was Annie?

Sherry: Nine. She was a nine-year-old at that point.

So, a neighbor came over while they were doing their inspecting and they told the police there was also blood in front of their house. Actually, two neighbors came - one neighbor came and complained there were some bloody mounds in front of his house - and that was the neighbor across the street - and they kind of ignored him because their hands were full. So, this [other] neighbor came over later and said, "Hey, you know, there's this bloody trail of foot marks in front of my house that I want you guys to look at." And instead of ignoring this second neighbor, they went over to the house and followed the bloody trail through the neighborhood and into the woods.

They were following multiple sets of prints. There were the larger shoeprints that had the distinctive pattern on the bottom, there was a set of footprints that had one sock on one sock off barefoot, and there were paw prints that appear to have been made by a dog. And they followed those footprints. If you want to see the neighborhood and kind of where the footprints were, I will put a picture of that up on parricide.org. We'll have some pictures there of the family, of the dog, and of the neighborhood - and kind of where that trail went; because this was not a short trail. This was a three-quarter mile trail of footprints. The footprints clearly suggested a hasty chase, a capture, and the return of two people - one of them barefoot with a sock on the other foot - back to the Swartz family home.

Marie: So, I really liked seeing the picture of the trail because it was hard for me to imagine how they ended up back at the house. But it looks like after Kay was stabbed, she ran. This was such a determined woman! She's bleeding and she's running while being chased by her attacker and a dog - and she ran almost a mile trying to get some help.

Sherry: Right. They don't think that she could scream or make any noise because her voice box had already been cut.

Marie: (gasp) That's horrible.

Sherry: Yes. So, I can't imagine the terror she was feeling during that chase or during the last moments of her life, actually.

Marie: See, this is why we're always looking for like lighthouses to cheer us up. If this were a movie she would have gotten help. She would have someone would have seen her and saved her.

Sherry: Right. Absolutely. It's just very sad.

Marie: It is.

Sherry: Next, they interviewed both Larry and Annie. Larry told them the same story as before, but he said he looked out the *dining room window* instead of the *kitchen window*. He mentioned all of the troubles the family had had with his brother Michael, and he mentioned that Michael had once

threatened to stab Bob in the back - and that Kaye had confided to others that they had kicked Michael out because they had feared for their lives. The investigators, remembering how upset Larry's dog had been when he called the dog to him - the dog actually growled at his young master - and he had nipped at two of the officers at the crime scene when they were trying to approach Kay's body.

Marie: So, even after her death, the dog's – like - standing over her and trying to protect her.

Sherry: Right! And so, the investigators asked him why the noise - especially the dogs - didn't wake him up in the night during the murders. Larry told them the dogs knew and loved Michael, and most likely would not have barked had Michael entered into their home in the night. In fact, the dogs were used to him sneaking into the house in the early morning hours, because Michael did sneak in and out a lot. So, when asked about his relationship with his parents Larry admitted that he and his dad hadn't been getting along very well lately. And when they probed him for signs of possible physical abuse, Larry responded, "Me and my dad don't get along very well. He's always yelling at me." That was a quote.

Marie: Okay, so he's already kind of trying to make it look like it's Michael. But he's not trying to make it look like his parents abused him.

Sherry: No, not at all.

Marie: Okay. I think that's important.

Sherry: Right. So, next was nine-year-old Annie. She sat on Larry's lap while she was interviewed by the police and she reported she had heard voices at around 11:30 the night before. She actually looked at her watch and it was 11:31.

Marie: That's kind of odd.

Sherry: She's a very precise girl.

Marie: Yeah.

Sherry: She thought she heard her father cry out for help. Frightened, she followed his voice to where it seemed to be coming from and she found herself in their carport peering into the backyard. She thought she saw her dad lying next to the pool and a guy - a very tall guy with dark curly hair - carrying something that looked like a bloody shovel - walking away. He was wearing jeans and a gray sweatshirt emblazoned with the name of Larry's high school. Both Larry and his brother, Michael, had dark curly hair. The investigators asked Annie if the man was tall - like her brother, Michael, who was 6 foot 6, or short like her brother, Larry, who was 5 foot 9. Annie said the man was tall, like Michael. But a quick check with the hospital uncovered incontrovertible proof that Michael was locked in the psych ward that evening. Remember - he had pulled a knife on someone at the Shining Light and they had basically committed him for observation and assessment.

Marie: He actually had a pretty airtight alibi.

Sherry: Right. He was definitely not the killer, if they could verify that he was there in lockup.

Marie: Ummhmm.

Sherry: In a second interview with Annie, she noted that Larry had thrown up that night after she'd heard her dad's voice calling for help.

Marie: So, based on Annie's information, it kind-of sounds like it's Michael. But we know it can't be Michael.

Sherry: Well, Larry and Michael both had dark curly hair.

Marie: They did, but....

