Digging Up Hoffa
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Synopsis:

The 1975 disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa continues to fascinate North Americans. A great deal of time and money has been spent looking for Hoffa’s body. Meanwhile, in a tiny house in a Detroit suburb, Phyllis DeLong worries about her finances – and a septic system that has broken down. But Phyllis is a resourceful woman and she decides that desperate times require bold action...

Cast:

PHYLLIS – mid-60s
RANDY, her son – 35
TV show HOST – any age, any gender

Location:

A room in a small home in a Detroit suburb. PHYLLIS and RANDY sit on a couch or chairs, facing lights, being interviewed for a TV true-crime show.

Time:

Now

Sound:

In background, periodically, the sound of a backhoe outside. Beeping sounds as it backs up. The occasional thud or crash.

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*Regular lighting. PHYLLIS and RANDY are settling on a couch or chairs. There is sound, off – a backhoe. Maybe occasional beeping.*

PHYLLIS: Is this OK?

HOST: A bit closer, please.

PHYLLIS: Move in, Ran. And where do we look, at you or the camera?

HOST: At me.

PHYLLIS: We talk to the Host, Ran.

HOST: The lights are going to seem a bit bright at first.

*(Lights come up. They are indeed bright. RANDY shields eyes.)*

RANDY: They hurt my eyes.

PHYLLIS: Move your hand down.

RANDY: It’s too bright!

PHYLLIS: That’s cuz you’re looking at them. Look at the Host.

HOST: I can dim it a bit.

PHYLLIS: He’s fine. How come you didn’t want us to wear makeup?

HOST: We go for a natural look.

PHYLLIS: That’s good cuz I never wear makeup. Makes me look like a corpse. How long do you think this will take?

HOST: Not long.

PHYLLIS: Randy likes his dinner on time.

RANDY: We’re having chops.

PHYLLIS: He’ll be hungry as a bear in an hour.

RANDY: I’m hungry now.

PHYLLIS: They’ll have found what they want in an hour.

HOST: Sooner than that I hope. I only have a few questions, it shouldn’t be more than ten minutes.

PHYLLIS: You’re welcome to stay for dinner.

HOST: Thanks, but we’ll have to get back to the studio. Depending what they find, that is. If they come up empty we’ll be out of your hair in no time. If they do find something, you understand the police will have to be called.

PHYLLIS: I’m prepared for that.

HOST: Then your yard will be a crime scene and it’ll be cordoned off.

PHYLLIS: I just want to do the right thing.

RANDY: Will that mean I can’t go out back?

PHYLLIS: Yes.

RANDY: Where will I go to the bathroom?

PHYLLIS: Never mind that.

HOST: It’s just the backyard that’ll be taped off.

PHYLLIS: The plumbing is out, so we’re making do with the McDonald’s on the corner.

RANDY: I go out back.

PHYLLIS: That’s enough Randy.

RANDY: Behind the garage

PHYLLIS: He doesn’t want to hear that.

RANDY: It’s the septic. It’s busted.

PHYLLIS: He doesn’t care.

HOST: We’ll start? I’ll record an introduction for this afterwards, outside the house. I’m just going to ask some questions for the camera, so when I make the sign *(Demonstrates sign.)* we’ll start the interview. Mrs. DeLong, can you give your name and age?

PHYLLIS: Phyllis DeLong. 65.

HOST: And you sir?

PHYLLIS: Randy’s 35.

RANDY: Randy Brian DeLong. Age 35.

HOST: I’ll direct most of my questions to you Mrs DeLong but Randy if you have anything to add, just pipe up.

PHYLLIS: He probably won’t.

RANDY: I might.

HOST: OK. Here we go. *(Gives sign.)* Mrs. DeLong, it was a real surprise to get your phone call this week. Can you tell us what prompted you to call, after all these years?

PHYLLIS: I’d been watching your last show on ‘Unsolved Crimes’ about Mr. Hoffa. I always watch ‘Unsolved Crimes’ and I was especially interested in this one because I knew Mr. Hoffa personally.

