



## **Innocent Victims: The True Story of the Eastburn Family Murders**

*Scott Whisnant*

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**Innocent Victims: The True Story of the Eastburn Family Murders** Scott Whisnant  
**The riveting true account of a grisly crime and the unprecedented three murder trials faced by Fort Bragg soldier Tim Hennis.**

On Mother's Day, 1985, the bodies of Kathryn Eastburn and her two young daughters were found in their Fayetteville, North Carolina, home. Katie, an air force captain's wife, had been raped and stabbed to death. Kara and Erin's throats had been slit. Their toddler sister, Jana, was the only survivor of a bloody killing spree that terrified a community still reeling from the conviction, six years prior, of Dr. Jeffrey MacDonald for the savage slayings of his pregnant wife and two daughters.

The Cumberland County Sheriff's Department soon focused its investigation on US Army soldier Tim Hennis. Detectives and local prosecutors built their case on circumstantial evidence and a jury convicted Hennis and sentenced him to death. But his defense team refused to give up. Piece by piece, they discredited the state's case, exposing false testimony, concealed evidence, and prosecutorial misconduct. At a second trial, Hennis was found not guilty and released from death row.

But an even more stunning turn of events was yet to come. Twenty-five years after the murders, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation tested a crucial piece of DNA evidence from the crime scene. The shocking results led to an unprecedented third trial to determine Tim Hennis's guilt or innocence.

From the initial discovery of the horrifying scene at 367 Summer Hill Road to the controversial change of jurisdiction that allowed Hennis to be prosecuted for an astonishing third time, author Scott Whisnant chronicles every development in this intricate, disturbing, and still-evolving case. Has the mystery of who killed Katie, Kara, and Erin Eastburn been solved beyond a reasonable doubt? Read *Innocent Victims* and decide for yourself.

## **Innocent Victims: The True Story of the Eastburn Family Murders Details**

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## **From Reader Review Innocent Victims: The True Story of the Eastburn Family Murders for online ebook**

### **Maureen Milliken says**

#### **Well written, thorough and can't put it down**

The author details this crime and the subsequent legal battles expertly, with a narrative that's readable, but also doesn't leave anything out. The final twist in the case is presented perfectly. A really good read that will stay with you.

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### **Jeanine says**

Horrific story of a mother and two children brutally murdered and the man on trial three times over 20 years.. And the corruption and mis handling of evidence and underhanded DA's office and local law enforcement.. Shocking.

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### **J.M. Knight says**

Wow just wow is all I can think of when I finished this book. This book is as in depth as other crime books and the author does skim over or rushed through certain parts and I felt left things out. At times I felt frustrated because though the focus is on Hennis there are so many questions that this book fails to answer and leaves open to interpretation. It is a well written book but it will leave you with so many questions and no answers.

I received a copy from netgalley.

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### **Amy Carpenter says**

#### **Makes you wonder what the truth is**

I read this book years ago when Hennis was acquitted. It seemed pretty much cut and dried at the end. A man who was found guilty on eye-witness testimony and sentenced to death had been vindicated. A wrong had been righted. When I heard DNA had been matched to Hennis, I was surprised and wanted to know more, so when I saw the book had been updated and re-released, I dove in. I read from the beginning so I could read all the details offered again. I had also heard news about problems in the SBI lab because I live in North Carolina, but never put the two together because the news of the DNA findings and the problems at the lab were heard years apart. I understand the importance of DNA results and had accepted that the killer had been found without doubt. However, if that is the case, why does the military oppose the testing of hairs, fingernail clippings, combings and blood-stained towels at the expense of the defense, which should support the DNA? Especially in view of the problems found in over 200 cases by the SBI lab, they should be happy for any other evidence showing Hennis is the guilty party. If the purpose of a trial is to find the truth, which

is what I've read many times, why not make sure this is the truth? It won't cost the State and Hennis has no objection. Unless it shows another specific suspect, it doesn't jeopardize the State's case. They've already stated much of what was tested doesn't implicate Hennis. My heart goes out to Gary Eastburn, Jana, Katie, Erin and Kara, who lost their family or their lives in this horrific crime. They deserve justice. The defense was allowed to retest the DNA match and didn't release their findings; if the results showed the DNA was not their client's, they would certainly announce it. I feel 97% sure Hennis committed this brutal, merciless crime against a helpless woman and her children. I would still like to see the other evidence tested by an independent lab. I also read "Bloody Lies: A CSI Scandal in the Heartland" recently, which adds to the slight doubt I have about how helpful people convinced of a person's guilt want to be in convicting him. There's too much pressure to "win" for those involved, the truth, if it doesn't support their view of the case, may be the last thing they really want to find. I found it another fascinating look at the reality of how criminal justice is carried out.

