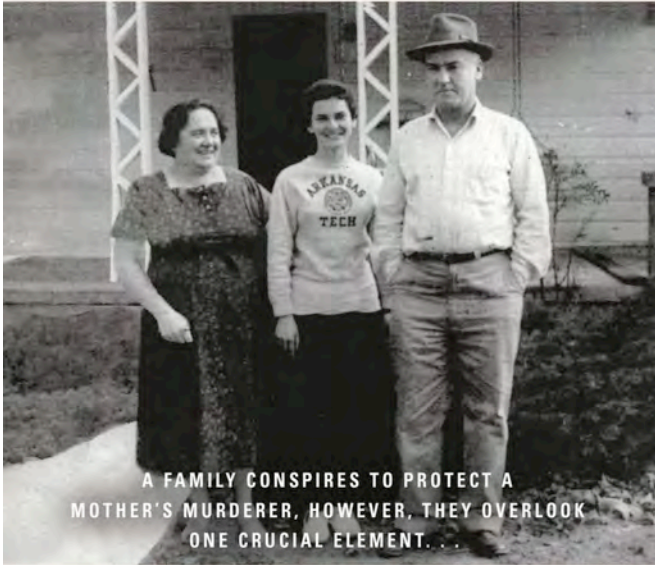


IF SOMEONE IS KILLED AND OFFICIALS  
REFUSE TO INVESTIGATE,

## Is It Still Murder?



A FAMILY CONSPIRES TO PROTECT A  
MOTHER'S MURDERER, HOWEVER, THEY OVERLOOK  
ONE CRUCIAL ELEMENT. . .

**DAUGHTERS WHO LOVE HER.**

Sherry Lewis Henry, Ph.D., MSW  
Cecelia A. Maurer, M.A. & Aubrey J. Harness, B.S.

*A Roman senator's daughter and her husband embark on a mission for the emperor. They'll deliver the sword of King David of Israel that legend claims carries a curse to Jerusalem. At every turn, they are faced with challenges—and a brutal killer.*

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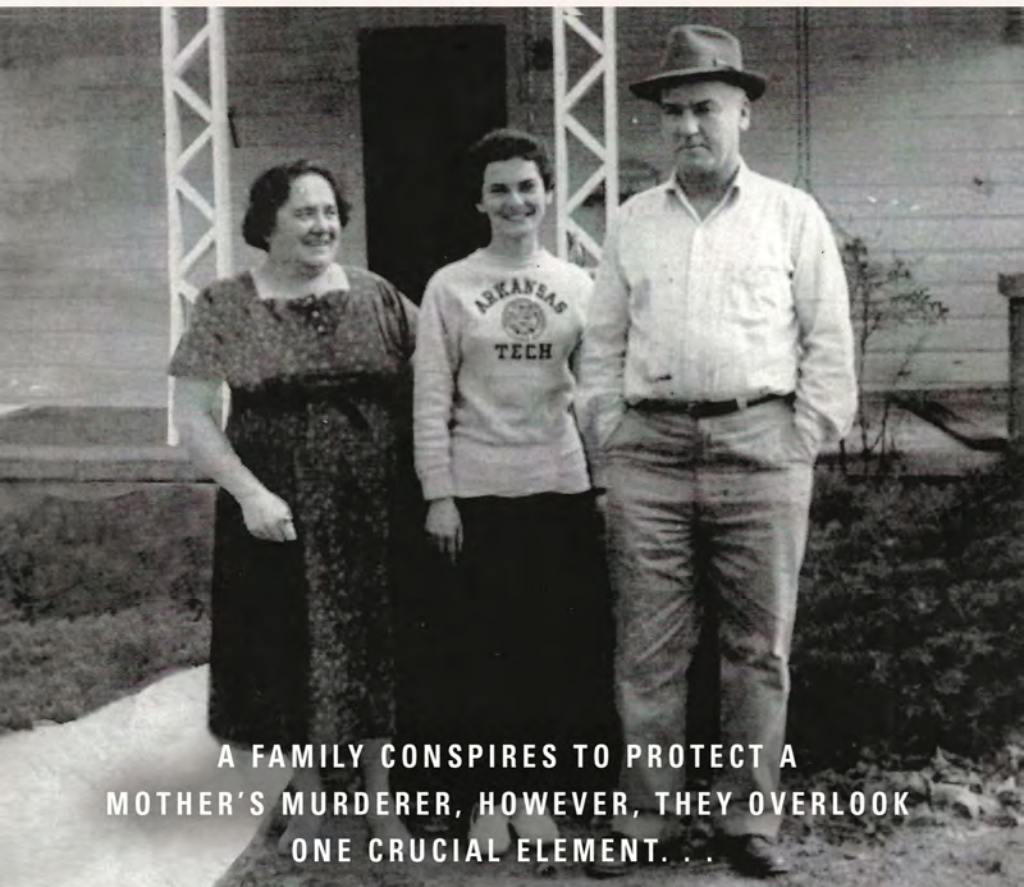
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“Sherry’s quest for truth is a compelling account of children living in fear and a loving wife’s submission to the alcoholism of her husband, yet it is more than that. It shows the spiritual and intellectual growth of the author as she channels her own pain, fear, and oppression, into a ministry to help others. This book clearly conveys how being a victim does not equate into victimizing others—rather, life can be rewarding and productive even after such a loss as ‘murder in the family.’”

