



Offbeat Oregon History: Was Lewis O'Neil a murderer, or did he just take the rap for one?

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

Of all the variations on the theme of “love gone bad” known to gossips, storytellers and prosecuting attorneys since the dawn of time, the “love triangle turned deadly” pattern has got to be given first place.

And it would be hard to find an example of this kind of story that would top the one that reached its climax with a shotgun blast on a dark Ashland street, a few days before Thanksgiving of 1884.

It started when a 46-year-old carpenter named Lewis O'Neil rolled into town, three months before. O'Neil had abandoned a wife and six children down in California a couple years earlier and drifted north with the railroad. When he'd arrived in Ashland, he seems to have decided to stay a while and put down some roots — after meeting Mandy McDaniel.

Sarah Amanda “Mandy” McDaniel, 35, was the wife of a prosperous local grocery-store owner, 48-year-old Lewis McDaniel. The McDaniels had married three years before, when she was a pretty youngish widow with a seven-year-old son and he a lonely frontier bachelor. The marriage had soured fairly quickly; when O'Neil rolled into town, the McDaniels were living separately, and Amanda was apparently looking for a new romance. She and O'Neil began a secret affair soon after he arrived in town.

Two weeks after he arrived, O'Neil took a short vacation from work to go and visit his much-older brother, 72-year-old George, at his mining claim several dozen miles from town. When he returned, he was carrying a shotgun which George had given him to try to sell.

Back in Ashland, Lewis moved into a room at the Pioneer Hotel and briefly resumed his affair with Amanda McDaniel. Then Amanda approached her husband, reconciled with him, and moved back into their home.

And a few days after that, at 7:30 p.m. on the

cold, rainy night of Nov. 20, 1884, someone stepped up behind Lewis McDaniel and shot-gunned him in the back of the head. He fell forward, dead, his hands still in his pockets.

The town marshal's night watchman, Charles Miller, was soon on the scene, and, recognizing the corpse, went directly to the McDaniels house to let Amanda know that someone had murdered her husband. With another citizen, he stood on the doorstep and knocked for several minutes as the rain poured down on them; then the two of them retreated to a neighbor's house to figure out what to do next. A few minutes later they decided to wait inside for Amanda to return, and crossed over to the McDaniels house again and — after a little more fruitless pounding on the front door — went inside and lit a candle and settled in to wait.

Then Amanda herself opened the back bedroom door, stepped out, and seemed surprised to see her living room full of people.

Rumors of extracurricular romantic activities, in a small town, spread very rapidly in a small town and are pretty much impossible to keep bottled up. By the time of the murder, everyone — including Lewis McDaniel — knew of O'Neil's affair with Amanda. So when someone murdered her husband, O'Neil was instantly the prime suspect. Almost immediately, the 1880s equivalent of an A.P.B. was out. Town marshal S.D. Taylor found O'Neil around 10 p.m., drinking in a saloon, and arrested him on suspicion.

There wasn't any hard evidence against O'Neil; but there was a lot of the circumstantial kind. For one thing, the shotgun he'd brought back from his brother's mining camp — a distinctive weapon with an alligator carved into the stock — was nowhere to be found. He first claimed he had no shotgun; and then, apparently realizing too many people had seen him bringing it back, he claimed he'd sold it to some guy on the road home. It was later found, chopped up into bits, scattered over a vacant lot. The lot had been searched the day after

the murder, so someone besides O'Neil had obviously done this. The obvious suspicion was that Amanda had done it for him, to help him cover his tracks.

It was enough. O'Neil was convicted on March 12, 1885, and sentenced to swing.

A few weeks later, another inmate claimed O'Neil had confessed to him that he'd done the deed under the precise direction of Amanda — who wanted her husband out of the way so that she could formalize her affair with O'Neil and so that she could inherit his grocery store.

On the strength of this conversation, Amanda McDaniel was arrested. But jailhouse confessions aren't very solid evidence, and the jury just wasn't convinced. She was acquitted.

As the hanging day loomed ever closer, a series of remarkable letters started going out from the Jackson County Jail, where O'Neil was being held.

The first and most egregious one went to Amanda McDaniel. It was a proposal, essentially, that she take the rap for him. He prefaced it by assuring her that if her court case had gone badly, he would have “come to your relief and clear(ed) you by taking the whole responsibility on myself, though I am innocent, but ... if you were found guilty you should never hang or go to the penitentiary for I would save you. Now you have been tried and come clear, and it is in your power to save my life.”

