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## **Episode 201: The Tylenol Murders**

### **Air Date: November 18, 2022**

**Stacy St. Clair:** So Adam Janus had taken the day off. He had run some errands with his wife and his young son, and then he had gone to the local preschool to pick up his daughter around lunchtime. And on the way home, he stopped at a grocery store. And he picked steaks and some fresh cut lilies, and he went home, put the groceries away, told his wife he was gonna lay down for a little bit. He went into the bathroom and walked out of the bathroom clutching his chest. And his wife called some neighbors for help. She didn't speak much English. They were both Polish immigrants. And when the paramedics arrived, they were stunned because here was this very healthy, very strong man who had just collapsed out of nowhere.

[moody music]

[as narrator]

**Phoebe Judge:** On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Adam Janus was taken to Northwest Community Hospital in Arlington Heights, Illinois, outside Chicago. Shortly after he arrived, he was pronounced dead at 3:15. The doctor who had worked on Adam, Dr. Thomas Kim, broke the news to Adam's family who had gathered at the hospital.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And Dr. Kim told them that they didn't have an explanation that it was probably either a stroke or a heart attack, but there was going to need to be more investigation by the medical examiner and the pathologist.

**Phoebe Judge:** We're hearing from Stacy St. Clair, an investigative reporter for *The Chicago Tribune*. The Janus family, including Adam's brother, Stanley and Stanley's wife Theresa went back to Adam's house. When they got there, Stanley said he had a headache and went into the bathroom.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And then Stanley collapsed in the living room and started having the same symptoms that his brother had — the breathing was very rapid and shallow, and the eyes were fixed and dilated as if they were being suffocated by some kind of invisible force. The paramedics, they arrived very quickly. It was the same paramedic crew that had tried to save Adam. And while they were treating Stanley, Theresa collapsed. And when the paramedics and firefighters turned her over, they saw that her eyes were fixed and dilated, which is a sign of death. And the fire lieutenant who was in charge of the scene turned to his crew and said, 'Guys, this isn't heart attacks.'

**Phoebe Judge:** Stanley and Theresa Janus were brought to the same hospital where Adam Janus had been pronounced dead a few hours earlier, and they were both seen by the same doctor who had worked on Adam, Dr. Thomas Kim.

**Christy Gutowski:** And he got out his medical books and began calling poison centers around the country trying to figure out what this invisible force was.

**Phoebe Judge:** This is *Chicago Tribune* investigative reporter Christy Gutowski. She says that the surviving Janus family members were all quarantined at the hospital while they waited.

**Christy Gutowski:** We interviewed Joseph Janus, the oldest brother of Stanley and Adam, who described looking at his sister throughout the night to see if she was still alive. And he looked at her to see if she was still alive, and they'd wondered who would be next.

**Phoebe Judge:** Everyone who had responded to the scene, the firefighters and paramedics, were also quarantined. One fire lieutenant named Chuck Kramer called his friend who was a nurse and the town of Arlington Heights only public health official. Her name was Helen Jensen. He told her what was going on and she came to the hospital right away.

**Christy Gutowski:** She spoke to Adam Janus's widow, and she got some background on what happened in the house that day.

**Phoebe Judge:** Helen Jensen went to the Janus home. When she got there, she started looking at anything that could have caused the family members to get sick — a pot of black coffee, old coffee grounds, home jarred fruits, a pound cake, some store-bought lilies, cherry juice. She looked through prescription medications. In the bathroom she found a bottle of extra strength Tylenol on the counter. It was a 50-pill bottle. She poured them out and counted them. There were only 44 left. She also found the receipt, so she knew that it was a brand-new bottle purchased that day. Six pills were missing and there were three people who had gotten sick. She took the Tylenol bottle to the hospital and showed it to someone from the Cook County Medical Examiner's office. She said she was met with skepticism and eventually just went home. That night Chuck Kramer got a phone call from another firefighter, Phil Cappitelli, to ask what was going on.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And Chuck Kramer tells him, 'We had a day like you wouldn't believe. These three healthy people, nothing in common health wise except that they all took this Tylenol.' And Cappitelli says 'Tylenol? My mother-in-law works with a woman in Elk Grove Village whose daughter died this morning after taking Tylenol.'

