Oakland County Child Killings

Expert gets inside serial killers' heads

Bob Keppel, who knows more about tracking serial killers than anybody, looks back on 1970s child murders

By Ted Montgomery
Special to The Detroit News

Calm, erudite and soft-spoken, Bob Keppel looks more like a high school biology teacher than a man who's come face-to-face with evil incarnate.

But Keppel has helped to stop serial killers such as Ted Bundy and Wayne Williams in their murderous tracks, and he's been called in on similar cases by homicide detectives throughout the world. He's cradled fractured skulls in his hand, examined moldering flesh and tried to piece together skeletons from a hodgepodge of desiccated bones found in shallow, unmarked graves.

Today, Keppel sits in his office at the Institute for Forensics in Seattle and studies recent news accounts that take him back to the early 1980s, when he was asked to informally consult in the massive manhunt for the Oakland County Child Killer.

"I remember thinking what a monumental job they had facing them," Keppel says. "Not only were they having trouble keeping track of the thousands of tips coming in, but they had a 200-person task force, which makes it extremely difficult to effectively coordinate all the information streaming in."

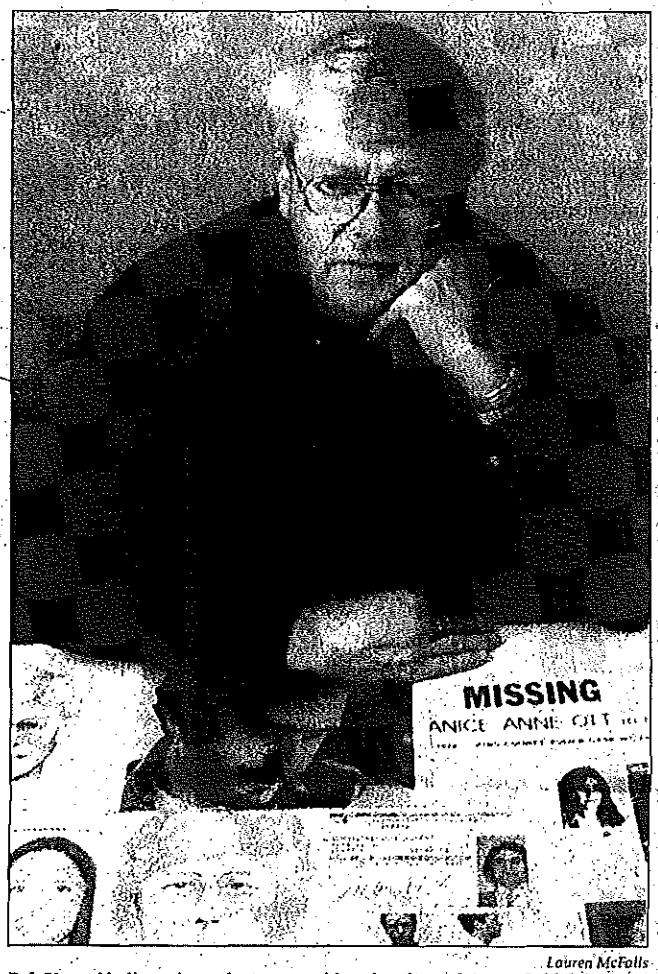
Flipping through the 20-year-old file cards in his mind, two things stand out from that case: first, the frustration that Michigan State Police felt over their inability to find the killer, and second, that the killer had probably flitted across their radar screen very early in the investigation. New developments may indicate he was right.

Keppel, then chief criminal investigator for Washington state, met Michigan State Police Capt. Robbie Robertson in July 1983, while both men were in Huntsville, Texas, to help form a national serial murder tracking system.

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Keppel has written about his work hunting serial killers.



Lauren McFalls

Bob Keppel believes investigators considered early on the true Oakland County Child Killer and dismissed him. He's helped nab killers such as Ted Bundy.

Other murders still pose questions

Serial murder expert Bob Keppel says Michigan State Police Capt. Robbie Robertson, lead investigator in the Oakland County Child Killings, believed other unsolved murders were committed by the killer.

"And we know from most serial murder investigations that there are usually more victims than we can confirm," Keppel says.

