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| **The Trial of Lindy and Michael ChamberlainEdited A Trial Commentary by Douglas O. Linder (2005)** |

*"The scientist shouldn't become too adventurous, too competitive.  The trouble is, we're all so human.  I've never seen a case more governed by human frailties."*
*--Dr. Tony Jones, government pathologist in the Chamberlain trial*

On August 17, 1980, at a campsite near Australia's famous Ayer's Rock, a mother's cry came out of the dark: "My God, my God, the dingo's got my baby!"  Soon the people of an entire continent would be choosing sides in a debate over whether the cry heard that night marked an astonishing and rare human fatality caused by Australia's wild dogs or was, rather, "a calculated, fanciful lie."

**Azaria Disappears**

On August 13, 1980, the Chamberlain family left their home in the northern Queensland on a camping trip.  At the time of their trip, Michael Chamberlain served as minister at Mount Isa's Seventh Day Adventist Church, a denomination much misunderstood Down Under.  He and his wife of ten years, Lindy, looked forward to several days of tenting and exploring with their three children, Aidan (age 6), Reagan (age 4), and Azaria (ten  weeks).

The Chamberlains arrived late on the night of August 16 at the Ayers Rock campground.  The next morning, Michael and the two boys climbed portions of the rock.  Lindy, cradling Azaria in her arms, explored a rocky area.  Just outside the cave, she looked up uneasily to see a dingo staring at her.  She would later tell a detective that she had the feeling that the wild dog was "casing the baby."

After sunset, the Chamberlain family gathered with other campers around the barbecues near their tent site.  Lindy held Azaria in her arms as she and Michael chatted with Greg and Sally Lowe, another young couple also vacationing with an infant.  Around 8:00, as Sally Lowe walked to a rubbish bin to dispose of items left from the evening meal, she turned to see a dingo following four or five paces behind her.  Minutes later, Michael entertained his son Aiden by tossing a crust of bread to a dingo that appeared near their barbecue bench.

Lindy announced "It's time I put the baby down" and went to their tent.  Ten minutes later, having left Azaria with her sleeping brother, Lindy rejoined the rest of the campers by the barbecue bench.  A baby's cry from the direction of the tent soon sent Lindy racing back to investigate.  Then came her cry: "My God, My God, the dingo's got my baby!"

Frank Morris, the first investigator to arrive, shined a light across the floor of the Chamberlain tent, where he noticed blood on one of the rugs.  Soon campers were locating flashlights and heading out into the dark scrub land. Nearly 300 men, women, and teenagers formed a human chain to look for tracks or pieces of clothing.

The main search turned up dingo tracks, but nothing more.  Away from the main search party, tourist Murray Haby had better luck, following the tracks of a large dingo under a sand ridge, Haby noticed a depression in the sand where the wild dog seemed to have laid down something it had carried. The imprint in the sand suggested a knitted weave of some sort.

**First Doubts**

There were four men first assigned to the Chamberlain case. Inspector Michael Gilroy accepted the Chamberlain's story, while Frank Morris did not.  John Lincoln also didn’t buy the dingo story:  "Not a chance.  Never happened before.  There's a fact you can't beat.  Never ever happened."  Gilroy noted that, even though none before had been fatal, there had been a series of recent dingo attacks in the park on children. Lincoln scoffs at the possibility that a dog could lug a ten pound baby over hundreds of yards.  To prove his point, he leaves the room and returns with a pail filled with ten pounds of sand, which he succeeds in supporting by his mouth for less than a minute.  He challenges the other officers to see if they can do better.

One week after Azaria's disappearance, a hiker near the park spotted shredded clothes resting near a boulder.  Upon closer inspection, the clothes turn out to be those of baby Azaria. Goodwin reported his discovery and Mr. Morris arrived to collect the evidence.

On August 28, Detective-Sergeant Charlwood took over the Chamberlain investigation and he had suspicions too because it was reported that when Lindy had brought Azaria in for a medical check up, the baby was dressed in all black.  The examining doctor is said to have been curious enough about the name "Azaria" to look it up in a Dictionary of Names and discover that it meant "Sacrifice in the Wilderness."  (Actually, it means "Whom God Aids.")  Gilroy also commented that Azaria's clothes were found close to where the family hiked earlier in the day.  He noted that the people who observed her that evening "assumed she was holding a baby when they have seen her holding a white bundle to her breast."

In places around Australia, ranging from laboratories to wildlife parks, investigators conducted experiments to test the probability of Lindy's account of Azaria's disappearance.  Blood, vegetation, and hair samples found on Azaria's clothing were examined.  Dead dingoes shot in the Ayers Rock region following the disappearance were dissected by veterinarians looking for either human bone or human protein.  Tears in the fibers of Azaria's clothing were studied--Did the tears appeared to be caused by a dingo's teeth or by some human instrument?  At Cleland Park wildlife reserve in Adelaide, dingos were tossed meat wrapped in a baby's nappy, so that the nappy could be studied and compared to Azaria's.  From these various efforts, investigators began to build a case for murder.