[curious, suspenseful music]

**Phoebe Judge:** I'm Phoebe Judge. This is Criminal.

The same day that three members of the Janus family got sick, a 12-year-old named Mary Kellerman had a sore throat.

**Christy Gutowski:** And her mother had bought a bottle of Tylenol the day before. And she went into the bathroom, her father heard her go into the bathroom before school began, and she took a Tylenol, and he heard a thump, and he ran to investigate, and he found his daughter in the bathroom, and she was pronounced dead shortly later.

**Phoebe Judge:** When Fire Lieutenant Chuck Kramer heard about Kellerman's death, he called the paramedic who had gone to her home. He wanted to know about her

symptoms, were her eyes dilated, was her breath shallow. She had the same symptoms that the Janus family had had. Chuck Kramer called the hospital. He said, 'There's something wrong with the Tylenol.' The doctor who had treated the Janus family only knew of one chemical that could kill someone that quickly. He found a 24-hour lab and called a taxi. He put two vials of blood collected from Stanley and Theresa Janus into the taxi and told the driver where to take them. The results came back later that night showing the presence of cyanide. When the analysis of the pills from the Janus' bottle of Tylenol came back from the county's toxicologist, the report said that four of the 44 capsules contain cyanide almost three times the amount necessary to kill someone. They also tested the capsules from the bottle found at Mary Kellerman's house and again found cyanide. Police started looking into where each of the bottles of Tylenol had come from.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And so now they know that these two families have purchased the bottles at separate locations, both within the same grocery store chain, but separate locations. And news gets out. By 5:30 that morning the news is already over the radio saying there's a pain reliever that is causing death. They have a press conference at 9:00 a.m. They specifically named Tylenol as being the tainted medication.

[archival audio from news report comes in]

**Speaker:** We don't know the extent of the contamination, so I think at this time it would be wise not to take extra strength Tylenol at all.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And in neighboring DuPage County, the deputy coroner Pete Siekman hears these reports, and they have two strange deaths of young mothers in DuPage County. And he thinks to himself, I wonder if these two things can be connected.

**Phoebe Judge:** 27-year-old Mary Lynn Reiner lived in DuPage County. She had given birth to a baby boy just a few days earlier. On the same day Mary Kellerman and the Janus' had taken the Tylenol, Mary Lynn Reiner was at home with her mother-in-law.

**Christy Gutowski:** Her husband was at work, and she had the new baby at home, and she had some aches and pains and went to the local grocery store, Frank's Finer Foods, and bought some Tylenol. And her husband had come home and was in the kitchen, she was going to the bathroom, and she ended up just making it into the kitchen and landing on a chair, and they called an ambulance right away, and she was pronounced dead shortly later.

**Phoebe Judge:** That same day in the same county, a 31-year-old woman named Mary McFarland had also died.

[soft, somber music]

**Christy Gutowski:** And she worked at an Illinois Bell phone center. And it was a perfect job for a working single mom. And she had a headache, and after having dinner with one of her friends on her break, she took some Tylenol and fell ill at work. And was pronounced dead that night at a hospital.

**Stacy St. Clair:** So within the first 24 hours we have six people who have taken—that they're aware of—who have taken tainted Tylenol, and five of those people are dead, and Theresa Janus is still on life support with no chance of survival.

[archival audio comes in]

**Reporter:** In drug stores and supermarkets around Chicago and in at least 30 states from Florida to North Dakota, stock clerks were busy pulling boxes of extra strength Tylenol capsules from the shelves. In laboratories chemists were taking samples to find out which capsules were tainted, and which were safe, and police were busy too looking for clues and spreading the message.

