

Rediscovering: Don Bolles, a murdered journalist

Episode 5: "It started as a routine day"

RICHARD RUELAS: Previously on "Rediscovering Don Bolles, A murdered journalist"

<theme music begins>

Rademacher: And the thing that's got me is one day I drove by the newspaper you had your car parked across the street on the Second Ave, uh Second Street. And you were looking at your tires and looking around your car and just the way you're looking at it. You know I had been in there sometime before that. I know you're spooked.

RICHARD RUELAS: Bolles told Rademacher that what he saw wasn't unusual. He always took a peek under his car.

Bolles: As a matter of routine, I always check to see if anybody's been fiddling with it because I know what I'm up against.

<theme music fades out>

RICHARD RUELAS: In May 1976 -- weeks before Bolles' death -- there was a roast of the noted humor columnist Erma Bombeck. She was nationally known. Appeared on "Good Morning America." Best-selling author and she lived in Paradise Valley.

Arizona Republic reporter Don Bolles was at the roast. So was Pat McMahon, who was a well-known radio and TV personality. McMahon went up to Bolles and made one of those cracks one might make at a function like this

PAT McMAHON: I said Don I'm really glad that you came over and that I could talk to you for just a moment to try my best to pound some kind of sense into that head of yours because you keep picking on all of these lovely business people ... Why is it you pick on these folks. You know instead of just simply. Writing nice things about some of the nice people you can see sweet things about them, Don. His answer stayed with me to this day...

<music starts >

PAT McMAHON: Because he looked at me and he didn't laugh this time. He said funny that you should mention that Pat, because this is my last story about those people. I promised my wife. This is almost word for word. I promised my wife. That I was going to wrap that part. Of my career up... and I said something like, "No offense, Don, but what else can you do? And I didn't mean to make it sound as if you were limited and I don't think you're going to go to the -- And I said this -- "into the obits."

RICHARD RUELAS: At that time in 1976, Bolles wasn't assigned to be an investigative reporter. He was assigned to cover the legislature. In fact, it had been *three years* since the law suits and depositions with the Funk family wrapped up. His wife, Rosalie, said she doesn't

recall him making such a promise to her that he'd stop writing those types of stories. Though, it sounded like she would have welcomed it.

Rosalie Bolles: Maybe he made a commitment to himself you know promise to himself but he didn't come right out and said he would promise not to do that. But I did ask him on occasion you asked him what if he needed to keep doing that investigative stuff with them. Because the mafia worried me.

RICHARD RUELAS: People still fed Bolles tips. And, as a curious reporter, he often listened.

So, it makes sense that he listened when a man he had never met named John Adamson pitched him a story. <music> It involved land fraud. It involved famed Sen. Barry Goldwater. It involved Rep. Sam Steiger, who had been a close source of Bolles.

RICHARD RUELAS: It also *wasn't* true. But Bolles didn't know that when he agreed to meet Adamson. After that meeting, Bolles told an editor about the tale Adamson had told him. He also told his editor he didn't think it was true. And that Adamson seemed a shady character. A sleeze bag. But, Adamson promised to bring documents to their next meeting. And Bolles was curious what Adamson might bring to further spin this story. Adamson set the meeting for June 2nd at the Clarendon Hotel. I'm Richard Ruelas and this is Rediscovering Don Bolles, a murdered journalist.

music fade

RICHARD RUELAS: June 2nd happened to be Don and Rosalie Bolles's wedding anniversary. <music> The couple had planned to celebrate by seeing the movie "All The President's Men."

All The President's Men: "Woodward, Bernstein. You're both on the story!"

RICHARD RUELAS: That movie was the dramatic re-creation of the two Washington Post reporters who methodically exposed the Watergate scandal that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation.

All The President's Men/ Deep Throat: It leads everywhere. Get your notebooks. There's more.

RICHARD RUELAS: By June, the movie had been out a few months. But the Bolleses were going to make a date night out of their anniversary and see it. It started as a routine day.

ROSALIE: Just a normal typical morning

RICHARD RUELAS: Rosalie got the kids up. She saw Don off to work. And Diane off to class. Rosalie also had a meeting scheduled that morning with Diane's teacher.

