

DATE: 11-2-92

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

Owner's name: Darlene Eldridge DBA/ \_\_\_\_\_ (If applicable)

Occupant's name: Darlene Eldridge DBA/ \_\_\_\_\_ (If applicable)

Address/fire occurred: 500 State St.

City, County & State: Cookville Putnam Co. Tennessee

Date of fire loss: 11-1-92 at 10:20 a.m.

CHRONOLOGICAL EVENTS

On 11-1 1992 at approx. 3:00 P. m., a request was received from City Line Sheriff Billy Higgins to investigate a fire that occurred on (SEE ABOVE) to a  mobile home,  dwelling,  vehicle,  business,  \_\_\_\_\_, owned by (SEE ABOVE) and/or occupied by (SEE ABOVE), located at (SEE ABOVE).

On 11-2 1992 at approx. 9:30 A. m., this writer arrived at the fire scene and obtained consent to search and a/an initial statement, 5 interview from \_\_\_\_\_ and/or \_\_\_\_\_ (other if applic.)

On 11-2 1992 at approx. 9:30 A. m., this writer made an on the scene investigation of the BRICK-BROWN (36'x29') Two Story Dwelling structure,  vehicle,  \_\_\_\_\_ (other)

ORIGIN OF THE FIRE: Was determined to be in the Living Room. This was substantiated by the burn patterns, fire and heat damage sustained.

DIRECTION OF THE FIRE SPREAD: Up and out in all directions in the From the Living Room ~~to other~~ upstairs & Kitchen.

CAUSE OF THE FIRE: Evidence found during the fire scene investigation indicated that this was an intentionally set fire. Suspect(s) used a  solid/ liquid accelerant and ignited same with an open flame. OR  This writer was unable to determine if this was or was not an intentionally set fire. Therefore, this fire is  incendiary,  accidental or  undetermined in cause.

All original documents, diagrams, photographs and evidence will remain on file at the Knoxville State Fire Marshal's Office.

IF CLOSED-( ) ARSON: All leads have been exhausted as to the person or persons responsible for this fire. If in the future any additional information develops to warrant reopening this case, the case will be pursued. Therefore, this case is being marked closed. ( ) OTHER: Due to this fire being  accidental/ undetermined in cause, this case is being marked closed. If any information or evidence becomes available, this case will be reopened at that time.

Age 37  
Set w/f.

CHRONOLOGICAL DARLENE D. ELDRIDGE  
Events

R6362  
455. State St.  
Cookeville, Putnam Co. TN 38501

Requested to come to 500 State St. Cookeville  
Putnam Co. TN. on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1992 at  
3:00 P.M. Request received from Billy Sliger  
Cookeville City Fire Chief. Reference to house  
fire and Burn Victim, Darlene Eldridge

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> this writer ARRIVED  
at the City Fire Chief office in Cookeville.  
Meet with Billy Sliger, whom explained  
some about the victim. And the house fire.  
Chap Sliger also advised that the  
victim had been flown to ~~the~~ Erlange  
Medical Center in Chattanooga - by Life  
Force "Helicopter"

Consulting Physician: ADEL N.  
SHENOUD A. "M.D. - Soot, on teeth, upper mouth,  
massive third degree burn over 20% of  
her body, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Day Burn Above Breast, Shoulders  
30% Burns from DIAPHRAGM up.

LOCATION F.M.C. Burn unit Referring  
Physician DR. Phil Craft

SULLIVAN Smith Medical Examiner Putnam Co

Date of Death NOV-24 1992 1:08

Released to Hooper Huddleston. Funeral Home

Cookeville Putnam Co CARDIAC ARREST/RESPIRATORY/AK  
Code 99

" AT 10:30 A.M. ON NOVEMBER 2, 1992 ARRIVED AT FIRE  
UPON ARRIVAL, THIS WRITER OBSERVED A BRICK  
TWO STORY HOME THAT SET BACK ~~OF~~ STATE ST  
ABOUT 100 FT. A RED CAR SETTING IN FRONT  
DRIVEWAY WHICH BELONGED TO DARLERO ELDRIDGE  
WAS LOCKED. THERE WAS A FRONT PORCH.

