

1 MS. SCARDINO: I'll pass the witness.

2 MR. REISS: Nothing further.

3 THE COURT: Thank you, Officer.

4 May this officer be excused?

5 MR. REISS: He can be excused, but I think we want --

6 THE COURT: We'll keep you on call. You can leave
7 today but stick around. Thank you.

8 THE WITNESS: I understand. Thank you.

9 THE COURT: Call your next.

10 MS. FULLER: The State would call Lauralee Veitch.

11 THE COURT: You may proceed.

12 MS. FULLER: Thank you, your Honor.

13 THE COURT: Do you need a break?

14 A JUROR: Now or soon.

15 THE COURT: Let's take a break.

16 (Break.)

17 (Open court, defendant present.)

18 (Jury in.)

19 THE COURT: All right. You may be seated.

20 You may proceed.

21 MS. FULLER: Thank you, your Honor.

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1 LAURALEE VEITCH,
2 having been duly sworn, testified as follows:

3 DIRECT EXAMINATION

4 BY MS. FULLER:

5 Q. Would you please state and spell your name for the
6 record, please.

7 A. Lauralee Andrea Veitch. L-a-u-r-a-l-e-e A-n-d-r-e-a
8 V-e-i-t-c-h.

9 Q. Ms. Veitch, what is your educational background?

10 A. I am a registered nurse.

11 Q. How long have you been a registered nurse?

12 A. Since 2004.

13 Q. And prior to that what did you do?

14 A. I was actually a registered practical nurse.

15 Q. Okay. What's the difference between the two?

16 A. A slight difference in clinical setting skills.

17 Q. Okay. So tell us what kind of education you have to
18 go through in order to become a registered nurse.

19 A. I've an associate's degree, so that was a -- two-year
20 program, for my ADN. Prior to that, I had my previous nursing
21 education, which was the RPN education, and that was 18 months.

22 Q. Okay. So in 2004 when you became a registered nurse,
23 who did you go to work for?

24 A. I went to work for Clinton Public Hospital in
25 Ontario, Canada, as a registered nurse.

1 Q. Okay. And what brought you to Houston -- or maybe I
2 should say when did you come to Houston?

3 A. I came to Houston in August -- I'm sorry -- July 2007
4 to accept a job at the medical examiner's office here in Harris
5 County.

6 Q. Okay. So in 2007 what job did you start with the
7 Harris County medical examiner's office?

8 A. Forensic nurse death investigator.

9 Q. And tell us what the job duties, the responsibilities
10 are of that position.

11 A. The job duties are primarily taking scene reports
12 either by phone or at a scene from law enforcement personnel or
13 hospital personnel of a deceased individual who has usually
14 died of some sort of unusual circumstances, a traumatic death,
15 an unplanned death. We would attend to the scene, take photos
16 of the scene and the individual, assess the individual for any
17 trauma, document that, and bring the decedent back to the
18 medical examiner's office where an autopsy would be held
19 usually the following day.

20 Q. Okay. So all of the documentation that you do on the
21 scene, is it used by somebody else later on?

22 A. Yes. The medical examiner uses our documentation,
23 the photographs as well as our report, as they're doing the
24 autopsy the following day.

25 Q. Okay. So how long did you work for the medical

1 examiner's office?

2 A. I was there until February 2011.

3 Q. And where are you currently employed?

4 A. I'm currently at Memorial Hermann surgery center in
5 Katy.

6 Q. And are you still a registered nurse?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. So you're working in the capacity of being a
9 registered nurse?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. Do you recall -- first of all, who would call
12 and notify you of a scene?

13 A. A scene would be called by a police officer, Harris
14 County or, you know, Houston police.

15 Q. Okay. So when an incident occurs, they would contact
16 you and say we have a body, we need you to come out?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. Okay. Do you remember being called to a scene on
19 June 19, 2010?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And do you remember where that location of that scene
22 was?

23 A. Without consulting my notes.

24 Q. Do you have them with you or do you need a copy?

25 A. I actually do have them with me.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. (Witness retrieves notes.)

3 The scene was at 10350 Land's Ending in Houston,
4 Texas, 77099.

5 Q. Okay. And do you -- did you note what time you were
6 called to that scene?

7 A. I arrived at the scene at 10:00 a.m. I don't have
8 the documentation of what time we were called.

9 Q. Okay. And would you go by yourself or would you go
10 with somebody else who was capable of also removing the body?

11 A. Yes, usually there would be a body car that would go
12 with us that would assist us in removing the deceased
13 individual, but sometimes they would arrive slightly later than
14 the investigator would.

15 Q. Okay. And then they would take custody of the body
16 and take the body where?

17 A. To the medical examiner's office on Old Spanish
18 Trail.

19 Q. Okay.

20 MS. FULLER: May I approach the witness, your Honor?

21 THE COURT: You may.

22 Q. (By Ms. Fuller) I'm going to show you what has been
23 marked as State's Exhibits 41 through 61. Could you please
24 take a look at those photos?

