

Delayed Justice

Murder, mayhem, investigation, cold cases, The Klan

- [Home — Murder, “cold” cases, and mayhem](#)
- [Forum](#)
- [Doc•u•men•ta•ry: Murder through the lens](#)
- [We Remember](#)

See p. 2 on →

Renee Pagel

Renee Pagel was stabbed to death in her home in Courtland Township, Kent County, MI, on August 5, 2006.

Renee, who was the mother of three children and a teacher at Kent Career Technical Center, had recently returned home from the hospital after donating a kidney to the father of one of her students when she was murdered. Michael Pagel, whom Renee was in the process of divorcing, has been named a suspect in her murder, but no arrest has been made.

February 27, 2009 — Heritage Hill Bride begins

All the working day yesterday was spent at the Grand Rapids Police Department scanning away on the file that encompasses the murder of Shelley Speet Mills. Using an out-of-date MacBook I kept the scanner humming along, page after page. No, I'm not done by any means and will return next week for another couple of sessions, but the pages and pages of interviews, photographs and reports chronicle a terrible crime.

Is this what we come down to in a murder case? ...Words, images, measurements? Yes.

But police know there is more, much more. Sergeant Terry McGee is the latest in a line of investigators who have pledged to do their best to bring justice for Shelley. This almost-39-year-old case bothers him as it has those investigators before him. A lot. But for the case to go forward there needs to be something new...new evidence, new cooperation from a source.

And so, in an effort at trying something new, we have been allowed to help in telling the story of this crime. And because this is a new thing, something as yet untried, we're making it up as we go along. So, stick around and take a new look.

February 24, 2009 — The smart web guy beat me to it

Well, there's humor in some of what I do. My intention was to roll out *Jack in the Box* in short segments as we felt the demand. It didn't work out that way. It's there...all there...at the web node. I get to laugh at my own pretension. Intention=pretension...yeah, like that. And thanks to a smart web guy for taking the time and thought; I **do** think he has the right idea. I love it when people bring their best to a project. And I've seen it again and again with this project.

Eventually, we'll have a comments section so viewers can post their theories of the crime, or, if they know something, even post the identity of the victim. Oh, we'd like to help determine his identity, to help return the name to the body. At this point there is no telling exactly what happened to him—other than cause of death—but it was brutal. Somebody has to be missing this man. Somebody has to know **just** who he is.

February 22, 2009 — Pulling the trigger on an idea

...Maybe not the best analogy given the usual subject of the site. But that's what it feels like. When we take this action, pull this trigger, it may change things for ever.

I am jealous of the intellectual property that's associated with my name. I OWN it. Well, okay, so I do. Now what? And who cares?

That's what we're trying to determine. In trying to build a site and enterprise I know that risk is required. I don't have money to risk, but I do have intellectual property in the form of films. This all comes from an understanding of a new idea in the universe: everything should be free. One part of me thinks that's not so good; the other part thinks it might be beneficially revolutionary.

So, we're trying out an idea in the spirit of seeing exactly what's up: we're going to put up one of our films for people to see. We're going to install it in segments...as viewers request. Now, maybe there are three or four people reading this odd blog, but if I hear from ten who want to see it, I'll post the second segment. And we'll decide from there. The film? *Jack in the Box*. It is perhaps the most important of our films just now because the case remains open, unsolved, and crying out for some kind of solution.

So, you can view the first segment [here](#).

If you want more, let me know: david.schock@delayedjustice.com (and because I don't know how yet to activate your e-mail program to swing into action you'll have to copy and paste it...unless our very bright web guy has the opportunity to do that).

And, if you have thoughts, please share them.

February 17, 2009 — A reporter remembers

Lunch yesterday was a delight. I had to good fortune to gather with John Douglas, a former columnist with the *Grand Rapids Press*, and Pat Shellenbarger, a current and well-respected reporter for that newspaper. I have a deep and abiding love for newspapers and recognize in them one of the most important functions of our polity: conveyance of information, untainted by bias. Well, that's the goal, at any rate. And in these two writers it's been realized again and again.

