

HUNT FOR CLUES IN GOLETA MURDERS

Investigators study Orange, Ventura county slayings

S.B. News-Press 8-2-81

By Dave Hardy
News-Press Staff Writer

Investigators who believe that one man is responsible for the two double murders in Goleta suspect that he may have killed couples in Orange and Ventura counties, too.

While the cases here involved unmarried couples, the other cases involved married couples. And the Ventura and Orange County cases bear the greatest similarity to the most recent double murder here, Monday's fatal bludgeoning of Cheri Domingo and Greg Sanchez.

The first of the series — the Dec. 30, 1979, murder of Dr. Robert Offerman and Debra Manning in Goleta — differs most substantially in that the two were shot to death.

Yet all four cases bear these resemblances:

-The victims lived in upper class or upper-middle class neighborhoods.

-All were killed in bed or in the bedroom.

-No weapons have been found.

-There were no signs of struggle.

-There was no sexual molestation.

-There was no apparent motive of robbery or burglary or anything else.

And in three of the cases there was no obvious sign of forced entry.

In the Ventura case, attorney Lyman Smith, 43, and his second wife, Charlene, 33, were found by his 12-year-old son about 2 p.m. on March 16, 1980. The

boy, who lived with Smith's first wife, came to mow the lawn of his father's hillside residence.

The couple had been bludgeoned with a blunt instrument sometime that Saturday night or Sunday morning, investigators said. At first, detectives suspected political motives in the killing of Smith — a candidate for judge and a man active in Ventura's Democratic Party. Now they don't.

Keith and Patty Harrington were found by his father Aug. 22, 1980, in their home in the locked-gate Niguel Shores development along the beachfront between Laguna and Dana Point.

'Concerned' neighbors

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Mature landscaping embraces the two-story homes on the well-lit streets in the north Goleta neighborhood where San Jose Creek meanders in the summertime.

Lush vegetation surrounds the creek, but most of the kids who played along its banks have grown up. They're teenagers now, and their cars crowd the curbs.

All the attacks occurred close to the creek.

Residents on both sides of the creek say they are "concerned" about their safety. They don't seem panicked, but they aren't comfortable either. Increasingly, they have been calling in small incidents to the sheriff's office. And they have been calling in for home security checks.

Most of the residents contacted at home by the News-Press said they haven't lost much sleep since Monday's killing of Cheri Domingo and Greg Sanchez at her 449 Toltec Way home. Yet they didn't want their names published either.

Other residents are outright scared. One mother of two told of a neighbor she wouldn't permit her 8-year-old daughter to go down the street to play unless an adult or older child accompanied her.

"It's spooky to think that there's somebody out there watching you," said another woman who lives nearby.

And one man who lives in the area with his wife and dog said, "It scares the hell out of me. There's a looney running around out there." None of the murder victims had a dog.

"The only people that are really concerned about it are the ones on Toltec Way," said the postman who delivers to the area — and who lives several blocks away from the latest killings. He added that his wife is "a

little shaken up."

He's not so worried, noting that he lives on the other side of the creek from the killings.

"It's got to happen next door before people get shaken up," he added.

Two other men expressed a similar sentiment, and both live alone with their wives.

Said one, "This guy seems to know who he's after. If he's not selecting just unmarried couples, that would rattle my cage."

Said the other, "I'm not scared. But if they found it next door, then I'd get worried."

A woman who lives in the same block as those two men said that she is "more aware of noises" at night. "Things I would have let go, I now pay attention to." She kept her windows and doors locked even before the latest murder.

A 15-year-old Queen Anne Lane resident said he had thought about the latest attacks but "isn't really worried about it." Nor are his friends, he said. His family has a dog and when they hear it bark, "we know something's happening."

Another woman said she was confident that her dog would alert her and her family of four if they had an intruder. She said she wasn't too worried.

But she added, "I woke up last night having this terrible dream that someone was choking me."

Among those who live in the neighborhood who isn't worried about his safety is Sheriff John Carpenter.

"I'm pretty much aware of the killer's method of operation. My house and my family don't fit in that method of operation. But that's very difficult to convince my family of. My family is concerned."

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Keith and Patty Harrington were found by his father Aug. 22, 1980, in their home in the locked-gate Niguel Shores development along the beachfront between Laguna and Dana Point in Orange County. The couple was believed to have been bludgeoned to death sometime during midweek, Tuesday night or Wednesday morning, Aug. 19 or 20.

Keith, 27, was a fourth-year medical student at U.C. Irvine. Patty, 24, was a nurse.

Darryl Coder, the Orange County sheriff's detective in charge of the Harrington investigation, said he will get in touch with detectives here just as soon as they have had time to evaluate their evidence. Until then, he

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said, inter-agency discussion would be "premature."

Local detectives have already been to Ventura to examine the Smith crime scene, said Sheriff John Carpenter, who noted that law enforcement officials throughout the state contact each other about cases that are even "remotely similar."

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