AND ALL FRONT WINDOWS, WAS BROKEN OUT, THE  
FRONT DOOR, WAS LYING ON GROUND NEAR FRONT  
PORCH. BILLY SLIGER COOKVILLE CITY FIRE CHIEF  
ACCOMPANIED THIS WRITER TO THE ELDRIDGE FIRE

SCENE. OTHER FIREMAN WAS PRESENT UPON ARRIVAL  
WHOM - WAS SECURING THE SCENE. AT WHICH TIME  
LT. DOLE McCLAIN, AND BILL BOWMAN, BOTH COOKVILLE  
CITY DETECTIVES ARRIVED. THE HOME CONSISTED

OF SEVERAL ROOMS, - LIVING ROOM, DINING ROOM,  
KITCHEN UTILITY ROOM, BED ROOM, <sup>BATH ROOM</sup> ALL OF DOWN  
STAIRS ALONG WITH A REAR DECK WITH A  
HOT TUBE. ON THE DECK WITH A GAS GRILL  
THERE WAS FULL BASEMENT, WITH (2) METAL ~~GUARD~~  
DOORS, WITH STEPS LEADING UP TO THE FIRST  
FLOOR. STEPS, LEADING TO THE 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR.  
THERE WAS TWO BED ROOM + BATH ROOM ON  
SECOND FLOOR. ~~A~~ SIGN NEAR DRIVEWAY  
HAD FOR SALE WITH A REAL ESTATE.

## Fire scene Examination

A Preliminary Investigation of the Living Room to determine the origin of the fire.

The General origin of the fire was the Couch located in the Living Room - "see Diagram"

The Couch, except for the springs was completely destroyed. Large holes burned through the floor under the Couch. All other contents

in the Living Room was either completely destroyed or damaged, including Carpet. The Carpet was destroyed by a low

burn. The fire traveled from the Couch to the wall behind the Couch and

up into the Ceiling Rafter, then into the Dining Room - on a low burn

than the fire moved into a high burn - fire; damaging all kitchen

appliances, also burning the upper kitchen cabinets, and the top of the rear door that led out to the rear deck.

and heat damage to the utility room. At this point, the behavior of this fire

was very hot accompanied by rapid temperature rise, flame propagation which then proceeded rapidly up the stairway steps that led to the top floor.

Burning the up Stairs Bath Room, &  
Burning out the top of the Door which  
was closed that led to the Master Bed  
Room where two dogs were found Dead.  
One under the Bed, and one other Dog  
Dead in the corner of the Bed Room.  
There was no fire damaged in the Bed  
Room, only heat & some smoke, A window  
located in the Bed Room DARK Reddish in  
color, showing high intense heat. At top  
of steps, the carpet was burned, and  
did some heat damage to the other Bed  
Room. The fire vented out the window  
at top of the steps, also, burned the  
carpet of the upstairs steps. All the wind  
on front of the house was out, showing  
out side fire damage to the wall at near  
the front Door overhead, One Electrical  
Clock located upstairs, at Miss Darlene  
Eldridge Room, which was plugged up and  
shown stopped at 10:30. According to fireman  
the power was pulled at 10:30 A.M. from  
the Eldridge home. Clock later tested shows  
that it was running at the time it stopped.  
The front Door was unlocked at time the  
fireman arrived.

(3) Samples were taken at Couch Area were nothing was left but. Ash debris. Also (2) Samples were taken at top of the steps, which did have a strong smell of Ammonia - The Basement Area had not been damaged with any fire. There was ash laying on the floor of the Basement directly under where the Couch was located. There was no debris found in the yard indicating no explosion had occurred. This fire has been ruled undetermined and suspicious --

"On November 20. This writer delivered Evidence (5) Samples to the T.B.I Laboratory. Then on the same date delivered a Subpoena to Chattanooga to Erlanger Hospital to be served & executed for all laboratory tests done and results of test. X Rays taken and findings of X Ray. Diagnosis. Extent and locations of Burns - Prognosis. Due to being the week end, with no administrator or keeper of medical records, present, this writer left the Subpoena with a Police officer from Chattanooga to be delivered & executed by Ed Forester. Arson Division of the

