

## Officials trying to link disappearances

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pokesman in Kansas City. "There's not been anything at all to tie these together yet."

Typically, serial killer investigations develop by looking for patterns in victims, methods or frequency.

In the three recent cases, over less than 11 weeks, Darby, Kenney and Hammond disappeared from otherwise deserted stores in their rural hometowns, about 80 miles apart.

Each woman is white and was alone when she vanished. At least two, and possibly all three, apparently were outside the store. In two of the cases, a possible suspect was described as a white man with a beard and moustache.

But in other respects, no pattern is apparent.

The women range in age from 20 to 42. They vary in height from 5 feet to 5 feet 7 inches. Two are blonde; one has light-brown hair. One was robbed of cash; the others had little or no money.

Geiman said investigators cannot really connect the apparent abductions without finding the women.

If they are dead, finding them would provide critical information to develop a profile of the killer. Such information includes autopsy results to let officers know how the person died, and perhaps some similarities in the areas where the bodies are found.

Without anything specific to suggest a serial killer in the three recent cases, investigators at this point continue to tackle the disappearances as separate cases, while continuing to compare notes.

Meanwhile, rumors fly in all three towns about what happened to the women, and residents try to keep it from happening again. Neighbors watch out for each other a little more, and friends keep better tabs on friends.

Debbie Hicks, who, with her husband, owns the convenience store where Darby worked, said she is much more aware of strangers.

"I find myself watching what cars pull up and who gets out," Hicks said. "We've always known that someone might pull a gun or something, but this wasn't just a robbery. This was different. It's sick."

**Darby vanishes in January**  
The first case began unfolding



Hammond

about 10 p.m. on Jan. 19 when Trudy Darby, 42, was closing the K&D Country Corner convenience store in Macks Creek. Darby called her son because she was concerned about a suspicious man outside. She gave no description.

By the time her son arrived a few minutes later, Darby was gone. The store was unlocked, the lights were on, and about \$220 was missing from the cash drawer.

Her nude body was found two days later in the Little Niangua River. She had been shot twice in the head with an automatic pistol.

About three or four weeks later, authorities found all of Darby's clothes in the river. Tipton said they also found the store's bank bag with Darby's rings inside, but not the stolen cash.

Area residents who passed by the store the Saturday night Darby disappeared told authorities of a large, light blue car, possibly a Chevrolet Impala or Caprice, parked in a rest area near the store. Tipton said the man was described as "barely fitting behind the wheel," in his late 30s or early 40s, with a beard and moustache.

That man has not been found. Tipton said he has little else to go on, even though his case is farther along than the others in that Darby's body was found.

"Our case is at a standstill," the sheriff said. "If one of their cases develops, our case may develop."

About 80 miles west of Macks Creek on U.S. 54 in Nevada, Cheryl Ann Kenney vanished 39 days after Darby disappeared.

Shortly after 10 p.m. on Feb. 27, Kenney, 30, locked up LJ's Quality Convenience Store. She has not been heard from since.

Nevada police say they found her car parked at the store. It was locked and undisturbed. Nothing was missing from the store.

"We don't have a suspect or anything," Nevada Police Capt. John Eador said. "We can't say we've even had an abduction for sure, but we're working it as if there's foul play involved and hoping for the best."

Police checked into three possible sightings of Kenney in Lamar, Mo., in March, but none of those was confirmed. Authorities also question whether she would voluntarily have left her husband, two children and ailing father while carrying only about \$6.

Thirty-six days after Kenney disappeared, Hammond, 20, vanished shortly before midnight

April 4 from a Clinton parking lot less than a mile from her home.

As she talked with her fiancé, Hammond described a suspicious man in a pickup who was in the parking lot, the fiancé told police. A moment later, she screamed and the line went dead.

Hammond's fiancé, Rob Shafer, said he headed for the parking lot. On his way, he said, he passed a pickup and heard Hammond scream his name. Shafer tried to follow the late 1960s Ford truck, which had a water or fish scene in the rear window, but was unable to catch it before his truck's transmission failed.

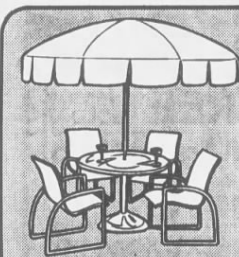
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