Michael Latimer, Attorney, San Antonio, Texas

“This is an excellent illustration of how one’s life course can be determined, by the events that occurred in childhood. Childhood abuses leave lasting scars along with an implicit need to resolve and master overwhelming experiences. Sherry’s work reads like a mystery novel, weaved in social corruption, personal guilt, anguish, and intrigue.”

Anne Corso-Johanson, Ph.D., Cerritos, California

“Most of what is worthy and of value is either born of pain or strongly associated with it. Through her personal and profound pain, Dr. Sherry Lewis has elucidated, distilled, and explained a syndrome, distinct and differentiated, that identifies the horrific experience of a particular category of victims. The term ‘**Survival Syndrome**’ explains what, for many sufferers has been wordless, captivating enslavement. With Dr. Lewis’s seminal work, the victim and the treating clinician, are given the conceptual tools, the optimism, and a poignant and inspirational example of recovery. I highly recommend this book to those serious in their study of the devastations of trauma.”

Robb Johanson, Ph.D., Cerritos, California

“There is no greater existential struggle in life, than the pulling free from the dysfunctionalities of one’s own family. Dr. Sherry Lewis’s shocking autobiography is one such heroic struggle.”

Robert M. Anthony, Ph.D., California

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# Table of Contents

<b>A Tribute to Roy Rogers and Dale Evans .....</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>Missing You .....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>Letter of Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One .....</b>	<b>3</b>
PEOPLE ARE DISAPPOINTMENTS .....	11
<b>Chapter Two.....</b>	<b>13</b>
PEOPLE HAVE TROUBLES .....	17
<b>Chapter Three.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Chapter Four.....</b>	<b>27</b>
MY OLD ROCKING CHAIR.....	31
<b>Chapter Five.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter Six.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Chapter Seven .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Chapter Eight.....</b>	<b>57</b>
EVEN ME .....	61
<b>Chapter Nine .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Chapter Ten.....</b>	<b>77</b>
MY MOTHER LIVES .....	81
<b>Chapter Eleven.....</b>	<b>83</b>
BESTOW THY PEACE .....	89
<b>Chapter Twelve .....</b>	<b>91</b>
THOU KNOWEST .....	95
<b>Chapter Thirteen .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Chapter Fourteen.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Chapter Fifteen .....</b>	<b>119</b>
I REALLY CAN'T COMPLAIN.....	123

