

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:16,352

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

2

00:00:16,352 --> 00:00:20,874

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations but not necessarily

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00:00:20,874 --> 00:00:31,719

the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

4

00:00:31,719 --> 00:00:38,642

As an actor, I have portrayed Theo, the little known brother of artist Vincent van Gogh.

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00:00:38,642 --> 00:00:44,444

Somehow I related so strongly to the story of the two brothers that I became obsessed

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00:00:44,444 --> 00:00:50,207

with Theo's struggle to defend Vincent and to prove that he was not insane.

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00:00:50,207 --> 00:00:55,609

Most people, including many experts, believe that Vincent van Gogh was mad, his brother

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00:00:55,609 --> 00:01:07,495

didn't, and I have evidence that he was right.

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00:01:07,495 --> 00:01:10,656

This for me is a personal search.

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00:01:10,656 --> 00:01:16,179

A search for a man who painted brilliant impressions of sunflowers and starry nights.

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00:01:16,179 --> 00:01:21,741

He was called mad man by many, and in fact he did cut off part of his own ear.

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00:01:21,741 --> 00:01:23,862

But was he really mad?

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00:01:23,862 --> 00:01:27,504

He was born twice and he had a deep feeling for family.

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00:01:27,504 --> 00:01:33,067

Yet, he considered himself a stranger on the earth.

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00:01:33,067 --> 00:01:38,109

Vincent van Gogh.

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00:01:38,109 --> 00:01:48,354

Today, 14 of his works are displayed here in the celebrated Louvre Museum in Paris.

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00:01:48,354 --> 00:01:53,996

In a feverish ten-year period, though plagued by illness, he turned out 1,800 pieces of

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00:01:53,996 --> 00:01:57,678

work, many of which sell for as much as a million dollars each today.

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00:02:09,123 --> 00:02:16,046

Clearly, van Gogh belongs in the pantheon of the world's greatest artists.

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00:02:16,046 --> 00:02:23,770

How could works of such beauty be the product of a deranged mind?

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00:02:23,770 --> 00:02:30,093

Vincent van Gogh, Dutchman, painter, impressionist, lover of love, God, and art, took this route

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00:02:30,093 --> 00:02:35,375

to the south of France after a year of painting and studying in Paris.

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00:02:35,375 --> 00:02:40,297

As I followed his trail, I reviewed my research.

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00:02:40,297 --> 00:02:45,260

From collections of his preliminary sketches, we know that he studied his art logically,

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00:02:45,260 --> 00:02:46,620

precisely.

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00:02:46,620 --> 00:02:47,901

He was well read.

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00:02:47,901 --> 00:02:50,022

He knew five languages.

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00:02:50,022 --> 00:02:55,464

His work was not accidental, it was an act of choice and use of skills which he had worked

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00:02:55,464 --> 00:02:59,386

hard and long to acquire.

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00:02:59,386 --> 00:03:03,028

For me, something here rang a jarring note.

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00:03:03,028 --> 00:03:07,990

How could this man work so diligently, skillfully?

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00:03:07,990 --> 00:03:13,833

How could he write more than 500 beautiful letters to Theo, so sensitive and full of enlightened

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00:03:13,833 --> 00:03:16,354

insight if he were actually insane?

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00:03:33,802 --> 00:03:39,084

Whatever Vincent's problem was, it began to appear here in the south of France.

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00:03:39,084 --> 00:03:41,846

What I hoped to find was the cause.

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00:03:41,846 --> 00:03:44,047

Was it the intense loneliness?

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00:03:44,047 --> 00:03:46,248

Was it the burning southern sky?

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00:03:46,248 --> 00:03:53,211

Was it the maddening mistral wind, lack of proper food, or the feverish work itself?

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00:03:53,211 --> 00:03:58,453

What caused the man to fall to the depths of illness and despair while his work soared

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00:03:58,453 --> 00:04:01,055

to the heights of brilliance?

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00:04:03,816 --> 00:04:08,458

My first stop in the town of Arles would be the corner where Vincent lived, in what became

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00:04:08,458 --> 00:04:11,059

known as the Yellow House.

43

00:04:13,740 --> 00:04:18,062

The adjacent Sidewalk Cafe is still open for business.