Sherry: Michael did not attend...

Marie: ...Michael was tall...

Sherry: ...that high school. Yeah.

Marie: Oh! Michael didn't ever attend that high school.

Sherry: No.

Marie: I guess he was 13 when he ended up at the residential treatment center. So, he never did go to that high school.

Sherry: Uhm uhm. He wouldn't have a sweatshirt like that.

Marie: Okay, so what did the investigators do next?

Sherry: Next, the investigators worked to find a match for that bloody palm print. Larry's palm print matched it - to the surprise of nobody. Larry was arrested and charged with two counts of first-degree murder. Annie was sent to stay with family friends who lived across the street, and three days after his parents' funeral Larry confessed the murders to his attorney, Ron Baradel.

Attorney Baradel attended the same church - Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church - as the Swartz family. He'd been friends with Bob and Kay for quite some time and had done some legal work for them in the past - and he liked them a lot. He even took Larry into his own home for a few days after the murders and defended him for free. He didn't really know Larry before the murders; he only knew his parents. So, Larry was benefiting based on the social capital of his parents.

Marie: It's a little bit strange, because he needed a place to stay because he killed his parents - but I think it speaks to the character of Bob and Kay that people were so willing to take in their children - even their child who was suspected of murder.

Sherry: Yes, I totally agree. I think that Bob and Kay seemed like good people who were really trying with their children. According to Andrea Siegel of the Baltimore Sun, Attorney Baradel insisted Larry was not a bad kid and that Bob and Kay Swartz were good people who were in over their heads with kids who had special needs. I personally think that both Michael and Larry suffered from Reactive Attachment Disorder and that Bob and Kay were just not ready to handle those boys - and didn't understand what was going on with them.

Marie: Yeah. It's hard to know exactly what they had. That's very possible, given their early childhood.

Sherry: I think so. Unfortunately. So, Larry hadn't really known him prior to the murders (I think I might have mentioned that) but he trusted him.

Marie: The lawyer?

Sherry: Yes. So, Larry hadn't really known Ron Baradel before the murders, but he did trust him. He talked to him quite a bit and here's a compilation illustrating how the murders happened according to Larry (and we'd like to thank our friend Thomas for playing the part of Larry for this part).

Thomas: January 16th was awful. My mom told me she hated my girlfriend and called her a slut. We got into this big fight and then my dad started in on me. He claimed I'd messed up one of his computer discs. I'd been goofing around on his computer with a friend and we must have messed it up. It wasn't a big deal, but nothing was going right so I said, "Forget this." And I went to my room. My mom and dad didn't know it, but I had a bottle of rum stashed in my drawer and I started to drink; hoping today would get better. After I caught a little buzz and was feeling better about everything, I went back downstairs.

My mom was watching TV and asked me about some tests I'd taken at school that day. I knew she was just going to get mad all over again, but I told her the truth. I'd probably flunked my Spanish test, but I'd done okay on the others. She was rude and wouldn't let it go, so I got mad and picked up the wood splitting maul and smacked her in the head. But she just kept at it and was now yelling at me for hitting her. I got really mad, so I went to the kitchen and got a steak knife so I could just get her to shut up. I stabbed her in the neck a couple of times. My mom was yelling and stuff, so my dad comes running into the room saying, "What's going on here?"

He sees me stabbing mom and gets totally pissed. He tries to stop me, so I stabbed him in the chest with the same knife. Then I just kept stabbing until he was dead. I was still mad at my mom and now I was going to go to prison for murder. I had to think fast. Of course, I thought of Michael and decided he could take the fall. He was already in all sorts of trouble and everybody knew he hated my parents. I tried to make it look like Michael had broken into the house and killed them. I left his court papers out for the police to find and I dragged my mom out by the swimming pool. I thought, "What would Michael do?" And I decided to take off Mom's clothes and do some other bad things I shouldn't have done to her body. I didn't know what to do with all the bloody stuff, so I hid them in the woods. I didn't think the police would look way out there. When I was getting ready to go to bed, my nine-year-old sister, Annie, got up and was saying she could hear my dad making funny noises and calling for help. I told her she was dreaming and helped her go back to sleep.

(musical interlude)

Marie: That was heavy and a little hard to listen to. Thanks again, Thomas, for reading that. I might have cried. Um, but I think it's interesting. So far we've only done cases where the child confessed. Not all kids who kill their parents do confess.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: But it's, I think it tells you something about the child when they are honest about the fact that they did it.

Sherry: Well, while this confession was important, it seemed to be incomplete and self-serving.

Marie: That's true.

Sherry: Initially Larry told them that he did it, and when they said, "Why?" This was when he was staying with Attorney Baradel – Larry said, "He just kept hitting me and he wouldn't stop."

Marie: Even though at the crime scene, he had told the police that his dad never hit him.

Sherry: Right, right. And at any other time he said, 'my parent...my parents never hit me.'

