

**DNA May Point to Serial Killer in the Area**  
**CRIME: Orange County Detectives Believe One Psychopath Killed at Least 10 people, Beginning in 1979**

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By Bill Rams

He could be behind bars. He could be dead. He could be on the loose -- plotting to kill again. His victims include a Laguna Niguel nurse and her medical student husband, a Santa Barbara doctor and his psychologist girlfriend, a prominent Ventura attorney and his wife, an 18-year-old Irvine cashier, an Irvine loan officer who had just visited her husband in the hospital, and a Santa Barbara couple having an affair. All killed in the middle of the night. All killed between December 1979 and May 1986. All killed by a burglar with a voyeuristic fetish. The hunt is on to find him. "Our killer is the 'Original Nightstalker,'" said Orange County sheriff's investigator Larry Pool. "And nobody knows it." Pool, his partner Brian Heaney and Orange County crime lab scientist Mary Hong used DNA technology and other evidence recently to link the cases. The project began more than three years ago, when the Sheriff's Department formed its unsolved homicide team called CLUE. They hoped to learn the identity of killers in unsolved slayings. They discovered that the same killer, a serial killer, bludgeoned a Laguna Niguel couple, a Ventura couple and two Irvine women in separate killings.

After connecting the initial cases, the detectives scoured the country for killings carried out in similar ways: The killer targeted couples who had just had sex. He sometimes brought a German shepherd dog with him. He usually covered his victims with bedding before bludgeoning them. They found two more similar double homicides and an attempted double killing, all in northern Santa Barbara County. Now, after sifting through hundreds of thousands of pages of investigative reports and re-interviewing witnesses, they hope to learn the killer's identity, bring him to justice and end the mystery for the victims' families. But their investigation hasn't come without obstacles: an incomplete California prison DNA database and an injunction preventing them from taking DNA samples from death -- row inmates.

"We think he is probably in prison somewhere," Pool said of the killer. "But who knows? He could be getting out tomorrow, next week or next year." In interviews and a 52-page synopsis of the case, the detectives put together the killer's chronology:

#### THE PRACTICE ATTACK

He was almost caught before the string of killings. The date was Oct. 1, 1979. It was a cool autumn evening in Goleta, a suburb north of Santa Barbara where murders rarely occur. Computer programmers Jennifer Horinek and Abraham

Himmel were awakened by man who pried the kitchen door. At knifepoint, he threatened to kill them. He forced Horinek to tie her boyfriend up, then tied her up. He led Horinek into the living room and pushed her to the floor. He swung his flashlight up and down her naked body, fantasizing about her, then left the room. He returned seconds later, put tennis shorts over her head and declared: "Now I'm gonna kill you -- cut your throat." Then he left the room again, apparently to stage a burglary. Horinek got up and, with her ankles bound, hopped toward the door. She tripped before she got there. She finally got out and screamed for help. The killer quickly chased her down and dragged her back inside. Next door, neighbor Stanley Los -- an FBI agent -- heard the screams. He grabbed his gun and went downstairs.

Himmel, assuming his girl-friend had gotten away, managed to wiggle out of the bindings. He made his break for freedom out a back door. The killer realized he had lost control. He raced away on a bicycle he had stolen. Los retrieved his car keys. But his car didn't start. He tried again. And again. Finally.

Too much time passed. He couldn't find the! killer. Then, a few miles away, as he flipped a U-turn, he saw reflectors in his headlights. Los sped toward the man, and jumped out of his car to chase him. But the killer jumped a fence. And disappeared into a creek bed. The suspect left behind important clues: The serrated kitchen knife, the 10-speed bike, the size 8.5-9 Adidas Runner footprints. And police had a description: young, white, about 5-foot-10, dark hair, a knife pouch on his belt.

Horinek and Himmel would be his only known survivors. They didn't return calls seeking comment for this story.

## FIRST BLOOD

Dec. 30, 1979. 3:05 a.m. Robert Offerman, 44, and Alexandria Manning, 35. He was an osteopathic surgeon going through a divorce, and she was his clinical psychologist girlfriend, who told friends she had a fear of being shot to death while she slept. The killer broke into Offerman's condo in Goleta and tied up the couple. Offerman, detectives believe, knew he was about to be killed, ! so he tried to tackle the assailant. But the killer had learned from his earlier bungled attempt. Instead of a knife, he brought a .38-caliber revolver. He shot Offerman. Then Manning. Detectives believe he planned to rape Manning but he didn't have time. After shooting the couple, the killer took some Christmas-turkey leftovers from the refrigerator and ate. Police found turkey scraps and cellophane wrap on the floor. The killer also brought a German shepherd with him. Its paw prints were found outside. Detectives believe he used the dog as a ruse so that he would appear to be a neighborhood jogger.

