

Parricide Podcast ◉
The Accomplice
Jessica Wiseman

Sherry: On January 10, 2000, 26-year-old Douglas Christopher Thomas (his friends called him Chris; but he didn't have that many friends anymore) woke up early to begin his day. This wasn't a typical day for Chris. He opened his eyes, stretched, used the bathroom, and thought about his date with death. That day. He was scheduled to die by lethal injection in the Commonwealth of Virginia after he'd been convicted of murdering J.B. and Kathy Wiseman. He almost died last July, but that execution had been stayed. He wondered if that would happen again today.

(musical intro) Ring around the rosie; 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 and today's episode is called The Accessory. It's about the parricide offender, Jessica Wiseman, and her accessory, Douglas Christopher Thomas.

Sherry: Just a heads up; this podcast is about kids, but it's not for kids.

Marie: If you like this episode, please like it and subscribe to our podcast.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: J.B. and Kathy Wiseman were not what anyone could call a stable couple. They loved each other and wanted their relationship to work, but they kept breaking it off. J.B. was described as a friendly hard-working laborer who liked his alcohol a bit too much and grew his own marijuana around the house. Kathy worked a couple of side hustles. She worked as the bookkeeper for her stepdad's HVAC business and at the local hair salon. So, I would guess money was tight. Her family seemed to be a bit disapproving of J.B. and his pot-smoking ways and J.B. and Kathy spent a lot of time breaking up with each other and then getting back together.

Marie: So, J.B. smoked pot, but Kathy didn't? Was that okay with Kathy?

Sherry: Well, actually both of them did drugs - and not just pot.

Marie: Oh.

Sherry: This probably did not help their rocky relationship; nor their finances. They'd gotten together at a young age and Kathy had given birth to their only daughter, Jessica Lynne Wiseman, when she was 19 years old. In the summer of 1990, they were working on reconciling for the umpteenth time. These were very unstable 33-year-olds.

Marie: It sounds like it.

Sherry: Um-hmm. This summer, they were spending time together in a neighboring county working on yet again rebuilding their relationship while their 14-year-old daughter, Jessica, lived...wherever. She could choose where she wanted to sleep each night.

Marie: That sounds like a lot of freedom for a 14-year-old.

Sherry: It really does. Jessica usually chose to stay at her great-grandparents home. The rules were lax; they were allowing friends at all hours of the night. The family members insist that this arrangement had something to do with Jessica being the caretaker for her great-grandparents.

Marie: This sounds more like a tv drama - like One Tree Hill - than a family to me.

The 14-year-old is, kind of, already on her own and doing as she pleases? I find it hard to believe that anyone would ask a 14-year-old to be the live-in caretaker for elderly grandparents. That's really not normal.

Sherry: No, it really isn't. That's what I was thinking, too. And - as you'll see - that's part of the problem that leads to the murders.

The picture of who Jessica was changed based on who you asked. The adults in the community saw Jessica as a responsible, reliable girl who had taken on great responsibility despite her young age. They would see her tooling around the neighborhood in the golf cart her parents had bought for her. They described her as a tall, innocent, pretty brunette who really had it together. But if you really want to know what a teen is like, ask her friends. You know - the secret lives of children. They're the ones who really know. And through the eyes of the kids her age Jessica was far from the innocent little 14-year-old that the adults were seeing. They described her as a bit of a hellion who lacked supervision was over-indulged with everything that money could buy to compensate for the instability in her life, and pretty much ran whichever household she was in.

Jessica was technically in school. She was enrolled in online classes because she didn't really like her classmates and she said she had migraines and leg pains. Some people thought she might have arthritis. She did keep up with her schoolwork and was said to be a pretty good student.

(musical interlude)

In order to really discuss this case correctly, we can't just talk about Jessica and her parents. We need to backtrack a little bit and talk about someone else.

Marie: Who?