<b>Chapter Sixteen</b> .....	<b>125</b>
TRUE HAPPINESS .....	135
<b>Chapter Seventeen</b> .....	<b>137</b>
<b>Chapter Eighteen</b> .....	<b>149</b>
EARLY THIS MORNING .....	165
<b>Chapter Nineteen</b> .....	<b>167</b>
UNEXPRESSED .....	176
<b>Chapter Twenty</b> .....	<b>177</b>
SILENCE .....	184
<b>Chapter Twenty-One</b> .....	<b>185</b>
MY HEROES.....	192
<b>Chapter Twenty-Two</b> .....	<b>193</b>
STILL, I AM HOPING .....	196
<b>Chapter Twenty-Three</b> .....	<b>197</b>
FAITH IN AN ANGEL .....	199
ALONE .....	202
<b>Chapter Twenty-Four</b> .....	<b>203</b>
<b>Chapter Twenty-Five</b> .....	<b>213</b>
TIME FLOWS FREELY .....	227
<b>Chapter Twenty-Six</b> .....	<b>239</b>
‘TIS WHY .....	255
<b>Chapter Twenty-Seven</b> .....	<b>257</b>
MY CHILD .....	264
<b>Chapter Twenty-Eight</b> .....	<b>265</b>
CAPTIVITY TURNED .....	277
<b>Chapter Twenty-Nine</b> .....	<b>279</b>
TRUTH – OUR REAL FRIEND .....	286
<b>Chapter Thirty</b> .....	<b>287</b>
WORTHWHILE .....	293

*If Someone Is Killed and the Officials Refuse to Investigate, Is It Still Murder?*

<b>Chapter Thirty-One</b> .....	<b>295</b>
<b>Chapter Thirty-Two</b> .....	<b>307</b>
<b>Chapter Thirty-Three</b> .....	<b>311</b>
PLEASE HELP ME, LORD .....	318
<b>Chapter Thirty-Four</b> .....	<b>319</b>
REST .....	336
<b>Chapter Thirty-Five</b> .....	<b>337</b>
SPECIAL FRIEND .....	347
<b>Chapter Thirty-Six</b> .....	<b>349</b>
THIS ACHE.....	366
<b>Chapter Thirty-Seven</b> .....	<b>367</b>
THE VICTOR O’ER MY SOUL .....	375
<b>Chapter Thirty-Eight</b> .....	<b>377</b>
ONE QUESTION YET.....	392
<b>Chapter Thirty-Nine</b> .....	<b>393</b>
<b>Chapter Forty</b> .....	<b>407</b>
<b>Chapter Forty-One</b> .....	<b>411</b>
ON HOLY GROUND.....	414
<b>Reflections from the author, decades later</b> .....	<b>417</b>
<b>Co-Author’s Notes</b> .....	<b>423</b>
<b>Co-Author’s Notes</b> .....	<b>427</b>
<b>Summation</b> .....	<b>449</b>

## Recurring Dream

The silence was deafening. The dog outside was trying to bark, the wind was blowing the tree branches and the people outside, were moving their lips, but no sound came.

Inside, the smells of cornbread and gunpowder mixed to make a nauseating odor. The heartbeat started slowly and then increased its tempo as different parts of the living room came into focus. Was it my heartbeat that was racing? The kitchen table had a plate of cornbread, a butter knife and a bullet beside the glass of iced tea. The sound of the heartbeat was like an internal drum now. Somehow, the Christmas tree looked ugly and gross in the new room. It had a tilted appearance.

I got up to steady the tree and slipped. The floor was covered with red, red blood. Something, everything, was wrong.

“Mama! Mama! Mama!” I heard myself shout. The heartbeat stopped, “Mama!”

Sound unexpectedly broke through the silence. I could hear my voice, my steps, the wind, the dog and a siren.

“Sherry, it’s okay. It’s okay. Let’s go,” was repeated by dozens of voices. But the tree was wrong. It had to be fixed and Mama should be here. I saw Daddy in Mama’s room, sitting on the bed.