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: So, I think he was trying to set up a defense that night when he was staying at the attorney's house. But the attorney's child walked into the room about that time, so they quit having the conversation. But in this confession there were a few weaknesses - Larry hadn't mentioned anything about how the bloody footprints and paw prints (indicating a chase through the neighborhood had come to be) and when they asked him about it he insisted he didn't recall that part of the evening.

Marie: Which doesn't make sense. If he recalls everything else, how do you forget the part where you chased your naked mother through the neighborhood.

Sherry: Right. And he says that a steak knife was used - that he went to the kitchen and got a steak knife. But at autopsy, they proved that it was actually a hunting knife that was used to kill these parents. Which isn't something that's typically kept in the kitchen.

Marie: Okay. So, that indicates that he knew it looked worse that he'd gone and found a hunting knife. He was trying to make it look like he had impulsively grabbed something from the kitchen. Hunting knives are not usually just lying around.

Sherry: A hunting knife shows a larger degree of planning than a steak knife. Yeah. So, it's highly doubtful he used the maul to hit her first. Larry was an athlete and the maul had caused the life-taking damage when it was finally used.

Marie: It was more the final blow than it was a starting blow. She wouldn't have been running around - running through the neighborhood if he'd hit her with the maul first.

Sherry: Right. Two weeks after his arrest, Larry had told his attorneys where to find the clothes he wore when he committed the murders. They had thought they were in the washing machine, remember? He said those weren't the clothes.

The police investigators had ignored that first neighbor who came over complaining about the bloody mounds of snow on his property and that meant that they missed some evidence. Larry told his attorneys that the clothing would be found in the woods across the street. That he'd made several trips across the street to hide them. And when they returned two weeks later to look for those mounds of clothing, they did find them. And Larry's sweat jacket from his wrestling team was among the items - confirming Annie's story about the murderer wearing a gray sweat jacket.

And then as to how she ended up naked - Larry admitted that he took off her clothes to administer a final humiliation. He didn't count on her wearing knee socks under her footed pajamas and that hidden sock inside of her pajamas confirmed the three-quarter mile chase that he was claiming to not remember - and that he said didn't happen.

Marie: Okay. So he took her clothes off after she had run back to the house. Oh, he couldn't have.

Sherry: Or she would have had a footed pajama run.

Brooke: The timeline is hard and you're right his confession is incomplete. So, he must have stabbed her, taken her clothes off, and *then* she ran - because she only had one sock on when she was running.

Sherry: Right. We'll talk more about what the investigators think happened but, timeline wise, they think that he stabbed her, she ended up outside - either on her own or taken by him. He undressed her to perform the rape - and he was being really quick about it - and that's why the one sock was left in her pajamas. And then they think she revived (or she wasn't unconscious at that point) and she took off running. So, she still had one sock on even though the one had pulled off.

Marie: Okay. So, maybe...maybe he'd come back in the house to look at dad - or who knows what happened. But she got back up after being stabbed.

Sherry: Yeah. They think she got away from him while he was undressing her initially.

Marie: Ohhhh.

Sherry: I know it's hard to imagine it all. So, those investigators have a big job when they have to take these timelines and figure everything out.

Marie: It's true.

Sherry: Yeah. So, the object rape was disturbing. There are very few cases of parricide where the child rapes the murdered parent.

Marie: So, I think the rape raises one of the questions we had early on; which is do adopted children have the same relationship with their parents when it comes to, kind of the natural inclination to not murder your parents. And that's a really hard question, because there's not a lot of research on that. But the one thing we did find was (which I'm thinking of now because we're talking about rape) this idea of reverse sexual imprinting which is sometimes called the Westermarck Effect. And there is a little bit of research backing it up and the idea is that if you raise children together from the age of zero (from birth) to six years old, they generally don't experience sexual attraction to each other where siblings who meet as adults might. It's very uncommon for very young children even unrelated very young children to experience sexual attraction to children they were raised with from a very young age. Which, I know it's a little bit of a leap, but it seems like you would also have kind of a bonding period with your parents in those years where they would feel more familial than if you were not raised with them for those ages.

Sherry: Right. And I know that there's a lot of um controversy around whether an adopted child killing a parent is the same as an unadopted child. I know we've struggled with that as we've moved toward everything in our research. So, I did pull some stats from our data. First let's talk about rape data.

We had an n of 764 which means we looked at 764 individual parricide offenders and of those murders only 16 involved rapes.

Marie: Rapes of anyone? Or rapes of a parent?

Sherry: Rapes of anyone, actually. Twelve kids raped their mom. One kid raped a stepmom. Two kids raped a sister's...well...a sister's body, and one raped a visitor.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: And the rapes of mom; eight of them raped the mom after she had died. And, one of them tried to rape the corpse and failed. And then three raped her prior to killing her. Of the twelve that raped mom, eight of them were biological children and four were adopted children.