That may sound an odd note in reference to a columnist whose purpose is to talk about idea and perhaps reveal his leanings. Fair enough, but John Douglas never took umbrage with those who disagreed, especially about films. Here was someone who would review films but who said he wasn't a critic. The idea was that he'd tell you his honest opinion and you could make up your mind from that. If you generally disagreed with him about films you'd probably like something he didn't. No

umbrage taken. The idea he has often said is this: if YOU like a film, it's a good film. John is also one of the few film reviewers who also has a history is MAKING films...when films were on...film, not video. When I had the privilege of teaching, John was one of the people I would ask to come and talk with students. They always had a good time and John always was generous with his energy and expertise. This is a guy who says what he thinks and acts on it. In a fight, I'd want him at my back.

And Pat is right there with him in terms of integrity and honesty. I first met Pat when I was leaving Hope College. He wanted to know more about that story. Wasn't much of one, really, especially in light of our today -lives and the dearth of jobs for so many. He told the story that I thought was fair and honest and with no more emphasis than it deserved. There was no sensationalism. I've been a fan ever since, and every once in a while John, Pat, and I gather for a nosh.

We talked, among other things, of the difficult times for newspapers, their smaller sizes and staffs. It's been my opinion that papers have to figure sustainable ways to collect micropayments from us for their online content. We run the risk of the economy constricting to the point where we lose good and experienced reporters. In their wake we may have to suffer citizen journalists whose training may not include the lessons that experience has taught their predecessors. There may not be time for an orderly up-bringing of a staff. Oh, golly, I see a bleak day ahead for newspapers and I don't know how to avoid it. But I can lament it. And I can hope for something better.

In addition to their fields of interest we talked about my efforts at this website and Pat shared with me the story of his coverage of the Oakland County Child Killer, a series of murders he followed at a reporter for *The Detroit News*. When he came west, his interest in the case didn't diminish, and at the advent of the 20th anniversary of the murders he filed the following story. Copyright is 1997 *The Grand Rapids Press*. This is used here with permission of the editor, Mike Lloyd, and these are one-time rights and not to be passed along. One concern about using copyright material is depriving its owner of earnings. The *Press* has wonderful archives and much is made available free of charge (this comes from a time before that kind of archiving) so I do not fear that I am depriving the *Press* of revenue. But I want to make sure that both the reporter and paper receive the honors due them. (Honor is nice, but revenues will help even more, so do me a favor and [subscribe](#), will you?)

UNSOLVED TERROR; Retired area cop can't find closure to 20-year-old **Oakland County** child killings

Pat **Shellenbarger**

The Grand Rapids Press

4/27/1997

→ Mark Stebbins lay face up in the snow, dressed in the same clothing he wore four days earlier, the last time his mother saw him.

His hood was pulled over his blond hair. His coat was buttoned wrong. He looked peaceful, like a child making angels in the snow, and unharmed except for the rope burns on his wrists.

He had been suffocated, his body dumped along a low brick wall separating the parking lots of a Southfield shopping center and an office building. He was 12 years old.

The police covered him with a blanket and began the painstaking search for clues and his killer.

They were still looking 13 months later when Marian King, accompanied by three police officers and her parish priest, sat in the lobby of the Wayne **County** Morgue. She smoked a cigarette to calm her nerves. After a few minutes, she rose from the bench, walked through a doorway and looked up at a

closed-circuit television monitor.

Her face flushed, she closed her eyes and nodded. The face on the monitor was that of her 11-year-old son, Timothy, kidnapped six days earlier.

Mark Stebbins was the first victim of a man who would become known as the **Oakland County** child killer. Timmy King was the fourth. Two other children were abducted from the northern Detroit suburbs in the winters of 1976 and 1977 and later found murdered.

The four killings touched off the most intense manhunt in Michigan history and a flood of worldwide publicity, sending a wave of terror through the state. It ripples still.

Today when parents tell their children to stay in the yard, they echo the warnings that issued from **Oakland County** 20 years ago. The murders marked a turning point in Michigan, an awakening that our children are vulnerable.

“I think terror would approximate what people felt,” said Dr. Bruce Danto, a forensic psychiatrist who helped police investigate the murders. “A paranoid kind of posture hit the community. Children reported their parents. Psychiatrists called me about their patients. Attorneys turned in their clients. People all over the state were affected.”

