

## **A TALE OF ABUSE AND MURDER**

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*Editor's note: This story relied heavily on multiple interviews with Charlie Schockner and his uncles, Mark and Jon Jicha. Charlie 's conversation with detectives was recounted from the memory of both Charlie and Long Beach Police Detective Richard Birdsall. Specific acts of Manfred Schockner 's violence, as well as information from the days after Lynn's murder, were shared by Charlie. The Press-Telegram also reviewed letters that were written by Manfred Schockner and by Mark Jicha, and obtained a copy of "Lynn's Personal Bill of Rights."*

Two weeks had passed since his mother's murder, and 14-year-old Charlie Schockner was looking to share one haunting thought.

His mother, Lynn Schockner, had been stabbed to death during an apparent burglary attempt on Nov. 8, 2004, as police surrounded her Bixby Knolls home to investigate a prowler call. Officers caught the killer fleeing the yard with a bloody dagger and a cap full of jewelry.

Now it was late November, and Long Beach Police Detectives Chris Cardoza and Richard Birdsall had arrived to update Charlie and his father on the status of the unusual case.

After the briefing, Charlie made an excuse to talk to Birdsall in the front yard – out of his father's earshot. He lowered his voice and shared the haunting thought.

"How's my Dad involved?" he asked. "I know he's involved somehow."

Manfred "Fred" Schockner, 67, is scheduled to be sentenced Wednesday to life in prison without parole for hiring the man who murdered Lynn Schockner, his wife of 25 years.

A combination of phone records, wire taps, hidden cameras and circumstantial evidence tied him to the crime so convincingly that a jury took only 20 minutes to return its verdict last month.

His cohorts, Frankie Jaramillo and Nicholas Harvey, whose trials ended in similarly quick verdicts, have been sent to prison already.

But what jurors didn't hear in any of the three trials was the story that came before the murder plot – that Fred Schockner, a millionaire businessman, had been abusing his wife and son for years.

"I cannot remember one moment where I truly felt love for my dad," Charlie, now 17, said in a recent interview. "All he cared about was money."

As Charlie and other family members tell it, the cycle of abuse in the Schockner home was nothing less than textbook.

From the moment of their meeting – at a Dodger game in 1978 – Fred was as domineering as Lynn

was submissive. He was 38, with family money and a job as a contract worker in the aerospace industry. She was 24. They married a year later.

Fred's behavioral problems were evident early on, according to Lynn's family, but grew worse with time.

He lost his temper with his wife over minor inconveniences – shoelaces that were too long for his shoes, food that was too spicy for his taste.

He yelled. He threw things. He whipped both his wife and son.

Days of criticism and insults reached crescendos of violence. Once, he took a stapler and sent the metal spikes straight into Lynn's arm.

The episodes always ended with apologies and gifts – part of a typical cycle of domestic violence abuse often referred to as the “honeymoon stage.” Fred took Charlie to Disneyland and Lynn to Hawaii. He constantly bought his wife jewelry, in lieu of any real change.

“That would be his way of making up for it,” Charlie said.

Then, quickly and predictably, the abuse began anew.

Charlie avoided confrontation by avoiding his father. After school, he disappeared into extracurricular activities. At home, he sat quietly through dinner and spent hours in his room.

Fred Schockner's refusal to respect the feelings and wishes of those around him added to his family's isolation: Lynn didn't have any close friends, and Charlie rarely invited his to his house.

When friends did come over, Charlie said, his father frequently acted inappropriately. He would curse, for instance, or disrobe and swim naked in the backyard pool.

“It was just sort of everyday life,” Charlie said. “I didn't know any different.”

But Lynn's family did, and they found it difficult – sometimes impossible – to be around Fred.

At family gatherings, Fred often insulted Lynn's mother and created problems with her older brothers, Mark and Jon Jicha. The strategy served to alienate his wife from those closest to her – another common thread in abusive relationships.

“To be honest,” Jicha said, “everybody in our family despised Schockner .”

In the fall of 1999 – after 20 years of marriage – Lynn announced that she was ready to escape her husband's unrelenting criticism, reclaim her emotional stability and rescue Charlie from his dysfunctional home life.

She worked up the courage to ask Fred to leave and then typed what she called “Lynn's Personal Bill

of Rights.”

The document, obtained through the family, is a heartbreaking list of 33 points that seemed to plead for respect and acceptance.

Next to No. 3, she wrote: “I have a right to say no to anything when I feel I am not ready, it is unsafe or violates my values.”

No. 9 read: “I have the right to terminate conversations with people who make me feel put down and humiliated.”

Number 20: “I have a right to be happy.”

Number 22: “There is no need to smile when I cry.”

Number 26: “I have a right to be in a non-abusive environment.”

Number 33: “I have the right to feel weak and vulnerable, for that is when I am being REAL.”

