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By Steve Miller

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Bob Bashara: husband, father, Rotary Club president and community leader.

Bob Bashara: slumlord, philanderer and BDSM enthusiast.

Did he also hire a hit on his wife?

Jane Bashara lived in Grosse Pointe Park, one of Metro Detroit's wealthiest communities, when she was strangled to death in her own garage by local handyman Joe Gentz. When Joe turned himself in, he told the cops everything—including how he was hired for a hit by Jane's husband. His payment: \$2,000 and a used Cadillac.

Born into one of Michigan's elite families, Bob was sweeping out the back alley of a property he owned when his wife was being killed. He made sure the bartenders at the Hard Luck Lounge saw him there at the time of her murder. He'd often brought girlfriends by the same bar, and for the last year had been seen with one Rachel Gillett—riding around town in her convertible, even showing up at BDSM events in the suburbs of Detroit.

When Joe Gentz confessed, his 67 IQ and barfly reputation made him less than credible. Bob successfully denied any part in his wife's murder. But he couldn't deny his attempt to have Joe killed in prison.

Includes photos.

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**Bibliography**

- Rank: #604829 in Books
- Brand: Miller Steve
- Published on: 2015-12-01
- Released on: 2015-12-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.50" h x .93" w x 4.25" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“Wanted: more from this author.”—*True Crime Book Reviews*

#### Praise for Steve Miller

“Miller took the time to tell each and every victim’s story, from how they began their lives with the same hope we all have to their drug addiction downfalls. But, more importantly, he humanized them.”—TrueCrimeZine.com

“Much more than true crime...It’s an unflinching look inside a marriage and what led to murder.”—*Creative Loafing*

“An eventful tale of deceit, jealousy, and the ultimate betrayal.”—*True Crime Books Examiner*

#### About the Author

Steve Miller is an investigative journalist and has worked as a correspondent for the *Dallas Morning News*, *People* magazine, *U.S. News & World Report*, and the *Daily Beast*. Miller is the author of three true crime books, including the Edgar-finalist *Girl, Wanted: The Search for Sarah Pender*. He is also the author of *Detroit Rock City: The Uncensored History of Rock ‘N’ Roll in America’s Loudest City* and coeditor of *Commando: The Autobiography of Johnny Ramone*.

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### INTRODUCTION

Daniel Defoe, the author of the eighteenth-century classic *Robinson Crusoe*, is, some claim, the father of the true crime genre for his coverage of Jack Sheppard, a habitual burglar and incorrigible jail breaker who told Defoe his story before his execution in London in 1724.

Defoe’s stories on Sheppard’s deeds were blared across the pages of a local newspaper. The public was duly titillated, and papers were sold.

Realizing he was onto something, Defoe next wrote the tale of a guy named Jonathan Wild, a crime fighter turned racketeer who was also executed. Wild’s tale was one of duplicity; he befriended thieves then turned them over to law enforcement for the reward, a real rat fink. Even the public didn’t dig that kind of deceit, and when he was headed to the gallows, he was pilloried with rocks.

It’s tame stuff compared to today’s sordid crimes, including the one you are about to read. But it proved that people like to read about bad guys.

Murder, while many find it compelling to read of, is never easy to write about. It's heavy to be in the middle of a project like this and realize that just for a second, you forgot that someone died. That takes you down for a bit.

Crime is almost impossible to understand, and it comes like a tornado to innocent people who think, "It can't happen to me." I notice it over and over, and it truly blindsides survivors.

On the more technical end, true crime books are usually eighty-thousand-word crime stories. The writing draws a writer deeper into a story than any five-thousand-word Sunday feature, but it's the same exercise in many ways.

For *Murder in Grosse Pointe Park: Privilege, Adultery, and the Killing of Jane Bashara*, I found myself from the beginning talking with Bob Bashara, the man who was ultimately convicted of the murder of his wife.

We exchanged emails and phone calls, which began shortly after his initial arrest on charges of solicitation of murder. I would explain this book to people unfamiliar with the case as a situation in which a guy hired someone to murder his wife and then tried to hire someone to murder the guy who murdered his wife.

"You could get rid of the whole human race that way," one friend told me. "We could just keep paying people to kill off everyone."

When you toss in Bob's acknowledged embrace of BDSM—an expansive acronym folding in bondage, dominance, submission, sadism, and masochism—a sexual fetish world that is probably followed by more people than would acknowledge it, the story becomes even more fascinating.

The book *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a novel by British author E. L. James about young lovers immersed in their devotion to the practice of BDSM, was released to the mass market in June 2011. It was less scary reading about the practice while sitting front and center at the local Barnes & Noble just a few feet from the Starbucks counter. Nothing can be intimidating in that scenario. The popularity of the book speaks of the practice, though, and some people are fascinated by it, even if they don't practice it.