Twenty years later, Robert Robertson, a retired Michigan State Police captain, is still affected. He sat in his lakeside home between Rockford and Greenville and talked about the biggest case of his career — perhaps the biggest of any Michigan detective’s career — the one that never was solved.

“I don’t think we ever got close to him, personally,” said Robertson, who headed a task force of more than 200 police officers, the largest ever in Michigan. “But if you said, ‘Why do you feel that way?’ I’d say, I don’t know.”

Robertson, 63, was a meticulous investigator, the kind who kept detailed notes of everything he did on a given day, every tip, every clue, every conversation.

“When you don’t have much, everything is significant,” he said. From a box of his personal records he pulled a file labeled “psychics.”

“All these psychics, they all had the answer,” he said. He asked each to sign a form agreeing to forfeit the \$100,000 reward. “That got rid of the psychics. See, I don’t believe in psychics, not for one, single minute.

“We tried everything. Any thought you have in your mind we tried. I don’t know of anything we would do differently.”

Originally there were seven kidnapped and slain. Investigators eventually decided that the murders of three victims — Cynthia Cadieux, 16, Sheila Srock, 14, and Jane Louise Allen, 13 — were unrelated to the other four.

Feb. 15, 1976, a Sunday, Mark Stebbins, his mother and older brother went to an American Legion Hall in Ferndale to watch a pool tournament. Mid-afternoon, Mark told his mother he was walking home to watch a movie on television.

He never arrived. Four days later his body was found in a Southfield parking lot, apparently placed there in broad daylight.

Three days before Christmas 1976, 12-year-old Jill Robinson argued with her mother and stormed from their Royal Oak home. The day after Christmas, she was found along I-75 in Troy, half her face blown off by a shotgun blast.

Officially, the state police were not yet involved, but Robertson, chief of detectives at the Michigan State Police district headquarters in Northville, and one of his men, Sgt. Joe Krease, paid visits to the Royal Oak and Troy police chiefs.

“We suggested they set up an office somewhere and assign some men to it, and we’d give them some men,” Robertson said, “but for whatever reason they chose not to cooperate.”

Jan. 2, 1977, a week after Jill Robinson’s body was found, 10-year-old Kristine Mihelich walked into

a party store near her Berkley home. She bought a movie magazine, walked out and disappeared. That's when it became clear that a serial killer was at work. Jerry Simmons, a Southfield police lieutenant, called a meeting of area detectives and suggested they coordinate their investigations. It was agreed that Robertson, a Cedar Springs farm boy who had joined the state police in 1955, would head the effort.

He knew there was little chance Kristine would turn up alive. "She wouldn't come walking down the sidewalk," he said. "Wasn't any doubt in our minds that the body would be found."

The kidnapper's habit had been to keep the children a few days before killing them and dumping the bodies. A week passed, then another, and there was no sign of Kristine. Nineteen days after Kristine disappeared, a mailman noticed something blue in the snow along a dead end street in Franklin Village. He backed up his truck, stepped out and saw an arm and a hand.

Robertson was meeting with police chiefs in Ypsilanti when he got the call that Kristine's body had been found.

The task force went into action, setting up an office in a shopping center, then moving to a Birmingham fire station and eventually a vacant school in Birmingham. Each department assigned detectives, and Robertson arranged logistics: phone lines, desks, funding.

He was the liaison with out-of-state and foreign police departments and he handled calls from the growing horde of reporters.

Krease — "as good a detective as they had on Earth," Robertson said — would head the street investigation.

"I think everybody figured we'd solve it, that the right information would come floating in," Robertson said.

Two months later — March 16, 1977 — investigators still were looking for that right information when Timmy King walked to a drug store near his Birmingham home to buy candy. He was a good student, an aspiring athlete, an all-American boy from an all-American family. He never returned.

"We knew at that point we had another abduction," Robertson said. Police saturated the area, knocking on doors, stopping cars, looking behind garages.

The task force swelled to roughly 250 investigators. Many police came in on their days off, grabbed tips and headed out to investigate. Robertson arranged for a computer to handle the thousands of tips, a rare use of technology in those days. So many tips poured in, the switchboard blew a fuse.

