Police file 352-481 gets thicker; Cheri Bates murder case month old

For a month, the case has been file No. 352-481. The clues have been gathered and catalogued. All telephone tips have been checked out. Dozens of persons have been interrogated, and the typed reports are neatly filed behind 352-481. Police supervisors have kept an exact count of the regular and overtime hours investigators have spent on No. 352 481.

And yet the Oct. 30 murder of Cheri Jo Bates remains unsolved.

THREE DAYS after the fully clothed body of the 18-year-old blonde Riverside City College student was found on the campus, her throat deeply slashed and a stab wound in her back, investigators called it a baffling case.

Now, a month after the murder, it remains as mysterious as it was that crisp sunny morning when an RCC caretaker found the body as he was sweeping the sidewalk along Terracina.

Miss Bates' murder wrenched the heart of the community. The apprehension of her assailant will do little to ease the hurt.

Cheri Jo Bates, the investigators learned as they bore into the case, was a bright girl who was popular at Ramona High School, where she graduated last June. She had been a varsity cheerleader in her junior year at Ramona.

SHE LIVED at 4195 Via San Jose in Riverside with her father, Joseph, a machinist at the Naval Ordnance Laboratory in Norco. Her brother Michael is in the Navy, and her mother lives elsewhere in Riverside.

Miss Bates' fiance, 19-year-old Dennis Highland of Riverside, said they had planned for two years to be married. He was away at San Francisco State College, where he is on the football team, when he learned of her murder.

The weekend before her death,



CHERI JO BATES

Miss Bates and Highland's parents visited him in San Francisco.

Her funeral was held on the Friday after she had died, and she was buried in a green hillside cemetery.

SLOWLY, AGONIZINGLY, her friends resumed their normal lives. The intense initial police questioning was over. The sharp memories of the brutal details of her death began to blur.

The police, who now hope an anonymous confession mailed to them may be the break in the case, acknowledge that they have just three other good clues to work on:

- A man's Timex watch, its leather band broken, found at the murder scene.
- Bits of human hair, skin and "debris" found under Miss Bates' fingernails.
- Greasy palm and finger prints found on the driver's door of her Volkswagen, found parked not far from where her body was found.

It was the little car that drew police attention from the start. The ignition coil and condensor had been torn out. The keys were in the ignition lock. School books were on the passenger's seat.

FROM THIS EVIDENCE, the police theorized that Miss Bates' killer

(See MURDER, Page B-2)

Typed confession letter receives close attention of police experts

By JOHN MONTGOMERY

Police today received an unsigned letter confessing the knife murder of Cheri Jo Bates, an 18-year-old Riverside City College student whose lifeless body was found on the RCC campus on Halloween Day.

"We have received a number of crank phone calls during the investigation," said Capt. Irvin Cross, head of the detective division, "but this is the first written confession."

A COPY OF THE typed confession also was sent to The Press. Postal authorities are examining it.

The envelope containing the letter to the police was addressed to "Homicide Detail, Riverside." Unstamped, the letter was found by postal authorities late yesterday.

The confession read in part:

"She was young and beautiful. But now she is battered and dead. She is not the first and she will not be the last.

"I lay awake nights thinking about my next victim . . .

"Keep your sisters, daughters and wives off the streets and alleys. Miss Bates was stupid. She went to the slaughter like a lamb. She did not put up a struggle . . .

"IT WAS A BALL. First I pulled the middle wire from the distributor. Then I waited for her in the library and followed her out after about two minutes. The battery must have been dead by then. I then offered to help. She was very willing to talk with me."

(Previous news stories have reported that the condensor and the coil of Miss Bates' Volkswagen were torn out. Police said today it also was true that the center wire on the distributor had been disconnected.)

"I told her that my car was down the street and that I would give her a lift home. When we were away from the library walking, I said it was about time. She asked me 'About time for what?' I said it was about time to die . . .

". . . . one thing was on my mind. Making her pay for the brush offs that she had given me during the years prior . . . I plunged the knife into her and it broke . . . I am not sick, I am insane. But that will not stop the game . . . "

Police said today they had no evidence that the knife used to kill Miss Bates, which has not been found, broke during the struggle.

Although the letter was typed, the envelope had been addressed with a felt pen. The letter itself was typed entirely in capital letters.

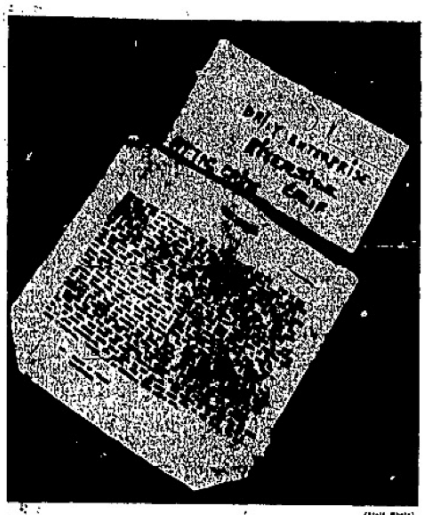
A NOTATION at the bottom said copies had been sent to the newspaper and to the chief of police. The chief had not received his copy at noon today.

