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'I could tell it was human'

The first victim was found on April Fools' Day 1978, and at first, everyone thought it was a joke.

About 3 p.m., three Standard Drilling Co. workers got bored while waiting for a colleague. Gene Shores suggested to Jimmy Bishop and Twila Duke that they kill time by exploring a vacant house at 520 N.E. 4.

"Who knows?" he told Bishop. "We might find a dead body."

The front door was boarded shut, but Shores and Duke found the back door unlocked. They slipped inside as Bishop entered through a hole in the side of the house.

The structure was dark, even in the cool light of afternoon. Fumbling through the living room, Bishop stumbled over something on the floor, then kicked it out of his way.

The room smelled strange, and as he moved into a shallow corner, saw an overturned chest of drawers and a fireplace. He noticed a strong odor that he had never smelled before.

Bishop warned the others about the stench, but Shores, carrying the broken handle of a tool, ignored the warnings. He stumbled over the same object as Bishop. They would later learn they'd tripped over a woman's severed thigh.

"Right at the door there was popcorn here, like you'd get at the movies, and candy and all that," Bishop said. "That was one of them kung fu guys. Gene took his stick and bit it, and when he bit it with a head case rolling out. We both had kind of a head ache, and being the dummy I was, I picked it up."

"He said, 'That's a dog's head.' I said, 'No, it's not. I could tell it was human.'"

Bishop studied the head back into the popcorn box, and the men decided outside to get help. News took them seriously, apparently thinking it was an April Fools' Day prank. Three inside the house, though, police quickly realized it was no joke.

Years pass before identity
The head and leg were recovered. So was the woman's right shoe, which had been left near the fireplace.

The victim's face had been mutilated, an autopsy revealed. Multiple incisions, mostly vertical, had been carved into the flesh. A horizontal wound cut through the cheeks on both sides, extending the angles of the mouth as if the killer had tried to create a gaping smile. An incision sliced through the center of the lower lip and into the chin — a wound that would later prove significant to investigators.

"It was horrible," Duke said. "It was horrible to see."

For well over a decade, the victim was logged in the books as Jane Doe. Authorities tried to identify her, comparing her teeth to dental records of several missing women, but the effort was fruitless. A sculptor worked with police some years later to produce a clay reconstruction of the woman's face. Still nothing.

Finally, in 1983, Anka Medina called the police. Her cousin, Curtis Lynn Shackelford, had been missing for 17 years. Medina had held off on calling the police because her mother said it wasn't her place. Shackelford's immediate family should make the call. When her mother died, though, Medina could wait no more. She contacted police.

Shackelford's remains were identified that same day. After DNA tests confirmed the match, the 18-year-old woman, a member of the Bae and Fox tribe, was buried among her relatives in an American Indian cemetery in Shawnee.

"We always talk about her," Medina said recently. "We always wonder what things would be like if she was here. She was such a caring person. She'd be willing to give you a hug before anybody else."

Toying with investigators
Kilian was the next to die. On the night of April 18, 1979, a dog found Kilian's head, dragging it down an alley in the 300 block of N.E. 19 toward a news pickup banked on a loop with no exit.

"That appeared to call to police," Eastridge said, and they started a search of the area. They found portions of what was identified as body parts of ... Kilian, scattered throughout that neighborhood wrapped in newspaper and brown paper and some in brown paper sacks. Along with Kilian's left hand



A photographer shoots evidence as detectives work.



Driver's license belonging to homicide victim Tina Sanders.

and parts of her pelvis, the killer left several punctured segments of skin and fatty tissue — all of it severely bloodied, as if it had been carefully washed and cleaned.

Officers canvassed the area and returned the next morning to make sure they hadn't overlooked anything, Eastridge said. Even so, they were called back to the neighborhood repeatedly during the next two weeks. Body parts kept turning up until May 1, when Kilian's torso, arms and part of his left leg were found in the 200 block of N.E. 7.

"The first thing that pops into your mind as an investigator is, 'Did the eyes surface?' were originally three missing fingers," Eastridge said. "When you go out looking for body parts, you're not looking for the trash and debris they're wrapped in. But I reviewed the case files, and I think they did a pretty thorough job. — That's not what ultimately led to believe this guy had to be just going with investigators."

Kilian, 22, was identified by fingerprints on April 25, 1978. Relatives told police they'd seen "several boxes" before her head was found.

