



Legend of D. B. Cooper

Death By Natural Causes

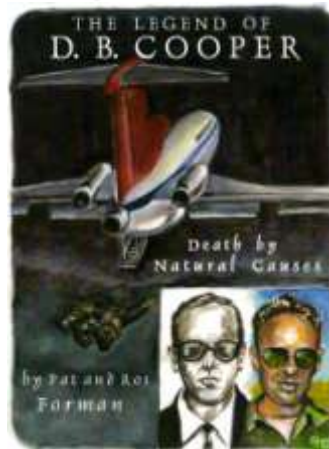


Ron's Intro:

Good morning. My name is Ron Forman. Our presentation is about a friend we met in May, 1977 at Thun Field, a private airstrip in Puyallup, Washington. Following the skyjacking in 1971, the FBI quickly came up with a suspect profile that included pilotage and skydiving skills. Several private pilots who also had jump experience were investigated, including John Thun, the owner of the field. But even though our friend possessed both of those skills, no one would have been suspicious because our friend was a female.

Those of you who know me can verify that there is no way I could do this presentation in under 30 minutes, as a matter of fact, no one is sure that I would be finished in time to head for Ariel. Therefore, I'm turning this over to my wife Pat. She is co-author of our book, The Legend of D. B. Cooper –Death by Natural Causes

The Legend of D.B. Cooper Death by Natural Causes



Barbara Dayton was the first person in the state of Washington to undergo gender reassignment surgery. The experimental surgery was performed at the University of Washington in 1969 when Bobby was 43.

When we met Barb she was a loner, working at the Suzzulo Library at the University of Washington as a research clerk. She spent every weekend at Thun Field working on and flying her Cessna 140. Once we were able to break down her barriers, she became a close friend, telling us several amazing stories. She asked us several times to help her write a book in the hopes it would help people be more understanding of, as she put it, “freaks like her”. But life can be so hectic, we kept putting her off.

After Barb died, we were nagged by our unfulfilled promise, but we didn’t think we had enough details to write a book. We did some research on the internet and were able to track down her remaining family. They agreed to supply us with pictures, diaries, letters, and the psychological evaluations from before and after the surgery.

Barb had confessed to us that she was D.B. Cooper, but initially we weren’t going to include that in our book. However, when we met the family, we found that they also were suspicious that Barb was Cooper. As we got to know them, we became convinced that it was important to try to investigate the possibility. It was evident that the family did not condone what the skyjacker had done, but it was also evident that the investigation would provide some sort of closure for the family. It would be the ultimate proof of how strong the turmoil inside of Barb was and explain away some of the hurt she had caused by deserting her family to become a female.

Bobby's Life – The Family



Bobby Dayton was born in 1926, the first of Elmer and Bernice Dayton's 3 sons. Elmer was a he-man type who supported the family as a plasterer. Bernice was a strong woman but allowed herself to be ruled by Elmer. Bill, the second son was later diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. Jimmy, the youngest was Bernice's favorite. He was killed in a horse riding accident at the age of 13.

Bobby's Life – Merchant Marines



The Dayton's lived in Long Beach, CA, but at the age of 17, Bobby quit school and joined the Merchant Marines. Barb would later tell us many amazing stories about Bobby's time as a seaman, one of which was an unbelievable story about getting lost in the jungles while on a boar hunt in the Philippines. He spent some time fighting the Japanese with the Moro tribe before ending up in a prisoner of war camp. The only thing that saved him from being shot as a deserter was the shortage of seamen at the end of the war. His skills were needed and he was released to sail on another ship. Records from the merchant marines and letters home show Bobby was suspended and fined for being absent without leave, supporting the story.

The Ranch - Dynamite



While Bobby was at sea the family moved to the Dayton Ranch in Cathey's Valley, CA. Cathey's Valley is about 22 miles southeast of Merced. Bobby tired of his time in the Philippines and upon returning home, he immediately began using his many talents and developing new talents to assist in making the ranch more livable. One of the new talents was the use of dynamite. Among other things, he used it to reroute water so Bernice could do her laundry at the ranch house.

