

# Answers elusive in many murders, disappearances

The 11 unsolved law enforcement cases that The Gazette has examined over the past week, are among more than 100 unsolved murders and disappearances in Iowa over the last 20 years. Following are summaries of other notable unsolved cases involving Eastern Iowans.

## Ronald and Stanley Anderson

PHOENIX — Was it merely coincidence that two Eastern Iowa brothers were murdered in Phoenix seven years apart?

Former Anamosa resident Stanley Anderson was strangled to death in his Phoenix residence in January 1983. Ronald Anderson of Coralville was killed in a Phoenix hotel room in April 1990 on a trip to see his son.

Phoenix police said they found no connection between the murders.

Contacted recently by The Gazette about the cases, Phoenix police spokesman Leo Spellopolous said there have been "no arrests, no suspects, no nothing."

"There wasn't a lot of evidence at either crime scene and there were no witnesses," he said.

Family members declined to comment.

## Lance DeWoody

OAKDALE — Lance DeWoody's body was found Aug. 13, 1985, in a picnic shelter on the north side of the University of Iowa's Oakdale campus.

An Olin native, DeWoody had been living north of North Liberty and working as a laborer in an Iowa City area plant.

His murder is like so many unsolved Iowa murders: Sgt. Terry Koehn, detective at the Coralville Police Department, says he has one prime suspect in the case who knew DeWoody and who continues to live in the Iowa City area. In the last two months, a new clue brought a new round of work in the case, Koehn says.

He won't say why he thinks DeWoody died, or how many gunshots hit him.

## Maureen Farley

CEDAR RAPIDS — Maureen Farley had been missing for eight days when her body was found Sept. 25, 1971, in the trunk of an abandoned car in a wooded ravine near the southwest edge of Cedar Rapids.

Farley had been struck on the head with a blunt instrument and died of a skull fracture. She was reported missing Sept. 20, 1971, after failing to report for work. She had moved from Sioux City to Cedar Rapids to be closer to her husband, David Farley, an inmate at the Iowa Men's Reformatory in Anamosa.

Family members say there were and still are several suspects in the case, but that there have been no developments in recent years.

## Sean Freese

MONTICELLO — Police say either a freak accident or suicide killed Sean Freese. But his mother believes Freese was murdered.

Freese had been strangled to death when his body was found in his car inside the garage of his Monticello home Sept. 6, 1991. He was in the driver's seat, with the seat belt wrapped around his neck. The keys were in the ignition but the car was not running.

Monticello Police Chief Burt Walters has ruled out murder because "there was no proof showing

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someone else had done it."

There also was nothing to show that the seat belt accidentally got wrapped around Freese's neck. That would seem to leave only one explanation, but Walters agrees with the family that Freese was hardly suicidal.

Freese's mother believes her son was killed over his involvement in a burglary ring a few years ago. She said he confessed to one of the burglaries but refused to finger the others who were involved. She believes the others became concerned that Freese would change his mind.

## Amos Jellison

BLAIRSTOWN — Word around town was that Amos Jellison preferred to squirrel his savings away at home rather than at the local bank. The rumor cost him his life, says Benton County Sheriff's Department detective Pete Wright.

Jellison was beaten to death late Aug. 2 or early Aug. 3, 1981, in his mobile home here. Robbery was the motive, but no stash of cash was there to take, says Wright.

Wright says he has a suspect in the case.

## Kenny Johnson

DUBUQUE — The 1987 rape and murder of runaway Kenny Johnson still haunts the town of Dubuque.

The troubled youth ran away from a Dubuque school for the behaviorally disturbed Oct. 8, 1987. Johnson's body was found 36 hours later in a remote section of Maus Park on Dubuque's south side, on a sandy beach of a Mississippi River backwater.

He had been strangled and there was evidence of sexual abuse. Draped over the body was a piece of orange carpet. Police hoped a witness, perhaps remembering the brightly colored carpet, would come forward, but none ever did.

Police speculated Johnson was killed by a pedophile, but have never located any solid suspects.

## Lynda Manuel

ANAMOSA — Lynda Manuel vanished after finishing the evening shift June 27, 1978, at what then was Bud's Super Value grocery. Her skeleton was found April 8, 1979, in a ditch along a gravel road near Fillmore in southern Dubuque County. A cause of death could not be determined, but she likely died soon after her disappearance, the medical examiner said at the time. The case is considered a homicide.

Anamosa Police Chief Richard Stivers said psychic Greta Alexander even was contacted in a last-ditch try for leads in the case.

"It should have been solved," said Stivers. "We had our suspects. But we never had evidence to make the case."

Those suspects continue to live in the Anamosa area, he said.

## Dick McKinney

CEDAR RAPIDS — Dick McKinney, a deputy U.S. marshal from Cedar Rapids, was shot to death just after being robbed while he was on-duty in a southeast-side Cedar Rapids alley in the wee hours of the morning on July 20, 1972. A grand jury later indicted five people in the murder. Four eventually pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and have long since served their prison time.

