

Police Files Remain Open on These More Baffling Slayings in County [Orange County Edition]

RICHARD BEENE. *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 1988, pg. 5.

For every case such as the unsolved slaying of Judy Nesbitt, which has baffled investigators for 8 years, there are many more murders solved within months after they happen. In 1983-87, the Orange County Sheriff's Department handled 43 homicides, of which all but 17 have been solved. Similarly, the homicide clearance rate in Santa Ana last year was 77%. It was 65% in 1986.

In Newport Beach, where Nesbitt was killed, police spokesman Bob Oakley said just five murders have remained unsolved in the history of the department.

Lt. Richard J. Olson, a Sheriff's Department spokesman, said in most cases the killer will turn out to be an acquaintance of the victim, or possibly even a family member, "but you always have that situation that arises when it appears that it has been done by someone who just disappears from the area."

In interviews across the county, these are the handful of unsolved homicides that emerged as the most puzzling:

Linda Ann O'Keefe

One of Newport Beach's five unsolved murders is that of this 11-year-old who disappeared July 6, 1973, while walking home from school.

On the day of her abduction, the girl called her mother from the Lincoln School in Corona del Mar, where she was attending summer school, to say that she was starting her walk home, about a mile away. Her body was found along Back Bay Road on Upper Newport Bay by a former county planning commissioner bicycling with family and friends.

The girl's body had been partly hidden by cattails and marsh grass.

An autopsy indicated that she had been sexually molested and strangled, but there were no indications of a struggle.

An 18-year-old Corona del Mar man was arrested in the case but released because of insufficient evidence.

Rosalind Louise Foster

Foster and Sandra Smith, UCI students and roommates in a Costa Mesa apartment, had gone to bed the evening of April 30, 1976, after an afternoon of studying. Sometime during the night, they were beaten in their beds.

Foster, 19, was killed. Smith, 21, suffered a skull fracture but survived.

Police said there were no signs of forced entry into the apartment, nor were there indications of robbery or sexual attack.

Detective Lynda Giesler, a 26-year Costa Mesa police veteran, recalled the case as being a difficult one because of the lack of physical evidence and witnesses.

"Even Sandra Smith didn't see the person who did it," Giesler said.

A male classmate of the pair reported finding the women the following morning when he went to the apartment on Paularino Avenue. He was later arrested in the attack but was released because of insufficient evidence.

"This is one of the oldest unsolved murders that I can recall here," Giesler said. "We review it from time to time, but there never has been much to go on."

Keith and Patricia Harrington

Keith Eli Harrington, 24, a third-year UC Irvine medical student, and Patricia Anne Harrington, 27, a pediatric nurse, had been married just 3 months when they were slain in their Laguna Niguel home.

Someone sneaked into the exclusive gated community of Niguel Shores just north of Coast Highway, broke into their home during the night and beat them to death with a club or some other blunt instrument. Their bloodstained bodies were found Aug. 21, 1980, by Roger Harrington, Keith's father, who had been invited to dinner that evening.

In September, 1980, the family made an appeal "on a personal, as well as societal level" and offered \$25,000 for information leading to the arrest of the murderer.

Olson of the Sheriff's Department said the Harrington case is "still active" and added that it is reviewed periodically when new information is received: "There was information we received fairly recently as to the similarity of this crime and several other crimes, and individuals involved in crimes of this nature in other areas. The investigators are following up."

Joe Luis Avila

Avila, an heir to the El Ranchito Mexican restaurant chain, lived fast and flamboyantly and died the same way. Shortly after midnight on May 7, 1987, someone pumped 14 bullets through the side window of Avila's black Porsche Carrera convertible, killing him instantly.

Police said it looked like a classic professional hit.

According to detectives, Avila, 40, helped close one of the El Ranchito restaurants in Costa Mesa at 11 p.m. and was driving to a Santa Ana Heights restaurant when the crime occurred.

When he tried to turn right onto Tustin Avenue from Santa Isabel Avenue in Santa Ana Heights, Avila stopped to avoid a small motorcycle that was parked to block the road. It was then, police speculate, that a gunman fired into the driver's side of the Porsche, starting near the roof and running across the left door's window.

Avila had been indicted in Hawaii in 1977 on a charge of drug smuggling, but the allegation was later dismissed on procedural grounds. The Orange County Sheriff's Department, which has been investigating the case, will say only that the slaying is being handled as a homicide.

Greg Anderson

Anderson, 12, was a well-behaved honor student who spent his afternoons riding his bicycle and weekends playing baseball and fishing with his father. He lived in an affluent neighborhood of single-family homes in East Tustin.

On June 2, 1988, someone killed him in the kitchen of his home. He apparently bled to death after being stabbed in the neck.

Anderson was killed shortly after riding his bike home from nearby Hewes Middle School at 2:30 p.m. His body was found by his 15-year-old sister.

Sheriff's Department spokesman Olson said he could not comment at length on the case because the investigation is still active.

"We talked to over 1,000 people," he said. "When you have a case that you have very little to go with, you have to talk to a lot of people. Sometimes you may go back a third time. But you just can't quit."

Malinda Gibbons

Gibbons, 22, hadn't even unpacked her moving boxes when someone forced his way into her new Costa Mesa apartment and sexually assaulted her. The intruder then stabbed her to death in the chest. The date was July 18, 1988.

The victim and her husband, Kent W. Gibbons, 25, had arrived in the county just 2 days before her death. The couple had come from Harrisville, Utah, a rural suburb of Ogden, after Kent Gibbons took a job as an engineer with Western Digital Corp. in Irvine.

When he returned to the Harbor Boulevard apartment complex after his first day of work, police said, Gibbons found his wife bound, gagged and lying in a pool of blood. She had bled to death from the stabbing.

The company has offered a \$25,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer.

No murder weapon was found. Police said they are looking for a wedding ring set, a woman's watch and a pocket calculator apparently stolen by the killer.