

The Flat Tire Murders

Researched, Written and Produced by Ashley Music

Part One – A Possible Scenario

The year? 1975. "Love will keep us together" by Captain & Tennille is topping the charts¹ and American's are still in love with the Bunker's². The place? A shopping mall parking lot near South Miami. It's late, and they've all but kicked you out so they could close up. The lot is basically empty and it's getting dark. You pick up your pace, slightly, as you spot your car. Juggling your packages to reach your keys in your purse you push any fear you had away, and keep pace to your car. You remember that you forgot to pick up potatoes at the grocery store and figure instant will have to do tonight. You set your packages down and prepare to open the back door, but, wait... is that... Shit!! The tire is flat. You get down to inspect and damn it is flat, flat, flat. When did this happen?? You don't know how to change a flat, you look quickly back at the mall doors. Dark. They've closed. There goes your chance to call someone for help. Sighing you resign yourself to walking to a pay phone. Where was it? Gas station maybe? Guess that's not too far. But then, you notice a man walking towards you, how long has he been there? He flashes a grin and says "Flat tire? Looks like you could use some help?"

Part Two – The Murders

44 years ago, the Flat Tire Murders began haunting the police and community in the Miami area. The killer (or killers) disabled women's vehicles while they were inside a store, most likely slashing or letting air out of tires, then kidnaped the women after either offering them help or by forcing them into another vehicle³. The women were all found murdered and had been "sexually molested" - as many papers described it back in 1975³.

The murders began in February, or at least that is when the first murder attributed to the Flat Tire Murders was reported on. Police aren't exactly sure how many victims there are. They have made reasonable assumptions based on modus operandi (MO) and signature, but nothing definitive has ever been officially announced. Laid out here will be a chronological list of the victims most commonly associated with the Flat-Tire Murders. This association seems to be based on timing, location and cause of death.⁴ Included will be a brief description on the circumstances of her death, and where possible, a small, *tiny* glimpse into their lives outside of the murder.

- Judith Oesterling (20). Found February 1st. Last seen around January 30th at her job at a massage parlor. Judith was known to hitchhike.⁴ She was found drowned and beaten in a canal and was fully clothed.^{4 & 5}

¹ "List of Billboard Hot 100 number-one singles of 1975", last modified August 6, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Billboard_Hot_100_number-one_singles_of_1975

² Rhonda Humphreys, "All in the Family - How did this show change American Television?", last modified September 16, 2012, <https://hubpages.com/politics/AllintheFamilyHowdidthisshowchangeAmericanTelevision>

³ "Pattern Same in 9 Deaths" *The Orlando Sentinel*, September 14, 1975, [Part 1]<http://i.imgur.com/5O49wrF.jpg> [Part 2] <http://i.imgur.com/ttPrn4Y.jpg>

⁴ Edna Buchanan and Brad Swanson "The 8 Murders Along the Canals Of Dade and Broward Counties, The Deadly Puzzle Began", *The Evening Independent*, August 6, 1975, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=euQLAAAIBAJ&sjid=OFgDAAAIBAJ&dq=ronnie+gorlin+murder&pg=6949,957179&hl=en>

⁵ "10th Young Woman Found Murdered in South Florida", *The Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 1975, <http://i.imgur.com/vLkHR4W.jpg>