Sherry: Well, in our episode, Life After Life, we provided a historical review of the Sentencing Reforms which were initiated by the Supreme Court regarding how minors - who committed adult-sized crimes - were to be treated after conviction. As part of that episode, we reviewed the list of people who had been executed for crimes they'd committed as juveniles before the practice was outlawed. We promised to provide you with a deep dive into each of the parricide cases we touched upon during that episode. Which is why we've recently shared episodes regarding the cases of Tyler Hadley and Kevin Boyd Jr. who were entitled to changes in their sentences based on those reforms. Today's episode is part of that Life After Life story - but not because of Jessica - because of her accessory; the 17-year-old boy she convinced to kill her parents for her, Douglas Christopher Mitchell. He's one of the convicts who was executed for the crimes he committed as a minor. So, we need to talk about him and his life for a bit.

Marie: Ah. So, is this a love story? Boy meets girl, they fall in love, etc.?

Sherry: Umm. A famous columnist named Jim Spencer once said, "You can't play Romeo and Juliet with a script written for Bonnie and Clyde. Maybe I'll just leave it at that for now.

Marie: (chuckles) Okay. Let's do it.

Sherry: Okay! So, some kids are born into a bowl of Lucky Charms. This was definitely not the case for Douglas Christopher Thomas. He seemed to have been born more into a bowl of Trix. You see, his birth was part of a shady scam. In truth his parents were Margaret Marshall Thomas and Robert Christopher Thomas. They had a brief, yet incendiary, marriage and had divorced soon after he was born.

Marie: Did his mom list his dad on a birth certificate?

Sherry: Nope. She didn't even list herself on that birth certificate.

Marie: Huh. How does that work? You have to list somebody's name on the birth certificate.

Sherry: That's right. Very true. According to the book, *Anatomy of an Execution* by Todd C. Peppers and Laura Trevett Anderson, Margaret listed the name of her own parents, Herbert B. and Virginia J. Marshall, on Chris's birth certificate.

Marie: Why?

Sherry: She later claimed that it was so that Chris (well, they called him Doug for the first half of his life and then he switched his name to Chris later) but, anyway, she claimed to be worried about little Chris's ability to obtain future Social Security funding.

Marie: That's weird. And a little dishonest.

Sherry: Um-hmm. But I kind of suspect that Margaret had been duped by her own parents. I'm not really sure why, but the more I got into this the more it looked like the grandparents were behind this move - telling Margaret one thing, while secretly just wanting control over this baby for whatever reason.

Marie: Kind of like a, sort of, cheap adoption?

Sherry: Well, yes and no. The deeper I got into this, the more I realized there is a story here that may never quite make sense. But this is what I think happened. I don't know the motivation of the grandparents, but I suspect they had convinced her that she was putting them on the birth certificate so that he would get insurance and Social Security from them as they got older and passed. I do think this is what Margaret believed, but the grandparents had convinced her of that in order to create some sort of *de facto* adoption. Whether Margaret had mental health problems or behavioral problems or - I don't know - maybe they just wanted another baby and decided to nab this one. Maybe no one will ever understand their motivation, but they basically tricked her into doing that for good or bad.

Marie: I mean, it could even be that she was in on it and didn't feel up to the task of raising the child of an abusive man.

Sherry: Exactly. I don't think we'll ever know what was behind this for sure. But it was fairly clear that Margaret wouldn't be raising this boy. Like I said, Chris's parents were separated before he was born on May 29, 1973 and their divorce was finalized in 1974. I guess his dad was into catching the really important days in a boy's life because he showed up at the hospital to meet his son that day and he

didn't reappear on Chris's life until 1996. That was when his dad read in the paper that Chris had been assigned an execution date and decided to pay him a visit on death row.

Marie: Wow! I just think that maybe you could show up for more than his birth and death.

Sherry: I know. It kind of makes me sick. But Margaret stayed in the picture.

Marie: That's good.

Sherry: In one capacity or another, she was always there throughout his life.

After Chris was born, Margaret completed her schooling at the local community college and entered the workforce in the Corrections system. Her parents did the heavy lifting for her, where Chris was concerned; caring for Chris as she got on her feet. When Chris was approximately two years old, Margaret had fallen in love with a female inmate and planned to move to Richmond, Virginia to be with her as that inmate was being released from jail.

Marie: Well, that's sterling decision-making. It's always great to date an inmate when you're a Corrections Officer.

Sherry: Her parents who – remember - were listed as Chris's parents on his birth certificate, refused to let her take Chris along with her. So, she just left him there.

Marie: Oh! So, maybe this is why they tricked her into putting their names on the birth certificate. Back in the 70's - which is when he was born, right?

