

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | LOST IN THE ASHES
S1E2 TRANSCRIPT

HUGH BERRYMAN: I've seen a lot of fire scenes and if you have someone that knows what they're doing, looking for remains... I hate to use it's impossible, but it's almost impossible to destroy a human body in a house fire. There's going to be bones, just pieces. There's going to be something left. Even when you cremate remains in a crematorium, at the end, there's bones left. The thing I was getting from the scene was the fact that they're finding, you know, a dog. They're finding food items, finding smaller animals. Should have been able to find these children if they'd been in that fire.

NARRATION:

ON A QUIET SUNDAY EVENING IN RURAL TENNESSEE, A FIRE RIPS THROUGH A MODEST FARMHOUSE. FOUR PEOPLE ARE REPORTED TO BE TRAPPED INSIDE: AN ELDERLY COUPLE AND THEIR TWO YOUNG GRANDCHILDREN. THE INFERNO RAGES LONG INTO THE NIGHT, AND FIREFIGHTERS CAN DO LITTLE TO SAVE THE STRUCTURE FROM BURNING TO ITS FOUNDATION. IN THE HOURS AND DAYS THAT FOLLOW, FORENSIC EXPERTS SIFT THROUGH THE BLACK ASH AND DEBRIS, SEARCHING FOR A CAUSE OF THE FIRE AND THE REMAINS OF THE FAMILY THAT LIVED THERE. BUT IT'S WHAT THEY DON'T FIND THAT TURNS THIS TRAGEDY INTO A HAUNTING AND PAINFUL MYSTERY.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "LOST IN THE ASHES."

CHERYL DANIEL: September 23rd, 2012 was the day that it actually happened. I was at my house in Shelbyville. I was asleep, and my sister and new brother-in-law came and knocked on the door and woke me up and told me that the house was on fire.

NARRATION:

45-YEAR-OLD CHERYL DANIEL BOLTS OUT OF BED. THE HOUSE THAT'S ON FIRE BELONGS TO CHERYL'S MOTHER MOLLIE, AND STEPFATHER ALBERT MCCLARAN, WHO'S KNOWN FONDLY AS BUBBA. IT'S ALSO HOME TO CHERYL'S TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, NINE-YEAR-OLD CHLOIE AND SEVEN-YEAR-OLD GAGE.

CHERYL DANIEL: It was like, oh, God, you know. My babies, Mama, Bubba. I got real shook up. I was trying to put my clothes on. My sister had to come and join and helped me get my clothes on because I couldn't really get in 'em. And then when I got out there, there's no fire hydrants out there. So, the firemen were having to bring water in to help put the fire out. I can remember walking around the fire, looking for a way in, you know, and the worst feeling of it all was not being able to help them. And... shock. It was shock.

NARRATION:

THE FARMHOUSE IS IN A RURAL PART OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE, JUST AN HOUR SOUTH OF NASHVILLE. AS PLUMES OF SMOKE DRIFT ACROSS THE MOONLIT HILLS, CHERYL WATCHES THE CHAOTIC SCENE IN HORROR, KNOWING HER PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE INSIDE. CHERYL'S SISTER, PAM LEVERETTE, IS WITH HER.

PAM LEVERETTE: The house was just completely engulfed. It was a shocking sight. It's like your world just turns upside down and... you know, it's like something that you see in horror movies. But you don't really expect it to ever be a part of your life. You don't think that it's really real and things like that can

happen but it has to us. And you felt helpless, hopeless.

NARRATION:

IT ISN'T LONG BEFORE CHERYL GETS THE DEVASTATING NEWS THAT NO ONE HAS MADE IT OUT OF THE FIRE ALIVE. AS DAY BREAKS OVER THE SMOLDERING SCENE, A TEAM OF INVESTIGATORS CALLED FROM DIFFERENT LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL AGENCIES BEGINS THE TASK OF RECOVERING THE REMAINS OF MOLLIE, BUBBA, CHLOIE AND GAGE.

CHERYL DANIEL: Chloe, the last time I seen her she was nine years old. She has... a sweet child, very sweet, has a big heart. Her eyes are piercing blue. The color of the sky, real long eyelashes. Just always wanting to be involved, always busy doing something. She loved life. I was told I could never have children, so when I was pregnant with Chloe I was a little bit in shock. It was a blessing. You know, her dad, he had passed away, too. So, you know, we were really what she knew, what she had. Gage, he was seven at the time. He had light brown hair, hazel eyes, you know, and he had some disabilities. He had the... they call it the Daniel Walker syndrome which controls your motor skills and your speech. He was a good-hearted little boy, just precious, sweet, kind, you know. He surrounded his life around Bubba, his granddad. Always asking questions, always involved, just loving. They both had really, really good hearts.

