

THE PARTS NOBODY WANTS TO TALK ABOUT

**mapping your notes, finding a structure, getting ready to write
tom french**

We start with a blank, a world of possibility.

-- from Peter Turchi's *Maps of the Imagination*

Moving From Reporting Into Drafting

- hang on to the idea at the heart of it all
- chart the river of information, detail, choices
- put it on a timeline
- identify points of contact, shimmering moments, quiet bursts of action
- compile a greatest hits list
- map it out, even (especially) on deadline
- find a clear and simple line of action
- follow your subjects as they move along that line
- pay special attention to the doorways in and out of every section
- be willing to choose
- scatter the gold coins
- as you do these things, remember that you have already begun to write

MAPPING IT OUT ON DEADLINE

This is the outline for a daily story (reported and written by Sue Carlton, Thomas French and Anne Hull, published in the St. Petersburg Times on 4/22/00) on the verdict day of the Valessa Robinson murder trial:

THE BABY PINK OUTFIT -- 20 lines

(tom writing)

a new outfit for valessa

JUDGE DROPS HIS BOMBSHELL -- 70 lines

(tom writing up to mistrial better than convic – 20 lines)

(sue writing the rest -- 50 lines)

valessa's grandmother running out of clothes, too

trial had gone longer than anyone expected

had turned into a roller coaster

up and down, up and down

at end of day before, had appeared on verge of mistrial

friday morning, defense came in ready to win at least that much

a mistrial better than a conviction

brian gonzalez, in back of room, sez not necessarily so

gives his color commentary on what's happening

the lawyers came in, what they were doing

judge enters, tells them not just the allen charge

wants to revisit principal question

"goddamn," sez brian in the back of the room

no, no, no sez the defense

lisa argues coolly

judge overrules her

as the jury comes in, lyann stands up and argues again

do you want to be found in contempt

that's your prerogative, judge

brings in the jury, reads them the allen charge

(words that have been argued about for 100 years)

then judge returns to principal question, tells them the answer is no

court reporter notices juror number two saying "yes!"
back into the jury room they go
everyone watches them, trying to fathom what's going on in their minds

DELIBS ONE -- possibly the longer section (maybe 80 lines)
(obviously this is only if we get to the jurors)
what's happening in that room
what thinking, what doing, what arguing about
who's on which side

VALESSA ONE -- 30 lines
(tom writing)
wearing the pink sweater set
makeover talk of courthouse
her attys argument disingenuous
dressing her for innocence
w/o taking the stand, her appearance was her testimony

MORE QUESTIONS -- 30 lines
(anne writing)
another question comes out
sitting on the legs
then another
collective memory
lawyers fighting back and forth
what does it mean?

THE WHY SECTION -- 50 lines
(tom writing)
snippets on what everyone doing as waiting
underneath it all is question of why
why this happened, why vicki robinson dead
give some of the answers
end w/the sheriff's answer

DELIBS TWO -- tight (maybe 20 lines)

(also contingent on the interviews)

quick section

they're getting close now

arguing out final points

they take the vote

knock on jury door

VERDICT -- 80 lines

(anne starts out writing; sue will jump in when she can)

people getting to the courtroom

the scene

judge's warning to people in courtroom

not a victory or a loss

then brings in the jurors

the verdict

third-degree murder

aftermath

reax

* englert leaving

* theresa sees mrs. klug, sees vicki in her

* tom klug's reaction

VALESSA TWO -- 50 lines

(sue writing; if anne gets to valessa, she adds that)

pink outfit removed, puts on the orange one

where goes, how gets there

what happens between now and sentencing

judge's reputation as a sentencer

where she will serve her time

how long will she serve -- 85% at least?

father coming to see her at jail

EPILOGUE -- 90 lines

(tom writing)

judge has said the verdict not a victory or a loss □

so true

waste

two years later, here's what's happened

kalupas and lady

whispel
michelle
chuck
adam
valessa
vicki

THE RING -- 20 lines

(tom writing)

upstairs, in st atty's office, is the Wal Mart ring

This is the outline for a story (reported and written in two days by Thomas French, published in the St. Petersburg Times on 2/28/03) about the delivery of a stillborn baby girl and the nurse who baptizes, bathes and dresses the child so her family can hold her before she's taken away to the funeral home:

OPENING

by 3

(short)

lois b at her kitchen table, sewing
a nurse in the labor-delivery unit at east pasco
one of those people who quietly does her job, holding the world together
in 18 years at the hospital, she's helped deliver thousands of babies
loves the way they smell, how open, how new
but sometimes, something hard happens
and she wants to be ready
so she sews the tiny gown, hoping it will never be worn

SETUP

3:30

in mobile home behind the hospital, dad comes home from work early
tuesday morning
two daughters are asleep, also his pregnant wife
he drifts off on the couch, wakes a few hours later to sound of mary gasping
she's in her bed, convulsing, throwing up
he grabs the phone and dials 911

LOIS

4

call comes in a little after noon tuesday
lois the charge nurse that day
(give her name, explain the abbrev)
rushes down to emergency room
paramedics bring mom in, lois and others go to work
lois starts iv, begins checking for fetal pulse, can't find it
they bring in the ultra-sound -- nothing

lois telling herself, what's next, what's next. etc. -- 53
so much potential in that little girl -- all snatched away from her
watches the doctor take the dad into a little room to tell him his baby's dead
dad comes out, goes to his wife's bedside
saying to his wife, "it's gonna be okay, it's gonna be alright" - lois typed, 1
blames himself, lois says it wasn't his fault
tells him they're fighting for his wife now
getting her stabilized for c-section
asks dad if he wants her to baptize his child, dad says yes

THE O.R.