Sherry: Um-hmm.

Marie: There was this huge stigma against homosexuality. So, maybe they knew she was a lesbian - even though she'd gotten married - and thought that she shouldn't be raising a son.

Sherry: Yeah. That's what I was kind of thinking there, too. It's really possible. But, again, we might not ever know for sure what they their thinking was behind that. But the decision did seem to work in Chris's favor. Chris recognized his grandparents as his mom and dad from the first moment he can remember. He grew up feeling loved and cared for in a stable environment. He said, "It was a pretty great childhood. I was a spoiled kid. Anything I wanted they gave me." He appeared to have a happy and uneventful childhood. He did well in school and loved playing sports. The kids in his neighborhood thought of him as happy and goofy.

Confusingly, the grandparents decided to formalize the adoption of the son who was not theirs in 1982. So, they had some papers drawn up. Prior to signing her Termination of Parental Rights, Margaret formalized her position, writing - as one of the conditions for adoption - that she wanted Chris to be returned to her at her parents' death. And that she had only signed over her Parental Rights because his grandfather had wanted to ensure Chris was eligible to receive insurance benefits and Social Security.

Marie: Wow! I'm surprised that got past a judge.

Sherry: It's a really odd agreement.

Marie: Um-hmm.

Sherry: Robert also signed his copy of the Termination of Parental Rights; and his paper stated that upon the death of the adoptive parents, custody of Chris would automatically be returned to both his natural mother and his natural father. When I was reading this I kept thinking any judge who signed this would be a party to fraud.

Marie: Yeah. it makes it pretty clear that they're trying to commit fraud.

Sherry: Um-hmm. It's the weirdest thing I have ever seen. Anyway, Chris had - by all reports - a very strong sense of family, and the love and support a family could afford. He had a close relationship with his adoptive parents, his aunts and uncles, and even his biological mother. Everyone got along and loved each other, for the most part. They gathered to celebrate holidays and had strong family traditions. Everything was great until after his 12th birthday - then everything fell apart.

1984 was a very bad year for Chris. First, his Uncle Winfrey was killed in a work-related accident. This was a poignant loss for Chris. Uncle Winfrey had always been like a second dad to him. He cried his heart out at this loss. A couple of months later, his grandmother died of cancer. This was in August and before he could even begin to grieve her loss, his grandfather died due to a brain tumor the following December.

Marie: That's awful! Three of the biggest figures in his life died within a year of each other?

Sherry: Yes. All of his primary caretakers were gone.

Marie: That had to be horribly traumatic.

Sherry: It was. And Chris was only 12 years old when all of this happened. He was essentially orphaned and struggling with crushing grief. Chris found himself living in Richmond, Virginia with his biological mother - as stipulated in the adoption agreement.

Chris would now be a city boy instead of a country boy. And he missed the quietude and the slow pace of the country.

Marie: That's just about every life stressor you can have in one year.

Sherry: I know. It's a lot for a little boy to handle.

Marie: Um-hmm.

Sherry: And according to the Guardian, Chris said, "I was moving in with someone I knew was my mother, but I didn't know her as a person. I was moving from my hometown."

Yes, his mother had always come to family gatherings, but she'd always come alone. He didn't really know her. When Chris showed up at her house, bag in hand, he was shocked to find it was stuffed with other children - and this annoying roommate named Joan. The kids told him both of their parents were gay. He didn't know what that meant, and he didn't like what he heard when they explained it to him. He confronted his mother, and she denied it. He went back to the kids and told them they were wrong, so one of the older kids snuck him into their mother's room so Chris could see for himself that it was true.

Marie: Meh. Nobody wants to see their mother engaged in any kind of sexual act.

Sherry: No. But just think, piled on top of all of these deaths, he's also starting to lose all of the social mores he's been raised with.

Marie: Um-hmm. And his mom won't tell him the truth.

Sherry: Right. Chris wasn't happy about this. And he didn't feel like he could talk to her about it, because she wouldn't tell him the truth. And he didn't even feel he could tell anyone outside of the home. He knew Margaret would just say that he'd lied about it.

Soon after Margaret left Joan and took up with another woman. But Chris would not actually hear his mother admit her sexual orientation until after the murders; when she was on the stand, testifying.

