

**THE NEPTUNE CABLE**  
ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION  
FOR OUR POWER NEEDS  
P.8

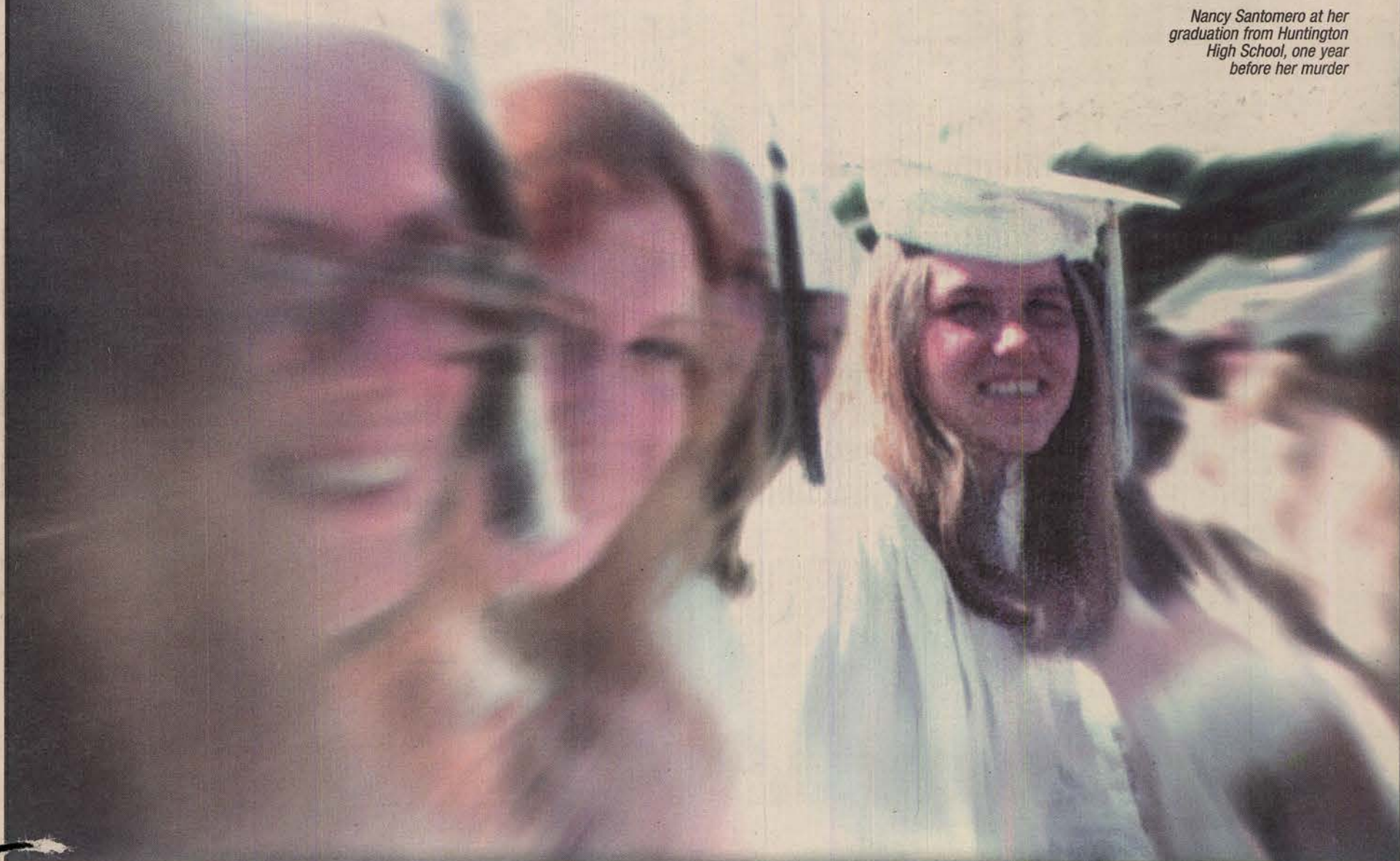


**THE MOVIELIFE**  
LI EMO STARS' MAJOR  
LABEL TRIUMPH  
P.28



# Long Island Press

*Nancy Santomero at her  
graduation from Huntington  
High School, one year  
before her murder*



## LONG ISLAND'S LOST GIRLS

THREE DECADES - THREE JOURNEYS - THREE GIRLS WHO NEVER CAME HOME

PART I **BROKEN RAINBOW** BY BILL JENSEN P.22



# LONG ISLAND'S LOST GIRLS

PART 1 OF A 3 PART SERIES

## BROKEN RAINBOW

UNSOLVED, SOLVED  
AND UNSOLVED AGAIN:  
THE MURDER OF A  
LONG ISLAND FREE SPIRIT  
RIPS THE LID OFF OF A SMALL  
WEST VIRGINIA TOWN

BY BILL JENSEN

*Jacob Beard just received \$1.3 million for murdering my sister.*

That is what the news feels like for Kathy Santomero-Meehan. The man once convicted of killing Nancy Santomero of Huntington and her traveling companion Vicki Durian on a mountain plateau in West Virginia in 1980 has been a free man for four years. Two months ago, after the West Virginia Board of Risk settled his suit alleging malicious prosecution, Beard is \$1.3 million richer.

Even with two eyewitnesses placing Beard at the scene of the murder, with the rifle in his hand and pulling the trigger—pulling the trigger so close to 19-year-old Nancy's head

that powder burns were left on her chin—a judge threw out his conviction in 1999, based on a witness who changed his story, tales of police coercion and a convicted serial killer's confession that he was the real culprit.

The thin sliver of doubt she held about Beard's role in the crime—maybe less than one percent—helped Kathy Meehan through his release. But the thought of him as a millionaire?

"It's obnoxious. If he is guilty, this guy just killed people and he got 1.3 million dollars," she says. "He's being rewarded."

In 20 years of investigations and trials, the story has been retold and revised too many

times to count. Racist serial killers confess to the crime, only to recant, then confess again. Witnesses come forward 13 years after the fact, claiming to have been too scared to tell the truth before. Accessories' remembrances of the night in question are wrapped in an alcoholic haze so thick the memories are more like dreams. One suspect chokes to death on a ham sandwich before he can testify, while another charges that his statement was given as a policeman jammed a foot on his neck. And whenever the jig seems up, when this sawdust-on-the-floor dance in the Appalachian mountains seems to finally be over, another record plays and it starts all over

again. Still the same town puzzled. Still the same players angry. Still the same girls dead.

### An Outdoor Girl

Rosy cheeks, shiny hair and perfect straight white teeth are the three things that jump out at you when looking at pictures of Nancy Santomero.

"She wanted to be a forest ranger," remembers her big sister Kathy, sitting in the living room of her home in Cold Spring Harbor. "She was a Peace Corps kind of person. Every time you squash a spider, you think of her, because she would have put the spider outside."



# The next day, and perhaps forever in Pocahontas, they would be known as the Rainbow Girls.

A 5'9" tomboy who laughed a lot, Nancy spent all the time she could outdoors, bicycling, hiking and walking along the rocks of the beaches of Huntington. "Simple clothing—not pretentious at all," says another sister, Jeanne Hackett. "She was very kind, caring, generous."

After graduating from Huntington High School in 1979, she left the homestead on Richmond Place for SUNY Buffalo but bolted after one semester. She moved in with a friend in Arizona and worked odd jobs. In Tucson, she became friends with Vicki Durian, a 26-year-old nurse with an equally caring personality and bright smile. The two decided to travel, stocking up their backpacks for a cross-country hitchhiking adventure. The final stop of their trip would be the Rainbow Gathering, a peace festival staged every year at a different national park by aging hippies.