NARRATION:

INVESTIGATORS SIFT THROUGH WHAT'S LEFT OF THE TWO-THOUSAND SQUARE FOOT HOME. IT WAS A SINGLE LEVEL RANCH STYLE HOUSE WITH FOUR BEDROOMS, THREE BATHROOMS, AND A FULL-SIZED BASEMENT.

CHERYL DANIEL: They found Mollie and Bubba in the basement because the top floor of the house had caved in from the fire into the basement. They found about everything of them except, you know, some of it maybe was not together. But they found their torso. They found his skull, his arms. You know, they say that Bubba was pretty smashed up, you know, so they couldn't really tell what had happened. He was, like, underneath his bedroom, where it would have been. Now this is what we're all kind of baffled about. Him and Mama did not sleep in the same room. And Mollie's room was, I say, a good 20, 30 feet away from him, but they found them side by side in the basement.

NARRATION:

AT THE TIME OF THE FIRE, MOLLIE AND BUBBA HAVE CUSTODY OF CHLOIE AND GAGE, WHILE CHERYL STRUGGLES WITH RECOVERY FROM DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION.

CHERYL DANIEL: I was 45 years old. I had moved away from Momma and Bubba. I was living in town. I had had some issues as far as mental and addiction, I'm not gonna lie. And they were taking care of Chloe and Gage. But I was still in their lives. They had just been with me the weekend before and I had just talked to Mama the night before it happened.

PAM LEVERETTE: Cheryl, my sister, she has loved those children before they were ever, ever come into the world. She loved them and she was the best mother she could be to them. She had some rough times and went through some rough days, but just for herself personally, and she did what she thought was best for her children. I remember her telling me, after this had happened, "I thought they were at the safest place they could have ever been was with Mama and Bubba," and, I know she probably has a lot of regret, and guilt, and a lot of what ifs.

NARRATION:

AFTER HOURS OF SEARCHING THROUGH BLACKENED RUBBLE, THERE'S STILL NO SIGN OF CHLOIE AND GAGE'S REMAINS. SOME SMALL BONES ARE UNCOVERED, WHICH ARE FIRST THOUGHT TO BELONG TO THE CHILDREN, BUT THEY'RE QUICKLY CONFIRMED TO BE FROM THE MCCLARAN'S PET POODLE AND A COCKATOO, WHICH ALSO PERISHED IN THE FIRE. SINCE THE CHILDREN WERE LAST SEEN AT THE HOUSE, PLAYING IN THE YARD AT AROUND 6:30PM, INVESTIGATORS ASSUME THEY MUST HAVE BEEN IN THE HOUSE AT THE TIME OF THE FIRE, WHICH STARTED AROUND 9:30 OR 10 THAT NIGHT. COULD THE CHILDREN SOMEHOW HAVE ESCAPED THE FIRE AND RUN AWAY FROM THE SCENE?

CHERYL DANIEL: The search started Monday morning after, you know, the fire had kind of calmed down and put out, they started, you know, looking through the rubble and stuff. And from that time on, they had people working day and night searching the fields. Helicopters came in. Cadaver dogs came in. Hound dogs came in. People on foot, you know, searching the area, searching the cars, old houses, whatever they could find out there around rover that they thought they may have, you know, ran off or, you know, tried to hide to get away from the fire. I kept telling my brother and my family, I said, "they're alive. I can feel them. They're alive." And they were like, "well, you know, honey, no. They're not. You know, that's a mother's wishful thinking," but I could feel. I could feel that they were alive. I just didn't know where they were at.

HUGH BERRYMAN: My first communications at the scene was a description of what they had, was a house fire with two elderly people that had lived there and two children.

NARRATION:

DR. HUGH BERRYMAN IS A PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE FORENSIC INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION AT MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY IN NEARBY MURFREESBORO.

HUGH BERRYMAN: I'm a board-certified forensic anthropologist. There's not a large number of us in the country. Right now, there are around 100 that are board certified. And, what a forensic anthropologist does is we assist law enforcement and medical examiners in the recovery of human remains, usually skeletal, and in the identification and analysis of the skeletal remains. We developed the Forensic Anthropology Search and Recovery Team. This is a student team of 15 incredibly good students, trained to work crime scenes. And this is one of the few, or maybe the only place in the country, that would work with the undergraduate students, that would actually go out and help process scenes and work with the medical examiner's office.