Marie: That's too bad. I understand it was a different time, and she was probably trying to protect him - or herself - in some way. But that had to be hard.

Sherry: It was a different time. But it wasn't a time when you would lie to your children that way.

Marie: I mean, especially if you're living with another woman. He's he's got to know. You have to know he knows.

Sherry: Right. So, anyway. At this point Chris felt he'd lost everything he'd cherished. His childhood had vanished, his support system was decimated, and he was struggling to grieve the many losses he'd experienced while trying to connect with Margaret on a parent-child level.

Chris developed a healthy set of abandonment issues about now, and began trying to recreate the close relationship he'd had with his parents with this...confusing entity that was his biological mother. She wasn't having it, and the more he pushed, the more she retreated. She did not recognize that he was struggling with issues of abandonment and loss. And she had no interest whatsoever - or at least no skills - in helping him to grieve his recent losses.

Marie: That's a lot to handle. And it sounds like she wasn't prepared to be his mother.

Sherry: Um-um. She wasn't. And she terminated her parental rights; which is confusing. And it makes the rest of the story even more confusing.

But it's not clear when Chris started engaging in criminal behavior, but his crimes got bigger and better as time went on. By the time he was finished Chris had gotten in trouble for shoplifting, breaking and entering, trespassing at the school, and possession of both drugs and alcohol. He even stole a car. As far as drinking went, Chris's parents had always allowed Chris to take sips of their beer and such - so we can't definitively say when he started drinking. But Chris was most definitely drinking and doing drugs like marijuana, LSD, cocaine, Robitussin by the time he was 14.

Marie: That's a lot of drugs and some pretty heavy hitters.

Sherry: It is. And if you look at how much he had changed in two years, it's pretty surprising.

Marie: That is very surprising.

Sherry: The school also noticed that Chris was in trouble. His grades had plummeted, he was skipping school, he flunked the ninth grade, and it was evident he was having problems. School counselors met

with his...now mother...and suggested he attend classes designed to help emotionally disturb students. His psychological assessments described him as isolated, angry, alienated from both home and school, and seriously depressed.

Marie: It sounds about on track for what had just happened. No one thought to explore the fact that this boy had lost the three most significant people in his life - as well as his lifetime home - in just six months?

Sherry: I don't know how people were missing this. And it might be because he moved away.

Marie: That's true. They didn't know his history?

Sherry: But the word mother connotes something important in your life, and so, it was a very confusing scenario. He's in a new town - with his mother who had never been his mother - but she was showing up at the school saying, 'I'm his mother.' And she would say, 'Oh, his grandparents died.'

Marie: Which is a very different situation than what he'd just gone through.

Sherry: Right. So, you would think that the School Psychologist would have noticed, but they didn't. And I feel like the psychologists were assuming a lot of things that really couldn't be assumed here. Someone would have to tell them that his mother was dead; and he was trying to grieve his mother and his father. But they thought of his parents as his grandparents - because that's what Margaret was calling them. And his mother was showing up in the picture...if you can see what I'm saying here it's a very unusual situation that would be difficult to sort through. Even if one took the time to try to get you to understand it.

Marie: Um-hmm.

Sherry: But they had decided that he was the problem. And maybe with some grief counseling, they would have found out he was - underneath it - all an angry, isolated boy. But that wasn't who he'd been, historically.

The school designed an IEP based on the boy they saw - that was meant to help him deal with his severe emotional issues and help him deal with the recent losses of his grandmother, grandfather, and uncle. Not his mother, father, and uncle.

He was placed in Special Ed to make counseling and behavioral therapy available to him. But it was to no avail. Nobody understood him, the huge changes in his life, or his reluctance to lose the few friends he'd been making so he could go sit in those Special Ed classes. This new wrinkle in his life was pretty embarrassing to him, actually. But the only way out of the Special Ed system was to actually perform; improve his grades, improve his behaviors, and stop being depressed. A daunting task that Chris decided not to undertake. He'd deal with his losses and depression in his own way.

He now had a girlfriend to console him and keep him company. Her name was Dawn. She wasn't from the Special Ed class, but she would drop by the door every day. And when he saw her, he would simply leave the classroom and go hang out with his girlfriend.

