ARKANSAS BAR ASSOCIATION

Mock Trial

2027

HIGH SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL

State of Arkansas v. Wynne D. Byrd



2027 Arkansas High School Mock Trial Competition
State of Arkansas v. Wynne D. Byrd

The Arkansas Bar Association Mock Tial Committee welcomes your participation in our 2027 competition. As the volunteer firefighters roll up their hoses, and the smoke rises from the ashes of the once stately Charles Black mansion, blotting out the stars from the night sky, the gathered onlookers talk quietly among themselves. “Who could have done this?” they ask. “And who would open a Murder Mystery Dinner theater in Jacksonville, Arkansas, anyway?” The owner of the mansion, Wynne D. Byrd, stands apart, staring at the charred wreckage of their nascent effort to rebuild a life for themselves. On the other side of the ruins of Charles Black’s folly, the assistant fire captain, Billie Jo-El, stands doubled over, gasping for air, their air regulator having failed during the fire, a look of cold determination in their eye as they stare across the dark expanse at Byrd and silently takes a vow to get to the bottom of it all.

We are pleased to partner with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas to host at the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Little Rock on March 5-6, 2027. All teams (unless there is a bye) will compete in four rounds of competition. The top two teams will meet in the State Championship round, and the State Champion will represent Arkansas at the National High School Mock Trial Championship, to be held in St. Louis, Missouri, on May 13-15, 2027.

In addition to our regular competition, we are working on our second mock trial workshop. We will publish details later, but the plan is to hold the workshop in Little Rock on Saturday, January 9, 2027. The workshop is free and open to all students and teachers, but registration will be required.

Students – You will experience what it is like to prepare for and present a case before a judge and jury. Working with your teams and coaches, you will learn to evaluate information and respond quickly. As you prepare, you will sharpen your public speaking and presentation skills. The greatest benefit is the opportunity to learn how the legal system works. By studying and understanding courtroom procedure, you should become more comfortable with the legal system. Your interaction with Arkansas’s finest attorneys and judges will give you a glimpse of the different interpretations of trial procedure and different approaches of individual members in the legal arena.

Teacher Coach, Attorney Coach, or Judge – We strongly encourage you to focus on the goal of participation, rather than stressing competition, while preparing your students. Your contributions of time and talent are making experiential educational opportunities available to Arkansas students. Your participation is an essential key element to the success of the program. Be proud of the impact you have made on the lives of these students.

The Mock Trial Committee would like to acknowledge:

- Joshua M. Jones, James Wilke, and the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis High School Mock Trial Steering Committee, who gave us permission to adapt their case for the 2027 Arkansas High School Mock Trial Competition;
- The Mock Trial Case Selection Subcommittee (Adam Jackson and Deanna Ray); and
- The teachers, judges, and attorneys who volunteer their time to prepare students for competition.

This case is a work of fiction. The names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents herein are the product of the authors' imaginations. This case is meant to provide an opportunity for students to explore legal issues and is not meant to provide commentary on any of the issues raised in the case.

Version History

1.0 - Original version of the case released in October 2026. Pursuant to Rule of Competition 1.1.2, questions regarding the case will be answered and published in future updates. All questions about the case should be sent to ARMockTrial@gmail.com.

2027 Updates to the Rules of Competition

It is the policy of the Arkansas High School Mock Trial Committee to adopt rules that are as close to the Nationals rules as possible. This summer, the National Board adopted amendments to the National Rules of Competition. The Committee has reviewed those rules and incorporated those changes into our local rules. Below is a summary of those changes. Apart from possibly the rules on openings and closings, we do not anticipate that these changes will result in a dramatic change to the competition.

While we strive for accurate, keep in mind that this summary is provided as a convenience. In the unlikely event of a conflict between this summary and the rules of competition as published, the rules control.

Openings and Closings: Changes to rules regarding openings and closings address how teams may use portions of the problem during openings and closings. See Rules 4.2, 7.7, and 7.8.

Emergencies: We have adopted Nationals language governing emergencies. The changes are detailed, but they are consistent with how we have handled emergencies in the past. See Rules 2.5, 2.7, 3.6, 3.7, 6.3.4.C, and 8.1.

Timekeepers: The amended rules clarify that there is to be no communication between the teams and timekeepers other than the displaying of time cards. The updated rule specifically authorizes teams to ask for a time check; however, such requests should be made to the presiding judge, who will then direct the timekeepers to state the time remaining. See Rules 6.1.C and 6.4.1.E.

Case Materials: We have adopted Nationals language regarding the case materials. Specifically, we note that everything that is needed for the trial is contained in the problem and that teams may not refer to any laws, rules, or images that are not included in the problem. In addition to the Nationals language, we have added commentary noting that any laws referenced in the case should not be relied upon for purposes outside of mock trial. Finally, the rules have been updated to prohibit teams from uploading any part of the problem into a generative AI tool. See Rule 7.1.

Other Minor Changes: Other minor changes include:

- Rule 1.1.4: Adding definitions of "Problem" and "Trial Segment."
- Rule 1.2.3.B: Noting that only the Mock Trial Committee may disqualify and evict a team from competition. For any other substantial rule violation, presiding and scoring judges are limited to deducting points from the offending team, which is probably the most appropriate consequence in most cases.
- Rule 2.6: While generally not a problem for our state competition, noting that teams are limited to using unmodified team roster forms.
- Rule 3.3: Clarifying who should be addressed at certain stages of the trial and that teams should address the scoring judges as members of the "jury."

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF PULASKI COUNTY, ARKANSAS
CRIMINAL DIVISION

STATE OF ARKANSAS

v. CASE NO. ARMT2027

WYNNE D. BYRD

FELONY INFORMATION

MAGGIE KING, Prosecuting Attorney of the Sixth Judicial District of Arkansas, in the name, by the authority, and on behalf of the State of Arkansas, charges WYNNE D. BYRD, with the crime of violating Ark. Code Ann. § 5-38-301 ARSON, committed as follows, to wit: that said defendant, in Pulaski County, on or about July 31, 2024, unlawfully, feloniously, did start a fire or cause an explosion with the purpose of destroying or otherwise damaging any property for the purpose of collecting any insurance for the property, and the property sustained damage in an amount of at least one hundred thousand dollars ($100,000) worth of damage, against the peace and dignity of the State of Arkansas.

Maggie King
Prosecuting Attorney

By: *Anthony McMullen*
Deputy Prosecuting Attorney

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF PULASKI COUNTY, ARKANSAS
CRIMINAL DIVISION

STATE OF ARKANSAS

v. CASE NO. ARMT2027

WYNNE D. BYRD

PRETRIAL HEARING ORDER

1. Trial Setting: All pretrial issues have been resolved, and this case is ready for trial. This case is hereby set for trial on March 5-6, 2027. The case is to be tried on the issue of guilt only. Sentencing, if necessary, will be decided at a separate hearing.

2. Stipulations: The parties stipulate to the following. No witness may contradict knowledge of the facts contained in these stipulations:

a. No jurisdiction or venue issues exist in this case.

b. All exhibits and signatures are authentic. Chain of custody for evidence is not in dispute.

c. All deposition excerpts and examination under Oath provided herein were given under oath by the deponent, and all witnesses are presumed to have read and updated their depositions immediately prior to trial. Witnesses may not deny the authenticity of deposition excerpts or deny having given the depositions.

d. Wynne D. Byrd will not be deemed to have waived any Fifth Amendment privileges until they take the stand or the privilege is otherwise waived by counsel.

e. No party may cross-examine any witness on their knowledge of, or ability to speak, read, or understand any foreign language.

3. Witnesses: The designated witnesses, and only these witnesses, may be called at trial. Only the party sponsoring their testimony may call them, but they may be called in any order:

Prosecution Witnesses	Defense Witnesses
Billie Jo-El	E.D. Norton
La Venganza de Socrates	Niko Tesli
Martie Keyes	Wynne D. Byrd

4. Exhibits: Both parties have collectively identified the following exhibits, which have been pre-marked and may be offered into evidence by either party. When identifying and entering exhibits, parties should use the exhibit labels and numbers premarked on the exhibits. Except as provided in the stipulations, no party has waived any objection to the admissibility of any exhibit:

a. Exhibit 1: Claims notes

b. Exhibit 2: Insurance policy declarations

c. Exhibit 3: Billie Jo-El photo of stove

d. Exhibit 4: Photos of hood vent blower motor

e. Exhibit 5: Photos of hood vent blower motor wire

f. Exhibit 6: Drawing of Black Mansion/Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Theater

g. Exhibit 7: Fire Report

h. Exhibit 8: Lo Lucha wrestling lineup

i. Exhibit 9: Screenshot of Spacebook post

IT IS SO ORDERED, this 31st day of October, 2026.

Kesha May

The Honorable Kesha May

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF PULASKI COUNTY, ARKANSAS
CRIMINAL DIVISION

STATE OF ARKANSAS

v. CASE NO. ARMT2027

WYNNE D. BYRD

JURY INSTRUCTIONS*

Instruction No. 1 – Respective Duties of Judge and Jury

(a) The faithful performance of your duties as jurors is essential to the administration of justice.

(b) It is my duty as judge to inform you of the law applicable to this case by instructions, and it is your duty to accept and follow them as a whole, not singling out one instruction to the exclusion of others. You should not consider any rule of law with which you may be familiar unless it is included in my instructions.

(c) It is your duty to determine the facts from the evidence produced in this trial. You are to apply the law as contained in these instructions to the facts and render your verdict upon the evidence and law. Do not do any research on the internet or otherwise; or any investigation about the case or the parties on your own. You should not permit sympathy, prejudice, or like or dislike of any party to this action or of any attorney to influence your findings in this case.

(d) In deciding the issues you should consider the testimony of the witnesses and the exhibits received in evidence. The introduction of evidence in court is governed by law. You should accept without question my rulings as to the admissibility or rejection of evidence, drawing no inferences that by these rulings I have in any manner indicated my views on the merits of the case.

(e) Opening statements, remarks during the trial, and closing arguments of the attorneys are not evidence but are made only to help you in understanding the evidence and applicable

* These jury instructions should be used for the purposes of the 2027 Arkansas High School Mock Trial Competition only. They should not be relied upon for any other purpose. Further, these instructions reflect the law that will be used for the 2027 competition and may not reflect the current law in the state of Arkansas.

law. Any argument, statements, or remarks of attorneys having no basis in the evidence should be disregarded by you.

(f) I have not intended by anything I have said or done, or by any questions that I may have asked, to intimate or suggest what you should find to be the facts, or that I believe or disbelieve any witness who testified. If anything that I have done or said has seemed to so indicate, you will disregard it.

Instruction No. 2 – Jury – Personal Observations and Experiences

In considering the evidence in this case you are not required to set aside your common knowledge, but you have a right to consider all the evidence in the light of your own observations and experiences in the affairs of life.

Instruction No. 3 – Credibility of Witnesses

You are the sole judges of the weight of the evidence and the credibility of the witnesses. In determining the credibility of any witness and the weight to be given his testimony, you may take into consideration his demeanor while on the witness stand, any prejudice for or against a party, his means of acquiring knowledge concerning any matter to which he testified, any interest he may have in the outcome of the case, the consistency or inconsistency of his testimony, its reasonableness or unreasonableness, and any other fact or circumstance tending to shed light upon the truth or falsity of his testimony.