The murders of Cynthia Cadieux, Sheila Srock and Jane Allan seemed to fit the killer's *modus operandi*. Here is what we know about them:

■ The body of Cynthia Cadieux was found in Bloomfield Township early Jan. 16, 1975. Her skull was fractured and she had been sexually assaulted. She was last seen the night before in Roseville.



The body of Cynthia Cadieux was found Jan. 16, 1975.

■ Sheila Srock was babysitting in northern Oakland County the night of Jan. 19, 1976, when she was raped and murdered. A neighbor who had been shoveling snow off his roof witnessed part of the assault, and described the assailant as a white man in his early to mid-20s, with a prominent nose and pointed chin.

■ Jane Allan left her home in Royal Oak on Aug. 7, 1976, to hitchhike to Auburn Hills. Four days later, her body was found in the Miami River in Ohio. Investigators say key suspect David Norberg frequently traveled to Ohio.

"Robertson thought there were enough similarities to at least consider the possibility," Keppel said. "That's one of the keys to any serial murder investigation: you can't rule out anything."

—*Ted Montgomery*

KEPPEL

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The first of four Oakland County children had been brutally murdered in October 1975. Over the next 18 months, through March 1977, three more children were found dead, their killer never found.

Now, as investigators await the results of DNA testing that could point to deceased suspect David Norberg, Keppel recounts the special problems that faced the child killer task force, the same type of problems he's faced numerous times.

Norberg moved to Montana a couple of years after the killings apparently ended and died in an automobile accident there in 1981. He had been a suspect, but police eliminated him after talking to his family. However, recent revelations have refocused the spotlight on him. Among his possessions at the time of his death was a necklace with a cross bearing the name "Kristine," similar to one owned by victim Kristine Mihelich.

Investigators preserved a hair found on one of the victims and recently exhumed Norberg's body to extract a DNA sample. If the DNA matches, it would link Norberg conclusively to the victim, wrapping up a 22-year investigation. Results are expected soon.



Lauren McFalls

Bob Keppel was instrumental in pioneering the use of computers as an investigative tool and says computers would have allowed police agencies to zero in on the Oakland County Child Killer almost immediately after the second murder.

Anatomy of a killer

The phenomenon of serial murder is relatively new in this country. Only during the past 40 years have police distinguished serial murder — a series of murders over time and territory, perpetrated against common victim types by the same killer — from mass murder, which is defined as a spree of killings in a short period, such as the recent school shootings.

The first serial murders to capture the nation's attention were those committed by Albert DeSalvo, the so-called Boston Strangler, in 1962 and 1963. DeSalvo knocked on the apartment doors of spinsters, widows and coeds, claiming to be a repairman, and strangled each victim. He was eventually apprehended on an unrelated charge and shocked Boston and the nation with his lurid confessions.

In the 1970s, serial murder reached greater horrors with John Wayne Gacy, the Zodiac Killer and the Hillside Strangler.

But it was Theodore Robert Bundy, an unassuming and likeable college student, who provided the oddest amalgamation. How could a handsome, intelligent boy from a good family turn into a sex killer?

It's not uncommon for homicide detectives assigned to serial murder task forces to share information with carefully selected colleagues. But Keppel's meeting with Robertson in 1983 was unusual. Keppel, fresh from six years of hunting Bundy in Seattle, was immersed in the hunt for the Green River Killer, who had murdered 49 prostitutes from July 1982 through March 1984. Bundy, in prison in Florida awaiting execution for his crimes, wrote to Keppel and offered to share his expertise on how to catch the Green River Killer. Bundy was executed in January 1989 for the 1978 murder of a 12-year-old schoolgirl in Lake City, Fla., one of more than 35 murders investigators believe Bundy committed.

Keppel, the man Bundy entrusted with his most explicit confessions, believes Bundy killed more than 100 women, dating back to his teen years in the 1960s. And, as Bundy himself acknowledged, there is not a person alive today who knows more about the horrific crime of serial murder than Bob Keppel.

But it's not what what he's seen that has horrified Keppel the most; it's what he's heard.

