

PROLOGUE

Nancy Hauptman is a name most residents of Kansas City, Missouri, recognize. The sixty-eight-year-old heiress to a fortune from her father's grain trading empire has always dressed her petite frame in designer clothing. Her once blond hair has turned gray, but she is still active in Kansas City's social circles. Nancy grew up in the fashionable Country Club Plaza district of Kansas City. She sold her father's mansion and downsized to a condominium in the same neighborhood in the early 1990's. As the daughter of a privileged family, she attended the best schools and graduated with a liberal arts degree from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She still keeps in touch with several of her sorority sisters via telephone, and lately using email.

Although she has no children, she was married in 1971 to a struggling writer who was never published. This didn't bother her since she had a generous trust fund

and admired the “artist’s struggle to succeed.” After her alcoholic husband died in 1983, she did not remarry. She had several friendly relationships with men since then but none of them turned serious. Nancy honestly felt that these men were motivated by the social status they would gain by being seen with her rather than a genuine heartfelt affection.

Nancy has always been a benefactress of cultural events in and around Kansas City. One of her major interests involved supporting public libraries. For example, she sponsored monthly events where unknown local authors presented their new works. At one of these events, she met retired homicide detective Warren Petersen. The seventy-year-old author wrote a book entitled *Cold Cases From My Police Career*. It describes eight cases that Detective Petersen was unable to solve during his career as a homicide detective. While not impressed with the author, she was intrigued by the book. She thought it would be a fun challenge to gather a small group of friends to solve these cold cases. She reasoned, after all, isn’t she smarter than the police detective who wrote the book?

She contacted several local friends, but they weren’t interested in spending time working on cold cases the police couldn’t solve. Nancy contacted several of her sorority sisters and found that two were interested in joining her group. Bridgette Sullivan of Boston, also sixty-eight years old, graduated from Northwestern in Nancy’s class with a degree in nursing. They regularly

stayed in touch since graduation until Bridgette's husband was diagnosed eight years ago with Alzheimer's disease. Over the past three years, he required constant supervision and considerable nursing from Bridgette. After he died six months ago, she was able to spend her time on other activities. She alternated visits to her three out-of-state children since her husband's death, but that had become a tiresome routine as well. Bridgette was flattered that Nancy thought her talents could help in such a challenging pursuit and accepted the invitation.

Bridgette suggested that one of her unmarried friends, Mary O'Neal of Boston, age sixty-six, might be interested in joining their group. Mary had retired from the Boston Gazette as Assistant Editor seven years earlier after a management shakeup. At one time, it was thought that Mary might someday become the Managing Editor of the newspaper. But the change in management prematurely ended Mary's publishing career. Since then, Mary has been a freelance writer and worked on special projects for the newspaper. Recently these assignments have become few and far between. With little work to keep her busy, she was becoming claustrophobic and bored in her tiny Boston apartment. Mary was looking forward to spending time and energy working on cold cases with her good friend Bridgette.

Nancy contacted another sorority sister from Columbus, Ohio. Sabine Mueller, sixty-seven years old, studied library science at Northwestern and graduated one year after Nancy and Bridgette. After graduating, she

married her college sweetheart and moved to Columbus, Ohio, when her husband's job was transferred there. They were happy in Columbus and had two sons before the marriage was irreparably damaged. She divorced him after twenty-five years when he had an affair with a secretary at work. Their sons have since moved away when their jobs required relocating to the West Coast. Sabine thought the chance to reconnect with her old friends while working to solve the cold cases would be a welcome diversion from a disappointing retirement.

Sabine said she knew another librarian that might be interested in joining their group. Susan Higgins of Omaha had just retired at age sixty-six. She had a long career with a large corporation located in Omaha and her specialty was conducting information searches on the Internet. Sabine met Susan at a conference eleven years earlier and they have kept in touch via email since then. They believed they were kindred spirits because Susan's husband had also strayed from his wedding vows after thirty-one years of marriage. Unlike Sabine, Susan did not have a trust fund. She lived modestly by herself on her librarian's salary before retiring. Since she retired, she has relied on her savings and monthly Social Security payments.

Nancy was elated when her little group was complete in early summer. She called it the "Cold Case Club" and they began working to solve the first case in Detective Petersen's book. This unsolved Kansas City homicide involved the shooting death of Donald Dugan,

age twenty-four, at a do-it-yourself car wash in 1998. He was shot once in the chest with a 9 mm automatic pistol. The only witness was Mr. Dugan's girlfriend, Ashley Pate. The twenty-two-year-old Ms. Pate had been drinking at the time of the murder and could not describe or identify any suspects during the police investigation.

Nancy called Detective Petersen to ask for tips on how she should begin her investigation. He gave her several suggestions. First, visit the murder scene and determine the spot where the body was found. Second, see if any windows or surveillance cameras overlook the spot. If so, talk to the owners of the cameras and residents who might have seen the murder. Third, talk to the witnesses for any leads or possible suspects. Nancy took notes and sent an email to her Cold Case Club members for suggestions.

