

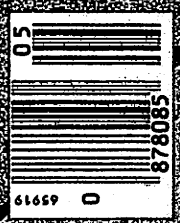
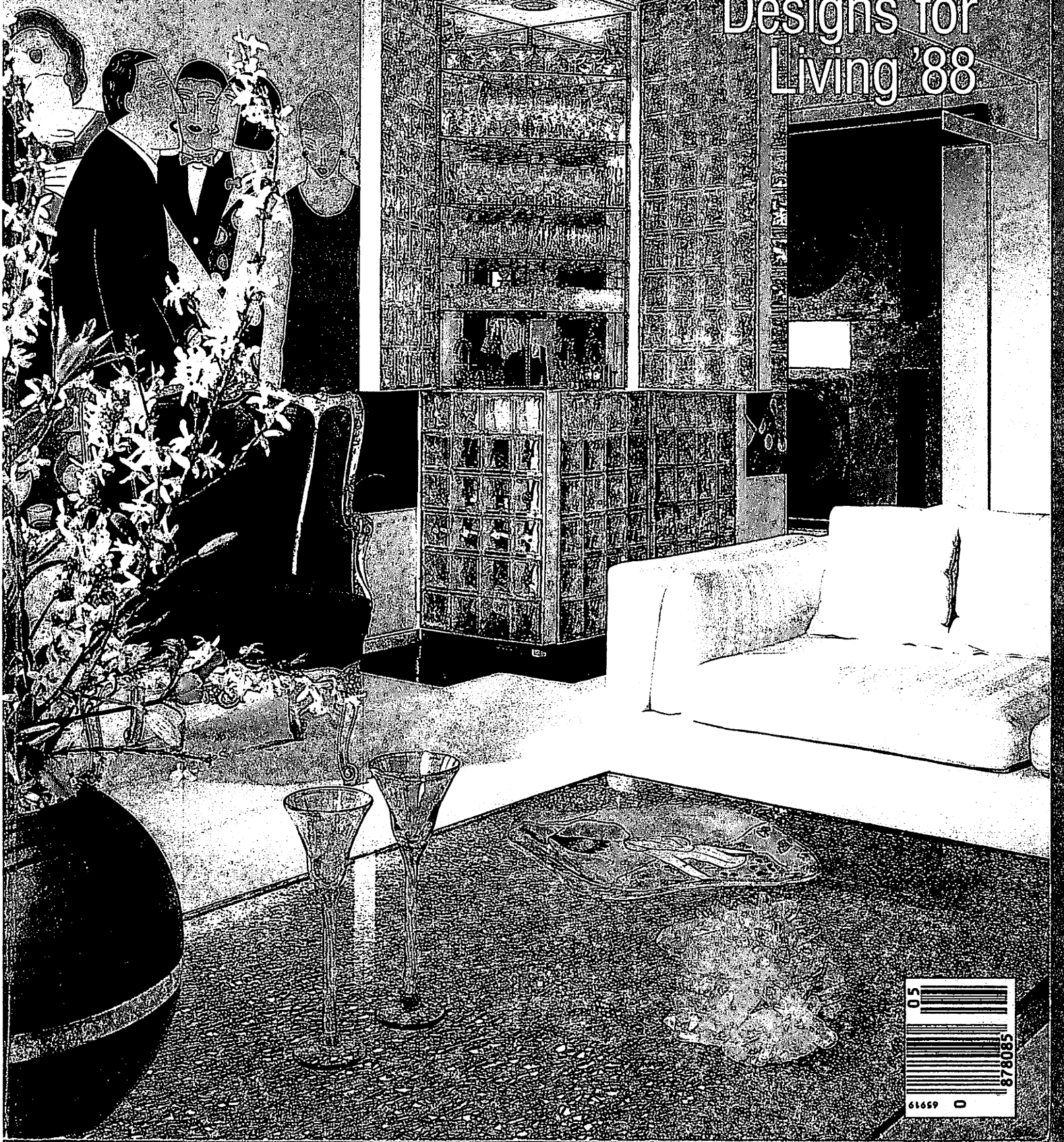
GREAT WEEKEND GETAWAYS • STALKING A SERIAL KILLER

# SAN DIEGO

magazine

MAY 1988/\$2.00

Designs for  
Living '88



# MAY



## ON THE COVER

Dramatic and witty, with a touch of Noel Coward, this bayfront Pacific Beach townhouse reflects the adventurous spirit of its owners, Bill and Elizabeth Zongker, who undertook the remodeling themselves. A few miles to the north in Del Mar, Sandra Koteen performed a different

kind of magic on her bluff-side home, remodeling it into a subtle setting for her jewel of an ocean view. These two homes—radically different, both sensational—celebrate the best of San Diego design. In "Looking for Mr. Goodtaste," we investigate the protocol of working with an interior designer and tell you what's involved—fees and all—when you call in the pros. Then we take you inside two very different kitchens—one colorful and ethnic, the other high-tech and sleek—designed by book authors Jerrie Strom and Fran Jenkins. Our annual salute to the savviest interior design in San Diego begins on page 140.