Instruction No. 4 – Burden of Proof

The State must prove beyond a reasonable doubt each element of the offense charged. On the other hand, the defendant is not required to prove his innocence.

Instruction No. 5 – Filing of a Felony Information

The filing of an information is merely the means by which a person is brought to trial. It is not evidence and is not to be considered by you in determining the guilt or innocence of Wynne D. Byrd.

Instruction No. 6 – Presumption of Innocence

There is a presumption of the defendant's innocence in a criminal prosecution. In this case, Wynne D. Byrd is presumed to be innocent. That presumption of innocence attends and protects them throughout the trial and should continue and prevail in your minds until you are convinced of their guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Instruction No. 7 – Reasonable Doubt

Reasonable doubt is not a mere possible or imaginary doubt. It is a doubt that arises from your consideration of the evidence and one that would cause a careful person to pause and hesitate in the graver transactions of life. A juror is satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt if after an impartial consideration of all the evidence they have an abiding conviction of the truth of the charge.

Instruction No. 8 - Arson

Wynne D. Byrd is charged with the offense of arson. To sustain this charge the State must prove the following things beyond a reasonable doubt:

First: That Wynne D. Byrd started a fire or cause an explosion.

And Second: That they did so with the purpose of destroying or otherwise damaging any property with the purpose of collecting any insurance for that property.

If you find Wynne D. Byrd guilty of arson, you will so indicate on the verdict form provided you. You will also make a finding about the circumstances of the offense as requested on the form.

If you reach a verdict of not guilty, you will indicate this on the form.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF PULASKI COUNTY, ARKANSAS
CRIMINAL DIVISION

STATE OF ARKANSAS

v. CASE NO. ARMT2027

WYNNE D. BYRD

VERDICT FORM

We, the Jury, find Wynne D. Byrd is guilty of Arson.

_____

FOREPERSON

We, the Jury, find Wynne D. Byrd not guilty.

_____

FOREPERSON

If your verdict is guilty, you shall make the following finding:

Do you, the Jury, find beyond a reasonable doubt that the amount of damage was more than $100,000?

_____Yes

_____No

_____

FOREPERSON

Statement of Billie Jo-El

My name is Billie Jo-El. Nope, never married, and not because I am some real estate novelist. The last name was my mother's married name. I will probably be the last of the Jo-El's when I die, which might be soon. I'm only 32, but the scarring I received in my lungs from the fire is bad enough that I might not see 40. <cough, cough>

I guess I am a little mad about it, but that doesn't mean I can't be objective. If Byrd hadn't tried to burn that stupid Murder Mystery Theater down, I might have made Fire Marshall or even Chief. And lived into my 40's.

I was 16 when my parents moved to the Air Force base in Jacksonville here in central Arkansas. One night, my mother shook me awake at 2 am. I could smell smoke and in the haze I saw the nylon curtain starting to melt. We crouched down and managed to get out of the house through the back door. My brother and my dad were not so lucky. My dad was trying to pick up my little brother out of bed, when a part of the roof collapsed on top of them, knocking them out. The firefighters said it was pretty painless for them. I'm sorry. It's still hard for me. <cough, cough>. Only the good die young, ya' know.

I was determined never to let that happen to anyone else. My mother decided to stay put in Jacksonville and took a job as a maid at one of the hotels near the military base, saving her pennies for someday. We had enough from my dad's life insurance settlement that she could afford to pay my way through school at Pulaski Tech for a year, before transferring to the University of Central Arkansas where I received my certificate in Fire Science, and a certificate in Criminal Justice. The Criminal Justice certificate included classes in conducting interviews and protection of fire and crime scenes for later forensic analysis. I was able to join the Jacksonville volunteer fire department at age 21, while I worked nights as a bartender. Since that time, I have attended a number of continuing education courses in Fire Investigation, specifically in the application of NFPA 921, which is the standard within the field of fire origin and cause for determining the cause of fires. By the age of 25, I was hired as the assistant fire chief for Jacksonville, which is one of only two paid positions in the fire district. Everyone else on the force is a volunteer with regular day jobs. I also applied to become a state fire marshal so that I could write official origin and cause (O&C) reports for fires, but unfortunately there were some budget cuts at the General Assembly in Little Rock. Even though I had all the training and requirements needed to be hired into the position, I have never officially been named a fire marshal.

The only difference between my role now and the role I would have if I had been hired as a fire marshal is the nature of the fire report I would write. As an assistant chief, I respond to almost every fire scene and take charge of fire suppression and interviews of witnesses, but

I am not allowed to conduct a full cause and origin investigation whenever there is a fire. Instead, I have to document the scene and unless someone confesses to setting the fire directly to one of the volunteer firefighters, I almost always have to list the cause of a fire as "undetermined." And confessions almost never happen. Most people will claim, "We didn't start the fire," even while they're standing there holding a gas can and a match. We just don't have the resources to adequately take into account all the forensics that a proper origin and cause investigation would need. Which translates into a lot of "undetermined" reports.

Yes, when Captain Jacqueline "Jackie" Oh wrote the report for the Mr. Boddy's fire, the Captain listed the cause as "undetermined." Like I explained earlier, that was department protocol. The NFPA 921 was later amended to remove any requirement for fire departments to list a cause in its reports, but when Captain Oh's report was issued, the box for causation had to be checked. So even if a cause appeared suspicious, our department had to list the cause as "undetermined." I didn't personally agree with Captain Oh's assessment. I even went into the Captain's office to insist that we list the fire as "incendiary," but Captain Oh told me that there were "political reasons" that we couldn't do that, that if we listed every questionable fire as incendiary, then we'd have to back those investigations up with additional financial resources we didn't have. I told her she may be wrong, but for all I knew she may be right. Fortunately, that former insurance adjuster kept digging and made this prosecution possible and the state saw fit to go back and spend some resources to send Byrd to jail where Byrd belongs. <cough, cough, cough, COUGH> The coughing's going to give me a heart attack <hack, hack, hack>.

I'm sorry. You know what, no, I'm not sorry. It's all Byrd's fault that I'm like this and I'm not apologizing.

So let me tell you why I am so convinced that Byrd did it. Before I start, I just want to say that all of my opinions are within a reasonable degree of fire investigative certainty. I did my own investigation, but I also relied on the statements taken down as part of the Fire Investigative Report, and the depositions and statements taken as part of this criminal lawsuit and the prior civil lawsuit.

I was working my regular shift on July 31, 2024 behind the bar at the Dukum Inn down on Sullivan St. in Jacksonville, in Pulaski County when I got a call that there was a fire at the Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Dinner Theater run by Wynne Byrd. Byrd is certainly well known around town. Byrd moved to town from Chicago in 2019 and started investing in a number of questionable businesses, one of which was Blue Cat Lounge, which went under after Byrd and a business partner lost all their money as investors and had to declare bankruptcy in 2020. There were rumors that Byrd hid cartel money in the walls of that place, but after at least one FBI raid and no charges being filed, I have to assume no one ever found it. Byrd's

debt was discharged and a lot of very unhappy business partners got saddled with paying off the debt on some of the more hare-brained schemes Byrd had come up with. Byrd's partner left, but there must have been some kind of settlement or something because somehow Byrd had the wherewithal to open Mr. Boddy's Murder Myster Theater in the former home of Charles Black, the infamous billionaire corporate raider who was murdered in his study by his butler there a couple years ago at a dinner party with a wrench. See, the butler always does it.

Anyway, back to the fire. I always carry my radio with me for just this kind of emergency. Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Theater is just across town, though I guess the address is technically in Sherwood, the next town over. I was able to get there about a minute before the first fire truck arrived, driven by Josh and Danny, two of the other local volunteer firefighters. There was heavy smoke pouring from under the roof around the perimeter of the mansion, and flames were visible in the front part of the structure. It did not appear that the flames had made it to the second floor. Josh and I put on our respirators and fire proof jackets, while Danny was in charge of fire suppression from outside the structure. We broke out the windows in the front and waved at Danny to aim the hose to those rooms. There was a melted metal wastebasket right next to heavy curtains in, I guess a library? The curtains had largely burned from the floor up and the flames were starting to catch the wooden trim around the ceiling. I went into the room and saw a cellphone on the mantle, which I put it into my pocket. All of a sudden, my respirator stopped working. Without thinking, I ripped it off my face, and took a deep breath and fell flat on my back unconscious. Josh had left the room, but came back, found me on the floor, and was able to pull me out the front door.

When I came to, other first responders had arrived and took over for Josh pounding on my chest trying to give me CPR. I couldn't catch my breath. Fortunately, one of the guests at the murder mystery, Jeff something or other, had his own oxygen tank that he let me use. <cough, cough>

One of the most important things to do once you make sure the structure is vacant, and once the fire is extinguished is to talk with anyone who might be a witness. I know others with the force had tried to call Byrd while Danny finished up. Fortunately, it had been a fairly small fire and was limited to just the one room so it did not take long to extinguish the flames before they could reach other parts of the structure.

It was 9:45 pm when Byrd arrived at the scene. It was hard to miss Byrd's arrival as Byrd was dressed in a gold-colored spandex suit with a fur boa. I had recovered some by then. As the senior most fire personnel on scene, I tried to interview Byrd while the rest of the crew went through the building to make sure there were no hotspots that could turn into a rekindle. I

was very dizzy and I had ringing in my ears from all the coughing, but I am pretty sure I accurately wrote down what Byrd said.

Byrd was very reluctant to explain the outfit at first but eventually Byrd told me they wrestled under the pseudonym El Prodigio, Iniciador Malvado del Fuego. I didn't have time to study any foreign languages in school, so I had Byrd repeat it slowly several times so I could spell it. There was a regular monthly Friday night event at the VFW that Byrd wrestled in that had become pretty popular. They had just gotten out of the ring when someone had called to tell Byrd about the fire. The cellphone in my pocket chose that moment to go off, and I took it out. Byrd said: "Oh goodness, I wondered where I put that." Byrd answered the call, and made a few grunting noises, before shouting "You're fired!" and closing the phone before shoving it into a spandex pocket.

The crew finished their walkthrough at 10:25 pm, right as I was getting finished with my interview with Byrd. The crew reported that there was minimal fire damage, which you would think Byrd would take as good news. Instead Byrd began wandering off and muttered: "That idiot. If you want something done right…" I don't think Byrd knew I heard that. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time, but in hindsight, I should have confronted Byrd right then.

My crew went to wind up the hoses and I turned around to sit down and suck up more of Jeff's oxygen. I surveyed the scene and saw that most of the on-lookers had dispersed. Who I didn't see was Byrd. I saw Byrd's Maserati parked next to my Explorer but no adult dressed in tight gold spandex. I thought it was weird.

We were just about to leave when Byrd came running around from the rear of the building shouting about smoke at the rear of the structure. There was a loud boom and it seemed like the back third of the building blew into the sky. It is a good thing none of us got struck with the debris considering we were within fifty feet of the structure. We all rushed to the back of the building. The entire rear elevation of the structure was on fire sending black clouds overhead. Danny ran back to the truck, but we had only one pumper available and very little water left. They tried to put out the fire, but the water gave out within just a few minutes. The fire kept spreading until the entire structure was engulfed.

