

## **Keep the Home Fires Burning! A DNA Analyst's Journey into the Bizarre Murders on the Remote Grounds of the "Silver Leopard Farm" in Epping, New Hampshire in 2006**

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My first encounter with the grisly scene was on April 6, 2006. My laboratory vehicle was stocked with photography equipment and serology processing supplies that vibrated as I headed down the long dirt driveway to the quiet farm. The fields had clusters of officers combing the grounds with metal detectors and cadaver dogs looking for evidence that might reveal where Ken Countie's body parts might be found. Large domestic rabbits hopped freely in the yard.

A detective led me into the house and pointed out rooms where he wanted me to document bloodstain patterns including the kitchen, dining room, living room and bathroom on the first floor. Two bedrooms and one bathroom on the second floor were also on the "To-do" list. I started my serology and BSPA analysis in the living room. The windows were covered with blankets giving the dark knotty pine paneled room a cave-like feel. The detective brought in industrial construction grade floor lamps. I was enclosed in my own personal white Tyvek sauna, roasting like a marshmallow over the heat of the lamps. Initial observations revealed a large bed-size void in the dust on the braided carpet and wooden floor. I was informed that the charred box spring and mattress on the front lawn were once in this location. A faint scent of vomit emanated from the floor heating vent which was surrounded by bits of rabbit feces and hay. The bright lamps illuminated a dark knotty pine wall bearing numerous directional blood spatters from floor to ceiling. Some twin, parallel spatters were observed on the wall that were consistent with knife cast-off patterns. Bloodstains swabbed from the walls in this room were identified as belonging to Kenneth Countie. The vomit smelling debris in the air vent failed to reveal any drugs or other clues towards identifying Kenneth's odd green discoloration that was noted on his very last trip to Wal-Mart, 2 large yellow diesel fuel containers seen resting on his lap. He looked gaunt and he had visible cuts and bruises. His escort, Sheila LaBarre pushed him down the aisle pausing to grab a disposable camera off the shelf so that she could take pictures of his physical condition which she attributed to a faulty Wal-Mart frying pan exploding on her stove top. She routinely scolded Wal-Mart employees for a variety of contrived reasons including placing blame on employees for assaulting Ken Countie. The police were called by Wal-Mart to remove this woman from the premises.

A week later, the local police department would show up at the farm to do a welfare check on Ken Countie only to find a large chunk of meat cooking away over the flames of hay and a burning mattress and box spring just outside Sheila's kitchen door. Sheila asked the police to leave, stating that Ken no longer lived there. The police had to leave to get a search warrant which meant never knowing if the large chunk of meat with the protruding bone on the fire belonged to Ken since it was gone by the time they returned.

A blood trail was present from the living room, through the dining room to the stairs leading up to the second floor. A maple arm chair sans cushions bore evidence of bloodletting injuries on both the right and left sides. The adjacent kitchen had random appearing blood stains here and there. Some of the stains were dark and dust covered while others were red and fresh looking. Ken Countie's DNA was found in the kitchen, dining room and the maple chair with the missing cushions; someone else's DNA was also found. Traveling up the brown painted stairs more blood was found along with a third DNA profile. Four days of scene analysis including a night time of luminol spraying revealed additional clues and additional questions, some of which

remain unanswered to this day. I will review the benefits and pitfalls of going from crime scene to sample selection to DNA analysis with a single analyst.