



1600 Block N Port St., Baltimore

DEAD BODY, EMPTY STREET, COLD BLOOD

Brian Swiston loved money and hated his brother. Now, his brother is dead and Brian Swiston inherited his two houses and a car. A Baltimore homicide detective's arrogant indifference might be letting Brian Swiston get away with murder.

CRAIG NELSEN¹

I handed Brian the rent money and he wrote out a receipt for six hundred dollars and handed it to me. Then he handed me a plastic bag. "These are the smoke detectors", he said.

"Alright." I went back inside, got a step ladder from the basement, and set the ladder up in the living room under the empty plate attached to the ceiling where the previous smoke detector had been. I climbed up and inspected the mount and the electrical wire dangling through the center of the mounting plate.

This was going to be easy. I plugged it in and clicked the unit into place. Halfway back down the ladder a thought struck me. Stopping, I looked back up at the new smoke detector. Why had someone thrown away both the old smoke detectors, the one upstairs and the one down here in

¹ Every detail of this story is true to the best of my recollection. Sherman has read it and added further details and corrected me where my recollection failed. The Candy Apple Man, too, has corrected me on one factual point. I changed nothing, not even the names.

the living room? Who does that? Do smoke detectors go bad? Change the batteries, yes, but the whole unit? I'd never heard of that.

I stood there looking up at the white plastic of the detector with the slits cut into it: of course! Smoke detectors are a convenient location for hidden surveillance cameras. Whoever had removed all the other cameras located throughout the house had removed the smoke detectors, too, after the former owner of the house, Brian's brother Glenn, had died in the very room where I was perched halfway up my step ladder.

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I arrived in Baltimore in early September looking for a place to do a short-term rental while I started up a non-profit called Vacant Building Rescue League. One day, driving around one of the hundreds of neighborhoods in Baltimore, I saw a guy pushing a grocery store shopping cart rigged up to be a street vending display for various colored candied apples. I hailed him and asked for one.

As he made change for the bill I'd handed him, I asked whether he knew of any places around there for rent. He thought for a moment then said maybe the place next to his uncle's house over on Port Street was available. The guy that used to live there died and I don't think they've rented it out to anyone else.

"I'll check it out", I said. He gave me the address to a modest row house. The row houses on either side of that house and the house directly across the street were occupied, but the row houses lining the rest of the block were completely vacant. There was plenty of parking.

I got out and knocked on the door. No answer. I knocked on the door to the left. This would be the candied apple seller's uncle's house. Again, no answer. I knocked on the door to the right and a woman answered the door. I asked about the house next to hers and she didn't think anyone was living there. It turned out that the landlord of the house she lived in and the owner of the empty house were the same person. "His name is Brian", she told me, and gave me his number.

I called the number and spoke to Brian. We arranged to meet and that's how I ended up at 1622 N Port St a few days later waiting on the sidewalk while Brian Swiston unlocked the front door of one of the two houses he had inherited from his late brother. We stepped in and, despite the four month interval, the stench of death was oppressive.

The place was dirty and cluttered with cheap plastic tables, rolls of video cable, dirty dishes, and trash. Underlying the smell of the corpse was the smell of rodents. "He was sitting right there at his computer when they found him", Brian said, pointing to an empty wall on one side of the living

room. "He had been dead a long time. Heart attack".

"Ah", I said, "that's rough".

"Yeah, homicide detectives investigated. No foul play. No drugs. Natural causes", he said flatly.

I expressed my condolences.

He shrugged, "It happens".

He showed me around—the basement, upstairs, the main floor. At every turn there were glaring construction failures. The steps to the basement, for example, were constructed out of wall paneling. The floor felt like you were walking on a sponge. Brian repeatedly pointed out the construction flaws, assuring me they were the handiwork of his dead brother and that he, himself, had tried to fix up the house properly, but had been consistently overruled.

When we stepped out the back door and onto the back porch, Brian pointed over to the back yard next door, which was full of brightly painted tubs and brightly painted tables and other accoutrements of a candied apple-making business. "That's Harry's place," said Brian. "He's a good neighbor. He makes candy apples".

