

Just a quick warning.. This series contains explicit language

## Episode 1: The Sister

You could think of An injustice like a contagious disease.

There's always a starting point, patient zero.

But it never stops there.

The infection spreads, through families,through districts,AFFlicting everyone who comes into contact with it.

Some will suffer hardly any symptoms, they'll shake it off ..recover quickly.

But there will be those crippled for life, burdened by the weight of all that happened, wounded to the soul by the actions of those who betrayed them.

This\_is a Stuff CIRCUIT podcast called The District, a story about INjustice, about a murder investigation that goes off the rails, about gossip and whispered accusations, but mostly a story about people.

People who are trying to get on with their lives, but can't.

The story is produced by Toby Longbottom and Paula Penfold with field recording by Phil Johnson.

I'm Eugene Bingham.

As journalists, working on cases of INjustice, you start to see patterns. Not just about the cases themselves,but what they do to people.

We saw it investigating the case of Teina Pora, a teenage kid who was wrongly convicted of rape and murder and spent 21 years in prison.

We've seen it elsewhere too, how insidious the effect of injustice is,how it can can stamp itself on people's DNA, cascade down generations.

Frankly, it can drive people a bit batty,and often it's not even the people most directly affected.

In the words of Martin Luther King

*"injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".*

**So, you'd think that we'd be better at spotting the patterns by now. At knowing the signs, that there's a good, important story to be told.**

**But when a woman called Lynette Stevens got in touch with us a few years ago imploring us to dig into the death of her brother, Murray, our ears should really have pricked up sooner than they did.**

**It takes us a while, frankly, too long, to get around to giving her a call**

LS Hello

EB Hi Lynette, it's Eugene Bingham speaking

LS Oh hi eugene thank you for taking the time to call me

**And when we do, we end up falling down a very deep rabbit hole.**

**Over the course of a few phone calls and emails with Lynette and her sister Sandra Heke who now lives in Australia, it becomes pretty obvious there's a lot going on.**

EB You've got lots on your plate

LS Yes, we have but I don't know what else to do other than to fight back with this business with my brother's death. My sister and I feel like we've gone in too deep now.

**The talk of fighting back, of being in too deep are clues of what's to come. But then the conversation takes an unexpected and macabre turn.**

LS I just want you to know I'm not the sort of person that would ever commit suicide. I'm very, very strong and I've got grandchildren I love to bits and I would never ever do anything like that.

EB Do you really worry about your safety?

LS Yes, I do because we've already had a windscreen, 2014 on Christmas day we had a windscreen smashed. I believe that there's a lot of people involved in one way or another and I don't think..

**With Lynette, as you'll discover, there's always a lot to take in.**

LS he nearly ran me off the road one day, he's such a terrible driver

**The conversation veers off in complicated, sometimes bizarre directions...**

LS I've written to the Indian High Commissioner and I got a lovely letter back

**Then u-turns on itself.**

**You need your wits about you to keep up frankly, so it seems like time to meet her in person.**

EB Hi I'm Eugene

LS Nice to meet you

EB Good to finally meet you. Phil, Toby..

LS Well, welcome to our humble little abode

EB Thank you is the car okay there?

**It is pretty humble actually and nothing about this house screams danger. Except perhaps the criminal number of 'wow's' I'm using,**

'Wow'

LS and when we first came here Roger goes you can't live in this little rabbit hole it's too small

**Lynette lives in a two-bedroom cottage next to a school in rural south Auckland. Imagine a retro version of one of those tiny houses that are fashionable these days - small but perfectly formed.**

**The lawns are mowed, the garden is tidy, with rocks and flower pots, and the small kitchen has pots hanging on the wall. There are oranges, apples and bananas in a fruit bowl.**

**It's a while since Christmas but there's still a decoration hanging by the front door. Lynette's a determined host, endlessly offering us food and a cuppa.**

**It's all perfectly normal.**

**She's tall, with blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail, she's a mother and grandmother, and she explains that her husband, Roger, has made himself scarce this morning while we're around.**

**We ask Lynette to go back to the beginning and she starts telling us what will evolve into a remarkable story, Where even something as simple as a date has a conspiratorial tone.**

LS Eleven, eleven, eleven, that was the day my husband and I had been out. We got home and I had a call from my mum in Palmerston North my mum and dad. Dad was still alive then and Mum said our Murray had been killed.

