

A10 Austin American-Statesman Friday, October 23, 1992

Yogurt shop murders: Arrests in Mexico

Shocking case: How it unfolded

Dec. 6, 1991: Austin firefighters respond to a blaze at 2848 W. Anderson Lane just before midnight. After the fire is extinguished, a search reveals the bodies of Jennifer Harbison, 17, her 15-year-old sister, Sarah, Eliza Thomas, 17, and Amy Ayers, 15.

Dec. 8, 1991: Travis County Medical Examiner Robert Baezaro releases autopsy reports stating each of the four girls had been shot in the head. Police say they have no suspects.

Dec. 8, 1991: Police discover evidence that they say leads them to believe more than one person was involved in the slayings.

Dec. 10, 1991: About 1,500 people attend the victims' funeral Mass at St. Louis Catholic Church.

Dec. 10, 1991: Travis County District Judge Ron Vines seeks autopsy reports on the victims at the request of the Travis County district attorney's office.

Dec. 17, 1991: Police release possible psychological profiles of the slayers.

Dec. 31, 1991: The victims' parents plead for additional help from the community during a news conference. An Ant Hooters restaurant issues a written statement asking for community assistance.

Jan. 10, 1992: The Austin Police Department, along with local, county and federal authorities, form a task force to solve the case.

Jan. 14, 1992: Police release additional information about the possible murderers. Seven billboards display images of the slain teenagers.

Feb. 26, 1992: Police arrest Laura Green on suspicion of stealing four tomatoes. She is charged with them by appropriation and questioned in the yogurt slayings. Her arrest came after intensive interrogation of a group of Austinites labeled by police as "People in Black." Police later say Green is not a suspect in the slayings.

Feb. 27, 1992: Local celebrities make a recording of We Will Not Forget, a song written by local musicians and dedicated to the four slain girls. Proceeds from the song are donated to a fund established to help those in the yogurt case and reduce crime through education and counseling.

March 19, 1992: Austin police release a sketch of a man seen parked outside the yogurt shop the night of the slayings. Police say the sketch resembles the sketch of a man seen in a November assault and abduction.

March 25, 1992: The CBS news program 60 Minutes reports on the yogurt shop murders.

June 3, 1992: The Austin business community adds \$75,000 to the existing \$20,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the people involved in the murders.

June 5, 1992: About 1,200 people march from the Congress Avenue Bridge to the steps of the Capitol carrying white candles in memory of the slain girls.

June 6, 1992: Six months after the murders, classmates of the slain girls graduate at Lanier High School, leaving seats for Jennifer Harbison and Eliza Thomas.

Aug. 5, 1992: Police begin searching for three men indicted in a November abduction and sexual assault. The three men are Alberto Cortes, Carlos Saabedra and Ricardo Sanchez. The men are wanted for questioning in the yogurt shop murders.

Aug. 7, 1992: The television program America's Most Wanted airs a segment on the yogurt shop murders and shows photos of the three men listed in the kidnapping indictment, prompting about 60 tips.

Oct. 10, 1992: Austin sex crimes investigator Roy Moore goes to Mexico City to give the Mexican attorney general a deposition about three men charged with abducting an Austin woman. One of the men in the abduction case fits the description of a man seen in a car outside the yogurt shop the night of the murders. Moore is joined by two Austin homicide investigators, Sgt. Mike Huckabay and Lt. David Patterson.

Oct. 16, 1992: The Austin investigators return from Mexico City. An officer says Mexican authorities were cooperative in the search for the three men wanted for questioning — Alberto Cortes, 22; Ricardo Hernandez, 26; and Carlos Saabedra, 23.

Oct. 20: Mexican federal authorities say they have arrested two men wanted by Austin police and that one confessed to the murders of the four girls in the yogurt shop. Officials said Porfirio Vela Saabedra, 26, and Alberto Jaramaz Cortes, 26, are being held. A third suspect is at large, officials said.

City breathes heavy sigh with arrests in slayings

By Tim Lott and Starla Smith Austin American-Statesman Staff

The yogurt shop murders touched Austin at its very core. Residents of a city that always had seemed more like a town — at least compared to Dallas and Houston — began asking themselves troubling questions.

"What kind of odd kind of person could kill four teen-age girls? Is my neighborhood safe? Should I buy a gun? Can I walk to my car alone?"

"Will it ever be the same?" Though laced with hope, that raw emotion was evident again Thursday as word spread that Mexican authorities had made arrests in the Dec. 6, 1991, slayings of 17-year-old Jennifer Harbison, her 15-year-old sister, Sarah, 17-year-old Eliza Thomas, and 15-year-old Amy Ayers.

Although they were arrests, not convictions, it was as if the city took a deep, hopeful breath.

"I'm glad someone was caught and I hope the families find something — was not uncommon.

"I don't think if you know them or not," said Broadway artist, 31, a student at Anderson High School, as she stood outside the shop Thursday night. She knew all four of the girls, she said.

"Everyone in Austin knows them now. It's not the fact that it was Sarah, Amy, Jennifer and



Lanier High School students watch a newscast Thursday announcing arrests in the slaying of four teen-age girls at an Austin yogurt shop. Mike Nelson, left, and Mike Taylor listen to details as Renee Heasler comforts a friend.

"I wanted to light the candles to show my support of the girls," Eichhorn said. "My daughter is 16. She's been here many times. It could have been her. I'm glad someone was caught and I hope the families find something — was not uncommon.

"I don't think if you know them or not," said Broadway artist, 31, a student at Anderson High School, as she stood outside the shop Thursday night. She knew all four of the girls, she said.