Jane Bashara's body was found January 25, 2012, and word of Bob's other world was quickly revealed. It included a basement room outfitted for bondage and other sexual mischief in a commercial rental strip along a main street in Grosse Pointe Park. The media called it a dungeon and did whatever it could to draw readers with lurid headlines and broadcast teasers.

Lester Holt, introducing an episode of *Dateline* in May 2012, called it "one of the most unusual cases we've ever had."

I never thought it was all that odd. People live their lives in accordance with the wishes of others far too often; lives of quiet conformity, following the leader into a trap of sameness that is hard to recover from. It's a set path and a trap ripe for revolt—graduate high school, go to college, decide what to do for the rest of your life, get married, have children, retire, die.

Bob Bashara started this way, walking the trail of so many before him, groomed to be upstanding and to follow the rules. His dad, George Bashara Jr., was a state appellate judge, an esteemed legal mediator and corporate counsel for Federal-Mogul, an international mechanical parts manufacturer.

Bob got married once, briefly, then again. He had the kids, the house. He was a community leader. He worked a solid job selling chemicals for a fine company. His wife, Jane, was an outgoing, generous soul who

people naturally liked.

“My whole life is dedicated to giving back,” Bob told a local reporter from the *Grosse Pointe News* in 1993. “Like Rotary’s motto: ‘Service above self.’ I like that. Everyone in Grosse Pointe should appreciate Grosse Pointe and southeastern Michigan. Parents should be involved with their children and with their children’s education.”

He believed that, I am sure.

But the mind is a slippery thing and can get away from you if you’re not careful. Somewhere, Bob’s wires got crossed; a little short circuit, perhaps.

He began to find himself attracted to things that were rather out of the ordinary while living out an antiquated notion of the American Dream.

He liked the idea of dominating someone in a sexual way. While working on this book, sometimes after conversations with Bob, I tried to think how his mind must have fucked with him as he lay in bed in his four-bed, four-bath, 3,400-square-footer in that upscale neighborhood, the kids sleeping down the hall, Jane blissfully unaware of her husband’s proclivities. Jane, by the way, was clearly the dominant in the Bashara marriage. There’s nothing wrong with that, unless your spouse feels stifled and takes action.

You want to think his course of action, which felt so good, scared him, but maybe it didn’t. Many people believe he is a sociopath. If so, it would allow him to rationalize his thoughts away, much like you can try to explain a scary noise in the forest off of a lonely, dark, wooded path.

That couldn’t be a bear thrashing in those woods. They don’t even come out this time of year, right?

For Bob, they came out all the time, and his sexual proclivities slowly started to rule him. He created an alternate identity, Master Bob. He went online to the websites that cater to “the lifestyle,” as it is politely described. That term applies broadly, from your common swingers to the BDSM games that Bob gravitated to.

Bob was into it. Really into it. Later on in this book, you’ll read about his games and the women he scared nearly to death. They tell me they didn’t like it, that Bob became crazed once he was given that power, once he had them bound and helpless.

Hollywood does movies that lampoon and ridicule the suburban life and for good reason. Drive down a soulless, treeless street pocked with boxes that masquerade as homes, all outfitted with seventy channels, central air on seventy degrees, windows and doors shut, and you should be afraid. These seem to me to be petri dishes of mayhem, if not in deed then at least in thought. I understand that contentment can be found under the rooftops. But if you are huddling under there for the wrong reason, well, that could very well flick the switch of weird and send someone looking for something to scratch a whole different itch.

*American Beauty*, *The Truman Show*, and *Revolutionary Road* all paint these benign streets as the hovels of victims, turmoil, and potential dissent.

Bob became a secretive, X-rated version of Lester Burnham, Kevin Spacey’s character in *American Beauty*. Instead of outright defying his circumstances, he decided to keep them and create a second universe.

He found girlfriends who shared his affinity for the lifestyle. And that wasn’t enough. The whole escapade into BDSM became a psychological mind-fuck that drove him crazy, this conflict of obsession and addiction

to a scene and the synapses that fire in the throes of arousal.

After he was arrested for solicitation of murder, Bob and I began to email each other. He was certain he was a victim, and I suppose he was, in a way.

On February 5, 2013, he wrote to me from prison:

*I love my family and try to reach out as often as I can . . . As for my wonderful son, i am so very proud of him, his work ethic and just the man he is becoming . . . Jane and I worked very hard with both kids, giving them every advantage possible in their young lives.. my daughter is also a wonderful lady, and can debate with the best . . . i see her as a Senator, someday . . . I was shocked to read an article wrought with outright lies and misconceptions, as they need to continue to debase me and drag me thru the muddy waters of life . . . I must go, but know it is not press or fame I seek, but only to get back to a life interrupted by a senseless act, by a man I was trying to help. Had I know how sick he was, i would have never associated with him. Finally, if you do happen to reach out to my son, tell him how much I love him and I hope he is well . . . and did he get my letter, sent also for jessica . . .*

I've met a number of killers and other bad folks. Some were just like Bob, living in nice houses, raising fine children until—snap—the thing came crashing down by their own hand.