The separation pushed Fred into another wave of apologies and promises.

In two letters, dated Oct. 15 and Nov. 23, 1999, he told Lynn he loved her and hoped that they could work through their problems.

“I never realized how terrible I was,” he wrote in the Oct. 15 letter, “and I thank God for the fact that you are still with me... It has added to my resolve to fully change for the better.”

Lynn eventually invited him back, with a firm but misguided belief that things would get better.

Mark Jicha, a former journalist with a warm, Southern drawl, was never shy about his feelings for Fred.

He had been appointed Charlie ‘s godfather but had stopped visiting the Schockner home when Charlie was still a toddler – opting instead to meet on neutral ground.

Jicha knew Charlie and Lynn were being mistreated and occasionally spoke with his sister about it. She sometimes would stand up for Fred, saying Fred had changed for the better, but Jicha had his lingering doubts. He told Lynn he wouldn’t visit her home again until she left Fred Schockner for good.

In the meantime, Jicha invited Lynn and Charlie to his home in Georgia as often as possible.

It was during one of those visits – in the summer of 2002 – that he became convinced that Fred’s abuse was in full swing.

Once, while Jicha was preparing dinner, he turned and said something in a louder voice than normal.

Charlie winced.

Jicha was crazy about Charlie – whom he saw as bright, generous and trusting – and that wince broke his heart.

As a writer, Jicha did what came naturally; he sat down at his computer and wrote a letter to Fred.

“Lynn tells me you have addressed this repulsive behavior, that you no longer abuse women and children. But those are just words,” he wrote. “Shame on you. Those are my words.”

Jicha knew his sister had made some bad choices in her life, but Charlie hadn’t.

“Charlie still has a chance to become something wonderful,” Jicha wrote, “something well beyond any of us have achieved.”

Later, during a car ride, Jicha confronted his sister, accusing her of exposing her son to violence. He showed her the letter.

Lynn sobbed. She acknowledged that something needed to change once and for all. For herself, but mostly for Charlie. Jicha gave the letter to Lynn, instructing her to use it as she saw fit.

Jicha now believes that the Georgia trip made a difference. Within the year, she had shown Fred the letter and begun talking to Charlie about divorce. In the summer of 2004, she told Fred she wanted a legal separation. He moved out, while she stayed with Charlie at the Bixby Knolls home.

Lynn called her brother that August. He remembers the conversation well.

“You told me all along that if I ever got separated, you would come out and visit,” she said.

“You’re right,” Jicha said, “I did.”

He bought the plane ticket immediately and arrived to Long Beach in October – a month before the murder.

Lynn was happier than he had seen her in decades. And his time with Charlie was precious: They palled around, visited the tourist sites, got reacquainted over belly laughs and long talks.

At the end of the five-day trip, Lynn delivered her brother to the airport and left him with a final message – the last, and perhaps most important, of her life.

“You know,” she said, “if anything happens to me, you’ve got to take care of Charlie .”

Jicha didn’t hesitate.

“Of course,” he said.

As Lynn worked to build a new life, Fred worked to take it away.

Living at his brother's house in Seal Beach and obsessing over the money that Lynn would take with her in their divorce, Fred recruited a gym manager named Frankie Jaramillo to be the middleman in his murder plot.

The two had become acquainted over the years, and Fred had been loaning Jaramillo large amounts of cash to finance his younger friend's lavish lifestyle.

Over a year-long stretch, he gave Jaramillo more than \$50,000. In October 2004 – around the time of Jicha's visit to see his sister – Fred gave him \$50,000 more.

In turn, Jaramillo called a body builder he knew named Nicholas Harvey. Harvey agreed to do the job for \$5,000.

On Nov. 8, Harvey jumped the fence of Lynn Schockner 's backyard, ducked down and waited to strike. But, unbeknownst to him, he had been spotted by a neighbor, and a bevy of police officers had quietly surrounded the house in hopes of catching the crook.

Lynn was napping at the time, roused only by her dog's incessant barking at the front bay window, where police stood outside. She stepped on the front porch and spoke with officers, who asked to search her backyard.

She offered to retrieve the gate key, shut the door and disappeared. Then, inexplicably, she decided to step out onto the back patio herself.

Lynn had struggled with arthritis for years, and was still groggy from sleep. Harvey overtook her immediately. He stabbed her 10 times and left her to die while he stormed inside, grabbed a fistful of jewelry from the master suite and jumped over the back fence – into the arms of the LBPD.

Charlie Schockner was in the middle of a math class at Poly High School when the news arrived. The principal pulled him out of the classroom and a counselor explained the situation.

It happened at 11 a.m. It happened at their home. A burglar had done it.

Fred and his own brother, Ronny, arrived at school to pick up Charlie. Feigning grief, Fred said little to his son.