Sabine Mueller agreed to call the witness, Ms. Pate, to discuss the murder. Sabine reported that the witness couldn't remember anything useful. Susan Higgins agreed to research the police reports online and use satellite maps to view the crime scene. She forwarded these documents to the other Club members via email.

Several Club members suggested that Nancy go to the crime scene since she was the only Club member residing in Kansas City. Because the scene was in a rough part of town, she didn't want to go there alone. Nancy called Detective Petersen, hoping to persuade him to go with her. He said he didn't think that anything could be found at the crime scene now that he couldn't find there

in 1998. Nancy called him several more times hoping to change his mind. But he didn't and became irritated by her persistence. After thirty days, the Cold Case Club gave up trying to solve the first cold case in Detective Petersen's book.

In mid-summer, the Club started working on the second case in the cold case book. The victim, Sharon Evans, was found murdered beside her disabled car in 2002 near the intersection of Interstate 435 and US Highway 71, near Grandview, Missouri. The thirty-four-year-old Ms. Evans was shot with a .22-caliber gun once in the neck and once in the chest. The gun was never found and the groove pattern on the slugs didn't match any bullet groove patterns the police had on file. No witnesses or suspects were listed in Petersen's book. Nancy Hauptman called Detective Petersen to discuss the case. He told her that the car had a flat tire and somebody might have stopped to help Ms. Evans, then decided to rob and kill her. Since there were no leads, the chances of solving this case were remote. After one week, he suggested skipping to the third cold case. Nancy agreed and the Club started working on the next murder case.

The third cold case involved the year 2000 murder of a ne'er-do-well named Tommy Fields, age thirty-one, with a record of multiple arrests for selling drugs. His body was found in Swope Park, but there were no witnesses or suspects listed in Detective Petersen's book. He told Nancy that he suspected another drug dealer,

William Teeters, had shot Fields with a .38-caliber gun, but he couldn't prove it. Petersen said Mr. Teeters, age forty-two at the time of the Fields murder, had an alibi and wouldn't crack when he was questioned in 2000. Nancy sent her notes to the Cold Case Club members for consideration. Susan Higgins agreed to acquire satellite maps and review police reports for this case. She pulled the maps and reports during the following week. After reviewing the reports, she found a small discrepancy between the date of the murder and Mr. Teeters' alibi. She sent the maps and reports to the other Club members and noted the discrepancy in her email. Nancy organized a conference call to discuss their next steps. They decided to take the information to the Kansas City Police Department for their review. With Nancy's public profile, she had no trouble obtaining an audience with the detective in charge of the case. Nancy was pleased that homicide Detective Juan Ramirez agreed to discuss the case when they met in early August. Ramirez was a slender, energetic forty-year-old Hispanic man who wore a suit and tie to the meeting. She was impressed with his professionalism and demeanor. Nancy was also a sucker for the deference he showed her during their meeting.

Detective Ramirez began investigating the discrepancy between the alibi and the date of Tommy Fields' murder. Mr. Teeters was brought in for questioning and confronted with the bogus alibi. He stopped talking, asked for a lawyer, and refused to answer any more questions. Luckily for the KCPD, he had ten

grams of cocaine and an unregistered handgun in his possession when he was picked up. Because Mr. Teeters had a record of skipping out on previous bonds, he was held in jail as a flight risk without bond for these new charges. As Detective Ramirez continued to work the Fields case, he found additional evidence that strengthened the case against Mr. Teeters. He was charged and his murder trial was scheduled for December. When Mr. Teeters learned he was facing a first degree murder trial, he agreed to a plea deal for second degree murder with a twenty-year prison sentence. The judge preliminarily approved the plea deal and Mr. Teeters' formal sentencing was scheduled for October. After he signed the plea deal, Detective Ramirez called to congratulate Nancy for finding Tommy Fields' killer. She forwarded his congratulations to the rest of the Cold Case Club.

Mary O'Neal was so proud of their work that she prepared an article and submitted it to the Boston Gazette. When the editors saw it, they assigned a fulltime reporter to gather additional information for the story. The reporter interviewed the Club members and the Kansas City Police Department by telephone. The Gazette also provided airline tickets for the Club members from Columbus, Kansas City, and Omaha to travel to Boston for a group picture and additional interviews in early September. The feature story ran in the Sunday edition of the Gazette the third week of

September with a by-line that included Mary O'Neal's name.

Retired Detective Warren Petersen heard the case was solved and read the newspaper article online. He was upset that his help with the Cold Case Club's investigation was never mentioned. He also thought the article made the Kansas City Police Department look bad. From then on, he refused to accept Nancy's calls to discuss the other cases in his book.