**Police officer:** A warning against the use of Tylenol extra strength capsules as being broadcast over commercial radio. This product may be contaminated with cyanide and should be destroyed.

[soft, percussive music]

**Stacy St. Clair:** They were literally going through the streets, police officers with bullhorns, telling people not to take Tylenol. Public health departments were going door to door, leaving flyers, knocking, saying if you have Tylenol, throw it out. The FDA cautioned people not to take Tylenol in the capsule, its capsule form. And Tylenol itself pulled two different lot numbers from the shelf representing about 170,000 bottles, which was sort of unheard of, but the recall would get even bigger days later.

[to Christy]

**Phoebe Judge:** Can you explain what Tylenol bottles were like in those days?

**Christy Gutowski:** You could go into the grocery store and literally open the milk or open the peanut butter, or in this case, open the Tylenol without the tamper resistant packaging that we're used to now. Now, with Tylenol, you have the glued flaps to the box, and you have the plastic wrap to get into the cap, and then inside there's a protective barrier around the lid, the mouth of the cap. But back then they didn't have that. You could literally just pop it open and there's a cotton ball protecting you from the

capsules. So it would've been very easy at that time to literally open the capsules, pull them apart, spill out the medicine, and then lace it with something like cyanide.

**Stacy St. Clair:** The hospitals and police phone lines were jammed with people who were concerned that they might have ingested something. I mean, it was actually a worldwide panic. People were being stopped as they landed in—you know, if you took a flight from the United States to England, they were stopping you in customs to make sure you weren't bringing Tylenol into their country.

[as narrator]

**Phoebe Judge:** On October 1<sup>st</sup>, two days after the first victims of the Tylenol poisoning had been discovered, another victim was found.

**Stacy St. Clair:** Paula Prince was 35 years old. She was a flight attendant for United Airlines. And she arrived on a flight from Connecticut on Wednesday night, September 29<sup>th</sup>. She left a note for her best friend who was a fellow flight attendant saying, 'Your flight's getting in late. So I'm just gonna head home. Give me a call later 'cause I have some really exciting news to tell you.' And on her way home, she stopped at a Walgreens near her condo, and she purchased a bottle of extra strength Tylenol. And there's actually a picture taken from a security camera on an ATM machine that captures the exact moment she is purchasing the Tylenol at the store. And she's dressed in her United Airlines uniform and has scarf tied around her neck and she went home to her condo, she lived alone, and nobody heard from her for several days. So her friend, the same flight attendant she had left a note for, heard from her coworkers that Paula had missed a scheduled flight, which was odd. So she and Paula's sister Carol went up to her apartment on a Friday night and they opened the door and they saw her lying there. And they knew instantly that something horrible had happened to her.

**Christy Gutowski:** And one of the most haunting things about a cyanide death is, is just how quickly it ravages the body. And no death was more apparent to Stacy and I—we actually saw some photographs—Paula literally fell backwards. She's half in her bathroom, half in the hallway. There's no crawling to the phone to call 9-1-1 for help. And you could tell it's just a life interrupted and stopped. She literally fell backwards and the cotton balls from removing her evening's makeup was there as well. It just shows you just how quickly and deadly cyanide is.

[tense music]

**Stacy St. Clair:** These deaths, with the exception of the Janus family, all took place in different towns. So you have five communities where these murders have occurred. Each community has their own police department, and you don't have a traditional crime scene as we come to think of it, right.

**Christy Gutowski:** We also have to remember the era in which this occurred in 1982. We live now in a CSI time, but back then, they didn't have—and it's hard for people to imagine this—but back then you didn't have cameras at every stoplight and surveillance cameras at every store, and so many of the tools that law enforcement have now, like DNA to help them solve crimes.