Liz Johndrow, a friend of Vicki's, met up with them in Iowa, and the group stayed a few nights at Vicki's parents' home.

"We weren't in any rush," Johndrow recalls. "Everyone was open to adventure, going with the flow."

In Iowa, Nancy called her older sister Kathy, who had just graduated from SUNY Geneseo. They made a plan to meet up at the Gathering in West Virginia. Wearing green army pants, a peasant shirt and the bracelets her sister had made for her on her wrist, Nancy set out with her friends for a wilderness adventure before coming home.

The three were aware of the dangers of hitchhiking, but felt a safety in numbers. Outside of Louisville, when a truck driver started getting physical, Johndrow recalls, they handled it. "We got him to pull over—I think one of the girls sprayed something in his face," she says. "Because it was the three of us, we felt we could always get outside [the car]."

The girls caught a ride with a guy going to Sullivan's Island, SC, and spent a few days splashing in the surf. On June 24, they were outside of Richmond, VA when Johndrow was called home because her father was about to get married. After breakfast, Vicki and Nancy set out towards Pocahontas, WV without her.

## Almost Heaven

There are no black-death coal mines in Pocahontas, betraying the stereotype of West Virginia. A good part of the land is mostly unfarmable mountains, lending to logging and skiing. Pocahontas is the United States'

second largest county by landmass standards, yet it holds only 9,000 souls. Souls of churchgoing folk, stay-at-home moms and overly polite children. But also the souls of good ol' boys armed with Budweiser, Canadian Mist, chew, dogs, and trucks with bumper stickers reading, "You can have my gun when you pry it out of my cold, dead hands." It's not on the way to anywhere, so there is no reason to go there, which is exactly why the organizers of the Rainbow Gathering had decided to stage their weeklong festival within its borders, at Monongahela National Park. With the Reagan era staring them in the face, the Rainbow people thought Pocahontas was their last best chance to get back to the Garden.

They started coming around the beginning of May, well before the July 1 festival date. Sightings of the tie-dyed pioneers were reported in the morning coffee klatsches and hardware store culture clubs. Longhairs were seen washing up, buck naked, in self-serve carwashes, spurring on stories of "easy" hippie girls running naked in the woods.

"It was pretty exciting to see all these people come in," says Pamela Pritt, a local journalist who has lived in the county all her life. "It was sort of like the '60s caught up with us."

In mid-June, some people sued on behalf of the county to stop the festival. The case was thrown out. Organizers claim that they had even been threatened with violence. "One night, we were all sitting there, and they started shooting shotguns at us," says Barry Adams, one of the original founders of the Rainbow Family.

The organizers of the Rainbow Gathering had made up a map for attendees, different routes marked with comments on how visitors might be received. One route traveled through an area noted on the map as "Tight and Uptight." That was the route Nancy and Vicki took.

## Up on Briery Knob

June 25 is one of the longest days of the year, so even though it was close to 9 p.m., daylight was still hanging on to Droop Mountain when Robert Must, one month

out of college, drove toward his cabin on the perimeter of the park in an area called Briery Knob. Ten minutes later and he might not have seen them.

"My first thought [was that] it was a man and woman who just had intimate relations," remembers Must. He had seen the Rainbow people coming through the area, heard the stories about people camping out. But as Must got closer, he got out of his Subaru and registered that it was actually two girls, laying parallel a few feet apart and not moving. Must jumped into his car, drove to a neighbor's house and called the police.

Bob Alkire was fast asleep at his house in Elkins, an hour and 30 minutes north of Droop, when he received the call. As part of the state's criminal investigation unit, Alkire had handled homicides before.

Inside Pocahontas Memorial State hospital, Alkire's big, piercing blue eyes methodically scanned the bodies for clues. One girl had long brown hair in braids, wore army fatigue shorts and a red football jersey. She was missing a sandal. The other was in lavender drawstring slacks and a blue hooded sweatshirt. The pockets contained no identification.

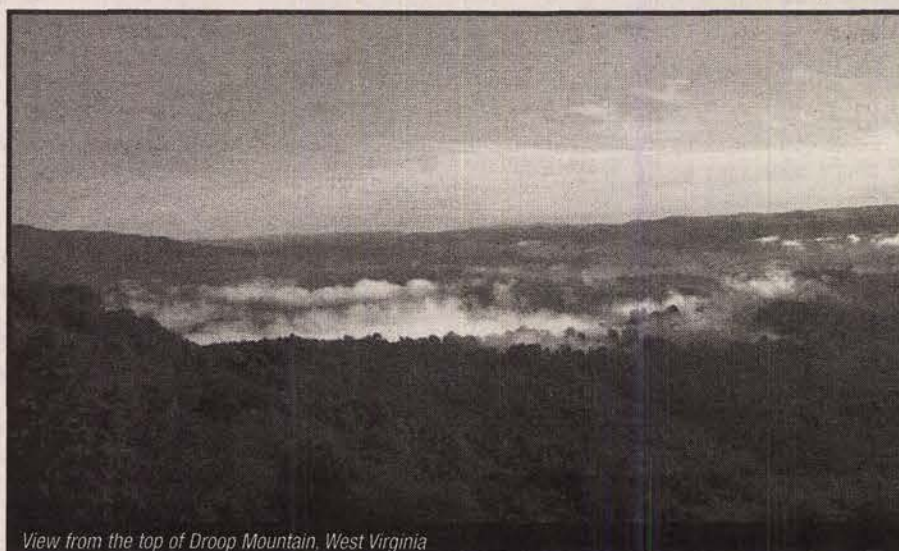
"We had no idea who they were," Alkire, now sheriff of Pocahontas, remembers today, sitting in his first-floor office in the brick courthouse in Marlinton—but he knew the girls weren't local. The next day, and perhaps forever in Pocahontas, they would be known as the Rainbow Girls.

The bodies were transferred to Charleston for a proper autopsy, where the medical examiner found that Vicki was hit twice in the chest, and Nancy three times—twice in the chest and once in the head. Both were shot from less than a foot away. Blood pooling around entrance but not exit wounds indicated they'd been shot elsewhere and then dumped on Briery Knob. There was no evidence of sexual assault.

A week later, Kathy arrived at the Rainbow Gathering less than 20 miles away and immediately spotted the white van where she was supposed to meet Nancy.

"It's hard to believe, but we saw it right away," she says today. The owners of the van, who were friends of Nancy's, told Kathy they hadn't seen Nancy yet. Kathy wasn't worried: "We thought she probably found something different to do on her way."

The festival went off as planned. Close to 3,000 revelers banged on tribal drums and strummed acoustic guitars. At night, they lit fires and talked about new solar energy technology and the hostages in Iran.



View from the top of Droop Mountain, West Virginia





Jacob Beard

Joseph Franklin

Pee Wee Walton

Johnnie Lewis

Arnold Cutlip

Halfway through the gathering, a rumor began circling that “two Indian girls” had been murdered nearby. Kathy paused for a second, remembering that her sister often wore her hair in braids, like a stereotypical good ol’ boy version of a Native American girl. But she quickly dismissed the thought, enjoyed the festival and traveled home to Geneseo.

A few days later, a friend who had accompanied Kathy on the trip had a chance to read the newspaper he had picked up in Pocahontas. He showed Kathy a small story about two unidentified girls found in the hills. A one-inch by one-inch photo accompanied the story.

Kathy borrowed money and a car and went back down to Pocahontas to see if it was Nancy. She didn’t tell her parents.