25 A. (Complies.)

1 Q. Do you recognize these photos?

2 A. Yes, I do.

3 Q. Are they a fair and accurate depiction of what they
4 purport to be?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And who took those photos?

7 A. I did.

8 Q. And did you take that during the course of your
9 investigation at the scene?

10 A. Yes, I did.

11 Q. And do you believe these photos would aid the jury in
12 understanding how you process and documented the body when you
13 arrived on the scene?

14 A. Yes.

15 MS. FULLER: Your Honor, at this time State moves to
16 admit State's Exhibits 41 through 61, tender to Defense counsel
17 for inspection.

18 MS. SCARDINO: Thank you, Ms. Fuller.

19 Your Honor, just for the record, prior to the short
20 break we looked at these photographs, and Defense has no
21 objection to any of these with the exception of 42, 49, 53, 54,
22 and 56, under 402 and 403, as unfair prejudice to the jury,
23 that it would inflame the jurors' minds. We've already had
24 photographs that are very similar to most of these photographs.

25 THE COURT: All right. You listed off your ones that

1 you're objecting to under 403. Would you just reiterate the
2 ones you have objections to so I could review them.

3 MS. SCARDINO: Yes, ma'am. 42, 49, 53, 54, and 56.
4 And I believe the later ones, your Honor, are -- they're
5 photographs that are --

6 (The following proceedings were had at the bench:)

7 MS. FULLER: Actually if I could tell you as you're
8 looking, that shot, 42, 43, and 44, are panoramic shots that
9 she takes that she then takes back to the medical examiner's
10 office so they can use the panoramic shot of the body as they
11 saw it.

12 And then you'll see the same thing of the back shots,
13 is that one, in that shot they lift up the clothing and
14 document to make sure there are no wounds.

15 MS. SCARDINO: It's not something the jury needs to
16 know or see. It doesn't help with any of the facts in this
17 case.

18 MS. FULLER: That's assuming. You don't know the
19 theory of the State. That's when they rolled the body over to
20 take the panoramic back shots.

21 (The following proceedings were had in open court:)

22 THE COURT: Your objection to 42, 49, 53, 54 and 56
23 will be overruled, and 41, State's 41 through 61 will be
24 admitted over your objection.

25 MS. FULLER: Thank you, your Honor. Permission to

1 publish?

2 THE COURT: You may.

3 Q. (By Ms. Fuller) When you arrive on the scene, what is
4 the first thing that you do?

5 A. I establish contact with the police officer at the
6 scene.

7 Q. Okay. And what -- why do you do that?

8 A. Usually they will provide us a walk-through of the
9 scene so we can document the scene with our photographs
10 appropriately in consecutive order of how anyone would approach
11 the scene.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. The photos should portray the way you would walk
14 through a scene.

15 Q. Okay. So do you have a debriefing by the officer
16 first or do you photograph while the officer is walking you
17 through the scene?

18 A. Many times I'll photograph while the officer is
19 walking me through the scene.

20 Q. Okay. So State's Exhibit 41, do you recall where you
21 were standing when you took this picture?

22 A. This was at the edge of the driveway at the beginning
23 of the sidewalk to the apartment complex.

24 Q. Okay. Now, when you're called out to the scene,
25 there's already a crime scene unit out there; is that right?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. What are your job duties when you get out to the
3 scene?

4 A. Our job duties focus on the deceased individual, not
5 the scene surrounding it. We -- we're assessing the body
6 itself for trauma, for any abnormalities. We document the scene
7 so that the medical examiner knows what type of area the
8 individual was found in, located in.

9 Q. Okay. All right. So your focus is going to be on
10 the body and any evidence you can collect from the body?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. So State's Exhibit 42, is that how the body
13 was when you arrived on the scene?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. State's Exhibit 43, also the victim's body on the
16 scene?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And 44, still part of the victim's body?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. What is the purpose of taking those three shots?

21 A. We take those three shots so that they can be lined
22 up panoramically for the medical examiner the following day, to
23 show how -- what kind of position the body was found in, was
24 lying in when we arrived, and to assess if there's any trauma
25 to the entire body.

1 Q. Okay. State's Exhibit 45, what are we looking at
2 here?

3 A. It appears to be the decedent's right hand.

4 Q. Is it common for you to photograph the hands?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And in order to photograph the hands are you able --
7 are you allowed to move the arms in order to do that?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. At any point do you ever touch the hands?

10 A. I try not to in a suspected homicide, because the
11 hands will be bagged at the scene for -- to retrieve possible
12 evidence the following day. If I do manipulate the hand, I
13 will try to do it further up the arm.