HOST: You knew him – from -

PHYLLIS: I was a waitress at The Red Fox.

HOST: The Detroit restaurant where he was last seen. And you were working there when -

PHYLLIS: The day he disappeared.

  *(Sound of backhoe has stopped.)*

RANDY: It stopped.

PHYLLIS: Maybe they hit something.

RANDY: Can I go look?

PHYLLIS: No Randy, wait. I was a waitress at the Red Fox, and often served Mr. Hoffa. You could call it a professional relationship, though I thought of him as a friend too. He was a generous man, he often ate at the Fox and we waitresses – we all wanted to serve him but his table was in my section so it usually was my – privilege. Mr. Hoffa was a very good tipper.

RANDY: He’s dead.

PHYLLIS: They know that.

HOST: Actually, there’s a theory he’s still alive.

PHYLLIS: Oh, I know you had that man on last episode who said he was in hiding in Brazil but that’s silly. He only spoke English, why would he go someplace like that? Anyway, watching the show I thought about what I know, it all kind of came back to me – and I realized, after all these years, I should come forward.

RANDY: He’s dead. His body is right out there.

PHYLLIS: Let me tell the story Randy.

RANDY: My Dad helped bury him.

PHYLLIS: Randy! Some of what he’s saying – can you -

HOST: We’ll edit the tape. So you were saying you knew Jimmy Hoffa.

PHYLLIS: Yes. He ate at the Red Fox twice a week. Always sat in the same table, corner, facing out. Sometimes he ate alone, but usually he had work associates with him. He was a good tipper like I said. And I want this in: he was a gentleman. The restaurant had a German theme, so we had to wear these dresses – you know – they were very modest, nothing like Hooters, but they – emphasized our qualities – and some of the men who’d come there were – well, they’d ask for dates and such. But Mr. Hoffa – not a hint of that.

HOST: Where were you living then?

PHYLLIS: Here. Bert and I bought this place in 1970, a couple of months after we got married. That’s a change in the world huh. Bert was driving a delivery van and I was waitressing and we could still buy a house right off. Now I can barely keep it. I raised the girls here, and Randy.

RANDY: Darlene, Lori, Randy. Bang bang bang.

PHYLLIS: Not quite that fast. I had Darlene and Lori and then I went back to work. Randy came a lot later. A happy surprise.

HOST: What can you tell me about the events of July 30, 1975?

PHYLLIS: Well, this is the strangest thing. I have a very clear memory of that day. I suppose because of all the – fuss – that was made afterwards.

HOST: But you never made a police statement.

PHYLLIS: Bert said I should keep my nose out of it, for reasons I’m about to explain.

HOST: OK -

PHYLLIS: Mr. Hoffa always parked out back of the restaurant, car facing out, like he was ready for a fast escape. Always he sat in the restaurant facing out, too.

HOST: How do you know about his car?

PHYLLIS: I smoked in those days

*(RANDY gets up and walks off.)*

PHYLLIS: Where are you going?! *(To camera.)* Sorry. *(To RANDY.)* Get back here!

RANDY: I want to see how big the hole is.

PHYLLIS: Randy!

RANDY:  *(Off.)* It’s the length of the house already. I’m gonna go see how deep.

PHYLLIS: Get back here!

 *(RANDY returns.)*

 Sorry.

HOST: You were telling me why you out at the back of the restaurant.

PHYLLIS: I was a smoker then, and every break I’d have one at the back door, the staff door, it faced the parking lot. And the first thing I noticed that day

HOST: Sorry to interrupt – what time was this?

PHYLLIS: After the lunch rush, 2:30 or so. I went out for a cigarette and I saw Mr. Hoffa sitting in his car, in its usual spot, facing out. I waved at him but he was watching something else. A car driving up. It pulled right in front of him, on an angle.

HOST: Blocking his car?

PHYLLIS: Yeah, sort of angled. And a man got out of the passenger side and went around to Mr. Hoffa’s window.

HOST: Did you know the man?

