

*[skip intro sequence, begin blizzard, use Wind plugin]
[if you can find them, incorporate news radio into the scene]
[few shots of blizzard outside, wipe in/out Nexpo logo, then title, wind off screen]*

Discovery in the Woods

[February 24, 1978]

Friday.

Joseph Shones was out scouting some mountainous backroads in the Plumas National Forest. He spent the better part of the day navigating his Volkswagen in hopes of returning with his family the next day, however due to harsh weather conditions, his venture led to his car becoming stuck in the snow around 5:30pm. Miles away from help and with dwindling options, he decided to hop out to give his car a push. In a strikingly unlucky turn of events, though, this physical exertion would lead to him enduring a heart attack at the worst possible place and the worst possible time.

-slight pause-

He returns to the confines of his vehicle, enduring the pain and contemplating on what to do. A short while later, though, he'd catch his biggest break. Two sets of headlights approaching from the opposite direction, and the shadows of what looked like a woman, a baby, and a group of men walking towards him while engaging in conversation. After realizing that this could be his ticket home, he fumbled out of the car and began calling for help. Once he started doing so, the headlights turned dark, and the conversation... fell silent.

-slight pause, find a way to symbolize time passing-

A couple hours later with his car still running, Shones would witness another anomaly - flashlights shining in the far distance. As expected, he'd jump out once more, vehemently pleading for one of them to notice him... however this too, fell unsuccessful.

-slight pause, find a way to symbolize time passing-

Another couple of hours pass, and Shones' car unfortunately runs out of gas. Fortunately, though, by this point, he'd felt well enough to exit his vehicle and begin a trek up the road towards a lodge roughly eight miles away. It was on this walk when he'd witness a 1969 Mercury Montego with no passengers inside. Considering the circumstances and having previously spotted numerous people within the last few hours, he didn't think much of it and chalked it up to belonging to those that he saw earlier.

The trek from Joseph Shones' abandoned Volkswagen to the lodge took him to the early morning hours of the next day. There, he was able to begin medical treatment and much needed assistance to get his car out of there. What he didn't realize, however, was the fact that on his walk there, he passed the vehicle of five men that would soon become enveloped in one of the strangest unexplained mysteries in history.

*["Let's set the scene." with loading screen and rotating Nexpo logo]
-pull date back, back it up two days-*

An Evening with 'The Boys'

February 24th.

It was on this day when the lives of five long-time friends would converge. 30 year old Jack Madruga would make his rounds within Yuba City and Oroville, California to pick up the others for a night out at a Chico State Basketball game. 29 year old William Sterling, 24 year old Jack Huett, 32 year old Theodore Weiher, and 25 year old Gary Mathias encompassed this close-knit bunch that was commonly referred to as The Boys, and they all were eager for a night out before competing in a basketball game of their own.

//QUICK BACKGROUND

The group played on a team called the Gateway Gators, an extracurricular segment of the Yuba City Gateway Program. This was a rehabilitative center aimed at helping them learn a trade while managing and overcoming their mild intellectual disabilities and mental health issues. It was because of this notion that the group lived with their parents, and with this came the expectation that they'd return home to them later that night.

Jack Madruga, the owner of his prized 1969 Mercury Montego, was known to have recently worked as a dishwasher at a local dried fruit company. He was keen on managing his own finances, however due to what family members describe as him being "slow in thought", he found it difficult to maintain a job.

William Sterling was known to be Madruga's best friend. He was deeply religious and enjoyed spending his free time reading literature to console patients in mental hospitals.

Theodore Weiher, the oldest of the crew, enjoyed confiding in his friends, however was known to lack basic common sense. According to his brother, he was known to have spent over \$100 on pencils for no reason. He was employed for a bit as a janitor and snack bar clerk, but was later urged by his family to quit since they believed he was causing problems.

Jack Huett was known to be slow to react, and typically hung around Weiher. He was taken under his wing, so to speak, and frequently required his assistance to perform basic tasks such as dialing the phone.

Gary Mathias was the most enigmatic of the group. He was the only one that lacked an intellectual disability, however in it's place, suffered severe mental health issues. The most prominent was his schizophrenia, which was the cause of his discharge from his brief stint in the Army. Both Mathias and Jack Madruga were the only two in the group that possessed a driver's license.

//BACK TO THE TRIP

And so they embarked. A roughly one-hour trip was ahead of them, and conversation ensued surrounding sports and the anticipation of a win for themselves the very next day. The boy's clothes were already laid out back home by their parents, so they were ready to roll. Things were goin' good.

[bring up, luma fade out]

[basketball game audio]

Vanished

10pm.