Chris was lucky enough to have a committed and caring teacher in the Special Education unit. But he was already too far gone - and simply couldn't find his way back or trust adults enough to help him out with that.

Marie: That's too bad. It sounds like he's not headed anywhere good.

Sherry: Oh, he's not. In April of 1989, Chris attempted suicide. But, for all of his drug use, he hadn't really figured out the drug thing. According to the book, Anatomy of an Execution, he'd taken 30 Penicillin pills before calling 911.

Marie: Ooph. That's going to give him terrible stomach upset.

Sherry: Right. But it's not going to kill him.

His presenting problem was his impending stint at the local reform school. He'd already been there once - and he didn't want to go back. But he couldn't seem to stop breaking the law. Chris got a new diagnosis at this point. Now he had Anti-Social behaviors and was angry at his mother for being irresponsible, ignoring his cries for help, and not properly caring for him. In truth, his complaints about Margaret were spot on - but no one would listen to that; or even acknowledge all that had gone on in his life. They simply added another diagnosis to his record. And somehow it was Chris's problem that his mother denied her homosexuality.

Marie: Oh. Did he report it to someone?

Sherry: No. The psychologist somehow knew about her homosexuality and felt that Chris's sexual acting out with teenage girls was all about him not being able to handle his mother being a homosexual - because he never mentioned her homosexuality to the psychologist.

Marie: That's a big leap.

Sherry: It's a huge leap. And the other huge leap is - that's not his mother!

Marie: No.

Sherry: So...

Marie: Yeah. She's his biological mother - and now his custodial mother. But his emotional mother - the woman who raised him - was his grandmother.

Sherry: Right! And she's died and no one will allow him to grieve for the loss of his mother - his legal mother.

Marie: That's hard.

Sherry: It is.

So, Chris was essentially transferred from his month-long stay in the hospital to the reform school. He was to be at the reform school from May 15th to September 1st. Chris got worse - not better - after his release. But now Chris began to pursue those romantic interests. He reportedly would have intense sexual relationships with young girls. He realized he was just trying to get close to someone. He even told his psychologist this - but no one really seemed to hear him. And Chris had what felt like a little bit

of luck. He was lonely and he missed his hometown and he went to Thanksgiving dinner with his aunt and uncle back in his old hometown and (this is his mother's brother - his Uncle Herbert and his Aunt Brenda) and they invited him to live with them back in his hometown!

Marie: Oh, that might help!

Sherry: Yeah. He felt it was a fresh start, and it was exactly what he thought he needed. He could go to school in a school that didn't call him 'Special Ed' and 'Jailbird.'

Marie: That would probably help!

Sherry: Um-hmm. According to court documents, Chris moved in with his aunt and uncle in 1988. There are some source materials that indicate that this was 1990 - but the court records show that it was 1988. Chris – well, changing his name to Chris from Doug (remember, his name is Douglas Christopher) - as he returned to his place of happiness that he had called home for most of his life. He slowly came to understand the meaning behind the adage, 'You can never go home.'

Marie: Well, but he was going home.

Sherry: Yes. He did. But it was no longer home.

Marie: What do you mean?

Sherry: You can return to the place that you called home, but your life experiences will change you. So, when you return it will no longer feel like the home you left. And the home you held so dear.

Marie: I can see that.

Sherry: This was his fresh start - he thought he'd guaranteed success by returning to that safe place where he was loved and stable. But that was all different now. The people who had provided love and stability were largely gone. He'd changed - but the circumstances had changed, too.

At first everything seemed to be going well. His Aunt Brenda kept mostly to herself and his Uncle Herbert worked nights. Chris needed stability, boundaries, attention, and help with his grieving. This wasn't really happening for him here. Then Brenda allowed her 12-year-old niece, Lainey Marie Creech, to move in in July. He was soon back with the school counselor. They noted that this was a boy who was getting little support from home. This school also saw a hostile, aggressive boy who lacked impulse control and was self-destructive.

But the girls all saw a cute boy who liked sex and trouble. He had no problem getting girlfriends. So, now sex, drugs, alcohol, and small crimes and misdemeanors defined Chris's days. His aunt and his uncle told him they were going to send him back to his mom if he didn't knock it off.

Marie: I'm sure that really helped the abandonment issues.

Sherry: Right. And he didn't knock it off.