The way  
work up  
Mini  
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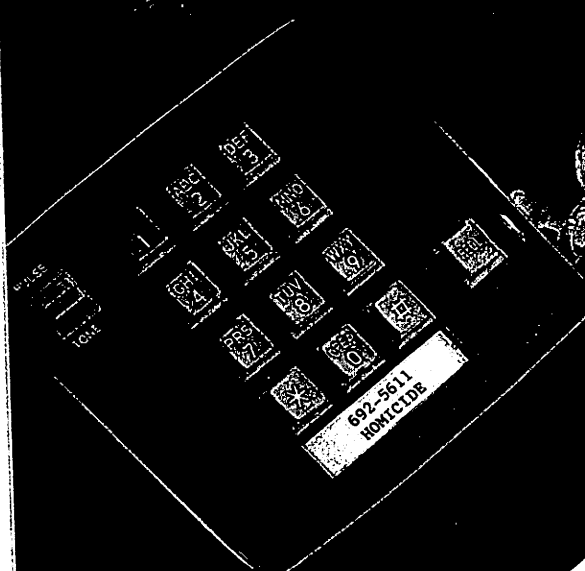
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**SAN DIEGO**  
May 1988, Volume 40, No. 7



**SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY**

**Criminalist Laboratory Field Services Report**

Time Notified 0805 4. By Whom Comm. Center  
Location Ms. Laguna

8050 # 8760602  
OUTSIDE # \_\_\_\_\_

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Building 14  
San Diego, California 92123  
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**AUTOPSY REPORT**

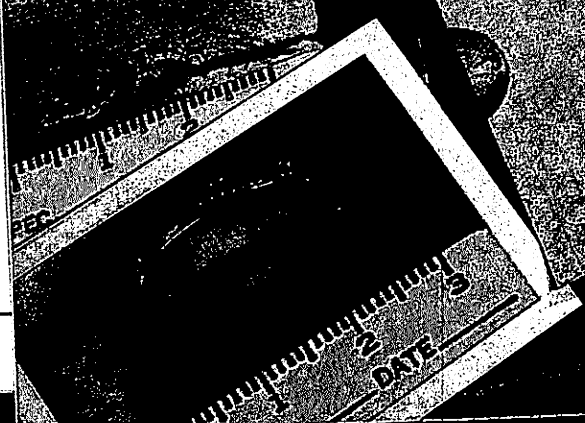
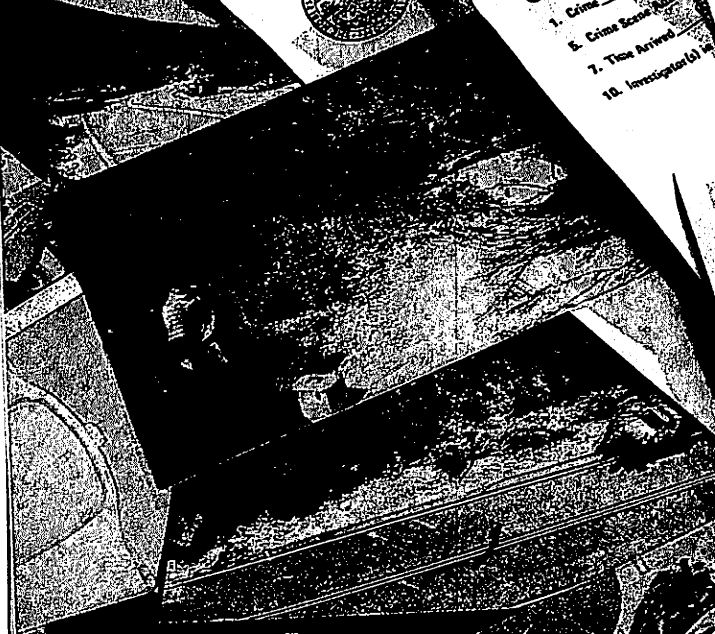
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**Criminalist**

1. Crime \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Criminalist**

1. Crime \_\_\_\_\_  
5. Crime Scene # \_\_\_\_\_  
7. Time Arrived \_\_\_\_\_  
10. Investigator(s) \_\_\_\_\_



# LADY KILLER

A madman may be stalking San Diego's prostitutes and transient women, killing them and dumping their bodies along creek beds, hillsides and in back-street dumpsters. One detective stands a chance of finding the serial killer. His fear is there might be more than one.

By Catherine M. Spearnak

Photographs by Jonathan Woodward

**O**N AN UNSEASONABLY clear night in June 1985, Donna Marie Gentile left her North Park apartment and headed for work on a corner of El Cajon Boulevard near La Mesa. It was a Friday, prime time for a hooker's business. Gentile, then 22, started hustling when she ran away from her Philadelphia home to San Diego at age 15. Over the years, she had used a lot of drugs, especially cocaine. Maybe tonight a "date" would turn her on, get her high. She waited.



Sunday evening, a man telephoned the Sheriff's Department. While walking his dog near rural Pine Valley, he had stumbled on a nude body. Someone *had* gotten Donna Gentile high on Friday night, then beaten her until her neck and back were fractured, strangled her until she choked to death and dumped her body on a brushy hillside 2 miles east of Interstate 8.

For three years, an alarming number of prostitutes and transient women have been turning up dead in San Diego County. Since Gentile (pronounced jentill-ee) was discovered, officials have pulled 32 female bodies from creek beds, hillsides and back-street alley dumpsters. Strewn from urban San Diego to rural Jamul, from a Coronado beach to a North County Indian reservation, the dead women are pieces in a deadly puzzle the

scene. Not all of the deaths can be strictly classified as homicides—the coroner's office could not determine how some of the women died, because their bodies were too decomposed. Some lay in the desert sun for weeks, or were attacked by animals. Others were found in a matter of days, yet still too late to name the cause of death.

Like Gentile, many victims were picked up while working San Diego's hooker haven, El Cajon Boulevard. They were killed and dumped east of the city off rural byways near Interstate 8 between El Cajon and the Arizona border, some as little as 25 feet from the back roads off I-8. Streed conjectures the murderer may travel the east-west route frequently.