But the fifth person, Harry Reese, now 42, was never found — and apparently has since been cleared from his alleged role in McKinney's murder. Reese, also known as "Dirty Harry," reportedly lived in the Davenport and Chicago areas and eluded authorities for years after the murder.

Then, in March 1986, the warrant for Reese's arrest was dismissed at the request of Assistant U.S. Attorney Bob Teig of Cedar Rapids. Contacted recently by The Gazette, Teig at first denied having anything to do with the case and later refused to discuss his reasons for wanting the warrant dismissed. He also declined to answer whether Reese is still alive or whether Reese is being protected as a witness in an unrelated federal case.

McKinney's widow and a son did not know the warrant was dismissed until it was brought to their attention recently by The Gazette.

Also, the order to dismiss the warrant was signed by U.S. District Judge Edward McManus — himself an acquaintance of Dick McKinney's who cited the relationship when he disqualified himself as the trial judge in 1973. McManus could not be reached for comment.

## Sandra Pittman

CLARENCE — Sandra Pittman was a "runaway-throwaway" from Davenport when her body was dumped at the Highway 30 rest area one mile west of Clarence on Sept. 17, 1980.

She died from a blow to the head with a blunt instrument, maybe a pipe or a tire iron, says Cedar County Sheriff Keith Whitlatch.

The murder happened less than a week after the Amana ax murders, but investigators doubt the crimes were related, though all the murders involved blows to the head.

Whitlatch says he leans toward the theory that an acquaintance killed Pittman. One suspect is in a mental institution, he says. The dumping of the body is an aspect of the murder that keeps open the possibility of a serial killing, adds Whitlatch.

## Charlie Plucar

LUCERNE — Robbery was the motive, too, for the murder of Charlie Plucar in his home 3 1/2 miles south and east of here, says Benton County Sheriff's Department detective Pete Wright.

Plucar, a semi-retired handyman, was shot twice in the head with a small-caliber gun either late June 21 or early June 22, 1977. He was found on the kitchen floor with his hands tied behind him.



Age: 46  
Hometown: Cedar Rapids  
Classification of case: Murder  
Date of murder: July 20, 1972  
Place of murder: Southeast Cedar Rapids

Wright says he has a suspect in the case, who now is living out of state. There has been investigative time spent on the case in the last month, adds Wright.

## Matt Pusateri and Brian Schappert

CEDAR RAPIDS — The murders of cab driver Matt Pusateri on Nov. 12, 1988, and convenience store clerk Brian Schappert on Sept. 8, 1989, were different and they were alike.

Different: Pusateri was shot while in his parked cab, and Schappert was stabbed to death as he worked at the Kum & Go store, 2743 Mount Vernon Rd. SE.

The same, says Assistant Police Chief Bruce Kern, in several ways: both victims were "good kids"; the motive in Schappert's case was robbery, and that most likely was the motive in the cabbie shooting; and there is the possibility that in each case the young man died because he recognized the robber and could have identified him to police.

## Dennis Stastny

CEDAR RAPIDS — The body of Dennis Stastny was pulled from the Cedar River in Cedar Rapids on Aug. 11, 1977. He died of a stab wound to the heart, but opinions differ on whether the death was suicide or murder.

A bloody hunting knife was found in the bedroom of Stastny's nearby apartment, and a trail of blood led out of the apartment, but stopped at an outside staircase. Then-Assistant Police Chief Jim Barnes at the time said he believed the wound was self-inflicted and that someone later carried Stastny to the river and dumped the body in.

But Linn County Medical Examiner Percy Harris disagreed, saying he thought someone else had stabbed Stastny. Contacted recently by The Gazette, Harris said he has no physical proof to back up his belief that Stastny was murdered, which he described as a hunch.

## Naomi Wilson

CEDAR RAPIDS — Why would a woman walk away and leave her house, her car, a good job and friends and family who love her? That's the puzzle behind the disappearance of Naomi Wilson, 1618 13th Ave. SE. The single woman disappeared April 12, 1981. Her car was found two days later in the K mart parking lot, 2727 16th Ave. SW.

Foul play has long been suspected, but police found little if any evidence indicating what happened to Wilson. There have been no developments in the case for years.

Repeated attempts by The Gazette to reach Wilson's family were unsuccessful.

— Rick Smith and Jeff Burnham



Age: 30  
Hometown: Cedar Rapids  
Classification of case: Murder or suicide  
Date of death: Body found Aug. 11, 1977  
Place of death: Evidence suggests at his home



Age: 17  
Hometown: Davenport  
Classification of case: Murder  
Date of murder: Sept. 17, 1980  
Place of murder: Body found at rest area near Clarence



Age: 32  
Hometown: Cedar Rapids  
Classification of case: Disappearance  
Last seen: April 12, 1981

## Loved ones: Families and friends learn to cope and live own lives

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Janet Martinko of her daughter's murderer.