**Phoebe Judge:** Local police departments and the FBI created a task force to work on the case. They attended funerals to see who was there, taking pictures of people, trying to see if anyone came to more than one funeral. They looked into employees at the stores where the bottles had been sold. They looked into Johnson and Johnson and its subsidiary, McNeil Pharmaceuticals and their employees. But they didn't come up with much. Johnson and Johnson offered a hundred thousand dollars reward for information leading to an arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the murders.

[to Stacy]

There is a tip line that was set up. What kinds of tips were coming in?

**Stacy St. Clair:** All kinds. I mean, you name it. Psychics were calling, people were calling 'cause they think their uncle's a little crazy and they should, you know, investigate the uncle. And once Johnson and Johnson offered a hundred thousand dollars reward, then everybody was calling. [chuckles] The phones just exploded, they said, and it was hard weeding through, you know, what's a good tip? What's a little off center? What's just a giant waste of time?

[as narrator]

**Phoebe Judge:** But then on October 6<sup>th</sup>, a call came in that got their attention.

**Christy Gutowski:** A bar owner called and said that one of his semi regulars a man named Roger Arnold had been in the bar and was bragging about having cyanide in his home and not just any cyanide — potassium cyanide, the kind that was used in the murders. And he was kind of an odd guy. He was an amateur home chemist, if you will, and he coincidentally worked as a dock hand for Jewel Food Stores.

And Jewel is one of the stores where two of the bottles had been purchased, one by the Kellerman family and another one by the Janus family. So the bar owner had called Chicago Police Department and said you should check this guy out. He had been going through a divorce and drinking heavily, so the police thought it sounded like a pretty good tip. They went out to the Lincoln Avenue bar scene, asked a lot of the different bar owners and bartenders to give him a call when Roger showed up, and a few days later on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Roger came into a bar called Lilly's, and they went and rounded him up. Roger Arnold went back to the police department. He admitted that he had purchased some cyanide off of a mail order company out of Wisconsin earlier that summer for some sort of a home project and said he got rid of it 'cause his wife—ex-wife now, but wife at the time—made her nervous and he didn't like having it around either. But he denied being the Tylenol killer.

**Phoebe Judge:** But Roger Arnold did allow two Chicago Police Department detectives to go to his house so they could search it. When they got there, they found a number of guns and manuals about how to make different kinds of poisons, including a book called *The Poor Man's James Bond*. They also found beakers and vials and other chemistry equipment, but no cyanide.

**Christy Gutowski:** He didn't have much of a criminal history, but he had made all these bizarre comments to coworkers at Jewel that he was angry, he wanted to poison people, he wanted to throw acid at someone. There was a medical student working at Jewel that summer and he said, 'Hey, can you get access to body parts? I'd love to freak out the police and drop body parts around.' He was just an odd guy.

[curious music]

And there were all these similarities between the stores where the tainted bottles were purchased. He lived near them, or he hung out near them. And the biggest coincidence was that he actually worked with one of the victim's fathers, Mary Reiner. He worked with her father for a short time at Jewel. They apparently got along well. There was no reason to believe that he had any malice towards this man. The man had had lunch with him and given him a ride a couple of times when Mr. Arnold's car—when he was having car problems, but there were all these similarities.

**Phoebe Judge:** But Roger Arnold was only charged with misdemeanor weapons violations. He was released on bond. The same day that the tip line received the call about Roger Arnold, a letter arrived at the Tylenol manufacturer in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania. It read:



*Gentlemen, as you can see it is easy to place cyanide, both potassium and sodium, into capsules sitting on store shelves. And since the cyanide is inside the gelatin, it is easy to get buyers to swallow the bitter pill. Another beauty is that cyanide operates quickly. It takes so very little, and there will be no time to take countermeasures. If you don't mind the publicity of these little capsules, then do nothing.*

**Stacy St. Clair:** And it basically says if you wanna stop the killing, you'll wire a million dollars to a specific bank account.