“I couldn’t call them up and say, ‘Maybe my sister’s dead.’ So I just went down there,” she says. People in Pocahontas showed discretion, hiding her from the small cadre of reporters who had gathered for the story. At first glance, Kathy didn’t recognize her sister. Then she saw the bracelets. She drove back home to tell her parents in person. The family didn’t hire an attorney.

“At the time, we thought the authorities were taking care of it,” says Kathy.

A few months later, at the end of deer season, hunters found Vicki and Nancy’s backpacks 60 miles away. Clothing, a camera, a tent, sleeping bags, a journal, and Nancy’s missing sandal were among the contents, as was a Confederate flag.

“I don’t remember them having that,” Johnndrow, the girls’ traveling companion, says of the flag. “That would have been rather odd.” The new evidence was pored over, but no clues were found.

## Corn Choppers and Chain-sawed Pigs

Two years later. Leads went nowhere. The case went beyond cold to downright frigid. Nancy would have been 21.

One day in August, Howard Durian, Vicki’s father, received a phone call at the family home in Wellman, Iowa. The man on

the other end said he was so sorry that the killer of his daughter Vicki had never been caught, and blamed the police of Pocahontas County for an inadequate investigation. He said he had just read a newspaper article about the unsolved murders and wanted to call and “get the ball rolling again.” Then he hung up. Durian contacted the authorities, who put a trace on his phone. When the man called back, the trace showed that the call came from a residence in Pocahontas County.

“That’s the first knowledge I had of Mr. Beard,” remembers Sheriff Alkire.

By some accounts, Jacob Beard was mean, sort of the town bully. According to one story, as a teenager he waded through a pen of pigs carrying a running chainsaw, filleting the swine to a bloody pulp. Another has him attending parties sporting an axe. By other accounts, he was a hard-working family man, a father of two from a wealthy farming family.

When the police came looking for him, Beard first denied making the phone call to Durian. Then he admitted it. Reached at his home in Greenbrier County, WV, Beard

claims that his phone call to Durian complaining about the local police force “infuriated Alkire, and he just took it personally and went off the deep end.” Beard offered information in exchange for immunity for being an accessory after the fact for the Rainbow Murders (only a misdemeanor in 1980 West Virginia). The police agreed and Beard introduced the world to the Corn Chopper Caper.

Beard told police that in September of 1980, locals Paulmer “Buddy” Adkison and Arnold Cutlip had come to his farm with a dead body and put it in his corn chopper. This “body” was supposedly the “third Rainbow girl.”

Arnold Cutlip was arrested and charged with murder by Pocahontas prosecutor Steve Hunter. Adkinson was already in jail on another murder charge.

“One person gives a statement and somebody’s arrested for murder!?” says Alkire, still incredulous 20 years later.

But Beard says that it was Alkire, who he claims had become obsessed with the case and had a vendetta against him, who came up with the corn chopper story.

“He talked me into making this statement,” Beard says. “He wrote it up and put my name on it.”

The case was dismissed before it got to the grand jury, but Cutlip, who was habitually unemployed, was unable to raise bail and spent seven months in jail during the wait. Beard says that he was going to recant the story if his friend Cutlip would be going to jail: “As far as anything going to trial, I would never let that happen.” More stories followed. The leads went nowhere but there was always one common denominator—the storyteller, Beard.

Beard claimed to have an alibi for the night of the murder. He says he left his job at Greenbrier Tractor Sales in nearby Greenbrier County at 5:15 p.m., as his handwritten time card indicated, and before that, he was on a service call for a customer who Beard couldn’t remember and has never been identified. He then went home, ate a sandwich and went with his wife to a school board meeting, which started at 7 p.m. (though witnesses place him there closer to 8 p.m.). He then went home with his mistress, Brenda Hillary.

“He had a magnetism,” Hillary says with a thick West Virginia twang. “Good personality. A big man. Self-confident.”

## Lies and Misdemeanors

Months passed, and Alkire couldn’t gather any more evidence on Beard. 1982 was closing with still no charges. Meanwhile, the trust between Hillary and Beard soured. On Christmas Eve, Hillary was getting her four daughters dressed for church service when Beard called. “He was saying ‘I love you, I’m coming up,’” remembers Hillary. “I could tell he was drinking.” She hung up on him and left for church. When she returned, her Old English Sheepdog was on the porch, covered in blood, a stab wound in its neck. She took the dog to a vet, who miraculously saved the animal. Then, at 2 a.m., Hillary woke to a crying noise under her bed. Lifting up the covers, she found her cat “slit from the

“Jacob, when he was sober, was a fine guy,” says Hunter. “When he was sniffing gas or smoking pot, he was meaner than hell.”



throat straight down." They went back to the vet, but the cat was not as lucky.

The day after Christmas, Hillary filed animal cruelty charges against Beard.

Beard says that he and Hillary are still friends, and that she does not still think he killed her cat. "I think if you called her up today, she would probably say 'I don't know' or 'No.'"

When called up, Hillary said, "I know he did it."

Beard was arrested, but never went to trial. Why? Many people point the finger at Hunter, the Pocahontas prosecutor who was in office from 1978 to 1984.

Rumors run rampant in the county that Hunter and Beard were close friends, possibly even related. Hunter claims to have had a close relationship with Beard's father, whom he describes as "a real salt-of-the-Earth kind of guy." But Hunter claims he "really didn't know Jake." He is however, able to give insight into Jacob Beard's personality.

"Jacob, when he was sober, was a fine guy," says Hunter. "When he was sniffing gas or smoking pot, he was meaner than hell." But Hunter returns with, "He wasn't someone I knew."

"Uh, that's such a lie," says Hillary. In fact, everyone contacted for this story other than Hunter claimed the two were friends.

Hunter claimed he didn't "offer him specific immunity" for a possible Rainbow accessory charge. But according to Beard's lawyer, Stephen Farmer, Beard was granted immunity from the Rainbow case as an accessory after the fact and "dismissal, as I recall, for the animal cruelty charge" in exchange for a polygraph test in which he stated he saw Adkinson up on Droop Mountain on the day of the murder.

In 1983, a teenage friend of Beard's named Bobby Lee Morrison came forward and told police that he was sleeping in the truck of successful local businessman Gerald Brown when he was awakened by gunshots.

Police had actually talked to Brown as a possible witness during their initial investigation, because his logging truck had been seen on Briery Knob the night of the murder.

On April 7, 1983, Alkire and Hunter were part of a search party looking for Brown to question him about the murders. Well past midnight, the crew stopped at Hunter's residence to get something to eat. At around 2 a.m., who should appear on the porch but Jacob Beard.

# The thought of Franklin as a viable suspect draws laughs from people in the county.

"He came under the pretext that he wanted to talk to us," Hunter recalls. What did Beard say? "Hell if I know," says Hunter. "When Jake's sober, he's no dummy. Maybe he thought he could buy his way out of purgatory... I didn't talk to him alone, though."

But Alkire claims that Hunter and Beard "went outside and talked, alone."

Hunter did say Beard "either did it or knew who did it, I'm firmly convinced of that." (When Beard was read this quote, he stated "He said that?" in a raised voice.)

But Morrison later backed off on his claim and the charges against Brown were dropped. The corn chopper story went nowhere.

The police were back to square one.

Then, some 800 miles away, a serial killer picked up on an unrelated charge was starting to talk.