NARRATION:

THE LEAD AGENCY INVESTIGATING THE MCCLARAN FIRE IS THE TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, OR TBI. WHEN THE SEARCH FOR THE REMAINS OF CHLOIE AND GAGE COMES UP EMPTY, THE TBI TURNS TO DR. BERRYMAN AND HIS TEAM OF STUDENTS TO PERFORM A DEFINITIVE SCIENTIFIC SEARCH OF THE RUBBLE. THEY CONSIDER AN INTRIGUING THEORY: THAT BUBBA AND MOLLIE MIGHT HAVE HELD THEIR GRANDCHILDREN CLOSE AS THE FIRE OVERTOOK THE HOUSE, AND CHLOIE AND GAGE'S REMAINS WERE POSSIBLY MIXED IN WITH THEIR GRANDPARENTS.

HUGH BERRYMAN: Actually, that first day, students were asked to look at the remains in the body bag because there looked like a third remain. And I think they were hoping this could be one of the children. And as they looked at it, they found that the overall shape of what they were seeing looked like it may have been a dog. Bones that were exposed were not human, and they actually found bits of fur. So, they can eliminate that. A lot of times it's very, very difficult, when you get certain things in a fire, it just looks

like bone and it's not bone. And so that can be confusing.

NARRATION:

DR. BERRYMAN'S TEAM OF FORENSIC STUDENTS CONDUCTS A PAINSTAKING EXAMINATION OF EVERY INCH OF THE RUBBLE LEFT FROM THE FIRE.

HUGH BERRYMAN: We lined up one arm length apart and you have someone calling step, and they'll say step, the students take a step. And they look at everything in front of them. And their field of view overlaps the students on each side of them. And so, you double look at areas and they'll take another step and sometimes we actually, we go in one direction and then we search again from 90 degrees to that. So, we kind of criss-cross the scene. And we're looking for bone, but you know house fires... it's been my experience that most house fires, people think that the bodies just burn up and that's not been my experience.

HUGH BERRYMAN: There's a certain pattern when a body burns, and they tend to all go through that same pattern, and it's when we don't see those patterns that we begin to ask questions as, why are we not seeing what we normally see? There are things we know are going to happen when a body burns. There's something called a pugilistic posture. Pugilism is a term from boxing. And what this means is the muscles, as they begin to shrink from the heat, deltoid and the shoulder, anterior and lateral deltoids are bigger than posterior deltoid. And as they shrink, the arms will tend to move forward or flex from the body and move forward. Biceps is larger than triceps. When it shrinks, it will overpower triceps and the arm will bend at the elbow. The arms will come up so the hands are in front of the face and it looks like a boxer, a pugilistic pose that you see in boxing.

NARRATION:

THE FIRE WAS MASSIVE, TORCHING EVERYTHING IN THE HOUSE. THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE CRUMBLED TO ITS FOUNDATION, AND SOME SAY THAT THE HEAT GENERATED BY THE FIRE REACHED TEMPERATURES OVER 1500 DEGREES. WAS THAT ENOUGH TO INCINERATE ANY REMAINS OF THE CHILDREN SO THEY COULD NEVER BE LOCATED?

HUGH BERRYMAN: If you have someone that knows what they're doing, looking for remains, I could say it's... I hate to use "it's impossible," but it's almost impossible to destroy a human body in a house fire. There's going to be bones, even if they're calcite bones, just pieces. There's going to be something left. Beyond the two bodies that were found previously, my team did not find any additional human remains. I kept thinking these kids, if they're not in the fire, they have to be somewhere. So, why didn't we find them in the fire if they had been in the fire? And a lot of effort was made searching that scene. It's always been kind of a concern. It's always in the back. It's been in the back of my mind ever since then is, I do wonder what happened.

NEWS REPORT: For five days forensic anthropologists from MTSU and the University of Tennessee sifted through the debris. They found Mollie McClaran, Bubba McClaran. They found a pet dog, a bird, but no signs of the children.