Chris had a penchant for stealing. Remember how his grandparents had been listed as his parents and how they formally adopted him? Chris had a small trust fund - because of the Social Security and the insurance his parents had left him with this tidy sum of insurance money - and he was getting those

monthly Social Security checks as their minor survivor. Despite that, when his tire on his Camaro blew out he stole a new one.

Marie: What's a Camaro?

Sherry: The Chevy Camaro was what all the cool kids liked to drive back in the 1970s and 80s. They weren't expensive, but they had powerful engines and a unique matchbox kind of look that really appealed to teenage boys.

Marie: How could Chris afford one?

Sherry: Well, the car was actually his Aunt Brenda's. She let him drive hers.

Marie: Hmm. But he was stealing, and robbing houses, and stealing a tire for his car.

Marie: But he had money?

Sherry: Yeah. Go figure.

Anyway, the theft of the tire was the last straw for his aunt and uncle. On July 17th, they told him his mom was coming to pick him up; they were done with him. So, he, a male cousin, and his then-girlfriend, Tracy, piled into the car and they all ran away from home. Tracy was splitting because Chris had asked her to - and her parents were pressuring her to break up with him (because they correctly thought he was bad news).

They decided to have a little fun so they headed to a local marina and stole a 42-foot boat to take it out for a spin. When they returned they spotted a car with its keys still inside. They really wanted to go to the Outer Banks, so they took the car and headed out. They did come back at one point - to try to get another girl to come along with them (I'm guessing the cousin was feeling like a third wheel). When she said no, they stole some gas and headed back to the Outer Banks for some sun and fun. Predictably, they were caught and arrested; and the North Carolina judge sentenced Chris to four years of Supervised Probation in North Carolina. The judge ordered him to stay in school, have a part-time job or participate in a school athletic program, and adhere to a curfew. He was to be home by 8 p.m. until 6 a.m. - 7 days a week - for the next 45 days. And, of course, he lost Tracy - her parents wisely set some strong boundaries where Chris was concerned. He was out of her picture.

He was sad, for maybe a minute. But he'd moved on to Jessica in the next minute. Well, the truth of the matter is he was already seeing Jessica on the side. I doubt he really cared at all. Relationships were always littered with other girls, to be honest.

Marie: Wow! So, did he end up living back in his mother's after that?

Sherry: Um. No. He was sent to his mother's house, but after a couple of days his aunt and uncle took him back in. They told him they'd give him yet another chance to straighten up.

Marie: Were there any consequences for his joyride with the boat and his theft of a car?

Sherry: No. None. Except for that being put on probation by the North Carolina courts. And the probation was to be handled through an Interstate Compact Agreement - but no one really followed through with anything the judge had ordered - as you'll see in a minute here.

(musical interlude)

Marie: So, Jessica.

Sherry: Um-hmm. Jessica was more than Chris could ever have dreamt of. The first time he saw her, she was 13 years old and driving her mother's convertible around town.

Marie: Wow! You can't even have a permit at that age.

Sherry: No. Her parents were pretty liberal, don't you think?

Marie: Um-hmm.

Sherry: Well, this gave her a ton of cool cards in his estimation. She was unusual - and not above breaking the law. Not only was she pretty, fun, rich (by his standards), didn't go to school from what he could see, and likable this girl had what other girls didn't. She had a big attitude and three bedrooms. This made her very attractive to Chris.

Marie: Three bedrooms? Why would that be attractive? It just sounds like a decorating nightmare. Did all the bedrooms have a bed?

Sherry: They weren't all in the same house. That's what made everything so great. Jessica had a bedroom at home, a bedroom at her grandparents' home, and yet another bedroom at her great-grandparents' home.

Marie: Wow! That's a lot of different places you can be. It would be easy to lose track of a girl with that many places she can sleep.

Sherry: And that's what Chris was counting on. Jessica was reported by the kids her age to not be an innocent child. Jessica - described as precocious and in control of their relationship - immediately engaged in a very connected very sexual relationship with Chris. For the first time in a long time Chris felt like he had hope for his future. He felt loved and said he belonged somewhere - with Jessica.

Marie: Oh, that's too bad.

