

Michael Connelly:

Hi, this is Michael Connelly with part two of our round table discussion. This is Killer In The Code: Solving The Black Dahlia & Zodiac Cases. Alright, we're going to get back to the questions.

Do you think it's possible that other unsolved cold cases in Chicago, Kansas, Atlanta, Arizona, et cetera, could have been Margolis as well? And the list of those cities are places we have traced Marvin Margolis or Merrill or under his other names, places he didn't stay a long time other than Chicago where he grew up, but this was a guy who seemed to always be moving until he came back to California. But anyway, I'm obscuring the question. I remember early on in a discussion I had with you, Mitzi Roberts, that the killing of the Black Dahlia was so brutal, so calculated. You said you would be surprised if this person, if this was a single case, that the killer, this was his only murder. Anyway. So I don't know who wants to start with that, but it's a very general question.

Rick Jackson:

Well, just as an investigator, when you're looking at somebody that has killed, what we believe is repeatedly in different locations within California, as far north as the Bay Area, Los Angeles, I feel Oceanside is very, very likely his. I feel that the Riverside case of Cheri Jo Bates is probably a very likely case based on the letter that was received. So it would not surprise me that anywhere he's gone, he started killing at roughly 21 in 1947 with Elizabeth Short. So he began at a fairly young age and then in the early forties he was the Zodiac case. So anywhere in between or even after, wouldn't surprise me if he was in locations that had murders, not necessarily the same M.O.s and really any M.O.s because he was evolving during this whole period of time if they couldn't connect other cases to him wherever he lived.

Mitzi Roberts:

In the serial cases, that serial killer cases that I've identified. And if you believe that Marvin Margolis is the suspect here, which I do, and if you believe he's the Zodiac, which I do, these type of perpetrators don't stop. Usually they can take a break for different reasons and things like that. But for somebody like him that's mobile and moving around, what would drive them to stop? If you believe that he is a suspect in these cases, then it would be smart to trace where he's lived, where he's been, and to look into unsolved murders there. I don't know enough about the famous unsolved with the key names, the Lipstick Murders and the Torso Murders. I don't know enough about those to say look into those. But if you have a killer that goes from place to place to place to place, and you're convinced that he's killed in one place, it's just smart detective work to look into can he have killed, would he have killed in another place and to compare him against some of your cold cases.

Rick Jackson:

And Mitzi and I did that on another case. That was at the end of my career with the guy that is the most prolific serial killer in US history, Sam Little. We traveled the country pretty much for the last year of my career connecting him to other murders and I mean all over, multiple states, 5, 6, 7, 8 states we were in. And it's just part of the process of what you do. And obviously Merrill/Margolis liked killing. The first one that we know of anyway, Elizabeth Short, was a very personal murder, and so I can understand how that can happen without necessarily loving murder. It was a payback. He was jilted, humiliated, and he wanted to do the same to her. But once you get into the other killings where there's no direct personal motive, random people in lover's lanes, a cab driver in San Francisco, a cab driver in Oceanside, that shows that he enjoyed killing. And so he's not going to stop enjoying killing when he was living in Kansas or Chicago or Georgia. It's going to go on if he felt like the opportunity. The only thing I would say is that

at some point age factored, does factor in, and I can't say what age, but age does factor in and does cause people to eventually stop.

Michael Connelly:

Next question is you say some members of the family have cooperated with you and turned over the sketch as well as two boxes of property and documents. Is there any evidence connecting to the murders found in those belongings, such as weapons or trophies?

Mitzi Roberts:

Well, of course the sketch, which Michael and I took that sketch that was sent to us and had it analyzed by an expert that was not familiar with this case or what we've been doing, and verified that the hidden word zodiac in the shading or at least some of the letters that he did see show up. And so yes, in that sense that was there. I'm not sure about the, I think some of the handwriting exhibits and a lot of stuff is just corroborating evidence. It's not like DNA on knives or anything like that. It's eyeglass prescriptions and knowing that the Zodiac wore eyeglasses, and handwriting exemplars that have been compared to the letters and have matched things like that.

