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55/04/03 The Mystery Woman in the Sheppard Case, Part I

American Weekly

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Intimate details of the day Dr. Sam's wife became...

BY

ELEANOR HARRIS

Although Marilyn Sheppard was the victim of one of the most publicized murders of modern times, she remained a shadowy figure all through the sensational trial that ended in life imprisonment for her husband.

Last week Eleanor Harris, one of the country's top reporters, told how she spent weeks interviewing relatives, friends and neighbors of the dead woman in an attempt to reconstruct Marilyn Sheppard's personality.

These interviews made it possible to piece together a vivid picture of Marilyn's childhood in Cleveland, her schoolday romance with Sam Sheppard, their marriage and their busy lives as a popular young couple in the Cleveland suburb of Bay Village.

People who knew the Sheppards intimately supplied a picture of their private problems—Sam's faithlessness and desire for a divorce—Marilyn's determination to keep their marriage alive. They particularly remembered Marilyn's happy plans for a Fourth of July picnic on the last day of her life.

PART II

For Marilyn, July 3 started like any other summer Saturday—except that Sam spent a great part of the day in surgery at Bay View Hospital. For this reason the Sheppards couldn't enjoy their favorite sport of water-skiing on Lake Erie. However, plans were made for a wienie roast and an afternoon of water-skiing the next day. The hospital interns and their wives were coming over.

Marilyn spent part of the day marketing, buying along with the long week end's supplies the picnic food for the next day: hot dogs and rolls. (The following afternoon, only a few hours after her blood-drenched body had been found, her two thrifty sisters-in-law entered the house to remove the unused hot dogs and rolls from the refrigerator.)

Marilyn spent part of the day cleaning her house with extra care, because the Aherns and their children were coming to dinner that night. She made Sam's favorite dessert: blueberry pie.

For a couple of hours, with her hair pinned up, she sat in Sam's never-to-be-finished den, the walls of which had recently been paneled. As yet, she had chosen no draperies for the windows.

She had always typed all of Sam's medical papers and kept his files for him, for which he paid her a small fee. Now she typed out the paper Sam intended to read at the American Osteopathic Association Convention in Toronto a few days later. (Says Dr. Richard, "Three days after her murder, when Sam got out of the hospital, he returned to the house to get this paper, together with the slides that accompanied it. He sent them to the convention to be delivered in his absence... He's very conscientious.")

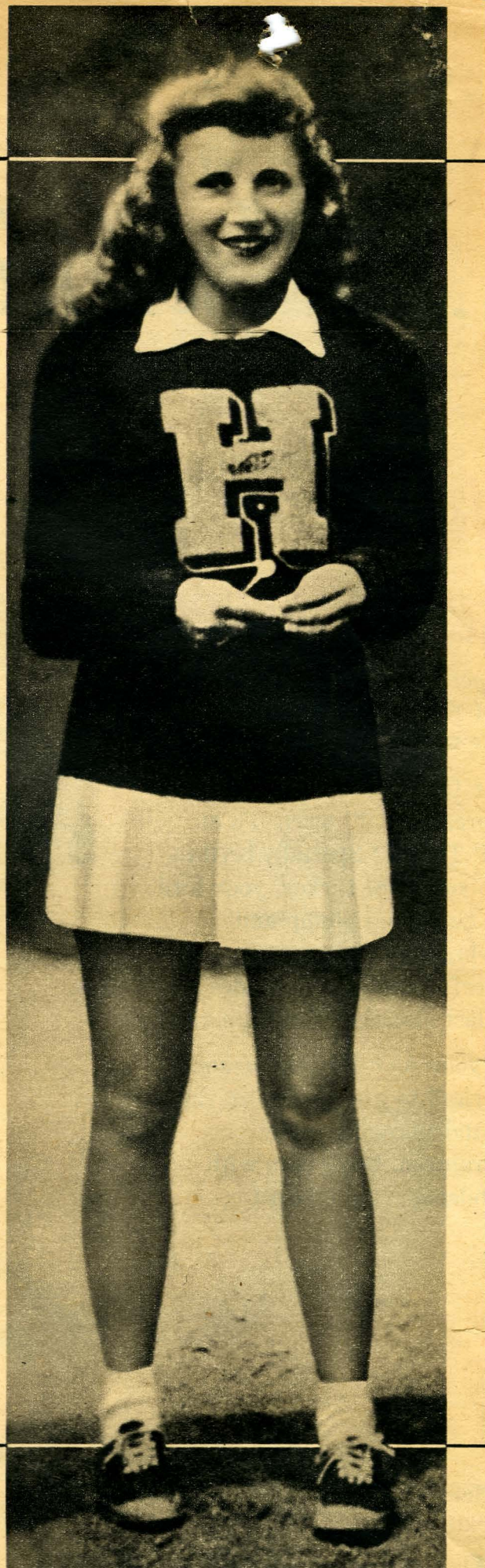
Lying in Marilyn's sewing basket was a half-knit Argyle sock which had been started months earlier by her aunt Henrietta Munn. She had promised to finish knitting the sock as a Christmas present for her uncle Worth Munn. But she left it untouched in the basket.

