

# '83 the year for murder mysteries

By MATT SPEISER

1983 was a year for murder mysteries in Santa Cruz County. If it wasn't bad enough that the county experienced nearly four times as many murders as the previous year, five remained unresolved at year's end.

Detectives had few clues in the unsolved murders. And what caused the most concern — though much of it expressed behind the closed door of the sheriff's detective bureau — was the discovery that three of these seemingly unconnected murders were related.

The first of the unsolved cases came in February with the discovery of a dead newborn baby at a gas station in Felton. The attendant at the Felton Exxon station found the infant in the public restroom as he opened up for business on Feb. 10. After questioning witnesses, deputies started searching for a man and a woman in their 20s who had driven into the station about 9 p.m. the previous night in a 1970s Volvo and spent several minutes in the bathroom.

The second case also occurred in the San Lorenzo Valley. The owner of the Buffalo Gals restaurant in Ben Lomond, Joette Marie Smith, 33, was discovered dead in the San Lorenzo River on March 29. She had apparently been killed by strangulation approximately two days before. However, since her body had floated down the river, investigators were uncertain even where the crime had taken place. And because of the elapsed time between the murder and the discovery of her body, it was difficult to determine what kind of trauma, such as a sexual assault, she had undergone before her death.

Deputies issued a plea for information on a report that a man was seen around the time of the murder — wearing a woman's wig and makeup and pushing a cart from Felton to Ben Lomond.

Another twist was added to the case with the

apparent arson-caused fire of Miss Smith's restaurant shortly after the murder.

The third case came in April, when a 20-year-old Silicon Valley worker was found shot and burned to death inside his 1982 Honda, which was discovered aflame on East Zayante Road near Summit Road. Mark Cameron Farrell was last seen leaving work in Santa Clara County at 2 a.m. April 27. Five hours later, his car was found near the summit.

Investigators never found a lead that could break the case. But they did have one piece of evidence, the bullet that killed Farrell, and that eventually made for a curious discovery.

On the evening of June 7, two Chinese men from San Francisco who had journeyed to a beach on Santa Cruz County's north coast were shot to death.

Once again, the significant pieces of evidence discovered were the bullets that killed Hon Mau Lee, 30, and Chen Chien Ying, 29.

Investigators soon determined that the bullets that killed Ying and Lee were fired by the same gun that killed Farrell. The discovery, however, raised more questions that it answered. And it raised fears.

Most worrisome was the thought that perhaps Santa Cruz County was being haunted again by a random killer, one who gunned people down for no apparent reason. Concerned that publicity might incite the killer again or might hinder the investigation, detectives kept word of their discovery hushed for months. Finally, in October,

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the Sheriff's Department confirmed that the murders were connected.

In addition to these five deaths, which were indisputably murders, several other mysteries remained at year's end.

Bodies were discovered in May and July in remote areas of the county, and because of severe decomposition, neither the identity of the victim nor the cause of death could be determined in either case.

The first was discovered May 14 near the 2100 block of Summit Road. The man — later determined to be a black man in his 20s — had been dead for one to two months and had been killed by unknown means, according to the coroner.

The second was found on July 20 off Highland Way a few miles from Spanish Road. The coroner determined that this was the body of a white man in his 30s and that he had been dead for six months.

The suspects in two other slayings were identified; one died by his own hand and the other is thought to have fled to Mexico.

In the first case, sheriff's Deputy Michael Gray was killed in early January when he attempted to question a hitchhiker on Route 9 in Felton. A massive seven-agency manhunt was launched for survivalist Leslie Grover Wyman, identified as

the gunman. Wyman's body was discovered 10 days later, three miles from the site of the shooting. He had apparently shot himself.

The second case involved the gunning down of farm worker Jesus Ramon Caro, 45, on Sept. 28 as he arrived at a Browns Valley Road orchard for work. Investigators say Caro was killed by a Carlos Bustos Arreola, 31, whose family and Caro's had long been locked in a vendetta.

Arreola was never caught, but at least investigators were able to piece together accounts and evidence to come up with a suspect — unlike the five murder cases that were, and remain, unsolved.

REFERENCE