PHYLLIS: Charles O’Brien. And a minute later Mr. Hoffa got out and came with Chuckie back to the new car and this was strange – they both got in the back seat. Mr. Hoffa first, then Chuckie got in the other side.

HOST: Did he see you?

PHYLLIS: Yes, I waved again. And I waved as they drove off, too.

HOST: You waved at Jimmy Hoffa?

PHYLLIS: And Chuckie. He often dined at the Red Fox with Mr. Hoffa.

HOST: Did you see any evidence of coercion?

PHYLLIS: Do you mean, a gun or something? Oh no, Chuckie was like a son to Mr. Hoffa!

HOST: So, let me get this straight. Charles O’Brien – Chuckie - got out of the passenger seat, went over to Jimmy Hoffa’s car, Hoffa got out and they both got in the back seat of O’Brien’s car.

PHYLLIS: Correct.

HOST: And drove off.

PHYLLIS: Yes.

HOST: Almost like they were being chauffeured.

PHYLLIS: Joey Giacalone was driving.

HOST: You recognized him too?

PHYLLIS: Oh yes, he was a regular at the Red Fox. And his father Anthony Giacalone. It was Joey’s car.

HOST: I don’t suppose you can identify the car.

PHYLLIS: A maroon 1975 Mercury Marquis Brougham.

HOST: *(A little incredulous.)* You knew that?

PHYLLIS: Well, yes, because I’m going to see it twice more that day, aren’t I.

HOST: But to know the exact make and model. We haven’t mentioned it on the series yet -

PHYLLIS: Welcome to Detroit. If you live here, you know your cars. And, like I said, that Merc was going to figure in my life.

HOST: Did Jimmy Hoffa look upset?

PHYLLIS: He looked straight ahead. I thought that was odd because he was the kind of man who usually noticed everything. Anyway, my break ended, and I went in and finished my shift. I got changed and went out to the bus stop

HOST: Sorry to interrupt again – how many hours later was this?

PHYLLIS: Three or so. I wasn’t working the dinner shift in those days because of the girls. Anyway, I wasn’t standing there ten seconds when Joey pulls up. In his 1975 Mercury Marquis Brougham. Randy sit still. Joey asked if I wanted a lift home and I got in.

HOST: Isn’t that a little unusual?

PHYLLIS: He was a customer. I’d served him twenty or thirty times; he’d always been fine. And things were different then, I mean, there was a different attitude to giving people lifts. Nowadays with all the nutbars nobody gets in cars but back then… However, on the way home Joey did ask where Bert was, and I thought that was strange, I was trying to remember if I’d ever mentioned Bert to him.

HOST: You were worried he had something else on his mind?

PHYLLIS: I was a bit. I said Bert wasn’t off his shift yet and I appreciated the ride because my mother was bringing my daughters back. So that was fine and we drove and chatted and when we got here he said he’d wait out front, he wanted to talk about Bert about some work.

HOST: Did he say what kind of work?

PHYLLIS: No, but the Giacalones were in all sorts of businesses and Bert had a van so... I went inside and about an hour later I heard Bert drive up, then I heard some voices, and then a car drove off. Randy for the love of God stop fidgeting.

RANDY: I want to see the hole.

PHYLLIS: Would it be OK? Otherwise he’s just going to sit here and twitch.

HOST: Sure.

*(RANDY leaves.)*

PHYLLIS: Come right back and don’t talk.

HOST: So tell me about Bert – when he came in -

PHYLLIS: Oh, he was upset. Shaking. I was worried it was about me getting a ride home, it crossed my mind that he might have thought I had something going with Joey. But it wasn’t that at all. He said, “Phyl, it seems like you saw something this afternoon you wasn’t supposed to see. So what you have to do is never say anything to anyone about it.” And I said, “You mean, something about Mr. Hoffa, cause it was a bit odd, he drove off with Joey and left his car behind in the lot.”

And Bert said, “Yes. That’s exactly what you have to forget.”

And I said, “Is Mr. Hoffa in trouble?”

