

Ok guys—I just read When Evil Came to Good Hart: an up north Michigan cold case, by first-time Traverse City author Mardi Link (The University of Michigan Press, 2008). This book came out right around the 40th anniversary of the 1968 Robison family murders in Good Hart, Michigan. The MSP was involved in this investigation and there are some very interesting parallels. I read the book on my Kindle, so I can't provide accurate page references now. (A Mother's Day gift and I am trying to be a good sport. I love books with a cover and corners you can fold over, but oh well.) The all-caps segments are of course my emphasis, a sad attempt to underscore the obvious.

Dick Robison, his wife and four kids were murdered while vacationing at their cottage. Five of the family members were shot to death; the youngest, seven-year-old Susie, was killed with a claw hammer. Mrs. Robison may have been raped; if not, the scene was staged to make it appear that way. Their bodies were not discovered for a month. The only physical evidence was one bloody shoe print, the bloody hammer (picked up by a deputy using a paper towel, thus obscuring the fingerprints), and shell casings (two weapons were used; the victims were apparently "finished off" with a final bullet to the head from a second gun).

Dick Robison's business partner, Joseph Scolaro, of Birmingham, was an obvious suspect. Not only was he embezzling from the business, he had owned two weapons—both of the types that had been used on the family. Of course the actual guns were never found, but shell casings identical to those found at the murder scene were found on Scolaro's father-in-law's property that was used as a shooting range.

Other suspects were Monnie Bliss, the builder of many of the cabins in the Good Hart area, including the Robison's, as well as a caretaker of the property. He found the bodies. John Norman Collins, convicted of one of the U of M coed murders and suspected serial killer of women, has also long been discussed as a suspect. He apparently was in the same EMU fraternity as the oldest Robison son and may have even visited the cabin as a guest at some point.

Link explains in a web article that she had always been fascinated by the Robison case, being the same age as young Susie Robison the summer of 1968. "The self-proclaimed Court TV addict pitched the project to an editor through 'a blind e-mail.' 'She responded (and) voila, I had a book contract,' Link said. She filed Freedom of Information Act requests, obtained files from Emmet County and the Michigan State Police and interviewed Good Hart locals. The publisher's approval came in March 2007 and by November, Link turned in the book." <http://record-eagle.com/features/x75055214/Author-fascinated-by-the-Robison-case> "I was trying to tell, from various angles, what really happened," she said. "The main character of the book is really the investigation."

Link's obvious conclusion that Scolaro was either the killer or the person who hired the killer(s) is one long-held by the MSP detectives who worked on this case, as well as the Emmet County Sheriff's office. In 2002 it was announced that three pubic hairs found on Shirley Robison's body would be retested and that her clothing would be reexamined for DNA evidence. Unfortunately, the evidence turned out to be too degraded. This result was made public.

Interesting that such a comprehensive book is written about a case that is still open. But it turns out that Link had quite a bit of help and a lot of file access.

First, in her acknowledgements, Ms. Link explains that "Sheriff Pete Wallin and Detective J. L. Sumpter of the Emmet County Sheriff's Office graciously opened up their exhaustive records on the case and provided me with their own personal observations and wisdom, which was invaluable." Hmm, I wonder if the B'ham, Berkley, or other local PDs would do the same in our case? "Thank you, Shannon Akans and Linda Ortiz of the Michigan State Police, for ACCESS to that agency's WELL-ORGANIZED, BEHEMOTH FILE ON THE CASE. I am proud to be a citizen of a state that has the Michigan State Police looking out for our welfare." [Really?!] The photographs in Ms. Link's book are "courtesy of the Michigan State Police." Wow. Definitely a Kool-aid drinker, but you can see why—she owes her first book to them and she is now working on a second book about a different murder. Thank god for the MSP and their willingness to provide "an open book" on the Robison murders! I bet you all sleep better knowing the MSP is looking out for your welfare.

"A Note to Readers" explains that: "This is a true story. It was written nearly forty years after the murder of the Robison family, and many of the people you will meet in these pages were deceased long before I began writing about them. METICULOUS RECORDS OF THE CASE WERE KEPT BY BOTH THE MICHIGAN STATE POLICE AND THE EMMET COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE, INCLUDING WRITTEN INTERVIEWS OF FRIENDS, FAMILY MEMBERS, BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, SUSPECTS AND OTHERS IN THE MIDST, AND ON THE FRINGES OF, THE INVESTIGATION." Records that Ms. Link was allowed to review in this still-open investigation. This included a 300-page report which was the "result of eighteen months of meticulous police work by detectives who had investigated the Robison case." In it all of the pertinent details were forged into a single narrative. Link describes the report:

"Here together for the first time was all of the background research, all of the interviews, the polygraph test results, the lab and autopsy results, and of course those crucial ballistics determinations. The three-hundred-page report was physically heavy, but also loaded down with human expectations. So precious was their package that to Detectives Stearns and Flis [MSP], who drove north in order to hand-

deliver their report safely into the care of prosecutor Donald G. Noggle, it must have felt like they were handing over pages plated with 14-carat gold."