About March 13, 1980. Time unknown, but a neighbor heard a scream about 2 a.m. Lyman and Charlene Smith, 43 and 33. He was a prominent Ventura

attorney up for a judgeship appointment, she was his second wife and had worked as a secretary in his law firm. Lyman's youngest son, Matthew! , 12, who had been away with his mother for the weekend, discovered his father and stepmother naked, in bed, bludgeoned to death. Their ankles and wrists were bound with cord, tied together in a diamond knot used by boaters -- and the killer. Charlene Smith had been raped. Several thousand dollars in jewelry had been stolen. Detectives believe the couple were beaten to death with a log found in or around the house. They found bark in the bedroom.

## TWO O.C. KILLINGS

Aug. 19, 1980. Sometime after 11:05 p.m. Keith and Patty Harrington, 24 and 28. He was a fourth-year medical student and she was a nurse. They lived at the gated Niguel Shores home of Keith Harrington's father. Their single-story home was nearly identical in floor plan and size to the Smith home. All the homes were single story. There were no signs of forced entry. The killer attacked the couple while they were in bed. They were tied up. Patty Harrington was raped. The killer also covered the couple before beating them to death with an unknown object, perhaps to prevent spraying blood on himself. The killer took with him some of the cord he used to tie the couple -- but also left some behind. It would be the last killing in the series where ligatures were left behind, an indication of how the killer learned from mistakes in prior killings.

Keith Harrington's father discovered the bloodied bodies in bed, heads turned away from each other, a few days after their death. + About Feb. 5, 1981. Sometime after 11 p.m. Manuela Witthuhn, 28. The loan officer had returned home to Irvine after visiting her husband in the hospital, where he was suffering a viral infection. The killer raped and bludgeoned her in bed. Police found matches inside the house similar to matches found at a later homicide scene. "We thought whoever did this to her might have known her," said Irvine Police investigator Larry Montgomery. "It reeked of an inside job." This case was different from the others in that her home didn't abut a creek bed or a greenbelt, another reason detectives didn't see a connection early on July 27, 1981. Gunshots heard at 3:20 a.m. and 3:35 a.m. Cheri Domingo, 35, Gregory Sanchez, 27.

Detectives believe the killer spent weeks in their Goleta neighborhood and other neighborhoods, stalking couples, hoping to watch them have sex. Domingo and Sanchez had just had sex before the killer broke into the home that Domingo had been house-sitting. They were having an affair; Sanchez had just asked another woman to marry him a week earlier, detectives say. She was bound. He was shot before being beaten to death. She was bludgeoned. No rape.

But neighbors reported seeing a white man jogging away from the home with a German shepherd, the same breed of dog as in the earlier Goleta case. For almost five years after the Domingo-Sanchez double homicide, there were no killings that police have been able to link to the killer. The killer was probably

arrested for something other than a homicide, perhaps a rape, detectives believed.

About May 4, 1986. Sometime between 10:45 p.m. and midnight Janelle Cruz, 18 The killer reappeared for the last known time to slay his youngest victim in her Irvine home. Cruz was home with a young man she was dating. Her mother and stepfather were away in Mexico. The young couple heard a noise outside and looked out the window. It must be a cat, they decided. Finally, the young man left to go home. Detectives suspect the killer entered the house just as the boyfriend was leaving. He raped Cruz and then bludgeoned her so badly with a pipe wrench that he knocked out her front teeth. Cruz was the only woman of all the victims hit in the face. Dust encircled the area of a pipe wrench missing from the garage.

## THE INVESTIGATION

By the late 1980s, all the homicide cases were cold. No new investigative leads. Nothing. Pool and Heaney picked up the cases after the CLUE team was formed in 1997. The Harrington double killing was one of about 100 that Pool and Heaney wanted to look at: It had remained a mystery. The couple had no known enemies. The case rankled the most seasoned sheriff's investigators and mystified Harrington's family. "We knew it was random," said Bruce Harrington, Keith's brother. "We were always scratching our heads. They were both really straight and narrow, down-to-earth people." Detectives had saved the rape kit used in the original investigation. The killer's semen offered the key to his identity. The detectives took the Harrington rape kit and rape kits from several unsolved homicides to the crime lab to have them analyzed. They hoped to find matches with convicted prisoners, whose DNA is kept in a statewide database.