Circumstances—usually the need to buy drugs or simply to earn a living—drive women to prostitution. "Most of them don't like what they do. It's garbage

Gentile was shaken by Avrech's dismissal. In March 1985, she made a videotape expressing fears about the effects of her testimony against Avrech. "In case I disappear somewhere, I want my lawyer to give this tape to the press," she said. "I have no intention of going out of town without letting my lawyer know first. Because of the publicity that I have given a police scandal, this is the reason I am making this. I feel someone in a uniform with a badge can still be a serious criminal."

Three months later, she was dead.

There was ample media speculation that Gentile's death was tied to her allegations against San Diego police officers. However, investigators have never linked her death to any officers, including Avrech. Streed conjectures one of her tricks could have decided to strangle her. He may also have killed the other women dumped on I-8 as well.

There remain disturbing similarities in Gentile's death and those of other victims, parallels that originally alerted Streed a serial killer might be attacking hookers. "Sheer numbers of victims is not an indication of a serial killer, because murder is cyclic. But as far as sheer numbers of prostitutes, dumps, strangulations, nude or partially nude bodies, that is an indication."

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**Detective Tom Streed, who has a doctorate in human behavior, says, 'In the beginning it was difficult to convince others that a serial killer might be doing this—until the bodies started piling up.'**

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Sheriff's Department Homicide Unit is trying to assemble.

A faint picture is appearing.

"In my opinion, there is a serial killer working Interstate 8, targeting prostitutes," says Detective Tom Streed, who's heading the investigation of what could become San Diego County's second murder series in ten years. The area's first known serial killer was David Lucas, accused of slashing seven people's throats during 1979. Streed believes the new killer—possibly aided by a companion—is responsible for the deaths of eight to 12 of these women, maybe more. In late January, hikers found the most recent victim near Escondido.

The slayings are termed "dump deaths" because the women are killed in one place and their bodies dumped elsewhere, usually miles from the murder

that they get some kind of gratification from being a prostitute," says Streed. "Most of them would rather be off the street. But that's the only way they have to make money. They're trapped. They're afraid of AIDS, of venereal disease, of getting beaten up. It's a hard way to make your money."

Gentile knew she'd chosen a dangerous job. Just how hazardous she wouldn't know until August 1984, when she alleged publicly she'd had sex with San Diego Police Officer Larry Avrech in exchange for his providing information to help her avoid arrests for prostitution. The claim rocked SDPD's downtown offices, and Avrech was subsequently fired for allegedly impeding a police probe, though the department never released any evidence that Avrech actually was sexually involved with Gentile.

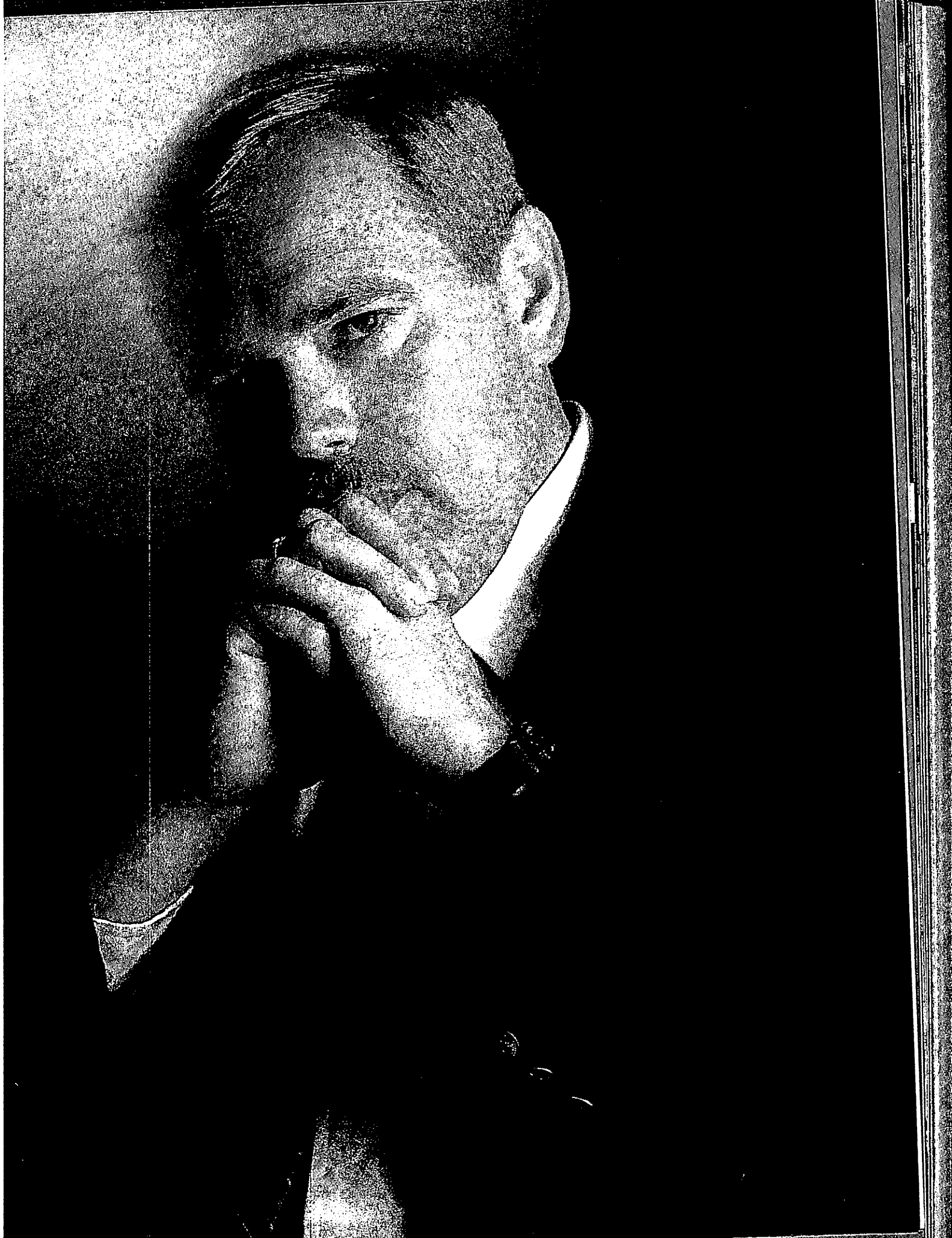
THE SERIAL KILLER CASE has become something of an obsession with Streed. A rare mixture of homicide detective and psychologist, he has a doctorate in human behavior. He lectures throughout the country on psychological aspects of violent crimes and testifies as an expert witness on violence and criminal personalities. The University of Virginia's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine, which specializes in forensic psychology, often invites him to speak about violent behavior associated with psychopathic personalities.