Prosecutor Noggle later determined there was not enough evidence to file charges against Scolaro. State Attorney General Frank Kelley backed up Noggle's decision.

Now, if Link can read these meticulous records, stellar written interviews and the gold-plated 300-page report in the still-open Robison murder investigation, why the fuck can't we look at the records and whatever else they have in the still-open OCKK case?! Bring on the gold-plated power point, boys. Let's see what you've got.

In 1973, the MSP and Emmet Co. sheriff went to the Oakland County Prosecutor, L. Brooks Patterson, to find a way to sidestep the Emmet County prosecutor. Rumor was that OC was going to issue an arrest warrant for Joseph Scolaro based upon conspiracy to commit murder charges. When Scolaro caught wind of the imminent conspiracy charges, he offed himself in May 1973. Like Chris Busch, he ended up in the Wm R. Hamilton Funeral Home, two blocks from our family's house in Birmingham. I wonder if he was also cremated. I'm sure it was a good option for people who had concern about hair and fingerprint evidence, just as it is today for obliterating DNA evidence not already in some database.

As previously mentioned, in 2002, Emmet Co. Sheriff Wallin asked the MSP Forensic Science Division to conduct DNA testing in the Robison case. Catch this: "Before the lab work was started, money, and a lot of it, happened to become available for tests on old DNA evidence. In March 2003, the Forensic Science Division received a \$1.4 million federal grant to conduct DNA testing on cold cases. The grant allowed the Grayling laboratory to select 175 cases from around the state in which there were "existing biological samples" and to test them. The idea behind the grant was that these biological samples would be entered into CODIS (Combined DNA Indexing System), the national crime-fighting DNA database, and checked against existing records. Adding 175 new cases would also expand the scope of the database itself." I am quite sure the OCKK case was never considered as one of the 175.

Emmett Co. detective J.L. Sumpter was interviewed about the Robison case in 2007. He said: "There is just something about this case. Once you know a little bit about it, you want to know more. No, you don't just want to know more, you *have* to know more. It's like it's contagious, and what you catch from it is obsession."

Link observes that part of her obsession was the fact that the crime involved the devastation of an entire family. Here, we have child victims who were held

captive for days (and Kristine for weeks) before being murdered. I hate to say it, but the Robisons were all probably dead within minutes. There just is no comparison to what these kids went through. Yet, we are to believe that it is best to “leave it be,” even though people interviewed in Link’s book describe thinking about the Robison murders “to this day.”

A friend of one of the Robison boys, John Mair, has never let go of this crime. Beginning in 1991, he pushed authorities to reevaluate John Norman Collins as a suspect. Mair even retained a Birmingham attorney (not named) to push his cause with then-AG Frank Kelley. Kelley’s office apparently took the information seriously, but found nothing to advance the investigation. As late as 2004, Mair continued his efforts to keep the case alive. His message was simply that John Norman Collins could not be ignored as a suspect and should have been adequately questioned about the crime. Sounds reasonable to me. The same is true of John Hastings in the OCKK case!

With the release of a fictionalized account of the murders in 2004 and the work of John Mair, there was a “flush of media attention” about the case at the 35th anniversary of the crime. Mair, a boyhood friend of one of the young victims and not a family member, explained that he “plan[ned] on stirring up stuff. Stirring up tips.” Again, sounds reasonable to me.

In Tim’s case, Sgt. Gray about had a coronary when my Dad and Chris suggested going to the media at the 30-year mark to try to drum up some kind of tip. Not exactly rocket science, but no—Gray basically said it would generate too many useless tips. You know those damn tips—they are so useless. Why bother?

In 2003, Emmet County Sheriff Wallin said the following about the Robison murders. “‘We’re not likely to arrest people,’ he said, when his office took a fresh look at the case. ‘Our mission is now closure and that the outcome is the final end.’” (From Link’s book.) Note that his mission was not described as “no comment on this ongoing investigation.”

Many suspect Joseph Scolaro was responsible for the murders. It is no secret that he took, and failed, three polygraph tests. He committed suicide, like Chris Busch allegedly did. Nobody has held back about their speculation about Scolaro, or other suspects for that matter, and I mean by full name, rank and serial number. Not only has much been revealed in the press and in this book about Scolaro, and other possible suspects, but also about victim Richard Robison, who was a strange agent in his own right. But not a word can be uttered about Chris Busch.