"Everyone in Austin knows them now. It's not the fact that it was Sarah, Amy, Jennifer and

Eliza. It was four young girls. It could have been anybody. I think mothers, sisters, brothers, family members, friends, everyone is going to sleep better tonight."

Other reaction was similar. "I'm very happy that the police, after working so long and so hard, have been successful in making arrests," said Jo Ann Kelly, director of human resources for Britco Foods Inc. and I Can't Believe It's Yogurt.

"I'm hopeful this will provide some relief for the victims' families. Our thoughts and prayers are with them."

Mayor Bruce Todd was in Japan on city business Thursday. In

Jennifer out of my mind."

For some students, the confession by one of the suspects, who said she shot the four girls, made their struggle to understand even more difficult.

"They've hurt hundreds of people," she said. "They don't know how many people they hurt during this. Either they should be put in jail for 100 years or given the death penalty."

Paul Turner, the Lanier principal, said he hopes this is a turning point in the recovery of his school from the tragedy. But Turner said others will not let his guard down unless there is a conviction.

"I personally would rather there be some kind of closure to it than for us to be left hanging," Turner said. "I don't know whether this will bring closure or not."

The family of Colleen Reed, the victim of another unsolved Austin crime, knows what it's like to wait for resolution. Reed was abducted from a West Fifth Street carwash by two men just three weeks after the yogurt shop murders.

Last April, Boston resident Alva Hank Wicker said he and a parallel killer, Kenneth Allen McDuff, kidnaped and sexually assaulted Reed. Authorities arrested McDuff in Kansas City, Mo., in early May. McDuff hasn't been charged in the Reed case. Reed has never been found.

"I'm ready for some closure," said Reed's sister, Lori Bible. "How much can you accept it when you don't have a body to bury or grave to go to? That's the part that gets me."

Also reported by Starla Smith, Kary Haglund and Mike Todd.

Suspects face trial without jury in Mexico, no chance of bail

By Daniel J. Vargas Austin American-Statesman Staff

Now that Porfirio Vela Saabedra, 26, and Alberto Jaramaz Cortes, 26, are in Mexico custody, they likely face a speedy trial before a Mexican judge, without the possibility of release on bail, authorities say.

George Nathanson, spokesman for the Mexican attorney general's office, said Vela Saabedra and Cortes will be arraigned sometime before Sunday on charges that

they murdered four teen-age girls at an Austin yogurt shop, and in the 1991 sexual assault and kidnapping of an Austin woman.

They will not be released on bail, Nathanson said. "Under Mexican law any accused person facing a sentence of 5 years or more cannot get bail," he said.

After arraignment, a trial or the next step, said Nathanson. The time it takes to go to trial will depend on how fast the court's calendar is, he said.

"I imagine that because of the notoriety of the case they will not let it through pretty fast," Nathanson said.

The suspects will be tried in Mexico because the Mexican constitution bars the extradition of suspects.

If the case goes to trial, Nathanson said, the men will face one charge which will determine guilt or innocence, and sentencing if found guilty. Mexico does not have a jury system, he said.

Nathanson did not know if the suspects had received legal coun-

sel, but said they would "definitely" have it before they are arraigned.

The sexual assault and kidnapping charges carry a sentence of 12 to 25 years.

Both men also are charged with drug trafficking and gun smuggling. The drug trafficking charge carries a sentence of 10 to 20 years, Nathanson said.

Nathanson said the men are accused of smuggling drugs from Mexico to the U.S. and smuggling

weapons from the U.S. to Mexico.

If convicted, all sentences, except for the drug trafficking charge, are subject to good time.

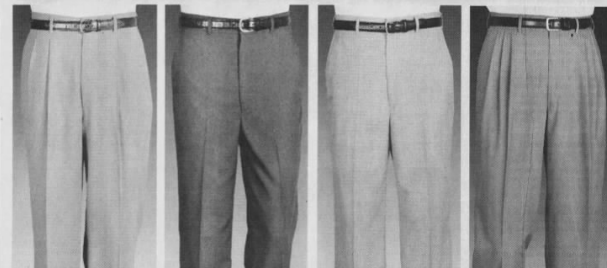
Nathanson said. Good time means that for every two days served, one day will be subtracted from the sentence, he said.

Nathanson said Vela Saabedra and Cortes face four counts of murder with a maximum sentence of 30 years for each count. He said he had not seen the case file. Mexico does not have the death penalty.

STARTS TOMORROW - OPEN EARLY AT 9 A.M.

ANNIVERSARY SALE

HAGGAR · FARAH · JOHN HENRY DRESS SLACKS



HAGGAR SALE! '24.99. Pleated polyester/nylon slacks in taupe, heather gray, navy or totem. Reg. 32.00. Waist.

HAGGAR SALE! '27.99. Plain-front Liza slacks with Magic stretch waistband. In heather, power, charcoal, navy or black. Polyester/nylon. Reg. 34.00. Waist.

FARAH SALE! '27.99. Plain-front, belted-in-blend slacks. In black, navy, dark brown or charcoal. Washable polyester/nylon/acrylic. Reg. 37.00. Waist.

JOHN HENRY SALE! '34.99. Triple pleat athletic fit slacks. In black, taupe, olive or charcoal. Polyester/nylon/acrylic. Reg. 40.00. Waist.

Size chart for Haggar slacks showing measurements for sizes 28 to 34.

Size chart for Haggar slacks showing measurements for sizes 28 to 34.

Size chart for Farah slacks showing measurements for sizes 28 to 34.

Size chart for John Henry slacks showing measurements for sizes 28 to 34.

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