She fed Koko, the mongrel dog they had taken from Cleveland's dog pound two years earlier. Then she put the finishing touches on her dinner and prepared to see the Aherns for the evening. Because of the likelihood of holiday accidents which might keep Sam at the hospital indefinitely, it had been arranged that she, Sam, and Chip would visit the Ahern house for pre-dinner cocktails whenever Sam returned from the hospital.

She dressed in white shorts, a bright blouse and white moccasins—since, on the telephone, Nancy Ahern

THE MYSTERY WOMAN IN THE SHEPPARD CASE

None of Marilyn's high school sorority sisters foresaw her tragic end during the happy days when she proudly wore athletic Sam Sheppard's sweater.



had said she, too, would wear white shorts.

Sam drove into the driveway in the late afternoon and by six o'clock the Sheppard family arrived at the Ahern house. Chip promptly began playing with the two Ahern children, nine-year-old Michael and seven-year-old Leslie. Sitting in the Ahern breakfast room, the adults had two drinks each, with Sam alone choosing martinis. The others drank whisky sours.

Sam wore what was to become a famous outfit: brown corduroy trousers, a white T-shirt, a canvas jacket, white sweat socks and loafers.

(After the murder was made known, just before six the next morning, he wore nothing but the moccasins, socks, and pants.)

Around seven o'clock Sam received a telephone call from Bay View Hospital and rushed out on an emergency call. Marilyn, meanwhile, returned home to look at the cottage ham she was roasting.

By eight o'clock Sam was back again and they had all gathered at the Sheppard house for dinner. The three children were fed first in the kitchen, and then the four adults sat on the porch for their meal. With (Continued on page 12)

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the ham Marilyn served applesauce, string beans and tossed salad. For dessert they had the blueberry pie she had made that day. No drinks were taken at the Sheppard house that evening.

As always, Sam ate with enormous appetite, and before starting his meal he put on a brown corduroy coat in place of his earlier canvas jacket, against the chilly evening. While they ate, they all listened to the radio broadcast of the Cleveland-Chicago baseball game.

After dinner Don Ahern went home briefly with his two children to put them to bed. (By 6 a. m. the next day there was to be no sign that the four Aherns had ever been in the Sheppard home—not a single Ahern fingerprint remained. For that matter, the Sheppard furniture, the telephone, even the kitchenware would be barren of any prints at all. There would only be two clear prints in the entire house: Sam's left thumb-print on the headboard of Marilyn's

bed, and one of Chip's palm-prints on the inside of the living room desk. Both this desk and the den desk, with drawers roughly pulled out and papers spewing from them, would show odd scratch-marks, as if made by a rough cloth being passed thoroughly over them—but no fingerprints.)

On his return to the Sheppard house Don Ahern found Marilyn, Sam, and his wife Nancy in the living room. The radio was still on but they were watching a television program.

Upstairs, in one bedroom, little Chip slept soundly. In another bedroom stood the suitcases of the Sheppard house guest, Dr. Lester Hoversten, who had gone away for the week end to visit other friends. In the living room, still listening to the 15-inning game by radio, the two couples began watching a film on the television set.

