

Oh, Danny Boy – Daniel Petric
Episode 5

(Sounds of video game: shooting, music) “I am sorry, Spartan, but come.”

Marie: Do you recognize that sound? That's from the video game Halo 3; a game worth killing for according to Daniel Petric.

(intro music) Ring around the rosies; A pocketful 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 talking about the murder of Susan Petric and the attempted murder of Pastor Mark Petric, by their son Daniel (or Danny) Petric.

Marie: A quick heads up, this episode contains instances of violence - since we obviously talk about murder. If you enjoy listening to our podcast, please subscribe to it or like it while we chat.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: The Pastor Mark Petric, his wife (Susan), and their family lived in Wellington, Ohio. They moved there a few years ago and were quickly accepted and loved by their Evangelical congregation. They had two daughters; one married and one still at home. Danny was their youngest child and only son.

Susan was said to be the perfect preacher's wife. She was happy, willing to help, a good mom, and she had an excellent sense of humor. According to Danny's own report - as presented on Katie Couric - he had a very good childhood. His parents took care of him and everything he needed was provided. They had homeschooled him until 2006 - his sophomore year - when he was enrolled at Wellington High School. He'd held his own in public school, earning a 2.7 GPA the first year. He enjoyed playing video games with his dad and his friends, hunting with his dad, and playing the drums. But Danny self-identified as a rebellious kid. He said he would butt heads with his parents over the things he wanted to do. He mostly had conflicts with his dad; who as head of the household was the primary disciplinarian.

They had a very traditional household - and he pretty much knew how to get around his mom when he really wanted something. His parents worked together to rear healthy well-rounded children who would grow up to do good things in the world. But, based on his dad's statements Danny was a rebellious boy. He would lie, manipulate, and sneak out of the house. Here, we'll let Danny's dad tell you in his own words:

Mark Petric Recording: Danny, uh, starts to get a little bit, um, a little bit rebellious. You know, testing the waters - what kid doesn't? We definitely kept an eye on what he did.

Marie: So, that interview was post-murder?

Sherry: Yes. That was post-murder.

Marie: That surprises me. Because it almost sounds like he's excusing Danny's rebellious phase - that included murder! I look forward to finding out how his dad got there. Um, but it sounds like he was a little rebellious - but maybe not enough to alarm his father.

Sherry: Mmm, he was pretty rebellious. According to interviews, people said that he would lie, manipulate, sneak out of the house - in order to just be with his friends. He sounds like he had a very rebellious streak.

Marie: So, how strict were his parents?

Sherry: Well, as you could tell, his dad said that he kept an eye on him; that him that he and his wife both kept an eye on Danny because of this rebellion that he was fomenting. But according to his dad in other interviews, his dad made house rules, but they were just that - *house* rules. His dad wasn't concerned about what Danny did when he was with his friends - because he didn't think it was the parents place to monitor their children when they were out with friends, so it was kind of like what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. If you're at Jonathan's house Jonathan's his friend we aren't going to worry because we aren't the parents that monitor our children's behavior.

Marie: Okay. So, I think that can be a little confusing, if the rule is no doing this but only at this location and you can do it anywhere else.

Sherry: I kind of think it plays into the problems that they had with him.

Marie: Okay. So, let's let's keep going with the story.

Sherry: Okay. So. 15-year-old Danny didn't realize how his life was about to change when he decided to go snowboarding one fateful day. He hit the slopes ready to tear up the mountain with his friends and he didn't think about the fact that snowboarding injuries are four times more likely than skiing injuries - which is about 4-16 injuries per thousand snowboarding days. He must have been having the time of his life practicing jumps and acrobatics with his friends when a misstep caused an accident, injuring his back.

Marie: That's kind of strange. Usually they break their arm or leg...

Sherry: ...or a lot of times wrist injuries are very common, or even head injuries. Back injuries are not common at all for snowboarding accidents. In fact ,they're quite rare. He was reportedly ordered by the doctor to take it easy – walk, don't run - and he was also informed that his football days were over.