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00:04:18,062 --> 00:04:21,064

I stopped to absorb the atmosphere.

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00:04:24,065 --> 00:04:28,067

The Yellow House had been destroyed during World War II.

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00:04:29,067 --> 00:04:35,070

All that remains is Vincent's luminescent painting.

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00:04:35,070 --> 00:04:42,073

Here Vincent dreamed of starting a community of artists, and Paul Gauguin was invited to be its leader.

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00:04:42,073 --> 00:04:47,076

Gauguin, eloquent, outspoken, and arrogant.

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00:04:47,076 --> 00:04:51,077

He had deserted his wife and five children in favor of painting.

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00:04:52,078 --> 00:04:57,080

To share his home, Vincent could not have picked a more unsuitable partner.

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00:04:57,080 --> 00:05:05,084

But Vincent, thrilled by Gauguin's acceptance, painted masterpieces to decorate the walls.

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00:05:05,084 --> 00:05:11,087

Gauguin arrived and flattered Vincent by painting his portrait.

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00:05:13,088 --> 00:05:17,089

They worked together, and they socialized together.

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00:05:17,089 --> 00:05:21,091

But soon, more than anything, they argued.

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00:05:21,091 --> 00:05:25,093

Vincent always the straightforward, passionate seeker of truth.

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00:05:25,093 --> 00:05:28,094

Gauguin, caustic, cool.

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00:05:28,094 --> 00:05:32,096

Baiting Vincent as a matador might taunt a bull.

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00:05:32,096 --> 00:05:34,097

Eventually Vincent wrote,

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00:05:34,097 --> 00:05:42,101

I think our friend Gauguin has become tired of our house, the little town of Arles, and especially me.

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00:05:48,104 --> 00:05:52,105

Was it the agitation of the argument?

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00:05:52,105 --> 00:05:54,106

Was it alcohol?

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00:05:54,106 --> 00:05:56,107

Was it illness?

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00:05:56,107 --> 00:05:59,109

What triggered the famous events which followed?

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00:06:02,110 --> 00:06:07,112

According to Gauguin's version of the story, he took a walk into the night.

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00:06:07,112 --> 00:06:09,113

He was being followed.

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00:06:09,113 --> 00:06:12,115

It was Vincent with a razor.

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00:06:12,115 --> 00:06:20,118

Gauguin later reported, I stared him down with a look.

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00:06:20,118 --> 00:06:24,120

What really happened, we will never know.

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00:06:34,125 --> 00:06:40,127

Then, Vincent performed the act most widely presented as evidence of his insanity.

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00:06:40,127 --> 00:06:44,129

He went back to his room and severed half his ear.

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00:06:59,136 --> 00:07:05,139

Later that night, he delivered a bizarre gift to a prostitute named Rachel at a local brothel

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00:07:05,139 --> 00:07:09,141

and said, Gardé cet objet précisément.

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00:07:09,141 --> 00:07:13,143

Well, guard this object carefully.

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00:07:20,146 --> 00:07:22,147

It was the severed ear.

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00:07:26,149 --> 00:07:28,149

Why?

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00:07:28,149 --> 00:07:33,152

The answer may lie in a previous relationship with a prostitute named Christine.

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00:07:33,152 --> 00:07:37,154

When Vincent met her, she had a child and was expecting another.

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00:07:37,154 --> 00:07:40,155

Vincent felt he could savor from the streets.

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00:07:40,155 --> 00:07:43,156

It was a noble effort, but a failure.

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00:07:43,156 --> 00:07:46,158

The lady did not want to change her lifestyle.

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00:07:46,158 --> 00:07:52,160

Was there for Vincent a connection between his past and the present?

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00:07:55,162 --> 00:08:00,164

The hospital at Arle where Vincent van Gogh was treated after he had slashed his ear.

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00:08:00,164 --> 00:08:02,165

Why had he done it?

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00:08:02,165 --> 00:08:04,166

And was he really mad?

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00:08:04,166 --> 00:08:09,168

Why was he suffering such personal pain while his work was soaring?

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00:08:12,170 --> 00:08:15,171

Here I hope to find some answers.