Sam had begun watching on the floor. As the evening progressed he moved to sit with his wife on

one of the two chairs borrowed from the Aherns, and then moved again to the couch—where he fell asleep. He still wore his brown corduroy coat, and the T-shirt which was to disappear permanently some time between midnight and the next morning.

The Aherns went home around midnight and Marilyn sleepily saw them to the door to say good-by—forever, as it turned out. Sam still lay asleep on the couch in the living room. As often before on windy nights, the Aherns decided not to sleep in their own bedroom, but to use the guest room overlooking Lake Erie. "It's fun listening to the waves," Nancy Ahern often told friends.

Meanwhile, at the Sheppard home, Marilyn left Sam on the couch and climbed the stairs for the last time. For the past few months she and Sam had been sleeping in the bedroom on the lake side. She had told her cleaning woman that its twin beds were more suitable than their double bed, because Sam had a cold.

Finally, in her pajamas, she went into the familiar lakeside room with its few pieces of furniture. Besides her Grandmother Reese's twin beds it held the Boston

rocker Sam had once bought her, a bedside table holding a telephone, and a chest of drawers on which stood a framed picture of herself taken with Sam.

Switching off the ceiling light, she got into bed. Near by slept her son Chip, who was not to awaken all night, even when somebody who dripped blood stood on the threshold of his room peering in at him. Downstairs was the dog Koko, which was not to bark throughout the night's eerie events. Also downstairs, Sam slept on the living room couch.

At the time it must have seemed to Marilyn that she was ending another average day. That it actually ended far differently for her was known to the world within 24 hours.

There was Sam's telephone call made to Mayor Houk at 5:45 the next morning, with the cry, "They've killed Marilyn!" (By that time, she had been dead between two and three hours.) There was Houk's dazed arrival at Sam's house, accompanied by his wife, a few minutes later. There was Mrs. Houk's telephone call to the Bay Village police—and to Sam's brother Richard Sheppard.

(Richard arrived, started up the stairs to where

Marilyn lay dead and came down again. Then he went back upstairs and was in Marilyn's room three or four minutes.)

There was Stephen's arrival; with him he carried not his medical kit, but a pistol for which he had no permit. There was the hurried carrying of Sam by Stephen and others to Stephen's car. He was quickly driven to Bay View Hospital, where Cleveland homicide men later talked with him.

There was John Eaton's decision, after looking around the Sheppard home in his capacity as Bay Village police chief, that the case needed the crime-detecting technique of the Cleveland Homicide Squad. He called them and they arrived on the scene.

Also, on the day of the murder, there was the hiring by Sam's brothers of the most famous criminal lawyer in Ohio, William J. Corrigan.

Three days later there was Marilyn's funeral, to which Sam came in a wheelchair, while wearing a neck-brace for his neck-fracture—which later turned out to be non-existent.

Seven days later, although Sam was not yet arrested for his wife's (Continued on following page)



Just before the jury was picked that convicted Dr. Sam Sheppard of murdering his wife, he was comforted by his father, who recently died in the hospital he founded.

THE MYSTERY WOMAN

IN THE SHEPPARD CASE

(Continued from preceding page)

murder, there was a day of grilling at Cleveland's Criminal Courts Building. During this session detectives wondered aloud if Sam might not have disposed of a blood-stained T-shirt in the Sheppard-controlled Bay View Hospital laundry, where bloody clothes were expected—and if the murder weapon might not have been cleansed in the hospital's disinfectant tanks. They further wondered if the Sheppard house had not been cleaned up before Mayor Houk had been telephoned.

Eighteen days later, on July 22, came the coroner's inquest during which Sam was further interrogated. The inquest was held in the gymnasium of a local school.

Twenty-six days later, on July 30, Sam finally was arrested for the murder of his wife Marilyn. At 10 o'clock that night, handcuffed, he was led out of his father and mother's home where he had been staying. Someone, among bystanders on the lawn, shouted: "Murderer!"