"We could have lost some good information the first two or three days," Robertson said. "We were overwhelmed with information. We were just overwhelmed. People were turning in their neighbors or their boyfriends or their bosses, so we had to sort those out."

Nearly \$1 million in state and federal grants was appropriated for the investigation.

Long before such techniques were common, a team of psychologists developed a profile of the killer: a white man, 25-30 years old, above average intelligence, obsessively clean, possibly associating with an accomplice.

A woman recalled seeing a man leaning on a blue Gremlin automobile and talking to a boy who fit Timmy's description. A police artist sketched the suspect, and thousands of fliers with the drawing and a photo of a Gremlin were distributed.

"You couldn't be alive and not know about the task force," Robertson said. "The detectives' mission the first couple of days was to find Timmy King alive. The hope was to knock on a door and have him holler."

But as days passed, hope dwindled. Timmy's parents went on television to plead for his release. His mother promised to fix his favorite dinner of chicken.

The night of March 22, six days after Timmy King disappeared, two men spotted a body along Gill Road in Livonia. Firefighters tried to revive the still-warm body, but it was too late. Like two of the

other three victims, Timmy King had been suffocated.

His clothing and body were clean — clinically clean, the pathologist said. Whether the cleanliness was an indication of the killer's obsession or an effort to destroy evidence, Robertson still does not know.

Timmy's captor had cared for his bodily needs. When the Wayne **County** medical examiner performed the autopsy, he found that shortly before killing Timmy the kidnapper had fed him his last supper. It was chicken.

When the winter of 1977-78 arrived, the police expected another kidnapping.

"We were geared up that — boom! — when an abduction took place or somebody reported a missing child that fit the profile, we were going to pull the switch, and the task force would be in operation," Robertson said. "We'd be all set. We wouldn't be caught flat-footed this time."

Investigators planned to ask all residents of the area to knock on their neighbors' doors, looking for the missing child.

"Nobody else in the world had ever done that," Robertson said. "This was the biggest investigation the state of Michigan ever had. We'd have caught him. If he had continued to kill, we think we were organized well enough that we'd have caught him."

Then the killing stopped.

"We'd like to find out who did it and why he did it and put him in jail," Robertson said. "But it wasn't worth another abduction to solve it."

Why he stopped is as much a mystery as why he started.

Whaaaaat???

"Originally I believed that the guy was either taken out of society or died, that he was in a mental hospital or hit by a train," Robertson said. "I was led to believe he couldn't stop without some help, but I've since changed my mind. Now I'm not so sure that he can't turn the switch off and stop out of fear of apprehension. For some reason he stopped. That reason? We don't have the foggiest idea."

It's one of the questions he still ponders.

"There are so many of those," Robertson said. "He abducts these youngsters off a public thoroughfare or parking lot without anybody seeing anything. How'd he do that? Was he a smooth talker who lured them into the car? We haven't the foggiest idea. The abductor deposits the child out in the open, yet nobody sees anything? Where do you keep a child for 20 days? How do you do that? That's the baffling thing. You go down a whole list of those things, and you say, how come? It goes on and on and on and on. I don't know. I just don't know."

Other questions: Why did this serial killer only strike in the winter? And why did he, unlike any before him, kidnap boys and girls? Autopsies showed that the boys had been sexually assaulted, but the girls apparently had not.

By the end of 1978, with no new abductions, few new leads and no more money, the task force disbanded. Robertson retired from the state police in 1984 and moved back home to Kent **County**, serving as Montcalm County's undersheriff for a year and head of security for Michigan National Bank in West Michigan. The case became the problem of the state police district headquarters in Northville.

The tips still come in, one or two a month.

"But how do you check a 20-year-old lead?" said state police Lt. Charles Schumacher, who inherited the case a year ago. "You can't go to the guy and say, 'Where were you 20 years ago?'"

He keeps some files under his desk at the Northville State Police Post. He pulled a photo of one murder victim. "I guess this is what keeps you going after 20 years," he said.

Five file cabinets and dozens of boxes holding some of the more than 16,000 tips are in a basement store room. The computer tapes on which Robertson's investigators recorded information are in Lansing, but the ancient computers to access it are gone.

