

Baking

From AI

pages upon Facebook pages and TikToks and everything. It's like a complete thing, absolutely went down the rabbit hole."

It's a very precise practice.

"It's precision which I didn't think I would like because I love to cook and I never follow a recipe. I always say that you season until your ancestors tell you stop. And so with baking, it's much more of a precise thing, but I love it. It's

like a science project, and it's ever changing, because you can change up your ratios, and add maybe rye flour, or feed it a little honey, and you can get a different outcome and a little bit of a different taste."

Where did you get your starter?

"I ordered it off Etsy. I ordered it off a gal who has been baking sourdough for a long, long time, and I got it in dehydrated form, and I brought it back to life. And it was a daunting task. At the beginning, I got it and I did not revive it for many, many weeks.

And then look, look at what it's grown into. But I've also made my own starter. It's very interesting because mine was, like 200 years old but you're feeding it all the time, so it's constantly turning over. But it's that little bit of bacteria that stays, that grows and feeds."

Do you have any loaves you were especially fond of?

"Every time I bake a loaf, I just love the smell of it. I don't like one over the other. It's kind of like: Are you sweet or savory? If I make like a roasted garlic loaf, when that

comes out of the oven, oh my goodness, it just smells intoxicating. The everything Asiago smells absolutely amazing. It really kind of changes and I don't make a loaf that I wouldn't truly love myself. We do little taste tests and stuff. I'll bring stuff down here and have a few people pop in ... and I'll have them taste them and see where we end up for what the overall consensus is on which one they like in terms of flavors and flavor profiles."

What's your setup at home?
"I just have a standard home

range and they are all made in a Dutch oven. Max I do is six loaves at a time in the Dutch ovens. I'm very fortunate that I have an oven I can do that in. Eventually, will I get a bread oven? Maybe. We'll see how that goes. It's also still a balancing act and I don't want it to not be a passion project and it to become a must."

Jared McNett is an online editor and reporter for the Sioux City Journal. You can reach him at 712-293-4234 and follow him on Twitter @TwoHeadedBoy98.

Journal

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There are other bizarre recollections with violent twists as well, including a time in Phoenix, when she claims a trailer Studey was towing for organized crime figures was stolen. Suddenly, men showed up after it was located, and Studey and the trailer thief were taken to a construction site, Kepler said in interviews and wrote in her journal.

"They had the guy in the car, and Don got in the car," Kepler said she recalls Studey telling her. "He said, first thing they did was they cut off the man's nose, then started cutting his ears off. 'This is what happens to people who double-cross us,'" the men allegedly told Studey.

In her writings, she says bolt cutters were used to clip off the man's fingers and other body parts before he was put in a ditch and buried.

From out West, Studey hustled back to Sidney, Nebraska, where Kepler was living, made her move all the cars out of the garage so he could hide his, and shut all curtains inside the home. No one in the house was allowed to pull the curtains back to look out the windows.

Studey, according to Kepler and McKiddy, moved around the country during his life, littering states including Colorado, California, Utah, South Dakota, Nebraska and others with bodies and beatings and tobbing other victims.

None of the claims have been proven, but much of what Kepler recalled in the interview exactly echoes what she wrote around 2020 and left to her daughter.

The journal by Kepler, a handwritten history of her family titled "The Hollow People," tells of a horrendous life for the Studeys, filled with abuse, severe beatings of family members and random robbery victims and arsons. Among the victims of Donald Studey's alleged arsons was Kepler, who claims Studey burned her home following a falling out Studey had with her husband. She and others claimed Studey would burn down homes to collect or steal insurance money.

The 188 pages paint a picture of Studey as a man who murdered with ease and would snap and kill those who upset him. The writings also talk about Studey, who allegedly carried a cut-off and cement-filled pipe with him, committing fatal hits and beatings on people around the country for organized crime.

'Lucy was telling the truth'

In an interview with a Lee Enterprises investigative reporter, Kepler said "probably 100 or so" murders could have been traced to Studey if he had been or were to be thoroughly investigated.

She also remembers envelopes that Studey had hidden above a refrigerator, which contained photos of targets for hits, their home addresses, ages, phone numbers and where they worked, she says.

"They were hit papers, their information to look somebody up and kill them," Kepler said, adding that another brother, the late Lou Studey, was nearly killed by Donald Studey because he peeked inside one.

Did he work for organized crime?



Lucy McKiddy walks to an alleged well site, Saturday, Oct. 12, in rural Fremont County near Thurman, Iowa.



Lucy McKiddy poses for a portrait next to an area she says bones were buried. Photo taken on Saturday, Oct. 12, in rural Fremont County near Thurman, Iowa.

"No doubt whatsoever. ... No doubt," Kepler said.

Kepler said Studey's organized crime contact worked out of Sidney, Nebraska.

All of Kepler's experiences with Donald Studey echo the long-voiced claims of Studey's daughter, Lucy McKiddy, that Studey was a violent killer.

Those claims have led to excavations – both public and private – at an alleged victim burial site in Iowa, the exhumation of one of Studey's ex-wives and the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars by film production companies trying to spotlight and re-examine McKiddy's claims.

Kepler backs up her niece's accounts while also noting she personally detests the woman.

"Lucy was telling the truth," Kepler said. "I think Lucy's 100% right."