Michael Connelly:

Since we were talking about the things that family turned over to us. Let's stay on that for a minute with the last episode, Chapter 6, we talked about Marvin Margolis's report card from USC and we put it on the website and readers have pointed out that that report card shows a different spelling for his last name and middle name. The report card is from Marvin Henry Margolies, not Marvin Skipton Margolis. And the question is how do you know you don't have the grades for someone else? And I'll start this off by just saying that report card that we put on the website came from Marvin Merrill's property turned over to us by his family. So I think it's a clear, or you guys, you're the investigators, take it from there. To me it's a clear indication that he was engaged in manipulating his identity.

Rick Jackson:

I have that report card in the boxes that I have with me that we're turning back over to the family tomorrow. And yeah, what are the chances that there's some differences from a person that's gone through his life changing names and it's a close name, what's the chances it's going to be, did he pick up the wrong report card and just happened to be very close to his? I doubt it. It's just another indication that he's using for whatever reason, one more alias. And it's really a pretty close name, obviously.

Mitzi Roberts:

Yeah, and I just had, that's given from the family. There's no, there's no better source to give us something like that than it came from the person whose report card it is. I mean, I would trust that even more than the academic institution, only because they have no way to verify that report card they're giving us is the same individual who we're investigating. But even more than that, even when you're going back through the grand jury investigation, they got his name wrong during testimony and spelled it wrong. And is that because that's the information they had that he gave them is the way he spelled it or they just spelled it wrong? So that's just a common theme throughout this investigation that there are different names being used, different spellings, different middle names, and it's part of his signature, part of the way he plays the game.

Michael Connelly:

What's interesting, and a reader, listener, pointed out was if you look at this thing, it appears that he may have taken classes in the year of 52 to 53 if we read this correctly. And that question says, was there a chance he came back to LA because we know we can put him in Chicago. He was actually prosecuted for a crime during this period. But we've also established that he moves around and his family doesn't know where he is a lot. What do we take from that little notation? It looks like two classes taken between 52 and 54. Could he have come back to try to finish his pharmaceutical degree?

Alex Baber:

Well, we know that his eldest daughter was born in Chicago in 1952. If I look at my records, I have to verify that, but I think it's 1952, early February, I believe. That being said, however, we do know that there's window there. We can't account for him up until the end of 53 where he's arrested for a con game for doing contracts that are blank and filling in additional information and numbers. Right.

Michael Connelly:

That's in Chicago.

Alex Baber:

That's in Chicago. So we got a buffer there of about a year and a half that we can't account for. So I am not saying that he did. What I'm saying though is there's an open opportunity there unless we find something else that we can use to place him somewhere other than USC.

Michael Connelly:

Okay. We seem to be talking about his family and how a few of them have cooperated with us, mostly through, well actually all three of you have talked to family members. I have talked to family members. Is there anyone in the family who is saying they agree with us or they're saying this explains a lot? Or there are people that are saying there's no way that our father was this killer, the serial killer.

Alex Baber:

I've experienced both firsthand. I've got people like the son that says, oh, this can't be my father. No way. However, he has shifted from one side to the other since I've had the opportunity to speak with him. And then we have other members that I've spoken to directly, three, that have stated that they found this very likely or possible that he is who we believe he is.

Mitzi Roberts:

The family members that I've spoke to, I've only spoken to two. There's more of a curiosity and a willingness to cooperate because they believe that it's an important case and that any surviving family members deserve answers, whether that be that Marvin is the guy or he is not, and they also want to participate because we've told them that this could give you answers either way. We're definitely not trying to fabricate a case on anybody if the evidence is going to point where the evidence points and it could point to this is the wrong guy, and then that is something that they'd want to know too.

We haven't really gotten an opinion one way or the other. We've gotten some information about Margolis's background, about his temper, about the way he treated the family. That, the fact that they're willing to give items to us that could be of evidentiary value, at least says to me that they're open to the possibility that he could be capable of doing something like this. I know if somebody came to me and said, we think your father's a murderer and we want you to give us any information that you

may have, I'd be like, there's no way. I don't have anything. I don't have anything cause there's no way that this, my father could have been this. Or if my father had stuff and I always had a suspicion in my mind that he could be capable, then I would give that. So the fact that they gave us items to be verified leads me to believe that it's a possibility in their mind

Rick Jackson:

That it wouldn't be shocking if the evidence revealed that this is true. It would not be shocking based on his behavior.

Michael Connelly:

So that leads to one of the questions that we've gotten several of the proximity question. How are we putting him in proximity to the Zodiac killings? What is the, let's see, where, what is the evidence that he lived or had a place in the Bay Area during the Zodiac murder spree is the exact question.