Today, Bob still maintains he never hired anyone to kill his wife.

"I've talked to a number of people in here," he told me one day in a jailhouse phone conversation. "And they all said they could understand how I would hire someone to kill the guy who killed my wife."

One gorgeous fall day in 2013, October 21, I went to the jail in Wayne County, downtown Detroit, for a visit. As government buildings in Detroit go, it was nicer than average. No scowling guards barking orders, no rush to get in as there is across the street at the county courthouse. I simply filled out my information on a clipboard, was verified as being on Bashara's visitor list, and entered the jail, walking into an elevator that took me to the seventh floor. I walked into a booth with a piece of glass and a phone, just like in the movies. There he was, dressed in jailhouse green scrubs, a clear plastic ID bracelet on his right hand. He was tall and unshaven. "They never got me my razor today," he explained right away, aware he was looking grizzled. He said the lack of a shave was part of being in county custody rather than state. He had recently been moved back to the county from the state in order to be closer to his legal counsel.

"At the state they let us keep them, but here, I mean, can you imagine? This is short term. Who's gonna kill themselves?"

We talked about the news and something that had recently come out that I found to be one more ratings grab: Bob had been accused of molesting a young female relative in 1995. The *Detroit News* had obtained a police report that stated Bashara faced second-degree criminal sexual conduct charges after the five-year-old told her parents that Bashara had twice caused her hand to touch his genitals, one time while wrestling in his bed and one time while she was being spanked in his home.

I was dubious when I read the story, which stated he had passed a lie detector test.

"Two tests," Bob corrected, his face ashen. I did believe him, right? I actually did. If it's a big deal when one fails the polygraph, it should also be a big deal when they pass.

During a lull in our conversation, which we were both aware was being taped by the county, he held up a yellow pad with a short yellow pencil and a message that he did not want recorded: it read there was a

“conspiracy” to get him, and “we have 12 examples.”

“There were reports that my car was seen backing out of my driveway that night of Jane’s death,” he said. But those reports all disappeared.

“What happened to those?” he asked me. I shrugged.

He had an answer.

“The police put that out there to see if it would get me to confess. But there was no way I was there at the time they claim Jane was killed,” he said.

To the end, Bob wants to be understood as a good man who had bad things happen to him. It just doesn’t work that way, though.

You just can’t explain it away like that. The justice system, such as it is, found him guilty. He is guilty.

As I worked on this book, I made the acquaintance of Rachel Gillett, the mistress that Bob was wooing when Jane was murdered.

She was reluctant but willing to tell her side of the story. We met on the patio of a Starbucks and talked about her ordeal.

“I have trust issues,” she told me almost as soon as I sat down with my iced coffee. She wanted nothing, only to talk and ensure that her story is fairly represented.

The bottom line, she said, is that she was completely hoodwinked by Bob. She thought throughout her entire three and a half years with Bob that he was estranged from Jane, as he represented himself first as widowed, then separated, on the brink of divorce, and finally divorced.

She was believable and kind, naïve to say the least, and completely embarrassed by the entire debacle. You’ll meet her in these pages, and her story is presented, her life described. A lost soul looking for something that she thought she’d found in Bob.

And she never asked me, as so many people do, for a dime. I wish I could say that about others.

There is an ugliness that these books bring out in people, and it’s no doubt partially attributable to the macabre circumstances.

Bashara’s longtime connection to the pillars of Grosse Pointe high society made it sometimes comical to watch the “get away quickly” sentiment.

“I am NOT allowing any use of any photo/image on that URL you sent in the below email,” came a response from a fellow who had taken a number of shots of a grinning Bob Bashara for the Rotary Club. I had inquired about using one for this book. I was impressed with the yelling of the word “NOT.”

Then there were the in-laws from long ago. Bob was married at a young age to a young lady named Priscilla Langs, in 1981, when she was twenty-one and he was twenty-three. The union lasted about a year.

I called Beverly Langs, Priscilla’s mother, as part of the reporting. She was as ugly as I’ve had to deal with.

“I don’t say a word without money,” she said, portraying the bottom rung of greedy America, where a home

run ball is not handed back to the hitter as its own reward but instead shows up on eBay.

Journalists can't pay for information, interviews, or time. It is simply unethical, a situation in which the subject becomes an employee and can then say anything, or at least the interviewer can make the story fit any scenario that he or she would like. Besides, what kind of journalist has to pay for information? May as well hang it up if that's your game. Or move to England, where such a practice is in keeping with the gossipy flavor of the reporting.

But Beverly assured me that several media groups had paid her—\$1,500, to be exact.

"I'm sorry to hear that things have gotten so bad for you," I said.

"Yes, they really have," she replied. "Now, are you going to pay me?"