Since she had been cleared of all charges in her trial, he continued, she could now confess to the murder with total impunity — clearing him. He would then sue the state for heavy damages and split the proceeds with her.

“I hope you will not delay,” he wrote, “as I know you can save my life and the disgrace will be no worse on you than it is now.”

Amanda did not reply.

Other letters went out as well, to other friends and relatives, with various other schemes for

someone else to take the rap for him. The last one went to his brother George, the one who gave him the shotgun; and it was an open request for his brother to “confess” to the killing and take his place on the gallows.

“The most trying feature,” the condemned man wrote, “is leaving my six children to the mercy of a world without protection and the disgrace of their father being hanged. ... As for you, you have lived to be a very old man, and in the natural course of events you can expect to live but a very few years more and are liable to drop off at any time. If you had one hour to live it would be a hard request to ask you to come and state that you had done the killing and that I had not had any hand, act or part in it or any knowledge of it. That would clear me, and spare me to my children, and only on their account could I ever think of making such a request of you.”

Of course, O'Neil hadn't thought so much of the children when he'd abandoned them and their mother four years earlier; but a looming death sentence does tend to remind one of family and friends. Ironically, the letter never reached the “very old man”; George had, shortly before, died of typhoid fever.

And so, on March 12, 1886, still maintaining his innocence, Lewis O'Neil was hanged.

As for Amanda, after liquidating her late husband's estate and paying off his taxes and debts, she cleared \$2,000 (worth \$55,000 in 2017 dollars). She took this and left Ashland the night before the hanging, settling in Talent, where she opened a café.

And so the story ends. Except, there is just one question still hanging out there in the air, a question that never was fully answered:

Where exactly was Amanda McDaniel, a few minutes after her husband had been murdered, when the town watchmen were pounding on her door?

Dr. Fuhrman: True hunger versus toxic hunger

By Joel Fuhrman MD
For The Sentinel

What are the physical sensations you associate with hunger? For most people these sensations include stomach grumbling, headaches, light-headedness, shakiness, irritability, fatigue, and inability to focus. Since eating removes the symptoms, they are mistakenly believed to be signs of hunger. The resulting overeating behavior, to reduce these physical sensations, undermines any attempt to lose weight. Understanding true hunger could be a key factor in reversing this trend.

Are these sensations truly signs of hunger? Conventional wisdom, and even medical textbooks, would suggest that they are. I disagree.

In my experience treating thousands of patients and guiding them through transitioning to a nutrient-dense, plant-rich (Nutritar-

ian) diet, I have observed that my patients' perceptions of hunger change after their diets improve — feelings of hunger become less frequent, less uncomfortable, and are mainly felt in the mouth and throat (“true hunger”) rather than the head and stomach.

These results were documented and published in 2010 in Nutrition Journal, a peer-reviewed publication which encourages scientists and physicians to publish results that challenge current models, tenets or dogmas. My data does just that — these results argue for a complete re-evaluation of our definition of human hunger.

Key results from this study: “hunger pains” were experienced less often on a high nutrient-density diet; discomfort between meals or upon a skipped meal was experienced less often on a nutrient-dense, plant-rich diet; 80 percent of respondents reported that their experience of hunger had changed upon following a high nutrient-density diet; Irritability and decline in mood were experienced less often on a high nutrient-density diet; a nutrient-dense, plant-rich diet was associated with more feelings of hunger in the mouth and throat and less in the head and stomach.

