

Police Still Seeking Leads in '79 Bludgeon Killings

By ERIC HEALY, *Los Angeles Times* [Orange County Edition] July 25, 1988. pg. 3

Sitting at his desk, Costa Mesa Police Sgt. Sam Cordeiro browses through four bundles of police reports. He is looking for a killer.

He admits that the intensity of his search has waned somewhat and that the prospects are bleak for catching the "Bludgeon Killer," who in 1979 sexually assaulted and beat four Costa Mesa women, three of them fatally.

"We're going to have to get lucky to solve this one," he said.

So far, there have been no case-cracking leads.

All of the victims lived within blocks of the intersection of Harbor Boulevard and Victoria Street.

Two women, Kimberly Gaye Rawlins, 21, and Marolyn Carleton, 31, had apartments on Avocado Street. The last victim, 17-year-old Debra Lynn Senior, lived nearby on Maple Street.

The only woman to survive an attack by the Bludgeon Killer, albeit narrowly, is 24-year-old Jane A. Pettengill. Today, she speaks with an implanted voice box and breathes through a hole in her throat-remnants of a tracheotomy she underwent as a result of the attack, Cordeiro said.

Pettengill has moved out of the area and changed her name.

At the height of the hysteria in 1979, Costa Mesa was covered with posters of the police composite sketch of the suspect. It was drawn from a description by Carleton's son, who saw his mother's killer bolt from their apartment.

The killer was described as strongly built, 25 to 30 years old, about 5 feet 10 inches tall, with an olive complexion and pock marks on his cheeks.

Pamela Senior, mother of the late Debra Senior, can't forget the face on the posters.

"To even consider that he's had good days, Christmas, Thanksgiving, days that he's deprived my child of," she said, her voice cracking. "It's very hard to accept that."

But Senior said she is convinced that the police are still doing their best to find the killer.

"The police have really done a great deal," she said. "I know they haven't forgotten us."

But for the mother of Kim Rawlins, there is no solace, said Kim's sister, Cheryl.

"My mother is not any different today than she was three days after the funeral. . . . That was her baby."

Kim was the third child her mother had lost, Cheryl said. One son died as an infant and a second, Earl, was killed in a hit-and-run crash on his motorcycle. Like Kim, Earl was 21 years old and his killer was never found.

After Kim Rawlins' death, her mother moved to Texas.

Cheryl, who lived next door to Kim, moved to another Orange County community. Months earlier, the two sisters had shared an apartment.

Cheryl recalled the last day she saw Kim alive. They were "clowning around" during the drive home from an Irvine medical laboratory where they worked together.

"Fortunately, I have that memory," Cheryl said. "I'm lucky. I'm one of the people who got to know her."

Costa Mesa police still receive a couple of calls a year from people saying they have seen someone fitting the description of the Bludgeon Killer, but most of the leads turn out to be dead ends.

"We don't know what that guy looks like now," Costa Mesa Lt. Rick Johnson said. "He could be bald for all we know." According to the psychological profile prepared for police by psychiatrists and other experts specializing in criminology, the killer was driven by a need to control women, a need that ultimately was satisfied only by killing them. He probably was unintelligent and extremely insecure, police said.

If the killer was scared away by the intense publicity and poster campaign at the time of the murders, he may be committing brutal crimes elsewhere, Cordeiro worries.

However, with no fingerprints to link the killer to other crimes, police at this point can only keep a

lookout for suspiciously similar cases in newspapers, police bulletins and most-wanted lists, Johnson said. There are no more leads to track, no more theories to test. As time goes on, the chances of finding a killer lessen. "If police can't solve a crime in 10 days, then it's very unlikely that they'll solve it," Cordeiro said.