

A.J.

A True Crime Story by Scott Cupp & Mark Graham; Copyright 2003; 303-777-4155
www.markgrahamcommunications.com; info@markgrahamcommunication.com

The Crime Scene

Homicide Detective Michael Waites would picture the scene in his head a thousand times over the next two years. Details like the ones he was about encounter that day have a life of their own; they evolve from images as surrealistic as daydreams into line items of evidence in a criminal case bound for infamy. Waites didn't know at the time, but he was moments away from finding the universe he'd been living in forever altered.

It was 6:25 a.m. on a Sunday morning, the 2nd of May, 1993; Waites would remember the date as long as he lived. He was stirring cream into his coffee when dispatch called. They requested that the Palm Beach County Sheriff's lead investigator respond at once to an apparent drowning. The dispatcher told Waites that the victim was a young boy, so he was already fighting to stay calm and objective. Waites was in his car and on the road within minutes. Forget the coffee. Forget the speed limit.

The address was 5881 Triphammer Road, and he recognized it as a low-to-medium income neighborhood in Lantana. The homes were all cast from the same aluminum-siding mold. Most were neat if not fancy. The one at 5881 Triphammer was a squat, ranch style house in need of a serious paint job; there was a 1984 Buick parked in the drive. The house had been cordoned off with yellow tape.

Waites was met out front by Sargeant Ken Deischer of the Palm Beach Sheriff's Department. Deischer briefed him.

"Victim's a 10-year-old white male," he said shaking his head. "Kid's dad discovered him floating face down in an above-ground swimming pool in the backyard. Maybe four feet deep," Deischer estimated.

He didn't have to say that it looked suspicious; any time you've got a 10-year-old boy drowning in four feet of water, it was suspicious.

"At about 6:00 this morning, the kid's stepmom discovers he isn't in his bedroom. She goes and wakes up the father and he finds the kid floating mid-line in the pool. Not a stitch of clothes on," Deischer said.

To this point, Waites had been listening with one side of his brain because the other side was processing every detail of scene, down to the color of the drapes hanging in the living room window. But when Deischer mentioned that the boy was naked, the Detective stopped dead. He and Deischer exchanged one of those what-in-hell-do-we-got-here kind of looks because they both realized how significant this might be.

As Waites circled the house to the backyard, Deischer made sure that he was aware of the fact that the victim may have been abused in the past. He said it in such a way that made it clear he wasn't jumping to any conclusions because he knew the lead Homicide Detective wouldn't be either.

“On the other hand,” Deischer said, “I’ve got Detectives Backherms, Restivo, Smith, and Calloway on their way over to conduct a neighborhood canvas. Hope you’re good with that.”

Waites nodded. If there were rampant abuse, the neighbors would know. They always knew. “Excellent,” he said. “Good work.”

Schoenstein, the Crime Scene Detective, was waiting for Waites by the back gate. She led lead investigator into the backyard. The first thing Waites noticed was the pool. Deischer had it pegged. No way it was more than four feet deep. There was a ladder along the outside of the pool and another on the inside leading into the water. Looking at the pool, it was pretty damn obvious that a normal 10-year-old kid could stand up in the water no problem. Red flag number one.

For more of A.J. please call or e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you.