On November 24, 1992 this writer along  
with Billy Slijer, Cookville City Fire  
Chief, and Lt. Doyle McChain, Detective.  
for the City of Cookville, meet upon Request  
at the District Attorney General office  
Reference to the Eldridge Fire and  
Also the Death of Darlene Eldridge  
Recommendation and order for Autopsy  
signed by the District Attorney General  
of the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit at  
which time it was agreed on Not  
to be Executed, and to take Pictures.  
Only after the Body of Darlene Eldridge  
was returned to Cookville, Putnam Co. to  
Hooper & Huddleston Funeral Home  
at which time, Lt. Doyle McChain  
and Bill Bowman - Both City Detectives  
of Cookville meet at the funeral home  
took Pictures of the Decesed. Darlene  
Eldridge was taken, at the Mortuary  
after seeing the ~~Scars~~ Burns about  
the Body of Darlene Eldridge, the Medical  
Examiner of Putnam Co. Dr. Sullivan Smith  
was Requested to come to the  
for further Investigation it was later  
determined by Dr. Smith and Charles W. Harlan,  
a Medical Examiner and coroner

An Order for Autopsy was ordered by Dr. HARDAN. Medical Examiner. This writer left Cookeville at 11:30 P.M. C.S.T. and returned home at 12:00 midnight C.S.T.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1992 this writer returned to Cookeville and met with Lt. Dale McChains and Detective Bill Bowman, at which time a copy of a brief history from Charles Hardan M.D. which he related the findings of Dardene Eldridge. The Dr. said that the geographic pattern of burns is consistent with scalding burns from a hot liquid. She died at Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga. The viable diagnoses for manner of death are primarily homicide, secondarily suicide by self-emolization.

On 11-14-92. Chantal Eldridge sister to Dardene Eldridge, gave signed consent to search the home of the described property. A verbal consent was also used prior to the signed consent by the family.



On December 16, 1992 Armed with  
Verbal Consent, AND A Signed Consent,  
William M. Dannelly, State Arson Investigator  
of the State Tenn. Fire MARSHAL'S ALSO,  
David Guy, Arson Investigator for  
the State Fire MARSHAL'S Office.  
Along with this writer AND Lt. Doyle M<sup>o</sup>Ch.  
& Investigator Bill Bowman. Both Police  
officers in Cookeville, Putnam Co. TN.

The Examination of <sup>the</sup> Interior of the  
Structure disclosed the living room suffered  
the greatest amount of fire damage.  
Further examination of the interior disclosed  
distinct flammable/combustible liquid  
pour patterns in the wood flooring in  
the living room. And the wood flooring  
on the second floor landing.  
Therefore, this Fire Investigation Report  
# K6362 was marked as undetermined  
suspicious, on 11-2-92 will now be  
changed to Arson. On Dec 16, 1992  
It is the opinion that a flammable/  
combustible liquid was poured in the  
living room and on the second floor  
landing causing the fire. The source  
of ignition being a match OR some type of  
open flame. And probable burning time approx 15-  
or no more than 20 min.

On JANUARY 12<sup>th</sup> 1993 James F. Cooper,  
And Julian Bowmar, of the Bureau  
of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms went  
to Darlene Eldridge's home and  
conducted a fire scene investigation.  
Also, on January 27, 1993 -- Fray,  
"The A.T.F. Agents" returned to the  
fire scene the home of Darlene Eldridge  
& again conducted a fire scene  
investigation, at 500 State St. Cookville, TN,  
Putnam Co. at this point time this  
writer has not received any report,  
OR statement from James F. Cooper.  
OR any other A.T.F. Agents.

On JANUARY 19, 1993 this writer turned  
over to DR. William M. Bass State  
Forensic Anthropologist, Photographs  
of Dardene Eldridge. for his opinion  
And his Interpretation of the Burn  
Pattern from the Photographs ~~brought~~<sup>to Keno</sup>  
to his office. in Knoxville, TN. The Size  
of the Photographs (4) -- 8" X 10" inches, in  
Color -- DR Bass Report will be  
in the FILE -- BRIEFLY DR.  
Bass Advised that, the degree  
of burning would suggest some  
type of liquid that would adhere  
to the skin and when ignited  
would burn deep. -- And that  
he could not think of any type  
of accident that would cause such  
a Burn Pattern, and it was in  
his opinion that some type of  
liquid was placed on the victim  
and ignited --