Back at the office, the guys call him "Dr. Streed." So do the students he lectures at San Jose State University, Grossmont College and Southwestern College.

---

Tom Streed of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department brings his dual skills as homicide detective and psychologist to his hunt for the Interstate 8 serial killer.





The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, published his pithy doctoral dissertation, "The Relationship of Hypnotic Susceptibility to Articulated Perceptual Style." His post-graduate publications include works on satanic violence, violent behavior associated with use of methamphetamine, and media accountability regarding the judicial system.

Renowned as an expert interrogator, Streed has interviewed dozens of serial killers and other notorious murderers, including Charles Manson. Law-enforcement agencies throughout the state call on him when they're having trouble getting a suspect to talk.

Streed moves easily from the ivy-covered towers of academe to the linoleum-coated hallways of the cop shop. He loves the dual role most couldn't handle—enveloping both the liberal sensibilities of the mental-health profession and the con-

resses like a cop, in a succession of nondescript suits and shirts, but he thinks like a shrink, always analyzing. Mental relaxation is not his forte, but that might be why he's at home with two careers instead of one. Streed is just a tad driven. A former marathoner, he ran until his knees gave out and he needed surgery—twice. He earned his master's and doctor's degrees while working full time in the Sheriff's Department. Calculatedly, he never mentions details of family. Cops never do—psycho killers might come after loved ones.

In 1987, Sheriff John Duffy named him Employee of the Year. This month, Streed is visiting the Soviet Union for three weeks—at their invitation—to lecture police and militia officers about investigative techniques used by homicide detectives in the United States. He was the only law-enforcement officer in the

Around the homicide unit, the grim take-off line started: "Who's killing all the prostitutes in San Diego County?"

SOON AFTER SHE TURNED sweet 16, Rose Marie Ritter left Scranton, Pennsylvania, for San Diego and became a prostitute. Her father, who had recently remarried, remembers, "Her mother passed away and Rose Marie had her own ways. I tried to take care of her. But with my new wife and her ways . . . well, Rose Marie didn't want to live the kind of life that we wanted." She and a girlfriend split for California. John Ritter, a tavern owner, knew his daughter's friend was a prostitute, but he prayed Rose Marie would choose a different lifestyle. She didn't, and it proved deadly.

On April 23, 1987, migrant farm workers found Rose Marie's nude body in an open field near Jacumba, a few feet from Interstate 8. She had died several days before, and her slender body had decomposed rapidly in the desert heat. By counting the number of maggots that had infested Rose Marie's body, an entomologist was able to determine she had been dead five to seven days. Her head had been severely beaten, and traces of cocaine and crystal methamphetamine appeared in her system.

According to the coroner's office, a drug overdose killed the 29-year-old, but John Ritter and some detectives think otherwise. Someone could have covered her face with a pillow until she smothered, but because her body was so decomposed, signs of asphyxiation such as broken blood vessels in the eyes did not show.

Ritter learned about his daughter's death while he was jawing with the patrons in his bar one evening. "It was announced right here on our local TV station in Scranton. They called her 'a well-known hooker from the San Diego area.' I almost fell through the floor."

The two had kept in touch over the 13 years since Rose Marie left. She called once or twice a month and had returned to visit Scranton. Her young stepmother had a new baby Rose Marie loved. "She carried his picture around and everything. She kept bragging to everyone that she had a little baby brother," Ritter remembers, laughing. But he could never forget about her line of work, and the knowledge never stopped bothering him. "We

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**An enigmatic killer is elusive game. He leaves no tangible clues about himself and few about his prey. And by dumping the body, he leaves no scene of the crime for detectives to investigate.**

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servative ideas that abound in a homicide unit. Streed thrives on the differences; the diverse arenas provide an outlet for his ever-curious mind. He's as comfortable swilling coffee and trading murder stories with buddies he's known for most of his 21 years in the Sheriff's Department as he is discussing his latest paper with Ivy League professors. A prolific writer, he uses his personal computer to gather information from university data banks.

When Streed talks, it's an interesting mixture of police slang and terminology from an upper-division psych course. As complex as the killer he tracks, he reveals few details about himself. Like a good psychologist, he lets you draw your own conclusions. Sitting in front of a desk, he seems as mellow as a snoozing cat. His habits tell a different story. He doodles. He paces. His eyes don't miss a thing. He

nation asked to attend the conference.

