

ANN ARBOR SLAY SUSPECT LINKED TO 22 MURDERS

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Coral Eugene Watts, prime suspect in the "Sunday morning slasher" murders of three Ann Arbor women two years ago, has confessed to murdering a number of Texas women and will assist police investigating as many as 22 slayings, including those in Ann Arbor, police said Tuesday.

"He's made admissions in some of the cases," said Ann Arbor Police Chief William Corbett, who declined to specify which cases. Houston police officials said **Watts** has provided details of a number of the slayings which could be known only by someone involved.

On April 20, 1980, Shirley Small, 17, was killed outside her residence at Georgetown Townhouses in Ann Arbor. Three months later, Glenda Richmond, 23, was found slain outside the University Townhouses. On Sept. 14, Rebecca Huff, a 30-year-old graduate student and former airline stewardess, was found dead outside her apartment in western Ann Arbor. Corbett said the women had been stabbed to death.

Watts made the admissions to detectives as part of his pleading guilty in Houston to burglary with intent to commit murder.

Dressed in a khaki shirt and blue jeans, **Watts**, 28, showed no emotion as Houston District Judge Doug Shaver accepted the guilty plea to a May 23 incident in which **Watts** tried to drown a Houston woman in her bathtub.

Watts' attorney, Zinetta Burney, bargained so **Watts**, a Detroit resident for most of his life, would receive a 60-year sentence on the burglary-attempted murder charge if he would cooperate with investigators on the other homicides, including the three Ann Arbor slayings and the 1974 killing of a Kalamazoo woman, according to the Houston district attorney.

Judge Shaver agreed to wait until next Tuesday before sentencing **Watts** to be sure he keeps his promise to co-operate.

Watts has led homicide investigators to two shallow gravesites in the Houston area, police said.

Prosecutors said **Watts** also agreed to provide information about slayings in Austin and Galveston, as well as Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo, if authorities in those areas offer him immunity from prosecution. Although **Watts** has been considered a suspect in several unsolved killings, including those in Michigan, police officials they never had enough evidence to do anything other than question him.

SHAVER said he had been told by Houston police before the court hearing that **Watts** may be responsible for as many as 22 slayings of women. In addition, Houston police official said **Watts** is considered the prime suspect in at least three assaults on women in Windsor

Shaver also told a reporter that **Watts** "does not like women . . . he thought they were evil . . . he'd just find one and kill that particular woman."

"There is evidence . . . he actually stalked his victims," said Harris County (Tex.) District Attorney John Holmes.

Investigators from Ann Arbor, Kalamazoo and Windsor were en route to Houston to testify before Shavers about **Watts** being the major suspect in their cases.

Detroit police said **Watts** has never been considered a suspect in any unsolved homicides. However, Homicide Inspector Gilbert Hill said, "We're going back over our open files and are in the process of contacting Houston."

Watts "has been our prime suspect since July of 1980," said Ann Arbor Police Chief William Corbett of the three slayings in that city

"WE INTERVIEWED (**Watts**) on two occasions in depth," Corbett said Tuesday, "and each time we became more convinced he was our man." Since being arrested in Houston, **Watts** has been interviewed again by Corbett's investigators, but Corbett declined to say what was discussed.

Corbett credited a Detroit police officer with providing information that led to **Watts** ' becoming a suspect. The Detroit officer, who was familiar with **Watts** ' record, phoned Corbett after the second Ann Arbor slaying and suggested that investigators check with Kalamazoo police, since **Watts** had been a prime suspect in a coed's slaying in that city.

ACCORDING TO a spokesman for Western Michigan University, **Watts** attended the school's summer and fall sessions from July 2 through Dec. 18, 1974.

On Oct. 25 of that year, according to Kalamazoo police, **Watts** was arrested for the early morning assault of a woman who was knocked to the ground and choked. **Watts** was charged with assault, but records showed no disposition in the case.

At 1:40 p.m. Oct. 30, the body of Gloria Steele, 19, was found in her apartment in a campus housing area at Western Michigan University. Steele had been stabbed 33 times. Based on evidence found at the scene that investigators would not discuss, **Watts** became the prime suspect.

"He's been our main suspect from the start," said Detective Sgt. Wesley Carpenter of the university's campus police. "His m.o. (method of operation) was to go to a door and ask for 'Charles.' "

On Nov. 12, 1974, **Watts** was arrested and charged with beating and choking a woman in Kalamazoo. He was convicted of assault and sentenced to a year in the county jail.

The next recorded police contact with **Watts** came on Oct. 17, 1979, when he was arrested while prowling among a group of homes in Southfield . Charged with disorderly conduct, according to police records, he was fined \$25.

IN ADDITION to the three Ann Arbor slayings in 1980, **Watts** is considered the major suspect in at least three assaults of women in Windsor, according to police sources.

The attacks, which occurred between July and November, were "extremely serious assaults . . . In one, a woman's throat was slashed. She was left for dead but didn't die," said a police source.

In each instance, according to investigators involved with the **Watts** case, the license plate number of a 1978 Pontiac Grand Prix belonging to **Watts** was entered in a U.S. Customs computer at the border between Windsor and Detroit. One of the victims, a 60-year-old woman, made a tentative identification of **Watts** after being shown a photograph of him, police said.

On Nov. 5, 1980, according to investigators, an Ann Arbor police car noticed a young woman walking erratically from a bar where one of the three previous victims was last seen alive. The scout car started to follow her but then noticed **Watts** ' car following the woman. The officers stopped **Watts** and arrested him for driving without his registration.

Investigators said a search revealed a pair of screw drivers and a set of wood carving knives on the rear seat. The knives were similar to those used in the Kalamazoo and Ann Arbor slayings, sources said.

Watts was questioned but released "because there wasn't enough to hold him," said a police official who asked not to be named. But Corbett and a task force he had formed, which included at least five area police agencies as well as the Windsor police, were granted a court order and placed **Watts** under surveillance for almost three months.

Watts , who was fired from his job as a Houston bus mechanic on May 24, claims he was born in Texas. Records indicate he spent most of his life in the Detroit area. His first recorded contact with police came on June 25, 1969, when, as a 14-year- old, he attacked a woman while he was delivering newspapers about 7:30 a.m. After the attack, **Watts** was committed to Detroit's Lafayette Clinic for psychiatric treatment; he was released five months later.

Watts ' mother, who lives in Inkster, was unavailable for comment. A woman who answered the phone at the east side Detroit home where **Watts** ' sister lives immediately hung up when asked about **Watts** .

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