ROSALIE: About her progress in school and plans for the future. Kind of like an IEP today.

RICHARD RUELAS: Don Bolles went off to the Capitol. He covered the action in the Senate that morning. On the agenda of the finance committee was a bill about an issue near and dear to his heart. captured his interest.

It was a bill dealing with Emprise and the Funk family. Those were the two entities that Bolles had tussled with since 1969.

The bill up for debate that morning was designed to break up the monopoly ownership of the state's dog tracks. It was an idea central to Bolles's stories about the dog racing industry: That the Funks and Emprise had a monopoly and should be broken up.

The bill would have required them to sell off some of the six tracks they owned within six years. But the bill had its teeth taken out in the committee hearing that morning.

<music>

RICHARD RUELAS: Under the bill the Senators passed, the Funks wouldn't have to sell any tracks for nearly a decade. Lawmakers did so to appease the Funk family. Around 11 a.m., Bolles went to the press room on the third floor of the Senate. A man went up there to speak with Bolles about the racing bill. He said Bolles was in a bad mood.-Bolles said something about how he had been fighting this thing for years. And how Emprise and the Funks owned the state legislature. He threw up his hands in frustration. I'm washing my hands of the whole thing, he said. He then told the source he had to go. He had a meeting at the Clarendon.

<dramatic music>

RICHARD RUELAS:The Clarendon was a midtown hotel that was supposed to be a crown jewel when it opened. It quickly became a rent-by-the-week type place. Not a bad spot; just nothing too fancy.

I had long thought that the Clarendon was picked because it was a spot where reporters hung out. But that wasn't true. It was likely picked simply because the lobby was a pretty long walk away from the parking lot.

Bolles was now driving a new B-210 Datsun, having gotten rid of the Plymouth with the bad wobble in front. He pulled his Datsun into the lot and parked. He walked past the pool and into the lobby and waited for the man he was supposed to meet: John Adamson.

RICHARD RUELAS: The woman behind the front desk asked him if he was Don Bolles.

There was a phone call for him. Bolles took the receiver. <fuzzy noise?> It was Adamson. Bolles didn't know this. But Adamson was calling from the Ivanhoe bar on Central Avenue.

Adamson told Bolles the meeting was off. Bolles told Adamson that he could find him at the state Capitol later that day if he needed. Bolles hung up. And started the walk back to his car. He stopped along the way to talk to a woman and her toddler who were swimming in the Clarendon pool.

Bolles said something about the little girl being on her way to becoming quite a swimmer.

Bolles got in his car. <car door shutting> Started it up. <car starting> And backed out of the parking space. Then, the bomb Adamson had planted under the car -- right under the driver's seat where Bolles sat -- was detonated by remote control. triggered. It exploded.

At the same time, in a nearby office tower, an attorney was dictating notes about a case into a recording machine. In doing so, he happened to capture the distant sound of the explosion.

<explosion>

That attorney made a copy of that recording for law enforcement. He said he hoped to play it for Bolles if he ever recovered.

Attorney on tape: Maybe I'll play it for Bolles to see what he sounded like.

RICHARD RUELAS: Although that blast sounded faint on that clip, in real time, it resonated through the blocks of midtown Phoenix. A few blocks away, an air conditioning man named LeLon Reed was installing an exhaust fan in a law office.

LeLon Reed: We heard literally the building shook. I mean a concussion. And this is a brand new sturdy building you know and the whole building just was a shockwave.

RICHARD RUELAS: Reed came out of the building and saw hazy smoke. He said he heard a voice telling him: Go. He listened to it. He ran to the scene. He entered the parking lot and saw a white Datsun. He also saw a man hanging outside the door. The man was face down.

LeLon Reed: He was backed out at an angle. The car door was open and he was laying outside the car door face down his right arm and was underneath him and his left arm was under his head. And as I'm coming across to him... He looked up and said, "Help me; Help me." And then collapsed.

