

## ► SHARE/Many cases show links of method, type of victim

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liest case discussed at SHARE dates to 1969. Under a one-crook scenario, the culprit would now be in his 25th year of violence — something unheard of among serial criminals.

There also are stark differences in many of the crimes. Some women were taken from their vehicles; others vanished from homes or the sides of highways. Some women died by gunshot, others by knife or strangulation or drowning. Some were clothed. Some were not.

But attendees did discover, as The News-Leader did in a 1991 series on unsolved slayings, that there are groupings of distinct similarities in many cases.

For instance:

■ Some victims were bound, killed by means other than gunfire and then dumped in the woods, not far from paved roads and often along or just off U.S. 71.

■ Vans were seen at or near the scene of several disappearances.

■ Many women shared similarities in hair color, height and weight. Serial criminals often fixate on specific types of victims.

■ Some of the women vanished from the side of the road, their oddly undisturbed vehicles later found with purses and keys still inside.

Intriguing — but attending officers were quick to note that similarities don't prove anything. However, many investigators privately conceded that a lack of fresh leads pointing in any other direction forced them to seriously consider the possibility of a serial criminal.

Which really isn't something they wanted to admit.

### Long odds

Even if proof emerged that one man is responsible for a series of crimes, catching him is difficult (the male pronoun is used here because most serial criminals who take women are men).

Only rarely does the victim know her serial attacker. Rarer still is an arrest once a crime's first few days have passed.

Then there are the families to consider. How do you tell a parent that their loved one died — from a chance encounter? Or that a lucky break may be the only way to catch the culprit?

Politics add another knot to a cop's stomach. City and county investigators don't work in a vacuum; when a disappearance or slaying drags on without resolution, they hear the coffee-shop naysaying and know voters won't forget at election

## Cases discussed during SHARE conference

- 1) Carol Blades, 20. Disappeared from Christian County on Dec. 15, 1969. Found dead near Ponce De Leon a year later.
- 2) Carolyn Sue Neely, 20s. Died of blows to head in Joplin on March 3, 1972.
- 3) Theresa Jean Smith, 19. Strangled, beaten and thrown from a bridge near Joplin in February 1981.
- 4) Karen Hill, 20s. Shot in the head in Leesville, La., in November 1981.
- 5) Jackie Johns, 20. Beaten to death in Christian County, found in Greene County in June 1985.
- 6) Sandra Melissa Alberta, 21. Shot and stabbed to death in Monette, Ark., in September 1986.
- 7) Bambi Loann Brantley, 26. Disappeared from Leesville, La., in October 1986. Her body has not been found.
- 8) Debra Sue Lewis, 31. Vanished from Springfield in April 1987; skeleton found at year's end in Newton County.
- 9) Sheila Johnson, 29. Disappeared from Jonesboro, Ark., in January 1989. Her body has not been found.
- 10) Kathryn Cockran Demeville, 36. Strangled near Tulsa, Okla., in May 1989.
- 11) Pamela Miller, 23. Taken from her car in Leesville, La., in May 1989. Skeletal remains found six months later in a nearby Louisiana parish.
- 12) Kelle Ann Workman, 24. Vanished while mowing a cemetery in Douglas County in June 1989. Her body was found 10 days later in Christian County.
- 13) Dana Stidham, 18. Taken from her car in Bella Vista, Ark., in July 1989. Skeleton found two months later in nearby woods.
- 14) Tammy Call, 15. Vanished from Leesville, La., in February 1990. She remains missing.
- 15) Diane Kelley, 26. Found dead in her car in Joplin in September 1990.
- 16) "Jane Doe," 23-36. Found outside an abandoned house in McDonald County in December 1990. She had been dead for some two months; police think she was a hitchhiker passing through the Ozarks.
- 17) Trudy Darby, 42. Abducted from a Camden County business in January 1991, found shot dead two days later in Hickory County.
- 18) Cheryl Kenney, 31. Taken from Nevada in February 1991. Still missing.
- 19) Angela Hammond, 20. Taken from a parking lot in Clinton in April 1991. Still missing.
- 20) Karol Sullens, 19. Disappeared from Columbus, Kan., in August 1991. Still missing.
- 21) Sherrill Levitt, 47. Taken from her Springfield home in June 1992.
- 22) Stacy McCall, 18. Taken from Levitt's home.
- 23) Suzie Streeter, 19. Taken from Levitt's home.
- 24) Tracy Pickett, age unknown. Disappeared in August 1992 from Webb City. She remains missing.
- 25) Tammy Jo Zywicki, 21. Abducted from her car in Illinois in August 1992. Her body was found the next month, wrapped in a blanket off I-44 near Sarcosie.
- 26) Candice Harms, 17. Shot dead in Lincoln, Neb., in September 1992.
- 27) Christy Kelley, 21. Found drowned in her bath tub in Joplin in April 1993.

### To help out:

If you have information on:

- Cases 15, 24 and 27, contact the Joplin Police Department at (417) 623-3131.
- Cases 2, 3 and 8, contact the Newton County Sheriff's Department at (417) 451-4242.
- Case 16, contact the Missouri State Highway Patrol at (417) 358-3373.
- Case 25, contact the Illinois State Police at (815) 224-1150.
- Case 13, contact the Benton County (Ark.) Sheriff's Department at (501) 855-3771.
- Case 20, contact the Cherokee County (Kan.) Sheriff's Department at (316) 429-3992.
- Cases 1, 5 and 12, contact the Christian County Sheriff's Department at (417) 485-2332.
- Case 18, contact the Nevada Police Department at (417) 448-2710.
- Case 19, contact the Clinton Police Department at (816) 885-5561.
- Case 17, contact the Hickory County Sheriff's Department at (417) 745-6415.
- Cases 6 and 9, contact the Craighead County (Ark.) Sheriff's Department at (501) 933-4550.
- Cases 4, 7, 11 and 14, contact the Vernon Parish (La.) Sheriff's Department at (318) 238-1311.
- Cases 21, 22 and 23, contact the Springfield Police Department at (417) 864-1752.
- Case 10, contact the Oklahoma Bureau of Investigation at (405) 848-6724.
- Case 26, contact the Lincoln (Neb.) Police Department at (402) 441-7245.

### Aftermath

It was a fairly jovial group that left the Ramada Hotel-Hawthorne Park late Friday. Business cards were exchanged amid promises of staying in touch, and several small knots of officers brainstormed about case similarities and ways to take fresh looks at the crimes.

No major case breakthroughs came from the SHARE conference, but then again, none was expected. In the short term, Asher's goal of improving communications seems to have been met, but even he acknowledged that success can only be claimed if the brainstorming

continues a week, a month, six months from now.

Perhaps the biggest success to come from 17 hours of seminars, case presentations and networking was voiced by Christian County Sheriff Steve Whitney, who has at least three unsolved slayings in his files.

The conference, he said, "made you realize firsthand that you're not the only one feeling pressure ... not the only one dealing with such cases."

Now, Whitney said, it's time to find the man or men who took the women. Before someone else dies.