Streed is no ordinary cop, as other deputies will tell you. So will he, though not in so many words. After the second dump death on I-8, he began wondering about a serial killer. He started a notebook detailing each death, though for months there were only two entries. "In the beginning, it was difficult to convince others that a serial killer might be doing this," Streed says. "No one wanted to think about the possibility, until the bodies started piling up."

By September 1986, the Sheriff's Department was listening. The homicide unit had 10 unsolved female dump deaths on the books. Lieutenant Bill Baxter, who heads homicide, began wondering, "Why does it appear there are substantial numbers of women dying in ways we're just not sure of?"

weren't as close as a father and daughter should be, because I had all these things in the back of my mind."

Ritter still wakes up sweating at night, wondering. "Flashbacks keep coming to me. I still don't know how she died, if she was in pain or what. All these crazy thoughts keep going through my mind . . ."

"A lot of these killers think the police aren't going to work as hard on a prostitute case," says Streed, who has investigated homicides for 16 of his 21 years with the Sheriff's Department. "But we know that even a prostitute has a family somewhere that loves her and cares about what happened to her."

Juliana Santillano had been dead for months before her family realized she was missing. The 25-year-old left her cousin's home in Long Beach one day early in January 1987. When she had been gone a few days, a friend told her cousin that Santillano had returned to her mother's home in Baldwin Park. Since she often moved between the two or stayed at her sister's house, her cousin never checked the information. Her mother and sister assumed she was still living in Long Beach.

Santillano wasn't living anywhere. She was dead. Two days after she left Long Beach, an early morning stroller found her nude body near the Silver Strand State Beach in Coronado. Only dark, waist-long hair streamed down to cover her. According to her sister Virginia, Santillano was a longtime heroin addict, had served time in prison, was forced to relinquish custody of her five children and died of a heroin overdose.

But sheriff's detectives are investigating the death as a possible homicide. Santillano had no reason to be in San Diego. She had no friends or relatives here, and she rarely left the Long Beach environs except for a trek to the mountains or the beaches she loved.

The family didn't know Santillano was missing until a day in March, three months later, when San Diego detectives knocked on her mother's door. "The way she was found, naked like that, everybody thinks someone did it," says her sister. Since that day, more than a year ago, they haven't heard a word about her fate.

Nancy Alison White is an aberration—she's the only victim who had no connection to drugs or prostitution, and she was not a transient. She lived near El Toro Marine Base, where her husband was stationed, and worked as a supervisor for an office-supply company. Unlike the other victims, who were dirt poor, she was settled, married and middle class.

Detectives believe White was abducted on I-8 when her 1974 Volvo broke down while she was returning from a visit with her husband in Yuma. Two boys found the 22-year-old's nude body three days later near a street that winds around Batiquitos Lagoon in a Carlsbad residential area. Her lips and nose puffy from a beating, White's body already had begun decomposing in the late August sun.

Streed believes whoever killed White may be the same person depositing bodies along the I-8 corridor. Her purse was left

cult to trace, sometimes even to name. Seven of the 33 San Diego County dump-death victims remain unidentified. Even those whose names are known leave little information about where they were last seen, who they were with or what they were wearing when the killer found them. The women disappear for days at a time and no one worries, usually because no one knows. These are not college girls like Cara Knott, the coed found strangled near Interstate 15 a year and a half ago whose death garnered national attention and intense local interest, especially after California Highway Patrol Officer Craig Peyer was charged with her murder shortly after the killing. For the most part, the 33 victims have not had families or boyfriends anxiously waiting and wondering—unless it's a pimp waiting to get paid.

To identify similarities among the vic-

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**The killer selects victims who are difficult to trace, sometimes even to name. Seven of the 33 San Diego County dump-death victims remain unidentified. The women disappear for days at a time and no one worries, usually because no one knows.**

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in her car, as if she had rushed off. And her looks are similar to the other victims, a slim white woman with long hair, dressed in shorts and a tank top to stay cool on a warm day.

AN ENIGMATIC KILLER is elusive game. He leaves no tangible clues about himself and few about his prey. And by dumping the body, he leaves no scene of the crime for detectives to investigate. To circumvent a lack of information about the killer, Streed finds out all he can about the women. "You can't understand a murder unless you know all about the victim. If you know your victim, you'll know your killer," he says. Not so easy when so many victims are known only as Jane Doe—unless the detective is also a psychologist.

The killer selects victims who are diffi-

tims, Streed decided he needed to know how the killer thinks—what he looks for when he's driving down El Cajon Boulevard. So he invented a psychological protocol, or scientific model, designed to profile the killer's mental processes as he stalks a victim. It has enabled him to theorize what kind of woman the killer wants and needs.

Like Detective Columbo in a polyester suit rather than a rumpled trenchcoat, Streed began scouring each dump site for clues. He examined the victim's injuries, her physical characteristics, her clothing, if any, and the position of her body. By correlating similarities, Streed devised a profile of the killer by analyzing his desires as he sought his "perfect victim."

Streed says the killer is looking for women who are distinctly less than sexu-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 275



ries of wine. Few know it evolved from the industry's need to get rid of excess red-wine grapes when the white-wine boom hit with a passion. This led to "white" Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon and assorted blends. Simply put, the process is to take the juice away from the grapeskins as rapidly as possible during crushing. The color of red wine comes from the skins. Since this separa-

tion is a difficult task, there is usually some color left in the resulting white wine and this has even been given a name: "blush." Just how far this category has come was indicated at the Ritz-Carlton, where a well-dressed couple stood in front of one of the winery tables sampling wine as one noted with enthusiasm: "Why, this is my first red Zinfandel! I didn't know they made it." ■

LADY KILLER

continued from page 133

ally alluring. Rather than a foul-mouthed hooker in a 10-inch skirt and stiletto heels, he wants a prostitute with a tom-boyish look. The I-8 victims tend to be slim and casually dressed, with little make-up. Sexually, they are not threatening. "Because of that, I think this individual has an awful lot of self-doubt about his masculinity. He may feel exploited by women, or threatened. He can't deal with the feeling that women are more confident about their sexuality than he is," Streed theorizes. "That places him in a position of needing to control women, to dominate and humiliate them."