"No," I said, and I restated why I could not pay her.

"Good-bye, then," and she hung up.

This is the mind-set we have wrought in the age of greed.

The family of Jane Bashara also refused to speak to me. I am particularly respectful of a surviving family.

In a previous book, *A Slaying in the Suburbs*, I worked hard to get the cooperation of the family of Tara Grant, who was slain in another Detroit suburb by her husband. The family had proclaimed they would live their lives to ensure the memory of Tara was kept alive and that she always had a voice. But when I asked to get some insight into Tara's life, I was told not just no but hell no.

"I'm going to do my own book," her sister, Alicia Standerfer, told me. The book never appeared.

Of course. In every book I've ever done I've encountered such notions. Everyone is going to do a book. They're just waiting for . . . what?

In the case of Jane Bashara, I reached out to her family via a family friend. They declined, and, yes, one of the sisters was—cue it up—going to do a book.

And one last thing: I've outlined before that I listen to music as I write these crime books. Rarely do I do that for any other bit of writing, but the music soothes as I tackle what could break my heart if I let it in.

For this one, I listened, inexplicably, to a lot of Wynn Stewart, Merle Haggard, Buck Owens. I got into Brian Eno's recent works, and when I was hitting the brutal scenes, Monster Magnet, Easy Action, and Human Eye came to the rescue.

Thanks for being here. Let's take a walk past the benign conformity and into a side of suburbia that some might find even scarier.

Steve

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### “Holy Shit, You Have the Mercedes”

The body was lying across the backseat, facedown just a foot from the passenger side door of the Mercedes SUV, her legs pushed down on the floor. It looked as if she were kneeling, and her legs were pushed together by the driver’s side seat, which was pushed all the way back.

The woman’s windpipe was crushed underneath her thin gold necklace, and her face was a battered mask, covered with welts, wounds, and bruises. Across the left ear and down to her neck was a gash, the blood just turning to scab. Her mouth was slightly open.

Her fingernails, manicured just days before, were torn off in a battle with her assailant.

She wore black stretch pants, a dark purple sleeveless blouse, a gold earring in her right ear, and black socks, with a few small leaves, autumn colored, stuck to the sock of the left foot. A pair of tan bedroom slippers was tucked, formally, under the driver’s seat. Her arms were half clad in a black nylon jacket, and the jacket was put on from the front facing backward, creating a straitjacket effect.

The faux fur hood of the jacket was unzipped from the jacket and rested on the back passenger side floor.

The woman, married for twenty-six years, wore no wedding ring.

On the front passenger side floor, her beige purse and various items—a compact, lipstick, Kleenex, Dentyne Ice gum, cell phone, credit cards—lay strewn about. Her checkbook was slightly open at the top of the purse. A prescription bottle for hormone pills, prescribed for women going through menopause, sat on the passenger seat.

Twelve hours before, about 4 P.M., she had been a very vibrant, alive woman, talking on the phone with her nineteen-year-old daughter.

“I need to get home where I can write something down while we’re talking,” she told Jessica, the daughter. It wasn’t cryptic or weird. It was the plan of a woman with a life to live. It was a note she wanted to write to herself to refer to in the future.

She was fifty-six years old and had started a post-retirement job in the fall with KEMA Services, a public utility consultancy.

She had come home, dropped her cell phone and purse down, and turned on the TV. Her husband, Bob, was not there.

Just after 6 P.M. the previous evening, the woman had been beaten and strangled in her own garage by a large man, a stranger. It took at least four minutes for her to die with her larynx crushed under a large Red Wing work boot. A parting thought—“that’s it, I’m dead”—it was a quick realization before the darkness, no doubt a relief after those endless minutes of being mutilated. After she was dead, her killer made a final stomp on her neck, smudging it around as one would put out a cigarette.

Now, in the darkness, four hours before daylight, it was Midwest chilly out, thirty degrees with a wind that made it feel like twenty-three. A broken chunk of moon was fading to the east. The locals didn’t know it, but the worst of winter was over even at this early date, January 25. It would be one of the warmest winters on record, but right now, the starkness of bare trees and dead grass was still a reminder that winter always paints Detroit a little darker with the brush of bleak that envelops the Midwest.

The neighborhood was still. It was among the worst neighborhoods in the city of Detroit, a shell of a town that has decrepit blocks by the acre.

The black 2004 Mercedes ML350 sport-utility vehicle was the only touch of luxury for many blocks, eight miles and another world from Grosse Pointe Park, where the woman lived. The 3,400-square-foot house where she was killed sat two blocks from Lake St. Clair, which is sometimes counted as part of the Great Lakes, its shores lined by some of Detroit's wealthiest suburbs.

Around her now were ghetto scraps, long boarded-up wooden-framed houses surrounded by heaps of garbage, some of it in torn-open black plastic garbage bags. The back doors of some of the empty houses were torn off, leaving black holes leading to darker basements. Just outside the SUV was a pile of old clothes, and a few feet past that, a cheap, discarded wooden kitchen table with one leg missing.