Bobby's Life – Trips to Mexico



Even though Bobby enjoyed the solitude at the ranch, he soon became restless and made several trips to Mexico searching for gold. Often he was accompanied by a friend or by his brother, Bill.

Bobby's Life – Private Pilot



Bobby was fascinated by flying at a young age and as a young man acquired his private pilot's license. Barbara would tell us later that up in the air was the only place she could forget everything and truly feel comfortable with herself.

Bobby's Life - Army



Bobby had a dream. He wanted to become a commercial airline pilot and thought the army would be the best place to get the necessary training. But after he enlisted at the age of 20, his hopes were quickly dashed. His physical showed a problem with his eyes that kept him from passing the stringent requirements to become a pilot. After that, Bobby hated every moment of his enlistment. He had trouble taking orders and spent much of his time in the stockade.

Bobby's Life – First Marriage



While home on leave some of Bobby's friends set him up on a blind date. The girl, Dixie, was 15 at the time and Bobby was 22. When Dixie's parents heard about the age difference they began insisting that Bobby do the honorable thing and marry her. Even though the couple both insisted that their relationship was totally plutonic, they agreed to be married. The couple had two children, Dennis and Rena. Ultimately the marriage ended in divorce.

Bobby's Life – Second Marriage



Bobby moved to the Northwest and began supporting himself working as an electrician at the Lockheed Shipyards in Seattle. There he befriended Cindy, a young single mother of 4 who was working as a waitress and the two married. There was a long strike at the shipyards so Bobby went back to the Merchant Marines for a time. When he returned, he found that Cindy was gone and so was the money he had been sending home. Bobby lost everything. Cindy would later come back and accompany Bobby on his quest for the gender reassignment surgery. At one session with the doctors, she was quoted as saying "Bob is like 2 different people. As a man he seems angry and depressed. As a woman he is much happier and more pleasant to be around. She described Bobby as being a good provider who never cheated or lied.



Skydiving

- Lessons at Snohomish
- Told the doctor he gave it up because it was boring

Bobby had skydiving experience. He took lessons at Snohomish Airport, and would later tell the doctors that he quit because it was boring.

Surgery

- Bobby to Barb



On December 4, 1969, Robert Dayton became Barbara Dayton. The surgery did not go well and Barb had to endure several more surgeries during the next year and a half. It had always been Barbara's hobby to plan the perfect heist, even though she never intended to execute any of the plans. While she was recuperating from the many surgeries, she began planning the skyjacking.



Barbara's Life – Before Jump

- May 18, 1971

Patient came in for follow up at my request. She looks well but is quite discouraged at being (un)able to find employment. She graduated from the U.W. Key punch training program, has a good recommendation but jobs are scarce and no one has been willing to hire her in any capacity. She would take any kind of job but those which require short sleeve clothing are out because of her many tattoos. It seems clear that she has run into much employer prejudice in many instances. She literally has no source of income and is ineligible for welfare because she is single, under 50, and has no handicap. *She has felt distressed at times and even considered suicide but "not seriously". She thinks of returning to living as a male but has cut her contacts in the male job market - and also, "that would cause more conflict than it would solve."*

- November 17, 1971

"The medical records contain notes from follow-up visits. Eight days before the hijacking, November 16, 1971, *doctors noted that Barb was depressed. She considered suicide again.*"

Skyjack by Geoffrey Gray pg 202

After the surgery, Barbara remained depressed, and suicide was mentioned in almost every psychological interview. She had gone through all the pain and suffering, hurt and alienated her family and friends, and still did not feel she could truly pass as a female due to her tattoos and manly stature. She couldn't find work, and didn't want to resort to welfare. She began to think seriously about executing her skyjacking plan. She didn't care if she died trying, but if she got away with it, what better way would there be to get back at the establishment. On November 17, 1971, only 8 days before the jump, she once again mentioned suicide.