Newspapers fueled suspicions that the Chamberlains killed their baby, possibly as a religious sacrifice.  Reporters frequently observed that the many Australians concluded from televised interviews with the Chamberlains that the couple's demeanor didn't match what they would expect from a couple that had just tragically lost a child.

**First One Coroner's Inquest, Then Another**

Coroner Barritt conducted The first investigation into the death of Azaria.  Television cameras were live when Barritt announced his findings.  Barritt concluded his discussion of the evidence by finding that Azaria "met her death when attacked by a wild dingo whilst asleep in her family's tent."  Neither of her parents were, Barritt found, "in any degree whatsoever responsible for her death."

Coroner Barritt's findings might have been expected to discourage investigators bent on proving Lindy Chamberlain a murderer, but they did not.  On September 19, 1981, the police searched the Chamberlain's home, seizing over three hundred items ranging from items of clothing to scissors to the yellow truck that they had driven to park. Detective Charlwood revealed that the search had been allowed because of the findings of British forensic expert James Cameron, who concluded from examining the baby's clothes that no dingo had been involved in her disappearance, but rather scissors had been used to tear the clothing.

What finally convinced authorities to push for a second corner investigation was the presence of large quantities of blood in the Chamberlain's truck. The detective questioning the parents made it clear that he believed that they murdered her in their yellow truck with scissors.  Many of the questions directed at the Chamberlain concerned the presence of blood in the family automobile: "Did you notice any blood staining inside or outside the car when you cleaned it?", "Do you recall cleaning blood  off the seats?"  The detective also noted called the evidence that an expert found fetal blood beneath the passenger seat of their truck.

A reporter from Sydney, Malcolm Brown, offered a concise comparison between the two coroners' investigations.  "The first investigation was about dingoes," Brown said, while "this one is about blood."  The blood evidence persuaded the courts.  Lindy Chamberlain was charged with murder and Michael as being an accessory after the fact.

**The Trial**

Despite the lack of a body, the lack of a motive, and the lack of any eye-witnesses, the prosecution opened their case on (a now pregnant) Lindy and Michael Chamberlain in 1982.  Ian Barker opened the case for the prosecution, telling jurors Azaria "died very quickly because somebody had cut her throat,” and that Chamberlain's story about the dingo attack "a fanciful lie, calculated to conceal the truth."

The prosecution first witness, park tourist Sally Lowe, offered as much support for the defense as for the prosecution.  Lowe described Lindy as being away from the barbecue only "six to ten minutes," a very short period in which to have committed the murder and temporarily disposed of the body. Lowe also damaged the prosecution's case by insisting, "I heard the baby cry--quite a serious cry," shortly before Lindy went to the tent and reportedly saw the dingo slinking off into the dark.  On cross-examination, Lowe confirmed that she was "positive" she heard a baby cry--a cry that was suddenly cut off--and that the cry "definitely came from the tent."  She also described Lindy before the incident having "a new-mum glow about her."

Testimony from others who were at the campground that August night generally presented a version of events that also seemed to aid the defense more than the prosecution, whose witnesses they were.  Greg Lowe, Sally's husband, was asked on cross whether he saw any if the Chamberlains cleaning blood from their Torana at the time when, according to the prosecution timeline, they would have had to have done so.  "No, I didn't," Lowe answered. "There were quite a lot of people around at that time at the tent-site, and I'm sure if anything like that happened it would have been noticed."  Judy West reported she heard Lindy cry "The dingo's got my baby!" just "five to ten minutes" after she heard a dingo growl--"low" and "deep"--outside the tent.  She also testified that earlier she had been forced to shoo off a dingo that had grabbed her twelve-year old daughter by the arm and pulled.

Witness Amy Whittaker, however, provided jurors with evidence of the seemingly odd behavior that had turned public opinion against the Chamberlains earlier in the investigation.  Whittaker testified that minutes after the alleged dingo attack, Michael Chamberlain had appeared at the doorway of her camper and announced, "A dingo has taken our baby, and she is probably dead by now."  Whittaker also reported Lindy saying, as she tried to comfort her, "Whatever happens, it is God's will."  She also described Lindy and Michael walking alone together into the bush for "fifteen to twenty minutes:--a time during which the prosecution argued the Chamberlains might have buried their baby.

Reporters saw the tide beginning to move a bit in the prosecution’s direction when a parade of forensic experts took the stand starting with biologist Joy Kuhl, told jurors that her tests proved that the blood found in the Chamberlain's trucks belonged to an infant.  The defense raised questions about the accuracy of her test results, suggesting that the blood--if that's what it was--might well have come from the bleeding hitchhiker picked up by the Chamberlains in 1979.