CHERYL DANIEL: Everybody had their opinions, you know, different opinions of whether they, you know, they'd turn to ashes. You know, they had found Mollie and Bubba's bodies, and a cockatoo bird and a miniature poodle. But they had not found anything of Chloe or Gage. And they brought in different people to help. Forensics, FBI, ATF. I think the cadaver dogs came from the World Trade Center, from the bombing. And, they finally come to the conclusion that they were not in the house fire. I was ecstatic. I was happy because I thought, yes, they're alive. Yes, they're gonna find them. They know that

they are out there. They couldn't have gotten too far. You know, somebody had to have seen them. I'm hoping that they will be found, and that they will be brought home.

PAM LEVERETTE: At the time, you know, we just maybe thought it was an innocent fire. TBI came over. They were talking to us, asking us questions. And they told us, "we do not believe the children were in the fire. We're not able to find any remains of them." And I remember sitting there and looking at them, and thinking, this is just all changed, everything is changed. And I remember asking them, "Do you realize what you're saying to us, at this point? This has gone from being just a house fire to possibly murder, and then our, you know, our children have been taken." And they just looked at us and they're like, "Yes, ma'am. We do not believe the children were in the fire."

NARRATION:

NOW, WHAT STARTED AS A HOUSE FIRE BECOMES A DIFFERENT KIND OF INVESTIGATION. WAS THE FIRE AN ACCIDENT? OR WAS IT INTENTIONALLY SET? AND WHERE ARE CHLOIE AND GAGE?

PAM LEVERETTE: A lot of speculation is what could have happened. What could have happened to two small children living in a rural area, where you would have to know they were there to know they were there. You know, it was in the middle of nowhere. It just seemed as though, if someone did take them, they knew them. And they knew where to find them to take them.

CHERYL DANIEL: I look at the rubble, and it's just I get angry. I have a lot of heartache. There's so many different emotions that go through my mind and my body. It's unreal. It's a lot of anger, you know, because who done this? Why would they do this? And hurt. You know, they took our parents. They took my children. Just a lot of different emotions.

NARRATION:

FACING A POSSIBLE CASE OF CHILD ABDUCTION, INVESTIGATORS MUST FIRST ELIMINATE OBVIOUS SUSPECTS, STARTING WITH CHERYL HERSELF.

CHERYL DANIEL: They had polygraphed me to eliminate me from being a suspect. They said that is, by law, they have to do that to call in the Amber Alerts. It was heartbreaking because of the circumstance. But I also knew that, you know, I had no involvement in it. But if I could help them, I'd be glad to take it because if I could, they could ask a question that maybe I could answer to help them find Chloe and Gage. I was, I mean it was fine, but I just took it as something they had to do and if it could help them, I would, you know, I would do it.

NEWS REPORT: Helicopters equipped with infrared cameras found no sign of the children in surrounding woods either. Did someone take them? The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation issued an Amber Alert Friday night calling the missing children 'endangered.' Authorities don't know what caused the fire, adding to the mystery.

NARRATION:

AS A SEARCH FOR CHLOIE AND GAGE INTENSIFIES, INVESTIGATORS TRY TO DETERMINE THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE, AND WHETHER IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, OR INTENTIONALLY SET.

MICHAEL KNIGHT: I'm Michael Knight, I'm the Program Manager for the Office of Public and Government Affairs for ATF Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

NARRATION:

MICHAEL KNIGHT HAS WORKED WITH THE FEDERAL AGENCY FOR 30 YEARS. ONE OF HIS BIGGEST CASES WAS THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING IN APRIL 1995. THAT INVESTIGATION LASTED SEVERAL YEARS AND INVOLVED A MASSIVE RECOVERY OF HUMAN REMAINS, INCLUDING MANY CHILDREN. A HOUSE FIRE IN RURAL TENNESSEE SHOULD BE A RELATIVELY SIMPLE CASE FOR KNIGHT AND HIS TEAM OF INVESTIGATORS.

MICHAEL KNIGHT: ATF was brought in fairly early in the investigation. We want to get out there as soon as possible for the preservation of any items that are collected. We don't know at that particular time, if it's criminal or non-criminal. When you first arrive, it's a rural area. And you see devastation. You could tell that there was some type of fire slash explosion that occurred. We didn't know at the particular time anything about the family. But they have lost everything. Not only are you looking at it from a standpoint of a fire scene, but that some family lost everything. And initially, when you come out to a scene, you very easily can have over 100 leads within the first five minutes. And those leads would include obtaining footage of any public safety vehicles, 911 calls, witness interviews, the type of scene, you know, what did the scene look like? Was it still smoldering? Was there an odor, aroma, to the scene? And what type it was? What type of smoke, what color smoke? Did the individuals hear a loud boom or a bang? Or was it just a smoldering fire? Are there any trends or tracks that we need to look at? I mean, has there ever been a serial arsonist in that particular area?