## Wasted

Born James Clayton Vaughn Jr., he changed his name to Joseph Paul Franklin in homage to Nazi leader Joseph Goebbels and American hero Benjamin Franklin. An avowed racist with a membership in the

KKK and the National States Rights Party, Franklin launched a killing spree in 1977 that would last three years. On his way back from a bank robbery in North Carolina to Lexington, KY, Franklin claimed he picked up two hitchhikers. "One of them told me she had dated blacks and all that," Franklin said in a videotaped deposition played in Braxton County Circuit Court in 2000. "And the other one told me she would if she had a chance, so I just decided to waste them at that time," Franklin said in a CourtTV documentary that aired in 2000. The girls would be added to his self-professed 20-plus body count, which included black men, Jews and his favorite target, mixed-race couples. But not everyone is convinced of Franklin's claims.

"I've sat in his cell and talked to him," says Alkire. "He's never been to Droop Mountain, West Virginia."

"He denied it, then admitted to it," says Kathy. "I don't believe him."

Neither does anyone else in Pocahontas. The thought of Franklin as a viable suspect draws laughs from a random sampling of

people in the county. For starters, the map that Franklin drew of the murder scene was incomplete, and sometimes, downright wrong.

"He said from the highway where he killed the girls, he could throw a rock. That's 6.6 miles," says Alkire. "He gives you four or five different versions on how they were shot."

It has been claimed that when Franklin was arrested, there was a magazine in his truck with an article about murders. The article contained incorrect information, which he reiterated when he made his confession and drew the map.

Franklin claims the girls were sitting in the backseat of a car when he shot them, but the trajectory of the bullet wound belies that story. He says he shot one of the girls only once, when each was shot at least twice.

Franklin, already on death row in Missouri, had a history of pinning himself to unsolved crimes. The sniper shootings of former Urban League President Vernon Jordan in 1980 and *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt in 1978 are two of his biggest hits he's tried to claim as his own, although he's never been tried for either. Hunter decided not to pursue Franklin, who was already in prison for life, and the case remained open.

But Franklin's stories would eventually raise a shadow of doubt.

## A Long Wait

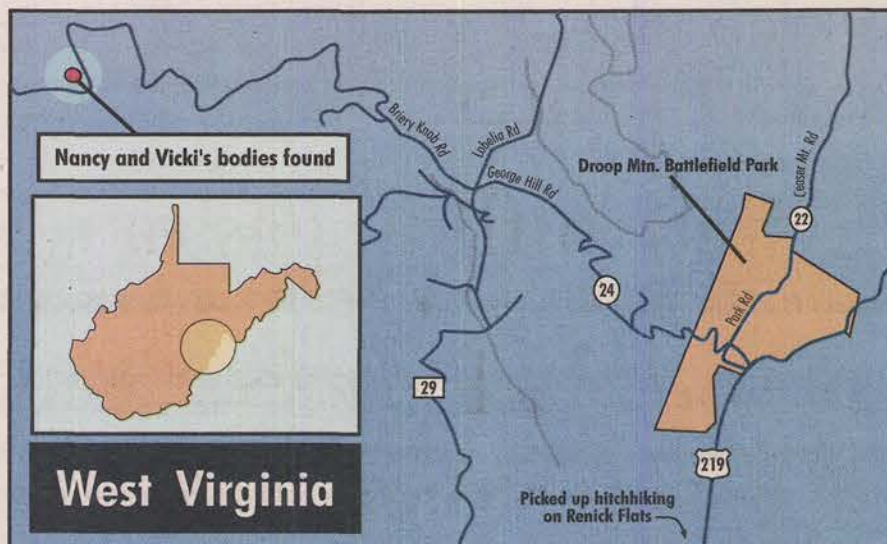
Ten years later. Nancy would have been 29.

The Rainbow people had come back to West Virginia, this time for a smaller, regional gathering. Barry Adams and the other Rainbow organizers asked Alkire if the old case was still open. They had a possible witness.

Though the witness never panned out, the case was once again brought to the front burner. In the case file, Walt Weiford, the new Pocahontas prosecutor found a small slip of notepaper with a reference to a girl named Pam Wilson, who would prove key to unlocking the whole case.

"Why it was not pursued [earlier], I can't say," says Weiford.

Wilson told Alkire and Sheriff Jerry Dale that she and her mother Alice Roberts had been on the Renick Flats, a long straight slip of Route 219 at the southern foot of Droop Mountain, on the day of the murder. They clearly remembered that two "hippie-type" girls climbed into a blue van between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. The van belonged to local





good ol' boy Richie Fowler.

On April 16, 1992, first-degree murder charges were brought against locals Fowler, Beard, and their pals Pee Wee Walton, Gerald Brown, Arnold Cutlip, Bill McCoy and Johnnie Washington Lewis.

As with everything else in this case, nothing came easy—three months later, the charges were dismissed for lack of evidence. But by January of 1993 it was on again, with indictments of Fowler, Beard, Cutlip, Brown and McCoy. While awaiting trial, Brown choked to death on a ham sandwich at Bill McCoy's house. It was by all accounts a genuine accident; the medical examiner found gristle in his throat and the pathologist said there was no way it could have been forced there.

Walton and Lewis claimed that Beard did the shooting, offering to testify in exchange for immunity. Beard, now 46 and living in Florida, was brought back up for trial. He would face the charges alone.

## The Story Comes Out

The prosecution peeled back layers of time to offer up a picture of Pocahontas, circa 1980.

At around noon on June 25, Richie Fowler and Bill McCoy picked up Pee Wee Walton. Their plan? To drive around in Fowler's custom van—a plush-carpeted, captain's chair-and-bed '70s job—drinking and shooting groundhogs.

Nancy and Vicki were walking along the Renick flats when a blue van pulled up. The girls got in. "[Bill] McCoy, he was a nice-looking, young guy. So he could have picked them up and they could have just felt fine for the majority of the time," says Kathy.

The three men took the girls to the residence of Gerald Brown, where, it is speculated, the girls ate a meal and took showers, having been on the road for weeks. It is also speculated that McCoy made a phone call. Eventually the five met up with the perennially unemployed Cutlip and Beard, and everyone headed to the woods to party.

Hours passed, many drinks were downed. Pee Wee Walton, already wasted, peeked out the window of Fowler's van to see Beard apparently looking at a friend's rifle. Inside the van, he witnessed Fowler and McCoy, armed with liquor and hillbilly, making passes at the girls. But the girls rejected the advances, and Fowler became enraged. He grabbed Nancy and said, "We kill people and we'll kill you."

The girls got out of the van and an argu-

ment ensued. "Why are you doing this?" one of them cried. Walton heard one of them frantically trying to get back into the van.

Johnnie Washington Lewis, also drunk, peered out the window of another truck and saw the women get out and stand next to Beard. He saw Beard raise his hands and heard shots.

According to Lewis, Beard said he shot them "because they were going to go to the law."

Drunk and upset, Pee Wee Walton said he wanted to go to the police. But then, he says, McCoy "got mad and hit me in the stomach and said 'We ain't going to the law.'" Walton also remembers somebody saying, "We've got to clean this place up. We might want to party here again." It is then theorized that Brown disposed of the bodies on Briery Knob.

All the evidence pointed to Jacob Beard. A host of witnesses corroborated the time of the shooting and placed Beard at the mountain. He was convicted, sentenced to two life terms and was to spend the rest of his life in the Mount Olive State Correctional Center.

The story was supposed to be over.

## A Man Goes Free

Four years after Beard's conviction, Joseph Franklin, the racist serial killer, was rotting in jail. During a rambling five-hour interview with Melissa Powers, an assistant prosecutor in Hamilton County, Ohio, he confessed to an old Cincinnati murder she was investigating. He also reiterated his claim to the Rainbow murders. "The Rainbow killin's were a little different," Franklin told Powers in the taped confession. "Because I just picked them up hitchhikin'." Beard's lawyer grabbed the new confession and started trying to get his client a new trial.