“Daddy, where’s Mama?” He looked through me, with a tear slowly edging its way down his cheekbone. His shoes had blood on them, as though he had walked through a river of blood. They were soaked. Tearing through the house, panic and dread, caused my head to pound. I screamed for Mama. There was the Christmas tree, a shiny, red now. The carpet was speckled with spots of blood. There was one of her shoes.

“Mama! Mama! No! No, Mama, no!”

Grotesquely lying on presents and pushing the bloody tree against the wall was my Mama. Bruised and broken, she looked small.

“Mama, Mama!” I heard myself shout and sob.

“Sherry, let’s go. It’s okay. It’s okay,” echoed voices through



the house. Bloody arms pulled me from Mama. How small she looked, the size of a small child, then a baby.

“Mama, don’t go! Mama!”

“Let’s go, Sherry. It’s okay. It’s okay.”

I turned and tore from the grip around my arms and ran to the tree. She was the size of an infant now, a sweet, but destroyed doll. The size of my toy teacup. My heart was ready to explode. The shouts magnified,

“Let’s go, Sherry. It’s okay. It’s okay.”

“Mama! No!” I shouted as I hit the floor.

All their shoes were covered in blood.

“Mama...Mama...Mama...Mama...Mama...”

## Chapter One

An ominous presence seemed to surround her as she hurried up the front sidewalk to her parents' home. Sherry inserted her key in the lock and swung the door wide open. There on the living room floor was her mother, lying in a pool of blood, dead. A large revolver laid a few inches away.

Sherry screamed and woke up, realizing that it was only a nightmare.

First thing the next morning, she called Mama on the telephone. She wanted to tell her about the ridiculous dream and rid herself of the gloom it had cast on her. But when she heard her mother's voice on the line, she knew she couldn't speak of her dream. She'd have to wait until they were together. She couldn't bear the thought of losing Mama.

"Oh, Sherry, I'm so glad you called. I'm looking forward to having you and my babies come home for the holidays. I can hardly wait for their eyes to light up when they see the surprises I'm making for them."

"You really spoil Aubrey and Cecelia, Mama. I sure hope we can make it for Christmas, but you know construction work. We're not told yet if Nat will be off for Christmas or New Year's."

Her mother's sweet voice offered comfort. "Now, don't you worry, Honey. Whether we have our Christmas on December 25 or on January 1, the babies won't know the difference—just whenever you all get here."

Sherry smiled, hearing her mother's excitement and love.

"How is everything, Mama?"

There was a pause. “You know, Sherry, it’s not easy with your daddy. Every day it seems he’s filled with more venom.” She sighed. “He doesn’t want me to talk to anyone or go anywhere.”

“You can’t do that, Mama,” Sherry said.

“Oh, I won’t. I told him so too. I told him that he could live like a hermit if he chose to, but that I wasn’t going to. No, I won’t do that.”

“I worry about you, Mama,” Sherry said softly.

“Don’t, Honey. You know, with you kids being older, I won’t be putting up with him much longer. Robbie’s a senior now and even engaged. Isn’t that something!” She was so happy for her youngest child.

“How are Robbie and Chuck doing?” Sherry asked.

“Oh, just fine. They’re both so cute and bashful. He’s a good boy from a good home. I’m real proud of Robbie. I still like to baby her, though, while I can, so I have her a hamburger cooked when she gets off the school bus each day. She seems to like a little spoiling. You and Ellis had it better in some ways than she has. Daddy don’t give her much spending money or car privileges. He’s a lot tighter than he was with you both, but she don’t fuss. She’s a good little gal.”

“Is Ellis coming home for Christmas?” Sherry hadn’t seen her brother much since marrying and moving away from Clinton four years ago.

“Oh, you know Ellis. He does whatever he feels like at the time. He’ll probably open presents with us and then be on his way. He’s still mad at me about his diabetes, but I don’t take any lip from him. It’s in our family, and he has to deal with it the same as I do. At least he seems to like this new college he’s in. Maybe he’ll make a go of it this time.”