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- Barbara Stephens (21). Found February 20th. Kidnapped from a South Dade shopping mall⁶, she was found in a wooded lot and had been shot to death.⁷
- Arietta Tinker (17). Found April 12th. A mother to a one year old little boy.⁸ She was found drowned in a canal, fully clothed, close to where Judith's body was located.^{7 & 8}
- Nancy Lee Fox (19). Last seen June 15th and found later that month. She was either abducted from a laundromat⁶ or while walking home from her job at a taco restaurant⁹ – there were conflicting reports in the newspapers. She was found in a canal, the same canal as Judith⁹, and died as a result of blunt force trauma to the head⁷. She was found with a shirt and jeans on⁷.
- Barbara Schreiber and Belinda Zeterower (14). Found June 19th. Both last seen hitchhiking together late on June 18th. Barbara and Belinda were found in a canal; shot to death⁶. Neither had been “sexually molested” according to The Pittsburg Press¹⁰, but according to The Evening Independent the “medical examiner found that both girls had sexual contact before their deaths”⁸.
- Robin Leslie Losch (14⁶ or 15⁷). Found July 10th. She was found fully clothed, in the same canal as Barbara and Belinda⁹, and had died of drowning⁷. This canal is only about 20 yards from where Judith, Arietta, and Nancy were found⁶.
- Ronnie Gorlin (27). Found on July 23rd and last seen on July 22nd.⁶ Her car, an Oldsmobile, was found with a tire deflated in a North Miami shopping mall parking lot the same day she went missing⁸. Ronnie was about to be married⁸. Instead, she was found naked, drowned in a canal, she had either one or both sandals on when she was found^{7 & 9}.
- Elyse Rapp (21). Found July 31st. It was reported that Elyse's best friend was her yellow, tabby cat because she was so shy⁹. She was found naked, in a canal (close to where Ronnie was found) with blunt force trauma to the head, but her cause of death would ultimately be drowning⁷. She still had on a necklace, which had a charm with the Jewish symbol for Life⁹ or Luck¹¹, depending on the source. Her vehicle was found with a flat tire⁸.
- Esmeralda Gordon (24). Found August 17th. Her husband, Seth Gordon, was an administrative aide to then Senator Kenneth Meyers. She was found *near* a canal in a rock pit, fully clothed and had been shot to death. Her car was found, with no flat tires, in the same shopping mall parking lot as Ronnie's⁷.

⁶ “Another Nude Body Discovered” *The Naples Daily News*, July 31, 1975, <http://i.imgur.com/L1LG0uk.jpg>

⁷ “10th Young Woman Found Murdered in South Florida”, *The Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 1975, <http://i.imgur.com/vLkHR4W.jpg>

⁸ Edna Buchanan and Brad Swanson “The 8 Murders Along the Canals Of Dade and Broward Counties, The Deadly Puzzle Began”, *The Evening Independent*, August 6, 1975,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=euQLAAAIBAJ&sjid=OFgDAAAIBAJ&dq=ronnie+gorlin+murder&pg=6949,957179&hl=en>

⁹ “Pattern Same in 9 Deaths” *The Orlando Sentinel*, September 14, 1975, [Part 1]<http://i.imgur.com/5O49wrf.jpg> [Part 2]<http://i.imgur.com/ttPrn4Y.jpg>

¹⁰ “2 Florida Girls Slain On Way to Friend's”, *The Pittsburg Press*, June 21, 1975,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=RACAAAIBAJ&sjid=CVYEAAAIBAJ&pg=1974,1392959&hl=en>

¹¹ The True Crime Database, “Case # 0145The Flat-Tire Murders The South Dade Killer”, accessed on August 18, 2019, https://www.thetruecrimedatabase.com/case_file/the-flat-tire-murders

The Flat Tire Murders

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Part Three – In summation

Who killed these women? Was it one terrible person or many? And which one of those examples is more disturbing? The community was terrified – rightfully so. One newspaper at the time stated that an investigator told his wife that if she came out to find a flat tire on her car to “run screaming”¹². Detectives worked hard to find answers and possible suspects. The slightest links were sought and even bigger theories were considered. Interestingly, or coincidentally who knows, two of the victims (Ronnie and Elyse) were Jewish and drove leased/rented cars with license plates starting with the letter “E”¹². Detectives were even working coast to coast trying to compare unsolved murders with similar MO’s. Sadly, there were many.¹² There was even a time when these cases were attributed to such prolific pieces of shit as Ted Bundy and the Zodiac. Neither of those were ever really taken seriously, but who knows, nothing’s impossible right?¹³

Many of the newspapers at the time reported that many, but not all, of the women were “sexually molested”, while it is not exactly clear what this means, one can make assumptions. Does this mean there could possibly have been physical evidence left at scene? Could any of these cases be officially linked through DNA? The recent advances in technology and investigative methods have given hope to cold cases. Hope to the family and friends that have been waiting decades for answers, although many have now gone on to their own graves never knowing who killed their loved ones. But there is hope, even for cases that have been cold for 44 years.