At the top of the letter was the word "By," followed by a long black line. No name or signature appeared anywhere on the letter.

Police said they will scrutinize the copies of the letter for clues. They said it was impossible to tell immediately whether the letter was the work of a crank.

Riverside Enterprise 11/30/66

Anonymous writer tells of killing Cheri Jo Bates



(Staff Photo)

CONFESSION LETTER—Unsigned letter, typed in all capital letters, confesses the murder of Riverside City College coed Cheri Bates. This carbon copy was sent to the Daily Enterprise. Another carbon went to the Police Department. The originalhas not been discovered.

Reproduction of confession letter

(This is a partial reproduction of the anonymous letter of confession of the murder of Cheri Jo Bates. A relatively few sentences or phrases have been omitted as excessively shocking. The omissions are indicated by dots.)

THE CONFESSION

By_____

SHE WAS YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL. BUT NOW SHE IS BATTERED AND DEAD. SHE IS NOT THE FIRST AND SHE WILL NOT BE THE LAST. I LAY AWAKE NIGHTS THINKING ABOUT MY NEXT VICTIM. MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE BEAUTIFUL BLOND THAT BABYSITS NEAR THE LITTLE STORE AND WALKS DOWN THE DARK ALLEY EACH EVENING ABOUT SEVEN. OR MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE SHAPELY BLUE EYED BRUNETT THAT SAID NO WHEN I ASKED HER FOR A DATE IN HIGH SCHOOL. BUT MAYBE IT WILL NOT BE EITHER . . . SO DON'T MAKE IT TO EASY FOR ME. KEEP YOUR SISTERS, DAUGHTERS, AND WIVES OFF THE STREETS AND ALSO. MISS BATES WAS STUPID. SHE WENT TO THE SLAUGHTER LIKE A LAMB. SHE DID NOT PUT UP A STRUGGLE. BUT I DID. IT WAS A BALL. I FIRST PULLED THE MIDDLE WIRE FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR. THEN I WAITED FOR HER IN THE LIBRARY AND FOLLOWED HER OUT AFTER ABOUT TWO MINUTES. THE BATTERY MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT DEAD BY THEN. I THEN OFFERED TO HELP. SHE WAS TIEN VERY WILLING TO TALC WITH ME. I TOLD HER TIAT MY CAR WAS DOWN THE STREET AND TIAT I WOULD GIVE HER A LIFT HOME. WHEN WE WERE AWAY FROM THE LIBRARY WALKING, I SAID IT WASABOUT TIME. SHE ASKED ME "ABOUT TIME FOR WIAT." I SAID IT WAS ABUT TIME FOR HER TO DIE I GRABBED HER AROIND TIE NECK WITH MY IAND OVER HER MOUTH AND MY OTHER HAND WITH A SMALL KNIFE AT HER THROAT. SHE WENT VERY WILLINGLY . . . BUT ONLY ONE THING WAS ON MY MIND. MAKING HER PAY FOR TIE BRUSH OFFS TIAT SHE HAD GIVEN ME DURING TIE YEARS PRIOR. SHE IIED IIARD. SHE SQUIRMED AND SHOOK AS I CHOCKED IIER, AND HER LIPS TVICHED. SHE LET OUT A SCREAM ONCE AND I KICKED HER HEAD TO SHUT IER UP. I PLUNGED TIE KNIFE INTO HER AND IT BROKE. I TIEN FINISHED THE JOB BY CUTTING IER TIROAT. I AM NOT SIK. I AM INSANE. BUT TINY WILL NOT STOP THE GAME. THIS LETTER SHOULI BE PUBLISHED FOR AIL TO READ IT. IT JUST MIGHT SAVE TIAT GIRL IN THE ALLEY. BUT TIAT'S UP TO YOU. IT WILL IE ON YOUR CONSCIENCE. NOT MINE. YES I DID MAKE TIAT CALL TO YOU AISO. IT WAS JUST A WARNING. BEWARE. I AM STALKING YOUR GIRLS NOW.

CC. CHIEF OF POLICE
ENTERPRISE

Warns that he plans to kill again

By BOB BODENHAMER
Daily Enterprise Staff Writer

Police said last nigh they are sending two copies of an unsigned letter confessing the murder of Riverside City College coed Cheri Bates to the state crime lab for examination.

The two identical letters, typed in all-capital letters, were received yesterday by the Police Department and the Daily Enterprise.

IN IT, the anonymous writer describes in detail the knife-slaying of the 18-year-old college freshman on Oct. 30 and warns that he intends to kill other women.

Capt. Irvin L. Cross, head of the detective division, said last night he did not know whether the letter was the work of a crank. He said it would be investigated thoroughly, but that until the state lab in Sacramento reports on its findings, he would prefer not to comment on what weight to give the letter as a clue h the murder case.

