

# FORENSIC SCIENCE

## CASE ARTICLE #9 – Blood & the Dingo

**Date of Crime – August 1980**

**Location – Uluru, Australia**

**Victims – Azaria Chamberlain**

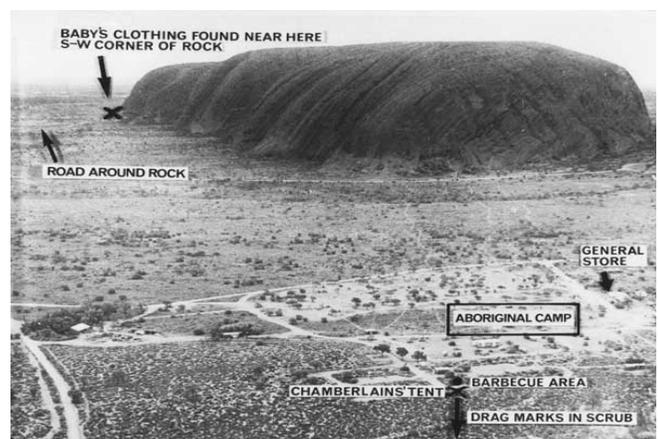
One infamous case that comes to the minds of many people when thinking about blood spatter forensic case analysis involves a line that has since become a pop-culture catchphrase thanks to Meryl Streep in the movie based on the crime *A Cry in the Dark*. That famous line...? "The dingo ate my baby." It is a case that focused on blood evidence and numerous mistakes and speculation.



In August 1980, the Chamberlain family camped near Uluru in the Red Center desert of Australia's Northern Territory. One night mother, Lindy Chamberlain, a Pastor's wife, put two of her children, 4-year-old Reagan and 9-week-old Azaria, to bed in their tent. When she returned some time later, the story goes, she cried, "The dingo's got my baby!"

According to Lindy, when she got to the tent she saw a dingo with a bundle in its mouth. She wasn't close enough to see what it was, but when she checked on the children she saw that her daughter Azaria was missing. As the cry went out, she and her husband, Michael, along with other campers, began searching for the child. A nearby camper, Sally Lowe, went into the tent to check on the still-sleeping Reagan. Seeing a pool of wet blood on the floor of the tent, she thought that Azaria was probably already dead.

When a tourist found the baby's jumpsuit, it was only slightly torn and bloody, but mostly intact. Though an initial investigation backed up Lindy Chamberlain's claim of a wild dog attacking her daughter, it was not long before the parents themselves stood accused of murder. One problem was that the baby had been wearing other clothes that weren't found at the time. Throughout the case, the crime scene was not properly controlled and local police improperly handled blood spatter and other evidence at the scene.



Forensics investigators found blood stains in the family car and concluded that Lindy had taken Azaria there and cut her throat. However, a more thorough analysis, performed later, revealed that what was originally thought to be blood stains was in fact a spilled fruit drink. One forensic expert identified a "bloody hand print" on Azaria's jumpsuit that later forensic analysis revealed to be red desert sand composed mostly of copper oxide (found in the area that the family lived). Police also paid to have forensic biologists study and report that based on information provided a dingo would not have been able to steal and kill the baby.



However, in 1982, even with all of these mistakes by investigators, and no plausible motive, Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of murder. Public opinion and "expert testimony and conjecture" were the only items used against Lindy in the trial. She was sentenced to life in prison. Her husband was accused of being an accessory to murder. The baby's knit jacket, found in 1986 near a dingo lair, helped exonerate the Chamberlains after Lindy had served three years of her life sentence, but several years of retrials and hearings were yet to come.

Forensic biologists have studied information relating to other dingo attacks in the region. In 1933 three young girls disappeared in the region and people speculated that it could have been due to a dingo attack. People who worked near dingo areas had reported of occasionally seeing human remains over the decades. After Chamberlain's trial other instances of dingo attacks on children in the area had also been documented. In a five year period over 279 dingo "interactions" with people were documented with 39 of these listed as "threatening". These included a fatal mauling of a nine year old boy who was attacked by two dingoes. There were also numerous non-fatal attacks by a dingo on people from 1996-2001. In 2012, 32 years after the event, a coroner finally determined that there was sufficient evidence to determine that a dingo was involved in the fatal attack on Azaria Chamberlain. The coroner pronounced that a dingo was responsible for the death of Azaria Chamberlain. An amended death certificate was printed for Azaria and all charges against her parents were officially dropped. In a statement Lindy said, "No longer will Australians be able to say dingoes are not dangerous and will only attack if provoked. We love this beautiful country but it is dangerous and we would ask all Australians to be aware of this and take appropriate steps and not wait for someone else to do it for them."

The Chamberlain case shows what can happen when people involved in handling and analyzing blood evidence lack proper training, or when investigators allow public opinion or preconceived notions to influence their analysis.



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Name - \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Answer the questions based on information from the article.

1) When did this case open and when did it officially close?

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Explain three facts about the case as explained in the article.

1 - \_\_\_\_\_

2 - \_\_\_\_\_

3 - \_\_\_\_\_



3) What were two pieces of evidence that supported the parent's story?

1 - \_\_\_\_\_

2 - \_\_\_\_\_

4) What were two pieces of evidence that went against the parent's story?

1 - \_\_\_\_\_

2 - \_\_\_\_\_

5) Explain two mistakes that blood experts made in handling evidence.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6) What sentence did the victim's parents receive?

Do you feel there was enough evidence to reach this result?

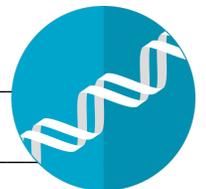
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7) What future discovery helped change the conviction? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



8) Based on the information in this article, do you feel justice was done or do you agree with the accused being acquitted? Why?

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9) Explain three other facts about dingoes presented in the article.

1 - \_\_\_\_\_

2 - \_\_\_\_\_

3 - \_\_\_\_\_

10) Forensic biologists have been called in to study animal attacks at crime scenes. In our area what animal may pose a possible threat to human life and what facts would be worthwhile for the public to know to avoid a situation like the one that the Chamberlain Family faced?

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11) What are three things that future forensic investigators can learn from this case?

1 - \_\_\_\_\_

2 - \_\_\_\_\_

3 - \_\_\_\_\_

12) What do you feel was the most important piece of evidence in the case? Why?

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13) Summarize the major point of this case article in one complete sentence.

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**OPTIONAL QUESTIONS TO BE PLACED ON SMARTBOARD  
BEFORE STUDENTS READ ARTICLE**



## **HIGHLIGHTING QUESTIONS**

- 1) Highlight the name of the victims and the name of the suspect**
- 2) Highlight every date/year in the article**
- 3) Highlight evidence that was wrongly used in the case**
- 4) Highlight the sentence that the convicted received**
- 5) Highlight 10 science/forensic vocabulary terms used in the article**