4:30

lois taking off her wedding ring in preparation for surgery
puts it and other jewelry in her pocket, w/photos of her own two kids
heads into the o.r. in the labor-delivery unit
usually lots of talking in surgery -- not today
doctor and nurses performing the c-section
lois stands beside him, staring inside the mother, waiting for the baby
doctor pulls baby out, it's a girl -- hands her to lois
usually babies come out w/fists clenched, screaming
this one limp, arms at sides, silent
her skin is still warm, though; warmer than usual, since mom has fever
hadn't been dead very long - 57
but lois knows that won't last
has to make her preparations before the stiffening starts
puts her in warmer, makes sure no moms outside in hall
takes her down the hall
have to get her ready for the parents

THE RITUAL

5

in decades past, stillborn babies were just whisked away
parents never saw, never got to hold
not usually done that way anymore
now recognized that it's helpful for parents to spend some time w/the child
been doing that for years at east pasco
lois often handles it
one of those people who handles things others can't face
until recently, she would clad the baby in stocking cap

but then, a year or so ago, while making barbie clothes for her nieces, lois had an idea

(was making a barbie bridal set)

why not make a gown for the baby, so looks nice

"i try to make them look as pretty as i can' - 55

about six months ago, sewed the pink one

been waiting in the nursery ever since

PREPARING THE BABY

5:30

around 2:40, lois wheels the baby into isolation nursery

first she weighs and measures the baby

she's big, 4 lbs, 4 oz -- if only they'd gotten to her sooner, could have saved her

takes her footprints

(normally hard, w/live babies and their kicking. not today)

then she fills sink w/warm water and baptizes her

gets another nurse to witness

the immersion, the words

the other nurse just saying over and over how beautiful the little girl is

"oh, she's such a beautiful baby' - 58

lois agrees -- her description of the baby

the softness of her eyelids, the veins in her hands, porcelain skin

"her little fingernails are so perfect.' - 64

other nurse begins talking about a child of her own who was stillborn

how much she misses her

"she'd be in her 30s now'

lois holds the baby, thinking of first time she held her own kids

thinks about this child's mother, down the hall, unconscious

how even if she lives, all the things she won't get to see w/her daughter

first dance, skinned knees, the tooth fairy, h.s. graduation, on and on

already getting cold, so lois hurries

now she bathes her, washing off the blood and vernix

uses johnson's baby shampoo, for the smell

usually she talks to the babies when she washes them

not today

she's quiet -- crying, saying a prayer

"strength and comfort, strength and comfort'

puts baby oil on the child

where she puts it -- feet and back - 60

goes over and gets the gown
has decided on the pink one
dresses her in it
almost too big for the gown
puts on booties and a stocking cap made by volunteers
folds her hands, closes her mouth
wraps her in pink gingham blanket made by wesleyan ladies
puts her in basket
now she's ready, takes pictures for the family
looks at the clock, 3:30
she's been on since 6:45, needs to get something to eat -- gets a salad, brings
it upstairs
other nurse says, lois, you're so calm
can't say anything
she's not calm -- she's falling apart

THE DAD

6:30

he comes in a few minutes later
been home, changed
made sure his other two daughters were okay
they're w/his parents
when he walks up, lois still at the table, trying to regain her composure
he looks utterly lost
another nurse takes him in to see the girl
outside the door, he hesitates
nurse tells him not to be afraid, his daughter is beautiful
"it's a girl?"
takes him in
the nurse unwraps her face, so he can see her
"does she look like her older sisters?"
dad nods
he looks at her, strokes her hand
"she has a name,' he says softly
"lindsay rose.'
now both him and the nurse crying
when he's ready, they walk out to the table where lois is sitting
the nurse tries to tell lois the baby's name, but she can't
so the dad tells her
lois gets up, writes it on the crib card, next to the footprints

for them to take home, so they can have it w/ them in all the years to come

LOIS AND THE MOM

7

afternoon goes on, mom still unconscious down in icu
lindsay rose still in the nursery, ready for the rest of the family
the dad's planning to bring his parents that night so they can see her and hold
her

"i feel really, really tired," sez lois
already working with another mom
getting induced - lois gives her an iv
"you sure you know what you're doing?"

lois says, yes, she's sure
gets done that night at 8
before she leaves, goes down the hall to see the mom
maybe she'll have woken up
maybe she'll be ready to be told

"when she went to sleep, she dreamed about her baby. when she woke up, it
was gone."

tries to talk to the mom, but she's still out
goes home, husband asks how her day was
bad

he leaves it at that

THE NEXT DAY

7:30

time so fluid inside a hospital
hardly sense of the sun outside
just hours going by
next morning, the mom is coming out of it
still foggy, doesn't understand where she is
what year is this, doctor asks?

2000

what's your last name?

i don't know

can't tell her yet

the dad comes back that afternoon
was up all night, in bed, asking god why
no sleep
went to the funeral home, all those open caskets

a baby one for his daughter
already picked one out
the service is to be the following tuesday
comes back to the hospital, not knowing what to do
keeps saying how this never happened to him before
asks about the gown
can they bury her in it? -- pg 32
still wondering how to explain to his wife
by that evening, his wife is conscious enough to be told
she holds her husband, crying
wants to see the baby
they bring her into the icu
still in the basket, in the pink gown lois made for her
so beautiful, so motionless
secretary sees her and begins to cry
before goes into the room, a nurse gets a blanket from a warmer, wraps her
in it
so mom won't feel how cold her skin is
they take the baby in, leave lindsay with her parents
from under the door, flash of a camera
a family portrait

ENDING

still thinking through possibilities -- might end w/lois working her shift,
going to see the mom, then going home to start sewing new gown
or w/some moment of her and the mom