Chico State's road opponent UC Davis takes the win. Considering the men's favorite team were UC Davis, it's safe to say that celebratory snacking was in order. They hit up a local convenience store by the name of Behr's, where they loaded up on a Hostess cherry pie, a lemon pie, a snickers bar, a marathon bar, a couple Pepsis, and a quart of milk. It's been noted that the clerk that checked them out was trying to close, and as a result was mildly annoyed.

Little did they know that they'd be one of the last ones to ever witness this group alive.

-pause, try to have screen showing parking lot side shot of store with snow falling and car on-

The Boys jump back in the car and embark on their journey back *[home]* – **glitch this out and cut to black loading screen.**

The Boys didn't make it back home that night.

-hard cut to map with music drop-

[Instead of driving south, they took a detour east.](#) Their total venture that night, encompassed their ride from Oroville to Chico. You'd think they'd head straight back down highway 99 and highway 70, but that didn't happen. Right before arriving in Oroville, the driver took a detour off of highway 70 and onto the Oroville Quincy Highway, a road that runs across Lake Oroville and up towards the Plumas National Forest. They drove until the mountain road ended, and continued their journey up a dirt trail until their vehicle became stuck in the snowdrift.

-slight pause-

It's unclear what happened from this point forward, but sometime after this arrival, they'd exit the confines of their car, and embark into the night.

-try to have this scene merge with the Shones' one, pan camera over to his car as they're walking away-

-try to have music end at cutoff-

Sounding the Alarm

Back at the Lodge, Joe Shone's medical treatment had gone well. He paid no mind to the Mercury Montego since it wasn't outta the ordinary, and by mid-day he was able to get his car gassed-up and headed home.

Concurrently, since the Boy's were nowhere to be found, the mothers of Ted Weiher and William Sterling were contacting police, pleading for help in finding their children. Notably, it was out of character for every single one of them to be away from home for prolonged periods of time, and so they believed that the worst had happened to them.

//THE SEARCH BEGINS

[For the next three days, the search was on.]

Tuesday.

A forest ranger scouting the area notices an abandoned turquoise Mercury Montego. It was left on an unpaved road near Elk's Retreat, a staggering two and a half hours from where the basketball game took place...

The vehicle appeared ordinary. It was unlocked, the window was down, and snack wrappers littered the seats. In the gas tank was more or less a quarter tank of gas, and by the time it was located, it wasn't stuck. Jarringly, considering how rough the terrain up this trail is, the vehicle was found with minimal damage.

[police sirens with music drop and cut to black]

Yuba County PD began broadcasting the details and photos of the missing men, and for the next five days, their search team would scour the region. This would soon prove difficult, however, considering the fact that this was in the middle of a harsh winter in the mountains. It's been reported that the search team nearly lost people on a couple occasions, and by Sunday, a harsh winter storm would move in, dumping nearly nine inches of snow in the area.

It was because of this, the environmental hazards, and the fact that time was running against them that led the PD to call off the search until snowmelt that spring...

...and as the case sat on hold, their families were frustrated, and the five men were left out there. Isolated. Nowhere to be found.

Follow the Trail

//THE DISCOVERY OF TED WEIHER

June.

A group of bikers are out on a weekend ride and head up onto the site of an abandoned forest service trailer at the Daniel Zink campground near Bucks Lake. The facility involved a main, large trailer in the middle, with multiple, smaller satellite ones around it. When they pulled in, they noticed a prominent, malodorous smell emanating from the main structure. Immediately after, a broken window.

They head inside. Curious on what they've stumbled upon, and-

A body. From head to toe were bedsheets concealing their identity, and after pulling them off, they discovered that it was one of the five men that disappeared four months prior. It was Ted Weiher, eighty pounds lighter, and with a considerable beard, lending credence to the possibility that he took refuge here for more or less two months.

In the bed, they discovered his body with his shoes missing. With that, his feet badly frostbitten. It appeared that he passed away due to starvation and exposure to the elements, however he strangely could've avoided this fate altogether. Since he took shelter inside of a forest service trailer, he had access to ample heat sources, and enough canned food to last all five men - months if they chose to stay there. While they found around 12 open cans scattered throughout the room, the vast majority of them

were unopened, and it also appeared that no effort was taken to block off the window that was broken when they entered...

The scene? Bewildering, especially considering that it was *nineteen miles* away from where Joe Shones spotted their abandoned car. But all in all, it was the jumpstart investigators needed to get back on the case.

[pull news papers in]

The search continued.

With mounting public attention and hope for closure, search teams prowled the new focus area southeast of Bucks Lake. It would only take a day before they'd catch their next break, too. On June 8th, police discovered the corpses of Bill Sterling, and Jack Madruga nearly five miles south of where Ted Weiher was found. In Madruga's pocket - his car keys. It was noted that he'd been dragged a short distance and partially eaten by animals. For Sterling - his remains were scattered around the area a few feet away. He was nothing but bones.

