

Unsolved: Few Martinko clues

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the Sheraton Hotel and then had gone to the recently opened Westdale Mall to try on a new coat her mother wanted to buy her for Christmas.

"She was really dolled up, she looked wonderful," remembers Martin Miller, now a chiropractor in Jefferson, Iowa.

Miller, along with Todd Bergen, Tracy Price and others, were Kennedy choir members who had been to the choir banquet that evening and who later ran into Michelle at the mall.

Miller remembers the mall being "pretty barren" that night as his group hung around about 9 o'clock waiting for a movie to start at a nearby theater. They asked Michelle if she wanted to join them, but she declined.

Miller recalls that she seemed to be in a hurry and was frustrated trying to find the store where her mother had picked out the coat for her to try on. Michelle got some change from them before going on her way, recalls Bergen, of Cedar Rapids.

Price, also of Cedar Rapids, remembers Martinko in those days as composed, thoughtful, college-bound and "very into fashion . . . not ahead of the times, but very much of the times."

She was mature beyond her age, say Bergen and Miller. "She didn't give guys in school much of a chance," adds Miller. "She always dated older guys."

As it turned out, Bergen, Miller and Price were likely the first Kennedy students to learn of Michelle's murder. Bergen's father, Floyd, was public safety commissioner at the time and was notified of the murder immediately. The three students went to the Police Station to tell detectives what little they had seen of Michelle the evening before. They were at the station when Michelle's "devastated" parents walked in. They, too, were among the hundreds of students at the funeral, "among the hundreds of kids bawling their heads off."

Police find body in car

Michelle was last seen in the mall about 9 p.m.

Mrs. Martinko says she expected her daughter home by 9:30 that night, and had become alarmed by midnight when there was no sign of her. She called police. By then, Mr. Martinko had gone out in the car hunting for his daughter, but didn't really know where to look. Mrs. Martinko called police again.

At 4 a.m., police found the family car Michelle had been driving: a 1972, four-door Buick Electra, with gold vinyl roof and light green body. It was parked in the lower lot at Westdale Mall, near one of the Edgewood Road entrances. The windshield was frosted over, the key was in the ignition and one rear door was unlocked.

Michelle was in the front passenger seat, dead from multiple stab wounds.

Cedar Rapids Police Department detective Gary Stark says the main stab wounds were to the chest, but several were to the neck and face.

The murder weapon, never found, was a double-edged knife similar in style to a dagger or a hunting knife with a curved tip. Stark doesn't believe the killer intentionally tried to disfigure Martinko's face.

"If you are fighting for your life and the knife is flying around in the car, you might receive a lot of incidental cuts," says Stark. And she did try to fight her killer off, he adds.

Stark says the killer could have been hiding in the Martinko car when she left the mall that night, or could have confronted her outside the car. He knows the car was moved from its first parking spot in the top of the lot to where it was found in the lower lot, but he won't say how he knows that.

Stark notes that Westdale Mall, which had been open 2½ months, was very much on the edge of town back then, with much open area around it. It would have been a short drive to an isolated road or area to commit murder, he says.

Composite of suspect

No Cedar Rapids crime has been investigated more or reported on more than the Martinko one.

"It is the most exhaustive investigation I've ever seen," says Linn County Attorney Denver Dillard.

Many people were subjected to lie detector tests, and investigators resorted to psychics, a sketch maker and a hypnotist.

Through hypnosis, two women helped draw a composite of a man in his late teens or early 20s who they believe they saw in the Westdale Mall parking lot about the time of the murder.

Several times over the years, detectives have questioned other killers and rapists arrested inside and outside Iowa. Killings

of young women around shopping malls, notes Stark, have happened with some frequency over the years. Just a year ago, he investigated such a murder in New Jersey, still unsolved, that was similar to Michelle's.

In 1986 and 1987, Stark and several agents of the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation reinvestigated the Martinko case from the beginning.

The high profile of the case made it a perfect one on which to test an idea — that a fresh team of detectives looking anew at certain, aging homicide cases might be able to unravel their mysteries.

That wasn't to be in the Martinko case. And when the year-long reinvestigation ended, it raised the prospect that the murder likely would never be solved.

The second go-around did offer a moment of anticipation. At one point, then-Cedar Rapids Police Chief Gary Hinzman announced that sophisticated laboratory tests were analyzing fur samples found on the clothing of one of the case's remaining principal suspects, Dennis McKee.

