

Tales of True Crime episode 16 excerpt

In the movies, we always know when something bad is about to happen. It starts in a place with an idyllic name and peaceful reputation, a place like Downers Grove, Illinois. Usually, the story is set in a place like Downers Grove to provide a contrast for the horrors that will come later. Vibrant, smiling, happy students populate the campus of the local high school, unprepared. Then, a skilled filmmaker injects a bit of musical score, something dark, intended to stir a sense of foreboding in the viewer and build tension. A killer watches, stalks his intended victim, and then the soundtrack goes silent... everything gets quiet... a jump scare is coming, and the viewer knows the killer is about to strike.

A villain in a black robe and mask leaps from the shadows and the terror becomes real.

On January 12th, 1976, the setting at Downers Grove South High School was very much like that, placid and bucolic, but there was no ominous soundtrack to signal the impending crime. Students who resided in places with names like Butternut Court and Crabtree Street, in Chicago satellite communities like Woodridge, Aurora and Lisle, couldn't know that a murderer was among them.

He wasn't wearing a robe and a mask.

He was also a recent graduate of Downers Grove... he was one of them, hiding in plain sight.

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Pamela Maurer was 16 years old, a Downers Grove student. She spent part of that night playing cards with a friend as a winter storm that would drop 7 inches of snow bore down on the Chicago West Suburbs. At about 8:30 they left for a mutual friend's house in Woodridge. Pam spent about an hour there, then decided to walk to a McDonalds, less than a mile away, to get a Coke. It was a Monday night, a school night, and when Pam didn't make it home by 11 pm, her mother called the police.

If you're a parent, you can relate to the fear Pam Maurer's mother must have felt. On any other night, a girl would be in her bedroom studying in the dim light of her bedside reading lamp, or talking on the phone with a friend. If she had an early exam the next day, perhaps she would have already been under-the-covers, sound asleep. In northern latitudes like Chicago, the sun sets before 5pm in January. It had already been dark for hours and it was freezing outside, but Pam wasn't home. A mother wonders... where is my child? Is she cold? Is she scared? Is she safe?

Around 7:30 on the morning of January 13th, her greatest fears were realized. Thomas Pattermann, the Lisle Township Highway Commissioner, spotted a purse lying along College Road. Thinking someone might have been hit by a passing car, Pattermann made a u-turn and returned to

the scene. On the other side of the guardrail he found the fully-clothed body of Pam Maurer. She had bruising around her neck that suggested she had been strangled.

[Full episode researched, written and produced by Troy Larson]

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