

A CHILD IS MISSING: THE FILE'S STILL OPEN IN MANY OF MICHIGAN'S CASES

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The incidents have a terrible sameness that has changed little through the decades: a child is reported missing; a massive search is organized, and the child's body is found a few days later. Police organize a hunt for the killer, following down hundreds, sometimes thousands, of clues. The killer is rarely found.

In the last three decades, some 20 Michigan children, ranging in age from three to 16, have been abducted and murdered. Among the cases were these:

March 31, 1955: One of the biggest searches in Detroit history ended when the body of **Barbara Gaca**, 7, of Detroit, was found wrapped in a grimy Army blanket in a dump in rural Oakland County. She had been raped, stabbed, and strangled. Her mother had reported her missing a week earlier when she failed to come home for lunch from Assumption Grotto School in the Gratiot-Seven Mile area. Her killer was never found.

June 1, 1955: Five farm children, playing in a pine copse 15 miles north of Kalamazoo, found the mutilated body of 8-year-old Jeannie Singleton of Kalamazoo. Jeannie, who walked with a pronounced limp, had disappeared nine days earlier during her four-block walk home from school. The search for her, which involved more than 750 people, included a motorcade that attempted to search every road in Kalamazoo County. Arrests and questioning of suspects continued for more than a year afterward. The killer was never found.

June 24, 1957: A 50-year-old convicted rapist who lived four doors from six-year-old Mary de Caussin confessed to her murder. The body of the Ecorse Township girl had been found eight days earlier in a wooded area about two miles from her home. Her hands had been tied behind her back and she had been raped, stabbed, and hit in the head. More than 1,000 people, including 400 Boy Scouts from the downriver area, had taken part in a 12-day search that began after she apparently walked away from a neighbor's yard where she had been playing.

Feb. 19, 1976: The fully clothed body of Mark Stebbins, the first victim of the so-called Oakland County child killer, was found in the parking lot of an office building at Ten Mile and Greenfield in Southfield. He had been sexually assaulted and smothered. Stebbins, 12, of Ferndale, had disappeared six days earlier as he was walking home in the afternoon from a pool tournament at the Ferndale American Legion Hall.

During the next year, three other children were kidnapped and murdered under similar circumstances, and police believed all the killings were done by the same person.

- * The body of Jill Robinson, 12, of Royal Oak, was found near Big Beaver Road and I-75 on Dec. 26, two weeks after she ran away from home after an argument with her mother. She had been killed by a shotgun blast to the head.
- * Kristine Mihelich, 10, was found suffocated on a rural road near Telegraph and Twelve Mile on Jan. 21, 1977. She was last seen at a party store three blocks from her Berkley home.
- * Eleven-year-old Timothy King of Birmingham was found suffocated in a ditch near Eight Mile Road in Livonia, four days after he was seen talking to a man in a parking lot in Birmingham.

A 34-member task force spent nearly two years and \$2 million in federal, state, and local funds tracking down more than 16,000 tips.

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