The hope was that the fur fibers taken from clothing belonging to McKee at the time somehow could be shown to be the same as that of the rabbit coat Michelle was wearing the night she was murdered. In the end, the test concluded that the fur found on the suspect's clothing was processed rabbit, but couldn't conclude it had come from Michelle's coat, says detective Stark.

McKee (who is serving a life sentence at the Iowa Men's Penitentiary at Fort Madison for a first-degree sexual abuse for a different crime) scoffs at the suggestion he had anything to do with Michelle's murder. That's a conclusion that Martinko's parents seem to agree with and that evidence has never been sufficient to rebut in court.

"I've stated from the very beginning that I did not kill Martinko," McKee wrote March 12 in response to a recent letter from The Gazette. "My involvement exists only in the fantastic imagination of a small clique of . . . corrupt cops."

McKee says if there was any rabbit hair on his clothing the detectives planted it.

Now 41, McKee became a suspect two weeks after Michelle's murder when his mug shot was picked from a photo lineup by a woman who had been violently raped at knifepoint in Cedar Rapids a month before Michelle's murder. Police came to believe that McKee was actively targeting the homes of recently divorced women he knew only as names from the divorce lists in the newspaper. Police found such a list, with the rape victim's name among them, when they searched McKee's residence.

For several years, Cedar Rapids detectives familiar with the Martinko investigation have always seemed to suggest that the case comes down to two prime suspects: someone who knew Michelle, and McKee.

Stark now offers no public opinion.

"It was possible it was someone who knew her" is as candid as he gets.

McKee doesn't automatically get eliminated as a suspect simply because Michelle was not raped, Stark adds. It's always possible someone came by and prevented him from doing what he wanted, he says.

Assistant Police Chief Bruce Kern says his sense is that many of the department's detectives, including Stark, feel they "know" who killed Martinko. But, he says, that doesn't mean much.

County Attorney Dillard is less sure: A case can be made for as many as 10 suspects, says Dillard. Of any suspect list with just two names on it, Dillard says the two are only the "most stereotypical" suspects.

By all accounts Michelle was beautiful. But her mother says Michelle had never let her beauty go to her head, even if a constant stream of calls and stares from young men usually made her conscious of it.

It was a beauty, in the end, believes her mother, that a young man who knew her decided nobody should have if he couldn't.