MICHAEL KNIGHT: And so, we look at it from all points. So, we have a dozen or so folks on site. And then we have numerous other resources off site that are still participating in assisting with the investigation. So, we are methodically processing that scene. And we're looking at it to determine what is the origin and the cause? You know, where did the fire begin? Every piece of item that was charred or burned was sifted. And when we're sifting those items, we're looking for anything out of the norm. Was there anything that we potentially could find that would indicate an intentionally set fire?

NARRATION: MICHAEL KNIGHT'S TEAM FOCUSES ON DOZENS OF EMPTY PROPANE GAS TANKS FOUND TORCHED IN THE RUBBLE.

MICHAEL KNIGHT: Would a propane tank start a fire? That's the first question that's asked. Did the propane tank start the fire? Or were they, after the fire started, an additional cause to adding more fuel load to the fire? Did these tanks belong there? Or were they brought there prior to the fire? So those are things that we look at. We can't necessarily rule those out. But we have to look at, was it a cause of a fire or was it as a result of the fire that they were consumed or they expelled some gas?

CHERYL DANIEL: Bubba did have propane tanks in the basement. He had had those since I was nine years old, which was probably 38 years, 35 years, they had been down there, nothing had ever happened with them.

NARRATION:

THE ATF ULTIMATELY CONCLUDES THE PROPANE TANKS CANNOT BE RULED OUT AS THE SOURCE OF THE FIRE, BUT THERE'S ALSO NO EVIDENCE THAT THEY SPARKED THE FATAL BLAZE.

CHERYL DANIEL: My theory is it was arson. They said that the fire had aired and vented through the door that was left open in the basement. I had to read that a couple of times because I was like, wait a minute. So, the basement door was open. They knew this, the investigators did. Bubba was adamant about, every night, checking to make sure that basement door was locked before he went to bed, every

night. That was his routine, his habit, because that's where he kept his tools. And somebody had to have opened that door to let it vent. And that was, you know, an eye opener for me. So, you know, I believe was arson. And because of everything that's happened with Chloe and Gage being missing and not being in that house fire, it was intentional.

MICHAEL KNIGHT: You can look at different aspects of this particular fire scene and go one direction or another direction. From our standpoint, that case is still open. We're always looking for additional information that could lead, not only to the fire itself, but to the big picture of the investigation. The criminal element has not been ruled out, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is a main priority of factor that we're looking at. Sometimes fire scenes, there's just not enough information at that given moment to make an exact determination.

NARRATION:

THE ANSWER TO HOW THE FIRE STARTED, AND WHAT HAPPENED THAT SEPTEMBER EVENING, ELUDES EVEN THE BEST TRAINED FIRE INVESTIGATORS IN THE COUNTRY. WAS IT ARSON? AND IF IT WAS, WHO SET THE FIRE? AND WHERE ARE THE MISSING CHILDREN?

WHEN THE SEARCH FOR CHLOIE AND GAGE REVEALS NOT ONE CLUE TO THEIR DISAPPEARANCE, THEIR AUNT, PAM LEVERETTE, BECOMES CONVINCED THIS IS A CASE OF ARSON AND KIDNAPPING.

PAM LEVERETTE: Everything that I have learned from the TBI, and with the children being missing, I just feel like someone has intentionally set the house on fire or did harm, or death, to my parents and taking the children, at this point. I think that someone had probably thought about it for a while and then just probably acted on it. I don't know who or why anyone would want to. Bubba and Mollie were very good people. They would you know, do anything for you. They had good friends. They'd lived there, you know, in the community and in that home forever, and I just cannot imagine anyone wanting to harm children. But I believe, 100% in my heart, that someone did do this.

CHERYL DANIEL: Somebody had to intentionally start that fire because why would they found my mom and dad and not my children? Why would my children be gone? You know, because if it had started on its own, you know, if Chloe and Gage, if they had even got out of the house, they would have been around there somewhere. And then when they seen me, seen us pull up, the family, they would have came out.

NARRATION:

INVESTIGATORS CAN'T CONFIRM WHETHER BUBBA AND MOLLIE WERE ALIVE OR DEAD WHEN THE FIRE ENGULFED THEIR HOUSE, LEADING CHERYL TO A CHILLING CONCLUSION.