Residents of Good Hart have said things like “I don’t think you can tie it up into a nice package and put a ribbon on it,” says a former neighbor, pointing out that the case remains officially unresolved. ‘You have to keep an open mind.’”

<http://www.hourdetroit.com/Hour-Detroit/June-2008/A-Web-of-Intrigue/index.php?cparticle=4&siarticle=3#artanc> . Ok, so the take away is

that some cases are never “solved,” but at least in the Robison case, people got to see what the cops and prosecutors did and didn’t do in that case.

In the Robison case, the MSP had what it believed was an airtight case against Scolaro. They, too, must believe justice was thwarted when Emmet County Prosecuting Attorney Noggle, backed by State AG Frank Kelley, declined to file charges based on what they deemed to be insufficient evidence. The MSP and Emmet County then provided open access to author Link to review all the “behemoth files” in the case, including the grisly photographs of the bodies as they were found a month after the murders.

In the OCCK case, I would argue it was the MSP who thwarted justice and that is why they are unwilling to provide the same unfettered access to the OCCK case files. Both cases remain open to this day. Yet Link falls all over herself thanking the MSP and Linda Ortiz for the open access she was given to the Robison files. In the OCCK case, the MSP wants \$11,000 for copies of whatever they deem to be nonexempt from a four-inch binder. I read somewhere that Link wanted people to understand how complex cases like this are and the reasons why they are sometimes not solved. WTF doesn’t that same thought apply here?! Hmm, maybe because this WASN’T so complex and because the case WAS solved—they just needed to bury the results once they knew Busch and Greene were in the ground/in prison for life. Why shouldn’t people see a stark example of what happens when you are a criminal defendant with money and someone to pull some strings? Or when the cops fuck up (which can be understandable under the circumstances) and can’t bear to admit their error. Chris Busch wasn’t some drunk driver avoiding prison time for god’s sake—he was a violent child molester, child pornographer and probably a kidnapper and murderer as well. Why didn’t somebody draw the line? And why aren’t we allowed to ask that question? *Why didn’t somebody draw the line?* Why didn’t somebody do the right thing? And why is it such a big deal if we ask those legitimate questions?

Justice was not only denied to the Robison family and the people of Michigan, but also to four children who never stood a chance against somebody like Chris Busch. Yet Link was able, with the help of the Emmet County Sheriff’s Office and the MSP, to write a book that one reviewer observed would allow “Readers who are willing to draw fair and logical inferences from [the] evidence [and they] will not be left to wonder who cruelly murdered this family as they played cards in their backwoods retreat.”

<http://laurajames.typepad.com/clews/2008/06/the-robison-family-murders-finally-in-print.html>

In the Robison murders, the MSP and the county LE think it’s the prosecutor who screwed the pooch (and from what I read, he probably did). Here, we know who screwed the pooch, and so does the MSP. They just don’t want the public at large to know. And apparently the Oakland County Prosecutor doesn’t either.

In the Robison case, two veteran MSP detectives worked like dogs and did not put their own ambitions and reputations above solving the case or as an excuse to distance themselves from it when things got tough. These jokers at the top of the pyramid at the MSP OCK taskforce were in charge of a cluster-fuck and they never got control of it. No way they were going to let any of that stick to them. Close the file drawer and move on because retirement was a long way down the road. Busch and Greene are taken care of--it's a done deal. Gotta move on and feed the family. Nobody else gets hurt.

Someone who was a seven-year-old kid driving to northern Michigan with her family in 1968 and hears a radio report of the murder of another seven-year-old and the five other members of her family up north is allowed to ask "who?" and "why?" and we are not? Link is allowed to draw a conclusion, based even on the evidence, and write a book about it in the still-open Robison case—and we aren't allowed to know what the evidence is here? What is wrong with this picture and why is the current MSP a party to this unbelievable set of circumstances? (Rhetorical. I get it, believe me, I do.)

<http://static.record-eagle.com/2003/may/22murdr.htm> (May 22, 2003)

"The investigation into one of the most grisly unsolved mass murders in Michigan history has been revived, thanks to the discovery of some forgotten evidence and the interest on two Emmet County detectives." One of those detectives was Helen Dagner's daughter, Bobra Johnston.