See, Danny was an avid football player. In fact, most of his pictures are pictures of him dressed up in football uniforms.

Marie: If he was homeschooled, when did he start playing football?

Sherry: I'm not sure. But the pictures go way back, so they must have had some community football games or he must have opted into that at the schools.

Marie: Oh. Okay, okay so he was involved in football for his whole life.

Sherry: Right. His identity was pretty wrapped up in football. I couldn't confirm any details regarding this next part of the story, but somehow that back injury caused him to contract a related staph infection somewhere along the way. Which is really weird because a staph infection is related to injuries that

break the skin - not jarred backs. So, I double checked this with our "staph" doctor - he's a friend who's a doctor - and he said that it was very unusual.

Marie: That is very strange. I wonder if there's more to that injury.

Sherry: Um. There might be. I'm really not sure. But any staph infection could have been cleared up with an antibiotic. It would not have lasted a year and, according to his attorneys, this injury kept him bedridden and home for a year.

Well, let's go back to the violent video games for a second. His dad said they were never allowed in the house. He and Susan were opposed to exposing their kids to graphic violence and they worried that vicarious experiences could cause Danny to become violent. But Danny, in his interview with Deborah Roberts - for the Katy Couric Show - indicated his parents DID know he played Halo at home and at some point, they did banish all the video games from the house because they didn't like the violence of Halo. He stated that the banishing had created a lot of anger and resentment on his part. Keep that in mind as we go forward, too.

Marie: As far as patterns go, it's interesting this is another child who had parents trying to pull the reins back in after being kind of permissive.

Sherry: Now that you point that out, yes.

Marie: It's just interesting to see some similarities as we go. So, you said he was kept trapped at home for a year. Umm, had he been going to boarding school - or what did they mean?

Sherry: Once he had the back injury - his defense attorney at trial said that he was trapped at home because of the injury for a year: that he was bedridden, trying to heal from staph. Which sounds really weird when you think about it. Staph infection is cleared up easily. Back injuries don't usually cause you to be bedridden for a year if you're a healthy 16-year-old boy.

Marie: And he wasn't bedridden, because he was going to friends' houses.

Sherry: That's part of the story, too. So...but, he was back to being homeschooled. So he was in public school for about a year and a half.

Marie: Okay. So, being home for a year was home from school.

Sherry: Yes. So, anyway, Danny was back to being homeschooled after only a year and a half of public schooling, like I was saying. And, according to all the reports, he started playing more and more video games - mostly the Primary Shooter games, like Halo, with his friend, Jonathan.

Marie: What does Primary Shooter mean?

Sherry: It means that you, as the player, are a shooter. So, what you usually see is the perspective of someone who's holding a gun and shooting at people - and running through things and shooting at people - but you feel that you are the first-person shooter. Like...

Marie: Ohh, okay. Okay, I've heard of first-person shooting games.

Sherry: Yeah. That's what it is. And that's what Halo is. So, he admits that he actually started playing Halo at a friend's house when he was in middle school - way before his accident. He says he enjoyed

playing them as an escape. But this is where information is a little bit sketchy. News reports, and his defense attorney, claimed Danny was bedridden and also that he couldn't play violent games at home - which his father confirms. Yet, Danny claims in his interview with Deborah Roberts that he was playing 18 hours a day - and then he quickly likened his behavior to that of a drug addict which - spoiler - becomes the defense strategy. Regardless of where he was playing them; whether he was at home playing them for 18 hours a day or at Jonathan's playing them for 18 hours a day, all reports indicated he was indeed playing. He started playing them non-stop, much to his parents' chagrin. I guess he wasn't spending too much time at home. But then again was he bedridden? It's really not clear. But, like, a lot of boys who fall down this rabbit hole of video games, this became a tug of war with his parents. They wanted him to get a life, and he wanted Halo to be his life.

