

Money, Murder, and Cows - Part 1
Scott Moody

(Musical Interlude) Ring around the rosies, A pocket full of posies, Ashes, ashes, We all fall down.

Marie: The sun was peeking over the horizon wondering if this lazy, Sunday morning was worth waking up for. Life starts early on a farm, and animals don't care if there is a pre-graduation party - they still want to be fed, milked, and cared for. Brett, Scott's friend, had spent the night - along with Paige Elizabeth Harshbarger and Megan Renee Karus - but he got up at 6 am to head home to do the morning chores. He understood and accepted the farming life, and he knew the cows wouldn't wait. As he headed out the door, he ran into Scott's mother, Sheri Kay, who was also awake because her boyfriend had taken off at about 3:30 am. She was enjoying the peace of a sleeping house as Brett headed for the door. She understood the farming life, too. She knew where he was headed, and she invited him to come back for breakfast once his morning chores were finished. He left his best friend's house happy - not knowing it would be his last time there.

Farmers rise early to care for every living thing, and Scott, as per habit, was up at the crack of dawn. But caring for the living is not what he had in mind. He couldn't say for sure, but he was pretty sure there wasn't going to be a graduation ceremony - or even a Memorial Day Celebration on this farm - not this year. He grabbed his .22 Marlon rifle and went to work.

You can almost see the lonely figure walking purposefully up the deserted, country highway as the distant church bells rang. Past rolling green pastures and fields of hay; the sky warmly softening from pink to blue - with his rifle in his hand - admiring his last dawn. Scott walked past his daily chores on that spring morning. No one would be taking care of the cows today. He had other matters to address. He entered his grandparents' home. They were both in the kitchen getting ready to eat breakfast. He shot them, and then he went back home.

That morning, the local police would be called to a murder scene. They would find Megan murdered on a couch in the living room; the blankets tucked up under her chin. Sheri Kay was found dead in her bed. Again, with the blankets tucked up under her chin. In Scott's room, the police found the body of Paige - shot dead - with Scott's shirtless body next to her. A Marlin rifle was reported to be nearby. The only living witness was Scott's 15-year-old sister, Stacy. She had been shot twice, and she was rushed to the hospital. This is the story of a mass shooting executed by 18-year-old Scott Moody - as per the local police and news reports.

(musical bridge)

Sherry: Welcome to the parasite podcast I'm Sherry...

Marie: ...and I'm Marie.

Sherry: In our last episode, You Can Never Go Home, we shared the story of the Gilley family. Billy Gilley was a Youthful Family Annihilator. He had a history of escalating violence and theft and he had molested his sister over the years before he killed his entire family - with the exception of his sister. Billy is still serving time in prison for those murders. When Billy's sister, Jody, shared her experiences, she noted that she'd felt a pang of familiarity when she read how Scott Moody had murdered his family. She noted

their cases were very similar. Scott was 18 years old - and Billy was 18 years old. Scott's sister, Stacy, was 15 years old - and Billy's sister, Jody, was 16 years old. Jody noted that both families lived in an isolated home and had endured hardships and economic woes that threatened the family farm. Jody related deeply to this murder and led the reader to believe they were the same; except for one difference. Billy had spared her life - and his own - while Scott took his life.

We empathize with Jody, and all of the terror she had to endure at the hands of her brother. We are proud of her for her achievements and found her story of being taken in by Attorney Guyer and his wife to be heartwarming and compelling. But we must respectfully disagree with her assertion that these two parricide stories are similar. We thought we'd share the case of Scott Moody and his family with you and let you decide for yourselves. This episode is about another alleged Youthful Family Annihilator, Scott Moody.

Marie: Just a heads up, this case contains references to murder, substance use disorder, and violence. If you like our podcast, please follow us and leave a review on the Apple Podcast platform.