I was defeated. <cough> I hate it when you try your best <cough> but you still fail to prevent a building from going up. At least there was only one injury. I went to the urgent care center later that night because I still couldn't breathe. It took several trips to a number of doctors over the next several weeks, but I eventually made it up to UAMS where I was diagnosed with acute scarring to my lung tissue and now I have to use oxygen at least a few times a day or I pass out. I have never vaped or used smokeless tobacco in my life, and certainly nothing off-brand that could cause that. The doctor's best guess is that the smoke I inhaled must have

contained some type of burning plastic that I breathed in when I took off the respirator. It permanently scarred my lungs, and the doctor doesn't think I will live more than another few years.

Why do I blame Byrd? Easy: while I can't prove the first fire was incendiary, I know there is no way my crew missed a hotspot that caused the second fire like Niko Tesli claims. Hotspots have to have a path for the fire to travel within wall spaces. Old houses often do not have proper fire blocking material so that when fire gets into the walls, it can travel upward rapidly and involve other floors. But fire moves outward and upward. It does not normally move laterally. So unless there was some kind of secret passage the fire crew could not inspect, the fire could not have traveled from the front of the house to the rear without being seen by someone.

The next morning, as I left the urgent care center, the sun was just coming up. I went back to the fire scene. I had left Josh there to make sure no one tampered with the evidence. There was very little left, but what was there told the whole story. As I went towards the back of the house, the first thing I noticed was the smell of natural gas. Natural gas is actually odorless, but the gas company adds sulfur into it so people can smell it and don't miss a leak when one starts. Just inside the back door, or what was left of the back door, there was an industrial natural gas stove. Incredibly, the stove was left almost intact other than a bit of heat damage. The hood vent and everything higher above the stove had been in the explosion and much of the debris was in piles outside. All the burners on the stove were turned up as high as they would go which explained the smell of natural gas. As there was no longer a room to trap the gas, I wasn't concerned that I might accidentally ignite a spark that could cause another explosion. I quickly took the photo of the burner handles in the "on" position, then turned them all off. I realize now the photo I took only shows one burner as I had a finger over a part of the lens, but they were certainly all in the on position.

The only logical conclusion is that the fire was started by someone on purpose by turning on all of the gas burners and somehow rigging up an incendiary device to ignite the fumes once they reached a high enough concentration. I never found the device, which is understandable as it would have been somewhere in a room that was turned into a giant fireball. It would not have had to be anything that complicated. Something as simple as a Zippo lighter left on or a candle left burning on the counter would trigger a spontaneous combustion once the gas and air reached the right concentration. Even though I didn't find such an incendiary device, I believe the second fire in the kitchen was an "incendiary" fire and not "undetermined" like Captain Oh seems to believe. <cough>

Statement of La Venganza de Socrates

Si, abagodito, me llamo La Venganza de Socrates, the great enemy of sophists everywhere! You can call me Socrates for short, all my fans do. What? Oh, yeah, sure, I guess I can sit down. What do you want to know?

You want to know who is behind this mask, who is the Revenge of Socrates? Fine, I think my lawyers worked out a protective order with you all. If you reveal my identity to anyone, I'm going to sue you back to the Peloponnesian War. I plan to start wrestling again soon, just as soon as I can get my own league going. And there is no way I can have you all telling anyone my real name, or my fledgling career will be gone before it even begins again. Plus, my mom might find out.

My real name is Wade Carmen. I grew up just a county over, in Butlerville, Arkansas. I did alright in high school, well enough to get into Arkansas State where I got a degree in Philosophy. After graduation, I bounced around a lot, I got arrested quite a few times, but never once served more than a night in jail. Even that time my camper caught fire and darn near started the Hot Springs National Park to light. Oops.

I got word my momma was sick, and since I no longer had a camper and had no other real place to call home, I moved back in with her. I've been staying there ever since. I bag groceries at a dollar store over in Des Arc, Arkansas. I'm not dating anyone and really I keep to myself. And as Wade Carmen, that is how I'd like to keep it.

But on Friday nights, I become the hemlock hero, the purveyor of the True and the Good, the arbiter of taste that my fans call La Venganza de Socrates. About three years ago, Sylvia Sam, a former friend of mine from high school, returned from a trip to Mexico. While she was there, she discovered the world of Lo Lucha style wrestling. You know, Mexican masked wrestling? Professional wrestling is a much bigger part of Arkansas history and culture than you probably realize. One of the earliest televised wrestling series was at the Harlem Theater in West Memphis from the late 1970's until the dominance of the WWF in the early 80's. Jerry Lawler and Sycho Sid both got their start there. I watched the WWF events as a kid, and my grandpa would tell my brother Kurt and me stories about getting in to watch the matches FOR FREE! Mind you, grandpa had also started to slip a little by then and you never quite knew what was going to come out of his mouth. I choose to hold onto the good parts.

Kurt and I would imitate the moves, pretend the end of the couch was a turnbuckle, and run back and forth across the living room before throwing ourselves into the air trying to land on our invisible opponents. We even developed our own moves, the Lumber Jack and Jill Chop and the Avalanche Splash. And the drama! The WWF sealed the deal by creating a whole backstory for every wrestler to explain why the Junkyard Dog would have a beef with the

Hulkster one week, then end up in a tag team match with him against Jim “the Hacksaw” Duggan.

Wrestling fell out of favor for a lot of reasons, the most common being because it is “fake,” though anyone who says that is really missing the point. I mean, I would never bet on matches, because of course the end result is predetermined, but if you can’t see the incredible talent and athleticism that these wrestlers have, well, I feel sorry for you. I, myself, was pretty conflicted about my love for the sport. On the one hand, it brought me and my brother closer to my grandpa, but I also saw the disapproving looks we would get from my mother whenever one of the female wrestlers would come on. Once my grandfather died, we never watched professional wrestling in the house again. It took me until college when in a Gender Studies course I figured out what my mother’s issue was. The Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling had no agency! They were rarely given cool tricks to perform in the ring and their stories had to do with fighting over a man. I could go on. I wrote my senior thesis on it.

So back to Sylvia. She was one of the few people back home who knew about my love for wrestling. You see, I couldn’t be open about it, because it might get back to my momma. If she thought I was talking about wrestling again, I’d have to endure a week of cold, hard stares every time I walked past her easy chair. Especially now that she’s sick, I don’t want to put her through that. Two years ago, Sylvia came back bursting with energy and excitement because she had an idea. In Mexico, Lo Lucha has many of the same problems that American Wrestling has, the misogyny, the subtle racism, the homophobia. But, for all those problems, Lo Lucha revels in its garishness. Creativity and athleticism are praised and those with the most skill who put in the hard work end up with the best storylines, not the best actors. Sylvia’s simple idea: Make Wrestling Great Again! Small venues, local athletes, plus, match up wrestlers by size and skill, not gender. We would get to write the story lines and could include or not include what we wanted. And surprisingly, it worked!

Sylvia started recruiting former high school athletes still in their 20’s who were like me, living at home, maybe working a 9-5 and who weren’t satisfied with what their life was shaping up to be. Soon, we had a group of about twenty regulars who could actually wrestle without major injuries. Our events have grown to the point where we currently have a weekly appearance at various VFWs and other small venues throughout northeastern and central Arkansas. And the best part is we do it like the old wrestling at the Harlem Theater. It’s totally free. Because we bring in customers who buy drinks on what might otherwise be a slow night, the venue pays us a little bit of money that we split among the wrestlers.

What we hadn’t taken into account was that by offering something for free and relying only on donations and the small amount paid by the venues, we didn’t have money to pay for health or worker’s compensation insurance for the wrestlers. For a “fake” sport, you can get

very seriously hurt very easily. One of our newer wrestlers, a former field hockey player, Te Golpear Con Un Palo, well, got hit with a stick during the wrestling match. Shattered a kneecap, and was going to have to miss work for several weeks. We knew we were in serious trouble. We barely had enough money to buy costumes for the wrestlers, much less to pay for a workers compensation claim. Even though wrestling was only a part time gig, the law says we were her "employer," and if we didn't have insurance, which we didn't, we were responsible for paying for her medical bills and time off work, and we could face criminal charges. We only learned after her injury that we were in violation of the law by not having insurance to cover it. Fortunately, Un Palo's former boss at the Blue Cat Lounge heard about the injury and offered to pay the medical bills and other work comp stuff, and Un Palo agreed not to tell the state that we didn't have work comp insurance. In exchange, we had to let someone else take Un Palo's place. Who? Of course, I'm talking about Wynne D. Byrd.

I gotta tell you, I thought it was a terrible idea. A total stranger coming in, offering a pretty substantial sum of money like that, something didn't smell right. But Sylvia was in charge, and I reluctantly agreed. Wynne even suggested a name, El Prodigio. I'm the one who added the rest: "Iniciador Malvado del Fuego." It could not have gone worse. El Prodigio was awful, much older than the rest of us, out of shape, could really only pull off laying on the mat while someone pounced. Our audiences were not big fans of El Prodigio. Rather than booing, they would yawn. And it didn't get better. Every time I would try to talk with Sylvia about it, she would wave me off, and say, "Everything will work out, you'll see." I started scheduling matches for Wynne later and later so that when the audience would walk out, at least the other wrestlers would still have someone cheering rather than walking out the door.

The week before the fire at Wynne Byrd's dinner theater, I wrote up the schedule for the Friday night show in Plato at the VFW Hall. Yeah, Ex. 8 is a copy of my handwritten notes about the lineup. As you can see, I put Wynne near the end at 9:45, which would have been our last slot that night. But Wynne wrote back and asked to move up the slot to 9:10 pm. I said no, but apparently Wynne went to Sylvia, who vetoed my decision. I was pretty ticked off, but I agreed.

So that night, July 31, 2024, I was up first. We start promptly at 9:00 pm. Despite the oppressive heat and no AC, we were still getting pretty big crowds. My match against La Envidia de Meletus went along as usual until the end. We had a fairly regular matchup. I would taunt La Envidia to leave the cave and use my Puppeteer™ move, which La Envidia followed by putting me into a signature Hemlock Hold™. That night, however, I must have taunted a bit too much, because the Hemlock Hold actually knocked me unconscious for a few minutes. I came to feeling pretty dizzy with a ringing in my ears. I was helped out of the ring and we went on to the next match.

I was still in charge of getting wrestlers in place so they could make their grand entrances. Between the occasional waves of nausea and dizziness, I managed to keep things moving. Until 9:05. And no Wynne Byrd. I tried calling a couple times, but Wynne didn't pick up. I was just getting ready to line up the next pair when someone walked in wearing the alternate El Prodigio costume, with the red and blue spandex and the feather boa. This person was about the same build as Wynne, but something seemed different. Maybe more muscular? I don't know. I didn't pay much attention and simply waved for the wrestlers to make their entrances.