(interlude music)

Sherry: So, I'm really not sure what the story is there - because there are so many conflicting stories regarding what was happening during that period in his life. But we do know that he was being homeschooled. We do know that he had some kind of injury - we don't know how, or why, the staph was involved or not involved with that injury. And we know that he played with Jonathan - either remotely or at Jonathan's house.

Marie: And that his parents were opposed to the video games - at least somewhat.

Sherry: Right. But that's the story, so far.

So, anyway Halo 3 was released on September 25, 2007. Now remember he's been playing Halo since middle school. But his parents refused to relent and let him buy the game. Danny snuck out of his bedroom window with \$70 in hand and bought his own copy of Halo 3. But his mom caught him sneaking back in and she confronted him. Danny confessed what he'd done. His mom confiscated the game and a fight ensued between him and his parents which culminated in Danny being told to get out of the house until he felt he would be willing to follow the house rules.

Marie: That, again, does not sound like a boy who is bed-bound. You don't kick out a child who...well, okay, a couple reasons. You can't sneak out of a window if you're bedridden.

Sherry: Well, and if your back's so injured that you're bedridden.

Marie: And you don't kick out a kid who you think is bedridden.

Sherry: Right, right. Well, Danny went to his friend's house, but his copy of Halo 3 remained locked in his dad's gun safe - where his dad had put it. I didn't find anything that revealed how they navigated his return home, but Danny did return home the day he would shoot his parents with his dad's gun.

Marie: So how did he get his dad's gun?

Sherry: Well, Mark kept the only key to the gun safe on his key ring and he'd always leave his key ring on the kitchen counter when he got home at night. October 20th was no different. Danny apparently snatched the key ring and took both the Halo 3 game and Mark's gun from the safe. No one was going to tell him what he could or couldn't do. Danny knew his father was the problem here and he could probably get his mother to relent and let him play Halo 3 - but that didn't matter. If he was going to kill his dad, his mom was going to have to go, too. He'd already carefully thought that all out. His parents

were going to fall victim to a murder-suicide. He'd been thinking about it for about a week. Mark would kill Susan in the heat of a big fight and then, realizing that he'd killed his wife, he would immediately kill himself.

The motive was attended to. Logistics had been considered. And Danny was ready. He loaded the gun, put on his most pleasant face, and headed into the living room.

Mark and Susan were enjoying a quiet Saturday evening when Danny entered the living room. He flashed them a little smile and said, "Hey guys, would you close your eyes? I have a surprise for you."

His parents were relieved and curious. Instead of the anger and manipulation they were used to coming from Danny, they were thinking perhaps he'd come around and thought of a way to apologize for all of his recent bad behaviors. They glanced at each other and then closed their eyes - not realizing it was the last time they would see each other alive. And Danny set his plan in motion. Here's Danny's dad describing what happened next:

Mark Petric (recording): And he came out. And he said to me and Sue, "Hey, Mom and Dad, I have a surprise for you - will you close your eyes? And I glanced over at Sue, and I was like okay, I mean, cool! We thought maybe he was going to be showing us something - or apologizing about all the video game tension. He came right around here, walked up right behind me, and shot me right in the head. And then he turned, shot - took four shots at his mom, and he hit her three times. And she died almost instantly. He had my 9mm handgun. He tried to hand it to me - I wouldn't take it. He kept trying to give me the gun and I wouldn't.

Marie: Okay. So, that was disturbing. So, basically what happened is Danny got behind the couch and he shot his dad first. Um, and he only shot him once because, of course, you can only shoot yourself once in a suicide.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: Um, so he shot him in the left temple, um, and then he started shooting his mother from across the room. Which also supports this murder-suicide frame.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: And, so then he shot his mother four times from across the room, in keeping with this murder-suicide frame that he was trying to pull together. Um, he hit her three times - which is really a lot. Um especially from across the room - that's pretty good aim. He's not, kind of, shooting like crazy.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: But then his dad was upset - and it was really kind of cold - he didn't freak out, he didn't run away; he just starts trying to get his dad to take the gun, and...

Sherry: ...and says, "Hey, Dad. Here's your gun. Take it."