Sherry: I think so, too. Anyway, her loose living arrangements - coupled with Chris's ability to easily sneak out each night - meant they could be together 24/7. Everyone thought Jessica was sleeping at someone else's house (just like you were saying). She was free to go out all night long. They could party and spend all of their time together. So, that's how they spent their summer.

Marie: How did Jessica's parents feel about Jessica and Chris? Did they even know?

Sherry: Her parents did know she was dating Chris. They were well aware of Chris before he ran off with Tracy and stole the car.

Marie: So, he was cheating with Jessica when he was still with Tracy?

Sherry: Um-hmm. Apparently so. Kathy told Jessica she needed to stay away from Chris after the car theft. Jessica wrote him myriad letters and was quickly back to seeing him on the sneak. But they got caught by her mom; hanging out at a local marina. Jessica insisted she was going to see him. Instead of enforcing her rule, that Jessica stay away from Chris, Kathy decided it must be fine; since Jessica was

already hanging out with him. So, she set some odd boundaries for the relationship. She told them they couldn't go for long rides together.

Marie: I wonder why she thought that was a good boundary.

Sherry: I'm not sure. But her mom had some real problems trying to set boundaries for this daughter of hers. She always undermined herself by letting Jessica do what she wanted. Her mom seemed too distracted by life to do much else. Her dad was stricter than her mother, but they were usually separated. So, Chris and Jessica had a fairly idyllic summer together - although it was sprinkled with several pregnancy scares.

Chris didn't follow the orders regarding his probation, either. He was always breaking curfew and he never really got a job (although he had a few false starts). When school started up, Chris didn't want to go, despite his probationary requirements. So, Jessica helped him navigate his way to online classes. He got himself suspended for a few days and then he started complaining about being bullied by the other kids at the school. Which seemed a little odd for a boy his age. And he suddenly developed respiratory problems; despite his smoking pot and tobacco. Given his poor performance, the reported bullying, and his newly developed disability the school gave him permission to leave the traditional program and join the online program that Jessica was in on October 22, 1990. This was really unusual back then - to be in online classes.

Marie: Yeah. That is very early for them to both be able to do online.

Sherry: That's very true. I think Jessica was encouraging this and kind of teaching him how to navigate it.

Marie: Yeah. But it really freed up their time, I'm sure.

Sherry: Oh, yes. Because he was really slow to enroll, so the assignments weren't exactly rolling in.

They spent their early days of fall fantasizing about being married and riding that roller coaster of pregnancy scares. But their cozy fantasy would be destroyed by a harsh reality - J.B. and Kathy were reconciling, and J.B. was insistent that 1) they all settle back into family mode (with Jessica living at home), and 2) Jessica needed to dial back her relationship with Chris. He was too old for her and had too many brushes with the law. But these parents are very inconsistent. Just like Chris's family was inconsistent. Brenda told Chris he was moving home when he stole that tire - and he ran away got into more trouble - and instead of sending him home, Brenda kept him there. And these parents seemed to have that same problem with consistency.

Marie: Yeah. That can be very confusing for a child, and doesn't really help reign in their behavior, because they know the rules - none of the rules - are solid.

Sherry: Right. And I think it kind of emboldens some of the kids who have decided that they like their, kind of, soap opera - One Tree Hill type of lifestyle. Jessica didn't want her freedom curtailed (as it always was when her parents reunited) and she did not want to lose Chris. Then the unthinkable happened. Chris's Aunt Brenda caught Jessica and Chris in a compromising position - in Chris's bedroom. I believe this was on the 2nd or 3rd of November. She sat them down to have a serious discussion with them.

Marie: Okay. Well, that sounds like good parenting.

Sherry: And, because Jessica was in the middle of yet another pregnancy scare, they also discussed how to get a home pregnancy test. But Aunt Brenda and her husband had made plans to go hunting in Roanoke for the next five days - so they left the teens at the kitchen table, asking Chris to be in charge of Laney. And then they left for a vacation.

Marie: That's the hard thing about parenting. It's often inconvenient, isn't it. I mean, you find a naked girl in your nephew's bedroom - a 14-year-old girl - and after a brief talk, you just go on vacation leaving Chris and Jessica, with your niece, alone for a week?

Sherry: I know. It was unbelievable to me.

Marie: Well, no wonder these kids are out of control not listening to anyone. No one is taking their issues seriously!