BOTH COPIES of the letter turned up yesterday in thepost office. The envelopes in each case were addressed with a felt pen and did not have stamps on them. They were postmarked Nov. 29 (Tuesday).

Both letters were carbon copies of an original, which had no turned up last night. One was addressed to "Homicide Detail, Riverside" and the other to "Daily Enterpase, Riverside."

AT THE BOTTOM of the copies there is a notation that says copies were sent to the Daily Enterprise and the "Chief of Police." As of last night the chief had not received a third copy, and Capt. Cross theorized the copy addressed to the homicide detail might have been the one the sender meant.

Near the end of the letter, the writer makes reference o a phone call, saying, "Yes I did make that call to you also. It was just a warning."

BUT THE LETTER does not make clear whether the call was made to police or someon else, and Capt. Cross said there had been no call to police that he was aware of in which the caller made a confession or statements that matched statements in the letter.

Capt. Cross said polie received numerous crank calls afte the murder, but nothing which could be linked to this letter.

AT ONE POINT in the letter, the writer says he "pulled he middle wire from the distributor" of Cheri's car, which was parked near where her body was found. Newsstories had reported that the condensor and coil were torn from the car. Police said yesterday it was true that the center wire of the distributor has also been disconnected.

In another place the writer said the knife broke when he stabbed the girl. Police said yesterday they had no evidence that the knife used to kill Cheri, which has not been found, broke during the slaying.

CAPT. CROSS said the crime lab's job in tracing the writer of the letter would be easier if the original copy were available, but felt that the carbon copies and the envelopes, with their hand-printed addresses, would offer potential clues.

Capt. Cross said the police department's letter turned up in the department's post office box. The one addressed to the Daily Enterprise was found later in the postage due section of the post office.

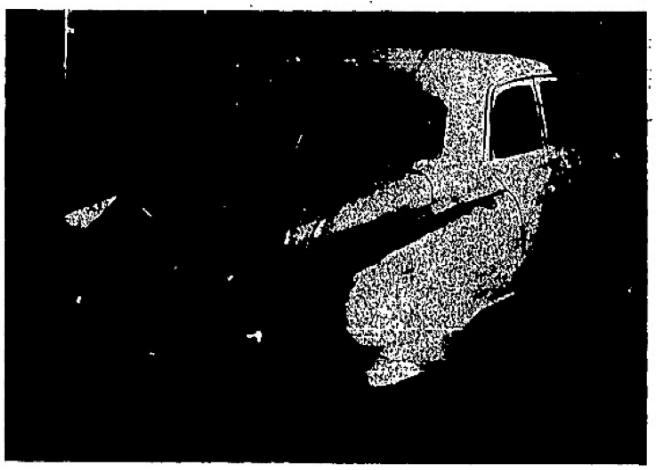
The Daily Enterprise turned its copy of the letter over to detectives for investigation.

WHILE DETECTIVES prepared to delve into the confession letter in an attempt to speed solution of the month-old murder, the police department also disclosed that a 1947-52 Studebaker with light-colored, oxidized paint is being sought.

Police said witnesses who participated in a recent re-enactment of the murder night at the college campus told them a car of that description was parked on Riverside avenue just south of Terracina about 7 p.m. on the night of the murder.

A photo of a car nearly identical to the one being sought was taken by the Daily Enterprise and appears with this story. Police ask anyone who knows of such a car to contact them.

(For a background sory of the fatal investigation of the murder, see page H-18.)



(Staff Photo)

A LOOK-ALIKE—Detectives invesigating the murder of Cheri Bates are looking fora car almost identical to this one. Police say a 1947-52 model Studebaker with light-colored, oxidized paint was parked on Riverside avenue just south of Terracina about 7 p.m. on the night that the Riverside City College freshman was stabbed to death. Detectives said a recent re-enactment of the murder at the college campus provided his information. They ask anyone who knows of a car similar to this one, used by police to stage this photograph, to contact the Police Department.

THE DAILY ENTERPRISE
A Newspaper for Riverside County

County page

Riverside, California — Thursday, December 1, 1966

After six months coed's murder remains puzzle to detectives

By JACK MATHEWS
Press-Enterprise Staff Writer

Exactly six months ago this morning, the battered and slashed body of 18-year-old Cheri Jo Bates was found in a secluded driveway on the Riverside City College campus.

Riverside police investigators had very few leads to work with at that time and now they have even less.

The only new development in this baffling case, the only unsolved murder on record in Riverside, is the announcement by Cheri Jo's father that he will offer a reward for information leading to the arrest of his daughter's killer.

JOSEPH BATES SAID yesterday that he has wanted to offer a reward since the day Cheri Jo was found but financial difficulties have prevented him from doing so. The 43-year-old Corona Naval Ordnance Laboratory machinist said that now, however, he is going to get a loan on his house and offer the reward.

"The amount of the reward will depend on what sort of arrangements can be made with the bank," he said.