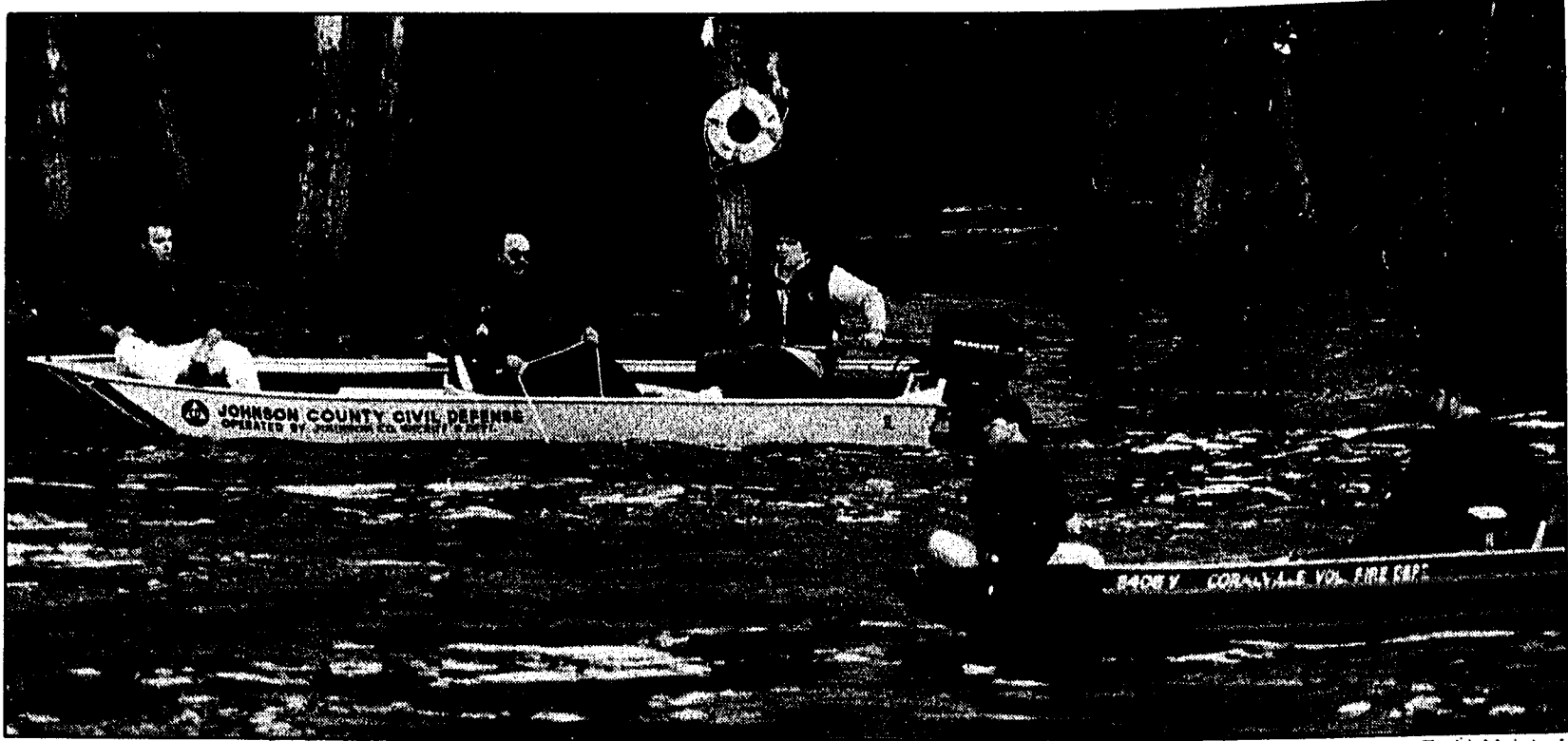
COMING UP

■ **Thursday:** The disappearances of three married women — the cases of Jane Wakefield, Lynn Schuller and Denise Fraley.

■ **Friday:** The disappearances of two boys — the cases of Guy Heckle and Johnny Gosch.

■ **Saturday:** Murders in the underworld of drugs — the cases of John Wall and Ron Novak.

■ **Sunday:** Families of the murdered and missing tell how they cope with unsolved cases.



Gazette photo by Todd McInturf

Emergency personnel, searching for two men believed drowned in a boating accident, drag the Iowa River last night behind the Iowa River Power Company restaurant in Coralville.

Drownings: 'A mother's worst nightmare'

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watched as the two disappeared into the water. "I felt really awful because there was nothing we could do. Somebody else in the restaurant was yelling 'Oh my God,'" she said.

The restaurant remained closed during the rescue attempt.

Ellis' mother, Joanne Staton of North Liberty, knew that Ellis was fishing. She has police scanners in her car and in her house that are on constantly. She heard a report that a boat capsized, then the location, and then instructions for someone to call Ellis' father. She rushed to the river, not sure whether her son had survived.

"This is a mother's worst nightmare," she said. Her son and Brogan had been best friends since about first grade, she said. "When you saw one you saw them both. Fishing — that's all they did. Day and night."

The families were neighbors, separated only by the Mehaffey Bridge. Ellis graduated from West High School; Brogan from Solon High School. Ramseyer had attended the Iowa City Community Education Center.

Ellis is an ironworker. Brogan was unemployed.

Brogan had been engaged for about a month to Rhonda Hamer, 19, of Hills. They had not yet set their wedding date.

She said she was upset with Brogan when he said he was going fishing. "He was supposed to spend some time with me."

It was Brogan's boat the three were using, and he had fished in that area lots of times, she said. "I told him not to get too close. He said he wouldn't."

As she waited, she clung to a chain-link fence at the edge of the parking lot and watched the rescue operation.

Ellis estimated the boat was within 30 feet of the dam when the boat capsized. Rescuers couldn't get closer than about 150 feet because of the undertow, Johnson County Sheriff Robert Carpenter said. There have been two or three drownings at that

location in the past 10 or 15 years, and numerous rescues, he said.

Rescuers were working against the clock to find the victims alive. "We're running out of time, to be quite honest with you," Carpenter said at about 5:15 p.m.

As darkness fell, lights were set up and the search continued under a full moon. The search was called off about 8:30 p.m.