It was three and a half months before he went on trial, on October 18—months filled with accusations made by Sam, Richard, and Stephen Sheppard against almost everyone Sam had ever known. Many friends were called Marilyn's murderer. Among the many people accused were Mayor Houk, Mrs. Houk, Dr. Hoversten, and Marilyn's cousin Keith Weigle. The police felt that none of these people was even faintly open to suspicion. Never-



On the last day of her life Marilyn Sheppard typed a medical paper for Dr. Sam and went shopping to pick up supplies for a picnic with some of their friends.



Two weeks after her son Sam was sentenced to life imprisonment, Ethel Sheppard committed suicide. Her farewell note didn't mention the murder trial.



Susan Hayes was no mystery to Marilyn Sheppard, who knew that Dr. Sam had been making love to the young woman in California and even in Bay Village.

theless, Dr. Hoversten offered to take a lie detector test, while Mayor Houk and Dr. Weigle insisted upon taking it. They passed superbly. Sam alone, on at least 15 different occasions, refused to take the test at all.

During the trial itself, as at the inquest, Sam told, from the witness stand, his story of what happened after midnight on Marilyn's last night. It turned out to be a hazily inexact story, told in oddly dreamlike language.

He spoke of being "stimulated" to go to Marilyn after hearing her cry out. He said that in her bedroom he could "visualize a form of some type with a light top." As he tried to reach Marilyn he was "intercepted or grappled."

Then, after looking at Marilyn's beaten body, and at his sleeping son, Chip, he heard a noise downstairs. "I can't explain my emotions," he said, "but I was stimulated to chase or get whoever or whatever was responsible."

In the living room he "visualized a form" which he says he chased to the beach where he "lost visualization."

The 12 members of the jury did not believe him, and they revealed their disbelief by their verdict of guilty. But neither did they believe that Sam had planned the murder ahead of time. They felt that the crime had been committed in a demoniac outburst of rage and, for this reason, their verdict read "murder in the second degree"—giving Sam life imprisonment in place of the electric chair.

The trial ended just before Christmas on December 21. Two weeks later tragedy struck again. After many weeks in Bay View Hospital following a stroke, Sam's mother took her son Stephen's gun and killed herself. Behind her she left a note that did not mention Sam. It read: "I cannot go on without Dad. Thanks for everything, Steve." Eleven days after her suicide the tragedy was compounded when her husband, who had also spent many weeks in Bay View Hospital, also died.

This modern counterpart of an ancient Greek tragedy is not yet played out, even though both the elder Sheppards are now at rest in Sunset Memorial Park—and, some distance away,

Marilyn lies in the Reese family mausoleum at Knollwood.

Like a cloud of poison gas hanging over Bay Village are the animosities caused by the Sheppard family's wholesale murder accusations, and the Sheppards themselves speak with unconcealed bitterness of Marilyn—as if they cannot forgive the fact that her murder somehow dynamited their comfortable way of life forever.

Seven-year-old Chip, now living with his uncle Stephen, still attends a grade school in near-by Rocky River. At his uncle's house he was told that his mother had gone to Heaven to help care for a baby cousin who died last spring; but at school it is said that some of his fellow-students shouted at him, "Your father killed your mother!"

Perhaps the strangest result of the tragedy is revealed in Sam himself. Some of those who have seen him in his jail cell say, "The Sam we used to know could never have killed Marilyn—but he's not the same Sam we saw today in jail. That man is a stranger."

He has now developed several of the qualities he criticized in his dead wife. He has become a fanatic smoker of cigarettes, and a reader of novels and books of history. With almost maniacal intensity, he insists that he is innocent.

Marilyn, who, ironically, turned out to be the mystery woman in the Sheppard case, seems just as much a part of Bay Village as she was while alive. Her neighbors remember her vividly. She continues to be a lively topic of conversation. But Bay Villagers also remember something else—that for good behavior, Sam Sheppard can be paroled from prison by the time he is in his early forties.

"He'll be back in 10 years," Bay Villagers say. Then, as they have for months, they sit staring at one another.

Perhaps Marilyn Sheppard's story will never be truly ended. **THE END**



Dr. Sam's older brothers (Dr. Richard, shaking hands with the murder suspect, and Dr. Stephen) tried hard to divert suspicion from Marilyn's husband.