Det. Sgt. Leroy Gren, who is in charge of investigation of the Cheri Jo Bates case, said he welcomes the news of a reward.

"We have always felt that there were people who might have information helpful to us who have not yet come forward," Gren said.

"We still get calls every week," Gren added, "and we check each one out However, they usually lead back to something that we have already investigated."

CHERI'S FATHER still finds it difficult to talk about the tragedy, referring to it as "this thing that happened."

Bates said that his wife, Irene, had divorced him slightly more than a year before the murder and his only other child, Michael, had left for the Navy.

"Cheri and I were just getting used to living alone together when this thing happened," Bates said. "It's a lonely life without her"



CHERI JO BATES
. . . Her killer still free

Bates last saw his daughter alive at 10 a.m. on October 30. She was playing a phonograph at the time and Bates was on his way to the beach.

Cheri told him that she would be home studying all day unless she decided to go to the library for books. She did. Books found in her car were stamped that day by the library and the car itself was found parked near the library annex on Terracina.

SEVERAL PEOPLE in the area heard screams about 10:30 p.m. and the sound of an old car starting up and driving away. None of them, however called the police that night.

At 6:30 the next morning — Halloween morning—a campus groundskeeper found Cherie lying face down in the dirt driveway of the library annex.

From the evidence at the murder scene, police investigators theorized that the killer may have known Cheri. Her car had been tampered with so it would not start and its keys were found in the ignition.

There was no signs of a struggle anywhere except where the body was found

The only physical evidence any of them had to work with was a man's wristwatch found next to the body, some greasy fingerprints found on Cheri's car and skin and debris found under her fingernails.

AFTER THOROUGH ANALYSIS by various governmental agencies, including the FBI and the California Criminal Investigation Bureau, none of this evidence produced any positive leads

To belay some of the understandable fears felt by female students at the college, mercury vapor lights were installed in the library area a few days after the murder. The area itself has been changed considerably since then.

The last major piece of evidence came November 30 in the form of a confession letter sent to both the Riverside police department and the Press-Enterprise.

The letter explained in detail how the writer allegedly tampered with Cheri's car, waited for her to return from the library and coaxed her away on the pretense of giving her a lift. The letter told of how Cheri struggled while she was being stabbed to death and the writer said there would be more killings to come.

Though the letter has turned up nothing in the way of evidence, police have not discounted it.

"There were a couple of things in the letter that were not mentioned in newspaper accounts," Sgt Gren said, "but of course it is possible that the writer simply guessed right."

Gren did not point out which things in the letter he was referring to.

Has the Cheri Jo Bates case, then, reached a complete dead end?

"I can't help feeling discouraged after this long a time," said Gren. "It is pretty well established that the longer a crime goes, the harder it becomes to solve. But we are, in no way, giving up."

THE INVESTIGATION has reached the stage, Gren said, where you work backwards through the material collected looking for something that might have been missed earlier.

Cheri's father is also discouraged, but not to the point of giving up.

"I'll never give up hoping that the man is caught," Bates said. "That's why I want to put up a reward. Perhaps it will bring in some bit of information that will help the police solve this thing that happened."

Bates said he will meet with bank officials this week to discuss the house loan and determine what size reward he will be able to offer.

Riverside Independent Enterprise 4/30/67

Newspaper links Zodiac killer to slaying of RCC coed in 1966

The San Francisco Chronicle said today the unsolved stabbing death of a Riverside City College coed in 1966 may have been one of the first works of the crazed Zodiac killer

But Riverside police detective Capt Irvin Cross, who has seen the evidence which the Chronicle says links the killings, said this morning he isn't that sure

THE CHRONICLE bases its case on the similarity between notes known to be from the Zodiac and notes sent to the Riverside police shortly after Cheri Jo Bates, an 18-year-old freshman at RCC, was found stabbed to death on the campus or Oct. 30, 1966.

Cross won't dismiss the idea that the Zodiac is responsible for her death, but says, "Until we get reports from the handwriting man, there's no way of saying for sure"

But he said he still believes a local man is responsible for her death.

In January of 1968, police began to suspect a local man on the basis of many clues they had uncovered

But they never had enough evidence to arrest him, they said. He is in jail now on a another charge, Cross said

Even if the letters were written by Zodiac, Cross said, "there was nothing in the letters to indicate that our local boy didn't do it"

Cross speculated that, even if the letters were written by the Zodiac, he could have been in the area and wrote the letter merely to claim responsibility for the killings.

MOST STRIKING of the similarities between the notes is the signature of the one sent nearly six months after the death.

It was signed with a "Z," the trademark which later came to be associated with Zodiac, who police have so far credited with at least five kilings in the San Francisco Bay area.