The DNA showed that the Harrington case was connected to the Witthuhn, Cruz and Smith cases. The surprised detectives quickly sent bulletins to police departments across the country, asking if they had any similar killings. They found the Goleta cases and haven't ruled out the possibility of others. But what about those Goleta cases? There is no DNA evidence available. Is it possible that someone else killed those couples? There are some dissimilarities -- some of the victims were shot to death, not bludgeoned, said Santa Barbara County sheriff's Cmdr. Bruce Correll, a young detective at the time of the Goleta killings. Correll is certain that the Goleta cases are connected to one killer.

In 1981, there were whispers that the Harrington and Smith cases were connected to the Santa Barbara killings. But detectives quickly dismissed the theory because of differences in the killer's method of operation. Correll said he refuses to dismiss anything now. "We all learned a lesson from Ted Bundy," he said. Bundy, who crisscrossed the country and killed an estimated 36 to 100 or more women, changed the way he killed to throw off detectives.

The Orange County detectives badly want to solve these cases. "This guy spent hours prowling, stalking, roaming neighborhoods and picking out his victims," said Heaney. "When he's out there, he's out there a lot. We want to make sure he's never out there again." Ninety-three 3-inch binders fill Pool's office. Pictures of the victims line the top of his bookshelf. Pool and Heaney have painstakingly compiled a list of more than 7,000 potential suspects. They've eliminated 40 percent of them. Many of those potential suspects are in California prisons. Under California law, inmates convicted of any number of violent and sex crimes are required to submit to blood tests so that their genetic markers can be added to the database. But the database is woefully inadequate, officials say, because more than 50,000 samples have not been added. Pool and Heaney were stymied when they asked to compare the killer's DNA with DNA of death row inmates. A court injunction, stemming from a lawsuit filed by eight female death row prisoners, prohibits corrections officials from taking samples from death row inmates. Until that case is resolved, no samples will be taken from death row inmates. Pool said he thinks about the case constantly.

"I've stood in the victims' back yards and tried to put myself in his frame of mind," Pool said of the killer. "It does take a toll on you." Learning that a serial killer was responsible has also taken a toll on some of the families -- some of whom came under suspicion at the time of the killings. Jennifer Carole, daughter of Lyman Smith, said she's always wanted to know who killed her father. Knowing it was a random, psychopathic killer offers some answers.

"It is incredibly shocking," said Carole, 38, of Santa Cruz. It has really bothered me since I found out. It's the randomness and the brutality. There's something about them being killed by a complete stranger who is terrorizing you that has really bothered me." She credited the sheriff's department for not giving up. "I am very grateful at how hard they worked to put this thing together," she said. "They haven't stopped. They just haven't stopped. They've hung in there with it." So where is the killer? Detectives say he is probably in prison. Forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz agrees, noting that the killer appears to have been too young, too aggressive, striking too often, to just quit. He could have moved. He could be dead.

Carole said she wants to know. "I hope they do find him and he's dead," she said. Modus operandi Detectives say the following similarities exist in most or all the killings: The killer prowled and watched victims before making his move. He confronted victims in bed generally between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m. + He tied his victims with pre-cut cords. The killer generally used a weapon found inside the home to bludgeon the couples. The victims' bodies were found covered by bedding. The killer turned off all the lights before leaving and sometimes ate after killing. The suspect left behind shoe prints of similar size, 8 to 10.

HOW TO CONTACT THE INVESTIGATORS

Anyone with any information about any of the unsolved slayings is urged call the CLUE investigators at (888) 390-2583 or send e-mail to [CLUE@ocsd.org](mailto:CLUE@ocsd.org). + The family of Keith and Patty Harrington are offering a \$100,000 reward -- up from the \$25,000 they offered 20 years ago -- for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer.

[brams@notes.freedom.com](mailto:brams@notes.freedom.com) + Call: (714) 796-7722

#### PICTURE CAPTIONS

**CLEARED:** For nearly two decades, David Witthuhn was under a cloud of suspicion for the 1981 murder of his wife, Manuela, in Irvine, a slaying that police now blame on another man, a serial killer.

**VICTIM'S BROTHERS:** Ronald Harrington, 53, from left, Douglas Harrington, 49, and Bruce Harrington, 56, stand near the grave of their brother Keith, who was murdered in 1980 in Laguna Niguel. Keith Harrington's wife, Patty, also was killed in that attack.

**SLEUTHS:** Among the investigators working on the 'Original Nightstalker' case are, from left, investigative aide Karla Perez, investigator Brian Heaney, research analyst Mike Hynes and investigator Larry Pool. All work for Orange County.