Planning the Jump

- Researched details of 727
- Knew route of flight would be Victor23
- Flew small plane to pick out jump site
- Drove to site to become familiar
- Could time jump based on checkpoints

Barbara began adding details to her skyjacking plan. She was doing volunteer work at the University of Washington libraries at the time, so she began researching the perfect airplane for the jump, the Boeing 727. She decided on the speed, altitude, and the configuration that would be required. Because of the skills she had acquired as a pilot, she knew that due to the altitude, there would only be two routes for the plane to fly south, the coastal route, and V-23. She knew the route would be V 23. Flying with gear and flaps down would increase fuel usage and make the coastal route impractical. She thought the flatlands in Oregon would be the best site for the jump so she flew her plane along the airway to pick out the perfect spot. To familiarize herself with the area in case she did not land at the exact jump site, she drove to the site. She decided she would use the lights of Portland to begin her timing to the site. (Later we were able to confirm the lights were visible that night by reading the flight transcripts.) As a second check, she would use the search light from Aurora airport.



Planning the Jump – Letter to kids

November, 1971

Dennis and Rena:

Perhaps this letter will explain many things. I know you have both wondered why I've remained so distant and never tried to contact you the last few years.

My past life was very mixed up, an inborn problem that made a normal life impossible for me. Your mother and I separated because of it, and I'm sure you must remember something, Dennis. Rena was too young then.

To be brief, no matter how hard I've tried in the past, I have never been able to accept myself as a male, and nearing the brink of possible suicide, I submitted myself to extensive medical and psychological research. It was determined that I was a transsexual. Physically a male, but more basically a female. The magnitude of the predominant sex could not be reduced. In December 1969, I underwent conversion surgery for sex-reassignment. I am no longer a would be man and I have my true identity now, and am much happier for it.

I'm sorry for the hurt this must bring, but you both have full lives ahead of you and I was only able to salvage a portion of mine.

Don't ever worry about either of you being abnormal, this thing is not hereditary, and I know you will both have good lives.

Think how hard it is for my parents to accept this, they do not fully understand, nor do I understand.

I'm very sorry for the coldness on my part towards you both in the past, but now you understand why it was better I stay away, I could sense my destiny.

I'm proud of you both and wish I were free to express everything I feel.

Please don't hate me for what I've done. Life is full of the unexpected.

Barbara Dayton
Robert Dayton

Barbara then began checking aviation weather daily waiting for wind conditions that would be suitable for the jump. She typed up a letter to her kids, sending it to her mother with instructions to give the letter to her kids "someday". The letter was dated simply November, 1971. There was no day because she was planning on mailing it the day of the jump. It wouldn't have been mailed at all if she decided not to follow through. It read in part,

I'm very sorry for the coldness on my part to you both, but now you understand why it was better I stay away. I could sense my destiny. I'm proud of you both and wish I was free to express everything I feel. Please don't hate me for what I've done. Life is full of the unexpected.



Barbara's Life – After Jump

- December 8, 1971

Followup interview to Gender Committee: Patient doing well, not depressed. Lives a rather socially empty life but is content with it. Is on welfare but is strangely unworried despite inability to get work - welfare expires in 3 months. Has many excuses why she can't work - tattoos on arms, lack of skills, age, etc. Indeed one has a sense that Barbara is quite content to be looked after indefinitely by the welfare system. **For all that, however, one has to allow that she seems reasonably happy and adapted to circumstances.**

John Hampson, MD

On November 17, 1971, only 8 days before the jump, Barb was still depressed and suicidal. Only two weeks after the jump, Barbara seemed inexplicably at peace. The transcript reads, "Indeed one has the sense that Barbara is quite content to be looked after indefinitely by the welfare system. ... one has to allow that she seems reasonably happy and adapted to circumstances."