It was weird. I've never seen Wynne walk in with so much flair, hopping up onto the apron, grabbing the top rope and literally vaulting into the ring. I swear I have never seen Wynne do that before. This El Prodigio turned around and from a standing position, jumped onto the middle turnbuckle, and began to exhort the crowd to cheer. The match was much different than scripted as well. El Prodigio was supposed to win but wow. El Prodigio's opponent was El Enterrador, a much larger person who somehow manages to perform back flips off the ropes at least a couple times a match. The El Prodigio who came that night was incredible. El Enterrador had to chase El Prodigio around the ring, trying to wrap El Prodigio in a special headlock, El Abrazo de la Muerte™. About four minutes in, El Prodigio was supposed to get caught, then squirm out at the last second, only to trip and fall onto El Enterrador, pinning for the win. This El Prodigio never got caught but instead climbed onto the top turnbuckle and backflipped over the head of El Enterrador ending in a leg lock that pulled El Enterrador to the mat. A three count and the crowd went insane. It was one of the most acrobatic moves I have ever seen with our troupe. And it absolutely was not Wynne Byrd.

I looked at the clock, and it was 9:22 pm. I am sure of it because the next match was set to begin at 9:25, and I remember everything went off on time that night. El Prodigio left the ring almost immediately and slipped out a side door to the parking lot without even changing. I went to find Sylvia as soon as the next match was lined up. I asked Sylvia what the heck had just happened. She looked at me very deadpan and said: "What are you talking about? Of course that was Wynne Byrd!"

About a week after the July 31 match, Sylvia gathered us all up after practice and said she had an announcement. Sylvia had decided to retire from the Southern Arkansas Lo Lucha League and said that after much consideration she had decided to accept a cash offer for her stake in the business. She wanted to introduce the new partner and pointed at Wynne Byrd, who was dressed in civilian clothes. Wynne stepped up and announced an intention to quit wrestling and focus on "growing the business" and "expanding the capitalization potential" of Lo Lucha wrestling. You know, to sell out.

I felt betrayed and I quit on the spot. All that we had worked for, that I had worked for, gone in an instant. The childhood dream of working with Sylvia to create a product that we believed in, where we would control the story lines, where we would make wrestling great again, betrayed by the allure of that most insidious of all the deadly sins. And I ain't talking about envy.

When I quit, I had forgotten about the Non-compete Agreement I had agreed to when Sylvia and I first started the league. And yes, Wynne Byrd has sued me to enforce it so I can't form my own league for now. But my lawyers insist it won't hold up in court, especially not if Wynne lands in jail.

I did not realize that I knew anything important until I met Martie Keyes at a New Year's party in December 2025. Martie had a few glasses of sparkling Blanc de Blancs (we were in Hermann), and let slip that Martie had worked on the Wynne Byrd fire investigation and got fired for it. I didn't want to accidentally identify my wrestling persona so after the party, I got on my SpaceBook account and found Martie. Ex. 9 is a copy of that post. Martie put me in touch with the prosecuting attorneys and now here I am giving this statement. And risking having my wrestling identity made known to the world before I can make my big come back.

Statement of Martie Keyes

My name is Martie Keyes. I grew up in Olathe, Kansas when it was still a small town. I made it all the way through 11th grade before I decided I had had enough of school. I dropped out and started working for a landscape company. That was easily the hardest I have ever worked in my life. Up at 5 am and try to get as much done before going home at 3. I still lived with my parents, trying to save up enough money for my own place. I lasted there for a year and a half before the accident. I was driving a pickup truck to a job site and dropped my phone onto the floor boards. I bent down to pick it up and I didn't see the small sedan come to a stop in front of me for no apparent reason. I tried to hit my brakes but it was too late and I slammed into the back of the vehicle. I survived, but the occupants of the other vehicle were not so lucky. My employer's insurance company ended up having to pay out the policy limits to get the claims settled. My boss called me up while I was still out under my work comp claim and told me I was fired. I demanded to know why. It's not like it was my fault the other vehicle stopped in front of me. He sighed very loudly and told me the decision was out of his hands. The company would pay for the rest of the time they owed me under work comp, but I was not to return to work once I was healed up.

I took the next few weeks to look for another job. I was fine by then, but I figured if work comp would keep paying for my time off, I could keep getting paid while I looked for work. So I told the doctor I was still struggling with knee pain when that wasn't really true. The doctor kept prescribing me Vicodin for the pain and I took it. This was before we really understood what Vicodin would do to you. I stopped looking for work and spent the next several months in the basement at my parent's home taking hydrocodone.

In my defense, I was only 19 years old and I'm not proud of that part of my life. One day, my older cousin came to see me. She convinced me that I had a serious problem and got me to start going to NA, Narcotics Anonymous. It took a lot of time, and a lot of work, but by the age of 22, I had cleaned myself up. I decided to go back to school. I obtained my GED and enrolled at Arkansas Tech where I majored in criminal justice. I decided I wanted to help people like me who had made some bad choices but were fundamentally good people. After obtaining an associates degree, I enrolled in the Little Rock Police Academy and then joined the Little Rock Police Department as a Patrol Officer. I worked for three years there before taking the detective test, which I passed on my first try. I was promoted to Detective in 2017 at the age of 27.

It's not that I didn't enjoy the work. I did, at least at first. But there is very little room for promotion. The detectives with seniority keep their positions in Violent Crimes pretty much as long as they want or until they retire. There are only so many positions open there. I knew I wanted to be in Violent Crimes so I could investigate the bigger cases, make a bigger name

for myself, maybe even make Lieutenant or even Captain one day. However, that dream got cut short in 2022. I was investigating a drug dealer who was pushing drugs into some of the local middle schools. We knew who he was, but he managed to recruit young children to run drugs out to his customers. There's a lot of bureaucratic red tape about stopping and talking to minors without their parents. But if we didn't stop them and find drugs on them as they left the dealer's home, we couldn't establish probable cause to get a search warrant. I had had enough, knowing these drugs might end up causing some family as much pain as I had caused mine, so I filled out a search warrant application claiming one of the children had accidentally dropped a bag and a white powdery substance fell onto the ground. It wasn't true, but we all knew what was in those bags, and it wasn't bologna sandwiches. We were able to use the warrant to search the guy's house.

It turns out the bags weren't filled with bologna sandwiches but peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The guy we thought was a drug dealer was actually a missionary who had set up what, by all appearances, looked like a flop house. It wasn't. He was giving out free lunches to neighborhood kids as part of his mission work. He agreed not to sue but in exchange, the department had to let me go. I still don't feel like I did anything wrong. My job was to try to protect the people in our neighborhoods. I feel like I did that, even if it meant that one guy had to be inconvenienced for an afternoon.

One of my friends from the force, E.D. Norton, heard about my situation and called me to offer me a job. E.D. retired from the force a couple years before I left and started working as an investigator for Arkansas All Risk Insurance Company, or AARIC for short. There had been an uptick in the number of suspicious claims being turned in and the company was looking to expand its Special Investigative Unit, or SIU. They were looking for people with some law enforcement background to help perform additional investigations into suspect claims. I applied at the headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas, and I got hired right away.

E.D. and I worked on the same team together so I could learn and we could share job tasks. A lot of the first six months was supposed to be training me on AARIC's claim file systems. We had computers available, but most of our paperwork still was done by hand. It was actually a lot like police work. We'd go out and conduct interviews, take photos, hire O&C investigators or engineers to figure out what happened on a claim. Once we had done a reasonable investigation, we would make a recommendation back to the claims handler who actually had file ownership. For a long time, I could not make my own claims decisions and really just worked as an investigator. However, in early 2023, AARIC had a big reorganization and my role got completely changed around. E.D., the most senior of our group, was promoted to Team Manager. AARIC laid off a third of its claims specialists and started referring SIU cases to us to handle from beginning to end, including having us make

the final decision on what to pay, and what to deny. So now, rather than being simply an investigator, I actually had ownership of my claims. I liked the idea of finally having some responsibility again.

In March 2023, a big tornado hit Little Rock so I was busier than I had ever been. Building fraud was rampant, and we spent a lot of time in the field without internet. We frequently had to write down notes by hand, and then enter them into the AARIC computer system when we returned to the office and had reliable internet access. Even after things settled down, I continued to write down notes by hand and then enter them on my computer at home. The internet at my house was sometimes spotty and I didn't always get my notes entered right away.

I received an Instant Message from E.D. about the Byrd fire the morning of August 3, 2024. The IM simply gave me the address and said: "Fire, suspected incendiary." I used the automated AARIC system to locate an O&C, or Origin & Cause Expert. AARIC has an agreement with a number of different companies who are in the region, and then randomly assigns a vendor. I think it's supposed to prevent us from becoming too friendly with the vendors which could create a conflict of interest. The AARIC system spit out Niko Tesli from Icarus Consulting. I had never heard of Niko before and when I looked up that name, I saw almost no experience with determining fire causation. A good O&C is important. We hire the O&C to determine the cause of the fire, not necessarily to deny the claim. In fact, a lot of the time the O&C figures out the fire was caused by an appliance malfunctioning and AARIC can pursue the manufacturer for reimbursement once it pays the claim.

I next called Wynne Byrd, who already had retained an attorney, Ms. Schlarman. We agreed to set up an inspection for Tuesday, August 6 at 9 am. I emailed Niko Tesli, who had to fly in from Philadelphia and couldn't arrive until after 11. I didn't see that as a problem. I met Wynne Byrd at the fire scene along with Ms. Schlarman. It's a little strange to have already hired an attorney, but it's not unheard of. I took out my dictaphone and asked if we could start with a recorded statement. Ms. Schlarman held up her hand, and said I could talk to Byrd, but I could not record it. You catch more flies with honey, as they say, so I agreed not to tape the interview.

The AARIC insurance policy has specific exclusions for fraud and misrepresentation and another for intentional acts by an insured. In other words, if an insured person lies to us about something important to the claim, or if we can establish that the insured intentionally caused the fire, AARIC can deny the claim. For that reason, we are trained to record conversations with our insureds. When we can't, AARIC policy says we are supposed to write down by hand what an insured tells us as close to verbatim and enter it into the claims notes system as soon as we can to ensure accuracy. Ex. 1 are the notes I entered into the computer

system. Unfortunately, I did not enter them until August 30, almost 24 days after I spoke with Byrd. I had to rely on my memory as I had spilled coffee on the notes I took back on August 6 and they were illegible. I don't have any memory of what was said in that conversation outside of what I wrote in my claims notes and I wouldn't be able to tell you what Byrd said without them. I'm sure that I got the essentials correct.

Tesli arrived a few minutes after 11 and we went to go look at the structure, or at least what was left of it. The roof was intact on the front half of the building, but there was obvious damage to the underlayment and a stiff breeze probably would have caused it to collapse under the weight of the slate tiles. The floors had mostly burned through and the second and first floor had collapsed into the basement. The back half of the house was built with slightly different construction, called on-slab, where the floor is built directly on the ground rather than over a basement or a crawl space. This area included the kitchen, a ballroom, and a conservatory. I noticed the stove was still intact, but the burners were all in the off position and it looked like the fire department had disconnected the natural gas and electricity. Tesli took a lot of time sifting through the debris and took a couple of pieces of electrical appliances from the area of origin, but ultimately determined that while we should wait to see the official fire report, it would likely be impossible to determine the cause of the fire.