¹² “Pattern Same in 9 Deaths” *The Orlando Sentinel*, September 14, 1975, [Part 1]<http://i.imgur.com/5O49wrF.jpg> [Part 2]<http://i.imgur.com/ttPrn4Y.jpg>

¹³ The True Crime Database, "Case # 0145The Flat-Tire Murders The South Dade Killer", accessed on August 18, 2019, https://www.thetruecrimedatabase.com/case_file/the-flat-tire-murders

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Acknowledgments and Sources

Rhonda Humphreys, "All in the Family - How did this show change American Television?", last modified September 16, 2012,

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u/WestKendallJenner, Reddit, "Who Killed the Politician's wife? An Obscure Cold Case from Miami", accessed August 19, 2019,

https://www.reddit.com/r/UnresolvedMysteries/comments/5fqla0/who_killed_the_politicians_wife_an_obscure_cold/

**Sources linked in the comments section of the reddit tread about one of the possible victims. These are links to images of the newspaper articles not links to the articles themselves. The name of the newspaper that the image is from was included in the comment and is what has been provided below.

- "Another Nude Body Discovered" *The Naples Daily News*, July 31, 1975, <http://i.imgur.com/L1LG0uk.jpg>
- "10th Young Woman Found Murdered in South Florida", *The Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 1975, <http://i.imgur.com/vLkHR4W.jpg>
- "Pattern Same in 9 Deaths" *The Orlando Sentinel*, September 14, 1975, [Part 1]<http://i.imgur.com/5O49wrF.jpg> [Part 2]<http://i.imgur.com/ttPrn4Y.jpg>

Bonnie's Blog of Crime, mylifeofcrime, "Unsolved Serial Killings: Flat-Tire murders *South Dade Killer * or *Tooth Fairy Killer", last updated May 9,

2013, <https://mylifeofcrime.wordpress.com/2013/05/09/unsolved-serial-killings-flat-tire-murders-south-dade-killer-or-tooth-fairy/>

**Sources linked in Bonnie's Blog of Crime. There are other victim names listed in Bonnie's blog, but those names were not included in this write up as none of the sources named those victims.

- "2 Florida Girls Slain On Way to Friend's", *The Pittsburg Press*, June 21, 1975, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=RACAAAIBAJ&sjid=CVYEAAAIBAJ&pg=1974,1392959&hl=en>
- "Canal killings may be connected with 33 other similar slayings", *Williamson Daily News*, August 28, 2019,

The Flat Tire Murders

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<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=5ZVDAAAIAAJ&sjid=ka4MAAAAIAAJ&dq=ronnie+gorlin+murder&pg=5194,3628724&hl=en>

- Edna Buchanan and Brad Swanson "The 8 Murders Along the Canals Of Dade and Broward Counties, The Deadly Puzzle Began", *The Evening Independent*, August 6, 1975, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=euQLAAAIAAJ&sjid=OFgDAAAIAAJ&dq=ronnie+gorlin+murder&pg=6949,957179&hl=en>

"Map of flat tire murders", accessed on August 18, 2019, https://www.newspapers.com/clip/14832786/map_of_flat_tire_murders/

Excellent write up that presents the information in a linear fashion and is easy to consume. There are no sources cited on this page, but most of the information can be corroborated with the newspaper articles that were linked above.

The True Crime Database, "Case # 0145The Flat-Tire Murders The South Dade Killer", accessed on August 18, 2019, https://www.thetruecrimedatabase.com/case_file/the-flat-tire-murders