Sherry: Stacy Moody was not at her mother and brother's funeral. She was still in the ICU recovering from gunshot wounds to her head. Her brother, Scott, had been slated to graduate along with 49 other students in this small farming community of Bellefontaine but he never made it to his graduation according to the police he'd been busy murdering his family, friends, and then himself on graduation morning. But let's take this story back a step or two. As per the Dayton Daily News, the New York Times, and the Journal News graduation was a big deal to the Moody family. Scott's proud grandparents had even paid for an ad to appear in the Bellefontaine Examiner. It sported a picture of their attractive grandson with the words, "Good luck in your future! Scott Moody, love, Grandma and Grandpa Shafer splashed across the page. The news outlets report that Scott's mom, Sheri Kay Shafer, was concerned when he refused to attend the graduation ceremony scheduled for Sunday - May 29, 2005. She had tried to change his mind, but he had already decided to forego the formalities. The media claims she didn't push it. Her therapist had advised her not to confront him. The therapist felt it was best to navigate Scott's surly, sour attitude and just get him to the other side of childhood. He could either move out or stay to help around the family farm - which they hoped would help him chill out as he assumed more responsibilities. He hadn't really decided what he wanted to do after graduation, but Sheri Kay was almost there - he was soon to be a high school graduate.

Even though he didn't want to walk, Scott did want a celebration. He asked his mom if he could have a small party. Yes, that could be arranged. Scott wanted to celebrate with his girlfriend of a week and a half, 14-year-old Paige Elizabeth Harshbarger. She was a Freshman at his high school. He also wanted to invite his best friend, Bret Davidson, and Bret kind of liked Megan Karus who was also graduating. So, they invited her, too. Scott's little sister, Stacy, was going to be home and that was fine with him. She wanted to invite someone, too. She was about Paige's age, so it really wouldn't be weird or anything. Kay said okay and Stacy invited Andrew Denny. It looked like Scott's pre-graduation celebration would be intimate, fun, and rather low-key. Some of the media outlets reported the party was filled with alcohol, illicit drugs, and sex. These allegations were refuted by Scott's best friend, Bret, who actually attended the party.

Marie: Well, had they been drinking?

Sherry: It's unclear, but possible. They were high school seniors.

Marie: Were there drugs?

Sherry: No drugs. This was confirmed by the police investigators after the deaths.

Marie: Okay. And how about sex?

Sherry: Well, maybe some sex - but not the wanton type indicated by claims that the party was filled with alcohol, drugs, and sex. For example, Scott's mother, Sheri Kay, had her boyfriend over so I'm sure some sex occurred - but not like that.

Marie: Okay. So, I wonder why that became part of the narrative if that wasn't true?

Sherry: Maybe we'll understand it all better by the end of the story.

(musical interlude)

As per Bret, the group of older kids got to know Paige better as the night went on. She was quite young - but she was a very popular girl at school. She played both softball and basketball - and Scott really liked her a lot. They did, too. The party was fun. Bret said everyone was joking around and anticipating their futures. They talked about those futures, graduation, and farming. Scott said he would probably stick around - at least for a little while - and help with the family farm. Every morning Kay, Scott, Stacy, and a hired hand would milk the 25 cows. If Scott left, they would probably have to hire someone to take his place. This farm was a lot of work. Bret felt a bit bad for Scott. Brett's family farm was thriving, and he knew his place on it was secure. He would probably live there happily for the rest of his life after he graduated next year - just like Scott's grandmother had lived on their farm for her entire life. Megan was all set to start working at the Ameristop Shell Station in just a couple of days. This job was her ticket to college. She'd worked hard and earned a scholarship to Bluffton University and she planned to study Social Work starting in the fall. Megan's parents had divorced, and then her dad died exactly one year ago. She, too, had played softball and basketball in school and she learned the hard way what to do when life throws you a curveball. She was going to be okay. They gossiped a little about their friends and classmates as they shot some pool and watched a movie. When it got late Stacey's friend, Andrew Denny, headed home and everyone else headed to bed.