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00:08:15,171 --> 00:08:20,173

I quickly recognize the garden of one of his famous paintings.

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00:08:25,176 --> 00:08:29,177

And now, the first real clues began to emerge.

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00:08:30,178 --> 00:08:34,180

In the hospital records, I found the diagnosis of his illness.

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00:08:34,180 --> 00:08:38,182

The key word was a total surprise.

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00:08:38,182 --> 00:08:40,182

Epilepsy.

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00:08:40,182 --> 00:08:48,186

Dr. Ray, his physician, diagnosed Vincent as epileptic, suffering from seizures, hallucinations.

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00:08:48,186 --> 00:08:53,188

He was hearing voices which taunted him, terrified him.

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00:08:54,189 --> 00:09:01,192

Vincent's biblical training had taught him, if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.

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00:09:01,192 --> 00:09:07,195

I wonder if Vincent was trying to silence an offending ear.

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00:09:10,196 --> 00:09:16,199

The isolation chamber where Vincent was locked up during his stay at the hospital.

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00:09:17,199 --> 00:09:23,202

This was his view of the world when he wrote,

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00:09:23,202 --> 00:09:33,207

Dear Theo, I write to you in full possession of my faculties and not as a madman, but as the brother you know.

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00:09:33,207 --> 00:09:41,210

A certain number of people addressed the petition to the mayor, describing me as a man not fit to be at liberty.

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00:09:42,211 --> 00:09:50,215

The commissioner of police then gave the order to shut me up without my guilt being proved or even open to proof.

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00:09:50,215 --> 00:09:54,216

I have done no harm to anyone.

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00:09:58,218 --> 00:10:05,221

After his release, Vincent was embittered and deeply pained by the cruel actions of the people of all.

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00:10:05,221 --> 00:10:11,224

He realized that he was ill, but felt that he deserved help rather than punishment.

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00:10:11,224 --> 00:10:18,227

It became obvious that he would suffer periodic hallucinatory attacks which terrified him.

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00:10:18,227 --> 00:10:24,230

Vincent and his brother Theo decided that he should have constant medical supervision.

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00:10:24,230 --> 00:10:28,232

He signed himself into the asylum at San Rami.

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00:10:28,232 --> 00:10:33,234

It was understood that he would be allowed to paint whenever he was well enough to do so.

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00:10:36,236 --> 00:10:42,238

He wrote to his brother, I think I have done well to come here.

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00:10:42,238 --> 00:10:47,241

The idea of work as a duty is coming back very strong.

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00:10:47,241 --> 00:10:52,243

I have two landscapes done, views among the hills.

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00:10:52,243 --> 00:10:59,246

One is the country I see from the window of my bedroom, a boundary wall,

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00:10:59,246 --> 00:11:05,249

and beyond it the gray foliage of a few olive trees and the hills.

113

00:11:19,255 --> 00:11:22,257

Though here there are some patients very seriously ill,

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00:11:22,257 --> 00:11:28,259

the fear and horror of madness that I used to have has lessened a great deal.

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00:11:29,260 --> 00:11:33,262

When I'm working in the garden, they all come to look

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00:11:33,262 --> 00:11:39,265

and I assure you they have the discretion and the manners to leave me alone

117

00:11:39,265 --> 00:11:43,266

more than I can save for the good people of the town of all.

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00:11:47,268 --> 00:11:52,271

A major newspaper article now praised Vincent as the leader of the Impressionists

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00:11:52,271 --> 00:11:57,273

and one of his canvases was sold for the equivalent of \$80, his first sale.

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00:11:57,273 --> 00:12:03,276

He was 36. No other painting would be sold in his lifetime.

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00:12:05,276 --> 00:12:09,278

The quantity and quantity of his work was enormous.

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00:12:09,278 --> 00:12:14,281

He captured, enhanced and enriched whatever he saw.

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00:12:14,281 --> 00:12:19,283

He said, I feel as if nature has spoken to me.

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00:12:20,283 --> 00:12:26,286

The pattern of Vincent's life now is defined.

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00:12:26,286 --> 00:12:31,288

The attacks were almost predictable, approximately every three months.