Carpenter said an attempt will be made to cut the flow of the river from the Coralville Reservoir so water will be less choppy near the dam. That would allow rescue boats to get closer to the dam today.

Primaries: 'Test of electability is elections'

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Clinton won easily in both industrial states, defeating Paul Tsongas and Jerry Brown and overriding critics who said his support was centered only in the South.

"The test of electability is elections," said the Arkansas governor, adding that he'd passed it.

Illinois Sen. Alan Dixon was struggling to survive a close contest with Carol Moseley Braun, the Cook County recorder of deeds. If Braun were to win the three-way primary, she would be bidding in November to become the first black woman and the first black Democrat ever elected to the Senate.

Voters ousted outspoken Rep. Gus Savage from his congressional seat, nominating shooting victim Mel Reynolds in a Chicago Democratic district.

In the presidential competition, Clinton won hefty victories in partial returns from both Michigan and Illinois. Tsongas ran second in Illinois, slipped to third in Michigan behind former Gov. Brown of California.

Both losers offered Clinton their congratulations, a polite touch in an increasingly bitter campaign. Both had vowed in advance that no matter the result, they will continue their battles to overtake Clinton.

Brown had enraged Clinton by accusing him of funneling Arkansas state business to his wife's Little Rock law firm, and their angry dispute came up in post-primary interviews.

Clinton said in a CNN interview that he'd known Brown for years, since both were governors. "A lot of people thought he was a pain in the you-know-what," Clinton said. "But I always sort of liked him."

Brown said he wouldn't wait until the Democratic convention "to start raising hell. I'm going to start raising hell tomorrow morning."

At a Chicago victory rally, Clinton sounded an anti-Washington theme, telling supporters that the people who voted for him, voted for change. "They have voted to go beyond the politics of both parties in Washington," he said.

"Bush, Bush, Bush," is how Clinton deputy campaign manager George Stephanopoulos answered when asked about Clinton's focus in the coming primaries in Connecticut, Kansas, Wisconsin and New York.

Brown called Clinton's campaign a well-financed juggernaut.

Tsongas, in Hartford, Conn., for a head start on the campaign for next Tuesday's primary, said that if losing builds character, he has enough now and "we have to start winning for a change."

Brown told supporters in Madison, Wis., that he is determined to represent the unrepresented and "to work real change. However long it takes me, and that's

my commitment."

Bush's victories ran the president's primary streak to 16 and 0. A Buchanan aide said the challenger would announce on Wednesday that he is scaling back his daily campaign but intends to remain a candidate and will concentrate on the June 2 presidential primary in California.

Votes for undecided or for minor or dropout candidates accounted for the balance of the Among them was former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, getting 3 percent of the Republican vote in Michigan.

Bush said the outcome "pushed the delegate count to a level where my nomination is virtually assured," and added in

a written statement, "I will seek the support of everyone who believes that we can change America as we changed the world."

Bush was winning 142 delegates in the two states, Buchanan none.

That raised the Bush count to 711 of the 1,105 it will take to settle the Republican nomination.

Angela Buchanan said her brother's campaign would stop running negative television advertisements against Bush. And, while Buchanan intends to campaign through the California primary, there will be a "change in focus," she said.

Network-commissioned polls of voters in the two primary states showed Clinton running

strong among black voters in Illinois and blue collar workers in Michigan. Brown was said to have run slightly behind Clinton among union workers in Michigan, but well ahead of Tsongas.

NBC said exit polls showed about 30 percent of the voters in both states said they disapproved of Bush's performance in office. In earlier primaries, the Republican protest vote had been running at or above that percentage; this week it dwindled.

Illinois was awarding 164 Democratic nominating votes and Clinton led for 107, Tsongas 46 and Brown 11. In Michigan, 131 delegates were at stake and Clinton led for 71, Brown 37 and Tsongas 23.

PROOF:

Not Promises

Karen Koontz
President/Manager

Hall Home Furnishings

"I recently experimented with the Ad Plus non-subscriber product at The Gazette. I was pleasantly surprised with the response. I will use Ad Plus again to supplement my Gazette circulation."

FACT:

Of those Linn County adults who have purchased \$250 or more worth of furniture or carpeting in the past 12 months, 83% read The Gazette last Sunday.*

*Source: 1991 Consumer Market Study, MOR



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