**Murray Christensen is Lynette's brother.**

**He'd been working on a farm down the road from her when he was killed in November 20-11.**

**The farm he was working on was owned by people prominent in the district.**

LS Big names in the district huge huge names.

**It's a phrase we'll come across a lot.**

**The District.**

**In rural New Zealand, the district defines the community, the area you live in.**

**In its most benign sense, it evokes scenes of date scones baking in the farmhouse kitchen, a whistling kettle on the stove, and the smell of cow shit at the stockyards. If something goes wrong, people in the district will rally behind you.**

**But get off side with people and you'll quickly find out who your friends are - and your enemies.**

**For Lynette it's as if "the district" is a sinister force, controlled by a group of people who have the power to influence lives, relationships and reputations.**

LS But the other thing is what they do is they make other people in the district believe something and that sticks.

EB Is that what happens in a district like this? A story gets spun and then that's what sticks, that's what people believe.

LS Absolutely it does.

**Lynette grew up in a rural district herself - the Manawatu.**

**She's the eldest of four siblings, Murray was the youngest.**

LS Him and I always were the most passionate and sort of always into politics and you know debating and we'd sort of had a few issues and words at times but basically the last time I'd seen him this was November he died, I'd seen him in July at his daughter's birthday so we'd had a really good talk that day.

**There's a bit of detail about what happened to him, but you'll come to see why it's important..**

**Murray was a digger operator who worked on farms around the district.**

LS He even wasn't supposed to be working that day actually he got called in because one of his mates that he worked with his I think his wife was sick or the guy was sick. I can't remember how the story went but. Murray went in and got asked to go and retrieve this tractor and trailer unit that had got stuck in a ditch. And there was a young fellow feeding out carrots and I don't know God knows why he got into this position but he was going down the steep incline and the trailer sort of went right into the ditch. And so Murray was asked to come and retrieve this with his digger. So after lunch there was all these different stories we got you know so many different stories but it seemed that that's what Murray was there to do is to retrieve the tractor and trailer unit from the ditch.

**Exactly what actually happened is where things start to get a bit more complicated.**

**District court documents show that the digger Murray was driving started slipping down the hill, so another worker was called in to pull out the digger with a bulldozer. That other worker, was a man called Karl, Lobb.**

LS The bulldozer was reversing down the hill. And the witnesses that I tracked down said Karl wasn't even looking and Murray was apparently heard by this young farm manager's wife who live just lived up the hill you know it was a short distance. And she heard all the abuse going on and the husband of this young woman told me that Karl was really mad with Murray because Murray was he was very passionate he was very angry. He wouldn't have

been easy to work with. He would have been very fiery and I'm not making excuses for my little brother because he was ratbag and he was heard to be yelling and abusing and swearing. And Karl Lobb just kept going for him. The police got there and they the paramedic the lone paramedic got there. And he said on his report that Murray was run over by the bulldozer. Now this is the story they tried to tell everyone that Murray was run over by the bulldozer.

**Yes, farms are dangerous places. Rural people know that. Lynette knows that - she grew up on one.**

**But she's sensing it's something more than a workplace accident.**

**And we're beginning to recognise things we've seen before with a pervading sense of injustice.**

**How a tragic event can worm its way into the psyche. How with unanswered questions, grief can linger.**

**And how when you seek answers you sometimes end up in places you don't expect. It's emotionally taxing.**

EB You've been through a lot

LS I have but then you think to yourself maybe it's happened because I can handle it.

**The afternoon Murray died, there didn't seem to be anything suspicious.**

**There was nothing that rang alarm bells - even to Lynette.**

**That is ..Until a police serious crash investigator visited Lynette and her husband Roger.**

LS The serious crash investigator came here and she said to Roger and I they're trying to say that Murray was run over. There is no way he was run over. He was crushed between a bulldozer and the digger Obviously the running over story I mean we saw the pictures in court and of Murray lying there dead on the ground there's not a mark on his body.

EB So she's telling you a slightly different story.

LS Absolutely a different story yeah. She was very adamant that they were wrong and she was right.