Suspicion fell on one of her male relatives. Newspaper accounts said he escaped from a mental hospital the same day as the killing and he had a history of violent behavior. In 1976, the same year as the Shackelford murder, he'd been arrested after allegedly kidnapping one of his grandmother's dogs with a hatchet and towing their remains into hedges. Two years later, he was arrested after allegedly attacking his grandmother with a steak knife.

Duke recalls the investigation into the man as not amicable, but one thing is clear: He was re-arrested in connection with the hospital escape on April 21 — more than a week before Kilian's final remains were found. It was in custody at the time, he couldn't have dumped the body.

In 1984, another suspect turned up. Serial killer Henry Lee Lucas confessed to murdering Kilian. At the time, though, Lucas was confessing to nearly every unsolved homicide in the nation, at one point



Driver's license belonging to homicide victim Tina Sanders.

was then still a Jane Doe. The connections were obvious: a Shackelford and Kilian each had a distinctive fashion through the center of the lower lip.

A Kilian and Sanders' body parts were intentionally scattered at different intervals.

"The women were dismembered, and certain body parts, including sex organs, were never found."

"All were left within a mile of each other in a predominantly black neighborhood."

"All were known prostitutes. (Kilian was a paint seller who lived on the street, and she was known to be a prostitute just to go going to draw attention if someone sees you.)"

"I know a lot of the parts were wrapped, but I'm talking about a human head."

They were just cut into bits
On March 6, 1986, a man found a woman's upper torso, lower left leg and some pieces of tissue in an alley behind his house at 501 N.E. 1.

Six days later, the matching head turned up behind a house at 507 N. Lincoln. It lay so close to a trash can that much of the face had burned off.

The victim — Tina Sanders, 22 — was identified by two tattoos on her shoulders: a Playboy bunny and the words, "Lady Aides." She was last seen alive on March 5.

In mid-April, police publicly linked Sanders' death to those of Kilian and Shackelford, who



A piece of human flesh inside a paper sack.

what she had to do to get by. I think all of those women were the same way. — All were young American Indian women with the same body type.

Each death occurred in the spring. By all indications, there was at least one other similarity: The killer didn't rush with the hatchet.

"There is evidence to suggest that this person took his time with the victim and may even have toyed with their bodies, at least post-mortem, not to mention the time it would've taken to dissect them into pieces," Eastridge said.

Initially, rumors persisted in media reports and on the streets that the killer was a medical student or physician, someone familiar with human anatomy and skilled in dissection. After all, the OH Medical Center was nearby, and who else could make those cuts?

Just about anyone, Eastridge said. "There's nothing surgical about this," he said. "It's just a gruesome and terrible wounding of the human body. But, basically, all these girls, they were just cut into bits."

Additional victims?
After all these years, Eastridge and his partner, Mike Burke of the Oklahoma County district attorney's office, have little to go on.

No DNA. No fingerprints. Just seven boxes of dusty documents and photographs.

"Two questions concern them the most. Who killed these women? And are there other victims?"

"It is interesting to note," Eastridge said in an e-mail, "that the first two murders are three years apart. The last murder is approximately seven years later, where a time that between us don't know about."

The detectives are looking for possible connections to

a man who was arrested last month in the grisly 2001 slaying of Audrey Flarris, whose case was featured in Cold Case UIC in December. Anderson, Webster, 52, is accused of disemboweling Flarris while she was still alive, ripping out her intestines and reproductive organs and throwing them around her apartment.

"We were always concerned that all these body parts were collected, but the same parts that were removed from ... Flarris were never found with any of those victims," Eastridge said. "It's not unusual for those parts to be a collector and not just certain parts from a victim."

Distinct differences exist between the Flarris case and the others, though. Flarris was elderly and white. Sanders was young and black. Flarris was dismembered, but she was not right where the killing occurred, but taken elsewhere and dumped.

"I just something that we want to check into," Eastridge said. "Whenever the killer has, he has his horrible game so far. The medical, whose counts was the first to die, hopes police will end it soon."

"He cut off her breasts and cut her mouth open," Medina said. "He scalped her. He cut her hair, and he just to think that she's in a better place now. We try to think that way, but she had her hands off, her arms off, her legs. Everything. So that was just kind of ..."

"That was hard to hear and imagine, but we just to think that she's in a better place now. We try to think that way, but sometimes we wonder about who this was, who does this to her. In this person alive? — Is it somebody who's dead and gone away?"

"We just want to know."

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