One legacy of the **Oakland County** case is a nationwide computer system operated by the FBI that allows police investigating a crime in one city to look for similar crimes anywhere else in the country. Ray Anger, a sergeant with the Berkley Police Department, told Schumacher about David Norberg, one of many suspects questioned 20 years ago.

Norberg moved from Warren to Recluse, Wy., shortly after the murders and died in a 1981 auto accident, Anger said. After Norberg's death, his wife found a small crucifix among his belongings.

Years later a Norberg family member gave it to police. On the back was engraved the name "Kristine." Kristine Mihelich had a similar cross, an aunt recalled.

Schumacher believes Norberg may have known a former Royal Oak man now doing time in an Arizona prison for sexually abusing a boy. Last year, Schumacher and another detective flew to Arizona to question the man, who is slowly dying from complications of diabetes.

"I told him if he did this and confessed, I'd prosecute him and get him back to Michigan," Schumacher said. "He'd sit there in his wheelchair and look at us. We'd say, 'We'd sure like to clear this up for the families,' and he'd start crying."

But the man would say nothing.

When he took over the case, Schumacher asked himself, "What technology do we have now that we didn't have then?" The answer: DNA analysis.

Later this year he plans to ask the FBI laboratory to use DNA testing to determine whether two hairs found in Kristine Mihelich's mouth belonged to her. If the hairs are not hers, he plans to request that Norberg's body be exhumed and hair samples gathered. He knows the chance of finding conclusive evidence after all these years is remote.

"Going to need a confession, I'm afraid," he said.

Robertson has heard that before.

"We had six or eight guys who confessed," he recalled. "One of them confessed and killed himself the next day. We didn't think he did it."

"I personally don't think it will ever be solved. If a guy came in and said, 'I did it,' you got to have more than 'I did it.' There's a little thing called proof. How in the world do you prove it?"

"In the early days it wasn't uncommon for the guys to come in all excited: 'We got the guy.' Every one of those guys that worked on it had a suspect that they were convinced was the killer. Part of the job of Joe and I was to take the facts and look at them. We had to look at each suspect and say, 'That don't fit.' Nobody ever fit all the slots."

Someone wrote a made-for-TV movie script based on the killings, but ABC rejected it. Too chilling, a network executive said. A Detroit radio newsman wrote a book about the murders, but it didn't sell well.

"The biggest comment from people writing books about it is, 'There's no ending,'" Robertson said. "Apparently books need an ending."

This story has no ending, certainly not a happy one.

Dr. Danto, the former Birmingham psychiatrist who helped Robertson's task force 20 years ago, has since become an expert on serial killers. He's writing a book about such cases, including the **Oakland County** child killings.

"I don't honestly feel a week goes by that I don't think about this case," said Danto, who now lives in California. "I think it's because we've never been able to achieve a sense of rest. The tragedy remains for those families and those victims."

"If the killer is never caught, their suffering is endless, because there is no closure. They still see the killer walking down the street, so to speak."

February 16, 2009 — A whole new list

It's good for us to keep track of our murdered dead. Certainly the FBI does it, the various states do it. Local law enforcement agencies do it. And, sometimes, newspapers do it. In particular, *The Times Herald* of Port Huron keeps a [list of unsolved homicides](#) in that area—St. Clair and Sanilac counties—but also keep [a list of all the homicides](#) it's been able to identify, solved or not. Reporter Bobby Ampezzan puts his number right out there just in case anybody wants to talk with him.

We Remember necrologist Melissa found the above site...among many other interesting Internet places that deal with homicide. And she's been busy elsewhere, too, chronicling our own listing. She has 75 victims up there now. Some of them have very little information and we'd welcome more, much more. And she's very careful in her work but sometimes facts are sketchy, too. If there are additions or corrections, let us know, please?

Here are her latest additions:

Roxanne Leigh Wood

Janice Sanders

Joel Bernard Winterhalter

Laura Wilson

Clifford Adam Terry

Jaivon Pickens

Danielle Munoz

Ronald & Christine Jabalee

David Cass Gornick

Edward Lawrence DeWitt, Jr.

Shirley Pullen

Peter Cacavas, II

Jennifer Abendroth

Chrystal Lauraine Didonato

Timothy Charles Allen

Troy Moross

Walford Ell Petrey