"That's how I found this place," I said. "His nephew was selling them on the street. They were really good, in fact."

"He's the one who called the authorities when the smell got too bad", Brian said. "They were tight".

We walked back inside. "It can be tough," I said, gesturing at all of the dead man's personal effects scattered about, "going through things. If it will make it easier, I can help... you know, make a list..."

"It's OK", Brian said. "We got everything of value". He locked the back door and replaced the jamb bar. "My brother was always talking about this collection of coins he had that were so this and that. We had to really look for them. We tore this place apart and finally found them". He snorted. "They really weren't all that valuable as he tried to make them out to be".

We walked back through the house and out onto the street. "Well, I'm interested", I said.

"Really"? He sounded surprised. "The rent is \$600 per month", he said.

"I'll take it".

As I got in the car, I saw Harry, the Candy Apple Man, a tall thin black man in his seventies, come

out of his house at 1620 and begin talking to Brian, gesturing broadly at 1624. He had a distinctive voice that carried far and he was complaining about the trash the residents in 1624 threw into the back alley.

* * *

I met Brian with his mother, Eva, to sign the lease and get the keys. Eva produced a lease. I read it through and requested some changes. These were granted and initialed and the lease was signed. I handed over \$600 in cash, and Brian wrote out a receipt.

The smell of her son's rotted corpse was still heavy in the house. "I'm sorry to hear about your son, Mrs. Swiston", I said.

"Yes," she replied impassively, staring at me. I could see where Brian got his coldness.

Brian gave me the keys and they left.

Over the next few days, with the help of a friend, I aired out the house, hauled away the junk, and cleaned. I talked briefly a couple of times with Harry, the Candy Apple Man, and learned that he had, indeed, been fond of Glenn. "He was a good man", Harry told me. "He used to sit out here on the back porch and we would talk about everything. I miss him, you know what I'm saying? I still can't believe he died. He was only in his forties, and he was healthy. Used to go running around the neighborhood. Jogging. Real athletic, know what I'm saying?"

Harry's nephew, Will, who stayed with Harry when he sold candied apples for him, also spoke well of Glenn, as did everyone in the neighborhood. Glenn was white, as I am, and the neighborhood is almost entirely black, so everyone I met in the neighborhood who knew Glenn assumed I was his brother. "No, no, I never met Glenn," I would say.

"Ah, Glenn was good people", was the typical response.

* * *

One night about midnight, I was alone in the house with my dog, Buddy, painting the kitchen cabinets. I was standing on a step stool, painting in the farthest top inside corner of the cabinets, straining to reach. My head was inside the cabinet, which was mounted on the common wall with Harry's kitchen.

Suddenly I heard a male voice say, "Hey"! He said it once, clearly and loudly. It was bizarre, because it sounded like the voice was right next to me inside the cabinet. But it was muffled, too, in some way. I pulled my head out of the cabinet. It must have been someone on the back porch, I

thought, and looked out the window. There was no one there. Very strange. I looked into the back next door and saw Harry's car was gone. He's still out selling candied apples, I thought, so probably Will is next door in the house. He must have been the person who yelled "hey".

Still, it was strange, because if the yell had come from next door, Will must have yelled into a glass held up to the wall, or something, for the voice to sound as if it were coming from inside the cabinet while my head was stuck in there painting.

I walked out to the back yard and looked at Harry's house. Everything was dark and quiet. "Will", I yelled! No answer. I yelled again. Still no answer. I walked out of my back gate into the alley then into Harry's yard and up to the back door and knocked. "Will", I yelled again! Nothing.

I went back to my house, perplexed.

Now, there are different ways a person yells "hey". There's the short sharp kind of "hey" you yell if you catch someone stealing your bike. Then there is the longer "hey" you yell if someone is far off in the distance and you are trying to catch their attention.

The "hey" I heard was definitely of the second kind.

I decided the voice had to have been Will's or the voice of someone else next door—it was the only explanation possible—and my straining into the cabinet had played a trick on my ears. I couldn't otherwise account for the undeniable sensation that the voice had come from inside the cabinet just inches from my ear.