**Phoebe Judge:** Investigators linked the bank account in the letter to a man in Chicago named Frederick Miller McCahey, the heir to the Miller Brewing Fortune.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And more importantly to this story, he was the owner of a defunct business called Lakeside Travel. And they quickly rule him out as a suspect that he would have no motive to do this and probably wouldn't be as stupid enough to put his own bank account in the extortion letter. And they ask him, 'Who would have a vendetta against you to do this?' And one name comes up very quickly. And that is the name of Robert Richardson.

**Phoebe Judge:** Robert Richardson's wife, Nancy Richardson, had worked at Miller McCahey's Travel Agency, and when it closed everyone's final paychecks bounced.

**Stacy St. Clair:** Including Nancy's. And Nancy had cashed her last paycheck at a currency exchange and the currency exchange gave her the money, but then sued her for the money back when the check bounced. And this greatly upset Nancy and even more so, her husband, Robert.

**Phoebe Judge:** Robert Richardson and Frederick Miller McCahey got a huge argument in public. And later Robert Richardson allegedly swore he would get McCahey investigated by the police. When they discovered the possible connection between Robert Richardson and the extortion letter to Johnson and Johnson, the FBI put out a wanted poster of him with his picture, and it was distributed across the country.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And news outlets across the country carried the story, including CBS Evening News with Dan Rather. And when Dan rather introduced the story and flashed the picture of Robert Richardson on the screen, there was a police sergeant in Kansas City who told us he nearly fell off his couch because he instantly recognized the man as someone he had investigated for pretty serious crimes.

**Phoebe Judge:** But he knew him by a different name: James Lewis.

**Stacy St. Clair:** So what happens next is that police sergeant and two other Kansas City detectives hop a flight to Chicago. They meet with the Tylenol Task Force, and they tell the Tylenol task force everything they know about James Lewis. And that includes the investigation of a 1978 homicide in Kansas City and a 1981 credit card scam in Kansas City. And after hearing this background, a nationwide manhunt begins.

[minimal futuristic music]

**Phoebe Judge:** On Halloween that year, more than 40 cities banned trick or treating.

**Christy Gutowski:** I was 13 years old in 1982, and I have a memory of my mother wanting to check my Halloween candy, and that was the first time I could recall that. Not really understanding why — why weren't we able to just dive into it and that was because of Tylenol.

**Phoebe Judge:** A few days after Halloween, the FDA began requiring companies to add safety seals to their products so that anyone opening a new bottle of over-the-counter medicine could see whether it had been tampered with. Johnson and Johnson put Tylenol capsules back on the market, this time with three different tamper-proof seals. Meanwhile, investigators were looking for James Lewis and his wife Leanne in New York where the extortion letter had been postmarked.

**Christy Gutowski:** So they began this dragnet and we interviewed the FBI agents who were in charge of it. And they literally go block by block by block in Manhattan in a grid system. They know that they're staying in like transient hotels and they're focusing on this particular area in Manhattan. And weeks go by and the Lewises are always one step ahead of the FBI.

**Phoebe Judge:** *The Chicago Tribune* had begun receiving letters responding to their coverage of the Tylenol murders. The letters appeared to be from James Lewis. But they were signed with his alias: Robert Richardson. In one, he wrote that he hadn't committed the murders. He said that the paper had incorrectly reported that he and his wife were armed. He wrote that, quote, "Weapons are for two quite similar types of mentalities: (1) criminals & (2) police. We or neither."