RICHARD RUELAS: Reed had a particular set of skills that would prove helpful. He had wanted to be a state trooper. In his training, he learned about cars and explosives. In the parking lot, he quickly assessed that the car wasn't on fire. There was no danger of the gas tank exploding. So he didn't have to drag the body away.

Also as part of his trooper training, Reed had learned some basic paramedic practices. He had also worked at a hospital and knew a little bit about anatomy. One lesson he learned: Do what you must to stop the bleeding. Reed would do so by turning his belt into a tourniquet.

LeLon Reed: So I took off my belt, straddled him. Ran it underneath his hip at the thigh, pulled it up through, laced it through the buckle and cinched it back and then tied it off. I stood up and asked for another belt. A white-haired man handed me his. While he was getting it off, Don Bolles started talking. And somebody was at his head, so I said, "Take down that information. It might be important." Then I turned back and got the belt. And I did the same thing on his left leg. Then, he revived.

RICHARD RUELAS: Someone brought out a first aid kit from the hotel. Reed and others used the gauze pads to cover the wounds. Someone else brought out a large beach towel. It was so

big Reed initially thought it was a blanket. Someone tried covering Bolles with it. Reed told them no. Put it under him. Save his face from burning on the hot asphalt. Remember, this was June in Phoenix. At this time, it was almost 100 degrees outside.

RICHARD RUELAS: Bolles kept talking. A woman named Leslie Evitt -- who had rushed over from a nearby condo building -- laid her head on top of Bolles's head. She told him to say what he needed to say. She would listen.

<somber music>

RICHARD RUELAS: In court testimony later, Evitt remembered that Bolles told her it was his wedding anniversary. He asked her to get in touch with his wife. He gave Evitt his home telephone number. Told her to call his wife there. Then Bolles told her something else. <music faded>

He said "Adamson did it."

<revelatory music>

Sharon Lovejoy news clip: Critically injured, Bolles gasped four words to bystanders. Mafia, Emprise -- the name of a New York sports concessionaire which once owned a piece of six racing tracks here -- and John Adamson <some type of pulsing, heart beat sfx>

RICHARD RUELAS: Bolles told Evitt to please remember what he was telling her. He was not going to make it. Lying on the towel in the hotel parking lot, outside his bombed-out car, Bolles also criticized himself.

"I should have checked my car," he told her. "It's my fault."

Bolles: As a matter of routine, I always check to see if anybody's been fiddling with it because I know what I'm up against.

Rademacher: I knew you were spooked... Just the way you were lookin at it.

<musical interlude>

RICHARD RUELAS: Paramedics arrived four minutes after the explosion. They took over the job of tending to Bolles. Reed and the others who had huddled around Bolles moved back. Reed looked inside the car. The driver's side door was open. The floorboard had been pushed up.

LeLon Reed: So there wasn't a fire in the car, but obviously you've seen pictures of the floorboard how it peeled up almost like a flower. And the seat was pulled up. Still attached to the floorboard and leaned into the back seat.

RICHARD RUELAS: Just to help picture this. The driver's seat was still attached to the floor of the car. But the floor of the car had been pushed up so violently that the driver's seat was flipped back 90 degrees.

LeLon Reed: And I don't know whether it was blown out of the car or whether he was blown back into the back seat and then had to crawl out.

RICHARD RUELAS: A television camera crew from Channel 10 captured the scene.

Fox 10 Clip - After onlookers and news media cleared the area, Phoenix police homicide, bomb and arson and officials from the United States Treasury Department began combing the parking lot and the surrounding area for clues that would tell what kind of explosive device was used. Bolles was rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital and listed in very serious condition.

RICHARD RUELAS: In the footage, you can see Bolles's face resting on a golden towel. His light brown hair - almost golden blonde -- is styled in a semi-pompadour fashion. He is wearing a black leisure suit that paramedics would eventually cut off his body. Every so often, Bolles raises his head and appears to say something. Then his head drops again. Reed said it was a challenge for paramedics to load Bolles on to a stretcher. Bodies are usually loaded face up. But medics decided it best to load Bolles as he was: face down. One of the ambulance drivers would later remember that Bolles kept taking off his oxygen mask. He kept talking about the mafia and Emprise.