We returned to the front of the building and let Byrd and Ms. Schlarman know that we were done with our scene investigation and they could start making arrangements to have the debris cleaned up. I got back in my car to return home, but before I could even make it out of Jacksonville, I received a new assignment for a car fire in Faulkner County about halfway back to my house.

I ordered the fire report a few days later and saw that it had been ruled "undetermined." I called Tesli and shared that news and Tesli said there really wasn't any way to disagree based on the facts. I admit I did not include my conversations with Tesli about the causation in my log notes. I can only chalk that up to being overworked and dealing with the stress of back-to-back scenes.

I wasn't ready to let it go, however, and I called the assistant fire chief listed on the report, Billie Jo-El in early September. What I learned changed everything. Jo-El told me about finding the cell phone, the stove knobs in the on position, and Byrd being the only person in the area of origin, as well as the weird comment Byrd made while walking toward the kitchen area. I called up one of our attorneys, Ms. Grape, and asked her to conduct an examination under oath of Wynne Byrd. What Byrd said completely contradicted what I wrote down in my log notes, plus now we had evidence of motive!

An arson defense to an insurance claim rests on evidence of a similar triangle of proof used in most criminal arson cases. The fire must have been incendiary. Jo-El's observation established that. The insured must have had a motive to burn the insured property. The property was purchased for $500,000 but was insured for over $2 million. With all the damage, it would have cost at least $700,000 to rebuild. Finally, the insured must have had the opportunity to set the fire. Byrd's story about going to the wrestling match didn't add up. Somehow, Byrd left the mansion at 8:30, and arrived in Carlisle at 9:05. That's 35 miles away and would take at least 45 minutes, with all the road construction around Jacksonville. Plus, Jo-El's statement about Byrd being the last person in the area near the back of the house put Byrd in the area of the fire at the time it started, which was something Byrd misrepresented to me. I immediately wrote up the claim for denial. I talked over the evidence with E.D., who signed off on the decision. We issued the denial letter December 11, 2024.

I didn't think about the claim again until I was asked to give a deposition. AARIC had been sued for breach of contract and also for defamation. I just tried to tell the truth, as I had nothing to hide. I explained when I input Byrd's initial statement into the claims notes. I also explained that Tesli had ruled the fire "undetermined." The attorney for AARIC stopped the deposition and grabbed my arm and led me out of the room. I got read the riot act in front of E.D. who was waiting in the lobby and everyone else there that day. I reminded the attorney that I was told to just tell the truth. That attorney was exasperated and went back into the conference to meet with Byrd's attorney. I heard raised voices and when the attorney returned, I was told I could leave.

E.D. called me the next day and apologized, but AARIC had decided to let me go. Somehow, I got blamed for not having accurate claims notes which led to the attorneys not including Tesli on some kind of mandatory disclosure and the other side in the case was threatening Rule 11 sanctions. AARIC decided to settle and put the whole thing behind it, including me. I was disgusted. I said some things I probably shouldn't have and slammed the phone down. I went back to landscaping, the job I did as a teenager, and decided the world just wasn't a fair place. Again getting blamed for something that wasn't my fault.

That all changed when I received a SpaceBook post from someone calling themselves "Aristotle's Ghost" who said they had information on the Byrd fire. A copy of that post is Ex. 9. It connected all the dots. Byrd never actually went to the wrestling match that night! Whoever that was, it wasn't Byrd, especially not if the wrestler posing as Byrd left at 9:20 pm and managed to drive from Plato back to the mansion in 25 minutes!

I took the information I had and went to the prosecuting attorney's office so they could track down "Aristotle's Ghost." I just want to see justice done. It wasn't my fault. It was Wynne Byrd.

Statement of E.D. Norton

I am here voluntarily at the request of my employer and they are not requiring either side to subpoena me to attend this deposition or the trial. I am a veteran of the first Iraq war. I served in a non-combat role as a chaplain with the Air Force, working with bombers who came back from missions in the first "video game war." They weren't in any real danger, the Iraqi army didn't have anything that could fly quite that high, but shortly after the bombing raids began, and the soldiers realized that what they were doing was not a video game like it looked on their screens, the toll began to add up. They still did their jobs, they followed orders, but a lot of them began to doubt exactly what it was we were doing. I saw a lot of them return with PTSD, or at least something similar and I tried my best to help them with their consciences.

I have always wanted to help people. That's why I became a chaplain in the first place. After my two years were up, however, Desert Storm was over, and I decided not to reup. Instead, I went back home to live with my sister in Conway, Arkansas. The Little Rock Police Department had a hiring fair and with my military experience, I was a shoo-in for a patrol job. Even as a chaplain I had to undergo a fair amount of training, even if they never expected me to see combat.

I worked my way up in the LRPD, making the rank of Lieutenant by 2011. In 2020, I decided to retire with my full pension and work in another industry that was not quite so stressful. During the time I spent on the force, I had worked on an Arson and Fraud Investigative Task Force with a few Special Investigators from a number of insurance companies. I saw that Arkansas All Risk was hiring and applied for one of their special investigator positions.

What I loved about AARIC's culture is that they encouraged us to actually work towards finding the truth. Some insurers have a culture that is quite the opposite, where SIU staff is encouraged to "root out fraud" at all costs and to err on the side of denying a claim. Instead, I was encouraged to do the work necessary to find coverage whenever and wherever possible. It allowed me to help people through what can be a very stressful time in their lives when their home and their personal property, all of the things that they have worked their whole lives to earn, are all gone in a second. Not that I didn't uncover fraud on occasion or find the occasional arson set by one of our insureds. I did, and while I certainly felt a little guilty recommending AARIC deny their claims, I still felt like they could learn from the experience to become better people. Generally, I would write those claims up for fraud and misrepresentation rather than an intentional act. With an intentional act like arson - burning your house down intentionally - I was required to report it to the NICB, the National Insurance Crime Bureau. And from there, law enforcement could choose to investigate further. But if a claim was turned down for misrepresentation only, I had more flexibility for reporting and I found law enforcement was less likely to pursue charges for something like insurance fraud.

Arson can hurt other people and other people's property, while insurance fraud just hurts the insurance company and maybe the rates go up just a bit. No one is really that upset about it, and hopefully the insureds learn a valuable lesson to always tell the truth.

One of the things I regret most about my time at AARIC was hiring Martie Keyes. Martie was a very dedicated police officer but had some kind of run in with internal affairs and was asked to leave. I knew Martie had a reputation as playing fast and loose with procedures and for coercing confessions out of suspects by less than honorable means. But like I always say, everyone deserves a second chance. I reached out to Martie to apply for one of the investigator spots at AARIC. AARIC was in the midst of a reorganization and Martie was hired for a probationary position with very little responsibility. I'm not sure Martie understood that. Within the first week, Martie had already recommended denial of four claims, even though SIU investigators were just supposed to do the investigation and not make the final decision.

Shortly after Martie joined, AARIC underwent a reorganization, and with any reorganization, certain people get moved up who probably shouldn't and SIU was given over to a new State Coordinator who came from Illinois. I was promoted to team manager for Western and Central Arkansas after our last team manager was demoted to a field adjuster to write estimates for weather losses. The whole tenor of our office changed. It quickly became apparent that the new State Coordinator had an agenda. An informal proclamation was made that if we recommended denying 15% of the claims that came to us, upper management would automatically approve the denial recommendation without taking much a look at the reasons why we were recommending denial. My best guess is there was some kind of conclusion from the number crunchers in the CFO's office that a certain number of insureds would just back off in the face of a denial and then we would defend the rest. That was certainly not the AARIC I had worked for!

But Martie seemed to thrive and denied well more than 15% of their claims. Since I was now Martie's boss again, I tried counseling against so many denial recommendations to management, but each time I would argue against a denial, I was overruled by the State Coordinator.

I first got involved in the Wynne D. Byrd claim shortly after I assigned it to Martie. Martie had a habit of not entering claims notes in a timely fashion. I periodically reviewed Martie's files but can't say that Martie's entries were always accurate because of the delay in entering them. That is my entry in Ex. 1 on August 23. Martie did eventually write up notes from that initial interview. Martie called me in September saying Martie had found proof that the fire was incendiary. It was at the end of a long day and I probably didn't ask for enough information or I would not have signed off on what happened next. Martie asked to hire an

attorney for AARIC to conduct an Examination Under Oath of Byrd. I agreed though I did not feel it was the right thing to do.

After the EUO, Martie wrote up the denial and knowing that my boss would overrule me anyway, I agreed to the denial. I was not surprised when I learned Byrd had filed suit against AARIC for breach of contract. I was very surprised to learn that I too had been sued personally. Byrd alleged that AARIC had sent that denial letter to a reporter who called to ask about the claim. There was a story in The Arkansas Leader about Byrd starting the fire and AARIC denying the claim. Because I signed that denial letter, Byrd alleged that I had made defamatory statements about Byrd to the newspaper. I did not send that letter and I don't have that kind of reputation. But you know who does? Martie. I admit, I don't have any actual proof that it was Martie who sent the letter to The Arkansas Leader but that wouldn't surprise me in the least knowing what I know now.

Both Martie and I were prepped by the AARIC counsel for our depositions. Martie seemed very uncomfortable the whole time we were getting ready. It's weird that someone who must have testified over 100 times as a police officer would be so nervous, but I think it was Martie's first time testifying for the company and I figured knowing that whatever Martie said could bind the company in the litigation must have freaked Martie out somewhat. The attorney asked both of us if the claims notes were 100% accurate and complete. Martie said they were. The lawyer told us to just tell the truth in response to Byrd's attorney's questions.

Martie went first. About fifteen minutes in, the door to the conference room burst open and the now very red-faced attorney for AARIC was shouting at Martie where everyone in the office could hear. Martie shouted back: "But I didn't mean to cover up anything about the O&C! Tesli's just an idiot!" The other attorney came out and told them they should probably keep it down and that everyone, including the court reporter, could hear them.

I asked Martie what had happened. It turns out Martie had hired an O&C but neither that fact nor their conversation about the cause of the fire ever made it into the claim file. Martie told me that sometimes you have to "relax the truth a bit" in order to make sure criminals don't get away with it. I was horrified and immediately fired Martie.

AARIC settled after being threatened with sanctions for failing to identify the O&C as a witness in discovery. I have first-hand knowledge of this fact because I received a copy of the Court's order to show cause why it should not strike AARIC's pleadings. Part of my job duties included overseeing litigation and I personally made the recommendation to my boss's boss to settle the case. The same reporter who had reported on the denial letter saw an opportunity and reported on the details of the settlement. The whole thing was blown out of proportion in the article, but the effect was fairly immediate. I personally received calls from

angry sales agents who sold AARIC policies that the policy holders were outraged at how we treated Wynne Byrd and moved their business to another insurer. The agents only make money if they write policies and without customers, they weren't making money.

AARIC fired the State Coordinator as well after I explained how the change in the environment of the SIU department had led to this particular denial being issued for Wynne Byrd. I was asked to perform a post-mortem on Martie's investigation to improve the SIU claims process going forward into the future. I started by reviewing Martie's claim file again. I was overseeing five investigators and at the time I signed off on the Byrd denial, I admit, I did not read through the whole claim file and instead relied on Martie's report. There were glaring holes in Martie's investigation. Martie never interviewed a single staff member working at the mansion on the night of the fire. It is possible one of the staff would have information as to how the first fire was ignited. Instead, Martie suggested the fire department said there were no witnesses to the ignition of the first fire. I compared that statement to the fire report and nowhere does it mention any interviews taking place. In my experience, it would be very odd for a fire department to conduct such interviews as that is typically done by police.