**Christy Gutowski:** And it's clear to the FBI agents that he's reading the press coverage of how the task force is doing and what's going on with the Tylenol murders because these letters reference specific things. And he's also photocopying newspaper articles of *The Chicago Tribune*. So the task force starts thinking, well, where can he get access to *The Chicago Tribune* in New York? He's copying them. He's knowledgeable about what's going on, and they realize that he's either getting them from a public library or

something along those lines. So they start blanketing these wanted posters at public libraries and they have new stands under surveillance and they get lucky after weeks and weeks. I think the manhunt was two months long, at least...December...mid-December, a librarian calls and says, there's a man here, he's hunched over. He's looking at a book, a reference book of addresses of major newspapers in the country. And he's clean shave, and in the wanted poster he had a beard. But they were pretty sure they'd seen this man several times. And they were pretty sure it was him. So the FBI comes, they race up to the fourth floor of this library and they approach the man. And sure enough it's James Lewis. He stands up. He does not resist arrest. He doesn't have any weapons on him. He doesn't say who he is. But at this point, the manhunt is over. He was arrested in December of 1982, so this is a couple months after the Tylenol murders. And his wife turned herself in the next day.

**Phoebe Judge:** Investigators didn't have enough to charge him with the actual murders. And he was found guilty of attempted extortion almost a year later in October 1983.

**Stacy St. Clair:** But while he's awaiting his sentencing, he calls the FBI and he offers to help solve the Tylenol murders.

[tense percussive music]

**Phoebe Judge:** He met with the FBI investigators about six times. He always maintained that he had nothing to do with the murders. But he told investigators that he had some ideas for how someone could have done it.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And he makes very, very detailed drawings, about a half dozen of them, showing the various methods and ways that you could fill capsules with cyanide and transport them to the store where you could salt the bottles with them. And he also makes a very detailed decision tree that says, are your pills dry? If yes, follow this path. If no, go back to the beginning. Are you on a park bench when you are pouring the pills into the Tylenol bottle? If yes, do this, if no, follow this different route. So it was just extraordinarily detailed, these drawings that he said we're done on speculation at the request of the assistant US attorney. He later told *The Chicago Tribune* that he was just trying to help, and he could describe how Caesar was killed, but that doesn't mean that he killed Caesar. That moment of him drawing, offering the drawings, these very detailed drawings, which have been determined to be feasible, they would never shake him as the prime suspect after that moment.

**Phoebe Judge:** Investigators had previously collected information on James Lewis when they were looking into a murder that had occurred four years before.

**Stacy St. Clair:** While he was living in Kansas City, James Lewis and his wife Leanne had a tax business and one of their tax clients was an elderly man by the name of Raymond West.

**Phoebe Judge:** A friend of Raymond West, a man named Charles Banker hadn't heard from him in a few days, so he stopped by his house. When he knocked on the door, no one answered. But he could see that his friend's car was in the garage. It was unusual for Raymond to be out of touch like this. Charles called the police. The last person to hear from Raymond, another friend, said Raymond had called her and they talked for a while. He mentioned he had an upset stomach and also that his tax man, James Lewis, had been over at his house a lot lately...uninvited. The police called James Lewis who said he actually knew where Raymond had gone — to the Ozarks for a few days with his girlfriend. But his friend Charles Banker insisted that Raymond didn't have a girlfriend. He returned to Raymond's house and this time there was a note on the front door. It said Raymond was in the Ozarks and to contact Jim for more information. It was on James Lewis's company stationary. Around this time, James Lewis attempted to cash a \$5,000 check from Raymond West. The bank thought this was suspicious, so they returned the check as a forgery. Several weeks later, Raymond West was found dead in his attic. James Lewis was arrested and charged with murder. And then the day before his trial began, the case was dismissed.

**Stacy St. Clair:** The case was tossed because a judge found that in his first interview with police that James Lewis had not been read his Miranda Rights. So everything gleaned in the investigation after that was deemed inadmissible. And that coupled with the fact that the medical examiner could not determine an exact cause of death because the body had so badly decomposed in the summer heat, prosecutors dropped the charges.

**Phoebe Judge:** Years later when they were investigating the Tylenol murders, police retested a fingerprint found in Raymond West's attic. It had been on a pulley that had been used to lift his body into the attic, and it was a match to James Lewis. But that case wasn't reopened — too much evidence was either missing or had been destroyed.