Fox 10 Clip: Onlooker: What I heard didn't make a lot of sense. Reporter: What did you hear? Onlooker: I'd rather not say.

RICHARD RUELAS: Rosalie had been at her daughter's school for a meeting. She came home to a ringing phone. It was the police.

Rosalie: They just said there's been a terrible accident. And Dan's been taken to St. Joseph's E.R.

RICHARD RUELAS: Rosalie knows that she drove herself to the hospital. But has no memory of doing so. Once there, police told her what happened.

Rosalie: Well I was shocked. I was just shocked. I had no idea. As I said, I thought it was a car accident of some kind, and then they tell me that it wasn't? That there was a car bomb and? <long sigh> So I didn't. <long pause> I was just so stressed I couldn't even think.

RICHARD RUELAS: Word of the explosion reached the Republic newsroom. Details trickled in. Paul Dean was a columnist at the time. And was in the newsroom that day.

Paul Dean : Everyone was in confusion because we had picked up on the police radio that a car had exploded. And there was a legislator or press credential in the windshield. Whose was it? Who could possibly be involved in something like that? Certainly not a legislative reporter. I can remember my reaction when we knew it was Don. I hurled a pen across the newsroom. No, and I was just furious.

RICHARD RUELAS: At the courthouse, an attorney remembers hearing it crackling across police radios.

David Derrickson (attorney there that day): It came across police radio and there were lots of police officers that we would run into down around the courthouse anyway. And this was getting

close to lunchtime. I was approaching the First Avenue or the East Court building at First Avenue and Jefferson. And we were told that a reporter had been blown up. And we didn't know what the status was, whether he lived or died. But that's when, that's when I found out.

Richard: Here's how former television news anchor Mary Jo West described it:

Mary Jo West: There was a poll there was a darkness there is of sadness and even there is fear that is hard to describe to other people today. Once that happened and Bill Miller my wonderful former boss said he had a great line he said we realized that the investigative stories we were doing were more than just putting on a program. It was serious business. Everything changed.

<tense music>

Richard: And Pat McGroder, the attorney who knew Bolles.

Patrick McGroder III: I think the city was shocked. I think they were shocked. By what happened to Don Bolles. But they were also shocked that it happened in the middle of the day in the middle of town. Someone got blown up? By a car bomb? In Phoenix? In the 70s? So I mean I think everyone was just generally in shock about that for a whole variety of reasons. And disgusted. And scared. And scared a little bit.

RICHARD RUELAS: People talked about the city seeming to lose its innocence that day. Here's Pat McMahon.

Pat McMahon: I just I remember thinking. That couldn't happen here. I really did. I just a bombing I could somehow imagine somebody with a gun being angry at what somebody wrote. But a bomb in your car? That's mob stuff.

RICHARD RUELAS: Bolles was taken to St. Joseph's Hospital. He wouldn't speak again. Those words he uttered at the crime scene and in the ambulance would be his last. When detectives came to question him the next day, Bolles was intubated. He had a tube down his throat so he could breathe. But he was lucid. He knew why police were there and what they wanted. He was able to nod his head and gesture with his fingers in response to their questions. He identified a photo they had of John Adamson and said yes, that was the man he was meeting at the hotel.

Sharon Lovejoy: Phoenix Police know Adamson well. He's a man with a criminal record. And police say he has underworld associates. He's a gambler and breeder of racing dogs, friendly with Ned Warren, an Arizona real-estate magnate who has been under investigation here for land fraud.

<tense music fades out>

RICHARD RUELAS: Meanwhile, back at the hospital, Don's health spiraled. A Republic executive – Bill Shover – stayed at the hospital through most of the coming days. He would bear witness to Bolles's agonizing end. <somber music> The doctors amputated his right leg in the days after the bombing. Then an infection made its way into his right arm. That also required

amputation. The infection spread to his left leg. Doctors amputated that one as well. Shover was witness to all of it. It affected him. And he saw it affect others at the hospital. Including a nun.

Bill Shover: The day he died was a Sunday morning, and he had one arm left. The legs were gone and his arm was off because he was poisoned from the shrapnel. That's what killed him. The nun was standing there with the nurse.