I mean that's snotty!

Marie: It is snotty. But he's really thought through how to frame them. And he's not losing his nerve.

Sherry: Umm hmm.

Marie: I think a lot of people would lose their nerve, when they see their parents actually shot.

Sherry: Exactly, exactly. And I don't think he would have gotten away with it, because he was a kid. He didn't think about the angle of the gun being in the - you know - in the wrong direction, and so forth. But he thought he was getting away with murder at that point. Until the doorbell rang.

Daniel's sister and her husband were coming over to watch the Cleveland Indians on TV with Mark and Susan.

Marie: Oh, okay. So, obviously the dad didn't die because we have all these quotes for him.

Sherry: Right. So fear suddenly soared with Mark's pain. According to Mark. He was afraid that Danny might hurt his sister, too. And he was lying on the couch unable to move, his life seeping out of him, as he listened to Danny turn his sister and her husband away, saying they couldn't come in because their parents were in a big fight. Then, dread spread through Mark as he realized that his daughter was his only chance for his and Susan's survival. It was all he could do to work through the pain and terror just to make one guttural cry for help. And that cry was answered by his son-in-law, who was a hero. He rushed through the door, encountered the murder scene, quickly let his wife know what was happening and told her to call 911, and started working on saving Mark's life.

Marie: That is really brave - and indicates to me that they knew Danny was a problem. You usually don't break down the door that quickly.

Sherry: Right, right. Here's a portion of that 911 call:

911 Dispatch (recording): What's going on?

Sister (recording): (tearfully) I don't know what happened. I just came over to my parents' house because we were going to watch the game and, um, my mom is shot and my dad is shot; my brother's here.

911 Dispatch (recording): Does anybody know what happened? Did your brother shoot your parents?

Sister (recording): I don't know. (keening)

Marie: I can't imagine how disturbing it would be to walk into your family home and see your parents like bleeding to death, and your brother just standing there...nonchalant.

Sherry: I can't even imagine it. But you will not believe what Danny did next.

Marie: So, what did he do next?

Sherry: While bedlam was breaking out in the living room and everyone was trying to save his parents lives, Danny nonchalantly retrieved his copy of Halo 3, climbed into the family van, and headed to his friend's house to play him some Halo 3. But. He was arrested before he reached his friend's house.

Marie: Well, good!

Sherry: Yeah. As the police were handcuffing him, he said, "My dad! He shot my mom and then he shot himself!" So, he's still trying to set up that murder.

Marie: He has forgotten one important thing - which is that people who genuinely witness a murder don't usually leave with a video game.

Sherry: Exactly. But he starts crying in a high-pitched, tear-filled voice: wailing, "My dad shot my mom!" As he sat in the cop car, he muttered, "Lord, please don't let my dad die. Please don't let my dad die." And then, once settled into an interrogation room, Danny began weaving the lies that were meant to get him out of trouble.

Danny (recording): My dad was just yelling - just screaming - at my mom. And then I then I heard my dad walk in the room and - he walked into his bedroom - and then walked back out. (Tearfully) So, I ran out there and my mom had been shot. And he pointed the gun at me. (tearful gasp) And then he said he was sorry. And then he shot himself.

Marie: Okay. So, he really tried to sell the murder-suicide. And that is a very dramatic story - um, but ultimately not very believable.

Sherry: You're right! It isn't very believable. Especially because he's still carrying out the plan as though his sister and her husband did not interrupt the murder.

Marie: Yeah. Um, he did not think that through very well. Because if you witness a murder-suicide and you're upset about it, you don't take a video game and trot off.

Sherry: No, you don't. And you don't leave so nonchalantly; at all.

Marie: And now he's got witnesses that he didn't plan on.

Sherry: That's right. Let's take a break.

(interlude music)

Sherry: Luckily, Danny's dad, Mark, survived the shooting. Mark could confirm that Danny was the gunman. Before help had arrived, he told his daughter. When interviewed after the shootings, Mark referred to him as a pathological liar, and he told the police that, "Danny has a serious problem with telling the truth."