Copies of known Zodiac notes and the Riverside notes have been sent to a state handwriting expert, who said that at first glance there was a possibility the writer was the same

But he said he needed more time to make a detailed examination

Miss Bates body was found Halloween morning in a driveway alongside a house on Terracina Drive A man's Timex watch and a heelprint were the only clues left by her murderer

She had been beaten stabbed repeatedly in the face and neck, and her throat had been cut She had not been sexually molested She had gone to the RCC library that night for some books

The letter which a Chronicle reporter compares with previous Zodiac notes, was sent to police and to Miss Bates' father

THEY READ, "Bates had to die — there will be more

It was signed with a "Z"

In January of 1968, a custodian at RCC reported to police he had discovered a poem written on a desk at the college which might be related to the case.

"Sick of living/unwilling to die.
Cut.
Clean
if red
blood spurting, dripping, spilling,
all over her new dress.
Oh well,
it was red anyway
life draining into an uncertain death
she won't die, this time
someone will find her
just wait till next time."
It was signed, "rh"

At the time, police said, the note was not directly linked with the killing of Miss Bates because of the time lapse in the discovery of the poem

They also said they did not know who the "rh" was who signed it.

The first communication from Miss Bates' killer was received by The Press-Enterprise and the police on Nov 31, 1966.

Titled "The Confession," the typewritten note described how the killing took place

IT TOLD HOW the killer was planning other murders, and then went into detail about Miss Bates' death. It told how the murderer had disabled her Volkswagen by pulling out the main wire to the distributor. Then, he said, he waited for her in the school library and followed her out. He then offered to help

Police felt the letter was genuine because the method used to disable the car never had been revealed publicly Only the murderer could have known.

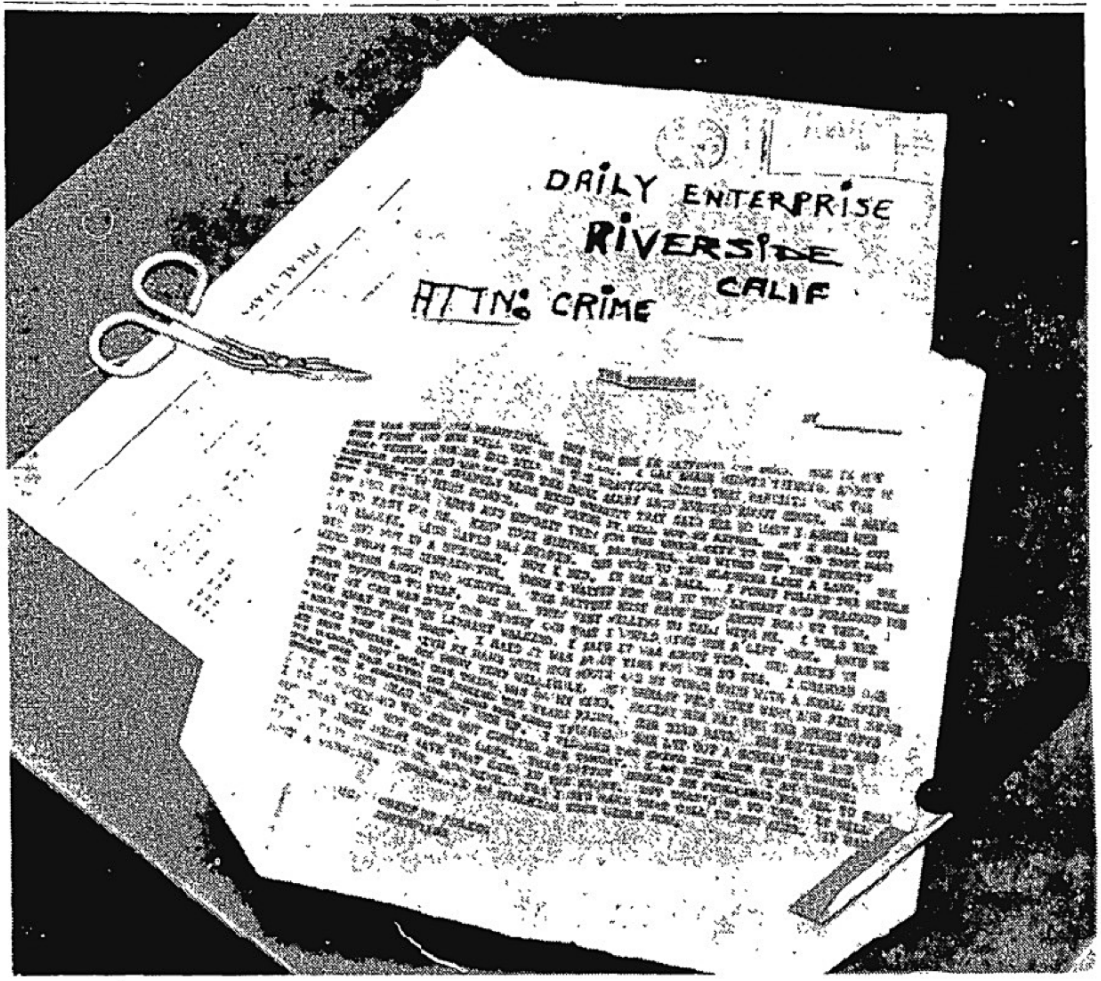
After more details about her death, he commented·

". . . I am not sick I am insane. But that will not stop the game. This letter should be published for all to read it."

