One year later: Little progress in search for killer

By MARY CONNELLY-SZCZESNY

It's been a long year.

Since March 1977, when residents were stunned to learn that 11-year-old Timothy King of Birmingham was abducted and killed by the so-called-Oakland County child killer, a lot has been done.

But nothing has led police to a suspect in the deaths of four children in the last 25 months.

In the year since Timmy's death:

•Community organizations and groups have devised programs to teach children to be wary of stmagers.

•Parents have counseled children to travel in groups and have kept a close eye on youngsters.

•A homicide task force involving 12 police and investigative agencies has been formed to check out leads in the case.

•15,009 tips on the child killings have been received.

•9,028 tips have been cleared.

•Five men have confessed to the killings. All were ruled out as suspects by police.

•Tips have been received from as far away as South Africa and India. Psychics have communicated with the task force and talked of church bells, tall blond men and someone carrying a rifle.

•The task force probe has led to 10 arrests of people suspected of crimes such as child molestation.

•Police have learned nothing which discounts the theory that the killer is probably a white collar worker with job flexibility and the ability to hold children hostage several days undiscovered.

MICHIGAN STATE Police Lt. Robert Robertson, in charge of the 27-member homicide task force, said this week that no strong suspects have been found in the child killing cases.

"I don't think we've had anything close," he said.

"But I think one of these days it will all come to an end."

"The public is frustrated because we haven't solved it. We understand that. It takes a long time. It's an extremely difficult case. We haven't given up yet. We've just commenced the fight."

Twelve communities and local agencies have agreed to pay for the task force until July 1. Among those contributing up to $280 monthly are Birmingham, Troy, Southfield, Beverly Hills, Franklin and Livonia.

Robertson said the task force will continue after July 1. But most details, such as who will pay the bills and where the group will be located, will not be settled until later this spring.

The task force is currently housed in the former Valley Woods School in Beverly Hills.

"The task force will continue in some form until there is no more work to be done or investigated," Robertson said.

NATIONAL EXPOSURE of the area's four child killings has aided the investigation, said Robertson.

"It puts us in the eye of other law enforcement agencies," he explained. "Every week we talk to other departments who have had homicides."

Although there are dozens of child killings in the country, Oakland County's are dissimilar because they involve both boys and girls. Two boys and two girls killed in the county since February, 1976, are believed to have been murdered by the same person.

Robertson said there have been "very, very few cases in history" which involved slayings of children of both sexes.

PUBLICITY SURROUNDING the case has also led to tips from psychics, although Robertson said the number of tips have been decreasing.

The tips are usually vague.

For example, he said, on March 10 a tip from a psychic advised investigators to seek a male and female in the state of New York.

"Sometimes the tip will merely say that where Timmy was held the church bells chimed at six o'clock. Or they see a tall blond man wearing a business suit driving a blue car or someone wearing some sort of uniform, carrying a rifle."

"It doesn't do us any good."

Asked if the task force has called in psychics to aid the probe, Robertson said, "The investigative techniques used at the task force are not discussed."

TIMMY KING of Birmingham was abducted March 16 last year and discovered murdered in Livonia March 22. Since that time, the child killer has not struck.

Robertson said he had no idea why the killings abated for a year but noted there were also no slayings during the 10 month period from February to December, 1976.

He cautioned parents and children to remain on guard.

Along with Timmy's murder, investigators are seeking the killer of Jill Robinson of Royal Oak found shot to death in Troy, Mark Stebbins of Ferndale discovered suffocated in Southfield and Kristine Mihelich of Berkley whose body was found in Franklin.

All were between the ages of 10 and 12 and were abducted and held captive for a number of days prior to being murdered.

No one charged in gambling raid

More than a week after law enforcement officials raided a Southfield bookmaking operation, no charges have been brought against any of the persons alleged to be involved in that operation.

None of the three men arrested during the raid have been arraigned on charges, pending further investigation, said Robert Bunting, co-director of the Oakland County Organized Crime Strike Force. Bunting said he expects warrants to be issued in connection with the raid within the next two weeks. In the meantime, those arrested at the time of the raid have been released on their own recognizance.

Two Southfield men and an Oak Park man were arrested March 8 in an afternoon raid at 26825 Oldham in the Knob-in-the-Woods apartment complex south of Eleven Mile.

Southfield police Capt. R. Jerry Simmons said the raid culminated a two-month investigation by Southfield police. Several weeks before the raid, members of the county strike force and the Michigan State Police also were called into the investigation.

After placing the apartment under investigation for a month, members of all three law enforcement agencies staged a raid at the apartment complex.

WHEN POLICE entered the apartment they found the betting operation in full swing, a state police spokesman said. The three men in the apartment were arrested without a struggle. Police said they also confiscated about six telephones, calculators, betting records and other bookmaking articles.

Police estimate the operation grossed about $10,000 a day in illegal bets. Police said the bets were placed by regular customers who identified themselves with code names when calling. Bets were taken on college and professional sporting events and on horseracing throughout the eastern states.

It is not certain how the winning bets were paid off, police said.

Simmons said the operation apparently subscribed to a large illegal wire service that relayed information on bets, odds and sports scores. Such wire services are usually operated by organized crime, Simmons said.

State police decribed the betting operation as an "upper level" activity, but they were not certain what impact the raid would have on illegal betting in the area.

Evidence collected during the investigation and the subsequent raid is being reviewed by members of the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, Bunting said. When the investigation is completed, sometime before the end of the month, warrants will be issued for persons believed to be actively involved in the bookmaking operation, Bunting said.

The initial investigation was conducted by the Oakland County Organized Crime Strike Force (a branch of the prosecutor's office), the Michigan State Police intelligence section, and the Southfield Police Department.

Southfield woman in 'jungle camp'

Ann Church, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Church of Southfield, is en route to the Mexican jungles for a rigorous exposure to primitive living conditions.

She will attend "Jungle Camp," a three week training program in preparation for service with Wycliffe Bible translators. Trainees will learn to maneuver dugout canoes through rapids, build a home and furniture from native materials, do primitive cooking and recognize poisonous and edible plants. They will be taking hikes five to 20 miles long through the rain forest.

Ann will serve as a translator with Wycliffe. She graduated in May 1977 from Wheaton College in Illinois with a BA in anthropology.

She received linguistics training from the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of North Dakota and the International Linguistics Center in Dallas, Texas.

She attends the Northwest Christian and Missionary Alliance Church of Farmington Hills.

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