He may be insecure, but the murderer is also charming, gregarious, intelligent and manipulative. These characteristics allow him to attract a victim. Even to street-wise hookers, he seems like a regular trick, perhaps more appealing than most of their dates. Without arousing suspicion, he invites a woman into his car. Once she's inside, half his job is done. All that remains is the erotic prospect of killing.

"Serial killers really enjoy excitement. They are sexually gratified by living on the edge of disaster," says Streed. The thought of killing is such a turn-on that a killer may spend days or weeks planning the murder and searching for a victim. The hunt can be as arousing as the kill.

An unabashed Freudian, Streed also believes the killer's preference for boyish women may indicate latent homosexual desires. He chooses prostitutes because they are available, easy targets. Just as importantly, he sees them as the least valued women in society. Professional

women, blue-collar workers or housewives would threaten his frail ego. As bizarre as it seems, the killer longs to be intimately involved with his victim. Strangulation and stabbing are the methods preferred by killers of women, because they provide the physical intimacy they crave and stimulate them sexually.

Defiling and killing a woman increases the killer's self-esteem. "If he can depress them, in the process he elevates himself," Streed explains. In the killer's mind, he becomes an invincible protector of society, ridding the streets of "bad girls, dirty girls."

The killer hopes victims will always respond the same way. If a previous murder was successful, he'll select a woman with the same looks, such as long brown hair and a petite body. To terrorize her, he must be comfortable with her. After the murder, he feels strong and potent, whether or not he's initiated sexual contact. He gets such a high from the experience that he cultivates his skills—even practicing in the mirror. And the attack skills improve, because murder is a learned behavior.

The thrill the killer experiences may explain why the deaths are sporadic. Months go by between body discoveries. "Possibly the last case was so gratifying that there's enough there to vivify the killer for a long time," Streed says. The need to kill dissipates for a while. But it will return. A second theory about the lapses is that the killer leaves the area between murders. Streed says he could be out on a ship or live in another area and return to San Diego to commit his crimes.

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THE PROTOCOL STREED CREATED to define his nemesis' frame of mind is among the first of its kind used in homicide work. The technique, which allows Streed to use his background in behavioral sciences to investigate a crime in which crucial details are missing, was praised by Dr. Park Dietz, a forensic psychiatrist at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. "I think he is using some innovations in an extremely important investigative manner," Dietz says. The technique works best when applied by a homicide detective, rather than a psychologist. Making the protocol work takes a great deal of knowledge of crime, as well as familiarity with abnormal behavior.

Streed doesn't hide his excitement about the theory. "This methodology isn't being used anywhere else in the country. But then, necessity is the mother of invention, isn't it? We don't know the crime scenes, so we had to generate a way to decide whether to link these cases together. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting. If it works, it was a hell of a great idea. If it doesn't, it wasn't."

Knowing the characteristics of the killer's "perfect" victim allows detectives to talk with potential victims working the street. A killer is never 100 percent successful when selecting a victim. Sometimes he targets a woman, makes a move on her, then discovers she's too assertive, or inaccessible. After approaching the potential date, he may reject her, deciding she can't be easily intimidated. He leaves to begin looking for another "perfect victim." The prostitute he left behind has unknowingly met a man who might have murdered her. Now she's a valuable source to detectives, who can tap her for information. They look for prostitutes who fit the description Streed developed, then question them about their recent contacts with tricks. Streed hopes the hookers might lead him to the killer.

The body found near Buckman Springs on July 22, 1986 will never tell detectives much. Still known as Jane Doe after almost two years, she was found when a sheriff's helicopter pilot spotted an abandoned car and alerted deputies. They re-

covered her decomposed body from an empty creek bed near the intersection of Buckman Springs Road and Old Highway 80. Like the others found off I-8, she was nude. Her clothing lay nearby, but her body sported only a wedding ring and pink polish on her short fingernails.

Because her body was so decomposed—animals had gnawed off the lower right portion of her leg—the coroner never determined how she died. Detectives only know she's Caucasian, about 20 years old and 5-foot-2, with straight brown hair to her shoulders. Most of the I-8 and North County victims have been whites and Hispanics.

The large number of Jane Does on the death list presents a problem for detectives trying to link the women to the serial killings. When a victim's name is not known, detectives cannot trace her background, talk to her friends or determine her lifestyle. Often she cannot be identified because her body has been ravaged by time, weather, animals or insects. This heightens the problem. Not only do investigators know nothing about her life, they can learn little about her death.

The names of the seven unidentified women, including two who were dumped along I-8, may never be known. The coroner's office checks victims' fingerprints and dental X-rays against state and national arrest records and missing-person reports. But if the women have never been arrested or reported missing, the check yields nothing.

The victims' transient lifestyles also play a role in their inability to be identified. Relatives and friends often never report them missing because they are used to seeing the women come and go, sometimes for weeks at a time.

While women's bodies were being dumped throughout rural areas of San Diego County, the city had its own string of prostitute deaths between August 1985 and August 1986. Although six women were killed and dumped near the 5000 block of El Cajon Boulevard, the San Diego Police Department determined there is no connection between any of the so-called "trash-dumpster" deaths.