CHERYL DANIEL: There is no way that anyone would have been able to have taken them children, taken Chloe and Gage out of their house, unless they had killed Mama and Bubba to get them. Because they would have put up a fight. They would have died fighting to save them children. I believe that someone went in. I believe that they had planned this out, and that they had went into Mama and Bubba's home, or maybe they let 'em in. They would have went to Bubba's room first, because he would have been the strongest and dominant one, and you know, took him out, and then Mama. And then took Chloe and Gage out of the house because they, you know, I've been told they maybe they had mercy on their hearts. They didn't want to hurt Chloe and Gage or... Basically in a small, short version, I believe somebody went in and killed my parents, took my children, and burnt the house down to cover up the

evidence.

NARRATION:

THE WAY THE CHILDREN DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE LEADS CHERYL TO BELIEVE THEIR ABDUCTOR WAS SOMEONE CLOSE TO THE FAMILY.

CHERYL DANIEL: If they would have known the person, they would have went with them, either by force or by themselves. We really don't know, you know, what action was taken first to take them, you know, Mama and Bubba, or anything so that just kind of stuck out, too.

NARRATION:

FOR CHERYL, THE ONLY MOTIVE SHE CAN IMAGINE FOR THIS HORRIFIC CRIME IS MONEY. HER PARENTS, MOLLIE AND BUBBA, HAD RECENTLY MADE A CHANGE TO THEIR WILL. THE NEW WILL WAS SUPPOSED TO BE IN THEIR SAFE, BUT THE SAFE WAS MISSING FROM THE HOUSE AFTER THE FIRE.

CHERYL DANIEL: Mama and Bubba had gone and changed the will to where Chloe and Gage would get everything, and they had just done that, like, a month or two before the fire. Bubba had put it in his safe. So that became an issue there, of trying to find it. So, we knew the one, you know, in the safe, you know of course, that was gone so that you'd have to go back to the old will.

NARRATION:

CHERYL ALSO BELIEVES THAT SOMEONE WORKED TO OBSTRUCT THE SEARCH FOR HER MISSING CHILDREN.

CHERYL DANIEL: We would hang up the pictures of Chloe and Gage after they went missing with their information and someone was going around pulling them down.

NARRATION:

SIGHTINGS OF THE CHILDREN ARE REPORTED FROM TENNESSEE, CALIFORNIA, NEW YORK, MONTANA, COLORADO, AND EVEN COSTA RICA. BUT NONE LEADS TO THE RETURN OF CHLOIE AND GAGE. MONTHS INTO THE SEARCH, THE PROSPECTS OF EVER FINDING THE CHILDREN LOOK BLEAK, UNTIL A RANDOM SIGHTING CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR CHERYL. A CUSTOMER AT A DINER SPOTS A YOUNG GIRL SHE THINKS FITS CHLOIE'S DESCRIPTION. SHE'S SO CONVINCED, SHE PULLS OUT HER CAMERA AND SNAPS A FEW PHOTOS.

CHERYL DANIEL: There was a tip that was here in Tennessee. It was February 2013 that the investigators had, that they showed me. A lady who was eating at the restaurant and had seen the story and had seen their missing pictures and took the pictures. She took several and sent them to the investigators. You know, I had looked at a lot of pictures in between this time, but I know this was Chloe. I mean, I know my child. I know it was her. They did, too. They believed that it was her. It was in a Ma and Pop restaurant in a town in Tennessee. When someone sends in a tip, the investigators ought to be able to go right then and get them but it doesn't work that way. These people were traveling, they paid by cash. There's no tracing them. There's no cameras in the Ma and Pop shop, or outside of the shop to, you know, get the license tags or anything like that. So, I've learnt to tell people you know, if you see them, call 911 right then and get the investigators involved then instead of, you know, waiting, you know, to send 'em in or whatever, which she could have sent them in right then but by the time they got there, they were gone.

NARRATION:

WHILE STRUGGLING WITH THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CHLOIE AND GAGE, CHERYL CONFRONTED ANOTHER DEMON IN HER LIFE: DRUG ADDICTION. NOW IN FULL RECOVERY, SHE'S TURNED HER LIFE AROUND SO SHE CAN BE READY AND HEALTHY FOR HER CHILDREN'S LONG HOPED FOR RETURN. TODAY, SHE'S A CERTIFIED PEER RECOVERY SPECIALIST, HELPING OTHERS WITH ADDICTION AND MENTAL ILLNESS. SHE ALSO MANAGES A SOBER LIVING FACILITY IN TENNESSEE.