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00:12:38,292 --> 00:12:42,293

They were followed by periods of recovery and feverish work,

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00:12:42,293 --> 00:12:46,295

hardly the pattern of a madman.

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00:12:50,297 --> 00:12:57,300

And then again, the next attack, the voices,

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00:12:57,300 --> 00:13:02,303

always the damnable voices that beleaguered his brain.

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00:13:07,305 --> 00:13:11,307

In May 1890, after two years in the South,

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00:13:11,307 --> 00:13:16,309

Vincent's loneliness and his longing to see his brother and the North again

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00:13:16,309 --> 00:13:20,311

prompted a decision to leave San Remy.

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00:13:20,311 --> 00:13:25,313

Before following Vincent's trail to Auvers, I had one more important stop to make.

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00:13:25,313 --> 00:13:29,315

The nature of Vincent's illness was now clear.

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00:13:29,315 --> 00:13:31,316

But what about his mysticism?

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00:13:31,316 --> 00:13:36,318

Why did he suspect that there was another side to existence?

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00:13:36,318 --> 00:13:40,320

Why did he see death as a trip to a star?

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00:13:40,320 --> 00:13:44,322

Perhaps at his birthplace, I would find some answers.

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00:13:45,322 --> 00:13:48,324

Certainly the family offered no clue.

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00:13:48,324 --> 00:13:51,325

His father, a minister in the Reformed Church,

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00:13:51,325 --> 00:13:56,327

both parents, straightforward, no nonsense, bound by tradition.

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00:13:56,327 --> 00:13:58,328

No mysteries here.

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00:13:58,328 --> 00:14:03,331

And yet, during his brief career as an evangelist among the miners in Belgium,

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00:14:03,331 --> 00:14:07,332

Vincent preached that he was a stranger on the earth.

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00:14:07,332 --> 00:14:09,333

Why?

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00:14:10,334 --> 00:14:14,336

In Zundert, Holland, I made an amazing discovery.

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00:14:14,336 --> 00:14:21,339

In the early 1850s, a strange ritual took place at this church every Sunday.

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00:14:21,339 --> 00:14:26,341

Young Vincent van Gogh visits a grave which bears his own name.

149

00:14:26,341 --> 00:14:30,343

The grave is that of a brother who was still born.

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00:14:30,343 --> 00:14:36,346

Both Vincent's were born on exactly the same date, one year apart.

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00:14:37,346 --> 00:14:43,349

He lived his entire childhood with a ghost that bore his name.

152

00:14:52,353 --> 00:14:57,355

Could this Sunday ritual have planted the seeds of his mysticism?

153

00:14:58,356 --> 00:15:04,359

In Auvers, a suburb of Paris, arrangements were made for him to live in a room over the Café Revue,

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00:15:04,359 --> 00:15:07,360

now called the Café Van Gogh.

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00:15:21,366 --> 00:15:26,369

He was placed under the care of a sympathetic doctor named Gache.

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00:15:28,370 --> 00:15:34,372

The current owner of the Gache house, Madame Vandebroek.

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00:15:34,372 --> 00:15:40,375

Doctor who was famous, Vincent came earlier than expected and was terribly impatient.

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00:15:40,375 --> 00:15:49,379

He came out here, unannounced, and came like a bombshell on the terrace

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00:15:49,379 --> 00:15:54,381

and was standing there in the bright sunlight when he was discovered

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00:15:54,381 --> 00:15:59,384

and ushered into the dining room, the doctor was called,

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00:15:59,384 --> 00:16:04,386

and when the dining room shutters were slightly closed because of the strong sunshine,

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00:16:04,386 --> 00:16:10,389

and Vincent, who wanted to see the view, threw them open and was standing there just drinking it all in.

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00:16:10,389 --> 00:16:15,391

In the first sight, the doctor had of his patient and friend was that one.

164

00:16:16,392 --> 00:16:21,394

He was indeed impatient, and perhaps he had good reason.

165

00:16:21,394 --> 00:16:26,396

When he arrived in Auvers, he had 70 days to live.

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00:16:29,398 --> 00:16:32,399

Is it possible that he knew that?

167

00:16:35,400 --> 00:16:43,404

In those 70 days, he turned out 100 pieces of work, as if he were in a race against time.