The nun started crying. She said, "Mr. Shover, when they get the person who did this to Don, I hope they take one leg, one arm, and the other leg before they kill him."

I said, "Sister!"

She said, "I know I'm not supposed to say that, but I've seen this man writhe in pain. I know he's having a terrible, terrible death. It just seems like justice to do something like that for them."

I'll never forget the nun saying that to me.

RICHARD RUELAS: Rosalie, Bolles's wife, was a nurse. So she had a clear understanding of what was happening.

Rosalie: They didn't have to tell me a whole lot except basically what they were going to do and why they were going to do it. He was septic. By that time from the explosion.

RICHARD RUELAS: Rosalie would stay at the hospital for the next 11 days.

Rosalie: I talked to him but they had him so sedated. Of course I don't know if he heard anything or he didn't respond at any rate.

RICHARD RUELAS: She was there when he died.

Rosalie: I was in there by his bedside, and I was with him when he died. <long pause> They had to come in and pronounce him of course, but I was there and I told him. I knew what the monitors were! And, I called out to the nurses that were there and uh... But of course, there was nothing they could do.

RICHARD RUELAS: The word of Bolles's death spread around the city and the nation. Pat McMahon still thinks about the injustice of it. Of a reporter being killed for doing his job.

Pat McMahon: You know he didn't do anything to you except maybe cause you to be convicted for life because that's the way justice is. Injustice is blowing somebody up. <long pause> He was a good guy.

RICHARD RUELAS: Inside the hospital, there had been a fierce battle to save the man's life. Outside the hospital, detectives and Republic reporters were investigating. They were trying to figure out who would want Bolles dead and why.

<tense music>

A great first clue came from the final words Don Bolles spoke: the name, John Adamson, the man he was set to meet — But also mafia and Emprise..

That morning, Bolles had covered a legislative hearing about Emprise. The final story he would ever cover.

But, before then, Bolles hadn't covered Emprise and its ties to organized crime for years.

Yet, those who knew Bolles said he had never really stopped looking at the company and what he thought were its corrupt ways. He never forgot what they had done to him.

Rosalie: He did. He did make it a personal crusade and that's why I think it bothered him so much that he didn't feel he was getting the papers' support.

RICHARD RUELAS: Detectives came to speak with Bolles' former colleague, Bill Meek. He had covered all the bitter back-and-forth legal battles between Bolles and Emprise. But police didn't ask Meek about the Funks or Emprise, or how Bolles felt wronged by those people. Meek had expected those questions. Meek knew how deeply the wiretapping battle with Emprise and the Funks had affected Bolles. He understood why Bolles would mention Emprise as he lay injured on the asphalt.

Bill Meek: Clearly, that's what he was thinking about. If he thought he was going to come into harm, that was the direction he thought it'd come from.

RICHARD RUELAS: But, Meek said, it didn't seem like many other people made that connection, or understood why Bolles may have been thinking of Emprise. Bolles might have believed he was killed because long ago he had crossed the mafia and Emprise. He didn't seem to think his killing might have to do with the stories that cost Kemper Marley a seat on the Arizona Racing Commission, but that's the path investigators would follow. It was the path Bolles put them on by repeatedly saying the name, John Adamson. And that's the path we'll follow next time.

<end tense music>

RICHARD RUELAS: Next time on Rediscovering Don Bolles, a murdered journalist ...

<theme music>

Man: There was no rush to judgement, no rush to prosecution, we wanted to do it right. And there was no reason not to get the right people, so we tried to uncover every rock we could, and wherever it went.

Richard: Bolles's picture hangs in the Arizona Republic newsroom. I've seen it every day. Though, in the last few months, as I've been reporting this story, I've seen it with new eyes.

Rosalie: The most? I miss physically having him. We had so much fun doing things, and I haven't felt that way since.

Richard Ruelas: Rediscovering: Don Bolles, a murdered journalist was reported and voiced by me, Richard Ruelas. Taylor Seely is the lead producer. Katie O'Connell is the executive producer. Script supervision came from Shaun McKinnon and Josh Susong. Web design for this

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