Those are quotes. He also said, "Daniel knows how to manipulate. His brain really works."

A psychologist, Dr. Newhouse, interviewed Danny after his interrogation. In response to the question of what went wrong? Danny looked the psychologist straight in the eye and flatly said, "Well, first, my dad didn't die. Then my sister and brother-in-law came over early and it all just blew up in my face."

Marie: Okay, so the problem is not, 'Well, I shot my parents. And I shot them because of this, and that was wrong.' It was, 'Well, my plan was not executed perfectly.'

Sherry: Right. And this is very concerning in light of the fact that he is also saying he is very, very sorry. This is not an indicator that this boy was sorry for what he had done.

Marie: No. He's only sorry that it didn't work.

Sherry: Right. He also told the psychologist, Dr. Newhouse, that he had planned the murders for at least a week. According to an article in the Marysville Tribune - when asked why he did it, Danny told the

psychologist, "Now that I was 16..." (this is a quote) "Now that I was 16, I wanted to make my own decisions - not live by their rules."

Marie: He's a child. I don't understand that attitude.

Sherry: It tells you that this boy was not sorry for what he had done.

Marie: No. And most people learn to live by their own rules without murdering their parents.

Sherry: Exactly. And Danny spent a considerable amount of time in jail awaiting his trial. His dad hated him at first. He went through many surgeries in the first 30 days after the shootings.

Marie: I'm honestly surprised that he lived. Being shot in the head is no small thing.

Sherry: Right. Well, apparently what saved his life is - Danny was standing up. So, when he shot him in the left temple, it crossed over and broke his jaw in two places. So, instead of going through his brain like a straight shoot would go...

Marie: Umm hmm.

Sherry: Straight shoot...is that right?

Marie: Straight shot.

Sherry: ...like a straight shot would go – (laughter) it went in at an angle. So, the trajectory was out.

Marie: That is horrible. I mean, in a way it's very lucky, because it sounds like he didn't have serious brain damage?

Sherry: Right, right.

Marie: He still has the trauma from being shot by his child - and watching his wife die. So, it's not that lucky. But..

Sherry: Right.

Marie: Relatively.

Sherry: I'm not...I...I've thought about this, and I'm not sure if it's better to survive this and know that your son murdered your wife and tried to kill you - or to just die.

Marie: It's really hard.

Sherry: Yes, yes. Because the...what's left in the aftermath is traumatizing.

Marie: And then you have to decide...and, all of the parents who survive - whether the child tried to kill them or not - now have to decide, 'Do I have a relationship with this person who killed my spouse?'

Sherry: And their mother.

Marie: Umm hmm. That's a hard decision.

Sherry: Right. So, for a long time Mark was very angry and hated him. And then he decided God's grace should help him forgive his son. He was a pastor. So, he petitioned for the right to visit Daniel in jail, as

his clergyman. And it was very unusual. They said, 'Well, you kind of fit three boxes. You're the father. You're the victim. You're the clergy? That's kind of a problem.' And they had to get a special dispensation to have that occur, because they could not have all of their conversations be held privately - like you usually would get with a clergyman.

Marie: Oh, that's very important. I hadn't thought about that privacy issue.

Sherry: Yeah! So, they did that.

So, he had the meetings with his son and more than a year after the shootings - as the trial began looming before him - Danny told his dad (the man he'd shot and then callously tried to set up as the killer of his wife) "Dad, I'm so sorry for what I did to mom, to you, and to the whole family. I'm so glad you're alive."

And Mark responded tearfully, "You're my boy. You're my son."

This is as per Mark at the sentencing hearing. And his dad cried as Danny told him he could hardly live with the guilt over what he'd done. He asked his father to be sure their congregation be advised of his sorrow over his crimes.

Now, based on what you know when someone says, 'I am so sorry I did this. I wish I hadn't done this.' and they're still sitting in jail awaiting their trial, what typically happens?