Since the bodies were discovered closer to the vehicle and on a potential road they could've taken northbound, they believed that on their hike, the pair couldn't press on any further, and met their demise through a combination of the elements, and mounting fatigue...

Two days later. The father of Jack Huett discovers numerous articles of clothing belonging to him a couple of miles northeast of the service trailer. Soon after - his remains. Interestingly, a short distance west of their location, service blankets and flashlights were discovered lying by the road. This discovery led investigators to the belief that he and Gary Mathias more than likely made it to the trailer with Ted Weiher, and lived with him for an undetermined amount of time.

Their reasoning was due to the discovery of Mathias's tennis shoes left in the room that Weiher was found in. The theories are tenuous, but they believed that they spent most of their final weeks alongside Ted Weiher in the trailer. After he passed away, however, they wanted to distance themselves from the corpse, and set out towards the northeast to get away from it. It was on this hike that the pair would meet their demise, spending their final days exposed to mother nature.

-slight pause-

Now, it would make perfect sense... However, to date, the remains of Gary Mathias have never been found. As of now, his missing persons case remains open, leaving questions abound surrounding the motive and the circumstances that late winter night.

-slight pause, cut to black loading screen-

Anomalies

//IT WAS GARY MATHIAS

Without a doubt, there are questions about this case.

-music-

The main one, though, encompasses the following: *why did they not head home?*

-slight pause-

Backing up and taking a look at this case presents an anomaly that's frequently brought up – Gary Mathias.

He had a friend that lived in Forbestown, a few miles away from Oroville and where the car was found. This has led many to consider the potential that Mathias had more to do with this than some were letting on. If we take a look at their route that night, mapping it from Chico to where they abandoned the car, it makes sense. The Oroville-Quincy highway is just north of Oroville, and the potential of Gary Mathias having driven up there in the past wouldn't be far-fetched.

So let's entertain the idea that Madruga was convinced. He drove the car up the O-Q highway, and missed the turnoff to Forbestown Road. As a result of this, he kept driving, and driving, until he eventually became stuck, miles up a mountain trail. Now up to this point, the events that night seem like honest, innocent mishaps. What led the mother of Jack Madruga to think otherwise, however, was the fact that after they were stuck, why, with five sizable guys that could've rectified the situation with relative ease, did they decide to abandon the car and press onwards into the unknown? What was restricting them from turning back, and undoing the mistake that they'd gotten themselves into?

According to Jack's mother, she plead that *"There was some force that made them go up there. They wouldn't have fled off in the woods like a bunch of quail. We know good and well that somebody made them do it. We can't visualize someone getting the upper hand on those five men, but we know it must've been"*.

Considering the circumstances at the time, postulating the potential of nefarious activity wouldn't be out of the ordinary. The state that Jack Madruga's car was found in led to even further questions than it did answers. According to reports, his car was found in immaculate condition, something almost unheard of considering the rugged terrain that existed on the road they'd taken. With five moderately sized men packed into an already heavy and low-sitting vehicle, undercarriage damage was nearly a guarantee. Given the fact that Jack had never driven up on this road before, it seemed odd that he was able to navigate it with such prowess near midnight. Furthermore, when his car was found, Jack's window was rolled down, which his mother claims was extremely uncharacteristic of him.

Bearing in mind the fact that Mathias and Madruga were the only two with drivers licenses, suspicions grew regarding the actual driver that night. Was Madruga truly at the helm, or did Mathias demand the keys while taking them up there?

Considering Mathias' numerous run-ins with the law, this wouldn't be entirely outside the realm of possibility. Prior to 1976, he was known to have been unpredictable, however straightened out after being prescribed schizophrenia medication. It was reported by his stepfather that, quote, *"He had no notable contact with police during the two years leading up to his disappearance, and he hadn't "gone haywire" in private during that time"*.

The reason I bring this up is because I see it mentioned all the time on various articles and forums, however the evidence presented, especially considering his own disappearance, is relatively insubstantial. While this is a notable possibility, in my opinion, there are others that carry a bit more weight.

-cut to black-

//THE JOE SHONES INCONSISTENCY

Let's talk about Joseph Shones.

-hard cut to scene out in the woods-

We can recall that he spent the better part of his Friday night stuck around the same area the Boys were. It's staggering that he spent most of his night under the unluckiest of circumstances, however I digress. In his testimony, he claimed he witnessed something. A group, consisting of a woman, a man, and a baby, all walking within the path of two sets of headlights.

