

Bound by tragedy

The murder of 15-year-old Kristi Wesselman remains a mystery 3 years after it occurred. There are few clues, and the DuPage County Sheriff's Department has had little success at finding her murderer. The case remains open, and is assigned to 2 detectives, according to DuPage County Sheriff Richard P. Doria.

Mystery

Murderer of Glen Ellyn teenager remains at large 3 years after slaying

by Dave Jacque

Sandra Wesselman is a slight woman in her 40s. There was an alarming seriousness about her as she spoke in a low, measured voice of the events that took place on Sunday, July 21, 1985, the day she lost her daughter.

"We were having a beautiful day," Sandra began. Mother and daughter spent the hot, muggy afternoon watching an old black and white movie in the only air-conditioned room in the Glen Ellyn home.

Kristi, 15, was a popular student at Glenbard South. She was president of her freshman class, and a member of the volleyball and basketball teams. Kristi was making plans for a trip to a basketball camp in Wisconsin.

"She did so much that last 2 years, I wanted to slow her down," Sandra said. "I'm glad I didn't."

Around 4 p.m., the pair decided it was time for some junk food. Sandra gave Kristi some money, and the girl left for the Jewel Food Store near Butterfield rd. and Rt. 53., about 3 blocks away from home.

"My last words to Kristi were, 'I love you, princess, be careful,' as she walked out the door."

Kristi was cutting through a small field on her way home, with a jumbo candy bar and a bottle of cola, when she was attacked, raped, and stabbed to death.

When Kristi did not return immediately, the waiting began.

"Generally speaking, I knew where she was and what she was doing," Sandra said. "I waited until 11 o'clock, her curfew time, and once that came I started phoning her friends."

"After I ran out of phone numbers and names I could remember, I drove to all the houses I could ever remember having dropped her off at ... just hoping beyond hope that there'd be a yard full of kids or a house with lights on.

"And there wasn't. Everything was quiet."

Nine hours after she disappeared, at 1 a.m. Sandra went to a Denny's Restaurant on Roosevelt rd., clutching at straws, hoping that Kristi would be there.

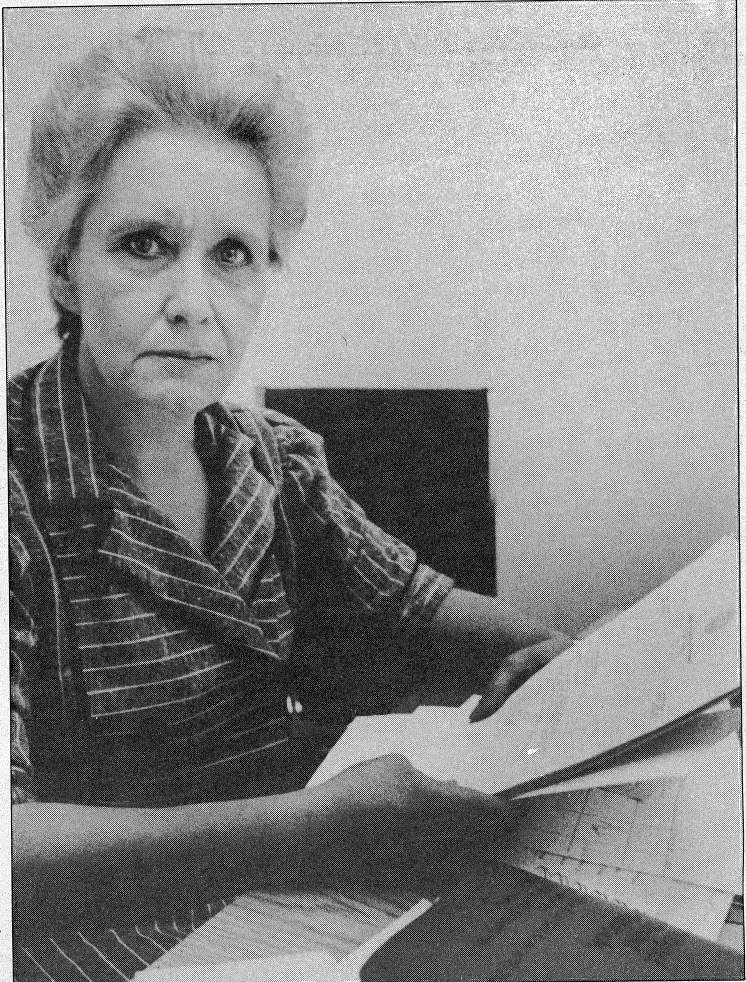
"I ran into a couple that I knew," Sandra said. "And Shirley and Jerry looked at me and said 'What's wrong?' Not 'Why are you here?' or 'Hi Sandra,' but they just looked at my face and said 'What's wrong?'"