Marie: Okay, so it's not solely adopted children who rape their mother?

Sherry: Uhm uhm. Not at all. Rape is not typically part of parricide.

Marie: Which is cold comfort but still probably a good thing. I think that raping a parent is - I'm not willing to say more disturbing - but perhaps equally disturbing. It's a true perversion of the parent-child relationship.

Sherry: Right. And even though it's a small number, we could spend an entire episode on rape because rape of a parent is - like you said - very egregious and rape of a corpse versus rape of a living person who's looking in your face who happens to be your mother is a whole different story. So, probably let's not go down that rabbit hole. But, yeah.

Marie: Not today.

Sherry: Yeah. Right. We'll put the data on our website at parricide.org if anybody wants to look at it.

Marie: Yeah, I love looking at it on the website because it can be hard for me to hold all those numbers in my mind.

Sherry: I know, it can be crazy. So, that's a lot so let's take a break.

Marie: I think a break is in order.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: So, as you can tell, there are a lot of discrepancies in what Larry says and what the evidence actually says. ***According to the book, Sudden Fury, this is how the investigators believe it went down:***

They aren't sure if the attacks on his parents were planned or unplanned; but most likely planned based on the evidence. They are fairly certain it was a surprise attack. Larry was either drinking out of habit or using alcohol as liquid courage - as some murderers do. Larry most likely started by stabbing his mother in the basement family room as she was watching TV. He injured her, but he didn't kill her.

He then went into the study where his dad was working and attacked him from behind. His dad was sitting down when he stabbed him - and he was stabbed 17 times. He returned to his mother and she had either run outside or he had carried or dragged her outside.

Marie: So, it looked like there was a spot where there weren't two sets of footprints. There were like drag marks.

Sherry: Yeah.

Marie: So, he probably did drag her.

Sherry: Possibly. They just prove it one way or the other.

Marie: They couldn't be sure.

Sherry: Somehow, she ended up outside - with Larry taking off her clothes. He was stripping all of her clothing off and, somehow, she escaped him and fled into the heavily wooded area near their home. But she couldn't scream for help because he'd already stabbed her and injured her vocal cords. But she did run, and he came after in hot pursuit; either chasing her or using the dog to hunt her.

Marie: I'd wondered about the footprints - the dog's footprints?

Sherry: Umm hmm.

Marie: What I would like to be true is that the dog was following to try and save her - because it protected her body after she was dead. It was defending her against Larry and the police.

Sherry: You're right. The police say that when they first got there - the investigators – two of the investigators tried to approach the mother's body and the dog attacked them. Literally bit at them. And then when Larry tried to get the dog under control, the dog squared off and growled at him. So, the dog wasn't happy about what had happened. But I don't know if he used the dog...

Marie: ...to find her.

Sherry: Yes.

Marie: But we know the dog was out there running because we have the dog's footprints, Larry's footprints, and then mom's one sock on one sock off footprints.

Sherry: Yes. That's right. And at some point, in that three-quarter mile run, he caught and subdued her and walked her back to the family home. They know that because of the marks made in the snow. He killed her with the maul outside and then, according to him, he sexually assaulted her. He said he used his hand - but there was a bloody tree branch there that they believe was what was used for the assault.

Marie: That's awful! It is. So, we talked a little bit about this dog. The dog's name was actually Hercules and I guess we there's no way to know what was happening.

Sherry: No, we will probably never know. The dog is pretty large. If you go to our website, parricide.org, you can see a picture. It's a family picture with the dog in it. It's a pretty big dog. That dog was given to Larry when he was first adopted into their family.

Marie: Okay. So may...it's hard to tell if it was Larry's dog or mom's dog because a lot of times it ends up choosing who it likes best.

Sherry: Yes. Yeah, it does. So, in 1987 a close friend of Larry's reported that he had told a little lie about the events leading up to the murders. This is included in Leslie Walker's book. He confessed to this friend that he had never had a conversation with his mom regarding the tests he took on that day. According to the book, Larry confessed to her that she (Mom) never said anything to him at all. And when the friend followed up with, "Well, what happened?" Larry confessed and this was a quote, "Nothing. I just came downstairs and killed them."

Marie: Do you ever wonder if some of these murderers don't actually know what their motive is. Like, they'll say something but then years later they'll say, "Oh, that's not it." Or "That didn't even happen."

Sherry: I think that things change. We're all human and memories change and if you tell a lie sometimes that lie becomes the truth in your head - and I think that that's why you see their motives evolve. When I'm doing research on these, I usually will look to the investigation and see what they were saying at *that* point. Because if they say, 'Well, I killed her because she took my cell phone.' Usually you know that it has something to do with that. It might be a bigger issue of control, or it might be an issue of hiding something; but what they say right then usually gives you a really big clue as to what happened unless they are trying to spin the story so that they don't get in as much trouble. Which is what Larry did right from the start.