Much national attention has been given the idea that a house in some parts of Detroit can be purchased for \$1. Median price in this two-square-mile area was \$21,000. Needless to say, schools in the area performed solidly below the state average and even below that of the lowly, beleaguered Detroit school district.

“Chav WTA Van Dyke” was scrawled in black spray paint on the side of a dirty white garage just down the alley from where the SUV sat. More graffiti was scattered around the area, on the sidewalk, on abandoned homes, on other garages, on light poles that hadn’t worked for a decade.

In a previous six-month period, the area in which the SUV sat reported twenty-six shootings, eight assaults, and five robberies.

In the darkness, Franco Leone was driving his tow truck through the streets of Detroit. He was a driver for H & B Land and Elite Towing, one of several tow truck companies to have a contract with the city of Detroit. It was a typical weeknight, a Tuesday night into Wednesday morning, and even the scofflaws were down for the evening. Leone was working the 8 P.M. to 8 A.M. shift and had seen some action that night. A drunk had parked in a thoroughfare, and another driver had taken a reserved spot in a condo complex. Both warranted a tow. A couple accidents.

But now, it was getting toward dawn, and Leone moved his attention over to an area between Seven Mile Road and Hoover Street in East Detroit. He cruised slowly down Pinewood Street, between Bradford Street and Annott Avenue, looking for stolen cars.

It was a good spot to dump a vehicle after a night of joyriding, and Leone could sometimes find a heisted car dumped in a sketchy area. Some nights, he could find a couple of them, although cars weren’t getting stolen like they used to.

“They make them better now, tougher to steal,” he was thinking to himself, when all of a sudden, pay dirt. What would a nice luxury SUV be doing in a place like this?

“I seen a Mercedes amongst a bunch of abandoned houses,” Leone says. It sat behind a sad-looking, empty redbrick house on the corner.

He stopped behind the SUV, blocking the alley it sat in. Leone wrote down the plate number and got out to have a look. It was now closing in on 6 A.M., and he called dispatch. He’d have to call it in before he could haul it. Hopefully, the cops would be quick about it.

He read the license and make of the vehicle to his dispatcher at H & B.

“Holy shit, you have the Mercedes,” she told him. “Frank, stay right there.”

The Mercedes had been called in around 11:30 P.M., almost seven hours ago. A worried husband and a missing wife.

The first cop car arrived within minutes. One officer stood with Leone, making small talk, as the other officer approached the car in the darkened alley. It was quiet and cold, and he could tell it wasn’t okay to be here. He took his flashlight and peered in. The back of a head of bloody hair lit up in the light beam.

More cops arrived shortly. In a city where the response time to an emergency call is an hour, the discovery of a body motivates even the most jaded cop. The city had 344 homicides in 2011. This would be number 26 for 2012 if it turned out to have been committed inside the Detroit city limits.

Leone stood by his tow truck fielding questions from a parade of investigators. By 8 A.M., the news was out and being broadcast around the city. But Leone was still talking to cops, waiting to go home.

As he wrapped up the last round of interviews, the investigator had to ask: “Did you kill her?”

“No, I didn’t. I just found the car.” And with that, Leone was allowed to leave.

The police decided quickly to tow the vehicle to the Wayne County Medical Examiner’s Office with the body still inside in order to preserve the entire crime scene.

Within three hours, the story of the dead woman from the Pointes found over by Seven Mile Road was dominating first the local news, then the national airwaves. The story’s heft was inevitable. A rich white woman with no enemies and a gracious and considerable influence among her wealthy peers was found dead in the back of her luxury car in the middle of Detroit.

Around midday on Wednesday, January 25, the woman’s employer issued a press release.

“KEMA is deeply shocked and saddened to learn about the death of Jane Bashara today,” the release read. “She has been an employee of KEMA for over 2 years. She was very well respected and has many close colleagues here. We are doing everything we can to help Detroit police in the investigation and to support her family during this tragedy.”

\* \* \*

Today’s rapid-fire news mélange that mixes authoritative media with the generally misinformed public and false punditry swung into full bloom, accusing and defending anyone within a blood test of Jane Bashara, wife and mother of two from the tony village of Grosse Pointe Park.

Most obviously, the attention swung to her husband, Bob Bashara, the son of a once esteemed state judge, George Bashara Jr., who died in 2002, leaving Bob and his sister an inheritance of \$100,000 to split with the rest going into a trust for his wife, Suzanne. In the event of Suzanne’s death, the trust was to be divided among four parties, Bob included. Several times over the years Bob would ask Suzanne for an advance on a portion of his share. He was always denied.

Despite his dubious fiscal skills, Bob considered himself a stalwart community leader—“I give it all back,” he was frequently heard to say—and served as head of the local Rotary Club, a deacon at his Episcopal church, and a member of the Lochmoor Club, a local country club.