14 Q. Okay. Do you recall if that's what you did in this
15 case?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. State's Exhibit 46, what are we looking at there?

18 A. The dorsal side of the decedent's right hand.

19 Q. Okay. So 45 is sort of a bit of the inside of the
20 hand?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. And -- of the right hand.

23 And 46 is going to be the outside of the right hand?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. State's Exhibit 47, what are we looking at there?

1 A. The decedent's left hand.

2 Q. And State's Exhibit 48?

3 A. The palmar side of the left hand.

4 Q. Now, when you arrived on the scene, were -- was the
5 victim's clothing intact?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. So State's Exhibit 49, what are we looking at
8 here?

9 A. During our scene examination we lift the clothing to
10 assess if there's any further trauma that's not visible
11 immediately. We do this on both the front and back of the
12 decedent without -- without doing -- taking their pants down or
13 anything that might disturb.

14 Q. Okay. So it's still looking for further signs of
15 injury or trauma?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. And did you note any on her torso?

18 A. No.

19 Q. The front side?

20 A. No, I did not.

21 Q. State's Exhibit 50, what are we looking at there?

22 A. The decedent's left hand.

23 Q. Okay. And that would be the outside or inside?

24 A. The outside dorsal side.

25 Q. And State's Exhibit 51, what is that?

1 A. That appears to be the right hand again, on the
2 palmar side.

3 Q. State's Exhibit 52?

4 A. The right hand on the dorsal side.

5 Q. Okay. There appears to be some discoloration in her
6 skin. What is that that we're looking at aside from the blood?

7 A. The whitened area on the dorsal side, is that what
8 you're speaking of?

9 Q. Yes. And you can touch your screen to show what
10 we're talking about.

11 A. Right -- from there to there sort of.

12 Q. Okay. What is that?

13 A. That appears to be an area where lividity did not
14 pool.

15 Q. What does that mean?

16 A. That means that there was pressure on that area so
17 that the blood could not pool in that area.

18 Q. Okay. So looking on this side of the hand where
19 there's some coloration, what does that mean?

20 A. That means that there was no pressure there. The
21 blood was able to pool freely there without any obstruction.

22 Q. Does that appear to be any kind of bruising, to you?

23 A. No.

24 Q. If you touch the -- your screen on the corner, lower
25 left. There you go.

1 A. (Complies.)

2 Q. All right. At some point after you photographed and
3 documented the front of the body, if, in fact, the body is
4 laying on their back, do you remove the body?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And what is the purpose of that?

7 A. To assess if there's any trauma on the posterior side
8 of the body.

9 Q. Okay. So State's Exhibit 53, have you done that in
10 this case?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. So we're now looking at the back side of the
13 victim?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. State's Exhibit 54, what are we looking at there?

16 A. The mid-section of the deceased individual, back
17 side.

18 Q. And State's Exhibit 55, what's this?

19 A. The lower section of their body on their back side.

20 Q. Okay. So State's 53, 54, and 55, are they also later
21 put together and used by the medical examiner?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. State's Exhibit 56, what are we looking at here?

24 A. That's the posterior side where I've lifted her shirt
25 to assess if there was any trauma in that area.

1 Q. Okay. And did you find any trauma in that area?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Now, there again is discoloration on the back. What
4 is that discoloration?

5 A. Again, the purple areas would be the areas where the
6 blood has pooled where there is no pressure, and the whitened
7 areas would be areas of pressure where she was lying on that
8 the blood was not able to pool into.

9 Q. Okay. Let me make sure that I have this right. So
10 the areas that aren't reddish or purple are areas that were
11 being pressed into the ground and so the blood flow -- the
12 blood wouldn't have pooled there?

13 A. The white areas would be the areas that have been
14 pressed.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. It's like when you get a sunburn and you press on it,
17 it's white until the blood comes back in.

18 Q. Okay. So the areas on the side are areas where her
19 body was not touching the ground?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. And that way blood was able to pool downward?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. What else do you document on a body in terms of not
24 only trauma, but what else, what other kind of individual
25 markings would you document?

1 A. We would identify any tattoos, any scars that may
2 assist in identifying the individual. We also assess the
3 decedent's temperature at the scene as well.

4 Q. Okay. So State's Exhibit 57, what was the purpose of
5 taking that photo?

6 A. Hmm, identifying marks perhaps.

7 Q. The two tattoos?

8 A. Correct. Yes, sorry.

9 Q. Now, at any point did you go -- did you search inside
10 any of the victim's pockets?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. State's Exhibit 58, is that a photograph that you
13 took?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And why did you take this photo?