Rick Jackson:

We do know. There was documentation. Alex found it, and I've driven by the house, that he had showed he lived at, in the late sixties, early seventies, and then again in the late seventies and early eighties, same location. We know he worked at Intel. Back then they didn't have this, let's work from home kind of situation and telecommuting and all this kind of stuff. You showed up in the office unless you were a travel kind of person. And the other thing, it's 55 years later, you're not going to be able to put somebody in a specific place unless there's something very unique that happened, like an arrest or something like that, on a day by day, week by week, even a month by month basis. We do know he has connections to the Bay Area.

And then the other one, again, Mike, you just found, his son went to school up there. Now did he live with his son at that point or did he visit his son? Maybe. But we know that he had a reason to be up in the area during that period of time. And another thing is there wouldn't be concern about the lack of (*unintelligible*) put him in the area if this was a DNA hit or a fingerprint match. It wouldn't matter where he lived anywhere in the world. You're going to say, okay, you're going to do going to check the DNA and sometimes, believe it or not, but from a detective standpoint and from a prosecutor standpoint and from a legal standpoint, circumstantial evidence, depending on how substantial it is, can be just as identifying as DNA or a fingerprint. And people might look at that and shake their head and they don't understand it. But this world has gotten so dependent on court using DNA and science. Sometimes you revert back to circumstantial evidence. It's very legal. There's convictions based on nothing but circumstantial evidence all the time. And so the fact that we couldn't put him in the Bay Area on a regular basis, isn't that concerning to me. The other evidence that we have is overwhelming, and I keep saying overwhelming. It's overwhelming. And I was at an event the other day, unfortunately, it was a celebration of life and there were many DAs there that had been listening to this podcast, that are blown away by how convincing the evidence is. And I know Mitzi and I and my work partner, Dave Tresmontan, we wouldn't have entertained moving into this unless we totally believed it. We're not going to get involved in something that was a hairbrained scheme. And we've cooperated, we give media interviews. And I should say there was one particular writer who said that I went to Michael Connelly with a farfetched theory. This guy must not know anything about crime if he considered this a farfetched theory because prosecutors and people in investigative positions, Mitzi, me, and Dave Tresmontan, say it's overwhelming evidence. So the farfetched stuff, I don't know if he just had a bone to pick with this or wanted to be personally abrasive and throw a lot of landmines toward us or what, but the fact that he said it's a farfetched scheme is ridiculous.

Mitzi Roberts:

So irritating about that is that people expect us as investigators to throw away the entire theory or the entire case against Margolis because we can't prove he was in San Jose one day. He can't be the Zodiac because we can't prove he lived in San Jose. So everything else that we have proven, the cryptology and all the other things that we have, we're just supposed to put that aside because of one or two things, we don't have definitive answers or we can't prove that he was positive that his alibi, that he didn't have an alibi. So we're just supposed to throw away all the other evidence, and that is just not what detectives do. So it's quite irritating on some levels when that happens.

Rick Jackson:

And even completed cases, and Mitzi will tell me the same thing or tell you the same thing. You're never going to get an answer to every question you want. Even when there's admissions or confessions or convictions, there are always unknown things because in a confession, oftentimes suspects will admit things because they know it's overwhelming evidence, but they always will mitigate some aspects or leave out parts or not remember certain parts because to admit certain things make it tough because it's very, very bad behavior. They mitigate it to be seen in the best light possible that they think they can get away with. And so there are going to be things we're not going to have answers to, but overall it's a very, very strong case.

Alex Baber:

Let me add one more piece guys. So, if we fast forward from 69, 70, to 78, when the son who said he never resided in San Jose, and we know, I knew, Michael's independent researcher discovered, that the son was in high school in San Jose actually at that time. So at the time that they moved there, and this is documented for anybody to see online, if you know how to research, at the exact moment that Marvin Margolis can be placed in San Jose in 1978, the Zodiac reappears, in emails in an April, letter, April 24th, 1978.