He was a landlord, holding both residential and commercial properties. The residential places were what

some might see as poorly located, in run-down areas, making him fair game for cries of “slumlord,” warranted or not.

But he kept them rented and most of the time did so with few beefs on either side of the transaction. In the right hands, these could have been moneymakers.

Rather than pay a management company, Bob handled them himself.

“I liked renting to people. Sometimes they needed a break and I could help them,” he says. “It also gives me time to do my other charity work, to make my own schedule.”

Bob Bashara spent the evening of January 24, 2012, sweeping, which was weird. His tenants said Bob never did his own cleanup work, preferring to use his network of handymen and helpers, who often performed menial labor in exchange for a break on rent.

On that evening, though, Bob was sweeping and working behind his property on Mack Avenue, his prime real estate, which housed a tavern, the Hard Luck Lounge, and an oyster bar, Dylan’s Raw Bar & Grille.

There were some other storefronts where tenants and businesses came and went: Paul Engstrom Fine Art, a storefront for a photographer who divided his time between Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco. An office unit that sat mostly empty. Above the commercial spaces, two apartments that were usually occupied.

It was a typical Detroit area piece of real estate; across the street, a liquor store drew street denizens and shady characters. A walk on one side of Mack was safe, the other dicey.

That chilly evening of January 24, Bob decided he would sweep and tidy up the place.

“I’d usually clean the place in the day when no one was around,” Bashara says. “People smoked out back, and the tenants never cleaned. It just happened that I was out there that night.”

Regardless, beyond the anomaly of cleaning in the evening, Bashara acted strange in the eyes of his tenant that evening.

“Bob was in and out of the bar that night,” says Mike Mouyianis, who ran the Hard Luck Lounge. He’d been there since 2008 and had also hatched a line of liquor, Hard Luck Candy Vodka, during that time. The Hard Luck was a smoky misplaced hipster joint, cool amidst privilege, with dark lights and a fifties’ dive vibe. A couple of pool tables, some locals out for a walk on the wild side. Cops liked to drink there sometimes, or would sit in their cars out front on Mack Avenue and check Facebook on their laptops while on duty, poaching the bar’s Wi-Fi.

Mike’s beefy biker character called for a certain clientele, younger, cooler, and more into music than the general population of the moneyed Pointes.

Mouyianis was introduced to Bashara by a friend at a bachelor party in 2008. The party was at the Crazy Horse, a strip joint on Michigan Avenue favored by out-of-town athletes and rappers. Into that mix came Bob Bashara, wearing a pastel golf shirt.

In the men’s room, Mouyianis stood at a urinal and Bob took the one next to him.

Bashara pulled a small baggie out of his pocket, tapped some cocaine onto the web of his thumb, and took a hefty snort.

“Want some?” Bob asked gamely.

If the sight of a fifty-something man in a golf shirt snorting cocaine fairly openly wasn’t enough to deter Mouyianis from indulging, nothing was. He passed.

“Bob walked out of that bathroom, sat down at a table, and paid two dancers to give him a lap dance almost immediately,” Mouyianis says.

Mouyianis ran with all kinds of people, and he is a born businessman, looking for a way to make some money doing what he loves, which includes running a bar. So when he learned that Bashara had some space in a fairly trafficked area, the two got together.

“He owned dozens of properties in the area, and I thought the one we were looking at was pretty good,” Mouyianis says. He noticed Bashara was a strange guy who had a lot of things going on, a fellow who took pride in the fact that he was a local working for his community.

“We’d go over to the city offices and he’s telling me how he knew everyone and he was pals with everyone, but when we got there it was clear that they didn’t really like him at all. They’d kind of say, ‘Okay, what do you want now, Bob?’”

The Hard Luck’s location was perfect. Business was fine, and the new line of liquor was selling and getting popular enough for Mouyianis and a couple other guys to make more and sell it elsewhere.

The building, though, was a drama.

Every year Mouyianis would get a notice saying the building was going to be seized for tax arrears. Bashara would tell him it was a misunderstanding and he’d fix it.

When he was first moving in, Mouyianis was cleaning, moving some things, and he noticed a door in the basement of the building. It could have led to storage, maybe an office, but the sturdy wooden door was always locked. It was odd; he never saw anyone going in or out of this room, even when Bashara was around.

One day he was moving some stock around in the basement—the Hard Luck had its own storage area—and Mouyianis saw a female friend of Bashara’s. She was dropping something off for Bashara, who wasn’t around.

“How’s it going?” she asked.

“Just working down here in the dungeon,” Mouyianis said.

Within five minutes, Mouyianis’s cell phone rang. It was Bashara.

“What do you mean by dungeon?” he asked.

Perplexed, Mouyianis said, “I was just using a term, Bob.”

\* \* \*

Mike was working behind the bar on January 24 around 6 P.M.