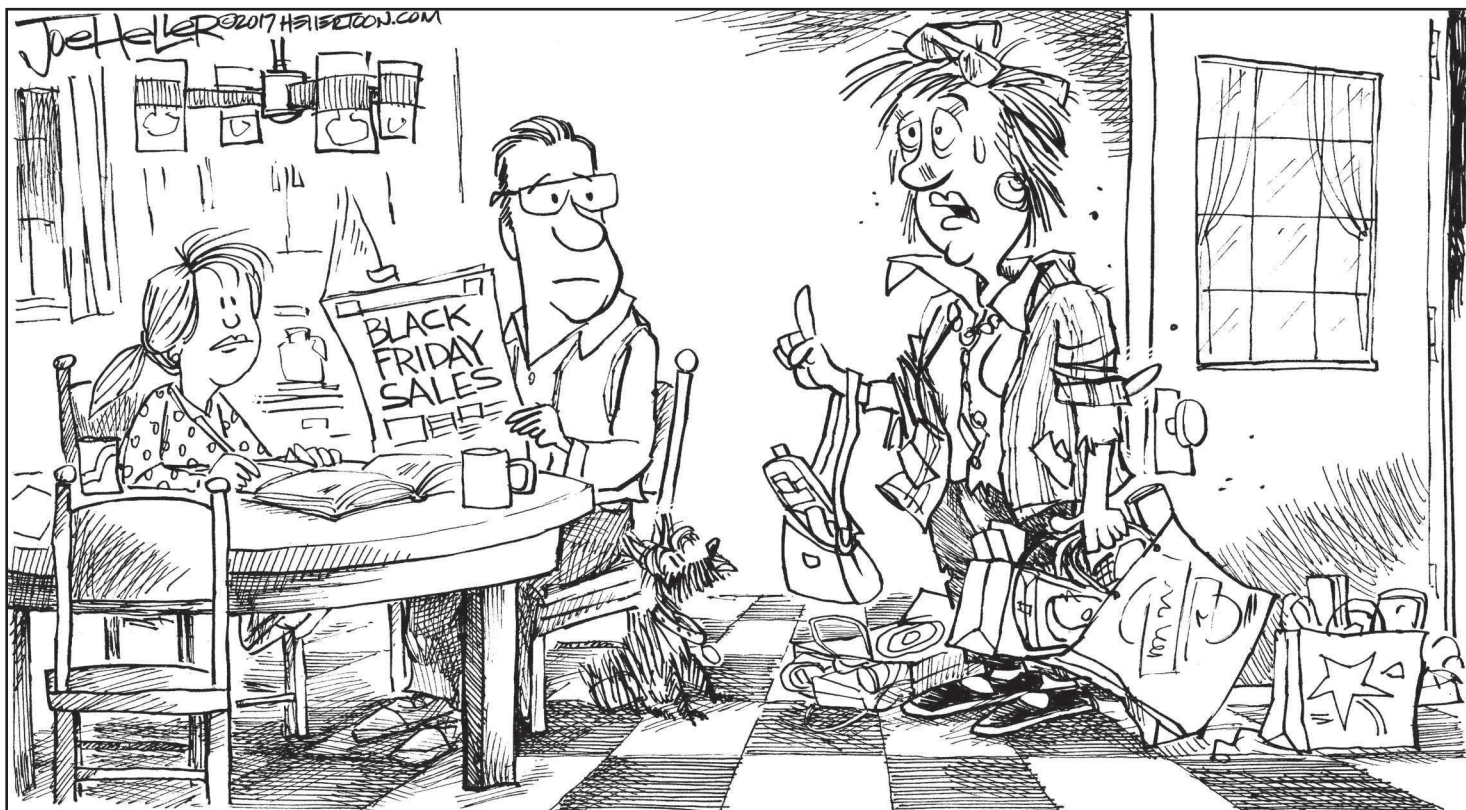
We concluded that enhancing the micronutrient quality of the diet leads to changes in the experience of hunger and a reduction in uncomfortable symptoms associated with hunger despite a lower caloric intake.

If stomach grumbling, headaches, and light-headedness a few hours after a meal are not really hunger, what are they? The typical Western diet is characterized by high-calorie processed foods, oils, sweeteners, and animal products and is low in phytochemicals and

other micronutrients. There is evidence that such a diet, low in micronutrients and phytochemicals, results in inflammation, oxidative stress, and accumulation of toxic metabolites.

When digestion is complete, the body begins to mobilize and eliminate waste products, causing uncomfortable symptoms. If we allow waste metabolites to build up by eating unhealthy foods, we will feel discomfort when the body attempts to mobilize and remove these wastes. I propose that these sensations are actually symptoms of detoxification and withdrawal from an unhealthy diet, lacking in crucial micronutrients. I call this toxic hunger. Scientists now know that nutrient-poor, calorie-dense junk food has effects on the brain similar to those of addictive drugs. Healthful food does not produce withdrawal symptoms — when the body is given vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts and seeds, there is nothing to detoxify.

This is why so many weight loss diets fail. Simply restricting portions of the same disease-causing foods does not resolve the symptoms of toxic hunger. In addition to being effective for weight loss, a nutrient-dense, plant-rich (Nutritarian) diet changes the perception of hunger, getting people in touch with true hunger (felt in the throat). The function of true hunger is to prevent the breakdown of muscle tissue for energy; true hunger is a signal that directs the body to the precise amount of calories needed to maintain a healthy weight. A Nutritarian diet, if widely adopted, could bring millions of people in touch with true hunger and stop the proliferation of obesity and preventable chronic disease.



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