"We've got to clean this place up," one of them said. "We might want to party here again."

Then, out of the blue, came a bombshell.

Arnold Cutlip came forward to claim that he spent the entire day of June 25, 1980 with Johnnie Washington Lewis, cutting locust posts and drinking at local bars, therefore Lewis, one of the state's two star witnesses, could not have seen Beard kill the girls.

"There is speculation [Cutlip] got paid," says Weiford. "How much and by whom, I don't know." (Cutlip refused to be interviewed for this story.) Lewis bucked the claim, but it was enough to cast his testimony in doubt.

Farmer brought the new evidence to court, and Senior Status Judge Charles Lobban let Beard go free pending a new trial. The news hit Kathy Santomero-Meehan hard.

In May of 2000, Beard was once again tried for the Rainbow murders. This time, the prosecution was on the defensive. Twenty years after the fact, witness testimonies had grown vague, clouded by the passage of time. Some changed their stories altogether.

Bill McCoy, who had said that he left the party on the mountain only to return to find Beard, Fowler, Cutlip, Brown and Walton "cleaning some blood out of the van," with a garden hose, now told the court that he made the story up because he was "going through heroin withdrawal and hallucinating."

Pee Wee Walton claimed he had told the police nothing about the killings until a big police officer smacked him around to get his statement placing Beard with a gun at the scene.

And Cutlip testified he was with eyewitness Lewis.

But the *coup de grace* was the cold-blooded monster Franklin, who glared from a video screen into the jury box and described how he

picked up the girls and decided "to waste 'em." The jury heard eight days of testimony, deliberated for two-and-a-half hours and let Beard go free forever. He can never be criminally tried for this case again.

Two months ago, the Board of Public Risk in West Virginia settled Beard's suit, which alleged malicious prosecution on the part of prosecutors and investigators.

Today, Jacob Beard splits his time between Florida and West Virginia. He will receive a monthly payment from the state, but has vowed to keep his job at Avery Atkins Tractors.

"I did buy a new pickup, a Ford," he says. "As far as buying five Corvettes, I'm not going to do that."

The Santomero family is split on his guilt. Nancy's mother, Jeanne Santomero, even wrote a letter in Beard's defense for the second trial. (When Kathy told her about Beard's recent settlement, her mother replied "Oh, good for him.") At this time, the family is not planning on pursuing a civil trial against Beard.

"If he's walking around and I believe in God," Kathy says with determination, "he'll get his." The parents of both Nancy and Vicki divorced in the aftermath of the murders.

Bob Alkire is still sheriff of Pocahontas County. "When you sit back and look over the last 20 years," he says with frustration, "you can see that we were doomed from the start. But you can't prove any of it." He plans on running for another term next year.

Walt Weiford is still the Pocahontas County prosecutor. "It's pretty much over," Weiford says of the Rainbow legal saga.

Liz Johndrow, Vicki and Nancy's traveling buddy who was one day away from possibly being a victim herself, is a massage therapist living in Vermont.

Barry Adams is planning the next Rainbow Gathering, taking place this year in the Great Basin between Utah, California and Nevada.

And the boys in the van? Richie Fowler moved away from Pocahontas and is said to be working a farm in Orange County, Virginia. Bill McCoy lives in Lewisburg in neighboring Greenbrier county. Pee Wee Walton still lives in Pocahontas, working at a building supply store. Johnnie Washington Lewis, still working as a farmhand, has also never left Pocahontas. Arnold Cutlip, still unemployed, can be seen shuffling around town.

Joseph Franklin still sits on death row in Missouri.

Nancy and Vicki are still over the rainbow. ☐



# LONG ISLAND'S LOST GIRLS

PART 2 OF A 3 PART SERIES

## DARK STAR, SHIP OF FOOLS

A FLOWER CHILD  
FROM BALDWIN  
DISAPPEARS IN  
CALIFORNIA AND  
THE POLICE  
STAND STILL

BY BILL JENSEN

One night in 1994, Susan Wilmer went walking through the parking lot of Nassau Coliseum looking for Happiness.

The Grateful Dead was playing that night. Wilmer darted through the crowd, through the patchouli-scented bongo circles and enterprising merchants selling grilled-cheese sandwiches and nitrous-oxide balloons, asking anyone and everyone she saw if they knew Happiness.

"I went up to one guy and said 'I'm looking for Happiness,'" remembers Wilmer. "And he said with a big smile 'You've found it.'"

But while there was plenty of sunnyside

bliss being passed around that night, Wilmer had not found Happiness.

Happiness was a man, someone who might have had information about Wilmer's daughter, Jennifer, who had vanished in Northern California a year earlier.

Elsewhere in the lot, volunteers from the Baldwin Police Athletic League handed out flyers with Jennifer's picture. She had traded the frosted brown locks she sported as a senior at St. Mary's High School in Manhasset for dreadlocks, but the flyers gave everyone an idea of what the petite, blue-eyed girl looked like. Maybe somebody in this caravan had seen her. At the show in Chicago last

week. Or the one in Oakland a month before.

The police department in the small county where Jennifer had vanished had offered little help since day one. Susan was getting desperate.

She never found Happiness.

In the close to 10 years since her daughter's disappearance, Wilmer has become active in missing-persons organizations. She founded FOCUS, a support group for the families of missing children, and, with the help of then-congressman Rick Lazio, pushed through a bill called "Jennifer's Law" signed by Bill Clinton in March 2000. The law expanded the nation's missing-children

database by providing the states money to enter more complete data on each missing person's case.

But all her efforts have not found her daughter.

And now, nine years and \$20,000 in private investigator's fees later, Susan Wilmer has made it legal.

"I just had Jennifer declared dead," she says from her Baldwin home. "Two weeks ago. I did that for my children, for the rest of the family. The therapist said it was a good idea. [But] it's not changing anything in my mind."

Susan is in the process of preparing a



*"I knew she wasn't alive.*

*A lot of people that are in  
my situation live with  
hope. But I knew."*

## Here Comes Sunshine

memorial for Jennifer, something that would provide closure for her children.

"A lot of people in my situation live with hope," says Wilmer. "I can't tell people to give up hope. But hope, to me, it's not reality."

But she'll be damned if she leaves this Earth before finding out what happened.

Jennifer liked to question authority. In grade school, she'd yell at the nuns when they picked on students who didn't know the answers.

In fifth grade, she asked her mother if she could have a Halloween party.

"Someone else in her class was having a party," Susan Wilmer remembers, "and Jennifer wanted to invite all the kids that weren't invited to the other party. That was Jennifer. She hated inequities."

So it's no surprise that the Camaro-infested, big-haired mainstream of late '80s Long Island drove the teenage Jennifer toward a counterculture. She would spin in the circles of the Deadheads.

At 20, she bolted for California, trying to, in her mother's words, "make it on her own." She left St. John's University (and the full scholarship she had earned while at St. Mary's) for the seaside town of Arcata, a haven for postmodern hippies 200 miles north of San Francisco. "She had a restless, adventurous spirit," remembers brother Fred Wilmer Jr., one of Jennifer's three siblings. Jennifer tried registering at the two-year College of the Redwoods, but was shut out of classes. She waitressed and lived on welfare for a spell, mainly hanging out in Arcata Plaza with the thousands of other street people who had made the pilgrimage to Arcata from all points east. "She was, in a sense, in a high-risk lifestyle," says interim Arcata Police Chief Randy Mendosa, who over the years has befriended the Wilmers. "She was definitely an urban traveler, which is pretty common [in Arcata]." Everybody around the Plaza had some type of nickname. Skinny Bob. Ragman Pete. Jennifer had come to be known as Jade.