Barb's Life – Friendship



When we met Barb at Thun in May of 1977 she was still a loner, but as time went on she seemed to truly enjoy our friendship and began visiting us almost every week at our home. She had an amazing, dry sense of humor. On one visit, she entertained us by doing one-hand pushups, picking up a match stick she held between her fingers. If the weather was too bad for flying, we would occasionally drive up to her apartment in West Seattle and she would show us around Seattle. One time we were walking in a rather dangerous area of downtown when what appeared to be a gang started walking toward us. Ron suggested we cross the street. “Don’t worry, Ron”, Barb replied. “I’ll protect you”. We both had a good laugh because we knew she probably could.

Barb was always very helpful to us. She fixed our broken dish washer and helped us fell a tree that was dangerously close to our driveway. She was always offering to blow things up for us with dynamite, but we never took her up on it.

The private pilots at Thun would always discuss the latest articles about Cooper when they met for lunch or sat at the round table at the restaurant drinking coffee. Barb would become angry if the article made Cooper sound like a fool. This seemed strange to us, and after one such outburst, Ron jokingly said, “I know, Barb was D. B. Cooper.” Barb gave Ron a look that could kill. On the way back to the planes, she would tell him in a very gruff voice, “Don’t ever say that again”.

A few weeks later, we were sitting at our kitchen table with Barb and another couple from the airport, when the topic of Cooper came up again. This time the article we were looking at was especially critical of the skyjacker. Barb once again became angry and started correcting the details in the article and defending the jumper. After awhile she noticed that the rest of us were silent, staring in disbelief. She finally said, “Well, you might as well know. Ron guessed right. I am Dan Cooper.”



Barb's Life - Nevada



Barb continued visiting us almost every weekend for several years, giving us more details of the jump and telling us more stories of her past. Then, for no apparent reason she just stopped. Bob Birch, another pilot at the airport had been flirting with her for years. When he got sick and needed someone to care for him, she moved into his home. She always said that when he passed away, she would be gone and she was true to her word. Bob's family said Barb was moved out within four hours of when Bob died, telling no one where she was going. A few years later, we tracked Barb on the internet and Ron went for a visit. She was living in a small mobile home in the desert outside of Carson City. We intended to visit again, but once again our hectic life interfered and two years later, Barb passed away. Rena, Barbara's brother Bill, and niece Billie managed to get to the hospital before Barb died, but she couldn't talk due to the tubes down her throat. Billie reported that right before she died, Barb was trying desperately to tell them something. Both Bill and Billie thought she was trying to tell them about the skyjacking.

The Jump Site



This is an aerial view of the site that Barb described as the jump site near Woodburn, OR. It was less congested in 1971, but when this picture was taken there were still lots of sod fields that would be perfect for the jump. The site is directly under V-23. The freeway runs nearby.



The Jump



Barb told us that she tied the money to her in a way that she could use it as a depth finder to tell where the ground was in the dark. She opened the door, lowered the stairs, and climbed to the bottom to get her bearings. She then went back to the top of the stairs to watch for her check points and time the jump. She computed her angle to Aurora airport using the glimpses she could get of its search light and verified that her timing was reasonably accurate. Barb went to the bottom of the stairs a second time and this time she jumped. She used her watch to time her free fall, and when she could see some lights from the freeway she pulled the cord.

After she landed, she put on the wig she had been carrying in her bag, shed the suit, and headed back to Seattle as a female.

Money Found



In 1979, Barb told us that she had a dream that the ink on the money was running and she had to move it. The next weekend she didn't show up at the airport. At that time we thought that she had gone to move the money. In 1980, we heard on the news that some of the money had been found on Tena Bar in Oregon. There were pictures of archeologists digging at the spot where the money was found, showing that it was above the dredging that occurred in 1974. We were convinced that Barb may have left the money there to keep the story alive. It just seemed like something she would do.

Sketch Comparison



As we were doing our research we became more and more convinced that Barb was the skyjacker. We placed a picture of her next to the sketch and darkened the hair and glasses. We felt the similarities were amazing.