Sherry: I know, right? It was back to fun and games for these teens. But Jessica got some really good news. She was going to be the Poppy Queen at the Urbana Oyster Festival parade. That was going to be held on November 3rd. Jessica insisted that Chris be her chauffeur for this parade; snubbing her dad who wanted to be there for her. Jessica could be seen, seated in Chris's Chevy Camaro, waving to the crowds with Chris at her side. Her dad was also in the parade. He settled for chauffeuring one of her friends in the parade instead. Kathy filmed the occasion - including - Chris and Jessica's long deep kiss.

Marie: These parents are very confusing. If they wanted Jessica away from Chris, why in the world would they let her ride in a parade in his car? It just doesn't make sense.

Sherry: It doesn't make any sense at all. They are very confusing. Between how the household went from indulging to strict - depending on whether J.B. and Kathy were on the outs or back together - had to be confusing to begin with. That even when J.B. was home, the parents would say, 'No, you aren't seeing this boy anymore.' And then he's the escort for her in the parade; that's not consistent at all. And that Jessica had three places to sleep and no one really in charge of her is even more confusing. But here we are. Like all parents, J.B. and Kathy held dreams for their child and none of their dreams included an emotionally unstable boy with a criminal record. So things were kind of a mess.

After a fun-filled Oyster Festival weekend, Chris and Jessica began talking about marrying in earnest. In a curious twist of events, Jessica's great-grandmother encouraged this talk.

Marie: Well, I bet that made Chris's aunt and uncle mad when they found out.

Sherry: Well, remember, they weren't even home. They were on their vacation in Roanoke. But phone bills would later reveal that Chris and Jessica had used Aunt Brenda's phone on Tuesday, November 6th, to call around to different states; trying to find a State that would allow Jessica to marry without parental consent at the age of 14.

Marie: My goodness, when is her birthday? I thought she was 13.

Sherry: It's in July.

Marie: So, she was barely 14.

Sherry: Yes. She caught his eye when she was 13, and she turned 14 in July. And that's when they started their relationship in earnest.

Marie: Okay. Well, I can't believe that their Great-Grandma is helping them. It's almost like everyone is in league against the parents.

Sherry: I know. I was thinking the exact same thing. And this tacit support by her great-grandparents may have given these kids the wrong message. Because Jessica was wanting to get married at this point because by all reports she was thinking that being married transferred control of her from J.B. to Chris. She was enjoying the freedom availed to her when her parents were separated and she wanted the party to continue. By the Prosecutor's timeline, these kids were looking for a way to get married to avoid killing Jessica's parents. They'd drawn a line in the sand and pushed Jessica's parents over to the other side - and weirdly Great-Grandma had lined up behind them on the wrong side - not understanding that this had little to do with love and everything to do with agency and control.

Marie: That's sad.

Sherry: Um-hmm. It is. Because by supporting the notion that these two kids should be married, she unwittingly supported Jessica's thinking that she was entitled to her freedom. Jessica didn't seem to care if she would end up wearing white or black; either way she wasn't going back to being the kid who couldn't do as she pleased when she pleased.

(Musical interlude)

Sherry: That's all for today. We're editing Part 2 of this episode as fast as we can. It will be available by next Tuesday, at the latest. Stay tuned to hear what happens. Okay, here's a spoiler. Jessica wears white.

Marie: Nmmm. That may be a spoiler. But it's also a red herring. Why?

Sherry: I just don't want them to be depressed all week. (laughter)

Marie: Okay. Fair enough.

Well, next week we're going to cover the night of the murders, we will discuss the other potential murders that most people don't want to talk about, and we'll tell you what happened to Chris. And, finally, how the courts actually acknowledged that Chris's functional and legal mother was his biological grandmother - and how that doesn't actually help his case.

Sherry: We'd like to thank the Daily Press, findlaw.com, the book - Anatomy of an Execution by Todd C. Peppers and Laura Trevett Anderson - which is an excellent book you all should read it, Strange Encounters and True Crime videocast, Pacific News Service, and amnesty.org.

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

Sherry: See you next week. This has been the Parricide Podcast and remember...

Marie: ...always sleep with one eye open.

(musical outro) Ashes, ashes; We all fall down.