But the city by the sea wasn't all pot and roses. Jennifer had bouts of depression, and had started to see a therapist. Then, toward the end of the summer, her roommate announced she had to bail the scene, and Jennifer was forced to vacate her apartment in Arcata.

Susan Wilmer says Jennifer was ready to come home. So much so that her mother had purchased a return plane ticket for her, which she could have picked up and activated at any

travel agency.

But Jennifer wasn't ready to give up on California. She called her mother and told her she had decided to go live with some friends "out in the country." "The country" meant Trinity County, 3,500 square miles of mountainous desolation and marijuana crops, with not a stoplight in sight.

Jennifer moved in with her boyfriend, a local named Tro Patterson, in a rented house in Hawkin's Bar, Calif., which he shared with a guy named Opie, another named Mingo and a girl named Rebecca. A friend told Jennifer of a farm up the road from the house. The friend said they weren't looking for any help at the moment, but Jennifer should still go down and introduce herself.

So at 7:30 in the morning on Monday, Sept. 13, Jennifer set out to hitchhike the nine miles into "town" along Rt. 299. She left a note to her roommates:

*Bye everybody,*

*Went to my 1st day at the farm.*

*Wish me luck! Good luck to you, Mingo  
and see you in a few months. If someone  
could give food to the kitten as needed  
I'd appreciate it. Hopefully I'll see you  
folks later*

♥ Jade

Local authorities would later come to

suggest that she had gone away intentionally. Evidence doesn't support that theory, however. Jennifer left all her identification at home. She left her clothes. Her address book. Her Bible. Her bankcard. But most importantly, Jennifer left her sleeping bag.

"No self-respecting hippie leaves her sleeping bag," says Susan Wilmer.

By September 19, Susan Wilmer had still not heard from her daughter. Jennifer's housemates had gone to visit the farm and realized she hadn't gotten there. Susan Wilmer got a phone call from Tro Patterson, Jennifer's boyfriend.

"I knew she wasn't alive," Wilmer says today. "I knew."

(By eerie coincidence, Tro Patterson's father, Jay Patterson, was the boss of Polly Klaas' mother. Polly would be abducted from her bedroom three hours south of Trinity just 18 days after Jennifer had gone missing.)

Frantic, Susan Wilmer called the county police. She Fed-Exed a picture of Jennifer. It sat in the sheriff's mail slot for days. The police wouldn't help.

"You have to understand that her adult daughter was a walkaway," says Martin Ryan, Chief of the California Bureau of Investigations. "There is no evidence of foul play, other than the time that's gone by." That was the attitude of the police from day one.

"Initially, I wasn't convinced that [there

was foul play] and I had my reasons," says Trinity County Under Sheriff David Laffranchini, alluding to Jennifer's counterculture lifestyle.

With seemingly no one looking for her missing daughter, Susan Wilmer felt helpless. She called her local congressman, who, at the time, was David Levy. His office called Trinity, and got the excuse that she was a runaway. Wilmer called the Nassau County Police Department, where Det. George Doherty checked the law enforcement database National Criminal Information Center. Jennifer's name was nowhere to be found. It was Doherty, 3000 miles away, who filed the missing persons report. (Laffranchini claims that Trinity had filed a report, and Wilmer filing another one left two reports with two different case numbers).

Smelling incompetence, Susan and husband Fred Wilmer made arrangements for their 14-year-old son to stay with a friend and caught a flight to California.

## Looks Like Rain

The Wilmers were familiar with the kinds of people Jennifer traveled with.

A few years earlier, Jennifer had asked her mom if a bunch of Deadheads could sleep in the backyard while the band was playing a set of shows at Nassau Coliseum (Unlike at many arenas, Deadheads can't sleep out anywhere near the Coliseum). She agreed, and woke up the next day to a "street full of VW buses" and "wall-to-wall sleeping bags" in her yard.

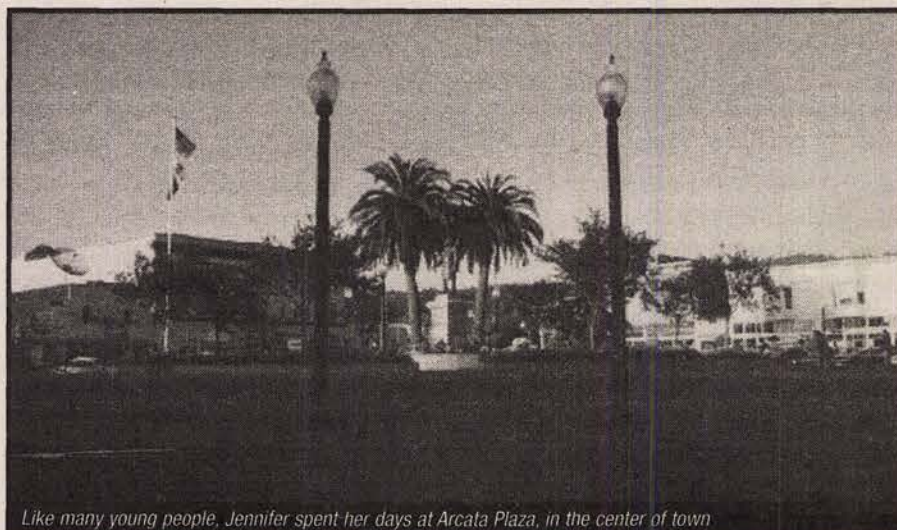
"They were so quiet," remembers Susan. "My neighbors didn't even know they were there. They were very sweet."

When the Wilmers entered the house in Hawkins Bar, they were met by three kids, all with shaved heads from having ditched their dreadlocks. The place was dirty, but Jennifer's housemates, just like the Deadheads who had slept in her backyard in Baldwin, were "sweet" and pleasant.

The kids at the house showed her a picture of Jennifer. It was the exact same one she had Fed-Exed to the sheriff's office. The police, for some reason, had delivered it back to the house.

"It was like a message," says Wilmer. "Here, take the picture back. We're not taking the case."

The Wilmers left the house and met with detectives at the police station, whose lobby is presided over by a large painting of the sheriff, a big six-gun on his desk, a real "don't mess with me" look on his face. Wilmer, a tough-talking Long Island woman with a missing daughter, tried to get answers from



Like many young people, Jennifer spent her days at Arcata Plaza, in the center of town



people who were doing very little. She spied the manila envelope case file marked "Wilmer" in one of the detectives' hands. It was empty.

"I don't want to badmouth anyone, but they did mishandle some things," says John Mohon, a private investigator in neighboring Humboldt County hired by the Wilmers.

Susan Wilmer is more to the point.

"He's an idiot," she says of Under Sheriff Laffranchini.

Perhaps because of the lax initial investigation, no answers were found. Months, then years, passed. Susan Wilmer didn't give up.

She kept pressing. She got loud.

"I almost felt a little disloyal to my mom," son Fred Jr. says of Susan when she would get emotional with the investigators. "I would defend her, saying, 'You have to understand, she's upset.' [But] in retrospect, she was 99.9 percent right."

Susan Wilmer started a letter-writing campaign, with seemingly the whole town of Arcata sending thousands of letters to anyone who would listen. They got the ear of Ryan at the California Justice Department.

It was far, far too late.

## Not Fade Away

Sometimes when David Laffranchini is driving across Route 299, he thinks to himself one simple question.

"If I was going to dump a body, where would I do it?"

Sometimes he gets out of his car, walks along the mountainous terrain, through the



Both the authorities and the Wilmer family believe Jennifer went missing somewhere along Rt.299

pull-off areas where the grass is worn out by impromptu piss breaks taken by weary travelers during the hour-long ride to the coast.