I also discovered that Martie had never bothered to speak to the insurance agent who wrote the policy. Martie's write up on motive was that Byrd had over-insured the property for more than it was worth. It turns out that Byrd had actually asked the agent to insure the mansion for the amount Byrd paid for the building. The agent had to convince Byrd to pay the extra premium to insure the building for what it would cost to rebuild, which was substantially more.

I am still Team Manager for AARIC. I have five more years before I vest with a yearly pension equal to ⅔ of my final salary with the company and I can retire comfortably. I just have to stop another mess-up like the Wynne Byrd claim from ever happening again.

Statement of Niko Tesli, PE, CFI

My name is Niko Tesli. I was born in a refugee camp after my parents fled from a major conflict. We ended up getting resettled in Italy in 2001 when I was 12. Despite the late start to my schooling, I managed to learn enough Italian and English to make it into secondary school and graduated at the top of my class from "scuola secondaria di secondo grado," which is the equivalent of your American high school. My last two years I spent in technical classes in electrical science. Right about that time, Italy was experiencing an economic crisis and the government and EU began imposing significant austerity measures. One of my teachers recommended trying to get into an American university so I applied. I ended up getting a full ride to the University of Michigan and graduated cum laude with a B.S. in electrical engineering. Rather than return home, I decided to stay in the States and got a job with a small electrical engineering firm that worked on smoke alarm systems for industrial warehouses. I worked there until 2019 when I joined The Icarus Group and worked under Rockie Kelso.

Kelso is a civil engineer who created Icarus to consult with attorneys and insurance companies on various forensic engineering projects. I thought Kelso was amazing and I still do! Kelso's background is in civil, so buildings, roads, that sort of thing, but has hours and hours of training on forensic engineering for product defects, accident reconstruction, and failure modeling for catastrophic bridge collapses. If you have an engineering question, Kelso will have an answer for you, except for electrical engineering. Kelso saw that there was this gap in the services Icarus could provide and chose me to fill it.

Kelso is a big believer in expanding one's knowledge and soon after I started, suggested that I take some courses in fire science so I could become certified to do fire scene investigations and Icarus could offer insurance companies and other clients not only Origin and Cause opinions but also electrical failure mode opinions.

Electricity has certainly been a huge boon to humanity. Even more than the ability to speak, electricity sets us apart from all other living species. Sure, birds use electrical fields to navigate as they migrate each season and some species of eel generate enough current to shock predators, but when's the last time you saw an eel turn on a light switch? And the technology really isn't even that old. The great battle between Westinghouse and Edison for dominance of the electrical market wasn't settled until the 1880's when the advantages of AC current finally won out, and soon thereafter, most homes in American and Europe began to rely on electrical power.

But as incredible as electricity is, it accounts for around 51,000 fires each year, with $1.3 billion in losses to property, not to mention 500 deaths and 1,400 injuries. So you can see

why Kelso wanted a piece of that business. Electrical fires affect a lot of people and businesses and someone needs to pay for it.

There are a lot of ways to certify as a CFI, or certified fire investigator. I took online courses totaling 25 hours of schoolwork and applied to a professional organization, the Professional Organization of Fire Safety, or POOFS. I had to pay $250 and took an open book test where I had to score a 70% or better. It's a good thing I was allowed to take it as many times as I wanted as it took me three tries to make it through. There were just some concepts that I had a hard time with. But now, since I passed my test, I am both an electrical engineer and a Certified Fire Investigator.

It's true that the fire at the Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Theater is the first fire that I investigated as a CFI. Kelso and I spoke at our weekly Vroom meeting on August 5, 2024. "Niko," Kelso said, "It's time you start paying back on the investment I've made in you. We got a call from your first client, Arkansas All Risk Insurance Company." I was a little taken aback. English might be my third language, but I understood the threat in Kelso's words. I had been hired for over a year and was getting paid pretty well, but I hadn't been able to pull in any fire investigation claims to justify my salary. I knew that I needed to investigate the fire and do my best to make the client happy. A happy client means a happy boss.

I flew out to Arkansas on the company jet from Philadelphia, where we are based. I arrived on the scene August 6, 2024 around 11:15. I met Martie Keyes, the claims adjuster, there and introduced myself to Wynne Byrd and Byrd's attorney, Ms. Schlarman. I have to confess, I was not exactly sure where to start. I think Martie got a little impatient with me as the four of us stood there waiting for someone to make the first move. Martie broke the silence: "Why don't we go look where the fire started?" Ah, I thought, that seems sensible. I learned from Martie that there had actually been two separate fires. The first fire was found in the front room but had been extinguished within just a few minutes. We were not able to safely access that part of the structure because it had collapsed into the basement and it looked like the second fire had completely destroyed any hope we might have had to analyze the fire scene. However, based on what I now understand about the fire scene from reading the fire department report, it is likely that the first fire was "accidental" as it occurred near curtains and did not have any competent ignition source nearby. It is likely a guest or host accidentally left a candle burning too close to some combustible materials, allowing the fire to start and spread.

Martie told me there had been a second fire when there was an explosion that had come from the rear of the home. Amazingly, the kitchen area was more intact than the front of the structure. The floor had not caved in. I didn't see a crawl space or basement under the floor and the roof had been blown off that part of the house so I felt safe inspecting the area. The

only appliance still there was a brand new industrial gas stove. If only it had been electric! I had not seen the photo taken by the fire department at that time. All I could see was that the stove was in pretty good condition considering it had been near an explosion. It appeared to be the only device that used natural gas and because of the explosion, I had to assume that gas must have somehow leaked from the stove and ignited from a source further away from the stove. If the ignition source had been right next to the stove, the explosion would have damaged the stove in a much more significant way. As it was, it suffered a small bit of heat damage to the door, small enough I couldn't be sure it hadn't been there before the fire.

I thought it was pretty unlikely that anyone would be able to determine the cause of the fire. I did my due diligence anyway and picked up a number of smaller electrical appliances that had been strewn around during the explosion. I packaged them up and took them with me to be stored back at the warehouse at Icarus. I thanked Martie and Wynne Byrd for the opportunity to look at the fire scene and said that I would have a report back to Martie in a few days.

Before I wrote my report, I called Martie to explain the bad news. There simply was not enough evidence left to come up with a plausible cause of the fire. Martie was extremely upset and threatened to have a word with my boss if I didn't come up with an explanation. But I couldn't. A day later, I got an IM from Kelso, who wanted me to call right away. I did, and before I could explain, Kelso said: "I really thought this was going to work out. But I can't have someone who can't decide on what causes fires working here. You're fired."

Fine, I thought, my parents managed to escape a war zone. I can figure this out. And I did. I called up a friend of mine from Michigan and together we formed Phoenix Consulting. I wanted to put my CFI and electrical engineering degree to work but not for insurance companies. I learned my lesson with Martie Keyes. Since forming Phoenix, I have worked over a dozen fires for various insureds who have been accused of setting fires at their homes or businesses.

I received a call from one of the attorneys for Wynne Byrd. My name had come up in the civil litigation around the fire and they asked if I would be willing to look at some new information that they had found. I agreed and they sent me the fire department report and the photo taken the day after the fire of the stove that shows one of the burners on. I think the fire department wasn't all that great with their cell phone camera, as I would have taken a photo of all the burners. I have not read any of the statements taken in the criminal case against Byrd and I don't plan to before trial. Apparently, our prices are a bit high at $550 an hour and Byrd is paying quite a bit for the defense attorneys as it is. I have already spent around 20 hours reviewing materials up to the time of this deposition. I charge a flat rate of $12,000 for trial attendance but that includes everything from prep to travel to trial attendance.

Once I saw the photo, I was pretty sure I knew what happened. One of the kitchen staff likely bumped the burner knob, or somehow managed to turn it on without triggering the pilot light. I'm positive there was only one burner on; otherwise, the fire department would have taken a photo of all six burners. I calculated the time it would take for the gas to build up in the kitchen using standard pressure from the utility into the mansion and from only one burner being on. Each burner is designed to release gas at the same rate regardless of the number of burners that are on. The gas and oxygen in the room would have reached an explosive level in right around an hour. In the absence of oxygen, natural gas won't ignite. Combustion happens when there is a spark or flame near the gas in the presence of oxygen. Normally you get a controlled burn, like on a stove. But in an enclosed space, the two mix and can create a chain reaction when they reach the right ratio. All it takes is a spark.

But what could have caused the spark, I wondered. Then I remembered that I had removed a number of electrical appliances from the kitchen debris. With a little bit of luck, there would still be a litigation hold on the items. Byrd's attorneys subpoenaed the items and had them delivered to my lab. I looked at all the smaller items that would have been out on the counter and they all appeared to have been off at the time of the fire. However, the vent hood was a different story. It would have been directly over the stove when the fire occurred and the switch was in the "on" position when I originally packaged it. It would have had electricity supplied to it so that it could operate a fan to exhaust smoke and cooking smells outside the kitchen. When I opened up the fan motor, I took the photos labeled as Ex. 4a and 4b. I immediately saw what caused the fire.

Electric motors at their most basic are copper wire wrapped around a magnet. When current is pushed through the wire, it causes a magnetic field that causes the magnet to spin. As copper ages, especially in the presence of acidic smoke like in a hood vent, the copper begins to deteriorate. Over decades, the copper develops little indentations. The electricity continues its course through the copper, but every so often the electrons have to jump between one piece of wire to the next. This causes something called resistance heating and the copper begins to deform, causing even bigger spots to form. Sometimes the resistance heating gets hot enough that it melts the wire creating an even bigger gap. The arc can be hot enough to cause lint or other organic material to ignite. It can also cause small sparks to form, a phenomenon known as arcing. Normally, a circuit breaker or fuse box will trigger and shut off the electricity before the defect causes a fire. But not in this situation. The current to run that kind of fan is relatively small, so it would not have drawn enough electricity to trip a breaker so long as the sparks were short lived. The copper wire showed signs of deterioration consistent with the corrosive process I just described. Photo 5a shows the oxidation on one wire, and after I cleaned off the oxidation from that wire, I took 5b, which clearly shows signs of arcing activity.

Within a reasonable degree of fire investigative and electrical engineering certainty, the copper in the motor sparked, causing the gas that had built up in the kitchen over the course of an hour to ignite. I do agree that it is possible that another ignition source could have been present in the kitchen, but I am a scientist. One can only hypothesize with the evidence that is actually in front of you. I prepared the map marked as Ex. 6 where I believe the two fires originated.

It is my expert opinion that Byrd could not have caused the second fire. The fire was not incendiary and because I have found the cause, I can now officially rule the fire "accidental." The wire in the electrical box would not be accessible and I had to open it up to find the corrosion on the wire which means it was closed when the explosion occurred and was not caused by human interaction. Plus, the hour it would have taken for the gas to build up means Byrd was still at the wrestling event whenever the gas was accidentally turned on.

Q: Can you please state your name?