She explained that Kristi was missing. At her friends' urging, Sandra called home one more time - no answer - and then called the DuPage County Sheriff's Department at 1:50 a.m.

"And the first thing was, 'Did she run away, could she be a runaway? Did she take money from your wallet?'" Sandra said.

While Sandra talked to an officer at her home, the couple took a picture of Kristi and "covered every bar, every restaurant, every place they could find open, and showed the picture. And they were at it until 6 in the morning."

Sandra said her efforts, and the efforts of the couple, apparently went unnoticed by the DuPage County Sheriff's Department. "I got a copy of the inquest, after the fact, and the officer that answered the call said he knew of nothing I had done to locate my daughter (prior to



RECORDS — Sandra Wesselman has kept extensive files containing information on the case of her daughter's murder, and her dealings with the DuPage County Sheriff's Department.

PHOTO BY ROB MILKOWSKI

calling the police).

The sheriff's police searched the field that Kristi was thought to have cut through on her way to the Jewel food store at 2 a.m., shortly after Sandra reported her missing. They found nothing in the search.

Sandra said she was told she would have to wait 24 hours to file a missing person report. She did not wait to begin a new round of phone calls.

Around 6 a.m. she called the parents of Kristi's friends, and asked them to call other parents and ask their children to call around.

Sandra then called Glenbard South and asked the principal to use the public address system to alert the students to Kristi's

disappearance.

"The answer I received from the man on the phone was 'We cannot use the public address system for something like this, because it would be an invasion of Kristi's right to privacy.'

"She was 15 years old, a minor," Sandra said. "And I was a parent asking for help. I had no rights. They refused to do it."

Sandra did have some praise for at least one DuPage County Sheriff's detective, Kevin Buccholz, who found Kristi's body

about 20 hours after she left home.

Buccholz found Kristi's body at 11:15 a.m. on July 22, about 25 yards from the path that wound through the small field which the girl had come through on her way home. She was lying on her side in waist-high weeds under a tree. She had been stabbed 8 times with a 3-inch to 6-inch knife.

Canvassing the neighborhood

(Continued on next page)

A 'crime of opportunity'

"The problem that you have with this murder is that it was absolutely a crime of opportunity," said DuPage County Sheriff Richard P. Doria, calling the murder of Kristi Wesselman "a chance encounter."

Doria described the Glen Ellyn teenager as "a good, all-American girl," who apparently had no unsavory friends, or associations with those prone to violence.

There is no "24 hour rule" in DuPage County, according to Doria, responding to Sandra Wesselman's claims that she was made to wait to file a missing

person report.

"There's no such animal," he said, saying it was mostly an invention of television.

Wesselman's claims that the sheriff's department is slow to act or somehow indifferent are unfounded, said Doria. He acknowledged that she has been told to write instead of call the Sheriff's department; her numerous phone calls became disruptive.

"The fact of the matter is, we can't jump every time she sees something on tv," Doria said.

"Nobody wants to solve her daughter's murder more than we

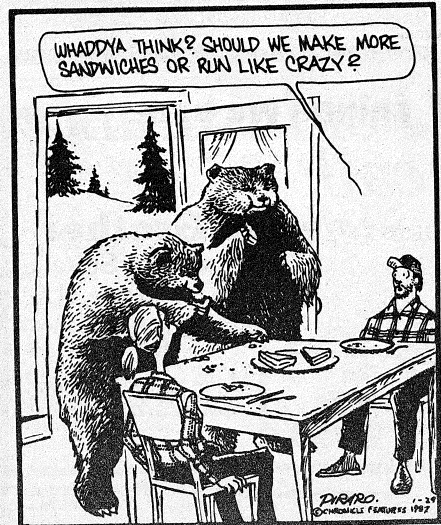
do," Doria said. "Mrs. Wesselman is a tragic person who has had a tragic event in her life. And there is no amount of explanation in the world that would do any good."