## Helping to forget

If the Martinko murder is Cedar Rapids' most-famous unsolved crime, Noreen Gosch of West Des Moines is the most-famous loved one of Iowa's most-famous victim of an unsolved crime.

In the decade since her newspaper-carrier son, Johnny, was abducted, the act of smiling at times has seemed improper alongside the pain of not knowing whether she'll ever see him again, Noreen Gosch says.

But this night she is smiling, even chuckling a little, as she tells a story about an invitation mailed to her a few years back.

"It was from a lady whose dog had just passed away," Gosch recalls. "She said there would be a funeral at a pet cemetery and

*"It's always bothered me deeply that I didn't go out there that night. But if I had been there, would I have been able to prevent the murder, or would I have been laying there with Ron?"*

Dale Laver, friend of Ron Novak

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wondered if I would consider coming.

"I didn't know her from a box of rocks! I sent her a sympathy card telling her I wouldn't be able to make it."

Once again, the story has helped her forget the once-frantic and still-fruitless search for her son.

"I miss Johnny a lot," she explains. "But it doesn't overshadow every minute of every day. I couldn't allow it to."

## What if . . .

There have been more than 100 unsolved murders and abductions in Iowa in the last 20 years, and behind each one lingers family members and friends forced to find an elusive balance between survival and obsession to know the truth.

For Dale Laver, finding the balance is particularly difficult. His best friend, Ron Novak, was murdered in his rural Center Point home the night of Dec. 23, 1983, and Laver still wonders what would have happened had he been there that night as he had planned.

"We were practically brothers," Laver says. "To have somebody snatch a brother away

from you like that, it hurts."

Extreme cold forced Laver to stay home in Cedar Rapids. His phone calls to Novak's home that night went unanswered. The next night, while watching television news, he learned Novak had been bludgeoned to death with a golf club and two hammers.

"It's always bothered me deeply that I didn't go out there that night," Laver says. "But if I had been there, would I have been able to prevent the murder, or would I have been laying there with Ron?"

"When I think about the murder, all I see is darkness. The facts are clouded, the clues are few and I don't know who to trust anymore."

## Faith brings peace

Howard and Nancy Heckle say they have found a balance since their 11-year-old son, Guy, disappeared from a Boy Scout outing Feb. 3, 1973. Investigators believe the boy probably drowned in the Cedar River or its backwater. Still, the Heckles of Cedar Rapids don't rule out an abduction.

The family's peace of mind comes in part in knowing that many, many people searched

long hours in trying to find their son, either alive or dead.

"The family will be forever thankful to this community and outsiders for helping with the search," says Nancy Heckle.

With no new developments in years, she and her husband talk openly and calmly about their son's disappearance, confident that the answer will come sooner or later.

"Being Christian helps," says Howard Heckle. "Nancy and I believe with every fiber that we've got that we'll see Guy again, whether it's on this earth or up in heaven."

## 'Broken hearts'

Finding the balance hasn't come as easily for the Missouri family of Denise Fraley, who disappeared from Cedar Rapids the night of Sept. 11, 1982.

In fact, Fraley's sister, Linda Plowman, attributes the poor health of parents Nadine and Ordie Stark to "broken hearts" over the disappearance, what they suspect was murder.

In recent weeks, Plowman was reluctant to dig up the past, fearing her parents' health could not bear it.

But that changed when Nadine Stark told daughter Linda: "If your Dad has to die and he could know something might possibly be resolved on this, he would die a happy man."

## Living with memories

A loved one's unsolved murder changes a family's life forev-

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Howard Heckle

er, but the cliché often is true: Life does go on, says Independent farmer Kevin Klotzbach, who lost his sister to a murderer on Oct. 20, 1981, in Coralville.

Klotzbach doesn't trust people less because of Vicki's murder, nor does he lock his doors on the farm any more than before.

"I still have the same kind of small-town mentality of believing in people, just like Vic did," says Kevin. "I haven't forgotten her. You never do. You learn to live with what happened."

There are unsolved cases in Eastern Iowa that for one reason or another — fewer investigative leads, for instance — have not gotten a fresh airing in The Gazette's unsolved crime series of the last week. Today, in an accompanying story, there are short reminders of 15 of the others.

But still, there has been no mention of Kathy Dick's uncle, Paul Knoekel, who disappeared from Dubuque in 1990, or of countless other sad or frightening stories that have touched the state in recent years.

It's not, of course, that these other stories are not important.

"It's frustrating how the police aren't able to help," says Dick, of Marion. "It's understandable; they receive so many missing reports every week."

Her request of the popular TV show, Unsolved Mysteries, has been rejected, and it has caused her to wonder if yet another TV show focusing just on missing people might not be "a blessing."

"Otherwise, there is nothing you can do," says Dick. "Nothing, but sitting around, thinking about him as a million thoughts race through your mind. Maybe this happened, or maybe this . . ."

*"I haven't forgotten her. You never do. You learn to live with what happened."*

Kevin Klotzbach, brother of Vicki Klotzbach