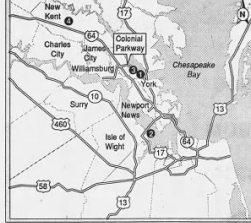


Unsolved Murders

1. Rebecca A. Dowski, 21, and Catherine M. Thomas, 27, were found strangled and stabbed in Thomas' car on the Colonial Parkway in October 1986.

2. Robin M. Edwards, 14, and David L. Knobling, 20, were shot to death at Rugged Island Wildlife Refuge in Isle of Wight County in September 1987.



3. Keith Call, 20, and Sandra Halley, 15, disappeared in April 1988. The car was found abandoned on the Colonial Parkway.

4. Daniel Lauer, 21, and Annamaria Phelps, 14, disappeared over the Labor Day weekend last year. Lauer's car was discovered in a New Kent County rest area off Interstate 64. Their bodies were discovered six weeks later in woods nearby.

Theory

Continued from A1

State police and the FBI appear to be focusing more narrowly on the serial-killer theory in the four cases, each of which involved young couples in automobiles in remote areas regarded as lover's lanes.

Basically, they think it's a serial killer," says Marjorie Lauer, mother of Daniel Lauer, who disappeared during the Labor Day weekend last year and whose body was found in woods near the New Kent rest area six weeks later.

Lauer said Saturday she has been in contact with FBI and State Police agents in recent weeks, and they said they felt it was all connected.

Joe Wolfinger, assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's Norfolk office, would not say the firm whether that agency has narrowed the focus of its investigation to a theory of a single killer.

The FBI, which is handling or assisting in all of the investigations, has downplayed the possibility that the crimes are related, and last month, Irvin B. Wells III, special agent in charge of the Norfolk office, remained hesitant to use the term "serial killer."

But, he said, studies by the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes dealt with the possibility of connections between the cases.

"While we cannot say they are, we cannot dismiss the possibility that four of these cases are connected," Wells said.

He said the crimes lack a definite "signature" often accompanying serial killings because the victims died from different types of wounds.

Wells ruled out other unsolved murders in the area, and said the FBI looked into — but discounted — the possibility that the recent murders of a Virginia Commonwealth University student and her former boyfriend were related. Wells would not say why they were excluded, but law accounts indicate the victims had some drug connections that could have led to their deaths.

Wells' comments regarding a relationship among the various murders are stronger than those made by Wolfinger last fall. Following the death of Lauer and Annamaria Phelps, the girlfriend of Lauer's brother, Wolfinger said there was no evidence concerning it, but "the possibility any two cases are related is something we'll always keep an open mind about."

J. Robert Jasnowski, special agent in charge of the State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation in Chesapeake, said that agency still is not ready to say that a relationship exists.

A behavioral scientist with the State Police said last fall that he believed at least three of the cases — excluding the New Kent case — were related.

Jasnowski would not comment about the results of psychological profiles, but he said his agency has considered the possibility that a police officer or impersonator is involved. He noted that each of the victims appeared to have gone passively to his or her death, as if ordered by someone of authority — or someone holding a gun to them.

Jasnowski said State Police agents are sharing office space with FBI agents in Hampton to coordinate efforts on all of the cases. And M. Lauer and others say the FBI is leaning toward the serial-killer scenario.

"I'm sure you know by now they're pretty much convinced it's a serial killer," said Mark Johnson, a College of William and Mary police detective who has been involved in the investigation of the 1986 Colonial Parkway killings of a W&M student and her friend.

"We're just waiting for September or October because we all agree that's when it will happen again," Johnson said.

Mrs. Lauer said she was interviewed by a Norfolk police officer who is preparing a series of television programs on each of the unsolved crimes to be broadcast on WTVZ-TV, Norfolk's Channel 35.

The officer who she said interviewed her, Norfolk police Sgt. Bob Hayes, said authorities plan to release new information during a press conference later this month.