Prosecutors witness Bernard Sims had investigated about two dozen attacks by dogs on humans in his job as a London ondontologist (bite mark expert).  Sims saw nothing consistent with a dingo attack in Azaria's clothing, claimed that a dingo attack would cause "copious" bleeding, and indicated that a baby's head could not fit into the jaws of a dingo.

James Cameron was the final witness for the prosecution.  Cameron, a professor of forensic medicine, testified that Azaria was killed by "a cutting instrument across the neck, or around the neck" held by a human.  He exhibited to the jury slides of Azaria's clothing taken in his laboratory with ultra-violet light which he believed showed the pattern of bloodied fingers.  The defense focused attention on previous cases in which Cameron's testimony had helped incriminate what turned out to be innocent suspects.

On October 13, the defense began its case by calling Lindy Chamberlin. Tears slid down Lindy's face as she described the clothing her daughter was wearing the last night she laid her down: "She had a white knitted Marquis jacket, with a pale lemon edging."  Phillips asked Lindy to place her index finger next to the picture of the so- called bloodied fingers.  The point became obvious, when spectators realized that the print made by so-called bloodied fingers showed four phalanges(joints in fingers and toes), while Lindy Chamberlain, and virtually every other human on the planet, have only three.

More than two dozen defense witnesses followed Lindy to the stand.  Several testified as to the Chamberlain's fine character and their grief over the loss of their daughter.  Other witnesses told either of their own frightening encounters with dingoes, or testified in general about the aggressiveness of the region's wild dogs.  In addition, eight defense forensic experts would attack the tests or conclusions of the prosecution's experts, on subjects ranging from fiber to blood evidence.

The defense saw Professor Boettcher as one of its most important forensic experts.  Boettcher attacked Joy Kuhl's conclusions that the Chamberlain car contained significant quantities of fetal blood.  In complicated testimony that might have flown right over the heads of the jurors, Boettcher tried to explain why Kuhl's testing method might have produced false positives for fetal blood.  "Two hundred *bad* tests are poorer than one *good* test."

The defense, in summation, stressed that the prosecution failed to provide even a remotely plausible explanation as to why Lindy Chamberlain would want to kill her own child.  "The prosecution has had two years and three months to think of a reason," he said, and "they can't."  Barker, summing for the prosecution, admitted that no motive had been proved, but insisted that was neither the prosecution's intent or its job.  "All that you need to find is that the murder happened," Barker told the jury.

On October 28, 1982, the case closed and most journalists reporting on the case left the courtroom expecting an acquittal. On October 29, at 8:37 pm, jury announced its verdict.  The jury found Lindy guilty of murder, and Michael guilty of being an accessory after the fact.  The judge sentenced Lindy to life in prison, but suspended Michael's sentence.

**The Trial Aftermath**

As Lindy passed her time in prison, new reports casting doubt on the prosecution's scientific evidence helped to create a growing Free Lindy movement.  Most damning of all the new reports was one showing that what the prosecution had claimed was the blood of a murdered child in the Chamberlain vehicle was in fact not even blood at all--it was paint emulsion.  Well over 100,000 Australia's signed petitions calling for her release.  The country remained, however, deeply divided on the issue, with one poll showing 52% of the nation's residents believed her guilty of murder.

In an unexpected turn in 1986, a hiker accidently slipped on some rocks in the same park where Azaria had died. The hiker died from his fall and during the investigation of his death, the police found Azaria’s missing jacket. Given the skepticism prosecutors had expressed for Lindy's story about the missing jacket, there seemed little choice now but to Lindy's release from prison.

A judicial investigation followed Lindy's release from prison. In May 1987, a 379-page report was issued critical of the investigatory techniques of Joy Kuhl, James Cameron, and other key prosecution witnesses in the trial.  He put great weight on the credible accounts offered by the Chamberlain's fellow campers, noting: "It is extraordinary that the persons at the barbecue area at the time of and immediately after Azaria's disappearance accepted Mrs. Chamberlain's story and noted nothing about her appearance and conduct suggesting that she had suddenly killed her daughter."

The Chamberlains held a victory feast for invited guests.  Among those invited by the Chamberlains were defense witnesses and lawyers, a couple whose daughter was taken from their car by a dingo, and journalists and politicians who had supported them during their long ordeal.  Lawyer Ken Crispin, in a speech, praised the Chamberlains for being remarkably free of bitterness or self-pity.

The Chamberlains traveled to Sydney to see a preview of the movie based on their experience, "A Cry in the Dark."  Lindy, in her book "Through My Eyes," called the movie, based on John Bryson's fine account of the case, 95% accurate and said that "no other actress would have been able" to play her better than Meryl Streep.

Lindy Chamberlain wrote in the last pages of her 1990 book, "And now we wait, we wait for the Northern Territory to pay us what they owe."  That day finally came two years later when she received $1.3 million in compensation from the Northern Territory government for wrongful imprisonment.