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11-16-1957

57/11/16 Hints He Killed Marilyn

Cleveland News

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Cleveland News, "57/11/16 Hints He Killed Marilyn" (1957). *All Articles*. 691.

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Hints He Killed *news* Marilyn

A 22-year-old fugitive from a Florida chain gang today "confessed" he beat a Cleveland woman to death in July, 1954, when she surprised him burglarizing her home.

The youth, held at Deland, Fla., did not mention Marilyn Sheppard as his alleged victim, but the story he told Sheriff Rodney B. Thursby vaguely resembled circumstances in the Bay Village crime.

Sheriff Thursby identified his prisoner as Donald J. Wedler.

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Mrs. Sheppard, pregnant housewife, was killed by 35 vicious blows of an unknown weapon in the bedroom of her home on the lakeshore on the morning of July 4, 1954. Her husband, Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard, is serving a life term in the Ohio Penitentiary for the crime.

Conscience Speaks

Sheriff Thursby called Cleveland police and told them his prisoner, who had been serving time for a robbery at the time of his escape from a road gang, said he wanted to get the Cleveland crime off his conscience.

"I arrived in Cleveland from California early in July, 1954," the sheriff quoted his prisoner. "I met a man who gave me some dope and then I stole a car, a 1949 or 1950 Ford.

"I remember driving over a big bridge into a residential district outside of Cleveland."

Carried Iron Bar

The youth said he parked the car, took an iron bar from a suitcase he was carrying and entered a home.

"I saw a man asleep on a couch," he related. "I went upstairs and there was a woman asleep in one of the rooms.

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SHEPPARD

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While I was ransacking a dresser she woke up."

The prisoner said he struck the woman with the iron bar "two or three times" and ran down the stairs, encountering a man on the way. He said he recalled a "large body of water" into which he threw the blood-stained bar.

He said he changed his clothes and abandoned the car and left Cleveland shortly after the crime. *News*

Kerr Is Unimpressed

Capt. David E. Kerr, head of the Cleveland homicide bureau, said he placed no credence in the "confession." He pointed out that Marilyn Sheppard's bedroom had not been ransacked, that she was struck at least 35 times on the head and face, and that Sam Sheppard claims he fought his wife's assailant and was twice knocked out by him.

Capt. Kerr said the "confession" was the second he had received within a week, and one of several since the crime three years ago. *7-16-57*

A few days ago a mental patient in an asylum wrote Cleveland detectives that he had slain Marilyn Sheppard.

Detective Inspector Thomas Murphy also discounted the Florida confession, but said he would ask Sheriff Thursby to mail him the prisoner's complete statement of the murder for study.

The Florida "confessor" is close to six feet tall with blond hair cut in "duck-tail" fashion. He was born in Washington, D.C., and was sentenced for armed robbery late in 1954 at Tampa, Fla.

Told of Dark Hair

Dr. Sam Sheppard described a "large man" with dark, bushy hair he said he fought with when he ran to his wife's help after her cries had awakened him on the downstairs couch.

Erle Stanley Gardner, mystery story writer who conducts the "Court of Last Resort" in Argosy magazine, reports in the latest issue of the publication that four "top experts" in lie detection have dismissed all possibilities that relatives if Dr. Sheppard "covered up any evidence" in the murder case.

Gardner wrote that there had been "insinuations" that the Sheppard family removed fingerprints, magnified the story of an intruder and in other ways directed evidence away from Sam Sheppard.

The writer said lie tests had cleared brothers of Dr. Sam and their wives of doing anything to aid him illegally.