By the time they were able to get back into the house, it was after dark. Gone were the reams of police tape that had crisscrossed the Andrews Drive home for hours that day. Gone was the blood on the back patio and the door jams and the bedroom floor – where the killer had overturned dressers and jewelry canisters before fleeing through the backyard.

Charlie was still numb with grief.

Sometime after arriving home, Fred appeared at his bedroom door. There were no hugs, no words of

support, no promises that everything would be OK.

Instead, he instructed his son to go into the master suite, where jewelry and containers – rummaged by the killer – were still scattered on the closet floor.

“Fred made me clean up the closet where all the jewelry had been poured out,” Charlie said. “He made me put everything back.”

Charlie’s uncles came to California and stayed at the home while the investigation continued.

Mark Jicha said he genuinely wanted to put all his conflicts with Fred in the past.

“If I was going to have any sort of a long-term relationship with Charlie,” he said, “I was going to have to get along with Schockner. And I was willing to do that.”

Fred seemed more than agreeable. At one point, he went to his bedroom and retrieved the scathing letter that Jicha had written to him two years earlier.

Jicha ceremoniously tore up the letter and hugged him to signify a fresh start. He didn’t suspect that he was hugging the man responsible for his sister’s death.

“You don’t assume you have a murderer in your family,” Jicha said. “No one does.”

Quietly, though, Charlie’s own suspicions grew.

The suspicions were borne of a lifetime of abuse at the hands of his father, but were fed by his father’s cold attitude toward the killing.

In talking to the cops and newspapers, for example, Fred had proffered that the burglar targeted Lynn’s flashy jewelry – the same jewelry he had used to buy off her forgiveness all those years.

Then, on Nov. 18, Charlie overheard his father accepting a collect call. He seemed to be talking to the killer – or someone who knew the killer – and he was talking about money.

“I don’t owe you any money,” Charlie recalled hearing his father say. “You didn’t finish this...”

The phone call was a puzzle piece that finally fell into place.

The next time he saw Birdsall – the week of Thanksgiving – Charlie asked how his father was involved.

Out in the front yard, Birdsall was circumspect. He assured Charlie that they would not close the case until everyone involved had been captured.

Charlie thanked the detective and returned inside.

Far from being surprised by the question, Birdsall and other detectives had been asking the same thing for weeks. In fact, long before the conversation in the front yard, Birdsall had taken measures to make sure Charlie was safe during the sensitive investigation. Police constantly were watching Fred and watching the home.

Because Fred had insulated himself from the killer with the middleman, police had to rely heavily on undercover operations to build the case. They worked as fast as they could, but it took longer than expected.

By the time Charlie came forward, authorities were nearing the end of the investigation. In fact, Birdsall said, the phone call Charlie had overheard had been placed by a police decoy, calling from county jail but posing as Harvey.

The next week was spent trying to get the boy out of town and setting up one last operation – one in which the middleman would be rigged with a camera to meet Fred at a restaurant. It turned out to be a key piece of evidence during the trial.

In anticipation of Fred Schockner's arrest, Birdsall called Mark Jicha and asked him to take Charlie back to Georgia – something Jicha had wanted to do anyway. Birdsall used the "media circus" as an excuse.

Although Jicha didn't know an arrest was imminent, he fully supported Birdsall's idea. He remembered his sister's request – to take Charlie if anything ever happened to her – and Jicha said he had been searching for a way to get Fred to relinquish custody.

His greatest fear, he said, was that Fred would hang onto Charlie out of spite.

Under pressure from Jicha and detectives, Fred acquiesced. He put his son on a plane on Nov. 27. He was arrested five days later.

Since then, Charlie has been living with Jicha and his wife, Susan Shipman, and spends ample time with his other uncle, Jon, and his wife, Elizabeth.

With therapy and an open line of communication, Charlie has thrived in school.

A talented artist and tennis player, Charlie said his life is free from fear and intimidation. He has applied to several colleges and universities and will begin touring them with the Jichas this fall.

Last month, Charlie returned to Long Beach for Fred Schockner's trial and was in the courtroom when the jury returned its first-degree murder verdict. Charlie's relief was palpable as he bucked back in his seat when the verdict was read. Outside, he stood grinning widely with his new family.

At one point, he broke away for a private chat with Mark Jicha; they strolled away, their arms slung around each other. It was just the sort of easy comfort Lynn had identified five years ago – when she asked her brother to watch over Charlie .

"I'm just relieved," Charlie said of Fred Schockner's conviction. "I don't have to live with him anymore. I don't have to deal with him. And justice is served."

As for Jicha, he still has a copy of the letter he penned to his brother-in-law five years ago, the one he tore up at Fred's insistence.

"Charlie has a chance to become something wonderful," he had written, "something well beyond any of us have achieved."

Since Fred's arrest, Jicha has re-read that passage countless times. To know Charlie, he said, is to know that Charlie is certain to make that statement come true.

In many ways, he has already.