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The Keddie Murders:

20 years have passed since four lives were taken in brutal slaying

By Dave Keller
Staff Writer

It was about 8 a.m. when Sheila Sharp discovered the bodies of her mother Glenna, brother John and friend Dana Wingate.

The bodies were bludgeoned and stabbed repeatedly April 11, 1981. One of the victim's throats was sliced.

It was the work of what some believe was two people who used a pair of kitchen knives and a hammer.

The 14-year-old Sheila's younger sister, Tina, was missing when investigators arrived on the scene.

The grisly discovery, made inside a small room in a Keddie home, set into motion what is now regarded in Plumas County as its greatest mystery, an unsolved crime for 20 years.

The murders remain a part of Plumas County's collective conscience, officials say.

That's partly because of the savageness of the offenses, partly because it involved three kids and partly because law enforcement still struggles with it.

"It's unusual for someone to get away with killing four people," said Bob Ivens, the retired commander for the sheriff's department.

Ivens was a 26-year-old deputy for the department at the time of the offenses but, like anyone who was involved in law enforcement at the time, the murders are on his mind.

"It bothers me," he said. "It is still very creepy to me. I still feel uneasy when I drive through there when I go on patrol."

The boys

Witnesses have said they saw John Sharp, who was 15, and Dana Wingate, who was 17, trying to hitch a ride sometime before they were killed.

They were standing near the corner of Crescent Street and Lawrence Street in Quincy, near the front of the Gold Pan Motel, witnesses said. It was sometime between 9 and 10 p.m.

No one, however, could explain the boys' whereabouts from 10 p.m. to the time their bodies were located 10 hours later. That's always been one of the central mysteries of the case, officials say. If they could figure out who picked up the boys, then investigators might know who committed the murders.

One theory put forth by investigators over the years is that the people who picked up the boys are the people responsible for the homicides. They could have forced their way in to the Sharp home when dropping off the boys or been welcomed in for a snack.

Another theory is that the boys were given a ride home and that the people who provided the lift had nothing to do with the murders.

Under that scenario, the boys simply walked in on the slaying of 36-year-old Glenna and were killed during the frenzy or were killed because they were witnesses to Glenna's slaying.

Meanwhile, there is evidence that the boys attended a party at the home of a well-known Quincy family in the hours before they were seen trying to hitch a ride to Keddie.

Sharp and Wingate were well known in Quincy because

John Sharp was one of the victims in the Keddie slayings in 1981.

they attended Quincy High School.

One theory examined by investigators was that the killers went to the same party that John and Dana attended.

There were reports that a pair of odd-looking men, possibly from Oroville, attended the party. In addition, there is a witness who has claimed that others who attended the party committed the slayings.

The scene

When investigators arrived at the scene on April 12, they were walking into a mess.

John Sharp, Dana Wingate and Glenna Sharp each were bound with a makeshift combination of wiring and tape.

Those were signs that the killer or killers had not planned the murders in advance, law enforcement officials have said. There also were signs of a struggle. The walls were ravaged by a knife.

There is other evidence that investigators have never publicized because public disclosure, even today, would jeopardize the resolution of the case.

Investigators also found blood covered kitchen knives and a hammer, items that were used in the killings. And, of course, there was the missing Tina Sharp, whose remains would not be recovered until seven years ago at Feather Falls, near Oroville.

Earlier, the terrified Sheila Sharp discovered the three bodies in the front room of the Keddie residence.

She had spent the night at a neighbor's home, which was located less than 15 feet from where the murders took place, and was coming home.

She ran screaming from the house, yelling for help from neighbors, who called the sheriff's department and removed

Tina Sharp was abducted from her Keddie home in 1981 during the slayings there. Her body was discovered seven years ago near Oroville.

the two other children, who were untouched, through a bedroom window to spare them having to see the murder scene.

The investigation

Among those who looked in to the murders were the department's Doug Thomas, who was the sheriff at the time, and Ken Shanks, who would become sheriff when Thomas stepped down months after the

Dana Wingate, a friend of John Sharp's, was one of the victims in the Keddie slayings in 1981.

an indefinite number of hours to the Keddie case.

Stoy, who retired two years ago, said the crime scene was frustrating because "there was nothing to start from" in terms of evidence.

In most instances, a crime scene, even homicide scenes, will contain evidence that will lead investigators in some direction, that will give them some kind of blueprint. Not in this instance, Stoy said.

There was no apparent motive.

"It wasn't something someone went there to do," said DeCroux, agreeing with Stoy.

There was only one fingerprint "a single bloody fingerprint," Stoy said.

For the most part, however, the crime scene was useless, Stoy said. As was the Feather Falls scene where Tina was found seven years ago.

"I'm willing to say it was a bunch of dumb luck" on the part of the killers that they did not leave behind any evidence that linked them to the crime, Stoy said.

Another problem was the lack of focus by the canvas investigators, he said. Everyone seemed to have had their own theory and went off on their own without working together, he said.

The only conclusion he reached—one shared by many others—is that two people committed the killings.

"There were too many people going in their own direction," Stoy said. "There was not enough teamwork."

In the end, the lack of unity may have prevented the department from solving the crime, Stoy said.

Also hindering the investigation is the fact that the department could not access many of the high-tech crime-solving techniques used today, Stoy said.

For example, Stoy said, profiling and DNA analysis were not reliable at the time and were not of much use to the department in 1981.

"We attempted to develop a profile," Stoy said. "But psychological profiling was in its infancy."

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These drawings depict those who were once believed to be suspects in the Keddie slayings.

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