“I’m working out here in back, just working on some stuff,” Bob went in and told him. That evening, Bob

would have a beer then head back out.

“He was real chatty, uncharacteristically,” Mouyianis says.

Around 7 P.M., though, Mouyianis felt sick—he chalked it up to food poisoning—and seeing as it was a slow night, he left his regular bartender, Kristy, in charge and went home.

Bob continued the pattern, in and out, with Kristy behind the bar.

Around the same time Mouyianis left, Michael Carmody walked in to meet Bob, who was at a table having a beer.

Carmody was a longtime friend and fellow Rotarian. They sat for one round, talking about football, talking about the Rotary, easy conversations about things they had in common. Carmody left after forty-five minutes, happy to have Bob as a friend. It would be the last time he felt that way.

A couple hours after Carmody and Bashara parted ways, a man who had been in the Hard Luck a few times came by. He was a big guy, six feet four inches, 250 pounds, barrel-chested with a broad back and thick legs. He looked like a guy who made a living working, a tough, as someone might have called him in the fifties. He had a silver brush cut, a loud mouth, and a limited vocabulary.

“Not all there,” is how some put it.

Kristy told Mouyianis the next day of this man coming in around 10 P.M. The man would later match a description of Joe Gentz, a slow-talking fellow in his forties who had moved into an upper flat a few blocks down the street. But no one ever mentioned it, and there would be plenty of discussion about this Gentz fellow and his actions on that evening.

There was one other thing that was strange that night. As Kristy closed up the Hard Luck, she exited through the back, as always, locking the door. She noticed the area that Bob had been intently cleaning.

“It was this little three-foot-square area. That was it. He had really done nothing,” Kristy later told Mouyianis.

The next morning, Mouyianis felt better, and his wife, Natalie, was preparing to go to work at the Greektown Casino. It was around 9 A.M., and she watched the local news on television while he puttered in the kitchen.

“Mike, oh my God, look at this,” she said, a little loudly, startling Mouyianis.

On the screen of the local NBC affiliate was a shot of a black Mercedes SUV, sitting in an alley in one of the city’s many slums. “Missing Mom’s Body Found,” the bold lettering on the screen read.

There was Franco Leone talking about finding the SUV in an alley.

“He killed Jane and we’re his alibi,” Mouyianis said quietly.

\* \* \*

The cops were working from scratch at the murder scene of Jane Bashara, and no one even needed an alibi yet. Sure, the husband is the first suspect, but Bob Bashara’s pedigree didn’t scream murderer.

Just a little over a month before, on December 16, Bob and Jane Bashara delivered \$28,000 in a fund-raiser

for their church, St. Michael's Episcopal in Grosse Pointe Woods.

And there was legacy to their devotion to their community. Readers of the *Grosse Pointe News* could see a Bashara photo routinely, be it Jane or Bob. The family took a copy of the local newspaper along to a family reunion in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, in January 2009, then posed for a photo of themselves reading it: Bob and Jane; their daughter, Jessica; their son, Robert; and Bob's mom, Nancy. The Bashara name was golden in the Pointes.

Sure, Bob had some weirdness to him, and he was a big man with a loud voice and a lot to say, a hail-fellow-well-met who came across as sometimes absentminded.

But the idea of a guy who had a twenty-four-year record of perfect attendance at the local Rotary Club being a wife killer was unthinkable.

He had come home, he told police, at 8 P.M. to find the TV and the lights on, but no Jane. He later told police he had called her around 7 and told her he would be home shortly. He also told a television reporter that the two had touched base via phone around 5 P.M., and she said she was on her way home.

Around 9 P.M., he called Patricia Matthews, one of Jane's closest friends, and asked if Jane was there.

"I think Jane is missing or something is wrong," Bob said. "It's late, and she always leaves a note."

Matthews didn't find it odd and wasn't even concerned. She'd called over to the house for Jane a number of times, and no one knew where she was, and there was no note. Why would Bob be so convinced something was wrong?

"I got home and she wasn't around, and I relaxed and figured she was out running an errand," Bashara told one of the news crews that began to camp outside his home. "As nine o'clock and nine thirty approached, I became much more concerned, and I got more people involved. I called my kids to see if they had heard from her, and they hadn't. I had been calling her cell phone to find out, and then as time got on, I involved the police, because I was concerned there might be something wrong."

After he contacted them around 11:30 and officers came by, police felt that Jane had been in a struggle at the house.

Since the crime took place in Grosse Pointe Park, the case was being handled by the local police, for whom "murder" is a word rarely heard.

When the Mercedes was found several hours later, the department was handed its first murder case since January 16, 1992, when Grosse Pointe Park resident Phyllis Ann Lenart was shot and killed in a robbery at a bus stop at Wayburn and Jefferson. The perp, Raynell Hampton, had been out of prison for less than two months on a drug charge.