He is looking for any signs of Jennifer.

"This is the type of county where it would be easy to kill and dispose of a body," says Laffranchini, who now believes in his "gut" that Jennifer is dead.

There was some hope for answers in 1998. Wayne Ford, a truck driver from Arcata, wandered into the sheriff's department in neighboring Humboldt County and pulled a plastic baggie from his pocket containing a woman's severed breast. Though Ford did prey on hitchhikers, he confessed only to killing four women—one of whose breast he carried into the station that day—dating back only as far as 1997. He never confessed to Jennifer's murder and private investigator Mohon learned that Ford was in the Midwest during the time of Jennifer's disappearance.

Around the same time, a young woman entered an abortion clinic and signed her name as Jennifer Wilmer. The missing-person infrastructure was set in motion, only to find out that the woman was a 14-year-old girl who was trying to hide the pregnancy from her parents. She had seen Jennifer's missing poster

and chose the name as an alias.

Calls with possible sightings are less and less frequent. Two weeks ago, Laffranchini got a tip from someone saying they had seen Jennifer at a Dead show "a couple of years ago, and she was fine." Wilmer dismissed the call. She is more interested in the police following up on a jailhouse confession, in which one man said that Jennifer was buried in Blocksburg, Calif.

"That would be thirdhand hearsay," says Laffranchini, waving away the claim as bunk. "I sat down with the [man with the confession]. The first thing he said was 'I'll tell you some stuff if you can get a break on my charges'... It was all fabricated."

"Every prisoner with information is going to say that," yells Wilmer.

The 20 grand the Wilmers have spent on private investigators has produced a few plausible scenarios:

Jennifer was hitchhiking to the farm. She got a ride, but in the car had second thoughts about going to the farm—they had said they weren't looking for any help right away. So she said to herself, "You know what, I'm gonna go to the coast and meet up with [boyfriend] Tro." Tro usually spent the weekends in Arcata, and would stay until Tuesday, to watch *Monday Night Football* in town. So Jennifer took the ride all the way down Route 299 to Arcata.

Once she got there, it's anybody's guess. Tro Patterson could not be located for this story. When contacted, his father, Jay Patterson, said, "He's up north. I was hoping

that we could get over this calamity, rather than open up a festering old wound." But the wound has never been closed. At the beginning, Jay Patterson was in constant contact with the Wilmers. But after Polly Klaas was found in December, Jay Patterson, now emotionally part of another heart-wrenching crime, stopped talking to the Wilmers, according to Susan.

Another theory relates to the search for Happiness back in the parking lot at the Coliseum. Happiness, it was thought, would provide the true identity of a Deadhead regular known as Cowboy Fred, an older guy who Wilmer says "was obsessed with" Jennifer. "He may well be who murdered her."

"Cowboy Fred was a dude Jennifer was scared of, for some reason; no one knew why," says Mohon, the private investigator. "He was an older guy and would follow her around Arcata plaza."

Or maybe "it could be totally innocent," says Arcata Chief Mendosa. "She could have stumbled into somebody's grow [marijuana farm], and they got threatened"—an interesting definition of "totally innocent."

Susan and husband Fred haven't been to Northern California in two years.

"Over the years, I started getting physically sick," says Susan. They spent their last two vacations at Hawaii and Disney. But they are planning a new trip out West, which will no doubt be punctuated by another confrontation with Laffranchini.

"This trip," says Susan, "I think I'm ready to ask the right questions." ①



A 19-year-old Jennifer with cousin Jessica on Long Island



# LONG ISLAND'S LOST

PART 3 OF A 3 PART SERIES

## A WALK BY THE RIVER

### THE UNSOLVED MURDER OF A SAG HARBOR FLIGHT ATTENDANT IN IDAHO

BY BILL JENSEN



It stretches from Eagle Island State Park to Lucky Peak Reservoir, a 20-mile necklace of foamy green water, flowing west to east through Boise, Idaho at a leisurely pace. Bicycle paths dart alongside the river. Fly fishermen in hip waders angle for trout. Sometimes you can spy a bald eagle flying overhead.

On the Boise River Greenbelt, dogs should be leashed. Pedestrians have the right of way. Women should not be raped and murdered and tossed into the river.

In the fall of 2000, Lynn Henneman, a 38-year-old flight attendant from Sag Harbor who was married only a month, took a flight to Idaho from New York. She was to stay in Boise for the night and then work a shift back east to Chicago, then to New York. She never showed up to her post at American Airlines the next morning. Two weeks later, a fisherman angling at night discovered her body lodged under a log in the Boise River. Police believe Henneman was murdered only a few

hundred yards away from where Kay Lynn Jackson, a 22-year-old Boise native, was sexually assaulted and killed while walking to church in April, 1998. A year later, the body of 30-year old Cassandra Ann Yeager was found on the outskirts of the city at the Lucky Peak Reservoir.

A first glance at the evidence—three women, all sexually assaulted and killed within two years and 10 miles of each other, with all three bodies dumped on park land—pointed to a serial killer, that ultimate terrorizer of communities. But the answer is not so easy. The women were all killed by different means: Yeager was shot in the head; Jackson was stabbed in the heart and Henneman was strangled. What's more, perhaps most importantly in an age when crime-fighters use microscopes as much as pistols, the DNA recovered from the scenes indicated three different men were responsible.

In a small city that sells itself on its seamless combination of urban sprawl and green

splendor, officials breathed a sigh of relief. Three little monsters were better than one big one.

Three weeks ago, the spectre of a serial killer began haunting Boise again, when the body of Cheryl Hanlon, a 43-year-old Boise native, was found on a hillside in the city's North End. Like Henneman, Hanlon was sexually assaulted, found partially clothed and strangled with a piece of her own clothing.

With Lynn Henneman's picture staring back at him from his daily planner, where it has been placed since the inception of the case, Boise Police Officer Dave Smith, in charge of both investigations, worked 18-hour days to track down Hanlon's killer. Last Thursday, he got his man. "There are a lot of similarities [between Lynn's and Cheryl Hanlon's murder]," says Smith. That was the main reason he was assigned to the case. He's now opening up the massive binders of Lynn's case file, which he keeps within arm's length on his desk, and looking for a connection.

Lynn had checked into two weeks before. They were there hoping, praying, holding vigil for any word of Lynn, who had gone missing without a trace. Her parents, Micki and Ron Huisenga, her husband, Walter Us, and her sister, Laura Pettet, were doing their own investigation, trying to piece together what they could about Lynn's last day.

Henneman was familiar with this part of the country. She grew up in Montana, and had met her first husband, John Henneman, in the college town of Bozeman. Divorced after 10 years, Lynn was waitressing in Montana when she met Walter Us, who was on a ski trip. The two hit it off, eventually moving in with each other and buying a house in Sag Harbor.

They had gotten married just one month before Lynn found herself on a night layover in Idaho.

Lynn checked into the Doubletree on September 24, presumably got her cookie and went to her room. She then told coworkers that she was going for a walk. Dressed in a dark, long-sleeved jacket, beige shorts and sandals, Lynn crossed a footbridge and veered onto the Boise River Greenbelt. She walked east along the river to the Boise Art Museum, where a credit-card receipt shows she bought glitter pens, window paint and a book of brain teasers. She later ate a spinach salad alone at the Table Rock Pub and Grill, a microbrewery on the edge of Julia Davis Park along the Greenbelt. (Just months before, a girl named Samantha Maher was abducted from Julia Davis Park, raped and murdered. Local Darrell Payne was arrested for the crime. His



The Boise River

## GLITTER PENS AND WINDOW PAINT

Everyone who checks into the Doubletree Hotel gets a free chocolate-chip cookie. It's the signature of the chain, a big, heated two-ounce puck of sugar that the front desk gives out with your key as a "welcome home" gesture. The cookies are baked on the premises, making the front lobby smell like a bakery.