Marie: Yeah. He was spinning before, I think, before he called the police, probably. He had an idea of what he was going to do.

Sherry: Oh, he definitely was. Because he called the police in the morning. He murdered her at 11:30 at night - we know that because of his little sister, Annie. When she woke up she heard that noise and she literally looked at her watch and it said 11:31.

Marie: Yeah. So, he had a while to think about what he'd done, and what was going to happen next.

Sherry: Uh-huh. And so, when you look at the motive on this one - there wasn't a trial. Usually I will, when I'm doing research, I will look at the trial to establish the motive. And they settled in this one, so I wasn't able to do that. But according to Judith Weinraub of the Washington Post, Larry's cousin, Riley, who's now a Silver Spring lawyer, said his cousin was tired of restrictions and decided he was going to put an end to that - and the way to do it was to eliminate these two people. I can see why he would think that (as someone looking from the outside who was actually kind of inside). I tend to disagree with him just a little bit.

Marie: Um, because it sounded like he'd had restrictions for a long time and he hadn't killed them.

Sherry: Yes. And he wasn't really all that restricted, from what we could find.

Marie: I mean, a 17-year-old who can go out and buy speed and have alcohol and have sex is not really very restricted. He's getting a lot of, at least, alone time.

Sherry: Right. And we know that he had sex one or two weeks before the murder. When he went out on a date with the girl that his mom called names.

Marie: Yeah, I mean, if you're on restriction all the time you're not on a date, you're not out with your friends, you're not on the wrestling team.

Sherry: Right. And his, his cousin may have been noting some control issues that they had, but here's a piece of information. Shortly before the murders, Larry had an overnight guest -John Smithmeyer - and they snuck out of the house and went to breakfast (in late night early morning hours) and the police found them and picked them up and returned them to the Swartz house because there was a curfew and they were underage. Bob and Kay were furious to a degree that startled John's parents.

Bob was ranting about how they should have been thrown in a drunk tank and thrown up on - and they needed some heavy labor. He sounded like he was a prison warden with some hardened criminals in front of him. And Kay was furiously talking about how Larry had ruined his life.

Marie: Okay, so they were probably reacting more to their own anxiety about him going down the path Michael had because, while it is bad to drink in high school, that is bad. It is bad to sneak out. A lot of kids sneak out and go get breakfast. They just do. It's generally seen as more of a harmless high school hijink.

Sherry: They do. And at that point, I do think that Bob and Kay were worried about failing yet again with another child. Anyway, this other family - the Smithmeyers - they were there at that point and they were shocked by the degree of frustration/anger they were seeing coming from these parents. So after the kids had left the room they started discussing this frustration at length and the Smithmeyers made an offer to take Larry in for the next semester - which Bob, out of hand said, "No. That's not going to happen." But then after discussing it a little bit he said, "Well, if he could get a job, we could have him come and live with you for a summer." So they're discussing sending Larry out of the house to kind of alleviate some of the pressure there - some of the anger there. No one knows for sure if Larry heard that, but it is very possible that Larry thought this was the beginning of them giving him away.

Marie: As a boy who's already had several families, I think it would be very hard to wrap your head around the idea that your family is going to send you away. Even if what they're trying to do is give you a break so that your family can stop being so mad at each other.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: Because a lot of parents will send a child that's having a problem away for a semester to stay with relatives to get away from their friends - to kind of just reset.

Sherry: Right. It can kind of de-escalate the situation. And it's not a bad move for a boy who's had so many families, who's watched his brother be kicked out of the family - he could very easily have thought that he was being kicked out. That this was Step One of being kicked out - and he was like, no not again!

So, I know a lot of the kids that kill their parents it's right around the time when they're being kicked out. They've been told to move; they've been told to find a place to live. So, it's very possible that that's what had happened. So those are two good motives for this case - and we'll probably never know, for sure, which one it was.

Marie: Yeah. I think it is hard to really be sure in a case like this.

Sherry: Yeah. There's a made-for-TV movie - Neil Patrick Harris starred in a movie called Sudden Fury and the movie was based on the book that was written by Leslie Walker in the 1990s.

Marie: Was the movie as good as the book?

Sherry: The book is fabulous! The movie is extremely marginal and very shallow. The movie is real simplistic. It portrays the parents as these monsters. Um, there's no nuance to the parents at all. They're these demanding horrible parents who have no idea who this boy is; which isn't really what we saw when we started looking through the case. The motive for the killings was indicated to be this deep abuse that the boys experienced. But if you look at the evidence, there's not a lot of reported abuse. There are people complaining that Michael is walking home in the rain from school - which was five miles.

Marie: That is a long walk. That does sound unpleasant, but it's not beyond the scope of what I've seen a lot of parents do with children who are really resisting the things they need to do - like going to school and doing their homework.