And Bert said, “Yes, and now we are too.” Those were his exact words. And then he added something that gave me the chills. “They’re going to come back tonight. Giacalone and a couple of his friends. And they’re going to make a mess of our backyard. We’re going to bury something and they’re making me help.

HOST: Did he ever say what was being buried?

PHYLLIS: No, but I had a darn good idea.

RANDY: *(Returning.)* The hole’s almost finished.

HOST: So you never looked.

RANDY: Yeah, I looked

PHYLLIS: He’s talking to me. I was petrified. So was Bert. He shook all through supper. Sure enough, around 8, Joey drove back up in his car with two men with shovels and Bert went out and joined them. After about an hour, they left. Bert came in and said tomorrow some fellows were going to drop sod off and I was to water it and I was to go back to the restaurant and never tell anyone anything, ever, about this. And the way he said it, I knew what it meant. So that’s what I did. They dropped off the sod, Bert laid it, I watered it – I’m telling you, there sod got TLC. And Bert and I never talked about it again, I never saw Joey Giacalone or Chuckie O’Brien again, the years went by... Bert died, life’s been tough...

RANDY: Dad was real sick.

PHYLLIS: Liver. *(Makes drinking sign).* Anyway, then I saw your show and I decided it was time. Do you think they’re done?

RANDY: They stopped digging.

HOST: Turning off lights. I’m just going to go talk to them.

 *(HOST leaves.)*

RANDY: Where’s he going?

PHYLLIS: Out to look at the hole.

RANDY: It’s the size of a swimming pool.

PHYLLIS: I know what you’re thinking and we can’t have a pool.

RANDY: I can swim. If it rained, would that fill it?

PHYLLIS: It’s not going to rain that much.

RANDY: If the water was working we could fill it.

PHYLLIS: The water’s not working. We’re not having a pool. We’re going to sell this place and move near Aunt Jennie in Lansing.

RANDY:  *(Sulking.)* Do they have toilets in Lansing?

PHYLLIS: Don’t be smart.

HOST: *(Returning, and will start packing up camera.)* Well, we’ve dug everywhere you said – they found some old septic tiles but nothing else.

PHYLLIS: Really!

HOST: You’re absolutely sure it wasn’t right up against the house

PHYLLIS: It was back further. I should know. I watered it all my life.

HOST: Well sadly enough, we found nothing. I was very hopeful.

PHYLLIS: So I guess you won’t use this?

HOST: Oh, this will still make a good episode. It’s another piece in the puzzle.

PHYLLIS: I suppose Joey and his boys might have come and dug things back up.

HOST: You’d have remembered that.

PHYLLIS: We used to go up to the peninsula for two weeks every summer, maybe they came during that time.

HOST: You’d have noticed the fresh sod.

PHYLLIS: True. Well, thank you for coming. I do enjoy your show.

HOST: And you really don’t want us to fill the hole in?

PHYLLIS: Randy can shovel it back, the exercise will do him good.

HOST: *(A joke.)* You could leave it for a swimming pool.

RANDY: Yes!

PHYLLIS: Oh lord.

HOST: If you’ll come outside now, I’d like a shot with you by the hole.

PHYLLIS: I’ll just get our coats.

*(HOST exits. RANDY follows him, then comes back.)*

 Is he gone?

RANDY: I really want a swimming pool, Mom.

PHYLLIS: Ran, if I was a rich woman, you’d have a pool. But right now, we just need plumbing. OK, here’s your coat, let’s go out and look at the hole and pretend we’re sad they didn’t find Mr. Hoffa. You can do that?

RANDY: I AM sad.

PHYLLIS: I’m not. All that yakking was work but we saved a lot of money. You know how much the contractor was going to charge for digging up the yard? And now, courtesy of Mr. Hoffa, we don’t have to spend a nickel. I always said Mr. Hoffa was a generous man and now he’s just given us $500 tip for our new septic tank.

RANDY: You always know what to do, Mom.

PHYLLIS: I do my best, Randy. I do my best.

*They exit*.

The End.