"She's gone through every detective we've got," said Doria, adding that there were 30 detectives on the case at one time.

And he says the department does respond to Wesselman's requests. Recently she requested that the department check out an alleged rapist arrested on the south side of Chicago. He turned out to have been in jail at the time of Kristi Wesselman's murder.

BIZARRO

By DAN PIRARO



LOOKING BACK: AN UNSOLVED MURDER

Field

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 much as cars use the pavement."
DAVID MULLINGER and Kevin Konsoer, both 14, approach the supermarket on their bicycles. They say they only use the path during a day. "At night, I would go on Butterfield," Mullinger said. Also atop bikes are 11-year-olds Hillary Kipnis and Anita Hostick. "I don't go late at night — after 4 o'clock, that's when (Kristi Wesselman) went through," Kipnis said. Hostick added, "We only go through with a friend."

Jean O'Brien, a neighbor who helped start a memorial fund for Kristi, said, "People sure haven't forgotten. I haven't been through that field for a year. I get goose-pimples every time I drive by."
 "Those continuing to use the path are 'not so much walkers, but people on their bikes,'" she says. "As time went on, some of that scary, spooky feeling has started to go away."

"IT'S PROBABLY MORE in the back of adults' minds than the kids'. Kids tend to forget."
 Ina Konsoer, co-president of the Valley View homeowners' association, said: "It's one of those typical time-heals-all-wounds things," she says. "Things have gotten pretty much back to normal."
 "You can't run around living in fear."

(Robert Smith contributed to this story.)

"Things have gotten pretty much back to normal. You can't run around living in fear."
 — Ina Konsoer



"I still think about her everyday. Mostly, I just wonder if she's still around — if she is still with us or completely gone. And I just miss her."
 — Rachel, a friend

Mother

(Continued from page 1)
 expected in a big town like this."
 "I love them. I never would have made it without them."
 The memorial fund raised several thousand dollars, which the family has since used to create a scholarship program at Glenbard South "for a kid that's behind the scenes and participating," Sandra says.

THE SCHOLARSHIP is available for each of the three years Kristi had left in school.
 "Part of it's helping me and part is helping the kids at school," the mother says. "It's part of her still being there."

The field where Kristi was killed remains a reminder of what happened to her daughter, but Sandra says it no longer bothers her. Still, if she happens to be driving by and sees someone walking there, she stops the car until she's sure they've made it safely through.
 "It bothered me more with all the yellow tape (for police lines)," she says. "But now it's just there, it's a part of our life. It's a part of Kristi, too."

The thought of moving away from Valley View and the field "crossed my mind," she admits, "but that would be running away. Wherever we go (as a family), we'll have to live with ourselves."

IF ANYTHING, she says, Kristi's death has brought her family closer together.

"We're survivors," Sandra says. "We're a lot tougher than I ever thought we were."
 She has nothing but praise for the DuPage Sheriff's Police detectives who handled the initial investigation and are still hunting for her daughter's killer.

"They're doing a beautiful job," she says. "They've handled a difficult situation with a good deal of professionalism and gentleness."
 Sandra had gone through a period of calling the detectives nearly every day, but has since overcome the temptation. "They have a job to do and I have to let them do it," she says now.

SHE REMAINS certain that Kristi's killer will someday be captured. "I'm convinced he will," she says. "It may not be today, or this week or this month, but eventually. He's living in his own agony, now."

Right now, she admits, she isn't sure she's strong enough to confront Kristi's killer. But if he is caught, she says she'd like to talk to him and learn what went through his mind before he killed her daughter.
 "I'd pray for him and his family," she says. "Whoever it is someone who needs help, not someone who needs to be hated."
 An opponent of capital punishment — "two wrongs don't make a right" — Sandra says she would have no desire to have the killer executed.

"HE MAY have a book or a piece of music to write, and he can do that in prison," she says in a state of mind, not a state of being.
 Talking to a stranger about her daughter's death is not easy for Sandra Wesselman, but it is something she feels she must do. She wants her words to act as a message for other parents who have lost children or who someday might.
 "Life can go on," she says. "To not share this with other parents would be to say Kristi died in vain."
 "I'm at peace. It hurts at times, but that's OK. It's supposed to."

