

On his long weekend off, in early March 2005, Game Warden Marshall Davidson drove four hundred miles from Zapata in south Texas up to the west Texas town of San Angelo to visit with his parents at the family home. It was a tumultuous time for the Davidson clan. Marshall's brother-in-law Michael Severance disappeared without a trace in January. Wendi, Marshall's veterinarian sister was running a new business and caring for her infant and three-year-old sons with help from her parents. Marshall's grandmother, Jesse Mae "Nanny" Eggemeyer was suffering through the terminal stages of lung cancer. The family agonized as they watched her waste away and become progressively more uncommunicative.

Marshall sat down to dinner with his mother and father, Judy and Lloyd Davidson and his three-year-old nephew, Wendi's son Tristan, on Saturday, March 5. They'd barely taken a bite when the telephone rang. Judy answered. When she returned to the dining table, Marshall saw distress wrinkling his mother's face. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said shaking her head.

"Who was on the phone?"

"Wendi."

"What did she want?" Marshall prodded.

"She said somebody's chasing her and she's going to keep driving and go to the cemetery."

"Well, who's chasing her?"

"She doesn't know."

Marshall strapped on his pistol and drove a couple of miles, turning in at the sign that read: “Grape Creek Cemetery—Founded 1895.” He entered a gate surrounded by scrubby trees and tall weeds and went up the narrow dirt lane into the small graveyard. It was a patchwork of old worn gravestones and newer flat plaques, amidst clumps of grass, dirt and rocks. The whole thing could have fit inside the twenty-yard line of a football field. The hum of the nearby highway traffic filled the air.

He saw his sister’s 2001 red Chevrolet Camaro first, then, he saw her standing by the grave of their grandfather. Wendi was obviously agitated as she paced over a tiny circular patch of ground like a high-strung race horse.

He walked toward her, looking around for any sign of another person or vehicle but none was in sight. “Who’s following you? What’s up?”

“No. Nobody’s following me. It’s just that, you know, I mean I got something that I need to say, but I’m going to wait till mom and dad are here.”

“No,” Marshall said, a bit irritated at being putting off by Wendi after he’d raced over to come to her aid. “Something’s bothering you this much, so what is it?”

“Look, nobody’s going to believe me…” Wendi began.

Marshall shifted his weight from one foot to the other waiting for her to continue.

“I didn’t kill Mike, but, you know, I did find him dead and I moved his body to the tank.”

“You did what?”

“I took him to the tank at Terrell’s. I was just like freaking out.”

“Why?” Marshall asked. “Why, why would you do something like that?”

“I don’t know,” she wailed. “I just found him dead there, and, you know, it’s—one of the doors, normally you have to use a key—or, you know, it locks from the inside, so you use a key to get it—you know, check it to see if it’s unlocked anyways. I went in there, and all the doors were locked up and he was—you know, he was laying there in the bed, and, you know, dead or whatever. And I freaked out, and the first thing that came to my mind is somebody I know had to do it, you know? How did they get in the clinic if they didn’t?”

“The door was locked?”

“I assumed it was,” Wendi answered.

“Why?”

“I didn’t really check. I just put my key in and turned it. They had to have a key. Maybe it was Nanny”, she said referring to their dying grandmother. “She had a key.”

“Nanny? You think Nanny killed Mike?” Marshall thought of his dying grandmother and knew the suggestion was absurd.

“I don’t know who did it but I didn’t,” she snapped. “Nobody liked him, you know?”

“That’s no reason to kill somebody.”

“I didn’t kill him. They’re going to think I did. That’s why I moved the body.”

Lloyd and Judy’s pick-up truck pulled into the cemetery with the Davidson’s seated in the front seats and young Tristan in a child’s seat in the back. Wendi, sobbing, rushed over to them with Marshall on her heels. Both started telling the story at the same time. The four-and-a half-month old infant in the Camaro chose that moment to wake up and add his cries to the cacophony.

Marshall shouted to be heard over the din. “Wendi, you know, the best thing for you to do is just keep your mouth shut.” He stalked off and flipped open his cell. He dialed the San Angelo Police Department and asked for Detective Dennis McGuire. The investigator wasn’t in the office. Marshall said it was an emergency and left the number to his cell phone. They told him that they’d have McGuire return the call.

