

POLICE SEEK TRAIL OF SERIAL KILLER WOMEN MAY HAVE BEEN LURED WITH DRUGS

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He's known in the neighborhood, but he doesn't say much.

He usually walks where he needs to go, rarely far from home.

And he kills women, whenever he gets the chance.

Those are some **of** the characteristics **police** suspect can be found in a **killer** preying on desperate crack addicts and prostitutes along a stretch **of** Woodward Avenue in Highland Park and Detroit. On Monday, he may have killed again.

Since mid-December, eight women -- small in stature and commonly hooked on crack -- have been found dead in or around abandoned buildings throughout the decaying neighborhood. All had been strangled. Some had their hands tied behind them.

Detectives were trying to determine whether a woman found around 6 a.m. Monday was the ninth victim. Her nude body was found on a blue towel in an alley a few feet from Woodward at Midland.

The woman, who has yet to be identified, is believed to have been strangled with a cord. But she was not bound or gagged. She was white; the other victims were black. Her body appeared to have been dumped from a vehicle and partially run over.

The other victims have stronger common threads. Most had something crammed deep down their throats -- socks, other clothing, pieces **of** foam insulation -- and their bodies appeared to have been hurled into the corners, closets or rusted shower stalls where they were found.

Police are convinced many **of** the eight previous slayings are connected, and the work **of** one man on a pace that outstrips the most notorious **serial killers** in U.S. criminal history.

"This guy is killing because he enjoys killing," said one **of** the leading investigators on the slayings. "He can't stop. He has to be stopped."

Investigators, wary **of** being blamed for publicizing a **killer** and inspiring a copycat, insisted on anonymity.

They said the **killer** probably uses crack -- the cheap, smokable form **of** cocaine -- to lure the women to their deaths. Evidence shows he probably walks behind them, catches them off guard and deftly chokes them into unconsciousness. Then they are strangled, either in the crook **of** his elbow or with a piece **of** their own clothing.

"Once he gets around behind them, they probably pass out in a few seconds," an investigator said. "They probably don't feel much pain."

The **killer** has left few clues and been aided by some long lapses in time between the slayings and their discoveries. In some cases, it took months to positively identify the victim. One, discovered Feb. 17, is still unknown.

"This is a tough case," said Detective David Minzey **of** the State **Police** violent crime unit, which is assisting investigators from Detroit and Highland Park. "We've got to get this guy before he kills again."

The **killer** appears to have staked out a 1.4-mile stretch **of** Woodward Avenue, north **of** Grand Boulevard and south **of** the Davison Freeway, an area dominated by abandoned buildings.

"He's very efficient," one investigator said. "He's very good at what he does. There's nothing that shows these girls had any type **of** chance."

One federal expert who advised **police** told them he has "never seen a **serial killer** work this fast."

The Boston Strangler, one **of** the most notorious such **killers** in U.S. history, killed 13 women over a two-year period in the 1960s. More recently, **serial killer** Ted Bundy was blamed for the deaths **of** 40 women during a four-year span. Milwaukee **serial killer** Jeffrey Dahmer confessed to 17 murders committed over 12 years.

Police are awaiting the results **of** scientific tests **of** clothing and semen found at the Woodward scenes, but are frustrated by a lack **of** better clues.

"We're missing all the good evidence you've got to have," said one investigator. For example, there was no flesh from the **killer** under the women's nails as there might be if they had fought back.

State **police** and national crime experts have developed some probable characteristics **of** the **killer**, based on the way he is working and interviews with murderers in prison. They include these likelihoods:

- * He either lives in the area or was raised there.
- * He probably operates on foot in daylight.
- * He is tall and strong, but quiet, probably blending easily into the surroundings.

* The **killer** may feel inadequate about sex; murder may be his twisted substitute, the dumping **of** the nude or partly clad bodies are a last act **of** degrading the women.

Police have questioned more than two dozen suspects, and consider a few **of** them serious possibilities. But they also know that some or all **of** the theories could be wrong, and that some **of** the slayings may have inspired a copycat **killer** .

'The walking dead'

The victims **of** the Woodward **killer** , apparently unknown to one another, shared lives **of** poverty, danger and the desperate agony **of** drug addiction. Not all **of** them were regular prostitutes, but all **of** them were hooked on crack and may have resorted to sex to get it.