Early the next morning Nikki, Stacy's half-sister, received an early morning call from Stacy. Nikki's initial annoyance at being awakened so early on a Sunday morning turned into concern as Stacy told her that she and her mom had been beaten up and she couldn't get her mom to wake up. Nikki and her significant other jumped in her car and headed to the farmhouse. Stacy met her at the door. Her face was both ashen - and black and blue. She wasn't really with it, but she was saying a few words on occasion.

Marie: She'd been shot, and she was walking around?

Sherry: Yes. They didn't know at the time that she was shot. They thought she'd been beaten up. But she had been shot twice.

Marie: That's crazy! Where was she shot?

Sherry: Behind her ear. Twice.

Marie: So, she was shot in the head and walking around?

Sherry: Yes.

Marie: That's amazing. It was more than a miracle.

Sherry: Yeah.

Marie: So, what did they find in the house?

Sherry: Well, according to the media, they found her mom, Sheri Kay first. And Nikki was pretty sure she was dead, so she immediately called 9-1-1 and said, "My sister just called me and said her mom and her had been beaten up and her mom isn't waking up. I can't wake her mom up. I can't feel a pulse." There was a pause as she moved further into the farmhouse. "Oh my God. Scott!?!? The son and girlfriend are beat up, too!"

Marie: So, she didn't realize anyone had been shot. She thought everyone was beaten and maybe the mom had been beaten to death.

Sherry: Yes. That's what she was supposing. Um, when someone calls and says, 'I've been beat up.' your frame is kind of locked in on 'this is what happened.' And a lot of times, when there is a murder by gunshot, people can't tell that it was actually a gunshot wound. So, if someone said, 'Oh I was beaten up.' You probably would take them at their word - that would kind of freeze that frame in your head and you'd go with it. And I think that's what happened with Nikki.

Marie: It makes sense. And if if she's running around – like - she's standing up, I think she would assume she's not been shot.

Sherry: Yeah. And she wasn't really standing up. Most of the time she sat in the kitchen - kind of in a catatonic state - gazing off - and they would ask her a question, and she would look like she was kind of searching inside her brain. She would slowly answer and then she would sit there. Brain injuries can be so weird. Yeah.

Marie: They found her mom and they found Scott and his girlfriend. Was there anyone else?

Sherry: Well, when she headed back downstairs - thinking that things couldn't get worse - she started sobbing and she said to the 911 operator, "Oh my God! There's one in the living room, too!"

When the paramedics arrived, they examined Stacy. This was the first time anyone noticed that she'd been shot in the head – twice - behind the ear.

That's awful.

Yes. They were going to send her to the local hospital, but once they realized she'd been shot they arranged for a life flight. They realized she was in serious trouble.

That makes sense.

Yes. Scott had been busy before he shot himself, but they didn't find his grandparents until later in the day. The Investigators were called in and before the first press conference, they concluded the case was a Rampage Murder - followed by a suicide. And Scott was named as the murderer. This case was closed before the beginning of the graduation ceremonies.

Marie: Well, that's strange. Shot behind the ear doesn't sound like a rampage.

Sherry: And doesn't sound like a teenage boy.

Marie: No, that sounds like a hitman or something like an execution almost.

Sherry: It's very odd and very suspicious and usually when an investigator is called in to investigate, they follow the clues in the crime. It doesn't sound like they did this at all.

Marie: They didn't take that much time. How did he kill himself with a rifle? Where was he shot?

Sherry: That...wasn't reported by the media. So, I couldn't really answer it.

Marie: That's so strange - shooting yourself with a rifle. I guess it's possible, but it's not common.

Sherry: It isn't very common. And there were two police reports. One police report said the rifle was nearby, and the other police report said the rifle was in his hand with his thumb on the trigger. I'm not a gun person, but I would think your thumb on the trigger wouldn't make a lot of sense either. But that's what we have.