At a candlelight vigil on the evening of January 25, Bashara, clad in a blue baseball cap, black gloves, and beige raincoat, received hugs and blessings of condolence from many of his and Jane's friends.

"God bless you all," he said.

The next day, he headed over to the police department for questioning.

"I'm doing what I need to do to cooperate with the authorities to find who did this to my wife," he told reporters outside the station.

The next day, he took a polygraph. He failed. While he was at the police department, the cops executed a search warrant on his house, complete with dogs searching for God-knows-what. They took computers and some documents. He went back to the house minutes after they left. It was set up that way. There was evidence to be sifted through. And there was a single small drop of blood on the garage floor. It contained DNA from two people: Jane Bashara and Joe Gentz.

2

### Growing up Wealthy and Healthy in Detroit

Bob Bashara grew up in a family of letters, law, and geographical consistency. His grandfather and father, George Sr. and Jr., were lawyers and hard-charging intellectual minds walking paths padded by ambition.

The Bashara family line traced to Lebanon in the late 1800s, part of a wave of Lebanese Christians who came to the U.S., first basing themselves peddling in the sidewalk trades of New York City but quickly broadening into the Midwest, where the living was cheaper, the spaces wider.

George Sr. was born in Hartford City, Indiana, in 1901. The family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, briefly, before George went back to Lebanon for a few years, and returned for good a few years later. He was eight years old when he returned, still knowing little English. Within years he won a national oratorical award for his mastering of English and he had landed in Detroit with his family.

Middle Eastern immigrants eschewed even temporary work in the auto factories of Detroit to pursue an education, George among them. He enrolled first at the University of Pennsylvania, then moved to the University of Michigan Law School, plowing his way through to a degree.

Perhaps his biggest contribution to the culture of Detroit was his work: counsel to the waves of Arab immigrants that began to really hit in the 1940s following World War II.

As honorary counsel for the Republic of Lebanon in the Midwest, “he was partly responsible for the large Arab population in Detroit,” Bob says.

His specialty became immigration law, particularly helping newly arrived immigrants navigate U.S. immigration rules.

“He knew the language, he was willing to help his community, and this was his real skill at that time,” says Edward Deeb, who fraternized with both George Sr. and George Jr. as a businessman and a resident of the Pointes.

Setting the tone for his family, George Sr. was a joiner, enlisting in community causes that included bar associations, the Syria Lodge, and the Cedars of Lebanon. He moved the family to Grosse Pointe Park into a large home on Balfour Street.

George took an office in the downtown Cadillac Tower for many of his years, and for a few years in the sixties, he and his only son, George Jr., who also became a lawyer, opened Bashara & Bashara.

The elder Bashara’s landmark case was the defeat of the UAW on behalf of Arab grocers, who were being pressured, sometimes menaced, in a move to unionize them. In particular, the merchants were harassed when they drove their trucks to pick up produce and other goods at a central distribution facility.

“George took the case when the grocers asked him, and he won,” Deeb says. “He was a hero after that, although it probably didn’t help his political ambitions.”

He was running up against a well-established legal fortress of steely union entrenchment and winning on occasion.

Bashara took a case in 1969 representing a plaintiff against another grocery union. The plaintiff claimed his union did not fairly represent him in a squabble with Kroger.

The union emerged victorious, thanks in part to the legal work of a young lawyer named Jimmy Hoffa, already a political presence behind the scenes.

But, yes, while his passion was the law, George Sr. was also a hopeful politician, albeit an unsuccessful one. At age forty, he ran for judge in the local circuit court, which hears a range of cases both civil and criminal. He lost but was unbowed. He ran again in 1947, 1948, 1953, and 1959. In 1959, he ran for U.S. representative against an entrenched incumbent, Democratic lawyer Louis Rabaut, and lost. In 1966, George ran for the state senate seat against George Fitzgerald, an Irish Catholic Democrat who had the backing of the Detroit political machine. Bashara, the Republican from Lebanon, never had a chance, and it was the last time he ran for office.

In his later years, George and his wife, Josephine, bought a condo in Pompano Beach, Florida, where Bob and other family members would visit during winter breaks at school.

But he always kept his home in Grosse Pointe Woods, living a solid, community-based life that set the stage for his kids, and their kids, where life was lived to improve, not move.

“He helped me pay for college, and he helped my dad in his practice when money was short,” Bob says.

George died on the second Friday of September 1980 of heart problems. He left behind George Jr., four daughters, and a wife.

\* \* \*

He fell not far from the tree, did George Jr. He was born in 1934, at the end of the Great Depression, but he knew little hardship. A chatty boy from the start, George Jr. fell in love with words early on. He was inspired by a guy in his neighborhood, Toby David, a local entertainer and radio personality on WJR, then later Canadian station CKLW across the bridge in Windsor, Ontario. David, also of Lebanese descent, was a national figure who had started in Detroit, moved to New York and Washington, D.C., then returned.

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