Three women were found in alley trash bins behind El Cajon Boulevard, while the bodies of three others were left on sidewalks nearby.

"There was a tremendous amount of press on the deaths at the time, so there was pressure from the media trying to turn it into a series. But we determined it was not," says Lieutenant Phil Jarvis, head of the city's homicide investigations unit. The SDPD works within City of San Diego limits, while the Sheriff's Department handles crime in unincorporated areas of the county or in cities that have contracted for its law-enforcement services.

The similarities to the victims along I-8 are astonishing. All six had connections to drugs and prostitution. Five were strangled, and all were found nude or partially nude. Race was the only major difference. The city victims were black, while the county victims were white. Still, Jarvis won't budge from his decision not to investigate further. "That's a lot of similarities, but we aren't convinced they are connected," he says.

Streed initially thought the trash-dumpster series might be linked to those in the county. Now he thinks it's a separate killer. Yet Jarvis is adamant there is no serial connection. He doesn't even consider Tara Simpson's death a murder.

Three months after her newborn son died in 1985, Tara Simpson became severely depressed. She talked about committing suicide, but never had the chance. Someone beat her, knocked out her front teeth and tossed her in a trash dumpster, then poured gasoline on her body and torched it. A man searching for aluminum cans found the black woman at 4:30 a.m. in an alley behind the 5000 block of El Cajon Boulevard. Because the coroner ruled Simpson died of an accidental overdose of alcohol and cocaine, the SDPD closed the case. Her death was never investigated as a homicide.

Six months later, another prostitute's naked, burned body, shrouded in a canvas bag, turned up in a dumpster near the alley where Simpson's body was found. Then a third trash-bin victim was found, wrapped in a sheet. Her killer didn't

bother burning the evidence, leaving her in the black blouse and bra that she was last seen wearing, her short hair still in neat cornrow braids.

"I haven't seen anything to convince me a single individual is doing these," maintains Jarvis. He and Lieutenant Baxter of the Sheriff's Department have known each other for years, and have discussed the trash-dumpster deaths over coffee. They continue to believe there is no connection.

**STREED BREAKS DOWN** the 33 deaths geographically into three areas: Interstate 8, Metropolitan San Diego/South Bay and North County. There may be some crossover. At least four of the North County victims could have been dumped by the I-8 killer, he says—Nancy Alison White, Melissa Gene White, Michele Riccio and Jodell Jenkins. Nancy White and Melissa White (no relation) were strangled, while Riccio's and Jenkins' deaths were ruled drug overdoses. Both were found in Valley Center slightly more than two months apart.

The detective does not believe one person killed all 33 victims. A separate killer is probably responsible for some of the metropolitan slayings, while other deaths throughout the county may not be connected. The core series victims are the women dumped near I-8, the four women found in North County and Juliana Santillano, who was found in Coronado. Some of the remaining 33 victims may be connected, while about 10 can be ruled out.

No matter how obvious it may be that I-8 has become someone's private dumping ground, the Sheriff's Department refuses to publicly acknowledge the idea. What's said behind closed doors is another matter. Privately, sources say Sheriff John Duffy buys Streed's theory and has praised his investigative work. "The sheriff has a tremendous amount of confidence in us, and he has no conflict with my assessment that there is a serial killer on I-8," Streed says.

Duffy declined to be interviewed, citing schedule conflicts, and named Lieutenant Baxter as his spokesman. Baxter says, as he has for the past year, that he

cannot confirm the existence of a serial killer until there's more evidence. But, Baxter notes, if the detective were way off base, the department would not give him the authority to talk with reporters. "If we say something, we better damn well be sure of it. We may well err to the point of being conservative, but that's the nature of the beast."

Baxter poses some concerns about problems associated with announcing that a serial killer is lurking about. The department does not want to incite unnecessary panic or create inflammatory headlines. And there is concern about jeopardizing the future prosecution of any of the murders. Neither does the department want to "mask" other murders by giving another killer the chance to dump a body in with those labeled part of a series, Baxter explains. He admits the public has a right to be warned about a serial killer, but only when the department is certain. When that will be and what kind of evidence it will take, he says he doesn't know.

Since August 1986, when the Sheriff's Department began examining the string of deaths for connections, the homicide unit has sent a dozen files to the FBI, has been reorganized to allow more experienced detectives to work the 33 cases and has sent Streed to the Pacific Northwest searching for clues. In Seattle, he compared notes with the Green River Task Force, formed specifically to try to solve the 46 deaths of prostitutes and runaways between 1982 and 1984, the nation's largest unsolved murder series. Streed once believed San Diego's deaths might be linked to the Seattle slayings.

No task force has been formed to review San Diego's 33 deaths. Adding more detectives to the 12-member staff could not be Sheriff Duffy's highest priority in his 1988 budget. Increasing the number of deputies and cooks in the jails, adding more 911 emergency operators and buying a computer system ranked well above hiring more homicide detectives.

Of more concern to Duffy are narcotics trafficking and drug abuse, jail overcrowding and the impact of illegal aliens on crime. "Homicides have dramatically

increased in recent years and most of that increase is directly related to drug trafficking and abuse, as well as the illegal-alien problem," Duffy said in July 1987. "There is not a disproportionate number of female dead bodies being found in the county, and any speculation about a 'serial killer preying on prostitutes' is just that—speculation."

Many detectives inside and outside the Sheriff's Department are familiar with Streed's investigation. A few, like Baxter, think more pieces of the puzzle must appear before a clear picture materializes. But most believe one person has committed many of the murders, though the department won't state that publicly.

