

Excerpt from “The Stranger Inside” © sourced exclusively from court records in Florida’s Ninth Judicial Circuit. 2000 words from a 90k word draft.

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In this excerpt, Casey Anthony meets a boy who would become her fiancé, Jesse, and soon learns she is pregnant from a different man. Her parents tell her the entire family will deny the pregnancy because they fear who the baby’s father may be. That decision by the Anthony family is the beginning of the greatest hoax on law enforcement, the media, and the public in American criminal history. The hoax brings tragedy when someone in the Anthony family kills the baby, named Caylee Anthony.

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In January 2005 a young security guard named Jesse was monitoring grounds for the sprawling mega-tourist attraction at Orlando’s, Universal Studios. He stopped and noticed the new girl taking pictures for visitors and he struck up a conversation. Seven months later, that girl’s baby was born, her name was Caylee, Caylee Marie Anthony. After Casey’s trial, in a CNN interview with Greta Van Susteren Jesse talked about what he remembered from that first day he met Casey Anthony.

Greta Van Susteren: *“Now, at some point, your relationship developed into much more than just co-workers. Tell me how that developed. I mean, what was it about her that you were interested in? Why did you find her intriguing?”*

Jesse Grund: *“Well at the time I was working as a loss prevention officer, undercover security, just walking around Universal Studios. And I saw this young woman, short, very beautiful, carried herself very professionally, working at one of the Kodak stores, and it was love at first sight. She was definitely my type and we just – we hit it off and started dating. And next thing you know, I’m falling in love with her.”*



Greta Van Susteren: *When you first met her, obviously at that point she probably was already pregnant. Did she ever talk about any other guy in her life?*

Jesse Grund: *“Well, she said she dated somebody in high school the year before but she had not really had any serious relationships. She said I was different from anybody else. There was a definite chemistry (we both felt) there and a difference between the*

two of us. And I had, you know, dated other people before, but I felt something very different with Casey than I did with anybody else.”

At this first meeting, there was no way Jesse could know his eighteen-year-old new friend was pregnant; and she didn't know either. In a few months she found out and started sharing the news with her friends. They exchanged ideas about colors for the nursery, which baby clothes to buy and in general they shared the sublime anticipation of a baby's birth. Lauren was one of dozens of Casey's friends interviewed in the Orange County State Attorney's offices.

Detective Kevin Kraubetz: *“OK, were you guys friends?”*

Lauren Gibbs: *“Yeah, really good friends, we rode to school together.”*

Detective Kevin Kraubetz: *“Kind of go back. When Casey got pregnant, did she tell you immediately?”*

Lauren Gibbs: *“No, I didn't find out she was pregnant until she was about five months. But she said she just found out.”*

Casey sensed that talking to her parents about her surprise pregnancy would be something very awkward for them. When her baby bump kept getting bigger, she

finally went to her father to tell him what she thought about the baby's father. She said to George she wasn't sure who the baby's father was. When George learned she had already been telling her friends the news, he went to Cindy and they went to Casey together and laid down the family rules regarding conversations about her baby. Cindy was the family's alpha-leader and saw this as a family crisis: Her plan was that they were all going to deny she was pregnant. For Cindy and George, Casey's baby was an emerging and embarrassing family secret. The birth of a new baby isn't a family crisis unless the family has something to hide. The question arises, what did Cindy and George have to hide from their daughter's pregnancy?

Young Jesse Grund was an articulate and perceptive twenty-four-year-old who coordinated a part time work schedule with Universal Studios and his college studies in law enforcement. He maintained a full personal schedule and had the ambition to match. He was anxious to join Orlando's police force. Richard, his minister-father was every bit as perceptive and intelligent as his son and both men had similar personalities: friendly, strong-willed, and persuasive. Jesse described for investigators the feelings he developed for Casey Anthony.

Jesse Grund: *"I felt like I didn't need any more time to know that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. I loved Casey, I wanted to spend my life with her."*

Casey was eager to create some distance with her parents and when she and Jesse

started dating she began spending more time at Jesse's house. Jesse's father recalled his first impressions of Jesse's new girlfriend during a cable TV interview.

Greta Van Susteren: *"Richard, when did you first meet Casey?"*

Richard Grund: *"I met Casey, I want to say, in May of 2005. She happened to come by the house. She was helping one of my other sons get a job at Universal."*

Greta Van Susteren: *"Was there anything, Richard, in May of 2005, that was the least bit unusual about her? Or did you, I mean did you like her immediately? What was your thought?"*

Richard Grund: *"Well, the most unusual thing was she appeared to be pregnant, even though she was telling everybody she wasn't."*

Early summer arrived quickly in 2005 and Casey hadn't seen an OB/GYN, not when she reached puberty, never in high school, and not now summer months into her term. Her RN mother was trained in pediatrics at nursing school, but she reacted to the growing life inside her daughter by ignoring the soon-to-be-single mom and her developing child. Cindy was telling friends and coworkers that the bulge in her daughter's stomach was a medical problem which she told everybody was not serious.

Lead detective, Yuri Melich, wanted to know from one of Cindy's co-workers, Debbie Bennett, about a conversation she had at work when they all saw Casey just a few weeks before her due date.



Casey was nearly eight months pregnant when she went to her Uncle Rick's wedding. Both her mother, Cindy, and father, George, told Rick and guests {and everyone} they did not believe their daughter was pregnant, and she did not need to see a doctor.

Detective Yuri Melich: *"You mentioned just prior to that Cindy was saying her daughter had female problems?"*

Debbie Bennett {Cindy's colleague at Gentiva}: *"Yes, she said her daughter was having female problems. And I thought that maybe if I had seen the daughter I would have said, 'ah, she's pregnant, that's her female problems.'"*

Cindy's mother, Shirley Plesea, was also interviewed by detectives and asked her reaction when she met Casey at her son Rick's wedding in South Carolina just before the baby was born.