<http://laurajames.typepad.com/clews/2008/06/the-robison-family-murders-finally-in-print.html> (2008)

Historic True Crime blog by "Crime Historian Laura James, Esquire." James reviews Link's book, noting that "[m]any writers have examined this case, but until 2008, none ever completed a nonfiction work about one of the worst mass murders in the state's history." . . . "Michigan has waited a long time for this book. In 200 crisp pages, the author tells the story with an immediacy that underscores the fact that for many, this tragedy may well have happened last year. The book includes numerous photos and an impressive list of sources. It describes the evidence that an exhaustive investigation produced."

http://mardilink.typepad.com/rusty_gun/2009/05/will-the-robison-case-ever-be-solved.html (Will the Robison case ever be solved? May 2, 2009)

Mardi Link website. She details a recent conversation with Rick Wiles, a northern Michigan schoolteacher and armchair researcher who launched a grassroots effort to close the case some years ago--

"Justice was denied the Robison family and the people of Michigan," Wiles told me recently. "Sheriff Zink and the entire MSP crew felt the case was solved and air tight. So,

the prosecutorial discretion of (then attorney general) Frank Kelley and Don Noggle thwarted justice.”

...
“But Wiles will not be denied, and neither should the rest of us. On May 18, 2009 the **Petoskey Public Library** will host a public forum on the case. I’ll be there and so will Mr. Wiles, along with former Emmet County Prosecuting Attorney Wayne Richard Smith, many of the MSP Detectives who worked on the case, and other notables. It is hoped that following this forum, the answer to the headline of this post, will be closer to, ‘Yes.’”

http://www.petoskeynews.com/entertainment/article_8de9806b-ef03-5d1b-9e23-75d3e62a998d.html (May 16, 2009)

The quest for answers in a nearly 41-year-old Northern Michigan murder case will be the focus of an upcoming program hosted by the Petoskey Public Library.

"SUMMERSET: A Search for the Lost Truth of the Robison Family Murder Tragedy" begins at 7 p.m. Monday, May 18, at the library's Carnegie building, 451 E. Mitchell St. It will be part of the Friends at the Carnegie program series.

Admission is free. Reservations are not required.

The program will feature:

- Petoskey High School teacher Rick Wiles, who has been curious for decades about the 1968 murders of the Robison family in a Good Hart cabin. He began actively researching the case about two years ago and produced a white paper on the topic;
- Traverse City author Mardi Link, whose 2008 book, "When Evil Came to Good Hart," explores the murder case; and,
- Harbor Springs resident Wayne Richard Smith, who was Emmet County's prosecutor at the time of the 1968 slayings. He left that position the following year to become a judge, and more recently has worked in private law practice.

Like many in law enforcement, the presenters suspect that Joseph Scolaro, an associate of Detroit-area businessman Richard Robison, played a key part in the killings.

Scolaro committed suicide in 1973, at a time when the Oakland County prosecutor's office was on track to file murder conspiracy charges against him. In a suicide note, Scolaro acknowledged various shortcomings but denied

committing the murders.

The investigation has yet to be officially closed.

<http://www.hourdetroit.com/Hour-Detroit/June-2008/A-Web-of-Intrigue/index.php?cparticle=4&siarticle=3#artanc>

<http://unsolvedhomicide.com/> (2003)

Tuesday, June 24, 2003 marked the 35th anniversary of the tragic Robison murders. On June 24, 1968 all six members of the Richard Robison family were murdered in northern Emmet County. They were found in their cabin north of Petoskey on July 22, 1968. this case is still unsolved.

The Emmet County Sheriff's Department, along with the Emmet County Prosecutor's Office, Michigan Attorney General's office and the Michigan State Police met in Emmet County in early June, 1998. Also at that meeting was a friend of the family and a representative from the Grand Rapids Silent Observer program.

Now five years later, on the 35th anniversary the Emmet County Sheriff's Department and the Michigan State Police have teamed up to investigate the Robison case. They are aided by the friend of the family, and the tip/reward programs of the Grand Rapids Silent Observer and the Crime Stoppers Alliance of Michigan

The hope is that, the tip/reward programs in combination with the DNA exam and the 35th anniversary, will get the attention of someone who knows who killed the Robison family.

Some foreign hairs were removed from one family member. These hairs will be examined to see if they have some DNA and if there is some DNA, it will be compared to the lead suspect as well as the CODIS DNA samples taken from convicted felons. CODIS is the national Combined DNA Index System database.

It may take until well after the 35th anniversary has passed to know if there is a usable sample of DNA, so it is necessary to publicize the unsolved case now, in the hope that some new information can be gleaned about the unsolved homicides of the Robison family.

<http://record-eagle.com/features/x75055214/Author-fascinated-by-the-Robison-case> (2008)

"[Link} shares her suspicion of Scolaro's guilt with police investigators. Emmet County Sheriff Pete Wallin credits Link for producing 'one of the best accounts' of the homicides."