Sherry: Right - and there was one woman who reported that Larry had come to her for a haircut. She gave him free haircuts in her basement or something - and she said he had a bruise on his back that he claimed his father had given him.

Marie: Oh.

Sherry: But they also mentioned in the same story that Larry is a wrestler. So did he get the bruise from wrestling? Or from his father? I don't know, but it seems odd that you'd have a bruise on your upper back if that was abuse. It typically - that's not typically where an abuse mark is made.

Marie: It's hard to know, for sure.

Sherry: It could be either way. I don't know. But they had no evidence of abuse and Larry insisted that his father did not physically abuse him, even though he did yell at him a lot.

Marie: Yeah. And usually someone who is trying to figure out how to be in the least amount of trouble is not going to hide the abuse they suffered at the hands of their parents. Because they know that that will explain why they did it.

Sherry: Absolutely. So, the author of the book, Leslie Walker, objected to the focus that was taken by the movie. She said these parents were not supposed to be portrayed as monsters. "I felt very strongly that his foster care background was key to the story. This is not a story about a young man who just explodes against his parents because they were too strict with him and abuse him. He had too many sets of parents and was taken from one home to another and never given a chance to bond with the parents - so he came to their home as a very damaged child." She was actually upset when a critical scene that helped the viewer understand this concept was left on the cutting room floor.

I don't really recommend the movie because I felt that it really doesn't tell the story and they change a lot of the characters, so it makes it very confusing. Like Annie is actually a boy and things like that. But I do highly recommend the book.

Marie: The book provides a lot of really good information and she actually wrote the book with a lot of information from the investigation. She had some good sources.

Sherry: She had actual case notes, she had investigative notes, she had access to all the players - so I really feel that the book is a superior...

Marie: ...resource?

Sherry: Yes.

(musical interlude)

Marie: Okay, so let's get to the non-trial, because Larry actually didn't go to trial. Um so, he ended up pleading guilty to two counts of Second-Degree murder the day before his trial was set to begin. That indicates that they really thought about this. They strongly considered taking him to trial. Which I can see why they would. He probably would have been pretty sympathetic; but I think they ended up getting

him a good deal. So, what happened - and it's not going to sound like a good deal at first, but remember this is murder. This is two murders which could have come with a life sentence. But he was sentenced to two concurrent 20-year sentences - but he got all but 12 years suspended (which means he didn't have to stay in prison for 20 years).

Sherry: But wait. Two concurrent means he served them at the same time.

Marie: Yeah.

Sherry: That's what we talked about in the John Hovey case.

Marie: Um, but he actually ended up not even spending 12 full years.

Sherry: Oh my gosh.

Marie: Which I will get to in a minute.

Sherry: Okay. (laughter)

Marie: One of the things that resulted in this sentence - which does feel really light for killing two people - was that the judge decided that Larry needed to be in psychological treatment which, based on what we know about Larry, seems fair. So, he thought he had a personality disorder based on his psychological evaluation, so he was going to spend his time at the Patuxent Institution, which is a Maryland prison noted for its therapeutic programs.

Sherry: I've heard about that program!

Marie: Yes. It's a good prison. It's especially a good prison for younger offenders.

Sherry: Why?

Marie: Because the conditions are more humane. Basically, there's less prison rapes there because they have more private rooms. They - it's more of what we think of when we think of prison. Instead of what it can be - with the overcrowding and the rape - and the often-inadequate access to hygiene and things like warmth.

Sherry: And if he's getting therapy right from the beginning, that's different, too. Usually they're not they're not eligible for therapy until the last couple of years.

Marie: And usually the prisoners don't have good resources. They have, maybe, a couple licensed therapists and that's kind of it. They don't really have a program for people with serious mental health issues. So this was a really I think this was a good choice. I think that, especially with a young offender especially with an offender who didn't appear to be, kind of, a hardened criminal - this was a good way to try and rehabilitate him. And he was someone who, I think, was possible to rehabilitate; at least to some degree. Keep him from murdering people again, but let him *not* be in prison for the rest of his life.

Sherry: Okay. Now, I hear that they are different also because they have a board - it's not the Parole Board that decides if the person gets out of that prison.

Marie: That's right. So, because it's a treatment facility, as soon as they think your treatment has progressed enough they'll let you out. And, of course, you'll still be on parole (and all those things) but

you don't have to spend as much time physically locked up. Because it's not a regular Parole Board. It's experts who decide if you have progressed enough in your treatment that you are safe to be out.

Sherry: So, this is kind of a hybrid prison it's prison, in that you're locked up and you have to follow prison rules. But it's also kind of like sending them to the mental hospital because they get the treatment they would receive there, but in the prison.

Marie: Yes. I love this approach because a lot of times when they put people in prison and say they're going to get psychological help, they do not get psychological help. Um and I think putting a traumatized boy into a prison where he's likely to be raped, is, he's definitely not going to get better so I think this is a good way to actually work on rehabilitation.