Marie: Yeah. That's very strange, too.

Sherry: Right. The authorities in this small town weren't sure how to handle this on a big day like Graduation Day. Do they derail the Pomp and Circumstance of graduation to announce the murders? They decided – no, the news could wait.

The graduation ceremony went off without a hitch. The students were happy, the parents were proud, and the rumors of what was happening up on the Sha-Ker Farm were quietly spreading through the school like wildfire. The celebration quickly turned somber with the final announcement - the one confirming for the community what had happened that morning up on the Sha-Ker Farm. Graduation Day was followed by a week of mourning and disbelief.

Paige Harshbarger's funeral was on Friday, June 4th. She was the first to be buried. The entire community came to a standstill as the hearse moved toward the graveyard. Everyone felt the loss and confusion that her family was going through. Megan Karus' funeral was next on Saturday, June 5th. And, again, the community came to a standstill - out of grief and respect for her family. The Shafer and Moody families were buried together after a mass funeral that was held on Tuesday, June 7th. For the third time, the community respectfully held the space as the procession of hearses solemnly approached the cemetery. The adults were all cremated, but Scott's remains were in a casket. As I said before, Stacy was still in the hospital recovering from the shooting. The story was that her brother had shot her in the face, left, and then returned to shoot her in the face one more time. This is what the media was reporting.

Marie: Well, he didn't shoot her in the face, right? It was behind her ear?

Sherry: Right. A lot of times - when it's rumors - things get twisted, or changed, as people are gossiping about it. They knew it was in the head. Someone probably changed it to the face because they didn't have any formal announcement telling them who was shot where.

Marie: This investigation is a little strange, too - just because it's so fast. Like they'd already decided not only who the main suspect was, but who the murderer was in mere hours.

Sherry: In 20 minutes! Yeah.

Marie: And then the bodies are cremated - or buried - within a week.

Sherry: Absolutely. It is a little odd.

Marie: That doesn't give you very much time to investigate, or take notes, or have someone else examine the body – like, get a second opinion. And once you cremate a murder victim, that's it! There's no more evidence you can collect.

Sherry: Right. And they weren't going to have a second opinion - they literally closed the case at that first press meeting.

Marie: That's crazy!

Sherry: Yeah. And this would have been the end of the story - and a very tragic story - except there is more. And you kind of stumbled upon it with your questions.

Marie: Yeah.

Sherry: Three days after the shootings - so this is before the funerals - the doctors deemed Stacy well enough to be interviewed by authorities. The Sheriff's office didn't bother sending anyone, as they believed the case to be closed. But the Logan County Coroner still needed to cross the T's and dot the I's on his report, so he headed over to the hospital in an effort to complete that report. He interviewed Stacy in the presence of her physician and her father Steve's attorney. Steve Moody and his wife, Audrey, were waiting outside the door. As a formality, and sure that he knew what the answer was, he asked Stacy, "Who shot you?" And he could not believe what she said next.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: In response to the question, 'Who shot you?' Stacy, unaware that her family was all dead and that Scott had been accused and then quickly proclaimed to be the killer - case closed - relayed the following, as per the book *Saving Stacy; The Untold Story of the Moody Massacres* by Rob St. Clair. Stacy said she didn't know what woke her on that Sunday morning. But when she opened her eyes, there was a man standing over her with a gun. Stacy stated that the man shot her in the neck - and she just laid there as he walked out of her bedroom. She heard two more shots, and then the man returned to the room, stood over her with the gun a second time - and as she squirmed to escape - he shot her a second time in about the same place on her neck. That's when she began to feel a horrible pain. The man left the room again and she heard two more shots. The Coroner was at a loss of what to say. He decided to try again - coming from a different interview direction. He asked her what this shooter looked like. Again expecting her to describe her brother, who he suspected she had mistaken for some man that - because of the brain injury - she wasn't realizing she knew. Everyone but Stacy knew that Scott had been lying dead on the bed without any shirt on; almost as if he too had been startled awake. But, of course, they all knew he hadn't been startled awake because he was the shooter.