Nevertheless, the experience was so vivid and odd that I told my friend Sherman about it the next time he visited. He listened intently and seriously. When I'd finished, I paused. Then I said, "I can't shake the feeling that it was Glenn trying to get my attention".

Sherman let out a low exclamation and sat back in his chair, never taking his eyes off me. "You are not one to let your imagination run wild", he said finally. "When it comes to things like this, like the unseen spirit world, or whatever you want to call it, you are the most skeptical person I have ever known".

"I know", I said, "and I still can't believe it. But I know what I heard, and I heard that".

* * *

The mail was beginning to pile up in the mailbox. It was locked, and I hadn't been given a key. I called Brian one afternoon and asked whether he had one. No, he didn't have one, so I forced the box open and retrieved the mail. My new utility bills. Old mail for Glenn. Because there was so

much of it, the mail was crammed into the box, so I had to push my fingers all the way to the bottom of the mailbox to pry the crumpled letters up. I had them all up, but there seemed to be one more still at the bottom of the mailbox.

I looked in, and there was a hand-addressed letter there at the bottom, really wedged in. Using my fingernail, I pried it out. It was a personal letter, addressed to Glenn. The return address indicated it was from his mother, postmarked just prior to his death. It had never been opened.

I called Sherman and told him about the letter. "Maybe that explains their coldness and the unnatural lack of grief about Glenn's death", I conjectured. "Maybe this was the mother seeking forgiveness or something and he never read the letter. One of those classic tragic dead letter stories."

Even though it was several days before the second month's rent payment was due, I called Brian and told him I'd found a letter that may be important, that it appeared to be from his mother to Glenn, mailed just before Glenn died, but never opened. If he wanted to collect the rent early, I told him, that was cool, in case he wanted to come get the letter right away.

"No, that's alright", he said. "I know what it is. We mailed him a bunch of letters and when we first heard he was dead we were afraid maybe the letters had made him kill himself. But when we got to the house, they were all still in the mailbox unopened."

"Oh", I said, vaguely wondering how Brian had gotten into the mailbox if he didn't have a key.

"I'll be by this weekend for the rent, and I'll get the letter then", he said.

"OK", I responded. "By the way, Brian, you said you would be interested in selling this house. What would you ask?"

He thought for a bit. "Well, twenty thousand for 1624. I'll have to think about it on the one you are in".

* * *

I had repainted the entire interior, save for the very front alcove window area. I was finishing that up one afternoon and was up on the step ladder painting near the ceiling when I happened to glance over at narrow kitchen cabinet awkwardly mounted on the living room wall. It was mounted high enough that the top of it would never be seen by anyone standing on the floor, but from my height on the ladder I could see there was another letter lying there. This envelope was unsealed and had the single word "Glenn" written with a masculine hand on the front of the envelope in black Magic Marker.

Brian's comment about he and his mother being worried the letters that "they" had sent Glenn had caused Glenn to kill himself had taken me aback. I had no compunction about removing the letter from inside the envelope and reading it.

It was a copy of an original, written in a large script and dated 1981—thirty-four years earlier. If Glenn had been in his forties when he died, then he must have been about ten years old when the letter was written. It was five pages long, each page but the first numbered at the top with a Roman numeral.

It read, in its entirety:

9/12/81

Saturday, 1 pm

Beautiful afternoon

My Dear Son Glenn,

Today is such a beautiful day and I'm all alone, Daddy is out playing Golf and I feel so good, so warm and loving and I thought today would be a good time to write to you and tell you. "I love you Glenn" You are my joy, you have made life living for me, you and your kids have been a tremendous blessing to me.

I'm dying Glenn and when you read this letter someday, I will have already been gone.. Don't worry about it because I'm gone to Jesus. I have always accepted Him. The thing that you did was to make me aware of how He died & suffered for me so I could be free and have Eternal Life. Oh! how I await the day when I will be in His Kingdom free from worry and strife. Take care of yourself, be confident all the time because God has taken his Son and gave him to all of us so we could be free. I'm so glad you have made Jesus your refuge. God knows how much you suffered in life, how much you gave up.