The two chatted a little longer, both growing more and more excited to see each other in the next couple of weeks. Then, with the dream still vivid in her thoughts and memory, Sherry made a point of

ending the conversation with words she wished she said more often: “I love you, Mama.”

She had no idea this was to be her very last conversation with her mother. The nightmare would soon become a gruesome reality.

Over the next few days, the dream would not leave her. It had such a powerful effect that she began to systematically collect all of Mama’s letters. She didn’t want anything of hers to be accidentally thrown away. Every morning she woke up with that same image in her mind of Mama lying on the living room floor. *Get over it*, she told herself. *You’ve got a lot to do. It was only a dream. Mama’s fine.*

Sherry knew she wouldn’t be telling Nat about her phone call to Mama, because he had given her explicit orders not to make any more long-distance phone calls. They would soon be disconnecting the phone and all the utilities, preparing to move once again. She didn’t like moving so often and particularly dreaded leaving this town where her friends and church were. But with her husband in construction work, they had to move often, and she tried to make the best of it.

Nat liked having his own truck. It enabled him to unhook the utilities himself and move their trailer home whenever he wished. There were occasions when his wife wished this wasn’t so easy for him to do. One Saturday morning in particular stood out in her mind. They had just finished eating breakfast—dishes were still on the table—when Nat said it would be a good time for her to buy groceries. He had other things to do later in the day and would need the car. Sherry left immediately, since they were out of milk and other necessities for the kids.

To her horror, when she returned to their trailer space, it was vacant! Nat had unhooked the utilities and moved the trailer right after sending her away. She had no idea where their home had gone. She wondered whether he had taken the time to pack appropriately. Somehow, she doubted that he had. A simple chore, really, yet it made a profound difference in securing their belongings. A few pillows stuffed into the cabinets, and tape on the doors, closets,

bathroom medicine chest, and drawers tended to protect most things well enough. He probably hadn't taken the time to do that, though.

After a number of phone calls, she learned that he had moved the trailer to another town not far away. When she eventually got there, groceries still in the car, Nat enjoyed her reaction too much. Inside their trailer home were breakfast dishes strewn across the floor, coffee spilled, glass dishes broken, food smeared into the carpet. No doors had been secured, so the refrigerator door had swung open, food had toppled out, and dishes had been thrown from the cabinets.

"This'll teach you to leave without washing the dishes first," he scoffed, watching his wife closely in her bewilderment of the whole trashy mess.

"I left because you told me to go right away. You were still at the table." Her words were useless in defense, but they nevertheless seemed important for the simple reason that they were true. Her entire life, she had valued the simple truth, whether it changed the situation or not. She knew that she would still be blamed, but she felt the need to hear the truth in her own words.

They had started to go to church, and Mama was so happy about that. She was certain that they would be a happy family now. Sherry hoped she was right. She geared her letters toward that impression, which wasn't difficult to do. They were in church, after all, and she was happy about that. Yet there were many signs that something was wrong, which even her pastor and other couples noticed as they interacted with them.

Nat demanded a leadership role, but he wasn't willing to humbly invest himself in preparation for leadership. He wanted to be seen as an expert in every class discussion, yet he seldom had his facts straight. Everyone was aware of it but him.

Sherry knew that Nat had been given his nickname in childhood for being so vulnerable to input from others. He had been seen as a gnat, eager to be an associate with other, older boys. They, of course,

had recognized this trait and had taken advantage of it, making him do silly things, amusing themselves with his blind faith in them.

None of Nat's ideas seemed to originate with him, and he always prefaced them with "Bill says," or, "John says," which, to him, was unquestionable. Sherry was never allowed input into any decisions. Nat was dictatorial with his wife, and it seemed important to him to deny her anything that he knew she valued. But she hoped that now, in the church, he would learn a humility that would put their family on solid ground. She was also glad that Mama felt so happy about them, and she thought that, just perhaps, time would prove her right. She would have to answer to Nat later, about defying him and phoning Mama, but, oh, how that phone call helped!