Shirley: "I started suspecting it when I seen her at the wedding."

Yuri Melich: "Did Cindy ever tell you anything?"

Shirley: "No. Cindy acted like she didn't know. But being a nurse, I don't know how the heck she couldn't notice."

Whatever the medical problem inside her daughter's uterus might be, it didn't concern the RN enough to schedule a visit to the family's doctor for her unwed teenage daughter. Gentiva's benefits provided full coverage for Cindy's children, but she never considered taking her pregnant teenager to see a doctor to diagnose the "mysterious" medical condition. That seems more than a little odd, since her job description at Gentiva was to review medical procedures and advise patients about how to obtain the maximum possible medical outcomes. Cindy was very good at her job and knowing in all

circumstances what she needed to do.

She was aware that if Casey went in for an exam, she would have doctor-patient confidentiality. A physician will certainly ask who her baby's father was. The doctor may want to know the most recent dates she had intercourse and with whom. Would Casey tell the doctor that a sexual assault may have precipitated her pregnancy? Did Cindy and George discuss the risks of exposing family secrets from a doctor's visit? Is that why they immediately made the rather strange decision to deny to everyone that Casey was pregnant?

Overlaying the relationships in the Anthony home was a strict rules-based environment. Cindy made the rules and Casey obeyed them. That's always the way it had been. Sexual abuse victims who consider coming forward to police often fear being blamed themselves. They worry about being separated from their parents when police make an arrest. Sometimes the fear of being abandoned is too much to overcome and they feel more than ever a need to be protected. Abused children often keep their family's secrets to avoid losing the security their abusive family represents to them.

In Hopespring Drive the family managed to keep functioning by denying the truth that could intrude into their home and destroy the Anthony family at any moment. There was a lot of worry Caylee would become that intruder when her DNA exposed the identity of her father. George and Cindy were not afraid of Casey, they were afraid of Caylee. Their

response was well practiced: deny reality, deny Casey was pregnant. Denial had long been the Anthony family's collective coping mechanism to deal with the secrets they had been hiding for a decade.

The mother and daughter, Cindy and Casey, adapted unique ways for talking to each other as Casey's baby bump stuck out more than ever like a sore thumb as the late stages of her pregnancy neared. How could they have a conversation while denying she was pregnant, when they both could see she was so late into her term? When she reached eight months, Casey told her mother, "You are right, I couldn't possibly be pregnant, because I never had sex ...". She could have completed the sentence by revealing the possible name of her baby's father, but she didn't. She was an obedient child in a home where abuse was the norm.

A family hiding abuse functions by creating an alternative reality that denies the abuse. Cindy's brother Rick, was interviewed by detectives over the telephone and asked if knew what was being said between Cindy and her daughter in the privacy of the Anthony home. As it turned out Cindy talked regularly with her mother, Shirley, and kept her informed about her feelings and what was going on. Shirley wasted no time in telling her son, Rick. So, Rick knew a lot.

Rick: "She'd have to have sex first in order to have a baby and that {Casey told her} she did not have sex with anyone}."

The family's rules about denial channeled Casey's behavior to always obey her mother. Even if it meant denying her baby's impending birth. What could be more bizarre! Cindy was the enforcer who made sure Casey kept quiet about whatever her mother wanted to stay a secret. On one occasion when the very pregnant Casey visited her mother at work, Casey used a comical ploy. She took an old winter coat from her mother's Ohio clothes closet, threw it over her shoulders and made a bee-line past everyone into Cindy's corner office. That strange visit provoked this exchange from Cindy's employer when detectives were visiting Gentiva's offices to talk with Cindy's supervisor about Casey's visits there.



Casey Anthony pictured with her father about the time she became pregnant with Caylee

Detective Yuri Melich: *Okay, let's back up, 2005, there were obviously some concerns about Casey and her pregnancy. Can you tell me in your own words about that?*

Charles Crittenden {Cindy's supervisor}: *"Yes, I remember the day Casey came in. At that time you'd have to pass by my desk in order to get to Cindy's office, and Cindy was in a meeting that day. And Casey came in and she normally would stop by my desk and you know, chat with me or whatever, or say hello. But that day she zoomed by my desk. I hadn't seen her in a while. And the minute she zoomed by, I'm like, 'she is pregnant' you know. And at that time, I would say it's about a month or six weeks before Caylee's birth. So, she was, you know, she was pretty good size. And I went to the other {person} that used to be here and I said, go over to Cindy's office and check Casey out. I think she's pregnant.' And sure enough she came back to me and said, 'she's got to be.' But she had on this big coat and was trying to cover it up." I couldn't understand, according to Cindy, she didn't know she was pregnant. But I didn't know how she could not see that."*

It is beyond belief Cindy misdiagnosed what everyone immediately knew the moment they laid eyes on Casey, even if she was wearing a long heavy coat. Trying to make sense of Cindy's denial of her daughter's pregnancy invites a simple admonition: never overlook the obvious. No matter how much denial surfaces inside Hopespring Drive, the

family rules explain everything. The family invented an alternate reality to make it all work for them. Casey denied for Cindy she ever had sex, so obviously she couldn't be pregnant, which fit perfectly with what Cindy already decided they should tell everyone.

In the Anthony's world, it all worked until the moment came when Casey told George she couldn't be sure who was the baby's father. In that instant, Caylee emerged as an existential threat to Cindy and George. Is it possible, is it even conceivable that the birth of a new baby girl would be greeted with so much fear in the Anthony's Hopespring Drive home? Could little Caylee Anthony generate so much fear that she would compel someone in her own family to kill her before her third birthday? Time will tell.