"They were already among the walking dead," said the Rev. Jim Holley, whose Little Rock Baptist Church is on Woodward between two **of** the murder sites. "Nobody deserves to die that way, but they were already dead in a sense."

The dead women left behind more than a dozen children and many more relatives who had searched for them and tried to save them from the streets.

"We would like the families to know we are aggressively pursuing this case," said Detective Minzey. "We are leaving no stones unturned. We are working on this very hard, but it never moves quickly."

The first body to be found was that **of** Debbie Friday, 31, who was last seen alive on Dec. 8. She cooked a dinner **of** steak, macaroni and cheese and vegetables for her infirm aunt at a home on Detroit's west side, then did the dishes and prepared to go out. She was happy enough to tell her aunt a joke as she headed for the door.

"Who's the guy this time?" her aunt asked, squelching the unease she felt about Friday leaving, knowing she might be gone for several days.

"He's a guy I know in Highland Park," Friday said. "I have to meet him over there."

With a laugh and a wave, Friday was gone.

On Dec. 14, she was found strangled, beaten and bound in the basement **of** a cavernous, pitch-black, double-wing apartment building at 170 Elmhurst, near Woodward.

Less than a mile away, in an abandoned, crumbling townhouse complex on Alger off the Detroit side **of** Woodward, the body **of** Bertha Jean Mason was found Dec. 30.

When Mason left the flat she shared with her boyfriend and their four children on Dec. 11, she said she was going to the store and to visit a friend. Mason was 5 1/2 months pregnant. An aunt, Bernice Brookins, said the Wayne County Medical Examiner's office told Mason's family the fetus has been "stomped out of her."

On Jan. 3, a bulldozer hit the corpse of a woman while demolishing a house at 74 Kenilworth in Detroit.

A coat had been thrown over the body, which was clad in a sweater and shirt, but nude from the waist down.

It took four months before police were able to identify her in early April as Patricia Cannon George, 36, of Detroit.

Just a few blocks north, on Jan. 25, the naked body of Vickie Truelove, 39, was found in the abandoned Longfellow Nursing Home at 9520 Woodward.

Her hands were tied behind her, a cloth was tied around her neck and face, and she had been thrown face down next to a mattress. Relatives said Truelove had worked at several nursing homes on Woodward.

On Feb. 17, three nude bodies were found in shower stalls at the abandoned Monterey Motel on Woodward.

Juanita Hardy, 23, was in Room 18. Her brother, Grant Fortune, said he hadn't seen her in several years, but knew she was a crack addict.

Valerie Brown Chalk, 34, was in Room 35, crammed on her back into the shower stall, her legs up against its tiled wall. There was a gag around her neck and mouth.

Her family had been looking for her since Nov. 6, and distributed nearly 5,000 flyers in the area after being told by a friend that Chalk was being held captive in a building.

The third woman at the Monterey has not been identified. Her nude, frozen body was found in the shower stall in Room 68. She had been gagged, smothered and strangled. That body also was on its back, one leg up against a wall.

On March 25, Vicki Marie Beasley-Brown, 43, told her two small children she was going to the store to get cigarettes and food for the next day's school lunches. Two days later, her landlady called Beasley-Brown's parents to tell them the children were alone and Beasley-Brown was missing. Her body was found April 15, in a closet on the first floor of a vacant apartment house on Highland at Second, four blocks from where the first victim was found.

As bad as their lives had become, the sites where the woman died were a final indignity, filthy rooms in rotting buildings, littered with cheap wine bottles and spent condoms.

No matter how they lived, friends and relatives said, they all deserved better from death.

Caption: Photo Color JULIAN H. GONZALEZ; Map CATHY MORRIS;

: (JULIAN H. GONZALEZ/Detroit Free Press)

Gloria and Clarence Beasley recently hold a photo of their daughter, Vicki Marie Beasley-Brown. Despite their efforts to help her, "She decided she wanted to live in the fast lane," her mother said. Beasley-Brown went to the store and never returned. Her body was found April 15. THE VICTIMS Valerie Brown Chalk Vicki Beasley-Brown Vickie Truelove Bertha Jean Mason Juanita Hardy Unidentified victim

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