16 A. Something was found in her rear pocket, which we will
17 then photograph, document, and collect at the scene.

18 Q. Okay. And I want to go back to State's 54. Is this
19 how she was before you entered into her pockets?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. So her pocket was buttoned and you unbuttoned
22 them?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. And after you find something in her pocket you then
25 photograph that?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. And is that what we're seeing in State's 59?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. State's Exhibit 60, what do we see in State's
5 Exhibit 60?

6 A. Hmm, that was her front right pocket, and a generic
7 red coupon was found inside her pocket.

8 Q. Okay. Were there any other pieces of evidence that
9 were found in her pockets or in her clothing?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Okay. And you also took State's Exhibit 61, a
12 photograph. What was the purpose of that?

13 A. That identifies the cross-streets closest to where
14 the individual was found.

15 Q. Okay. Now, you mentioned that you would bag the
16 victim's hands. What does that mean?

17 A. We would take some brown paper bags and put them over
18 the deceased, deceased individual's hands, and tape them up
19 with masking tape prior to transporting the decedent.

20 Q. Okay. And what's the purpose of doing that?

21 A. To maintain any evidence that might be on the
22 individual's hands, especially with a gunshot wound, they may
23 have gunshot residue on their hands.

24 Q. Okay. So after you had photographed the body and you
25 photographed the front and the back side of the body and you've

1 gone through the clothing, what would be your next step in your
2 investigation?

3 A. Putting them into a body bag, and assessing their
4 temperature.

5 Q. And why do you assess their temperature?

6 A. That can give an idea as to how long they may have
7 been out at the scene.

8 Q. Do you clean up the body at all before transporting
9 it to the medical examiner's office?

10 A. No, not at all.

11 Q. Did you examine the wound on this individual?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Did you make any observations about the wound itself
14 and document that?

15 A. Can I refer to my notes?

16 Q. Yes, please.

17 A. (Complies.) Yes.

18 Q. What did you note about the wound itself?

19 A. The location of the wound just below her mandible,
20 and the defect of the neck appeared to have soot around the
21 area.

22 Q. Did you notice any other signs of trauma to any other
23 part of her body?

24 A. The posterior of her head had a corresponding defect
25 to the wound that she had at her neck.

1 Q. Okay. How about in the torso, did you notice any
2 signs of trauma in her torso?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Did you notice any signs of trauma to her hands?

5 A. No.

6 Q. How about her back, any signs of trauma?

7 A. No.

8 Q. How about her legs, front or back, any signs of
9 trauma?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Okay. So after -- after the body is bagged into a
12 body bag, what happens next?

13 A. Then we put the deceased onto a stretcher, load them
14 into the van, the medical examiner's van, and they get
15 transported back to the medical examiner's office, where
16 they're checked in and usually put into a cooler, and the
17 autopsy is usually performed the following day.

18 Q. Do you have any part of the autopsy?

19 A. No.

20 Q. So after you leave the scene, is your portion of this
21 investigation over?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And you submit all your findings to the medical
24 examiner who is assigned the case?

25 A. Correct.

1 MS. FULLER: Pass the witness, your Honor.

2 THE COURT: Cross-examination.

3 MS. SCARDINO: Thank you.

4 CROSS-EXAMINATION

5 BY MS. SCARDINO:

6 Q. Ms. Veitch, you are now a -- an RN at Memorial
7 Hermann trauma center?

8 A. Memorial Hermann surgery center.

9 Q. Surgery center. I'm sorry. I misunderstood you.
10 And that's in Katy?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Your job when you were working for the medical
13 examiner's office was not to do any investigation as to who or
14 why or how, other than what you see there, correct, with the
15 body itself?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. And so you wouldn't have any way of knowing this
18 young man sitting at counsel table, Mr. Buckner, correct?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. And you and Mr. Duncan, or Officer Duncan kind of
21 have the same duties, do you not?

22 A. Similar, yes.

23 Q. Right. He doesn't investigate anything, he just
24 produces the evidence, right?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. As you do?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. So basically, I guess what you're telling this jury
4 then is that there was an entry wound in the neck and exit
5 wound in the head and no signs of trauma anywhere else on her
6 body. Would that be fair to say?

7 A. I don't determine if it's an entry wound or exit
8 wound.

9 Q. Oh, I'm sorry.

10 A. That's usually the medical examiner.

11 Q. Okay. I won't call it that. I'll call it a wound on
12 the neck and a wound on the head.

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. And you look at the body to determine if there were
15 any other signs of trauma, and you found none; is that correct?

16 A. Yes, that's correct.

17 Q. All right. Thank you.

18 MS. SCARDINO: I'll pass the witness, your Honor.

19 THE COURT: Anything further?

20 MS. FULLER: No, your Honor.

21 THE COURT: May this witness be excused?

22 MS. FULLER: Yes, your Honor.

23 THE COURT: That okay with you, Ms. Scardino?

24 MS. SCARDINO: Yes, ma'am.

25 THE COURT: Thank you so much for coming from Katy.