She had a great deal to do, as they were moving again, this time to a new state. Her days were spent packing and taking care of the children: Aubrey, now a three-and-a-half-year-old, and Cecelia, one year younger. Although Mama called them "her babies," Sherry knew they were growing quickly, and she valued every day and every experience with them.

So much happened in so short a time. They made the move, and immediately in came a heavy snowstorm. They were exhausted. Sherry barely found time to purchase a Christmas purse for Mama with the Green Stamps she had collected from the grocery store. Five days after they had talked on the phone, she was wrapping the purse when someone knocked on the door.

"Yes?" she said, looking at an elderly woman she'd never seen before.

"Your mother is dead."

"What?" she asked in disbelief. Her confusion turned into anger, anger at this stranger who had the audacity to deliver such a message.

"You can use my phone," the woman said, pointing to her mobile home across the street.

“You must be mistaken. I just spoke to her on the phone a few days ago.” Sherry held up the purse she was wrapping for her mother’s Christmas present.

The woman sadly shook her head and again motioned to her house.

“Please watch my kids,” Sherry whispered, hurrying out into the falling snow, her footsteps crushing the newly fallen flakes. She felt numb, but her hands were shaking when she dialed her parents’ number.

“Who’s this?” she asked when a man answered. Daddy never answered the phone.

“It’s me, Sherry, Arthur Lewis,” replied her father’s cousin.

“What are you doing answering Mama’s phone, Arthur?”

“Sherry, something’s happened here...”

“Put Mama on!” she shouted. “I want to talk to Mama.”

“That’s impossible, Sherry. Your Mama’s passed—”

She hung up. She didn’t want to hear the end of that statement or that word. She didn’t go back to her trailer right away. She ran out of her neighbor’s home and wandered around in the snow. She walked and let the cold air press against her, cooling her body that was fired so terribly by inner rage and the sudden onset of deep grief.

That night, Nat and Sherry bundled up their kids and left for Mama’s home. The trip was long and difficult. The driving snow made the roads slippery and made it hard to see. Husband and wife didn’t talk along the way. Sherry was left to her own painful thoughts.

She thought of the many questions she could have asked instead of just hanging up the phone. She knew so little—only that her mother was gone, dead. She couldn’t get the feeling of the word, but she knew it would be more than a word in a few hours when they got to her parents’ home.

“I wish I knew what she died from,” she said to her husband several times, hoping that he would stop the car and make a phone call to inquire. She knew better than to ask, though. She couldn’t bear to have him refuse that, too.

“You had Arthur Lewis on the phone. All you had to do was ask him what she died from. But what did you do? Hung up the phone! That sure makes a lot of sense, now, don’t it? You always do the stupidest thing possible. I really think you have some kind of special talent. You’re always so stupid.”

The way he laughed at her following his callous statement would have enraged her, except that instead it instantly brought her back to another scene that had taken place just one year earlier. His laughter had totally repulsed her then. When President Kennedy had just been shot, and pronounced dead, and the nation—the entire world—mourned (if not for America’s loss of its president, at least for a young widow and two little children); Nat had laughed heartily, primarily because the men he happened to be near at the time had laughed. Just like a gnat, he buzzed along with them. Then it had mattered. Now it was Mama, and Nat just didn’t matter one way or another.

Sherry wondered how she’d died, assuming it had been from a heart attack. She was so glad she had said “I love you” on the phone. She wondered whether Momma had heard it or had already hung up. And that dream. Sherry remembered the dream and her friend’s words:

“You’ll never have more than you can bear.”

When the children were awake, they sang Sunday school songs. The action ones were the most comforting for the kids. They could lose themselves in songs like “Peter, James, and John in the Sailboat,” “Deep and Wide,” and “Little Robin Red Breast.” They also knew the words to some strengthening choruses, such as “I Know the Lord Will Make a Way for Me” and “At Calvary.”



