

Wikipedia – Helle Crafts – Woodchipper Murder

Helle Crafts ⁽ⁱ⁾ **Hell-Ah Craf-Ts** (born **Helle Lorck Nielsen**, July 4, 1947 – November 19, 1986) was a [Danish flight attendant](#) murdered by her husband, airline pilot Richard Crafts. Her death led to the first murder conviction in [Connecticut without the victim's body](#).^[1]

Disappearance^[edit]

Helle Nielsen and Richard Crafts married in 1979 and settled in [Newtown, Connecticut](#). Helle continued working while raising their three children. By 1985 Helle had learned about Richard's several affairs and began divorce proceedings. On the night of November 19, 1986 a friend dropped Helle off at the couple's home. This was the last time anyone but her husband saw her.

Over the next few weeks, Helle's husband gave her friends a variety of stories as to why they were unable to reach her – that she was visiting her mother in [Denmark](#), that he did not know where she was, that she was with a friend in the Canary Islands. Friends grew concerned because they knew about Richard's aggression and temper; Helle had told some of them, "If something happens to me, don't think it was an accident."^[2]

The case^[edit]

In the Crafts home police found pieces of carpet taken from the master bedroom floor. The family's nanny recalled that a dark, grapefruit-sized stain had appeared in an area of the carpet now missing. There was also a blood smear on the side of the bed. Richard's credit card records showed several unusual purchases around the time Helle vanished, including a freezer that was not found in the house, bed sheets, a comforter, and rental of a [woodchipper](#). In papers provided to a private investigator by Helle was found a receipt for a [chainsaw](#), which was later found in [Lake Zoar](#) in [Newtown, Connecticut](#), covered in hair and blood matched to Helle by DNA.^[1]

A snowplow driver had seen Richard using a woodchipper near the shore of Lake Zoar, during a severe snowstorm late on the night Helle was last seen. In or near the lake police found many pieces of metal and some 3 ounces (85 g) of human tissue, including a tooth with unique dental work, a toenail covered in pink nail polish, bone chips, 2660 bleached-blond human hairs, fingernails and [O type](#) blood (the same type as Helle's). This led the police to conclude the remains had gone through a woodchipper. The forensic investigation was led by [Henry Lee](#).^[1]

It is believed that Richard struck Helle in the head with something blunt (at least twice, leaving the blood stains found) then kept her body in the freezer for some time. He later took the body to the river, where he cut it apart with the chainsaw, putting the pieces through the woodchipper.

A prosecution requires an official determination of death, which is typically done by identification of a body – which was not available in this case. After the found tooth was matched to Helle's dental records, the Connecticut State Medical Examiner's Office issued a death certificate; Richard was arrested in January 1987. His trial (moved to New London, Connecticut due to extensive publicity) began in May 1988, but ended in July with a [hung jury](#).

A second trial (in Norwalk, Connecticut) ended in a guilty verdict on November 21, 1989. Richard was sentenced to serve 50 years in prison.^{[2][3]} He will be eligible for parole in 2021.^[4]

In popular culture^[edit]

The special edition DVD of the 1996 film *Fargo* contains a statement that the film was inspired by the Helle Crafts case,^[5] although other accounts exist regarding its basis.^{[6][7][8][9]}

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Helle_Crafts