

FOUR UNSOLVED ORANGE COUNTY MURDERS

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MALINDA GIBBONS

Malinda Gibbons had lived in Costa Mesa for just three days when the 22-year-old was bound, gagged and stabbed to death in July 1988.

Costa Mesa police Lt. Ron Smith started investigating Gibbons' murder the day it occurred. "It was my first case as a homicide sergeant and I have a very personal stake in the case," Smith said.

The Gibbonses had moved to Costa Mesa from a small town in Utah.

The couple, devout Mormons, moved to Orange County where Kent Gibbons, 25, had just started a job as an engineer at Western Digital Corp. in Irvine.

Smith said Malinda Gibbons appears to have been killed by a stranger.

Costa Mesa police have 25 unsolved murders on the books, and three retired detectives have been hired to work exclusively on solving them, said Smith. The murder of Malinda Gibbons is high on their priority list.

That case was included in the 20 priority unsolved homicides targeted by the district attorney's homicide chief.

"We'll call down the deputy DA and go through all the evidence.

I want her to see all the bloody clothing. I want her to see every bit of evidence. I want her to take this case very personally," Smith said.

If you have information on the case, call Smith at (714) 754-5256.

PHILIP GEORGE COUSINS

Philip George Cousins, 44, was shot once in the chest and once in the back of the head. His body was locked in the trunk of his undamaged 1990 Honda Accord for at least three days, police said after the March 1994 killing.

"I know the person who did it is out there walking around free," said his widow, Rachel Cousins, who has been active in the victim-rights movement and talks to detectives about the case nearly once a month.

Rachel Cousins said the absence of an arrest in the case "is much like a big black hole. I realize that an arrest is not going to bring him back, but I feel that I owe it to him, to have the person who killed him brought to trial."

Philip Cousins, a property manager, was last seen alive by his employer at Preferred Real Estate Management in Santa Ana. His body was found five days after he disappeared, in the trunk of his car parked outside Wolf Auto Parts at 4200 Third St. in Santa Ana.

A cellular telephone and a tape deck were found in the car, but the victim's wallet and all forms of identification were missing.

If you have information on the case, call Santa Ana police Investigator Dennis Bannon at (714) 245-8360.

JANE BENNINGTON

The 1977 sexual assault and murder of Jane Bennington, 29, in her Corona del Mar apartment appears to have been committed by a stranger.

"All indications are that she did not know the person who attacked her," said Newport Beach Detective Thomas Fischbacher, who is investigating the case. Bennington was killed Aug. 2. Police suspected that her boyfriend committed the crime, but he was later cleared of suspicion in that case and sent to prison for an unrelated bank robbery, Fischbacher said.

Bennington had gone to a local club the night before her murder and was last seen alive by her female roommate. The roommate returned home and found a sliding-glass door to the apartment ajar.

She went to bed and discovered Bennington's body after she awoke.

Bennington had been strangled and hit on the head.

Investigators reopened the case in 1996 because it appeared to fit the pattern of crimes later attributed to ex-Marine Sgt. Gerald Parker. Parker was convicted in 1998 of six Orange County murders committed in the late 1970s.

The DNA evidence that linked Parker to the six murders exonerated him of involvement in the Bennington murder.

If you have information on the case, call Fischbacher at (800) 550-6273.

CARRIE D. BENDEL

The 1946 murder of waitress Carrie D. Bendel, whose body was dumped in the field at a Stanton ranch, is one of the oldest cases that Orange County investigators have reviewed in recent years. "We found the file when we were moving; the rest of our cases only go back to the early '60s," said sheriff's Investigator Brian Heaney.

Bendel was in her early 20s when she was sexually assaulted and strangled. Police have no picture of her. Her body was found with her clothes in disarray, but it was concluded that she had not been raped.

Bendel had been at the El Sombrero Bar in Belmont Shore the night she was killed and was reported to have left with an unidentified man who said he had come from Laguna Beach. He bought her a few drinks, police records show.

Police also suspected the victim's brother. Long Beach police had stopped the brother from beating Bendel just two weeks before her death. Heaney said he ran a check on the brother recently but was unable to find any record of his whereabouts in California.

"Whoever did it would have to be in their mid-70s or 80s by now," Heaney said. "Even if somebody confessed, we'd have to locate witnesses to check out the confession."

If you have information on the case, call the Sheriff's Department at (714) 628-7170.