One day, Kepler claims, she and Studey walked up into the hills of Green Hollow along the mushroom paths, and sat by a tree. The area, located on a rural Iowa hillside about 40 miles from Omaha, was allegedly used as a burial ground by Studey for his victims, his daughter McKiddy has claimed.

Kepler said she looked around and saw bottles littering the place during that walk with her brother.

"Jesus Christ, Don," she said she

told Studey. "This place looks like a graveyard. And he looked at me and said, 'It is.'"

Kepler entered her plea in the aggravated assault case in October of 2021.

Her eight-year sentence was commuted by Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs on May 24 of this year.

According to a unanimous recommendation of the Arizona Board of Executive Clemency, the release to community supervision was "based on Ms. Kepler's good behavior in prison, participation in programming aimed at personal development, lack of any other criminal history and significantly deteriorating physical health."

'Like a woman confessing before she passes'

The supposed graveyard on the rural Iowa hillside is getting a new look as two companies join forces to produce a documentary and attempt to dig back into the Studey case – literally.

One of the production company principals, who spoke with Lee Enterprises, is Paul Lima, head of Bullish Content. The teams did their own interview with Kepler, and Lima said the vividness of Kepler's memory struck him.

"The thing that stood out was just her ability to recollect the specifics,"

Lima said. "She's just very credible, and she has nothing to gain from doing this. She's just released from prison, and she has a condition that she's going to likely die from, right? That's the reason she was let out early. ... So to me, it's kind of the equivalent of a deathbed confession. She hates Lucy (McKiddy), so it's not like she's siding with Lucy or gaining anything from this. I felt like this was a woman confessing before she passes."

Lima said "the brazenness" of Studey's alleged crimes – including Kepler's claims that Studey gunned down a police officer with whom he'd had a dispute – is what captivated the production companies and explains why they have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars to get the documentary completed.

It's the largest sum of money the companies have spent on a production, said Aengus James, head of This Is Just A Test Media.

"Here's this thing, this big headline (first published in Newsweek) where this man maybe killed dozens of women, and the next question is, is it true, right?" James told Lee Enterprises. "We just felt like we might not get this opportunity ever again, and it became a development that really turned into a production."

James and Lima have been surprised by the volume of information that they were able to gather for their filmmaking.

"The access that we received, and the amount of information, from first-hand accounts, starting with Lucy, talking to Susan (McKiddy's sister) and then going through family members that had stories, hearing from townspeople that Don was a murderer and everybody knew," James said. "We were just following up on all these rumors, these urban legends and finding out that some of them – people could corroborate them."

'Can you help me move some stuff?'

One of those rumors was given some credence by a man known as Robert, who claims to have seen Studey with a dead body. Robert

spoke to Lee Enterprises on condition that he not be fully identified because he's in fear for his and his family's safety.

The production companies toured Green Hollow with Robert, and Lee Enterprises spoke with him separately. He said his account is something that scarred him, dating back nearly 50 years.

Robert, who had previously never spoken about his dealing with Studey to law enforcement – or anyone – said he was approached by Studey in a bar Robert had stopped at while making his way across Iowa.

Studey was working in the bar, sweeping floors and other jobs, when Studey bought Robert a beer. They had never met, but Studey bought another, then another, before "he asked me if I'd help him move some stuff, do some work for 100 bucks. So hell yeah, I'll do some moving of stuff for \$100."

It was about 1975, Robert said, and Studey seemed friendly enough. Robert, who was used to making a couple bucks an hour baling hay, agreed. They drove separately – Studey in an old pickup and Robert in his Dodge Charger – to Green Hollow.

He said Studey took him around to the back of his truck.

"The tailgate was up," Robert said. "There was a tarp over a part of the bed (of the pickup), and when it came off, I looked over and there's this body with tennis shoes sticking out. I just met this guy. ... He was nice enough to me, but he lifted this tarp and there was a wrapped-up body in the back of the truck. If you can just imagine the trauma I felt. It was crazy, and the paranoia set in. If I didn't do it, he could just kill me right there, right? That's the only reason I did it."

What he said he did was help Studey carry the body between two trailers on the property up to the tree line in Green Hollow. Robert said he carried the upper body while Studey carried the lower half. Robert said he distinctly remembers the tennis shoes sticking out.

"There's this body wrapped in white in the back of the truck, and he wants me to help move it back towards the woods," Robert said in the interview with Lee Enterprises. "He mentioned that it was a female ... and I think I saw black Converse-like tennis shoes."

They started carrying the body up into the woods, when Robert, frightened and feeling ill, dropped the side of the body he was carrying.

"I told him, 'This is too much for me. I'm not going to do this.' He said, 'That's all right. Just go wait back by your car. I'll take it from here, and I'll pay your money.'"

Figuring Studey would kill him for what he saw, Robert, after waiting a bit by his car, said he jumped in his Charger and sped off to the nearby town of Thurman, Iowa, trying to make sense of what he had witnessed.

"The way he was acting with the body, it was like he's done it before," Robert said. "I think he had done it many times..."

Next up: An FBI file on Donald Dean Studey is 612 pages. What's in it?

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EDITOR: Bruce Miller; 712-293-4218
bmiller@siouxcityjournal.com

CIRCULATION: Tommy Cooper; 712-293-4200
cooper@siouxcityjournal.com

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