

MYSTERY AT MOUNT NEMO – WIRED FOR SOUND (PART 2)

DETECTIVE'S PERSEVERANCE UNCOVERS THE TRUTH, WRITES STEPHEN METELSKY



STEPHEN METELSKY
Column

"That blew the investigation open," said Det. Chris Clarke, who steadfastly believed Angie Pauls' death was not an accident on Nov. 23, 2003, when she fell from Mount Nemo.

In the weeks since the incident, it was initially believed to be "an accident,"

Clarke had convinced the homicide unit that Pauls' death was likely a result of foul play at the hands of her partner, Milorad Polimac, after Clarke learned of damning evidence from the fire captain who responded to the call that tragic day.

That evidence involved Pauls' face being covered up with a sweatshirt after she had fallen 70 feet near a path featuring signs warning hikers of the dangerous terrain.

"You just don't cover someone's face with a sweat-



shirt. They're already dead," said Clarke. "He (Polimac) covered her (Pauls) face. You only cover someone's face if they are dead, and (Polimac) said she was alive."

This was the detective's theory; one that required tangible evidence to form reasonable and probable grounds to prove Polimac was responsible for his wife's death.

"It was a homicide investigation now," recalled Clarke. "The case was getting bigger and bigger."

It became a homicide investigation due to the legwork of the detective. He had finally convinced all the naysayers who doubted his "gut feeling" that this was a homicide from Day 1.

The homicide team transitioned to the major case management model with investigators being seconded from the major incident response team (MIRT).

Clarke recalled that difficult first meeting — the coroner's conference. It was to discuss the exhumation of Pauls' body for a forensic ex-

amination, the same exam Clarke had adamantly suggested the day after Pauls' death — on Nov. 24, 2003.

"If we exhume the body and do a forensic examination, will we be able to tell if Angie Pauls was able to speak or not?" asked Clarke, in reference to establishing whether Pauls would have had the ability to speak after a horrendous fall and sustaining the life-threatening injuries she succumbed to.

"No," was the response Clarke received during the coroner's conference.

"What's the point then?" Clarke responded. The detective was now against exhuming Pauls' body if it could not unequivocally establish that key piece of physical evidence. Clarke also had the victim's family on his mind.

"If we exhume her, we will be upsetting the family and not getting any evidence out of it," Clarke said during the conference.

The detective's point was quashed and Pauls' body was exhumed. The forensic post-mortem examination determined the cause of death was due to a severed spine.

Meanwhile, the file morphed into a Part 6 wire investigation.

Part 6 wires pertain to listening devices installed after authorization is received from a judge, giving police legal authority to surreptitiously break into the



Diane Burgess photo

What was initially thought to be an accident at Mount Nemo was later found to be a murder.

home of Polimac to install hidden wires. A team of investigators from Niagara police were enlisted to do that covert work.

"We had 19 wires up and lines everywhere," Clarke remembered.

Police had wired up the inside of Polimac's home and his cellphone. They even had a microphone installed at Pauls' grave. It captured some disturbing evidence when the surveillance team discreetly followed Polimac to the cemetery during the investigation.

"He went to the grave and swore at her and called her a wh-e," Clarke said of the wiretapped evidence.

It wasn't standalone evidence to convict someone for murder. It was circumstantial but shed light on Polimac's moral character. Polimac had also wanted his wife cremated immediately after her death — another potential red flag.

Polimac began to "act suspiciously" during the investigation. He was under constant surveillance. It prompted investigators to reference Polimac as "heat conscious" — a term police use to describe someone who drives erratically to evade being followed.

Polimac had also resorted to making all his phone calls from one phone booth. Police had that wired up for sound too.

Half a year into the investigation, there was one last wire to install as investigators closed in, and it directly involved Chris Clarke. Once the homicide team amassed enough evidence to arrest Polimac, they chose the detective to make the arrest. Clarke's bulldogged dedication to the file had paid off — and this was his reward.

That last wire was going to be attached to Clarke and used to record Polimac's arrest.

"They were going to wire

me up. I practised the night before in the mirror. I was nervous," said Clarke.

In November 2006, Polimac, then 56, was convicted of first-degree murder by Justice Bonnie Wein in an Ontario Court of Justice.

In 2010, Polimac's appeal was denied. He is not eligible for parole until 2031.

Years after the case, Clarke was at Joseph Brant Hospital after the birth of his child. The doctor on rounds that day was the very same coroner the detective tried to initially convince that Pauls' death was a homicide. The doctor shook the detective's hand.

"Chris Clarke. I should have listened to you that day," the doctor reportedly told the detective.

The Polimac case prompted the provincial coroner's office to update their sudden death policies involving all cases where the deceased person is found by their partner. These cases must include considerations for forensic post-mortem examinations.

Correctional Services Canada confirmed Polimac is still serving his sentence at an undisclosed jail in Canada.

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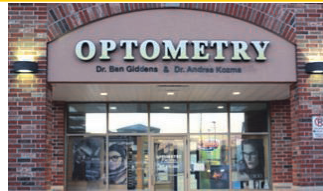
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