Sherry: That sounds like a really nice prison for him. It sounds like it was a real good answer - that judge was very wise.

Marie: He was very wise. And I think that this was a good approach and one that should probably be taken with more youthful offenders.

Sherry: I agree. I like that approach.

Marie: And it ended up working out because, as we know, he ends up adopted again and doesn't kill anyone else. So, it was pretty effective.

Sherry: Umm hmm.

Marie: Anyway. So, let's talk a little bit about his time in prison.

Sherry: Okay. So, did Larry have a lot of visitors in prison?

Marie: He did have a lot of visitors. The thing about Larry is, even though he was an admitted murderer, people still cared about him and liked him. His brother, Michael, they didn't end up close. So, Larry took Michael off of his Approved Visitor list after his second visit. He said that visiting with Michael just upset him and they didn't get together again until the summer of 1988. And then, in 1990 Michael joined him in the prison system. So, I'm not...I'm not thinking that's super surprising because he was encountering the law from a fairly young age. But at this point he's 25 years old and he'd been given a second chance at a good life. In fact, the author of Sudden Fury, Leslie Walker, had invited him to help her promote her book on a book tour. Unfortunately, a couple days before the tour was scheduled to begin, he and a friend named Ronald Scoates – um, they decided they were going to rob someone named Robert Austin Bell for beer money. What they ended up doing, was stabbing him to death over a jar of quarters. Now, it was a jar of quarters worth about fifty dollars - but that's - to stab someone to death over fifty dollars...

Sherry: ...It's terrible.

Marie: It seems pretty foolish. Um, so then Michael was sentenced to Life Without Parole for this murder - which makes sense because he was older and he had a criminal history.

Sherry: Was he able to go to Patuxent, like his brother?

Marie: No. He wouldn't be eligible for that for a lot of reasons. But, no, they didn't end up in the same prison. This is kind of a little bit of trivia that's interesting - the most important piece of evidence in his stabbing someone for beer money case? He left a bloody palm print on the frame of the back door.

Sherry: Well, I mean, these boys really need to learn to wash their hands. (laughter)

Marie: So, um, Larry's little sister, Annie - um she did better than Michael did. She was sent to stay with close friends of her parents on the day of the murders and they eventually became her new parents and they are still her parents to this day.

Sherry: Oh, I'm glad things worked out well for her.

Marie: I know, I'm sure it must have been so traumatic to go through this and she had also been abandoned as a child - so I'm glad that she found a family that was a good family for her.

Sherry: Yeah!

Marie: So, Larry was released on January 23, 1993 - only nine years after the murders -

Sherry: So, the Prison Board (i.e., the psychologists/psychiatrists on that board) decided he could get out early? He must have done well.

Marie: Yeah. I think that that's not unexpected, either, because he was pretty compliant with his parents. He maybe didn't try hard in school, but he participated in school. But while he was in prison he finished high school, he took some college courses, and he took advantage of the therapy that was available to him. He also made some friends. He started corresponding with a man named Glenn Ussilton

Sherry: Is that Us-il-ton or Yuselton?

Marie: I'm not sure, honestly.

Sherry: Okay.

Marie: I think...

Sherry: Say it the way you want, I'm not sure either.

Marie: Yuselton? That's a good question. But Glenn had read the book, Sudden Fury, and felt some sympathy for this boy. So, eventually he came to visit Larry at the prison with his wife and his two young daughters. And the daughters were told, 'Give Larry a hug.'

Sherry: How old were these kids?

Marie: They were very young. So, one was a teenager and one was a child. I don't know their exact ages but it would have been weird for them. But they gave him a hug and...'This is your brother, Larry.'

So, one of the daughters - uh her name is Amity. She wrote an essay about this relationship several years ago on a website called XOJane.com. That essay seems to be gone now but you had a copy, right?

Sherry: Oh. I did save a copy of that for the research I was doing. I was looking for more details on that earlier and I've noticed that NPR had covered this story on American Life back in 2013 - and she may have written a book but I couldn't find the book so I'm not sure if she found a publisher.

Marie: Can you tell us more about the NPR story and this article?

Sherry: So, Amity and her sister. Amity was the older daughter. They'd grown up in this qualifiedly abusive home. Their father was an alcoholic and a mean one at that. As they sat in the Patuxent prison chatting with him about the movie, *Mermaids*, and talking about the weather and talking about how school was going - Amity recalls wondering, "How could my parents feel so sorry for Larry and his terrible circumstances. Why didn't they feel sorry for me?"

Marie: That is pretty telling. I mean, she's looking at this guy who's in prison and she's like wait a second why don't you feel bad for me?

Sherry: Right. It was a fair question, but let me tell you how Amity recounted her life at home. She says, "Life with my father was miserable. In my home we lived by his rules - rules that were fluid and shifting and terrifying."