He ended the letter with the warning, ". . . Beware. I am stalking your girls now."

The Press

Riverside, California Monday, November 16, 1970 Section B — Page One



Murderer's note

This is the note sent to the Press-Enterprise and to Riverside police about a month after the murder of Cheri Jo Bates. Police used a razor to open it and scissors to extract it from the envelope without disturbing fingerprints which might have been left on it by the writer.

New Clues Link Zodiac to Earlier Killing

From Page 1

minutes or so selecting three texts dealing with English composition and emerged into the autumn darkness at 6:30 p.m.

She turned the ignition key. The starter groaned and groaned but the engine wouldn't catch.

PASSENGER

Suddenly, a man appeared at the passenger side window and, apparently, offered his assistance. He, too, failed to start the car. Then the man either suggested he drive her home or to a nearby service station. In any event, Miss Bates walked off with him toward a campus parking lot.

The next dawn, a college groundskeeper found the blonde coed's body.

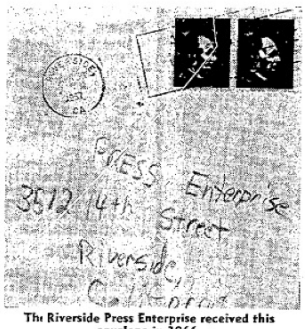
The popular cheerleader had been brutally beaten, repeatedly stabbed with a short-bladed knife, and her throat slashed.

She had not been sexually molested.

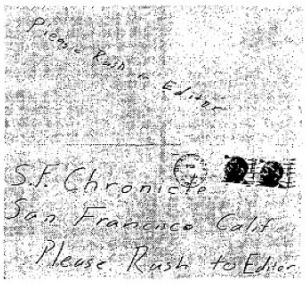
A heel print and a Timex wristwatch — torn off in a fierce struggle — were the only clues the killer left at the scene.

Riverside residents had utmost confidence the killer would be quickly caught. The police of this city of 107,000 had until then boasted often the proud fact they have never failed to solve a murder.

What police felt was a major break came exactly one month later, on Nov. 30, 1966.



The Riverside Press Enterprise received this envelope in 1966



This is the envelope mailed to The Chronicle by the Zodiac killer

ENVELOPES

Two unstamped envelopes — one addressed in large block print to the Riverside Press-Enterprise, the other to "Homicide Detail" — were dropped into a rural mailbox. Each contained a blurred carbon copy of a purported "confession" by Miss Bates' killer. The typewritten message read in part:

"She was young and beautiful. But now she is battered and dead. She is not the first and she will not be the last.

"... Miss Bates was stupid. She went to the slaughter like a lamb. She did not put up a struggle. But I did. It was a ball ... I said it was about time. She asked me, 'about time for what?' I said it was about time for her to die ...

"... I am not sick. I am insane. But that will not stop the game ...

"... Beware ... I am stalking your girls now," the confession, unsigned, concluded.

DETAILS

There has never been any question the confession was from the murderer. In it included details about the crime police had kept top secret in particular the fact Miss Bates' car had been sabotaged by pulling out the middle wire of the distributor.

Because the confession indicated the killer had once been given "the brush-off" by Miss Bates, Riverside Detective Captain Irvin Cross and his homicide investigators turned their search toward possible rejected suitors. Literally hundreds of young men — mostly fellow students, but military personnel from several nearby bases as well — were checked out and cleared. The murder of Cheri Jo Bates remained unsolved.

KILLING

On April 30, 1967, exactly six months after the killing, three stamped letters — addressed to the Press-Enterprise, the police, and, cruelly, to the slain girl's father — were dropped into a city mailbox.

"BATES HAD TO DIE THERE WILL BE MORE" was printed in large, scrawled letters on each of the notes pencilled on pages of lined 3-hole school paper.

At about the same time, a college janitor reported to police someone had defaced a library study desk by scratching a gory poem into the varnished top with a ballpoint pen. The poem read:

"Sick of living unwilling to die.
"cut, clean if red! clean.
"blood spurting, dripping, spilling
"all over her new dress.
"oh well, it was red anyway.
"life draining into an uncertain death.
"she won't die, this time.
"someone'll find her.
"just wait till next time."

Beneath the weird wording appeared two lower-case letters—"r" and "h"—which were interpreted to be the initials of the author.

The three "BATES HAD TO DIE" notes and the desk poem were not connected to each other at the time, nor to the confession letters received a few months earlier. They were decided to be the works of sick-minded hoaxers. After a few futile police attempts to find the authors, the notes were routinely tucked away into then already-voluminous Murder File 382-41 and the desk stored in the evidence vault.

They remained there until last week when The Chronicle learned of their existance, examined them, and then pointed out to Riverside police:

- That the penciled printing bears eerie and strong resemblance to that of Zodiac's felt-tip pen lettering in the numerous communications he has sent this paper.
- That he printing on the "BATES HAD TO DIE" envelopes seemed to match exactly the desk poem writing.