All my life I lived a life of dreaming. Never living in the present. Never feeling the moment alway thinking of what other's feel about me. Never thinking hey! I'm Agnes I want to love everybody. Love me because I Love You.

Be my Glenn Michael Wrzesien Swiston and be proud that you made me a Christian. You have witnessed to me and made me Jesus's child. You have saved my soul.

I love you so much,

Mom

My legacy to you is Love. Love is so important. Love is the very existence of living. Love everybody even if they reject it, keep loving never give in to hate. Hate and Jealousy will destroy. My favorite poem will always be "If". (Remember).

Bye Glenn Be good and careful

I Love You

Mom

* * *

When Brian called to let me know he was coming over, I asked him again if he'd come up with a price for the house. "Not yet", he said. I opened the door when he knocked and he stepped inside. "Wow", he said, looking around. I had finished the painting, taken the coverings off the windows, and, with the cleaning, the place really did look better. A lot better.

"I'll be right back", I said. "Just need to run upstairs to get the letter and the money".

When I came back down, Brian had walked into the kitchen and was looking around. I motioned to a chair and as he sat down he said, "The only art my brother ever had up on the walls were those, you know, inspirational posters with sayings like 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going', stuff like that. He had them all over the place."

I handed him the money and the unopened letter. "You know", I said, "everyone I meet who knew Glenn speaks highly of him. He was well-respected". Without responding, he opened the letter and read it silently, then put it in his pocket. He counted the money and began writing a receipt. Thinking he hadn't heard me, and that what I'd just said would be something someone would want to hear about their dead brother, I added, "Everybody has nothing but good things to say about Glenn".

There was a flash of annoyance on Brian's face. "Look, there's one thing you should know about Glenn", he responded sharply. "He had money issues. He was really bad with money. We had a business like one of those where you bid on the contents of abandoned storage units? Well, if something didn't sell, Glenn would just put it out on a table out front on the sidewalk and let people just come and take the stuff for free".

He stood up to leave. "About the selling price for this house, I've been thinking. Considering all the work I put, and my brother put, into this place, I'd need to get forty thousand for it".

"I see", I said. After he left, I wondered what kind of art Brian had on *his* walls.

* * *

One afternoon, Sherman was up for a visit and we were out in the alley where Harry was making candied apples. The aroma was sweet and pleasant mixed with the autumn leaves decaying on the ground over which the rats were scampering playfully. The three of us talked over the fence for a long time and the conversation turned to Glenn.

We told Harry about the strange lack of grief on the part of Brian and his mother regarding Glenn's death.

"Glenn and Brian was very different people", said The Candy Apple Man. "Glenn didn't laugh right away, know what I'm saying? He would listen and laugh when it was funny. He was better people than Brian. Brian laughs too much, know what I'm saying"?

"It's very strange", I said, thinking of the enigmatic letter I'd found on top of the narrow cabinet. "Did Glenn resemble Brian? I mean, did they look like brothers"?

"I have a picture of him", said Harry, and he went inside returning with Glenn's business card, which identified him as the owner of an IT company. "He was a computer genius", said Harry. On the business card was a photo of Glenn, a remarkably handsome young man with a big winning smile. Physically, Brian and Glenn were not obvious brothers.

I told Harry about the two letters. Could Glenn have been adopted or something?

"I had a guy here one time working on the gas line", Harry answered. "Glenn came home and walked into his house and the guy told me he recognized him. He said he used to do work on a farm up by Rosedale. He said Glenn was just a young boy at the time, high school age, know what I'm saying? He told me that Glenn lived in the barn."

"Wow", Sherman said.

"Glenn never talked about it in all those times we talked about everything, but there was some shit that happened to Glenn, know what I'm saying. Glenn's girlfriend thinks Brian done it. Brian killed Glenn."

"Really", I exclaimed!