Marie: They usually will plead guilty because they want to save the victims...I mean, trial can be extremely difficult and often further traumatizes people who have already gone through something horrific. So usually people who are truly remorseful - even for less serious crimes like white-collar crimes - they will cut a plea deal or plead guilty and, kind of, help avoid a trial.

Sherry: Right. And that's what I expected to happen here, when he's telling his dad how remorseful he is. But that's not what happens. Danny declined to plead guilty; despite the judge agreeing to leave the door open to a guilty plea by agreeing that he would give the minimum sentence of 23 years – life. Instead, Danny insisted on moving forward toward his trial, where he was confident he would leave his troubles behind by arguing that he was just too young (at age 16) to understand that when you die you don't reset. He said, "I shot my parents but I thought they would come back to life."

Marie: That's ridiculous for an eight-year-old, much less a 16-year-old.

Sherry: Right. And here's how he explained it all to Deborah Roberts during that interview:

Deborah Roberts (recording): So, tell me about that day - October 20th. How did you wind up with a gun in your hand?

Danny (recording): We always did a lot of hunting and a lot of target shooting so there was [sic] a lot of guns in the house. I went and got the gun from my dad's closet.

Deborah Roberts (recording): Why did you go get the gun to begin with?

Danny (recording): I was angry at my dad. He was firm about it - adamant about it - that there would be none of this and that's the way it was going to be. And so that created a lot of resentment and a lot of anger.

Deborah Roberts (recording): So, did you think, 'I'm gonna go get a gun and I'm gonna kill my dad.'

Danny (recording): I did. I went in my room and I was mad. I told my dad, uh, 'Hang on, I got something I want to show you.' I went and grabbed a gun, and...

Deborah Roberts (recording): Your dad said that you came out and you said, 'Close your eyes.'

Danny (recording): Right.

Deborah Roberts (recording): Then you fired the gun. At your mom, first.

Danny (recording): No. It was at my dad first.

Deborah Roberts (recording): Do you remember that look on her face? Did you think that you were just hurting them or did you think that you were killing them?

Danny (recording): Uh. I didn't understand. Like I said, I was a teenager at the time. There's a difference between knowing something and understanding something - and understanding that I was taking a human life.

Deborah Roberts (recording): You're seeing the blood on your parents - on your mom. What, what were you feeling at that moment?

Danny (recording): I'm used to playing these games and at the end of every round, everything just resets. At the end of every level, everybody's still there.

Deborah Roberts (recording): But you're 16 years old. I mean, you've got to know your parents aren't going to reset after you fire this gun at them. Are you blaming the video game for what you did?

Danny (recording): No.

Sherry: I absolutely do not believe him.

Marie: I don't, either. I think that that was very disingenuous.

Sherry: I agree. Beyond words, it makes me so angry to listen to that.

(interlude music)

Sherry: Moreover, his attorney claimed his love of violent video games should be considered an addiction - and addiction withdrawal should mitigate his responsibility in all of this and possibly provide a basis for a diminished capacity defense.

Marie: Wasn't he a hunter? Like, he killed animals.

Sherry: Right. And I'm pretty sure none of those animals he killed jumped up and ran off of his plate or ran away from him after he'd shot them. I'm pretty sure he was clear that a dead person is a dead person.

Marie: Yeah. And he'd planned it for a week. I mean, this seems very insincere. It doesn't feel like he's even trying to come up with a good lie.

Sherry: Right. But he, his attorney asked for a bench trial, rather than a jury trial. Can you talk a little bit about why that might be?

Marie: Probably because he knew that a jury would rip him apart. He was probably trying to make some sort of technical argument that he thought a judge would understand better than a jury and he knew that he would not be sympathetic to a jury.

Sherry: Did it work?

Marie: Well, no. (chuckles) The judge, being a reasonable person, rejected his addiction defense and found him guilty of both aggravated murder and attempted aggravated murder. And Danny was stunned! Um, this boy does not...he doesn't seem to have been unintelligent, but he did seem to be overconfident.