If we're assuming that his recollection is correct, then this leaves us questioning the identities of the other party involved. Ted Weiher's sister has come forth, theorizing on the potential that the men witnessed something nefarious that night sometime after the basketball game. Perhaps they witnessed an attack, or some sort of signal, whether domestic or not, and decided to follow the family to help.

I'm not entirely sure how large the distance between Shones and the group he witnessed were, but hearing the cries of someone in need would surely spark some sort of desire to help instead of shutting up entirely. I find it strange that the headlights cut off *and* the conversations halted in both instances when he witnessed people.

...While the circumstances don't scream maliciousness, they definitely don't drive the situation towards innocence.

-slight pause-

That is, *if*, his recollection was correct. You see, since this testimony came out, Shones' story had slightly changed each time he shared it. While this, of course, could be a simple case of memory distortion, the notion that he changed it *at all* ultimately weakens his story altogether.

According to sources, conversing with Shone's after the fact was... admittedly frustrating. He would claim that he was very ill during the moments he believed he witnessed the others, and essentially admitted that he could've hallucinated some of the details. Bearing in mind that the other parties stopped dead in their tracks both times he called out for them, it could've easily been a figment of his imagination. ...but, what if it wasn't?

-cut to black-

That's just it. The nature of word of mouth testimonies weakened by the circumstances of their situations ultimately leave them up for debate and shrouded in uncertainty. While a nefarious situation is plausible, we can't discount the potential that the Boy's predicament that night was all one big accident gone wrong.

-slight pause-

//AN HONEST MISTAKE

Let's put Gary Mathias in the spotlight once more.

Entertain this.

-cut to stadium scene-

The men are at the game. All is going well, and they leave that night without issue. They hit up Behr's to grab some snacks, before hitting the road back home. They're driving down Highway 99 towards Oroville, and somewhere on the way, Mathias convinced the others to visit his friend in nearby Forbestown. Hesitant since it was late, Madruga agrees, and they detour right before Oroville onto the O-Q highway where they eventually miss the turnoff onto Forbestown road. The O-Q highway is incredibly dark at that time of night so it would make sense. Hesitant to turn around since the highway tightly winds through the backcountry, the others suggested alternate turnoffs that were - supposedly ahead. Alternate turnoffs that, as we know, they never took.

-cut to black-

Before they know it, they're up a mountain road, lost in the darkness, before becoming stuck. Now, while they could've dislodged the car and turned around, we can't rule out the possibility that they simply just didn't think to do so in their situation. On top of this, it was reported that a day prior to their dilemma, a snowplow had cleared a path along the road they bottomed out on, potentially instilling a sense of optimism that some external party would soon be back to help. A party that – never came.

And so they roughly map out the nearest spot to get help, jump out of the car, and start a trek towards their destination. Since the service trailer was a whopping 19 miles away, it's safe to assume that surviving a trek of this magnitude against harsh weather is more or less a death sentence, given they didn't have ample preparation. As we know, the only ones that made it to the trailer were Mathias, Huett, and Weiher. An undetermined amount of time later, Huett and Mathias would either leave to go get help for Weiher, or abandon his corpse and embark on yet another, last ditch effort to get themselves out of isolation. And, it's on their way out that both Huett and Mathias both succumb to the elements, drawing their predicament to it's unfortunate end.

If you ask me, I think Mathias pressed on Northeast, attempting to make his way towards the Meadow Valley area. What he likely didn't realize, however, was the fact that it was roughly 21 miles away. If he *were* with Weiher, someone that shedded nearly half his body weight, then we can assume that Mathias mirrored this to some magnitude leaving him weaker than when he initially arrived there.

I believe Mathias died somewhere around the Meadow Valley region, and wildlife got to him before search teams could ever make it out there...

-long fade-

//CLOSING REMARKS

But that is – just my postulation.

This case of the Boys from Yuba County is, by all accounts, one that doesn't make sense, and details that support one theory ultimately weaken the other. It seems that we have the segments in front of us, and they're *mostly* put together. Without the whereabouts of Mathias ever materializing, however, that's really all that we can do.

Like, how was the car unscathed through rocky terrain? Why didn't they react to the cries of Joe Schones, someone that they could've seen as their beacon of help? Why was the heat source and food that could've lasted them months untouched?

It's cases like this that engulf me with fascination even though there are *still* countless questions. Countless loose ends. Countless, unknowns.

-soft cut to black-

The Boys embarked on that brisk Friday night to what was supposed to be a night of sports, a night of laughter, and a night that they'd never forget. What transpired, in reality, were events that the world around them have been trying to piece together, because it's all of us - that can't forget them.

-roll dem creditz-

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