Lynn Henneman's family converged on the Doubletree Riverside, which presides over the west side of the Boise River Greenbelt, in September of 2000. It was the same hotel that



DNA did not match that of Lynn's killer.)

Witnesses saw Lynn leave the restaurant at around 7 p.m. That was the last recorded sighting of her on Earth. Since she had an early flight the next morning, one could surmise that she began the three-quarter-mile walk up the north side of the river back to her hotel.

When she failed to show up for work the next day, coworkers reported her missing. Police began an exhaustive search of the Greenbelt. They brought out the dogs, the all-terrain vehicles, the divers, combing tooth and nail on the ground. They deployed the helicopters, for a bird's-eye view from above. They got nothing.

A week-and-a-half later, Lynn's wallet and ID were found under the bleachers at a local high school, a mile from where she was last seen.

Near the Main Street bridge on the river, police found the glitter pens and window paint Lynn had bought at the museum, along with her beige shorts.

Then on October 7 at close to 7 p.m., an angler fishing on the south side of the river near East 50th Street spotted a naked figure trapped beneath a log. The vigil at the Doubletree turned to mourning.

An autopsy confirmed that Lynn had been murdered and was sexually assaulted. Amazingly, though it had been submerged in water for two weeks, police were able to lift DNA from the body. That gave them hope. One hundred and fifty-two local men had their DNA tested. No match. A sample of the DNA was entered into the national FBI database. No match. Anyone arrested along the Greenbelt for a sex offense—even on indecent exposure charges—has their DNA tested. Still, no match. "I get leads on this thing every week," says Smith. "If anyone is arrested [for a sex crime along the River], I chase 'em down and swab 'em."

## MURDER BEGETS SAFETY

Last April, 50 people gathered on what would have been Lynn's 40th birthday, dropping handfuls of pink, red and white rose petals into the Boise River. The gathering was organized by Paul Blomberg, father of Samantha Maher, another Greenbelt victim, who has developed a rapport with Lynn's parents. When contacted at their home in Bozeman, Mont., Lynn's mother, Micki Huisenga, declined to be interviewed, citing both pain and a fear that the killer, still on the

loose, could seek more retribution.

"Basically, we just don't want to go there," said Huisenga. "It hurts."

Lynn's murder prompted new security initiatives along the Greenbelt: more lights and new security patrols. Boise police officers have stepped up bicycle patrols. A motorcycle detail, the result of a community donation drive, has been instituted. Mile markers have been installed along the Greenbelt by area Eagle Scouts, and dense brush that could be used as ambush cover has been removed by park rangers.

Since Lynn's murder, no one has been killed along the river.

Lynn may have saved other lives. Or has her killer simply picked another span of geography in which to work?

Three weeks ago, Cheryl Ann Hanlon's

body was found five miles away near a children's playground, and Det. Dave Smith raised his eyebrows to a possible connection.

On March 13, armed with a tip, Smith arrested Eric Virgil Hall, 32, for first-degree murder in connection with the March 1 killing of Hanlon. The next day, Hall, characterized by police as a transient, confessed to Hanlon's killing. Hall is a previous sex offender, who was actually arrested only two weeks ago for failing to register for a previous conviction.

The similarities between the murders are cause for hope.

Hanlon was strangled with her own clothing, similar to Lynn. She was found partially clothed. Both seemed to be victims of opportunity, rather than planned assaults. Both had murderers who made attempts to conceal the crime, throwing Lynn into the

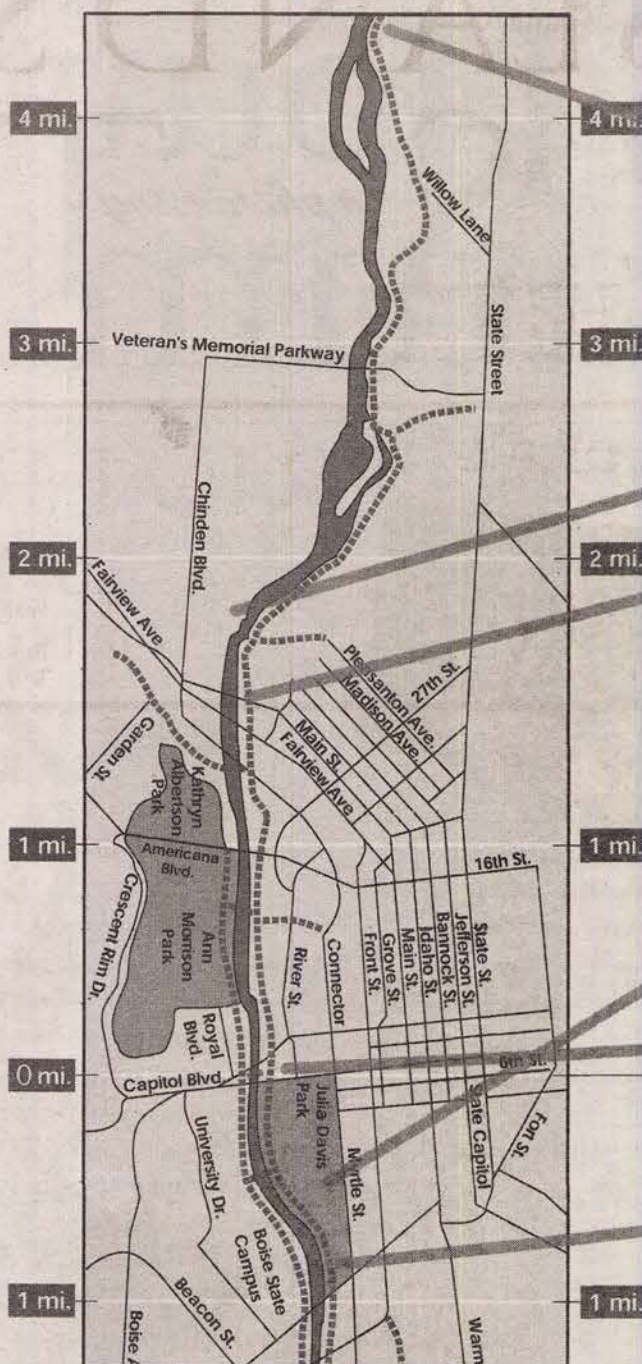
river, Hanlon into a shallow grave. Both were beaten about the head and both had jewelry removed—Lynn had been wearing a gold sapphire ring with diamonds, which has not been recovered. Hall was in Boise at the time of Lynn's murder, living right off the Greenbelt.

Like the 152 men before him, Hall will be swabbed for DNA, and tested against the sample found on Henneman. "We won't know for a couple of weeks," says Smith.

The detective keeps in constant contact with Lynn's parents. On Monday, he called them with the news about Hall. "I told them to be cautiously optimistic," says Smith.

And even if Hall turns out not to be his man, Smith will still cling to hope, and a scrap of DNA, that Lynn Henneman's killer will be found. ⑩

## BOISE RIVER GREENBELT



Lynn's body found by a fisherman two weeks later

Doubletree Hotel

Lynn's personal items found under Main St. Bridge. It is believed this is where she was murdered

Lynn buys gifts at Boise Art Museum - 4:21 p.m.

Lynn leaves Table Rock Pub and Grill - 7 p.m.

Samantha Maher abducted from Julia Davis Park that previous July