Sherry: Yes.

Marie: He had the audacity to be shocked that his argument didn't work. But then the Judge held a separate sentencing hearing and his dad came to that sentencing hearing. And he actually came to support Danny. He told the court that he felt Danny may have a divine calling to set an example for children everywhere to save them from making the mistakes Danny had.

Sherry: I do not want my children using Danny as an example. Sorry.

Marie: I think he's a terrible example! I believe by the mistakes - he means, um, getting too into video games and then killing your parents. That's not a mistake.

Sherry: Not when you planned it for a week.

Marie: Every boy in that era - not every boy, but I would say more than 90% of the boys - played Halo and very few of them murdered anyone. But I think that people grieve in different ways, and I think that his father was trying to see how this could be part of God's plan - and so he he told the judge that he hoped that Daniel could get a second chance to do something positive and constructive. And I think he sincerely believed that this could be a calling for Danny. That maybe there was a reason for all of this, and that Danny could do some good in the world. I'm not sure if Danny was sincere.

Sherry: I'm pretty sure he wasn't sincere, just based on the fact that he insisted on a trial after he apologized, that he continued to make excuses for himself.

Marie: Yeah. He didn't act like someone usually does when they actually accept responsibility for their actions. And usually people who are sincerely, um, repentant don't ask their victims to advocate for their release.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: If they care about their victims, they don't use them in that way. Contributing to my belief that he was not sincere, is his behavior at trial. He looks like he's crying. He's sniffing. He's wiping at his nose and his eyes, but there are no visible tears. And his attorneys' behavior, I think, also indicates that they don't think he's sincere.

Sherry: What were they [doing]?

Marie: Well, they were on either side of him. Um and neither of them patted him on the back. or got him a tissue, or any of the things you see...attorneys are people, too. And usually they have sympathy toward their clients.

Sherry: Yeah. I've seen a lot of videos where - if the child is crying at the trial - the attorney puts a consoling arm around the child's shoulders, or pats the child's hand, or it even just reaches out and touches their arm.

Marie: And that wouldn't be inappropriate in a courtroom. I think that the fact that they didn't have any impulse to comfort him - is telling.

Sherry: I agree.

Marie: So, Danny was, of course, offered a chance to speak at the sentencing hearing. Danny gave a brief nod to his attorney who was standing with him. He took a deep breath and kind of exhales but he shakes his head as his other attorney stands. And he hangs his head and keeps shaking his head and in response to something his attorney whispers to him. He replies, "I can't." and then he sits back down in his seat.

Sherry: Now tell me if I'm right, isn't this their chance to say I'm sorry to the family?

Marie: Yes. And often they'll turn around and look into, um, the gallery of the courtroom and speak to the family and say, 'Wow. I am so sorry for what I did and the effect that I had on you and the effect that my actions will have on you for the rest of your life.' And his family was there. His father his sister his grandfather and other family members. They were in the courtroom and he didn't take this opportunity to turn around and say, 'Please forgive me.' or 'I'm sorry for taking Susan away from you.'

Sherry: ...or my mom?

Marie: Yeah. Um. She was different things to different people. But he didn't acknowledge any of their grief, or loss. He just stood up and, like, shook his head. Um, he still wasn't crying but he was still kind of making motions like maybe he was crying but he didn't say anything. The prosecution took this as further evidence that he was remorseless and asserted that he had used his dad prior to the beginning of the trial with his conversations with the 'I'm sorry, I sure miss mom.' And they argued this was a trial strategy - which it looks like it was.

Sherry: It sure looks like that to me.

Marie: From outside, maybe he was sincere - but it it doesn't look like it. But in any case, the Judge appeared to agree with the Prosecution regarding Danny's culpability and remorse and the Judge noted that even if the incessant playing of these shoot-'em-up video games had warped a sense of reality, Danny was still guilty of murder and mentioned that Danny had done some careful planning to commit this crime - which he had.

Sherry: Yes.

Marie: He had really thought out setting up this murder-suicide scenario...