When Marshall walked back to the Davidson’s pick-up, Wendi was in the back seat of the truck next to Tristan, comforting the child. Judy was babbling, Wendi was crying. Marshall tried to settle everyone down but failed. Three minutes after his first call, Marshall redialed the police department and was told that McGuire didn’t answer his cell. “Give me his number,” Marshall demanded.

“We’re not authorized to give his number.”

Marshall identified himself as law enforcement and insisted, “Somebody better give me his number. I need him to meet me at Grape Creek Cemetery”

“Hold on. We’ll check.”

Marshall gave them his mom’s cell phone number, too, and said he’d call back. He tried again to calm his hysterical mother. He gave up and called the police again. This time, he was told, “Okay. He authorized us to give his cell phone number, so here it is.”

Marshall disconnected and dialed the number he was given. McGuire answered. “Hey, meet me out here at the Grape Creek Cemetery.”

“I got your message and I’m on the way.”

McGuire was close enough to the cemetery by then that Marshall was able to look up and spot him approaching on the highway. Sergeant Dave Jones, a special crimes

investigator with the Texas Department of Public Safety rode with him. Officer Bill Mabe who was on nearby Sutton Road securing the gate to Terrell Sheen's 7777 Ranch headed toward the cemetery, too.

Marshall called Sheen and warned him to stay away from the ranch. McGuire exited Route 87 at March Road, heading for the graveyard in the fading sunshine of a dying late winter day. He was the first member of law enforcement to arrive on the scene.

McGuire spotted Marshall standing in the lane behind the super cab truck. Inside, McGuire saw Lloyd in the driver's seat and Judy in the front passenger seat with her infant grandson Shane on her lap. Wendi was in the back with her other son, three-year-old Tristan.

McGuire and Jones stepped out of the car and approached Marshall. McGuire asked, "What do you need?"

"Have you searched the pond on Mr. Sheen's ranch?" Marshall said.

"No, we have not," McGuire admitted.

"You need to," Marshall said as Mabe's vehicle pulled into the cemetery. The other officer joined them as Marshall explained, "Michael Severance's body is in the pond. My sister said she didn't kill him but she moved his body to the pond."

"Are you talking about the pond on Terrell Sheen's ranch?" Mabe asked.

"Yes," Marshall said and walked up to the rear passenger door of the pick-up truck and opened it.

McGuire followed him, standing back a couple of feet listening to the conversation and observing the distress emanating from the truck cab.

In a raised emotional voice, Wendi said, "I didn't kill him but somebody did. I thought that one of you did it," she said, referring to her family, "so I moved the body to protect you."

Lloyd sat in stunned silence. Judy babbled incoherently, near hysteria, denying that she killed anyone. Wendi repeated, "I did it to protect you. I did it for you."

Marshall interrupted them. "The police are here and they need to take Wendi into custody. Wendi, you need to get out of the pick-up truck now."

"No. No, don't do it, Wendi," Judy shouted. "Marshall, we'll take her. They don't have to take her."

"They need to take her," Marshall insisted.

"No, you're not going to take her," Judy said to her son.

Marshall ignored her. "Wendi," he said, "You just need to go."

Wendi paused, considering her mother's objections, then stepped out into the grass and stood close to her brother. Marshall turned to the officers and said, "You need to arrest her. She found Michael Severance dead and disposed of his body in the stock tank at Terrell Sheen's Four 7's Ranch."

"What are you?" Wendi asked. "A cop or my brother?"

"I'm both," Marshall said. He clenched his jaw tight. He knew he was doing the right thing. But he also knew he was disappointing his sister.

Mabe took a step toward Wendi and said, "You need to come with us, Ms. Davidson. You are not in custody but we need to ask you a few questions."

As Wendi turned to go with him, Marshall put a hand on her forearm. "Keep your mouth shut until you've been able to talk to an attorney."

As Mabe deposited Wendi in the back seat of McGuire's car, McGuire asked Marshall if he could come into town to the police station on Beauregard Street. Marshall agreed to come in but said, "I will not investigate my own sister. That is your job. I don't want her talking to anybody until we get her a lawyer."

Marshall watched as the police vehicle pulled out of the cemetery toward the setting sun. He kept his eyes on the silhouette of his only sibling sitting in the back seat of a patrol car, on her way to an interrogation room to be questioned about her involvement in the murder of her own husband.

Marshall's heart sunk. His loyalties were divided. Now that the deed was done, he was having second thoughts.[sounds a bit mild. "he felt sharp pangs of regret."?]