Marie: Hold on. He didn't have a shirt on?

Sherry: No.

Marie: How did he go to his grandparents' farm and shoot them shirtless?

Sherry: Maybe he wore a shirt and took it off. I don't know.

Marie: That's very strange.

Sherry: It's suss [suspicious], right?

Marie: That should have raised some red flags for the investigators.

Sherry: There were no investigators. They'd closed the case!

Marie: Well, I mean just...On the first day they should have gone, 'Well, it looks like he did it. But there are some strange things happening here.'

Sherry: The fact that they closed the case without having the opportunity to interview the only eyewitness to the shootings is very strange.

Marie: Sloppy at best.

Sherry: Yes. Well, after he asked her what that person looked like - Stacy paused for a moment sifting back through the horror and pain of the last few days – before she carefully answered, "He was an older man with short gray hair. And he was wearing a blue shirt. She wasn't sure, but she thought she remembered him as having a bigger build. She said she couldn't remember much else. When pressed, Stacy said she was sure she hadn't seen that man before. He was a stranger. She couldn't recall if he had any facial hair; but he was definitely older. The coroner was at a loss of what to say and Stacy was clearly exhausted - drifting in and out of consciousness - so he thanked her for her help and asked the attorney to contact him as soon as Stacy felt up to talking again.

Marie: Wow! That is quite the plot twist. We have a whole new suspect, but the case is already closed.

Sherry: Right! An unnamed suspect.

(musical interlude)

Marie: This is a very interesting story, but I have a lot of questions.

Sherry: Okay. Let's talk about those questions.

Marie: So, if the story is that he had this party - so, he asked his mom to have his friends over - he was good-natured enough to let his little sister come to the party. Which is kind of a big deal for an 18-year-old boy. Um, and then he wakes up in the morning, goes and kills his grandparents, and comes back and kills everyone in the house; in what's described as a rampage. First, we're missing motive. Why would he do this?

Sherry: Well, the motive that they came up with is the family farm was under a lot of distress. Their great grandmother had died, about a decade before, and the farm had fallen into disrepair while the will went through probate. It was said around town that there was a bad will that was written by the great-grandmother - and that had created all sorts of problems and made it difficult for Sheri Kay to actually run her part of the farm without any money.

Marie: Okay, so I mean he decides to put them all out of their misery and he doesn't want to leave any of them behind. So, I would see – okay - maybe he is in despair and kills his mother and sister. But why kill his friends - and his little 14-year-old girlfriend?

Sherry: The 14-year-old girlfriend is very difficult for me, because he was a week-and-a-half into a relationship with a girl that he'd liked for a long time. That doesn't sound like someone you would kill.

Marie: Yeah.

Sherry: And that made me pause to think, “This is kind of a strange case.” Usually when I go through these cases, I try to contextualize everything - and place what kind of killer this person is. And this one was really hard for me to wrap my arms around.

Marie: Yeah. And motive is, kind of, it just doesn't make sense. Usually, we can understand what they were thinking when they were trying to kill someone - or did kill someone - as the case may be. But in this case, that doesn't make sense. And then the facts don't add up. So, the sister is the only eyewitness and she clearly remembers a man she doesn't know - an older man and he's wearing a shirt.

Sherry: A blue shirt. And he has gray hair.

Marie: Yeah, which doesn't sound like her brother; but maybe she has a brain injury. Maybe she's not a great reporter here, but they don't even ask her anything before they close the case.

Sherry: Right. They literally closed the case before they interviewed the only living witness.

Marie: Yeah. That doesn't make sense from an investigation standpoint - and then they also cremated about half of the victims.

Sherry: Cremated all of the victims in the family - but not Scott - which I don't understand still.

Marie: Yeah. That's strange, too. But it's like - if you're investigating a murder, you usually don't cremate everybody in less than a week and get everybody buried - and close the case.

