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Amanda Vicary Interview on True Crime

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WGLT Interview with Amanda Vicary, June 29, 2022

Lindsay Jones: True crime stories used to be confined to the paperback but now true crime stories have become a staple of streaming services and podcasts. Amanda Vicary is a psychology professor at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington who's studied true crime. She'll be the featured speaker at a webinar tonight hosted by several central Illinois libraries. In this interview with Tim Alexander, Vicary explains her passion for the genre.

Amanda Vicary: Well my true crime obsession started young back in grade school um when I began reading true crime so I've been into true crime for a very long time. The wrongful conviction element really wasn't until maybe I don't know five or six years or so ago I think I was drawn to sort of mystery component of it you know did this person really do it and if not then who did? Then also sort of the emotional element of just how horrible it would be to be in prison for you know 15, 20 plus years for something you didn't do and just a prison of all places right and the whole world things you're a, a, a rapist or a murderer and you're innocent and no one's listening and that always just sort of struck a chord with me about just how terrible that must be.

Tim Alexander: What are some of the examples of the potential wrongful convictions in Illinois that you are currently studying?

Vicary: Well there's two main cases that I teach about in my classes at Illinois Wesleyan and I teach a specific wrongful conviction class for first year students and we study the case of Barton McNeil, uh, which your station has covered before and so Bart was convicted back in the 90's of the murder of his daughter and then we have of course uh there's new evidence in the case, the biggest one being the fact that the person he pinned at the beginning his ex-girlfriend, Misook went on to murder someone else. And so that case is currently um Bart is represented by Innocence projects and is working its way through the court system. The other case is that of Jamie Snow who was also convicted right around the same time as Bart for the murder of a local gas station attendant Bill Little and there's some questionable eye witness identification and some snitches and things like that. In his case, and he's represented by um the exoneration project and that case is also in court fairly frequently. So we study those cases in my classes, the students get a chance to talk to both of the men on the phone, ask them questions, read their trial transcripts and things like that.

Alexander: Why is it that women seem to gravitate to true crime stories more than men?

Vicary: Well, there's a couple different reasons, and I'll go into the, the more minute details in the webinar but the big take home message is that it seems as the things that women are attracted to about true crime are the things that could lead to them potentially surviving a crime themselves or preventing being kidnapped or what to do if you are kidnapped or someone breaks into your house or something like that. People, especially women, seem to be drawn to that information.

Alexander: At Illinois Wesleyan University what are some of the uh topics that you're currently covering with students on crime in the justice system, gender, and social psychology?

Vicary: So my class for first year students is specifically on wrongful convictions where we learn about Bart and Jamie's case and things like eye witness testimony and false confessions and things like that. And then I teach a course um crime in the justice system that is an upper level course for people of any major where we talk about also things like false confession and eye witness memory and jury behavior and you know again the local cases and things like that. Then I teach an intro social psychology course that is on things like romantic relationships and aggression and stuff like that. Then I teach a course on gender, the differences between men and women, are these differences real, if so why do they exist um you know gender identity, things like that.

Alexander: You are hosting an interactive webinar through 14 central Illinois libraries this Wednesday June 29th, can you tell us a little bit about what you'll be talking about and covering during that webinar?

Vicary: Yeah! So it's going to sort of be in two parts, so the first part I'm going to talk about some of my academic research in crime, some of my studies looking at why people are interested in crime, why in the world do we sit around and watch stories about people getting murdered for fun right? Because that's sort of a strange thing and so I'm going to talk about some of my studies in that area and then I'm going to provide some overviews of uh Barton McNeil's case and Jamie Snow's case and talk about you know what were they convicted on, what is the new evidence showing and I also have some recordings that Bart and Jamie made for the webinar that I'm going to share as well.

Alexander: Will listeners uh participants in the webinar have a chance to ask questions?

Vicary: They can ask me questions at the end. Bart and Jamie will not be on their prison phone time doesn't allow for that but yes it will definitely be open to questions at the end and I am happy to discuss the cases with anyone that wants to.

Jones: That's Amanda Vicary, a psychology professor at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington speaking with Tim Alexander. Vicary will be the featured speaker at a webinar tonight at 6:30 hosted by several central Illinois libraries including Danvers, Deer Creek, and Carlock. And that's it for today I'm Lindsay Jones.