A: Wynne Byrd.

Q: And Wynne, do you mind if I call you Wynne?

A: Yes, that's fine.

Q: Wynne, what do you do for a living?

A: I guess you could say I am an accountant. But not like a CPA, I mean I have a degree in accounting, and I keep books for my client, but primarily I invest my client's money in businesses that I feel will be able to grow that money. I also partner with small local businesses and help teach them how to better run their operation to increase profitability.

Q: Who is your client?

A: I'm afraid I can't answer that question for you. My attorney has told me that I need to assert my right against self-incrimination under the 5th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Did I say that right?

Ms. Schlarman: Yes, that's correct.

Q: Alright. Let me ask you this, how do you make your money?

A: Can I answer that one? Okay, first of all, I do receive a small salary for the accounting work I do, but most of my income is from my own investments. I actually had quite a bit of money saved up from a trust fund my grandmother left for me. Whenever I invest my client's money in a business, I also try to invest some of my own money, too. Not enough to overtake my client's controlling stake but enough that if I made a good choice with the investment, I also make money. I know, it probably sounds like a conflict of interest but like I said, I'm not a CPA or technically a financial planner and my boss knows about it.

Q: Well, tell me about the bankruptcy.

A: I see you've done your homework. Yes, my partner Martine and I had to declare bankruptcy in 2021. On my advice, my boss had purchased a large stake in the Blue Cat Lounge and Martine and I had invested some of our own money. Martine and I moved into one of the cottages on the property after we moved down here from Chicago. We had taken out a large sum of cash from our holdings, planning to make other investments. There's nothing like holding a wad of cash up to a small business owner in a depressed economy and offering them cash for a stake in their company. Anyway, Martine let slip to a group of people at the Blue Cat Lounge that we were looking to invest, not realizing that those people were attached

to a local crime ring. They managed to break in and steal all of the cash we had. I didn't think it was a huge deal because we had insurance. What I didn't realize is that you have to separately insure cash with your insurer or they put a very low limit of liability on the policy. The Blue Cat only insured cash of up to $1000. All of the money we'd planned to use to make periodic payments into the businesses we now partially owned was just gone. I had several very unhappy business partners who threatened to sue us to require us to make our contributions. So we had no choice. We had to declare bankruptcy, which put a halt to the immediate threat of lawsuits.

Q: So what happened to Martine?

A: We found we couldn't trust one another anymore. Martine left and I have lived separately ever since.

Q: I heard Martine's body was found on a boat just off the coast down in Miami.

A: Apparently so. I'm not sure anyone learned exactly what happened.

Q: I'm sorry to hear that. Well, let's turn to your purchase of the Charles Black mansion. Where did you get the money to pay for that?

A: I had taken out a large life insurance policy when Martine and I were still together. I mean, if your life and business partner were to suddenly die, it would be devastating. So I purchased a $1 million life policy on Martine. I had completely forgotten about it because the premiums were deducted from my bank account automatically. It turns out it was still in force when Martine was discovered and the life insurer paid out to me as the beneficiary.

Q: So Martine dies under somewhat questionable circumstances and you receive a windfall of $1 million?

Ms. Schlarman: Objection! We are here about the fire loss claim. Your question is completely improper!

Q: Fine, I'll withdraw it. So Wynne, let's talk about the dinner theater you opened in the Charles Black mansion. Why a dinner theater?

A: It's something Martine and I loved to do back in Chicago. We'd get all dressed up and pretend to be someone else for the evening. I had done a lot of improv back in college. The dinner theater let us indulge in that skill again.

Q: Tell me about how it operated as a business. First of all, how much did you buy the mansion for?

A: It was a real bargain. $500,000. I know real estate values in the big cities have increased like crazy in the last couple years, but not so much in smaller towns. Charles Black's niece? Maybe nephew? I don't know…"Dijon" somebody. Well, they owned the place and had put in a full industrial kitchen, but after Black died, they went to Europe to start a culinary career there. The one thing they neglected to install was a modern vent hood for the kitchen. The house sat empty for a bit, but when I saw it was for sale, I immediately put a bid in on it.

Q: How much did you insure it for?

A: I think you've got the policy there.

Q: $2 million?

A: Yes that's right. Look, I put basically all of the life insurance money into buying the mansion and starting the theater, and I'd need not only my investment back, but some extra if anything should ever happen to the mansion so I could start my life back up again. Plus, there is no way to rebuild a gorgeous house like that for what I paid for it.

Q: So tell me about Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Theater.

A: You really don't need that much staff to start a murder mystery theater. I chose to be one of the cast members as well as the director and the writer for the productions to save on some of the upfront cost. I reached out to some of the kitchen staff at the Blue Cat Lounge to provide food for the productions and I got to writing. We were able to open with our first production, "The Death of Julius Caesar" on June 14, 2024.

Q: Seems like everyone would blame Brutus.

A: Yeah, but that was the twist. It turned out everyone had a hand in the death of Caesar. Brutus just pushed in the last knife.

Q: So what was the production at the time of the fire?

A: I quickly discovered that a small town can't support a mystery theater six or even five nights a week. I had a full house the first couple nights, but then the numbers started to dwindle. We were in a smaller town. We switched to a Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday schedule and I frantically tried to write more stories to get repeat customers. July 31, 2024 was the opening of "Westworld Abbey." It was set in the wild west but instead of the guests being the ones to sit down for dinner, we switched it up and had the guests serve the hosts, who played the parts of fabulously wealthy railroad tycoons. The guests would catch snippets of conversation while serving the robber barons and would then discuss with the other guests while they ate their own meals back in the kitchen. Everything was catered and pre-plated so no one would have to use the stove.

Q: Where were you?

A: Because it was opening night, I was there at the beginning to direct the guests to the kitchen as they arrived. We hadn't told anyone about the concept and I wanted to be there to make sure it started off smoothly.

Q: Tell me how the fire started.

A: I have no idea!

Q: Weren't you there?

A: No, I left around 8:30. I think the fire department told me the fire started around 9:00 pm.

Q: Where did you go?

A: After Martine and I split, I started looking for other outlets for my time. One of my former employees from the Blue Cat emailed me one day about getting injured while wrestling and asked if I could help with some of the medical bills, which I did. But I thought, wrestling? That's crazy! So I reached out to Sylvia Sam, the showrunner for the wrestling outfit, and asked if I could join. She said she was looking for someone to replace her injured wrestler and agreed to have me come on. The best part is they were experimenting with Lo Lucha masked wrestling, where your identity is hidden behind a mask, and they were trying out a form of co-ed wrestling where matchups are based on size and skill rather than gender.

Q: Seriously, Lo Lucha wrestling? You don't seem like much of an athlete.

A: No, probably not. But I worked hard and I like to think I got better.

Q: So what time did you arrive at your match?

A: The match was down in Carlisle, which is about 35 miles away. I probably got there at 8:05.

Q: Who was your match against?

A: I don't recall.

Q: Can you tell me anything about the match at all?

A: No, not really. The fire really took most of my attention that night. I can't tell you anything else about the match or what time I left.

Q: Did someone tell you about the fire?

A: No, I do recall heading back right after the match to the mansion. I remember seeing a bright glow in the sky as I got close and two fire trucks parked out in front with a number of guests and all of my staff huddled up outside. I went up to the person who looked to be in

charge and asked what had happened. This person – we'll say the Fire Captain – was short of breath but managed to get out that there had been a fire and asked for an interview. I do recall that this Fire Captain somehow had my cell phone. I have no idea how - I thought I had it with me the whole night but it suddenly rang and the Fire Captain pulled it out of a pocket and gave it to me.

Q: Who was it that called?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Do you still have the phone?

A: No. It broke shortly after the fire. I think I dropped it or something.

Q: Can we get phone records?

A: I know you asked for those and I think we tried and were told that since it was a prepaid phone, there was nothing we could do. So again, I'm sorry I can't help you.

Q: So we have no way to figure out who was on the other end of the call?

A: I guess that's true. I really am sorry.

Q: Were you still there when the second fire happened?

A: I was. It was so scary. I had been told I couldn't go back into the house until the firefighters cleared the scene. I hadn't gone to the restroom since I left for wrestling. There was an old outhouse that I hadn't tried using since I bought the mansion maybe fifty feet from the back of the house. I had been told that it still worked so I went back there to take care of, well you know. I had just managed to rearrange my spandex wrestling suit when I heard a giant roar. The outhouse actually rocked a little bit. I hurriedly put the spandex back into place and ran out to find the firefighters who were still in the front yard.

Q: Did you have anything to do with setting either fire?

A: Absolutely not.

Q: Thank you, Wynne. That's all I have for you today.

8-5-24, 3:12 pm EDT - MK

Contacted Icarus for C&O. Only person available is Niko Tesli. Emailed C&O to coordinate time for inspection.

8-23-24, 9:02 am EDT - EDN
Martie, your inspection and interview was 8-5-20. Please try your best to enter claims notes right away!

8-30-24, 9:53 pm EDT - MK
Interview with NI, Named Insured Byrd, and inspection of risk on 8-6-24.

Financials - accountant, self-employed. Purchased risk as investment shortly before fire. Upgraded kitchen and plumbing to bring house up to code to operate Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Dinner Theater. No year-over-year comparables for business as only open 45 days at time of fire.

Facts of loss – NI not at scene at time of first fire, at wrestling meet in Carlisle, 45 minutes away. Received a call from fire department who told about first fire. Returned to scene after fire department had extinguished first fire.

NI speaking with Fire Department when heard explosion at rear of risk. Followed fire department to rear of building, back half of building blown off in explosion. No known candles, fire places, other ignition source in kitchen other than stove, per NI. No gas can, propane, or other combustible in kitchen other than gas stove, installed by prior owner in 2016. New vent fan installed in 2024 to bring kitchen up to code.

Inspection: area of origin inaccessible for first fire for safety reasons. Second fire at rear of structure, per O&C obvious incendiary fire. Will not request report at this time.

Recommendation: move to EUO and request financials to determine motive.

****

11-26-24 7:49 am EST - MK
EUO Summary - Financials - refused to testify as to employer. Suspect Cartel. Declared recent bankruptcy, received cash settlement from ex-business partner life insurance policy used to purchase risk. Overinsured by $1.5 million.

Facts of loss - left scene to be in wrestling match, different than at time of statement. No cell phone records available to verify location. Returned at 9 after first fire. Went to rear of structure before second fire, different than at time of statement. In outhouse when exploded. Statement = No involvement in either fire.

Recommendation: denial based on fraud and misrep, and intentional act.

Arkansas All Risk Insurance Company

Stan Smith Insurance Agency
222 Lake Rd.
Litle Rock, AR 72204

Eff. Dates:02/15/24 - 02/15/25
Policy No.: 2024BC12340-C

Named Insured: Wynne D. Byrd
11749 Mansion Ave
Sherwood, AR 72120

DECLARATIONS

This Declarations is a summary of the coverages contained within your insurance policy. All coverages listed below are subject to the terms and conditions contained within your policy booklet and any endorsements.

Property Coverages:

	Coverage Amount	Deductible	Premium
Coverage 1 – structure	$2,000,000	N/A	$ 2,632
Coverage 2 – contents	$1,250,000		$ incl.
Coverage 3 – ALE	$ 10,000		$ incl.