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### **Paul Gaya Ochieng Simeon Juma says**

If you are a police man, prosecutor, advocate or somebody who works with law enforcement then this one is for you. It is not a horror story, but murder, trial, conviction, appeal, re-trial, and acquittal. It has the do's and don'ts for both prosecutors and defence attorneys in court. It will teach you a lot. F. Lee Bailey's thoughts are also quoted for our consumption. A great read.

What is the story? It starts with the murders of the Eastburn family in their house in Fayettsville (forgive my pronunciation). An unknown person kills a mother with her two daughters at night without being detected. He leaves behind an adequate supply of physical evidence that is later collected by the police. The County Sheriff is under an immense pressure to find, catch, and lock the killer. The public wants that and they don't care.

To appease the public, the county sheriff acting against the advise of the District Attorneys office move in on a target, Timothy Hennis. He is caught in the assumption that he was identified leaving the Eastburn house on the night in question. His explanation that he was there to purchase a dog flies right through the D. A's office. Eventually, he is charged with first degree murder with attracts a death penalty.

He is tried under the most unfair and hostile environment of the justice system. The only thing that he is granted is representation by two of the most abled defence lawyers in town. Despite the odds being stacked on his favor, Mr. Hennis is convicted and sentenced to death. Working full time, his lawyers prepare an appeal with they present before the supreme court arguing that his client was never given a fair trial as per the Constitution.

He reasons that the defence was never consulted before the screen was mounted in court. Also, that the jury's passion was inflamed by the numerous gruesome photographs which were played by the prosecution in court with no probative value at all. They also attack the lack of physical evidence linking the accused person to the crime they have been charged with. Fortunately, the members of the supreme Court agrees with the appellant and grants him a new trial.

Working to repair their case and right their wrongs, the defence team prepares for the trial without any rest. They interview new witnesses and re-interview old ones. New motions are made before the new judge and new concessions made with the DA's office. At the end of the trial Mr. Hennis is acquitted of all charges. Vanstory, the prosecutor who conducted the initial trial is charged with prosecutorial misconduct after it is

discovered that he never supplied the defence with all the evidence in his possession at the time of the initial investigations.

It is surprising that even in advanced criminal justice systems like the United States such fatal mistakes occur. Innocent people being convictees and sentenced to death for crimes they never committed. It is the worst form of injustice one can ever undergo. It is also important to note the conduct of the prosecution and judge during the whole trial. A prosecutor must be and remain a detached party from the proceedings. They must disclose both inculpatory and exculpatory evidence in their possession. Failure to do that should attract a punishment or sanction from the state to the individuals involved. Our system must always seek to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. The question is how to tell the difference?

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### **♥ Marlene♥ says**

on Wednesday, September 13, 2006 I wrote about this book....

Thanks for sharing. I wanted to read it but then at the beginning of the book I noticed they were referring to the story of Jeffrey MacDonald a lot. I knew a bit about that case but had not read Fatal Vision by Joe McGinnes about this case, so I read Fatal Vision first.

This book has a lot of similarities with that story.

It was a very good read but if there is one thing I cannot stand is when I read a book and then discover they never caught the killer(s).

Afterwards I searched the Internet but it seems case is not solved.

Very well written.

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### **Erica Kelley says**

Considering he really thought Hennis was innocent, he gives a VERY fair portrait of the killer. He gives all the damning evidence, it's not one sided at all.

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### **Eileen Drake says**

Good read. Story moved right along, keeping me intrigued - what will happen next. Couldn't put it down. Highly recommend.

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### **Ronnie Cramer says**

This is a hard one to rate. I almost gave up on it at the start (for various reasons), but decided to keep going. Having said that, I have to admit I was fascinated at one point, and at the end I was fairly impressed. Then

came the epilogue which put the preceding pages in an entirely different light. Without giving too much away, I'll just say that the book was something of a roller coaster ride, but ultimately a negative experience for me.

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### **Videoclimber(AKA)MTsLilSis says**

This book is intriguing. I am still unsure about this case. I am also unsettled by the fact that this man has been through this ordeal and am unaware of the legalities of this case. I am stumped as to who is guilty, and am pained for the children who were lost. This is a book you'll not soon forget.