And perhaps the most meaningful discovery was that two of the three notes had been signed with a "z."

Other similarities between Miss Bates' murder and Zodiac's known killings were also pointed out by The Chronicle to those top of investigation and conferences with police in Riverside.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion, Captain Cross immediately forwarded the three notes and a photograph of the strange desk poem to Sacramento for examination by specialists of the State Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Identification.

The CII handwriting expert, Sherwood Morrill, after preliminary examination of the Riverside evidence, said it is quite possible the Zodiac killer authored the notes and poem.

There are minor differences, but, says Morrill, this could be our Zodiac's ever-worsening mental condition—a murderer growing more and more confident he can kill at will and never be caught. He agreed the notes and poem were done by the same person.

CAR

If the man who signed the notes "z" is, as police here now tend to believe, Zodiac, they consider it likely he is also the killer who sabotaged Miss Bates' car and then lured her to her death.

They are not without reason, excitedly working to determine if the presumed initials "rh" on the poem might not be those of Zodiac, who has many times boasted in his writings of having included clues to his identity.

Additional descriptive details about Zodiac have also been obtained by The Chronicle in an exclusive interview with one intended victim who, by chance, escaped unscathed.

Kathleen Johns, 23, driving from her former home in San Bernardino to the Bay Area to visit relatives on the evening of Sunday, March 22, noticed a late model car following her after she passed through Modesto. The driver began blinking his headlight off and on when she turned onto lightly-traveled State Highway 132.

Eventually, concern that something was wrong with her car overcame her fear and she pulled to the side of the road and stopped. So did the following car.

A man, clean-shaven and neatly dressed, approached, said her left rear wheel was "wobbling" and that he'd fix it if she'd like. Mrs. Johns breathed a sign of relief and readily accepted the offer.

"It's all fixed now," he told her a few minutes later, then headed for his car.

WHEEL

Mrs. Johns started to drive away. She went but a few feet when the left rear wheel fell off and the station wagon thudded to a stop.

The man came back, said with a sincere smile "the trouble's worse than I thought," and offered her a ride to a brightly-lit service station visible a quarter-mile up the road.

Mrs. Johns, a 10-month-old daughter to worry about and seven months pregnant besides, gratefully accepted and with the child, Jennifer, got into the stranger's car because "he seemed so nice."

Two hours later and many miles away a passing semi was flagged down by an hysterical Mrs. Johns. She later told this terrifying tale to police:

CAR

Once inside the car, the stranger had proceeded to drive off the highway into a network of deserted farm roads. Thinking him a man about to make a pass, she sarcastically asked "do you always go around helping people like this?"

"When I get through with them they don't need help," she quoted the soft-spoken stranger as answering.

After that, for nearly two hours, he drove slowly by the farmlands, every so often turning to look at her and say such things as "you know I'm going to kill you" and "you know you're going to die."

"I was terrified," Mrs. Johns told The Chronicle. "I knew ... I knew he meant it. He said it over and over in a calm, quiet voice and you could feel he meant every word. I just sat there waiting for it to happen."

STOP

Suddenly the car screeched almost to a stop. The would-be killer had almost driven the wrong direction onto a freeway exit ramp.

Mrs. Johns saw her chance and took it. She grabbed Jennifer, leaped from the accelerating car and ran deep into a field where she finally threw herself — on top of Jennifer so she could hold the baby quiet — into an irrigation ditch.

SLAYING

From there she could see the stranger, a flashlight in hand, trying to find her. After a while he got back in his car and drove slowly off.



Escaped victim identified this sketch

Asked that night to describe the stranger, Mrs. Johns gave police her estimate of his age, height, weight, and hair-coloring, then her eyes drifted to a station bulletin board and she screamed out "Oh my God ... that's him ... that's him right there."

It was a WANTED poster with an artist's sketch of Zodiac.

It had been distributed statewide by San Francisco police after the Oct. 10, 1969, slaying of cab driver Paul Stine, which Zodiac proved was his doing by mailing a bloody swatch of the victim's shirt to The Chronicle. The picture was based on accounts of eyewitnesses who saw Zodiac flee the Presidio Heights murder scene.

To the description police released then (see accompanying photo), Mrs. Johns remembers these details about Zodiac and his car:

- His chin had traces of pock marks such as can be caused by acne.
- He was wearing a dark blue nylon windbreaker-style jacket over dark blue or black woolen bell-bottom pants.
- His shoes, in her words, were "spit-shined," the high-gloss black reflecting the interior light of the car.
- He wore black thick-rimmed glasses — held tightly on his head by a thin band of elastic such as glasses-wearing athletes and some working men use.
- He spoke in a monotone with no noticeable accent.
- The car was a late-model American make: a light-colored two-door with black bucket seats between which was a sporty console-style automatic transmission gear shift. At the front end of the console was an ashtray, in which, on the right-hand side, was a built-in cigaret lighter.
- The car, bearing the old California license plates, was messy. Clothes and papers were scattered on the dashboard and on both the front and back seats. Mostly men's clothing, but also some smaller, patterned tee-shirts such as a child of 8 to 12 years might wear.
- On the dashboard were a couple of colored plastic scouring pads, and also a black, rubber-gap flashlight.