[moody music]

In June of 1984, James Lewis was sentenced to ten years in prison for attempted extortion for sending the letter to Johnson and Johnson. The Tylenol Task Force still suspected that he was responsible for the murders, but they could never place him in Chicago in the days leading up to the poisonings. He was released in 1995 and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts where he started a website design firm. Stacy St. Clair says that for the most part, the case went dormant. There was some testing as DNA

technology became more mainstream in police work, but no one was assigned to the case full time. And then in 2007 as the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murders approached, another task force was created known as Task Force 2. It included one of the original FBI agents on the case, a man named Roy Lane.

**Stacy St. Clair:** So when they decide to form Task Force 2, the first thing they do is they look to see where James Lewis is. And it's been sort of years since anyone kept tabs on him. And they launched this ruse where Roy Lane contacts Jim Lewis and says, 'I know a journalist who is writing a book about the murders and she doesn't think it's you, and she can clear you. Would you be willing to help her?' And James Lewis accepts the opportunity and in his own words, happily accepts the opportunity to clear his name. And all the while they have, he and his wife Leanne, have no idea that they're being recorded and every word they say is being captured.

[to Christy]

**Phoebe Judge:** And what things do they say?

**Christy Gutowski:** There was a meeting between the undercover FBI agent posing as the journalist, her name is Sherry Nichols—that's not her real name though, that was the name that was given during the operation—and Lane were there at the Sheraton Hotel in Chicago. And Mr. Lewis is sitting on a couch and they're talking about the timeline of when he mailed the letter, wrote the letter, and mailed the letter, the extortion letter. And they didn't know, the task force didn't know back in the 1980s or even the 1990s when Lewis mailed the letter; they just know that they got it around the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of October.

[as narrator]

**Phoebe Judge:** They hadn't been able to clearly see the original postmark.

**Christy Gutowski:** But through advances in technology by 2007, the FBI lab was able to lift layer by layer by layer of ink off of the envelope of the extortion letter, and they learned for the first time that it was mailed October 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Phoebe Judge:** The victims had taken the poison Tylenol capsules two days earlier on September 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Christy Gutowski:** Lewis has said repeatedly that it took him at least three days to mail the letter. Lewis has also told them that he first learned about the murders while reading a *New York Times* article on October 1<sup>st</sup>. And on the video clip, the Sheraton, Agent Lane has basically picked up a manila folder and he has created a calendar on it and he's counting backwards. And Lane is very cool, and he said, well, you would've been

writing the letter when the people are dying before the people are dying. And Lewis is like, well, that can't be right. I've been telling myself for 25 years under oath, it took me at least three days. I would've sworn to it under oath. When did the people die? And Lane, very coolly is explaining the timeline to him.

**Phoebe Judge:** If he had taken three days to write the letter, Roy Lane said, he would've started writing it the same day people had been taking the poison Tylenol, September 29<sup>th</sup>, before it was even in the news.

**Christy Gutowski:** And Lewis at one point clutches—he's carrying a messenger bag that is strapped over his chest as he's seated—and he clutches the bag and he's quiet and he appear nervous and he's like, well, it just couldn't have happened. It must be faulty memory.

**Phoebe Judge:** Agent Roy Lane and the agent posing as the journalist, also took James Lewis to the Walgreens in Chicago, where Paula Prince, the flight attendant, had purchased her bottle of Tylenol. James Lewis headed straight to where the Tylenol used to be in 1982. But that's not where it was anymore.

[eerie, suspenseful music]

**Stacy St. Clair:** They used the information in part to get a search warrant for Lewis' condo in Cambridge. And inside the condo and several storage areas they got a whole bunch of paperwork, and among the papers was a very detailed timeline of what Jim and Leanne Lewis did beginning September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1982 taking you through the rest of that—much of that fall. And the list is very detailed to the point where it'll have the day they bought a frying pan at Gimbals and visits to the library. But there is a time gap for James Lewis from September 25<sup>th</sup> 'til midnight of September 29<sup>th</sup>, and that falls in the window in which investigators believe the poison bottles were put on the shelves.