Michael Connelly:

Somebody mentioned hairbrained, so this next question was first directed to me, but I hand it off to Mitzi after I make a mea culpa. But it says, "Connelly, you once endorsed the theory that George Hodel was the Black Dahlia Avenger. What made you change your mind and why should we believe you now?" What that listener is referencing is that I blurbed, which is I endorsed a book called Black Dahlia Avenger that fingered George Hodel as the killer of Elizabeth Short, and he is on the top suspects list. By the way, the book was written by Hodel's son, Steve Hodel, who was formerly an LAPD homicide investigator, which was one of the reasons I felt compelled to read it and then endorse it. And I read that book knowing very little about the case, and I found it convincing. And what's the harm in saying, I agree. I think I even said "case closed" or something like that. I can't remember exactly what I said in endorsing that book, but I did live to regret this and I made my mea culpa in the very first episode I think, of this podcast. And because the newly formed cold case unit investigated the claims in that book and their report was that that is a flawed investigation and that it's a good theory, but there's no evidence that Hodel was the killer. And I think Rick and Mitzi, you may have had part in that investigation or are aware of it or have reports. So if one of you wants to bail me out here, please do.

Mitzi Roberts:

Yeah, I think it's very easy. And it is exactly what's different in what we're doing here, is that Hodel's theory is a great theory and it's supported by some of the facts in the case in that George Hodel, there

was wiretaps into him. He was a doctor. There's things that make you look at him as a suspect and buy into him as a suspect. It's a good theory in the case, but there were a lot of good theories. And so I can see how somebody on the outside can read that book and buy into it. I mean, there's still many, many people that believe, I get that question a lot. Oh, that's solved, wasn't it that detective's father? Wasn't it that doctor? But as Michael mentioned, because the theory did look so good, that's what investigators do. We then go in and fact check it for evidentiary value. And a lot of the stuff that Steve Hodel wrote in that first book just was not accurate. It was not true. It was actually disproven. So that is hindsight, that is information that Michael didn't have and that the listeners and the readers didn't have at the time, that we were able to disprove. And I think that flip side is why when it came to this investigation, I was so skeptical because I think I even mentioned to Michael, I don't want to be the person that gets stuck in something like that, that has to turn around five years from now and say, yeah, I got that wrong. And so is why we are doing that. We are being upfront with the listeners and with the people, when we're interviewed on these stories, is if we have a case where the evidence doesn't fit or where we're unsure of the evidence, we have double checked it. We have triple checked it by independent experts and came up with the same information that Alex has, which makes it more viable as evidence in the case

Rick Jackson:

And my perspective on the Hodel, that was ordered by the assistant chief of police, that the Cold Case Unit looked through Hodel's claims and his book and make a determination if it, is it legitimate? Is it not legitimate or in between somewhere? My part of that was to look at an array of other women in the LA area during the late forties and the early fifties that Steve claimed, Steve Hodel, claimed his father also murdered. And as I went through those cases in the archives and I learned that many of them were already solved or had been solved, Steve probably didn't have access to a lot of those because they were internal investigations, investigations. But several of them, there were a couple where there were convictions of other people. Some confessions on some of them, compelling confessions, and there was a plea on some of them. So, just the fact that he's naming cases that we know weren't his father's hurts the credibility of the overall investigation. And I worked with Steve Hodel. I was a young homicide detective in Hollywood in the early eighties, and Steve Hodel was there. He was a good detective. And that's the interesting aspect of that. Steve knows what evidence is, and it would be hard, I can guarantee you it would be hard for him to discount Alex Baber's investigation because he knows evidence. Whether he'd be willing to admit that, probably not because he's so invested with his many books and his reputation and so on and so forth, that it would be hard for him in my thinking to say, yes, this is a good investigation. But inwardly, I think he probably knows it's a very strong case as he knows evidence.

Mitzi Roberts:

I just want to add on that. I tend to agree with you on that, Rick, because years ago I was sort of ordered to do an interview and it was related to Steve Hodel's claims. I believe it was a radio interview, it may have been KNX or something, and I gave a statement on the case and that something to the effect that Steve had a good theory. Well, when our theory came out, and that's the difference I think with us is we're willing to look at other theories. When our case came out, now, it's no longer theory. I believe it is factual. Steve went back and brought up that old interview and said, well, what is it Mitzi's here, during 2012 or 2014, whatever it was, she said that she believed my theory. Well, that was really misleading because he gave part of that interview, he gave the part where I said it was a good theory. What I actually said was that it was a very good theory and it could actually be factual. The problem with the theory is there's no evidence to back it up. And so it couldn't be proven. And that was the problem I was having at the time was there was several very good theories, but they couldn't be proven by the evidence. And so then it's just what theory do you choose, if any? And so the fact that he is now bringing

that up and trying to use my, portions of my statement, to bolster his case should tell you a lot about his motives and not really wanting to objectively look at these cases and solve a crime, but push forward his narrative still.