Liability Coverages:

Commercial General Liability	$2,000,000 per year	$2,410
Medical Payments	$ 5,000	$incl.

Total Premium **$5,042**

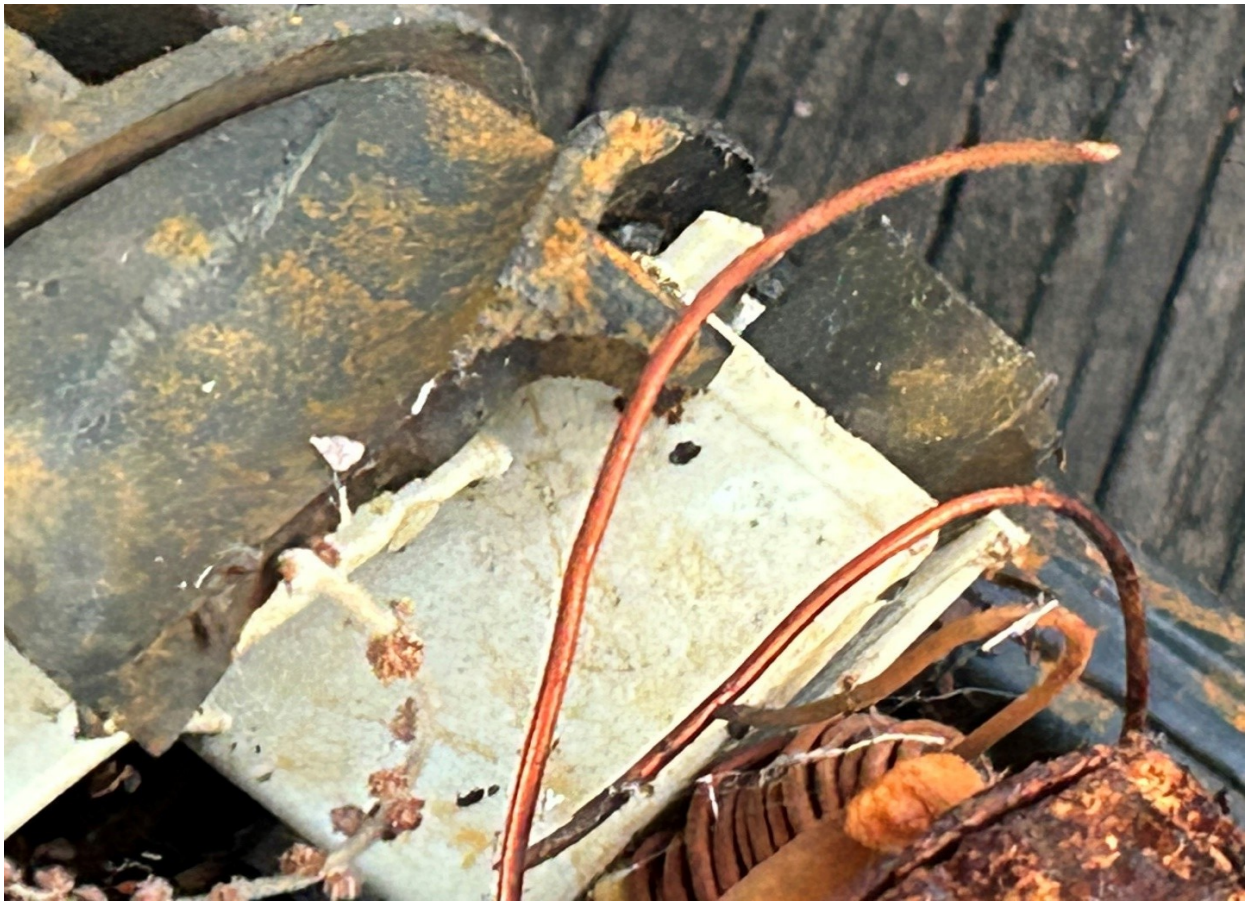
The policy is comprised of this Declarations and the following documents and endorsements:
Policy Booklet ISO 7287 (03/15), Endorsement E5675309, Endorsement 2012, Endorsement BR 2049


LEFT
REAR

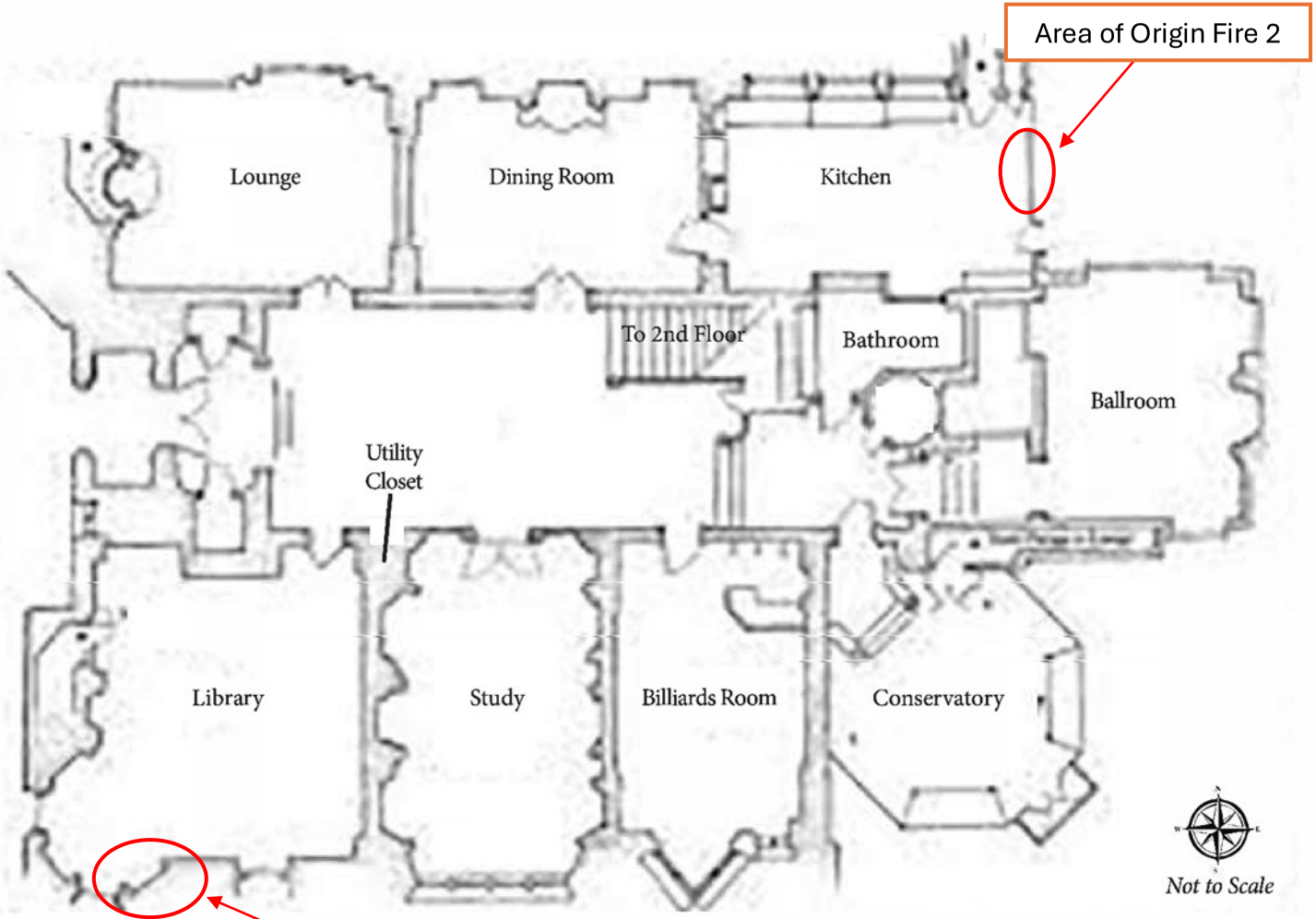








Mr. Boddy's Murder Mystery Theater
Black Mansion
1st Floor



Line 1

Fire type ☐ Suspicious Circumstances ☑ Injuries- number 1

☑ Undetermined ☐ Deaths- number

Line 2

Address of the fire 11749 Mansion Rd., Sherwood, AR

Line 3

Date the fire occurred: July 31, 2024 Time: 8:50 pm

Line 4

Is the property insured? ☑ Yes ☐ No If yes, Name of Insurance Co. AARIC

Insurance Company contact person (if known): Martie Keyes Phone: 501-555-XXXX

Estimated value of the property: $500,000 Estimated damage: Total

Line 5

Owner's name: Wynne Byrd Phone: 212-432-XXXX

Line 6

Name of person reporting fire: Sarah Bardol Phone: 501-598-XXXX

Other witnesses: Phone:

Line 7

Responding Personnel: Capt. Jo-El Jones Barnett

Line 8

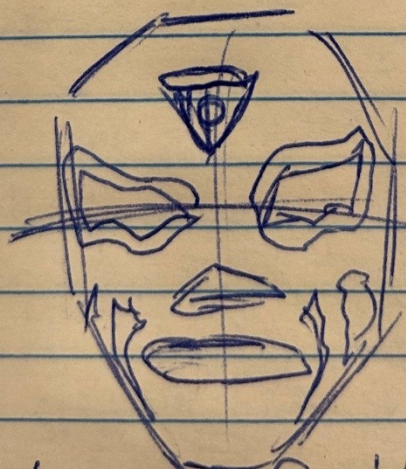
Brief description: Units 3 and Pumper 2 responded to a call reporting the smell of smoke. When they arrived, they found the front area of the structure partially engulfed in flames. Cap. Jo-El and Volunteer Fire Fighter Jones entered the structure and extinguished all visible flames. Jo-El's rebreathing apparatus malfunctioned, but Jones was able to pull Jo-El to safety. No cause for the fire could be found and the damage was limited to flame damage to curtains and a nearby waste basket. After a check for additional hot spots, personnel cleared the scene. While still on site, an explosion occurred in the rear of the structure causing extensive damage to the structure. Further fire suppression efforts were unsuccessful. No cause for the explosion could be determined. Both fires are ruled by this department to be undetermined.

8-31 lineup

Intro - ~~8~~:55

9 pm Socrates v. Meletus
9:10 pm El Prodigio v. El Enterrador
~~9:10~~ pm La Telenovela (Lucy) v. ~~La~~ Cardura Una (Mackenzie)
9:25 pm
~~9:25~~ pm El Serpiente Blanco v. Hermana Pesadilla Retorcida
9:40
~~9:45 pm~~ ~~El Prodigio v. El Enterrador~~

9:55 Maria Feliz v. El Pastel de Queso (Helena)



New mask for Helena?

The Ghost of Socrates:

This may seem a little weird, but we met a few days ago, and I can't actually tell you who I am. I may have information about the fire at the old Charles Black Mansion. Can you tell me who I should contact?

Re: The Ghost of Socrates:

No, that's amazing. I was just telling someone about this case at a party a few nights ago. Carmen something. I may have had a few too many that night. Maybe you know them? Either way, please contact the attorney general's office, they have an investigation going into Wynne Byrd! I'm going to nail that sucker to the wall!