Conclusion

- 2006 FBI Visit



In 2006, we were getting close to completing the book and began to worry about whether we could be charged with a crime when we went to the FBI. We hired an attorney in Tacoma to accompany us. He set up the appointment at the Tacoma office, and we put together a presentation. In the beginning the agent didn't seem to believe us, but according to our attorney, by the end he seemed to be trying to convince us that the story was true. He requested items for a DNA test, samples of handwriting, and articles that might have fingerprints. The attorney delivered the items to the FBI the next day along with a letter itemizing the items we had presented. We never heard from the FBI again. When the investigation was reopened in 2008, Larry Carr told a reporter that "there is nothing about the Forman's or Barbara Dayton in the files... She is not a viable suspect because of eye color and height."



Was Bobby/Barbara Cooper?

- Skin Color
- Hair Color
- Use of Dynamite
- Raleigh Cigarettes
- Drank Bourbon
- Similarities in handwriting
- Familiar with Skydiving
- Private Pilot
- Access to Research
- Similar Demeanor
- Opportunity
- Motive
- Ease of melding back into society

[skin color] Barb was part Indian so her complexion was similar to what has been reported [hair color] Barb had told us she used shoe polish to blacken her hair. This would be consistent with the description in Geoff's book that the hair appeared greasy and "like black patent leather shoes." [Dynamite] Dynamite is a very unusual choice for a weapon for a sky jacking and Barbara was familiar with the use of dynamite. [Raleigh Cigarettes] Barbara told us she smoked Raleigh cigarettes at the time, and this was later verified by Rena. [Bourban] Bobby drank Bourbon and water or Bourbon and seven-up. [Handwriting] We had a sample of Barbara's handwriting compared to the writing on the boarding pass by a retired FBI signature expert. We were told the similarities are amazing, but there is not enough on the boarding pass to make a definite determination. Barb was a skydiver and a private pilot. She was a research clerk at the U of W libraries and had access to all types of materials. The described demeanor of the skyjacker was just like Barb's demeanor. She used many of the same phrases and colloquialisms as Cooper. [Opportunity] She was a loner who no one would miss if she disappeared for a while. She told us her motive was to get back at the FAA. Rules made it impossible for her to be an airline pilot and the FAA put too many restrictions on private pilots. She also had a grudge on society in general. We think there was another reason for the jump. Barb did this **just because she could**. She had every talent necessary. And she finally pulled off the great heist ... the perfect crime.



Will Cooper Case Ever be Solved?

- Probably not
 - The Tie
 - Reliability of eye-witness accounts
 - “Confirmation Bias”
 - Experiment Pinpointing Jump Site
 - Pressure bump on the gages cannot be disputed
 - Curtsy

Will the D B Cooper case ever be solved? Probably not. The tie that was found on the plane was about 3 years out of date as far as style goes. Could it be that Cooper got the tie from the Good Will. Barbara was getting her clothes there at the time. Could all the evidence now being found on the tie be from a previous owner? The Comic Book: Is Dan Cooper a French Canadian? Possibly not. Barb used to say that the only books worth reading were comic books. All others were just blocks of wood. She had an unlimited supply of comic books at the libraries. Could a French comic book with the picture of Dan Cooper have caught her eye at some point? Over the years the description of Cooper has changed slightly. Originally the eye color was reported as “possibly brown or dark”. Now the eye color is reported as definitely dark brown. Could part of this be because of the scientific phenomenon called Confirmation Bias? According to Geoff’s book, only Florence saw the eye color. Could the witnessed eye color in the dimly lit plane be reported as brown because that would be what is expected of a person with dark skin and hair? The pressure bump was measured on the instruments and was caused when the door was opened. The timing of that is not debatable. The curtsy, however, was not recorded on instruments. It was reported by the pilot who was not on autopilot at the time. Could there have been a second curtsy of the aircraft that went unnoticed? Was the jump site identified by the first time Barb went down the stairs and back up? The pilot would have been very alert right after the door was open, but could a second curtsy have been overlooked 9 minutes later due to the turbulence caused by the plane flying with gear and flaps down. In 2000 we heard on the news that the FBI had DNA from the Raleigh cigarettes, but now that we are hearing the cigarettes were

lost and there is no DNA profile from them on file in the national database, there is probably no way to ever prove