Alex Baber:

We've actually had my findings verified independently by experts in their fields across the board, that have done this at no cost. With no skin in the game, with the exception of our most recent handwriting analysis, which we went above and beyond because we already had one, but we wanted another independent party. So we did endorse paying them for their opinion just to have a second opinion. But that was not influenced by monetary gain by any means. It's a very respected and sought after expert in this field. But every other piece that I have presented to you detectives, as well as Michael, and as far as law enforcement goes, I have not had one single representative of any jurisdiction tell me that my suspect is not viable or that the evidence I have presented is bogus or they can eliminate it. Not one, not a single detective. And that includes all the North Bay jurisdictions I met with, including the FBI, as well as, though I haven't spoken with LAPD personally, they know of me and they know, they've been interacting with both Rick and Mitzi obviously, but not one individual has said that this doesn't fit, it doesn't align.

Michael Connelly:

That kind of brings us to the last question, and it's very related, and it was, did you realize that you would be stepping into a hornet's nest of criticism when you came out with a suspect in both cases, that was not one of the more established suspects that amateur experts on the cases favor? Let me start this off, because a lot of this invective has been aimed at me. So I'm going to say yes and no. We were well aware that there were many so-called experts out there, most of them self-anointed and that they would have invested their time and belief in other suspects and theories, but the facts are facts, and we could not avoid them. We also had two professional homicide investigators, including one who had the Black Dahlia case for many years. But it is a very interesting cultural phenomenon where you have so many people invested and unwilling to hear or consider anything else, which is completely, and Mitzi, I want to hear you talk about this part. It's really antithetical to what real detectives do. They have a saying in LAPD homicide. "It goes where it goes." But the people out there are really unwilling to do that. Not everybody, but there's a lot of people, potshotting us, exaggerating things and getting a lot of stuff wrong. People who blindly say, we're wrong, but I'm not even going to listen to what they have to say, what we have to say. So it's kind of ridiculous. But really, how can you say you're an expert in anything if you do not know everything about it, including the consideration of opposite opinions and facts.

Mitzi Roberts:

Yeah, I absolutely knew that I was going to face this because I had the case for 15 years and I've been on the other side and I have been a naysayer and I have been amongst the naysayers. But the thing is, is that in detective work, if you do the right thing for the right reasons, like you said, it leads where it leads. So I didn't really care what they said because I believe in facts backed by the evidence, and I think we have that in this case. And so it goes where it goes, and every time we've been wary about some of the facts in this case, we've checked it and sometimes triple checked it and been very transparent on things that have gone our way and things that perhaps didn't go our way, but backed it up with reasonable explanations of why that occurred. Which is different from the naysayers that I'm seeing. And that I'm with you, Michael, in that it's extremely irritating and disconcerting that these so-called internet type investigators have come up with their own theories and lack the ability to step aside for a

minute from their theory and even look into evidence or facts that may hold something that may be true. And that's something we've always done. I've always looked at other theories, looked into other theories, given my input. I know Larry Harnisch had a theory that I thought when I looked into it, there were a lot of facets of his theory that I thought that were very compelling, but again, could not be backed by any concrete evidence. But that's exactly the reason why I decided, and in retirement, met with Alex, is because this is a fascinating case. I'm an investigator by heart. You can't take it away from me. And who wouldn't want to hear something that at the least will be an interesting story. So the fact that I was willing to even listen to Alex is what is so irritating about those naysayers is they won't even, and some of them have publicly said, I won't listen to the podcast. I won't because of this or because of that. Well, that is not, you're not an investigator. You don't want to find the answers. You want to further your theory in the case, and that's the difference between me and you. And so let the naysayers come. I don't care because I believe in facts backed by evidence, and until I come up with something in this case that says differently, I think we're on the right path and I'm dedicated to continue it forward.

Michael Connelly:

You've been listening to Killer In The Code: Solving The Black Dahlia & Zodiac Cases. We'll be back with Chapter 9 soon. This episode was produced by me, Michael Connelly, and edited by Terrill Lee Lankford. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you'll be alerted when new episodes are available. Thank you for listening.