Friends

(Continued from page 1)
 happen to her. . . She doesn't finish the sentence. It's too painful to think about.

KRISTI WESSELMAN was indeed attractive, athletic, outgoing — one of the most popular girls in her class at Glenbard South High School. She was the freshman class president and was to be vice president of the sophomore class. Her many friends loved her, and some, such as Rachel, can't stop thinking about her.
 "I still think about her everyday," she said. "Mostly, I just wonder if she's still around — if she is still with us or completely gone. And I just miss her."
 The crime was not supposed to happen here — not to a nice girl walking near her nice neighborhood. The fact that it wasn't supposed to happen made the crime linger in the collective mind of the community; even those who did not know Kristi found it hard to take.

TEARFUL MOURNERS, many of them Kristi's classmates at

Glenbard South High School, packed the funeral Mass at St. James Church the Apostle Church on Park Boulevard. The pastor spoke of overcoming vengeful thoughts, but some couldn't accept the words.
 "To teenagers," Sue says, "death is just incredible. There was incredible grief. Teenagers way of grieving is so different."
 Grief hung over the community like a fog, particularly at Glenbard South, where Kristi made such an impression as a freshman. "Her mother told me the school was her life," said Thomas Gardner, assistant principal for student services. "The school tends to be the center of the community because we're unincorporated. There was an immediate impact. The school was just buzzing. There was concern, bitterness, tears. . ."
THE GRIEF, hate and fear that accompanied the killing became a potent elixir that gripped the community. While support groups and counselors tried to help students out with their lives, rumors about

Murder

(Continued from page 1)
 selman murder with similar cases elsewhere. They also are talking to almost anyone in DuPage arrested in connection with a violent crime. But so far, there have been no matches.
 "It's more of a reactive situation now," Montesano admits.
 Reactive and sometimes frustrating, both for police and residents who want the case solved.
 "You wish you could perform a miracle for them," says the detective, "but you can't."

It was 1:47 a.m. Monday, July 22, 1985, when Kristi Wesselman's mother placed the missing person call to DuPage Sheriff's Police. She had not seen her daughter since about 4 p.m. the previous day, when Kristi had announced plans to walk to Jewel and buy a candy bar. "Her last act was one of love," Sandra Wesselman says now. "We were going to have a junk food lazy day."
 At first Sandra thought her daughter had met some friends and forgotten about calling home. But by 11 p.m. Sunday, Kristi's curfew, Sandra had begun calling and visiting her daughter's acquaintances. Her last stop was a Denny's restaurant, where she hoped she would find the girl "talking and drinking Cokes with her friends."
KRISTI WASN'T there. It was clear something was wrong.
 Deputy Mark Edwards arrived at 1:58 a.m., to consult briefly with Mrs. Wesselman, and begin searching the area — including the vacant field just blocks from the Wesselman home. But it was dark and he was alone and he came up empty.
 Montesano reviewed the missing person report when he arrived for work Monday morning and immediately assigned Det. Buchholz, a nine-year veteran of the violent crimes division, to investigate.
 "I knew it didn't sound like your normal missing (person case)," Montesano says now.

Buchholz met with the family, went over Kristi's description, and began following the route she probably would have taken to the Jewel store at Route 53 and Butterfield Road. The trail took him through the 35-acre weed-covered field to the south of the shopping center — the same field Edwards had walked through hours earlier.
THE FIELD was a favorite short-cut for Valley View residents; they had used it often enough to wear a cement-hard dirt path through the weeds. Adults walked there. Children played there. It was no place to die.
 Buchholz — who now works for a municipal police department in Florida — traced Kristi to the Jewel store and then began backtracking, looking for a place where something might have gone wrong.
 He found it in the middle of the field. Kristi was dead.

"I had read the clothing description that was on the report, and I knew her age, so I was pretty sure that's who it was," he says.
 A group of the girl's friends already was gathering to search the field and so Buchholz went directly to Sandra Wesselman to tell her what he had found.
 "Things like that you don't forget," he says.
 The detective radioed his findings to Montesano at 11:27 a.m. It was not Montesano's first homicide call, but like the others, the moment remains etched in his memory.
 "I still remember when I got the call on the radio," he says. "I remember all of them."