Sherry was glad that Nat didn't know how much their singing meant to her; otherwise, he would have put a stop to it. When the kids grew sleepy, Sherry pretended to sleep too, while continuing to sing the words over and over, silently.

They arrived at Mama's at three in the morning to find hordes of men, milling around the house. They looked like zombies with their blank stares and expressionless faces.

*What are they doing here? Sherry wondered. Why are they in my mother's house at three in the morning, and why are they staring at me?*

She asked several of them, about her sister. "Where's Roberta?" No one seemed to know. Someone mumbled that she was spending the night with friends, but nobody knew with whom or where.

When she asked about her mother, they looked at each other and back at her, saying nothing. All through the years, Mama and Sherry had gone together to visit families in which a loved one had died. They always talked about the loved one. They talked about how fine they were, and they touched, hugged, and even cried with the mourners. Where were those people now? What was different here when Sherry needed to talk about Mama and to be touched and hugged? She needed to cry. Didn't anyone remember how fine she was, and so recently, too?

Suddenly, Ellis appeared. Sherry asked him, "Where's Robbie?" She desperately wanted to see her. The sisters had always been close, and Sherry wanted to be with her now so terribly.

"She's okay. She's okay. But we need to talk, Sherry."

"Ellis, what happened to Mama? And why are all these people here acting so awful? Nobody will talk to me, and I'm hungry, Ellis. I never saw Mama's refrigerator so empty! I'm hungry and I want to see Robbie and I want to see Mama! Where is Mama? Why isn't she here?" She had never come home before when Mama wasn't there, and this was agonizing, excruciating!

“Now, Sherry, you’ve got to calm down, and we’ll tell you everything. But let’s go in the back where we can talk, okay? Come on.”

Ellis and an aunt, their dad’s sister, ushered Sherry into the back room. This didn’t seem like Ellis. But Daddy had watched his daughter go from person to person with her questions, and he had just stared. He saw Ellis motion her to the back, so she figured she was expected to go through this ritual back in her old room. It had been so pretty, and it still looked much like she’d left it only four years ago. She sat down on her old bed, which had become Mama’s in her absence. She wasn’t sure why Aunt Jewell was there, but she was willing to put up with anything to get some answers to this grisly riddle.

### *People Are Disappointments*

*People are disappointments  
They’re cruel at times and hard  
Some things they do we can’t  
Overlook or disregard.*

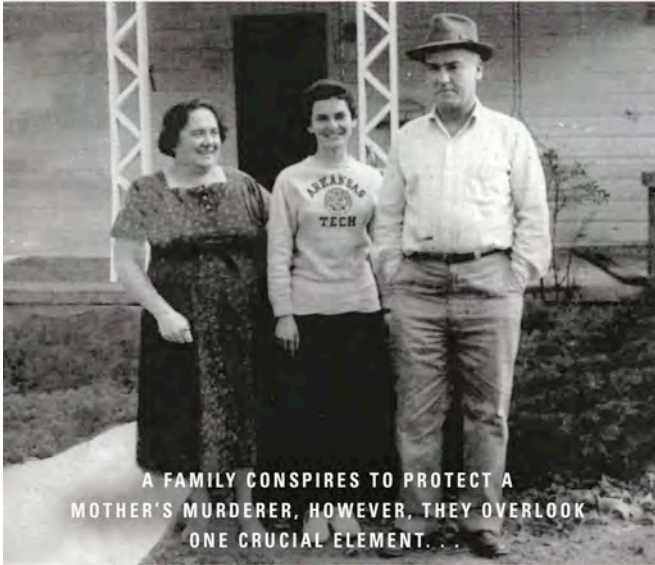
*It seems they’re just out to get us  
And, sometimes they are;  
That’s when it’s important  
to know what we stand for.*

*It doesn’t matter, good or bad  
what we get from attention  
But the more important things  
Which we often fail to mention.*

12 years old

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