CHERYL DANIEL: It's taken me years. It's taken a lot of soul searching, a lot of time, a lot of praying, a lot of different emotions. A lot of anger, a lot of crying, a lot of tears, a lot of everything. But I had to. I had to find peace. And that's how I did it.

PAM LEVERETTE: I know that every day she has come to be sober and drug free in the last couple of years has been for those children. It's the love that she has for those children. And like I've told her, God always has perfect timing. And I know, without a shadow of doubt, that first of all, he had to get Cheryl ready as a mother to come, for those children to come home to, and she's ready. She has done everything in her power. Her love for them has overly exceeded becoming the person that she is today and being ready and able to be the perfect mother when they do come home.

NARRATION:

NEARLY A DECADE LATER, THE MYSTERY OF WHAT HAPPENED TO CHLOIE AND GAGE CONTINUES TO BAFLE AUTHORITIES. BUT AGENCIES LIKE THE TBI AND THE ATF HAVE KEPT THE CASE OPEN AND HAVE PRESERVED MANY ITEMS AND EVIDENCE RECOVERED FROM THE FIRE SCENE.

MICHAEL KNIGHT: We keep these cases open in case there is something that's found from a technical side, or from a human interview, or information that's brought forth. In technology, you know, this year, next year may produce something that can solve it. And that's why, when we have evidence, if there is something, a new technology, or new piece of information that we can combine with the items that we collected, that's always very, very paramount. When a case is open, most of those items are still saved because they could be utilized down the road.

NARRATION:

AGE PROGRESSIONS OF CHLOIE AND GAGE ARE UPDATED EVERY FEW YEARS. FOR CHERYL, IT'S THE ONLY WAY SHE CAN WATCH HER CHILDREN GROW UP.

CHERYL DANIEL: You know, it's overwhelming. These are my babies. And then it's like, well do they look like this? Or, you know, do they not look like this? And then I look at their eyes and you know, Chloe, her eyes are so distinctive that, you know, it's unreal, and little Gagie. It's hard. Because you don't know. Chloe would be graduating, and Gage would be a sophomore. So, you know, I think about prom and graduation and stuff like that too and, little Gagie. He's probably tall. I call him Gagie, he's little, but he was at the time, but his dad's, like, six foot, so I'm saying Gagie may be six foot. Chloe, bless her heart, she's just gonna be short. She ain't gonna have no choice, I don't think.

CHERYL DANIEL: I do not want them to be forgotten. As long as I live, I won't let them be forgotten. I have a Facebook page. It's "Always Searching, Not Forgotten" is the title of it, for Chloe and Gage. I do whatever I can to keep their story out there and their pictures out there. You know, and Mama and Bubba, we want justice for them, too. Their lives were taken way too soon from us and Bubba... I have a hard time with him being gone. I just try to adjust the best I can. I have never given up hope and I never will. I have days to where it's like, will this ever end? Will I ever find them? Will they ever come home?

But I've laid it at the Lord's feet and I feel like, in his time, the truth will be brought to light and we will know. Either way they come home, whether here on Earth to me, or in heaven, I will get to see my children again.

NARRATION:

TO SEE THE LATEST AGE PROGRESSION PHOTOS OF CHLOIE AND GAGE, OR IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR DISAPPEARANCE, GO TO [UNSOLVED.COM](https://www.unsigned.com) OR EMAIL THE TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION AT TIPSTOTBI@TN.GOV.

NEXT ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

34:17

CARLOS AMAYA: Has he done this to someone else? I don't know. But he's out there. And that's the reality. I mean, this person could be looking at me and my family every day. And just kind of "oh, I got away with it." It could be someone right down the street. Or someone I may know. He could be right under my nose.

34:39

NARRATION: Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13. It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran. Produced by Lloyd Lochridge, Christine Lenig, Courtney Ennis, and Paige Hymson. The Story Producer for this episode was Cynthia Bowles, and it was edited by Paul Yates. From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil, Andy Jaskiewicz and Bill Schultz. Production support by Sean Cherry and Ian Mandt. Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay. Publicity by Josefina Francis and Hillary Schupf. The original theme music was composed by Gary Malkin and Michael Boyd.

THANKS FOR LISTENING TO EPISODE 2 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.