

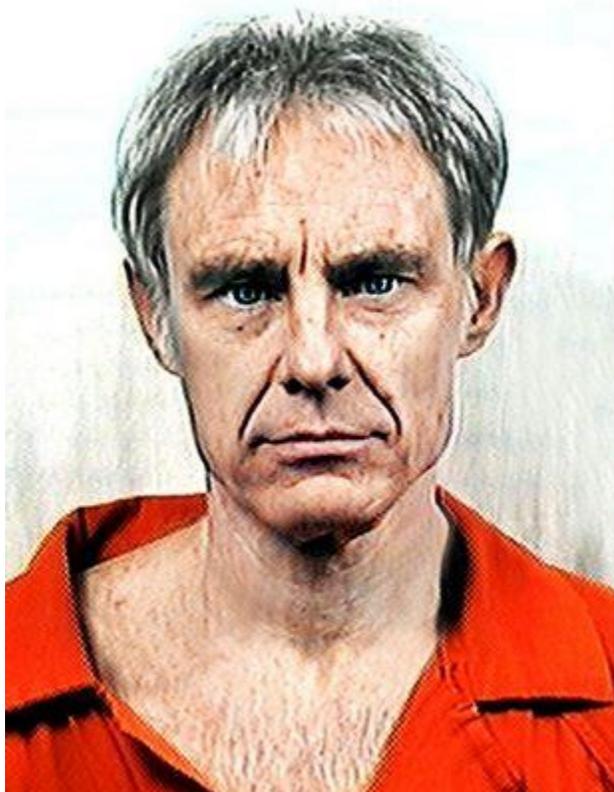
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Abortion doctor strangled and beat his wife to death on Valentine's Day before returning to work

- 07:00, 14 Feb 2016
- By Gail Shortland

Dr John Hamilton chose the most romantic day of the year to kill his wife of 14 years...



John brutally killed his wife Susan, then went back to the surgery to perform an op

Mild-mannered Dr John Hamilton was known for being a romantic – and for being devoted to his wife Susan. On their wedding day, he surprised her with a Porsche, and throughout their 14-year marriage he lavished her with expensive gifts and luxury holidays. The Hamiltons appeared to be deeply in love.

Which is why it's even more baffling that John chose Valentine's Day – the most romantic day of the year – to end Susan's life.

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Dr Hamilton was a talented obstetrician-gynaecologist in Oklahoma City. When he met Susan in 1985, they were both divorced with four children between them. Susan was attractive, intelligent and people loved to be around her. John was soon head over heels in love.

The couple married two years later and settled into a privileged life. Susan started working part-time at John's clinic, but it came at a price. As well as delivering babies, John, 53, was involved with abortions, and it attracted criticism in the conservative state. There were protests, John's face was put on a 'Wanted' poster and Susan received threatening calls.

On Valentine's Day 2001, John left their house early for surgery, then returned home to exchange cards with Susan before heading back to conduct his second operation of the day. Waiting at the local florist was a huge bunch of expensive red orchids John had ordered for his wife, but before he could pick them up, he was dialling 911.

"Please send police. Please send an ambulance, please," he cried. "I think my wife is dead." He told the operator he was trying CPR. "Please send somebody quick," he begged.

When paramedics arrived, it was a sickening scene. John claimed he had returned home and discovered Susan, 55, in a pool of blood on the bathroom floor. She'd been strangled with two neck ties and her head had been smashed with such force that parts of her brain were exposed. The unknown weapon was never found.

John was covered in Susan's blood and was hysterical as he stared down at his wife's unrecognisable face. Who would kill her with such brutality?

Susan had received threats from anti-abortion activists. Had she been killed to punish John? The police didn't think so. They had their suspicions and their prime suspect. John said he'd tried mouth-to-mouth but there was none of Susan's blood on his face despite her facial injuries.

At the crime scene, there was no sign of forced entry, nothing stolen and no bloody footprints leading away from the carnage.

Then police found the Valentine's Day card Susan had given her husband that morning. Inside, the message read: "I bought this two weeks ago, so I guess maybe it doesn't seem as appropriate. But I do love you. Have a good day. Susan." Her words made police question whether the marriage was as perfect as it seemed.

One of Susan's friends revealed that the couple had argued after Susan had discovered John had been making calls on his mobile to a topless dancer. While John insisted she was just a patient he was trying to help, Susan accused him of having an affair.



The couple had been married for 14 years and everything seemed perfect

John was taken to the police station. They noticed that during the car journey there that he was scraping his knuckles on the mesh divider – was he trying to hide injuries on his hands?

The time slot to kill between surgeries was tight, but when investigators discovered he'd been late for his second operation, he was charged and denied bail.

However, John had plenty of supporters. Even when details about the stripper were revealed, public opinion was that at worst he had stepped over a professional boundary. If he'd been having an affair, perhaps his mistress had killed Susan?

When the trial started in December 2001, in the majority of people's eyes, John remained a gentle, kind and devoted husband.

Prosecutors said Susan had confided in friends that she was considering a divorce. The couple had argued after they'd exchanged cards in the morning. While John was cleaning up with a rag found at the scene, he was paged to perform surgery at the clinic so left, dumping the weapon and his clothes on the way. Then he returned later to 'discover' the body.

Blood on his cuff

Susan's blood and skin were found on John's steering wheel. Also, while loved ones were sorting through Susan's clothes they found some of her jewellery hidden in her underwear. It was unlike her – had John put it there to look as if it had been stolen?

He never got the chance to retrieve it. There was also blood on his shoe, consistent with splatter from an 'alive' Susan.

John's defence team said investigators hadn't looked into the threats from anti-abortionists enough. When he took the stand, he said he loved his wife and insisted he'd tried to save her. He explained the blood on his steering wheel by saying he'd moved his car for the emergency vehicles. He and the stripper also denied an affair.

The defence team brought out a blood expert, who testified that the blood patterns on John were consistent with him trying to save his wife. But when the expert was asked under oath if there was anything that had been missed, he alerted the court to splatter inside John's cuff. He said it was likely to have been the result of John forcing a blow to Susan's head.

It turned the case around. A man hired by the defence had unwittingly become the prosecution's ultimate weapon.

The jury took two hours to find John guilty of first-degree murder. He was later sentenced to life in prison without the chance of parole.

"The majority of the jurors were very disappointed they didn't have the sentence of death as an option," the judge said. "You should consider yourself very lucky."

John continues to appeal the conviction but has so far been denied a retrial. His supporters still believe he's innocent and that he loved his wife too much to hurt her.

But it wasn't his love for Susan that was in question. It was whether he was responsible for her terrible death.