"Yeah, when they took his body out, the homicide detective, this Asian dude, know what I'm saying, talked to people on the block here and went around the neighborhood asking questions,

but he didn't talk to her.”

“Huh”, I said.

“They said it was natural causes, but I heard Glenn arguing on the phone, really screaming arguing about money, know what I'm saying, one night right before he died.”

“Wow, that's interesting”, I said, and I told Harry about Brian's comment that Glenn had had money issues and was bad with money.

“Ain't that something”, said Harry. “Ain't that goddam something. Glenn had money issues? Brian is the one that owed Glenn money. A lot of money, know what I'm saying? Ten thousand dollars, Brian owed him. And that ain't chicken feed, know what I'm saying? Hell, yeah”, Harry shook his head. “Glenn was bad with money? He owned these two houses that he paid for himself and he had his business and his car and Brian owed *him* money. Well, goddam, ain't that something”. Harry's indignation on behalf of Glenn was deeply genuine.

We talked for a time more; you could feel Harry's grief. “Well”, I said, finally, “Glenn sounds like he was a decent guy. But I'll say one thing, the man was no carpenter”.

“Ha HA”, The Candy Apple Man let out a yelp, “ain't that the truth! I walked in the house one day and looked at those studs. 'What the hell are you doing with these studs, boy' I said. 'They look like a blind man put 'em in.' Ha HA. They going every which way, know what I'm saying? You could be nailing into the stud and then you go straight down and put in another nail expecting the stud to be there. Shit! You pounded right through the sheet rock into nothing but thin air 'cause the stud ain't there, know what I'm saying, ha HA! The stud was like this”, and Harry held his arm at a forty-five degree angle. “Ha HA! The city inspector always come by and chew his ass good. You got pipes running this way and that way and up and down and crosswise, ha HA. Glenn says to me, 'Candy Apple Man, this house is costing me a fortune!' And I say, 'You gotta fix them studs, boy, you know what I'm saying, ha HA”!

Laughing, I bent down to take the leash off of Buddy. When I looked up, the Candy Apple Man had become very serious. “Let me ask you something, Craig”, he said.

“Sure”, I said straightening.

“Do you believe in voices from beyond the grave?”

I was so shocked at the question, I stood dumbstruck. I looked over at Sherman and he, too, was stunned by the question. I looked back at Harry. He was waiting for an answer. So, I told him about the voice in the cabinet. I told him how the voice had seemed muffled as if far away, but, at

the same time, how it seemed to come from within the cabinet right next to my ear. "So", I finished, "I figured it must have been Will who yelled 'hey' through the wall from your house and my ears had just played a trick on me. It was the only thing that made sense".

"It wasn't Will", said The Candy Apple Man. "When I'm not here, no one is here, know what I'm saying".

* * *

The next day, I called Baltimore homicide. I found out the detective who had been the lead investigator on the case was a Detective Chin. He wasn't in. "Maybe I can help", said the detective who had answered the phone. So I told him I was inquiring about a death at 1622 N Port St in Baltimore that had occurred the previous June. He pulled it up on his computer. "Natural causes", he said.

"Hmm", I said. "There are some things about this that give me some doubts, like there may have been foul play involved".

"You know", said the detective, "we get these kinds of calls all the time. I'm not saying that this is the case here", he hurriedly reassured me, "but lots of times people who maybe don't know all the details or something...", he trailed off. "But we're pretty thorough when we investigate and if the autopsy says 'natural causes', it's a pretty good bet it was natural causes".

"I understand", I said, thanking him for his time.

But I couldn't shake the misgivings I had about the death of Glenn Swiston. There seemed to be the undeniable possibility that a monstrous crime had occurred on that empty street. As my uneasiness grew over Glenn's fate, I looked more closely at all the video cable running all over the house. By all appearances, Glenn had been security-conscious to an extreme. He had had something like sixteen video cameras positioned throughout the house. They had been connected to his computer, presumably, in the living room just inside the front door, but they also connected to a monitor in the basement which had been set up in what appeared to be a "panic room" Glenn had been struggling to build.

The chances were good there had been a video recording of his moment of death. Had the police looked at it, I wondered?