Kristi Wesselman, all-American girl, officially was pronounced dead by Deputy Coroner Karla Conner at 3:04 p.m. on a sunny Monday in the middle of a weed-covered field in unincorporated Milltown Township.
 The autopsy was performed later that day by Dr. D.A. Barrett II, a pathologist, at Central DuPage Hospital, Winfield.
 The doctor's report indicates Kristi bled to death, probably within seconds, as the result of eight stab wounds to the chest.
 The murder weapon, believed to be a knife with a three- to six-inch blade, was never found.
 Police reports indicate the girl had been sexually assaulted.
 There were no signs of drugs.
 The autopsy results provided no additional clues concerning her attacker, which Chief Deputy Coroner Richard Ballinger says is not unusual. Things like that usually happen only on TV.
 "I thought the autopsy was done as well as anyone could do," he says. "Our department has never once fumbled the ball on anything like this."

Rumors and theories. They have surrounded the Wesselman case since Day One. Rumors about suspects. Theories about motives and the kind of person who would kill a girl like Kristi Wesselman.
 Rumors and theories, but precious little hard evidence.
 Buchholz, who worked on the case until leaving the sheriff's department last December, has his own theories.
 "It could have been a random killing," he says, "but I think it may have been thought out, maybe in a dream world, by someone who knew what he wanted to do — maybe not to her, but to somebody."
 Buchholz keeps in contact with DuPage investigators to share his impressions of different suspects and the initial stages of the investigation.
 "They're still interviewing lots of people and some of the people I hadn't cleared up," he says. "Sometimes different people may get different feelings in talking to people (suspects)."

THE CHANCES of solving the case probably "depend on who the murderer was," he says.
 "If it's a serial killer who just strikes by opportunity, sooner or later he'll probably get caught, but he may not ever be charged with this murder," says Buchholz. "If it's a local person, I would hope their conscience would get to them sooner or later."
 Montesano, for one, isn't ready to abandon any possibility.
 "I just hope it wasn't a serial killer," he says. "Those are the hardest to solve."
 Investigators admit that the passage of time has reduced their chances of catching Kristi's killer, but not as drastically as one might think.
 "So what are the odds of an arrest?"
 "We don't make odds," Montesano says. "Go to Las Vegas if you want odds."

Obituaries

DEBORAH L. FILIATREAU
 Deborah L. Filiatreau, 36, of Palatine, died Saturday in her apartment.
 She was born Aug. 14, 1949, in Burlington, Iowa. She was a Cook County Public Health nurse for the past 12 years.
 Miss Filiatreau is survived by her parents, Jacques C. and Ethel Filiatreau of Winfield; a brother, Jay Filiatreau of Houston, Texas; a sister, Susan (Norman) Stozek of Greenfield, Wis.; a nephew, Benjamin Stozek; and two nieces, Elizabeth and Rebecca Stozek.
 Visitation will be from 7 to 9 today at Hanerhoff-Hultgren Funeral, 304 N. Main St., Wheaton.
 Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Wednesday at the funeral home. The Rev. Paul Stavarokos, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church will officiate. Burial will be in Wheaton Cemetery.
 Memorials may be directed to the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, 70 W. Hubbard St., Chicago, Ill.

MARVIN FACKTOR
 Elmhurst
 Marvin Facktor, 50, died Saturday at Central DuPage Hospital, Winfield.
 He was a Wheaton attorney with his own practice and formerly was a partner with Mirabella and Kincaid of Wheaton.
 Mr. Facktor is survived by his wife, Gale, and three children, Gregory, Charles and Laura.
 The service was at 10 a.m. today at the Congregation Etz Chaim, 1710 S. Highland Ave., Lombard. He is being buried in West Lawn Cemetery in Norridge.
 In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Congregation or to Multiple Sclerosis Research at the University of Chicago.

Crash kills GH woman

Journal Staff
LENDALE HEIGHTS — A Glendale Heights woman died early Saturday in a car crash in Addison.
 Illinois State Police say Carla A. Prindle, 23, of 208 Shorewood Drive, was exiting off southbound Route 53 onto Army Trail Road at 4:20 a.m. when her car hit a concrete island with a light pole.
 Police had no further information, saying that investigators have been working on another accident, and have yet to study Prindle's.

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