Marie: Okay, so that sounds a little bit like what Larry said. That the rules were shifting and he didn't say terrifying, though.

Sherry: Well, they shifted for *him* in order to *indulge* him. Not listen to this, "Something small and accidental could set my father off in a rage. Maybe my sister or I broke a cup or slammed a car door too hard. Or maybe we hadn't even done anything at all. We would still be on the receiving end of my father's wrath. And once he started drinking we knew we were in for it. The episodes usually began the same way. First, he would drink - not even hard alcohol - just beer. And he would blast music and sing loudly. Always Jackson Brown or John Cougar Mellencamp. To this day, I have a visceral Pavlovian response to songs like *Running on Empty*. Then, after his low-grade anger progressed into full-blown fury, he might force us all into the family van and drive us around drunk for hours, screaming and swerving the whole time. Or he might run into my sister's room and smash up every piece of furniture in it. He might brandish a rifle and threaten to shoot all of us, or he might shoot, or he might hit me or my sister with a belt. Worst of all he might wrap his hands around my mother's throat and strangle her as my sister and I tried to pull him away. It was like living in a child's version of war; just waiting to see if the bombs would start falling and wishing you had shelter."

Marie: Okay, so that is an abusive household where the father is abusing physically and psychologically every person in the family.

Sherry: If you look at what Amity went through and what Larry went through, it becomes very clear who lived in an abusive household.

Marie: And I think that's why parricide is so confusing. Because you see these cases of abuse. I mean Amity was horribly abused - I think that's the sort of child who we think is killing their parent. And yet she didn't kill her father.

Sherry: No. A lot of kids who are abused - egregiously abused - do not kill their parents. But the difference between what Larry says, even though some of his words are similar, the descriptions that he can provide versus what Amity can provide, are very telling.

Marie: It's true. But it's also interesting. Because this man who is physically abusing his wife and his daughters and terrorizing them, feels really bad for Larry and goes, "I need to save this boy."

Sherry: Yeah, he does. He takes pity on Larry and he feels like Larry had a rough life and decides to actually take him into his home and he says, "Everybody needs a family." That's why he decided to adopt him.

And for the second time, Larry was adopted. He became the son of Glenn and Cindy Ussilton. Larry became the older brother to Amity and her younger sister. The girls were shocked and filled with trepidation to think that a killer would be sleeping in their home right down the hall. No responsible adult had intervened to stop this insane plan. Amity had hoped somewhere along the way an adult would say, 'No this is not going to happen.' So, she recalls sitting with her sister on the living room floor in the glow of the television, as Larry and his parents sat on a couch and watched that movie we were talking about earlier - Sudden Fury. She said her family had felt really special when Neil Patrick Harris stopped by to talk to Larry and kind of get a feel for the boy that he'd be playing. But watching the fictionalized story of the murderer, who was sitting right there next to her parents laughing and talking about how dramatic the movie was, felt completely surreal. And it was very weird for her to watch the movie of how her brother murdered his adoptive parents, laugh about it, and then get ready for bed and go to bed in the same home as the murderer.

Marie: See, that's the thing that I don't think we talk about a lot is murderers generally don't die in prison, they're released. And then it's like, well wait, how afraid of you should I be?

Sherry: And where do they go?

Marie: Yeah.

Sherry: And this one literally was adopted again. The girls actually kind of liked having Larry as an older brother. Larry, the man who stabbed and bludgeoned his own parents to death, wasn't nearly as scary to them as their dad was. And their lives improved because when Larry was there, he would take them to the mall and he would be nice to them. And as long as he was around, their dad was very careful to keep his public self on display. So, the family experienced a hiatus in their own abuse.

So, life in the Ussilton home improved for everyone as Glenn enjoyed fishing, shopping, and spending time with his new son. And eventually he bought a larger home because he wanted to accommodate Larry's more adult need for space and, reminiscent of his first adoption, Glenn and Cindy took him on a trip to Disney World.

But all good things must come to an end and Larry fell in love. His relationship with Glenn started to deteriorate into anger and fighting as he began to pursue his own path to adulthood and he secretly married his true love, moved out of state, had a child, divorced, and remarried. Glenn was so angry, he drew up a will leaving Larry one penny - to ensure he was completely disinherited from the family.

But on December 29, 2004, Larry died of an apparent heart attack. He was only 37 years old and his death was one that brought about two obituaries: one written by his wife and one written by the second set of adoptive parents. So, there were obviously still a few feelings regarding the ownership of Larry.

What a wild life in only 37 years!

Sherry: I agree.

Marie: What do you think, listeners? We'd love to hear your thoughts on this episode. We're also currently putting the finishing touches on our episode list, so if you know of a parricide that you would like to see covered please send us the name of the parricide offender and we'll add it to our list.

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