\*Thank you to Scott Whisnant, the publisher, and NetGalley, for allowing me to read a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Denise says**

I thought I understood the legal term "double jeopardy" but this story proved I was wrong. The actual crime occurred over 30 years ago but Tim Hennis has been on a rollercoaster ride of verdicts. I found this story very interesting and a relatively fast read. This is a must read for people who enjoyed Fatal Vision or Making a Murderer.

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### **Doreen says**

I'm a huge true crime fan and read Innocent Victims when it was first published 20 years ago. Despite Mr. Whisnant's talent for writing and ability to explain events accurately, the ending left me confused and unsure. I looked forward to rereading this book to refresh my memory but mainly to find out what happened afterwards. The gruesome murders of Kate, Kara & Erin Eastburn is extremely heartbreakingly. It was a horrible crime followed by a horrible, sorely lacking investigation(s) and then 3 trials; none of which really provided clear answers. In all honestly there were so many instances of conflicting or unclear evidence I'm still "on the fence" as to Tim Hennis' guilt or innocence. I lost count of the times I wanted to scream at the attorneys and judges because there was so much that could and should have been done. I realize forensic testing is costly but it just boggles the mind of the average person why the judge refused to allow more, if not all, of the evidence to be tested...even after the defense arranged to pay the fees.

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### **Sharyn Simcox says**

### **Outstanding**

Thorough well written account of the Eastburn case. Whitman relates the investigation of both the defence and prosecution. How things come together is fascinating. There's just enough background on the characters involved. If like me, you are a "Just the facts mam" kind of reader you'll like this. As to Hennis guilt or innocence I have to lean towards guilt. But after the shenanigans of the original prosecution I'd find reasonable doubt

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### **Pam Koenig says**

What I read, what is the version with an epilogue updating the latest events in the case.

I received this book in exchange for a fair review from NetGalley. I am a True Crime devotee whether in book form or docudrama. I try to see all sides and pay attention to evidence and people. This book left me baffled at the rush to judgement that was made on such flimsy evidence. The author takes you through what was found, what was processed and what was tested. So many things came across to me as glaring discrepancies between substantiated fact and quick judgement. To me the timeline, evidence and reason for the crime just didn't match up. The fact that now that DNA testing has advanced so much, that all items weren't put through new testing is unbelievable. If the semen sample matched Mr. Hennis, why doesn't pubic hair, skin from under fingernails, fingerprints or anything else also indicate his DNA. This was a man who right from the beginning came forward, gave samples of anything they requested and time and time again showed no fear that he would be a match to any samples they had. From all accounts, the book shows he was a respected and likable soldier and family man. Throughout the reading of the book, I found nothing to suggest to me that this was the type of psychopath the could leave his base while on duty, drive to the house rape and kill a woman and murder two innocent children, then return to duty as if nothing happened. The fact that the lab that did the testing was cited for so many infractions should have made it imperative for new testing to be done by an outside lab. In the first trial, the fact that nothing matched the defendant, but everything was qualified as possibilities makes it sound like a kangaroo court. The state contended that the semen that came from inside the victim could only come from the defendant, but the pubic hair didn't. What kind of logic is this? What happened to the semen sample he gave originally? Why didn't any other sample match his? The timelines don't even make sense. The book left me more convinced than ever, that he was railroaded by a rush to judgement by people intent on solving a crime and calming people's nerves. The fact that this crime was so similar to the other major crime in the same area just made the police want to avoid the circus that was made of that crime. I truly enjoyed the book, but wished that all the evidence had been retested and would prove once and for all that Mr. Hennis was innocent. Thank you for allowing me to preview this book. The last few true crime books I have read, had put me off the genre, with either boring or insipid storytelling, but this has renewed my interest.

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### **Valerity (Val) says**

I was provided with an ARC of this book from netgalley and Open Road Media.

I read the first version of this book when it came out 24 years ago, and remember the details about the ad for the dog and the Members Only jacket in the story. What a crazy story with so many reversals and strange characters popping up. It's the only case of a person being convicted and put on death row, overturned, retried, then acquitted and set free, then convicted again in a military court and put on death row again. Despite the author appearing to leave the door open for more DNA testing to somehow prove Hennis' innocence again eventually, I don't see that happening. He seems to have been rooting for him all along. I still have the murders stuck in my head, how cold and gruesome they were and how brutally they were carried out. The decades of suffering by the loved ones left behind. The added pain of them being found on Mother's Day, 1985. A fascinating read that follows the many crooks and turns, highs and lows of this wild story about the murder of the Eastburn mother Kathryn (Katie) and her 2 young daughters Erin and Kara. Leaving

the youngest, Jana alive but dehydrated in her crib.

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