Few, if any, of these details about Zodiac have ever been made public before. At the time the news media figured, wrongly, she'd made a mistake in identifying a "Bay Area" killer as the man who removed her from Modesto and the story was largely ignored.

Police, however, feel she did meet with and escaped from Zodiac. They base this on a thorough examination of details of her story.



CHERI JO BATES
1966 murder

And also because of a Zodiac letter received by The Chronicle: in which he bragged about his near miss and the fact he'd gone back to Mrs. Johns' sabotaged car and burned it to the ground. When police found the station wagon it had, indeed, been set afire.

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Detectives to meet in Sacramento

Cheri Jo Bates may have been first to die in Zodiac's string of murders

By JIM BETTINGER

On the night before Halloween, five years ago tonight, Cheri Jo Bates was murdered.

Now, five years later, state crime experts think the infamous Zodiac may have begun his string of murders by stabbing and slashing the pretty Riverside City College coed to death in a driveway that night.

ZODIAC HIMSELF, in cryptic, coded letters to several newspapers, has said he did it. And the handwriting in those letters matches the handwriting on a note sent to the Press-Enterprise six months after Cheri Jo was slain, according to state handwriting experts.

The scrawled note said simply, "Bates had to die There will be more." And it was signed, "Z".

The experts also say Zodiac carved a bizarre poem, "Sick of living/ unwilling to die," on the underside of a wooden desk at Riverside City College.

But they couldn't say whether Zodiac addressed two copies of a typewritten letter, entitled "The Confession", which were received by the Press-Enterprise and the Riverside Police Department exactly one month after Cheri Jo died.

THAT LETTER told in fairly complete fashion how Cheri Jo supposedly was slain — and it contained details and clues that had not been made public at the time.

But the Riverside Police Department isn't so sure Zodiac killed Cheri Jo. They've had a "hot suspect" since January 1968, and Detective Capt. Irv Cross maintains "there was nothing in the letters to indicate our local boy didn't do it."

Police never had enough evidence to arrest him for Cheri Jo's murder.

And his handwriting doesn't match Zodiac's.

BUT THERE ARE enough, just enough, connections between Zodiac and Cheri Jo to make it him the plausible killer.

Cross will be in Sacramento next week, with all the information the Riverside Police Department has on Cheri Jo's murder, to meet with detectives from other departments that have suspected Zodiac murders and with a special state task force on Zodiac.

The other departments are the San Francisco and Vallejo police departments and the Napa sheriff's department.

And how did Cheri Jo die? This much is known for sure:

ON THE DAY of her death, she and her father, Joseph, went to Mass at St. Catherine's Church on Brockton Avenue and then to a restaurant for breakfast.

Her father went to the beach, but she stayed in town to study. When he got home, at 5:30 p.m., he found a note: "Dad — went to RCC Library."

At 6:30 a.m. the next morning, a gardener found her body — stabbed and her throat slashed — lying face down in a driveway on the RCC campus. She had died sometime between 6 and 11 p.m. the night before.



CHERI JO BATES

From there on the police scenario is based on a combination of deduction and assumptions. Police believe Cheri Jo drove her Volkswagen to the campus a little before 6 p.m., checked out three books and came out.

SOMEONE, in the meantime, disabled her car and waited for her. Police believe she knew the man.

When Cheri Jo couldn't start her car, the man offered either to drive her home or to a gas station, and Cheri Jo agreed.

As they were walking, the man attacked her and killed her.

Police detectives have spent thousands of man-hours — "about 8,000," Cross says — on the investigation, but the possible connection between Zodiac and Cheri Jo didn't turn up until a year ago.

THE LINK WAS turned up by Paul Avery, a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, who has written about Zodiac extensively and is now writing a book about the series of murders.

If that connection is real, it will cap an investigation that has always had its sensational aspects.

For instance, two weeks after the murder, 65 persons who had been at the library the night Cheri Jo was killed returned for a re-enactment of the scene.

Each was asked when he had arrived, where he had parked and whether there was anyone there on the night of the murder who wasn't at the re-enactment.

SEVERAL PERSONS have been under suspicion — one man even confessed, but it turned out he was in a mental hospital on the night Cheri Jo was killed — but most have been cleared.

So the investigation inches along — "We're handling it on a piecemeal basis now," Cross says — and it is definitely not closed.

Another detective has said that during the investigation. "I can't help feeling discouraged after this long a time," he said. "It is pretty well established that the longer a crime goes, the harder it becomes to solve."

That was Lt. Leroy Gren speaking, and when he said it, he was a sergeant, and Cheri Jo Bates had been dead only six months.

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