Sherry: ...to that point that he couldn't readjust once he had a witness thrown in.

Marie: Umm hmm. So, he probably had rehearsed that over and over in his mind because he was stuck on it like it was a train track.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: This planning worked against the defense's hope for an insanity plea and Danny was sentenced to 23 years to life. So, let's talk a little bit more, though, about his father. Because I think his father is the really interesting character in this story. What did his dad do?

Sherry: I know that he was saying that he'd forgiven Danny for what he did. But then he had some other things to say, too. What were they?

Marie: So, his father has kind of become an advocate against video games. Which, it sounds like maybe he was before the attempt on his life and his wife's murder. Um, but he is convinced that the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings were directly related to kids playing graphically violent video games. He clumps his son in with these shootings - which is a little bit strange. I'm not sure that he's analyzed this quite enough. I think his emotions are really vested in his son not being fully responsible.

Sherry: Well, for starters, he's not a mass shooter.

Marie: Yeah. His son's crime was not similar to Columbine or Sandy Hook. And those crimes - they are similar because it was young men who were angry at the world and went and killed a lot of people. Not who planned a week in advance to kill their parents because they wanted to be in charge of their own rules.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: So, I think it's very different and not really a good comparison. But it's also the idea that violent video games are causing boys to kill is not really well-supported. It has been studied a great deal. Dr. Michael Wellner points out that mass killers aren't influenced to kill by the video games. They actually decide to kill and then use the video games as tactical training to help them carry out their murders.

Sherry: Okay. That makes sense. So, they've already decided, and this is just one way they can practice. That makes a lot of sense because I did go through all of our cases and this is the only one that tried to attribute Video Game Addiction to murdering one's parents.

Marie: Well, shooting two people and framing it as a murder-suicide isn't really played out in any video games I know of. It's all 'go out and kill a bunch of people'. More like you're hunting animals than like you're in a detective novel.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: In my opinion, because he's so different than these mass shooters, I think that his claims of Video Addiction were a way to try and excuse himself and avoid taking responsibility for a murder that actually happened because his parents told him no. This was much more about a power struggle and an attempt to differentiate gone horribly wrong than it was about being influenced by video games - where you go and kill aliens

Sherry: Or a 16-year-old boy not being aware that when you shoot someone they die - after he'd been hunting for years. That really irritated me.

Marie: I think that was very a very insincere argument. I think that he...even saying it...had to know how ridiculous it sounded.

Sherry: I don't know how he did that with a straight face.

Marie: But, anyway, Mark struggled, um, obviously he was a widower - but he ended up giving up his ministry.

Danny - you remember he had two sisters - those two sisters have grown up and gotten married, but Danny's dad and his sisters still visit with him in prison and they say they've forgiven him for what he did.

Danny is still in prison and he isn't eligible for parole until he turns 39. He says that he studies and tries to improve himself and he looks forward to the day he's released from prison but all he wants is his freedom and to do what he wants to do.

Sherry: Isn't that what got him put in prison in the first place?

Marie: It is. Yeah, but it doesn't sound like he's changed.

(musical interlude)

Marie: What do you think, listeners? We'd love to hear your thoughts on this episode.

Sherry: Feel free to join our discussions on Instagram at ParricidePodcast, Facebook at Parricide Podcast, or by writing to us at ParricidePodcast@parricide.org. And if you like our podcast, please subscribe to the Parricide Podcast and tell your friends about us.

We'd like to thank Jade Brown for our theme music, and we'd like to thank Bauer's House and Katie Couric, along with True Crime Daily, the Times Recorder, Marysville Tribune, and the Chillicothe Gazette for a variety of information, sound bites, and the photos that we used for this show. And a special thanks to our "staph" doctor of the Auer. You can see the photos from this episode at parricide.org - just click on the Parricide Podcast once you get to the website.

Marie: And we'll see you back with another episode in two weeks! Goodbye for now!

Sherry: See you next time!

(musical theme) Ashes, ashes; we all fall down.