**Phoebe Judge:** Investigators also looked again at a book that was taken from James Lewis's belongings back in 1982. It's called *The Handbook of Poisoning*.

**Stacy St. Clair:** And they found fingerprints, multiple fingerprints belonging to James Lewis in the book, including a fingerprint on page 196, which details how much potassium cyanide is needed to kill the average human.

**Christy Gutowski:** It's like pieces of a puzzle. They don't have a smoking gun, right? They don't have a confession. They don't have DNA. They don't have a witness that saw him at one of the stores where the Tylenol bottles were shelved. But it's pieces of a

puzzle and each piece is piece of evidence and it all fits together and leads them to one person. And that's James Lewis.

**Phoebe Judge:** This past September was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murders. Investigators went to Cambridge and met again with James Lewis. He's now 76.

**Stacy St. Clair:** He voluntarily met with them without an attorney. And talked for several hours according to our sources. And investigators have put the ball in prosecutor's hands, and they've said, this is as good it's gonna get. This is a chargeable, circumstantial case and they've asked prosecutors to take it. And so far the two prosecutors who have authority over the case have not taken the case, have not charged it. So the way it looks now is that prosecutors will run out the clock until there's no possibility to charge James Lewis.

**Phoebe Judge:** The other main suspect in the case, the one had been reported to the tip line by a bar owner for saying he had cyanide, Roger Arnold, died in 2008. Not only did he claim to have cyanide, but he had a connection to one of the victims and investigators had proof he was in Chicago at the time of the murders.

**Stacy St. Clair:** They did exhume Roger Arnold's body as part of Task Force 2 to see if his DNA matched the DNA profiles found on the bottles. It didn't. So my guess is, is what investigators tell us they fear the most, and that is just prosecutors running out the clock.

**Phoebe Judge:** Stacy St. Clair and Christy Gutowski reported an investigative series looking back on the case published in *The Chicago Tribune* earlier this year and accompanied by a podcast, *Unsealed: The Tylenol Murders*. They tried to interview James Lewis and they approached him, but he declined a formal interview.

[smooth, moody music]

In 1983, Congress passed what was called the Tylenol Bill, making it a federal crime to tamper with consumer products, labels, or containers in a way that could hurt someone. And then in 1989, the FDA created federal guidelines requiring manufacturers to make their products tamper-proof.

[to Stacy and Christy]

Just the last question for both of you. Why 40 years later is there still such an interest?

**Stacy St. Clair:** Because it taps into our biggest fear. That we'd do something so ordinary, you know, buying a ball of Tylenol for your 12-year-old who has the flu, or

taking a couple Tylenol because you've got a headache at work, and then you're dead. And there's nothing you could have done to stop it and there's nothing you could have done to fix it once you've swallowed it. And we're reminded of it, of this crime, every time we go into a store. Every time you open the safety seal on a bottle of salad dressing or a bottle of cough medicine or your peanut butter or your jelly, you are breaking through those seals because of these seven people and the horrific way they died. And that's why I think it sticks with people.

**Phoebe Judge:** Criminal is created by Lauren Spohrer and me. Nadia Wilson is our senior producer. Katie Bishop is our supervising producer. Our producers are Susannah Roberson, Jackie Sojico, Libby Foster and Megan Cunnane. Our technical director is Rob Byers. Engineering by Russ Henry.

Julienne Alexander makes original illustrations for each episode of Criminal. You can see them at [thisiscriminal.com](http://thisiscriminal.com). We're on Facebook and Twitter @criminalshow and Instagram @criminal\_podcast. We're on TikTok @criminal\_podcast where we're posting some behind the scenes content.

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I'm Phoebe Judge. This is Criminal. [music fades out]

**END OF EPISODE.**