**So to Lynette this seems weird - that there's an official line about how her brother died and then a police crash investigator who has a closer look completely disagrees. And it does seem weird, doesn't it?**

**In itself, maybe she would have shrugged it off.**

**Except it's the first in a string of inconsistencies.**

EB So quite early on in the piece you're getting these conflicting stories. Did that start to make you feel uneasy.

LS Very uneasy right from the word go. I had this feeling that there was lies told about this death and it was nothing rang true for me I'm such a suspicious person I'm so cynical especially now I never had any reason to doubt anyone before I just you know,

**For Lynette, a sense of injustice is colliding with another of her natural traits.**

LS I hate loose ends I can't stand it, it just drives me.

**She gets on Google and dives deep, trawling, for connections, fishing for the truth. She buys books online off Trade Me - dozens of them line shelves in her spare room. They're mostly about controversial New Zealand crime cases - a collection of the darkest moments in our criminal history. It's like she's studying other miscarriages of justice, figuring out how to figure things out, but you've got to wonder if it's good for her,**

LS I will wake up in the early hours of the morning and these things just flash in my head and I think oh my God you know I've had these these gut instincts and every time I go and delve a little bit, I know they say you shouldn't look at it it's like Dr Google but you do find out quite a bit. I bought that many books off trade me and it is all sort of centering around this bunch of people.

**Journalists. Campaigners. It puts people off. I've certainly had other journalists who've seen my name in these emails say, "oh, no, you haven't been caught up in this too, have you?"**

**I get it. It's easy to ignore her, dismiss her as a nutter.**

**But here's the thing. As she keeps digging, she starts to find things out, like this from a couple who knew her brother.... and Karl Lobb.**

LS The husband told me lots of things too, he said that Karl Lobb was really angry with Murray and really hated him and Murray got fed up with Karl Lobb all the time they were fighting constantly because Karl Lobb was a real chatterbox and Murray just wanted to get on with his work. So Murray would have been quite abusive to him. I can imagine ..he fell out with lots of people from being intolerant.

**She starts to wonder...who is this Karl Lobb and what's going on**

LS you know we just didn't know what to make of it

**So, it's kind of a relief to her when he's charged with careless driving causing death. She goes along for the trial...but it turns into a mess and fizzles out.**

EB So that case collapsed, so no no conviction.

LS Nothing. Yeah. he got off.

**It's the first in a string of disappointments for Lynette and the rest of Murray's family. The police prosecution has gone nowhere. And then a health and safety case goes nowhere.**

LS all been made to go away, the whole thing

**You've got to think that for most people, that would be the end of the road. You'd just walk away, get on with life.**

**But not Lynette.**

**As you might be beginning to sense, she's pretty determined.**

**And here's where we find out there might be a whole lot more to the death of Murray Christensen.**

EB So at that point you just knew Karl Lobb as a colleague of Murray's. There's obviously no love lost between them but nothing more really at that point. So Sandra finds something online Does she ring you or what happens?

LS She sent me the email. She copied and pasted. Well I think she sent me the link. Yeah.

EB And what does it say?

LS It said that Karl Lobb was a witness in 1970 Crewe murders.

TVNZ archive

1970 and a murder investigation that would shock the nation. A baby found alive in a blood-stained farm house. Her parents bodies found days later weighted in the Waikato River.

**That's Next time on The District**

**The District is a Stuff Circuit podcast series**

**Written and produced by Toby Longbottom, Paula Penfold and me**

**Toby also edits the series**

**Phil Johnson and I recorded the sound,blame me for the dodgier bits.**

**The final soundmix was provided by David Liversidge at Radiate Sound.**

**Archival sound recordings from the RNZ Collection at Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision.**

**And our music is from Audio Network**

**Mark Stevens, Patrick Crewdson and Keith Lynch are the executive producers**

**And we had digital help from Suyeon Son and Alex Liu.**

**You can find out more about this podcast series and the characters in this story over at Stuff.co.nz.**

**Have a look at the website, where you can find extras, including some wonderful archival photographs.**

**Oh, yeah, and some recipes,we spent so much time in farmhouse kitchens we thought we should share the love.**

**I'm Eugene Bingham. Thanks for listening**