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OPINION

The Mississauga murderer who'll never be released from prison

Authentic witness voices enliven podcast on Demeter's crimes, says John Stewart

By **John Stewart** Mississauga News

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There's a reason that the definitive book about Christine Demeter's 1973 murder begins with a list of the cast of characters.

The Edgar-winning "By Persons Unknown," written by then-husband-and-wife team George Jonas and Barbara Amiel, lays out the players in anticipation of the reader's pending disorientation upon entry into a strange dimension filled with people and scenes apparently ripped from the pages of dime pulp fiction, complete with a bloody domestic murder scene, multiple suspects, duelling husband-wife murder plots, untimely witness deaths, surprise

bombshell leads and a murder trial for the ages with a witness telling stories of a (conveniently dead) hitman turning up at his home covered in blood.

Not to mention anonymous witness Mr. X wearing a cloth bag over his head.

It's a story ripe for retelling in the time of true crime podcasts, which is what "accidental investigative journalist" Catherine Fogarty has done with "Unrepentant Killer: The Life and Crimes of Peter Demeter" at bit.ly/3nvyKsG.

She remembered the infamous murder as a grade school student in central Etobicoke. The writer and producer wanted to highlight the lesser-known subsequent diabolical Demeter plots to kidnap and kill his nephew and his lawyer's daughter, which earned him additional life sentences.

Fogarty, who holds a master's degree in social work and an MBA, is the president of TV production company Big Coat Media, which temporarily suspended production of its popular "Love It Or List It" series due to COVID-19.

She's also acquiring a master's degree in creative non-fiction through U of T and King's College, which will result in the April publication of her book on the 1971 Kingston Penitentiary riot.

COVID-19's pause in proceedings advanced the schedule of her podcast passion side project.

Fogarty wrote and narrates the meticulously researched tale of the doomed couple and the duplicity that lies at the heart of their relationship.

The podcast's "Wizard of Oz" colour moments come when ex-Mississauga police detective Barry King and ex-Mississauga Times reporter James Bailey provide eyewitness commentary.

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King recalls the night Demeter's nervous closest friend, Csaba Szilagi, quickly blurted out the details of 19 murder plots Demeter had proposed, including electrocuting his wife in the pool of their Dundas Crescent home.

King will never forget Demeter's look of stupefaction as his best friend took the stand as the Crown's star witness.

Bailey incredulously recalls reporters, defence and Crown lawyers mingling in the same London,

Ont. hotel lounge, watching Demeter and the femme fatale of the story, his mistress Marina Hundt, sip cocktails.

Demeter's original conviction still seems extraordinary, constructed as it was on mounds of circumstantial evidence, with no identified killer.

The irony is that the 87-year-old murderer has outlived most of the other cast, Fogarty says.

His subsequent convictions result directly from his self-absorbed personality, a narcissistic cocktail of greed, lust and psychopathic bitters, which she expertly details.

While it's easy to get mesmerized by this murder mystery come to life, Bailey emphasizes that it was a real tragedy: "I always remind myself that a woman was lying in a pool of blood and a little girl in the other room had lost her mother forever."

John Stewart is a retired longtime Mississauga News journalist and the 2019 Ontario Weekly Newspaper Association Columnist of the Year. His column, My Back Pages, appears weekly. Connect with the author via stewartjohn85@gmail.com.

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