Invigorated by success, Nancy Hauptman was determined to solve the fourth case in Detective Petersen's book. The Club began working on this case as soon as they returned from their trip to Boston. This case involved the 2001 stabbing death of Terrance Fulton. The forty-two-year-old cashier was working the night shift at a gas station where \$700 was taken during a robbery. The knife was never found. Mary Connors, age thirty-six at the time of the stabbing, was filling her car with gas when the cashier was killed inside the building. Ms. Connors found the body when she entered the building to pay for her gas and called 911. Since she was outside when the stabbing occurred, she was unable to provide a description of the killer. Bridgette Sullivan interviewed Ms. Connors right after Labor Day but was unable to obtain any new clues. The Club discussed this case several times but was unable to make any progress. The Club dropped this case in mid-September and moved on to the next.

The fifth cold case involved the 1998 murder of Sally Gomez at a Kansas City convenience store. The twenty-six-year-old Ms. Gomez was shot twice in the chest with a .45-caliber automatic pistol. The grooves on the slugs didn't match any patterns the police had on file. There were no suspects listed in the cold case book, but two witnesses were identified. Paul Daniels, age thirty-four at the time of the shooting, was the cashier at the convenience store during the robbery and murder. Nancy Hauptman called him in mid-September to discuss the incident. Mr. Daniels said he couldn't see the shooter's face because he wore a mask. During the interview, Nancy asked why no money was taken during the robbery. Mr. Daniels said it was because the shooter didn't ask for any. Then he proceeded to berate Nancy for snooping into "police business." Nancy ended the call and reported her meager findings to the Club.

Susan Higgins volunteered to contact the second witness, Charles Smith. Mr. Smith, estimated to be forty-five years old at the time of the shooting, was also wounded during the incident. Susan launched an Internet search to find him. However, she was unable to locate this witness. She identified nineteen Charles Smiths in the Kansas City metropolitan area and contacted each one. But none of them was involved in the convenience store shooting. She reported these facts to the Club members and wrote the following note to herself, "Second witness can't be found." The Club's investigation stalled and several of the members lost

interest in working the cold cases. Several weeks passed without any new activity to solve Ms. Gomez's murder.

The Club members were shocked in early October when Bridgette Sullivan was attacked and robbed outside her home in Boston. She died from massive head trauma received during the robbery. Nancy Hauptman thought the Club should start its own investigation. But the other Club members believed the Boston Police Department should handle it. The Club was shaken further one week later when Mary O'Neal was killed in a hit-and-run accident. The Boston Police Department investigated this incident and found that the car had been stolen the day before. The driver did not leave any fingerprints in the car and he was never found. Although the police found out that Bridgette and Mary knew each other, they concluded that the incidents were not connected because the cause of each death appeared very different.

Sabine Mueller and Susan Higgins became reluctant to go outside alone and made sure that their doors were always locked. But Nancy Hauptman continued attending her social engagements in Kansas City. However, she became more concerned after Sabine Mueller was killed in Columbus, Ohio, in early November. Sabine was pushed into the street and hit by a bus. The Columbus Police Department investigated the incident, but the assailant was never identified. This case was never solved and appeared to be a random act of violence. Because of the different jurisdictions, police

never connected this crime to the other Cold Case Club members' deaths.

Nancy Hauptman and Susan Higgins became quite anxious that their friends were victims of violence and discussed the situation via email. They wondered if they would be next. However, four weeks passed and everything seemed to be returning to normal. The week after Thanksgiving, Nancy decided to begin her Christmas shopping. One warm and sunny afternoon, she drove a few blocks to the Country Club Plaza shops. Later that day, Nancy's lifeless body was found just after dusk in a parking garage in the Plaza area. She had been stabbed and her purse and car were missing. The Christmas presents she bought were scattered around her body. The receipt for the last package she purchased included a time stamp of 4:13 PM which gave the police a good time line for this crime. But no other leads were found. The Kansas City Police Robbery Unit assumed it was a typical robbery gone wrong. They contacted their confidential informants and asked them to assist in finding the killer. The assailant was not identified during the investigation and her purse and car were never found. The police theorized that while resisting the assailant, she was stabbed to prevent her from screaming.

Susan Higgins was unaware of Nancy's death and tried to contact her several days after the murder. Susan's calls and emails went unanswered but she was not concerned. Nancy had always been slow to return calls and emails. That was one of several aspects of Nancy's

personality that Susan disliked. Furthermore, Nancy warned Susan that soon she would be going south for the winter. Susan concluded that she must have decided to leave earlier than she mentioned during their previous discussions. Since they were not working on a case at the moment, Susan dropped the matter. She went about her normal routine for several weeks.

Ten days before Christmas, Susan Higgin's body was found in the house where she lived alone. It was a small, one-story white house in central Omaha. A friend who lived near Susan became concerned when her newspapers and mail were accumulating and called the police. The investigation revealed that her home had been broken into while she was sleeping. Her throat was slit while in bed, but she was not sexually assaulted. None of her neighbors saw or heard anything unusual, and no fingerprints were found at the scene. Her purse and jewelry were not taken, and nothing else of value was missing. The Omaha Police Department is already feeling the pressure to solve this case. The Police Chief has made it clear to his lieutenants that solving this case is a priority.

(A complete list of characters appears in Appendix 1.)