I resolved to contact Detective Chin and ask him directly. I tried once, but he was again "out on the street".

And then life distracted me and days passed while I did nothing.

Late one evening I drove to a local Giant store that was open until midnight. I parked in the parking lot, got out of my van, and walked around to the passenger side to roll up the window and lock the door, leaving the window open enough that Buddy could still stick his head out and remind me all the way to the store that I'd forgotten to take him with me.

Then, behind me, I heard a distinctive voice, "You've got some business to take care of". Before turning around, I knew it was Harry. When I turned around and looked, sure enough, there was Harry's old beat up green Dodge mini-van with the wooden frame for holding candied apples attached to the roof. It was parked in the next row, a few spaces away. I hadn't noticed it in the darkness of the poorly lit parking lot.

I didn't see Harry, so assumed he was sitting in the car. "Yep, just stocking up", I said walking towards Harry's car. "Wanted to see...", and then I stopped. Harry's car was empty and he was nowhere to be seen. What the hell? I looked over at three teen-age boys who had been walking through the parking lot. They had stopped walking and were all three staring at me quizzically.

Not wanting to appear a lunatic, I started in the direction of the Giant. But as I walked, the impact of what had just happened hit me and, when I reached the door, I stopped, turned around, and walked back to Harry's car. The three boys, by this time, were far across the parking lot, but they noticed me walking back to Harry's car, and they, again, stopped and watched what I was doing.

I stood there, I'm not sure why, staring at Harry's car. Perhaps I was verifying in my mind that it really was Harry's car and it really was in the Giant parking lot. I guess I was coming to terms with the fact I had distinctly heard Harry's voice when Harry wasn't there.

I went back to the store and went inside, looking for Harry. I spotted him at the end of an aisle. After we exchanged greetings, I told him about what had just happened in the parking lot. "Well, goddam", he exclaimed! "Ain't that something"?

"Here's what's so weird", I said. "I knew it was you before I turned around and saw your car. I heard your voice. I turned around and your car was there but you weren't, and I know your voice. Those three kids were staring at me because, from their point of view, I had started talking to an empty car for no reason."

"Guess you do have some business to take care of, know what I'm saying", he said.

* * *

"Baltimore Homicide. This is Detective Chin. How can I help you?"

I introduced myself, told him where I lived, and said, "I understand you were the detective who

investigated a death that occurred at this address last June.”

“Yes?”

“Well, I know the official autopsy ruled the previous tenant died of natural causes, but there are some things about this death that don't seem right to me and I wanted to talk to you to see what you thought.”

“What doesn't seem right?”

“Well, just some things that don't seem like he died from natural causes. The way his mother and brother acted about his death, and after talking to the neighbors and finding a couple of letters and some other things, I wonder if Glenn—the previous tenant—well, the neighbors think he was murdered”

“Murdered? Who do they think murdered him?”

“His brother.”

“His brother? You're calling me because the neighbors think the deceased was murdered by his brother? “

“Well, not just that. There were some other things. The brother inherited the house and they had a bad argument just before he died. Glenn's girlfriend thinks the brother did it. A bunch of things.”

“You have an issue with the brother or something?”

“No. Not at all. It's just— I mean, he was a healthy guy in his forties, who jogged. No drugs, not a heavy drinker, no medical condition, and he just suddenly died? And right after he had a violent argument with his brother. And he and his brother had money issues, and I found some letters...”

“Let me get this straight”, said Detective Chin. “You think the brother murdered the deceased because you talked to the neighbors”?

“No, I don't think that for sure. It's just that there are a lot of things—”.

“You sure you don't have a beef with the brother”?

“I already told you I—”.

“A homicide investigation isn't like what you see on TV”.

I took a deep breath. “Detective Chin”, I said, “I just have two basic questions. First, is it possible

that the body was so decomposed that the autopsy finding was in error”?

“Let me ask you a question, Mr. Nelsen”, Detective Chin responded. “And I don’t mean this to be sarcastic. But, do you have a medical degree”?

“No”.