"To sit and listen to Ted Bundy talk about murder and hear him attempt to justify why he killed all those girls, it makes you feel disgust and repulsion," says Keppel. "But I was careful not to wear my feelings on my sleeve. As soon as a serial killer thinks you're being judgmental about their crimes, you'll lose him. My conversations with Bundy taught me how serial killers think, and how you need to interact with them to encourage them to give up their secrets."

Much of Keppel's conversations and correspondence with Bundy are recounted in his book, *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. It's among three books he's written on serial murder, and is used as an investigative text on identifying and apprehending serial killers.

Drawn into the case

Keppel has acted as a consultant on the most high-profile serial murder cases in recent history. He helped develop a profile of the Atlanta Child Murderer, Wayne Williams, that was astonishly accurate. Then there were the Ted Bundy and Green River Killer cases, which both occurred in his jurisdiction.

When Robertson, who is now retired, approached Keppel in Texas, he knew if anyone could offer insight into how to find the Oakland County killer, Keppel could. Bundy would have concurred.

"If anyone wants to know about serial murder, they ought to contact Bob Keppel," the notorious killer once said.

"Bob Keppel is a superlative detective," says Ann Rule, the prominent true crime writer who spent a part of her childhood in rural Washtenaw County, where her father was sheriff. "Keppel has taken us a long way toward understanding the phenomenon of murder."

But Keppel wasn't able to help Robertson.

The Michigan officer detailed the four murders to Keppel at a table in a dimly lit cocktail lounge in Huntsville. The two spent the whole night seeking any avenue of investigation the Oakland County task force may have missed.

Robertson told Keppel the two female victims were not sexually assaulted, but the two boys were. Two victims disappeared on Sundays, and the other two disappeared on Wednesday evenings. All four were kept by the killer at his lair for between three and 10 days. And each was freshly bathed and clothed at the time they were found.

"He was convinced that the Michigan Child killer was right in front of their noses all along, and that they had probably even talked to him," Keppel says. "One of the features of any serial murder investigation is that the police should go back over the earliest suspects they had. More times than not, the murderer's name comes before the police very early in the investigation."

Personal involvement

Because investigators learn everything there is to learn about the victims' lives, the victims begin to seem like family members. It's almost like losing one of your own.

Jerry Tobias was the director of the Youth Bureau for the Beverly Hills Police Department at the time of the killings, and was the officer who originally interviewed Norberg.

"He was a different kind of guy. He was totally cooperative, but his answers to my questions were guarded," says Tobias, who now is a weight management counselor at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak.

"To tell you the truth, I never got a strong feeling that he was the killer, but I never could completely clear him," Tobias says. "We could never substantiate to our satisfaction that he was at work on the days when the children were abducted."

Even though he is no longer a law enforcement officer, he remains connected to the ongoing investigation. "I think we're going to catch this killer. And as long as I'm living and breathing, I'm going to do everything I can to help bring closure to these cases."

Robertson had a similar determination 16 years ago in the cocktail lounge in Huntsville, Keppel says. "His description of the child murders and what they meant to him had a lasting effect on me. During this discussion, Robertson illustrated that he had a mental toughness and that he would never quit the fight to catch killers."

The Oakland County Child Killer case files remain officially open, but the trail has grown icy cold.

Today, Keppel operates the Institute for Forensics in Seattle. It's a clearinghouse of information and technologies for investigative agencies. Keppel, who was instrumental in pioneering the use of computers as an investigative tool, maintains computers would have allowed police agencies to zero in on the Oakland County Child Killer almost immediately after the second murder.

He subscribes to Locard's Exchange Theory, put forth by French criminolo-



Bob Keppel, whom Ted Bundy confided in, thinks the serial killer murdered more than 100 women. Their dealings with each other formed Keppel's book "The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer."

gist Henry Locard, which states that when a murderer comes in contact with things at the crime scene, a cross transfer of evidence occurs. He believes investigators can find something of the killer at every crime scene, and that the killer takes something from every crime.

Unless Norberg is identified as the killer through DNA testing, or someone someday confesses to the murders, they will probably never be solved. But thanks to Bob Keppel and other dedicated law enforcement officials who suspend their lives to search for serial killers, we now know a lot more about serial murderers and how to catch them.

The Institute for Forensics is located at 800 Fifth Ave., Suite 4100, Seattle, WA 98104. The phone number is (206) 447-1405.

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