Sherry: Well, and here's another thing that's a little bit odd if you think about it. His little sister wanted to come to his pre-graduation party. This is a little sister, and, if you remember, the media is describing Scott as surly and grumpy and grouchy. What kind of older brother lets their 15-year-old sister show up to their graduation party, if that's the kind of boy they are?

I thought that was really odd.

Marie: Yeah. And I don't know many grumpy boys who get up at six in the morning to milk cows.

Sherry: Oh, I know! And when everyone was talking about how ornery Scott was, his best friend - Bret (who is his best friend; but I think he's an accurate narrator of this story), actually said that he had seen Scott working with cows for years. They were in 4-H together, and they were 4-H judges together, and they had raised animals together, and farmed together for over a decade. And Bret said that Scott was one of the most patient men he knew; that Scott was even nice to the cows - and patient with the cows - and that's not an easy thing to do.

Marie: Yeah. This is...they're not making a cohesive story here. Was he this grumpy, surly teenage boy or was he so responsible that he was running the family farm?

Sherry: Right. And even though the investigators were saying that this case was closed - and that they knew who the murderer was - the town was abuzz. No one believed that Scott had done this, but it was all rumors and conjecture. There was nothing solid saying he hadn't done it. And with the case closed, there was nothing they could do about it.

Yeah. And, again, the time...there's no timeline that makes sense. There's no motive that makes sense. There's no way that this boy got up, presumably got dressed, went to his grandparents' house, shot them, came back...

Sherry: ...took his shirt off - or put his shirt on - or something.

Marie: Yeah. Got back, shot everyone in his family, crawled into bed with his girlfriend...

Sherry: ...with his shirt off at that point...

Marie: Shot her - and then shot himself - with a rifle?!? And shot everyone behind the ear. That's not a rampage! A rampage shooting - he would have had to chase someone. He would have had to shoot someone somewhere other than behind the ear.

Sherry: There would have been anger.

Marie: Yeah! There's not a lot of anger here. It's methodical.

Sherry: Yes.

Marie: Which doesn't make sense. And then the shirt on - shirt off thing.

Sherry: And it doesn't go with the therapist saying that he's grumpy. And then having everyone tucked in, with two shots or one shot behind the ear. Because what we find out later - is everyone was shot behind the ear - not just his sister. So, everyone shot behind the ear and everyone's tucked in and he's found on the bed with his girlfriend - presumably where he slept last night. That doesn't make sense!

Sherry: I agree!

Marie: Well...

Sherry: And that is why we...need to explore this case a little further.

Marie: Okay. Well, do we have time today?

Sherry: I think we're out of time for right now. So, unfortunately, we're going to have to do it next week.

Marie: Okay. Well, I'm excited to hear more, and see if we can make some sense of it out of this.

Sherry: Me, too! Because - as we've been looking for answers, we found that the beginning of this story actually doesn't start on graduation night. It starts a couple of generations before Scott. And it has more twists and turns than Lombard street. So, we'll see you next week and tell you what we found out.

Marie: Thanks for listening. and we hope you learned something. Feel free to join our discussions on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter using Parricide Podcast or by writing to us at parricidepodcast@parricide.org.

Sherry: And if you like our podcast, please subscribe to the Parricide Podcast and tell your friends about us.

Brooke: Yes! Please do!

Sherry: We'd like to thank Jade Brown for our theme music and the Dayton Daily News and the New York Times, the Journal News, and the Bellefontaine Examiner for a variety of information and the photos we used for this show. You can see the photos at parricide.org. Just click on the Parricide Podcast once you get to the website.

Marie: What do you think? Are the two cases similar, so far? You can reach out to us at Parricide Podcast on Facebook or Instagram or by emailing us at parricidepodcast@parricide.org.

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Sherry: Thanks for your support and we'll see you next week!

Marie: Bye!

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