“In Baltimore City, all forensic autopsies are performed at”, and he named the place, “but it’s just a coincidence that they are performed in Baltimore City. That office also does the autopsies for Prince George’s County. That office also does the autopsies for Anne Arundel County. That office —”

“OK”, I said.

“—does the autopsies for Baltimore County. That office also does the autopsies for..”, and Detective Chin slowly and deliberately continued until he’d named all the counties in Maryland for which that office did autopsies. “If the medical examiner says the cause of death was natural causes”, the detective continued, “you can be sure it was natural causes. You can be one hundred percent certain it was natural causes. You can take that to the bank. You have a good day”.

“Wait”, I said. “I have one more question. Glenn had a lot of cameras set up all over the house. Did the police take the cameras or view any video that captured his moment of death”?

“I don’t have to answer that question, Mr. Nelsen”, Detective Chin responded.

“I’m not asking whether you have to answer the question, Detective Chin. It’s a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Did the police view any video from Glenn’s cameras”?

“I don’t have to answer that question”, Detective Chin repeated.

“OK, I’m taking that as a ‘no’”, I said.

“You have a good day, Mr. Nelsen”, said Detective Chin, ending the call.

* * *

It was the smell and the flies buzzing about the windows that prompted The Candy Apple Man to call authorities one day early in June, 2015. After the Baltimore Fire Department broke out an upstairs window, a fireman went down the stairs, walked past the rotting corpse in the sweltering non-air-conditioned room, and unlocked the front door. Glenn had been dead at least a week.

According to S Erin Presnell, MD, Professor, Co-Director of Medical and Forensic Autopsy Section,

Department of Pathology, Medical University of South Carolina College of Medicine, “postmortem changes begin soon after death and progress along a time line...In most circumstances, autolysis and putrefaction occur in tandem. In temperate climatic conditions, they can result in rapid degradation of the tissues. These alterations may eventually produce great distortion of the body after death, hampering the interpretation of the postmortem findings but not ameliorating the value of the autopsy.”²

In other words, decomposition in a body has a negative correlation with the accuracy of an autopsy. The longer the post mortem interval (PMI) between the death and the autopsy, the less reliable a finding of “natural causes” as the cause of death.

A funeral was held on June 5, 2015, in Rosedale, Maryland, for Glenn Michael Swiston Jr. beloved son of Glenn M. Swiston Sr. and Eva Swiston (nee: Benik). Devoted brother of Bethany Berkowitz, Brian and Joshua Swiston.

The June 5 funeral means Glenn actually died sometime in May and spent the last week of May decomposing in his house on N Port St. The daily temperatures in Baltimore for the last week of May, 2015 were well above normal temperatures for that time of year, twice reaching the 90 degree mark. Twice during that week, a light rain fell. There was no air-conditioning in the room in which Glenn's body was found. Glenn's body would have suffered accelerated decomposition.

All the forensic pathologists with medical degrees agree—after a week of decomposition in such circumstances, an autopsy on a human body to determine cause of death faces severe limitations. The emphatic declarations by Detective Chin notwithstanding, Glenn's official cause of death was far from bankable.

Has a towering injustice been allowed to stand? My misgivings concerning Glenn's death have only grown deeper as time has passed. I think it's very possible Brian murdered Glenn, by strangulation would be my guess.

The hostile dismissiveness of Detective Chin to my queries, and his indifference to a possible miscarriage of justice, was completely uncalled for and extremely unprofessional. He is a black eye for Baltimore's homicide detectives.

I printed out this story and sent it around to daily and weekly papers in the Baltimore area, posted it around online, and sent it to higher-ups in the Baltimore police department. There was

² <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/1680032-overview>

S Erin Presnell, MD is a member of the following medical societies: Alpha Omega Alpha, American Society for Clinical Pathology, College of American Pathologists, National Association of Medical Examiners, American Academy of Forensic Sciences, International Association of Medical Science Educators

no response. In fairness, what would a response even look like? I tried contacting a Wrzesien I found in the Baltimore area, also no response. I wish there were some way to do more.

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