Numbers tell part of the story. In 1984, only two female dump deaths occurred in San Diego County. That number jumped to seven in 1985, 15 in 1986 and 11 in 1987. Yet even six months ago, no one in the Sheriff's Department was willing to publicly announce Streed's theory—not even Streed.

Then, during a five-month period ending in October 1987, four female bodies were dumped near where Gentile's was found—Anna Lucilla Varela, Sally Ann Moorman-Field, Sara Fienland Thornton and Diana Gayle Moffitt. Their names can be added to seven more dumped close to I-8 that Streed believes could be tied to the same killer—Marsha Shirlene Funderburk, Theresa Marie Brewer, Volah J. Wright, Rose Marie Ritter, Donna Marie Gentile and two bodies that remain unidentified.

Were the deaths last fall what finally gave Streed the impetus to discuss his assertions? He says no, he's never doubted the serial-killer theory. He smiles, confident as usual.

**IF 33 WOMEN HAVE DIED** or been murdered over the past three years, with no killer found, why do so few people know about it? One reason is that media coverage of the deaths has been skimpy. Usually, mention has been relegated to a few paragraphs in the news briefs section of local newspapers. A few days later, if the victim is identified, the paper might

## LADY KILLER

give her name, age and background. If she's not identified for weeks or months, nothing appears. "My experience has been give it three days and it's old news," says Baxter.

These are not "glamour" murders. For the most part, the women are without close family, friends or social connections. They are prostitutes, transients and drug addicts on the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. Neither do they garner much sympathy. The one victim to get slightly more notice than others was Nancy White—a white, middle-class working woman who was married and led a "normal life."

After the blitz of television, newspaper and radio reports that followed Gentile's death, reporters could get little new information from the Sheriff's Department. Coverage waned until last fall when four bodies were dumped in East County.

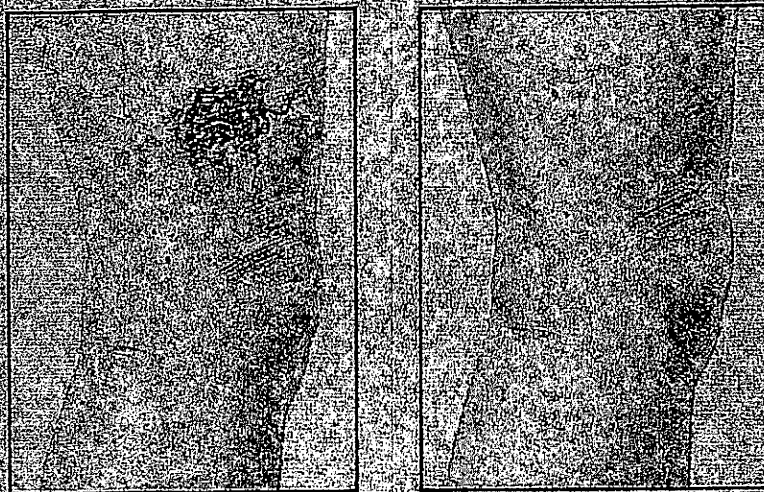
The first of those victims set off a furor when her body was found less than a half-mile from where Gentile's was dumped. Five days later, a hiker found another nude body in some brush off Alpine Boulevard, about 10 miles west of the Gentile site.

A brief barrage of stories linked the deaths. Baxter admitted the homicide unit had spent the past year investigating the possibility of a series of murders. Since that time, media interest has faded. But why was the mounting string of unsolved deaths never reported when the toll hit 15 in mid-1986? Or more than 20 by January 1987? Why were there almost 30 victims before anyone noticed?

Some Sheriff's Department insiders blame a San Diego-based media contingent that focuses mostly on crimes within the City of San Diego—27 of the dump-death victims were found outside the city limits. The most recent discovery exemplifies that claim. On January 28, hikers found the body of a still-unidentified woman on the La Jolla Indian Reservation near Escondido. She fits the victim profile—nude, aged 20 to 30, dumped within 100 yards of a major roadway (Highway 76). No cause of death has been determined. Only a North County daily newspaper, the Escondido Times-Advocate,

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Perhaps there is little public interest in the murder of prostitutes. Does the level of notoriety a death achieves determine its level of importance? Both Streed and Baxter say no. But SDPD's Jarvis admits his homicide detectives were under heavy pressure to find a suspect in the Cara Knott case. Says Jarvis: "We wanted to solve that case so badly we put some real pressure on ourselves." He quickly adds that detectives feel the same pressure to unearth facts about any killing.

Among the public, Baxter says, "I think there are those who care significantly, and there are those who honestly don't care. But it's hard to evoke as much empathy as there is for a pretty little coed."

The same reaction occurred in Seattle during the two-year spate of Green River slayings. Seattle residents devoured details about the case as if it were a soap opera. But when it came to arresting a killer, the public really didn't care, says Green River Task Force Detective Dave Reichert. Dwindling concern with the murders and rising anxiety about drugs prompted the state to slice the task-force budget by half. Not so with the college coeds slain in Seattle by serial murderer Ted Bundy. Public outcry to catch their killer was much stronger, notes Reichert.

But public outcry—or the lack of it—isn't what motivates Streed. For the detective, the series gives him an opportunity to stretch his investigative skills and use his psychological expertise. The low-key and intense Streed keeps thinking. At night he often peers through a telescope to ease his mind, but sometimes it wanders to something less peaceful than the stars.

"The person involved in these cases made a mistake, and that's going to be his undoing," says the psychologist-detective-astronomer. He knows, but he's not telling. "Serial killers are not as smart as we tend to think. The reason they get away with what they do in a lot of cases is luck. And eventually that luck runs out." For women walking the streets of San Diego, that prophecy can't come true soon enough. □