168

00:16:43,404 --> 00:16:59,411

On a Sunday morning, the 27th of July, 1890, Vincent as usual took his paint box, easel, and brushes,

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00:16:59,411 --> 00:17:03,413

and walked up this road to the nearby fields.

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00:17:07,415 --> 00:17:10,416

He was also carrying a gun.

171

00:17:13,418 --> 00:17:16,419

He was about to make a decision.

172

00:17:16,419 --> 00:17:19,420

The next day

173

00:17:37,429 --> 00:17:44,432

Regardless of our moral reaction to his act, it must be recognized as a deliberate choice.

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00:17:47,433 --> 00:17:54,437

After lying unconscious all day in the hot sun, he managed to stagger back to the café.

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00:17:54,437 --> 00:18:00,439

What occurred in the last hours of his life most clearly indicates that he was not mad,

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00:18:00,439 --> 00:18:07,442

but obviously a man afflicted with a physical problem which drove him to a desperate act.

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00:18:08,443 --> 00:18:14,446

His brother received the news the next day and came immediately.

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00:18:17,447 --> 00:18:27,452

When Theo stepped into this room, he expected to find his brother either unconscious or dead.

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00:18:27,452 --> 00:18:35,455

He was shocked to find Vincent sitting up in his bed, calmly smoking his pipe.

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00:18:35,455 --> 00:18:41,458

Vincent asked his brother not to cry. He said,

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00:18:41,458 --> 00:18:44,459

I did it for the good of everyone.

182

00:18:45,460 --> 00:18:52,463

Dr. Gershé said that Vincent's wound wasn't really that serious and Vincent had a strong constitution.

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00:18:52,463 --> 00:18:59,466

His chances of recovery were good, but Vincent was very stubborn about it.

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00:18:59,466 --> 00:19:05,469

It seemed as though he was determined to succeed in his own death.

185

00:19:05,469 --> 00:19:12,472

He said, I've been a failure at so many things in my lifetime.

186

00:19:12,472 --> 00:19:17,475

I hope I haven't failed at this as well.

187

00:19:17,475 --> 00:19:23,477

Theo held his hands and they talked late into the night.

188

00:19:23,477 --> 00:19:31,481

And then Theo said, I felt his hands weaken and his voice grew fainter.

189

00:19:32,481 --> 00:19:37,484

I sat on the bed. I cradled him in my arms.

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00:19:37,484 --> 00:19:44,487

I kissed his face and he looked up at me and he said, Theo, I wish I could die like this.

191

00:19:46,488 --> 00:19:54,492

And then, said Theo, he closed his eyes and I felt his heart stop.

192

00:19:54,492 --> 00:19:59,494

I held him close. I didn't want to let him go.

193

00:20:00,494 --> 00:20:13,500

I felt his soul lingering near me for those next few moments and then something went out of me and he was gone.

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00:20:14,501 --> 00:20:29,508

Vincent's brother Theo, his only lifelong friend and support, went into a physical and emotional decline.

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00:20:29,508 --> 00:20:34,510

And six months later, joined his brother in death.

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00:20:34,510 --> 00:20:49,517

With the mistral wind, the heat of the sun, his illness, it's amazing that Vincent van Gogh accomplished as much as he did.

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00:20:49,517 --> 00:20:56,520

While it is interesting and worthwhile to investigate the man, the power and the magnificence of his work are awesome.

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00:20:56,520 --> 00:21:00,522

Today, the controversy about Vincent van Gogh continues.

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00:21:00,522 --> 00:21:10,526

He was a very complicated man. He was sometimes difficult, sometimes stubborn, mystical, loving, self-destructive and always passionate.

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00:21:10,526 --> 00:21:19,531

I set out looking for answers to a set of intellectual questions. Some of those questions have been answered. Some still remain mysteries.

201

00:21:19,531 --> 00:21:25,533

But I found something that was in a sense beyond the search and I think even more important.

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00:21:25,533 --> 00:21:35,538

In my efforts to understand the man, I found a new and even deeper appreciation for the beauty that he gave us.

203

00:21:55,547 --> 00:22:01,550

The Lost Ark, Tonight at 8 on the History Channel.