He said the FBI and State Police have been working with the Norfolk Police Department and the Isle of Wight Sheriff's Department in generating publicity, and that the group is focusing its investigation on the possibility that a serial killer is on the loose and that the public must be warned.

Hayes originally said his comment were off the record, on the condition that the Daily Press not publish articles based on his remarks until the press conference. The newspaper decided to report some of Hayes' comments after the officer said Saturday that he had authorized other news outlets to report information he gave to them.

Juanita Halley, mother of a missing Christopher Newport College student, said she is glad officials are ready to issue a warning.

"Every time this happens, it's like ours all over again," said Halley, who is convinced the killer is either a police officer or someone impersonating one.

"People can't say their children are safe if they don't go to Rugged Island or they don't go to the parkway...Just be careful where you sleep or where you stop," she said.

The mysteries began in October 1986, when rangers patrolling the Colonial Parkway between Williamsburg and Yorktown discovered the bodies of two young women in the back of a Honda Civic hatchback: Catherine M. Thomas, a 27-year-old Virginia Beach stockbroker, and Rebecca A. Dowski, a 21-year-old senior at W&M, had been strangled and their throats had been cut.

In September 1987, David Knobling and Robin Edwards were shot to death at the Rugged Island Wildlife Refuge at the foot of the James River Bridge in Isle of Wight County. Their bodies washed ashore on the banks of the James River.

In April 1988, two CNC students on their first date together disappeared after a party. Keith Call's car was found abandoned on the Parkway the morning after the date, and neither he nor Sandra Halley has been seen since.

Last September, Daniel Lauer and Annamaria Phelps disappeared on a trip from their home in Amelia County to Virginia Beach, where they were to share an apartment with Lauer's brother.

Businessman benefits from S&L bailout

N.Y. Times News Service

WASHINGTON — An Arizona insurance executive with a history of legal and regulatory problems was allowed to buy 15 insolvent Texas savings and loan associations with borrowed money in 1988 and was promised \$1.85 billion in federal subsidies in what congressional investigators call the worst abuse found in the federal bailout program.

Government documents show that the businessman, James M. Fall, of Phoenix, put up only \$1,800 of his personal money and borrowed the rest of the \$70 million he needed to buy the institutions, none of the money from outside sources and some from his own insurance company. He then consolidated the institutions into Bluestem Savings, based in Dallas.

Last year, with the help of the first \$250 million of federal payments pledged over 10 years, Bluestem was the nation's most profitable large savings and loan.

"In all my years in public office," said Sen. Howard M. Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, "I have never seen such an abandonment of public responsibility as in the S&L deals in 1988, and the Bluestem deal is an abomination, the worst case we have found."

Metzenbaum is chairman of a Senate Judiciary subcommittee that has scheduled a hearing on the matter for Monday.

M. Danny Wall, who was chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board at the time of the Bluestem deal, and other former officials of the agency, insisted in interviews that there was nothing improper in their

handling of the sale.

Fall declined comment.

Clifford G. Smith, an executive with Fall's company, Life-shares Group Inc., responded to written questions by writing that Fall would consider an interview request to show "how he can most effectively demonstrate to you, the constituent, the propriety of his action."

Investigators for Metzenbaum's Subcommittee on Antitrust, Monopolies and Business Rights are trying to determine why the bidding process involving Fall was quickly concluded, why some bank board officials who raised questions about Fall were excluded from the process or overruled, why a holder who would have saved the government \$97 million was eliminated, and what role was played by

an aide to George Bush who represented Fall before the board.

The investigators also want to know why companies controlled by Fall lent the Bush aide, Robert J. Thompson, more than \$200,000 in 1988.

Metzenbaum is among the members of Congress who say that the subsidies paid to entrepreneurs to take over failing savings institutions were too generous and amounted to a government giveaway to the affluent.

New information shows that regulators allowed Fall to acquire the Texas institutions even though a company controlled by him pleaded guilty to fraud in 1976 in Alabama. Federal regulations specify that such a plan is a "preemptive disqualifier" for a person seeking to buy a savings and loan.

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