

The Justice Files: The investigation of a pistol's past

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July 31,
2019



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SALT LAKE CITY (ABC4 News) – For three decades, families have been in search of justice. Three young women were killed in the 1980s. The murders of Christine Gallegos and Carla Maxwell remain unsolved. The killer of the third victim, Lisa Strong, was convicted and sent to prison.

But to this date, the killer has maintained his innocence.

In part one, we told you about the murders of three young women and how they were connected... The same gun was used in their deaths.

In part two: the investigation which went nowhere and the frustration families felt.

It's nearly seven years after the murders of Christine Gallegos, Lisa Strong and Carla Maxwell and their family's frustration reaches a boiling point.

"She was my daughter. They had no knowledge. They felt that she was a party girl, she was 18," said Gallegos.

In 1985, her daughter, Christine Gallegos is brutally stabbed and shot in an alleyway near the old Salt Lake Bee's Derks stadium.

"This is the location where Christine was shot and stabbed. it's clear from the evidence that there was a struggle," said Jason Jensen, private investigator.

She manages to break free and runs. But she collapses and dies near 1200 South and Jefferson.

A year later, there's another murder at a convenience store in Layton.

Carla Maxwell, 20, is shot multiple times, robbery's the motive.

The following month, Lisa strong is shot and killed in a Salt Lake City neighborhood.

Eventually, police revealed ballistics from bullets found at the scenes show the same gun. A .38 caliber handgun was used in all three murders. The cases go cold...

"Oh, they were being stone walled. they were being rejected. they were being blown off," said Rocky Anderson, attorney.

He referring to a task force led by Salt Lake City police that is formed in 1986.

In 1989, lead homicide detectives say serial killer Paul Ezra Rhodes who is on death row in Idaho is their suspect. Publicly, the squad is 100percent sure he's their man.

Not convinced, Rhodes is behind the murders of the three women, a patrol officer begins a separate investigation.

Officer Frank Hatton-Ward says it's a gang known as the "Various Chosen Few."

Police records indicate detectives didn't follow Hatton-Ward's theory.

In a memo, the head of the homicide unit wrote:

Witness statements are "hearsay."

Interviews have "leading type questions" and "when time and manpower allowed" they'll look into it.

Seven years later, there's still no charges against Rhodes and that's when the victim's families reach out to attorney Rocky Anderson.

"After all this time, they knew they had blown the investigation. That their detectives had gone public with a theory that was totally false," said Anderson.

His team investigates and learns from Hatton-Ward about the gun used in all three murders.

A pawn slip of a "38 special" leads them to a friend of the killer.

Tina Shroyer: "He gave me a pawn slip. and so, I gave that to the officer, and I said you want to find out who did it, here take this paper," said Tina Shroyer.

In 1986, Tina Shroyer happens to live across the street from where Lisa Strong is murdered.

And she knows Forrest Whittle who often partied at her house.

Whittle's very dangerous. Whittle's evil. Seriously I feel it inside my mind. I would never let him in my home.

Salt Lake City police declined to comment about the investigation. Thursday night Whittle is convicted of Lisa Strong's murder and three decades later, a new theory develops.

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