

Austin American-Statesman
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Yogurt Shop Killings: 8 years of clues, dead ends

Dec. 6, 1991: At 11:47 p.m., Austin police officer Troy Gay, patrolling Northwest Austin, reports a fire at the I Can't Believe It's Yogurt shop at 2949 W. Anderson Lane. Authorities find the terribly burned bodies of Jennifer Heston, 17, and her sister, Sarah, 15, and their friends Elisa Thomas, 17, and Amy Ayers, 13. Each had been shot in the head. Thomas and Jennifer Heston were shop employees; the other two had stopped in to help them close up.

Dec. 7, 1991: Police consider robbery, possibly drug-related, as a motive. They report that the front door of the yogurt shop was locked but the back door was found unlocked.

Dec. 8, 1991: Police say more than one suspect was involved. The teens, believed dead before the fire was set, were tied up.

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

Dec. 23, 1991: A teenage girl and her boyfriend confess. But police dismiss the confessions as false because the two youths don't know confidential details of the crime. Authorities say they have few leads.

Jan. 3, 1992: Police form a task force to investigate the case.

March 14, 1992: Police release a sketch of a man seen peering outside the yogurt shop the night of the slayings. Police say the sketch resembles the sketch of a suspect in an assault and abduction of an Austin woman kidnapped in downtown Austin.

April 1, 1992: Police arrest a 17-year-old, Armando Razo, who fits the description of the man wanted for questioning in the yogurt shop slayings. He is later released.

Aug. 5, 1992: Police begin searching for three men indicted in a homosexual abduction and sexual assault. Police say the three are wanted for questioning.

Aug. 7, 1992: America's Most Wanted TV program airs a segment on the slayings, showing photos of the three men. It prompts about 60 tips.

October 1992: Mexican federal authorities say they have arrested two men wanted by Austin police and one has confessed to the yogurt shop slayings. Officials say Porfirio Villa Saavedra, 26, was charged with murder and Alberto Jimenez Cortez, 26, was charged as an accomplice. A third suspect remains at large. Villa Saavedra is a former deliveryman for a company that supplied the yogurt shop.

Villa Saavedra recounts his confession, saying Mexican federal agents tortured him. Cortez tells officers he and Ricardo Sanchez walked in the car outside the shop the night the girls were killed. Austin police say they don't have enough evidence to charge them or clear them.

Dec. 6, 1996: On the fifth anniversary of the slaying, family members express frustration with the investigation. Meanwhile, authorities begin using a video about the case to 130,000 inmates, hoping that someone will turn in the killers for the reward.

March 3, 1998: A local, state and federal task force — created in the summer of 1997 — disbands and hands the case back to Austin police.

Aug. 6, 1999: Police assign six investigators and one sergeant, and enlist other agencies to pursue their latest lead.

Oct. 6, 1999: Police in West Virginia and Texas arrest Maurice Earl Pierce, 24, Michael James Scott, 25, Robert Burns Springstern Jr., 24, and Forrest Brook Watson, 23, and charge them with capital murder.



Police stand watch outside the I Can't Believe It's Yogurt shop at 2949 W. Anderson Lane the day after four teen-age girls were killed there. Two of the girls were employees at the yogurt shop; the other two had stopped in to help close up.



After months of court battles for \$1.5 million, Pierce, above, and Forrest Watson, below, are taken away after an arraignment hearing Wednesday at the Garret-Dettes Juvenile Detention Center in Austin.



As mourners attend a funeral service at St. Louis Catholic Church four days after the slayings, about 500 people gather on the lawn to grieve the loss of the teens.

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