

## **EVIDENCE OF INNOCENCE - TWO EX-COPS SAY WRONG MAN IS JAILED FOR MURDER ADMITTED SERIAL KILLER CLAIMS HE DID IT. PROOF OF THE TRUTH WAS DESTROYED**

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One snowy February morning in 1983, Patricia Rosansky, a 17-year-old junior at Battle Creek Central High, was abducted as she walked alone to school.

Two months passed before her corpse was found, and another year before police made an arrest.

The suspect was Thomas Cress, 26, an illiterate, two-bit thief who functioned at the level of a third-grader. No physical **evidence** tied Cress to the murder -- no prints, no blood. Strands of hair were found clutched in the teen's hand. But they didn't match Cress. There also was **evidence of** rape, but in 1983 DNA science could not link it to a suspect.

Cress nevertheless was convicted in 1985 after witnesses said he admitted to the slaying in casual conversations. He was sentenced to life in prison and now resides in a unit for mentally ill inmates at the Riverside Correctional Facility in Ionia.

He insists that he is innocent. "The prosecutor just refuses to let me go," he says.

This is a story about the imprecise science of finding a killer. It involves the jailing of a possibly innocent man, the broken careers of two detectives who came to believe Cress -- and the possibility that a serial killer who drifted through Battle Creek has gone unpunished.

A two-month Free Press review of Cress' case shows:

- \* There is compelling **evidence** his chief accusers lied at his trial to collect reward money.
- \* Michael Ronning, the admitted serial killer, has confessed to Rosansky's murder -- and passed a lie-detector test.
- \* Cress, too, passed a polygraph in which he denied killing Rosansky.
- \* Finally, the state destroyed crucial **evidence** that might have cleared Cress. Detectives say when they told a prosecutor another man was likely responsible for Rosansky's murder, he ordered the destruction of semen and hair found on Rosansky -- **evidence** that, through advances in DNA science, could have confirmed the killer's identity.

Prosecutors admit the **evidence** was destroyed, but deny acting maliciously.

Cress' saga is now at the center **of** bipartisan legislation in Congress that would require states to preserve DNA **evidence** while criminal defendants are in prison. U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., a cosponsor **of** the bill, called the **evidence** destruction in Cress's case "an egregious violation **of** fundamental fairness" in a statement provided at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing Tuesday.

The case also has renewed a chilling debate in Battle Creek: Was a serial killer responsible for the murders **of** Rosansky and two other young women -- Maggie Hume and Karry Evans -- a generation ago?

Battle Creek was never so big that the killing **of** a young woman passed unnoticed.

Especially with Maggie Hume.

Her father was Mike Hume, a popular football coach at St. Philip Catholic Central High.

Maggie was a four-year cheerleader at St. Philip, an honor student who wore her blond hair in a bouncy pony tail. Maggie stayed close to home after high

school. She attended community college and, in the summer **of** 1982, found a job as a doctor's secretary.

Smart and reliable, Hume, 20, typically arrived for work at 8:30 a.m. -- an hour early. So coworkers grew concerned when she failed to show Aug. 18, 1982.

Police were called. When officers entered Hume's second-story unit at the River Apartment complex that afternoon, they discovered her body under a bundle **of** clothes in her closet. She had been strangled and sodomized. A billfold was stolen from her dresser.

As police interviewed tenants, they somehow failed to notice a young man packing his car. He lived in apartment 13, below Hume. None **of** the officers saw him slip into his rusted old Cutlass, and quietly out **of** town.

Six months passed, with no break in the Hume case, when Patty Rosansky left her home in Battle Creek around 8 a.m. to walk to school.

Patty lived with her brother several blocks from Battle Creek Central High. She was a B student, active in Junior Achievement and, like Hume, attended St. Philip Catholic Church.

Crunching through the snow on her way to school that day -- Feb. 3, 1983 -- Patty and a girlfriend spied some classmates. Her friend stopped to sneak a cigarette. Patty walked on.

Within a block or so, she was abducted and driven to a wooded area used as a dumping ground outside town. She was marched to a ravine near the Kalamazoo River where she was raped, sodomized, perhaps strangled and, finally, bludgeoned. She was then covered with branches and debris. When scrap collectors discovered her partially nude body two months later, one **of** her mittens still gripped the cold ground, a testament to her final struggle.

As Battle Creek worried about Hume's slaying and Rosansky's disappearance, a third girl mysteriously vanished.

She was Karry Evans of Bellevue, a town of 1,282 residents a few miles north of Battle Creek. She, too, was 17 and was last seen alive one March afternoon walking down Main Street.

Evans was a junior at Bellevue High, where she played clarinet in the band. She lived with her grandparents.

Two months later, mushroom hunters discovered her body in a wooded clearing between Bellevue and Battle Creek. She, too, had been strangled.

Bounty hunters offer him up

Seven months. Three murders.

All women ages 17 to 20.

Detectives chased what few leads there were. But for months, there were no firm suspects.

Then, in January 1984, a Crime Solvers program on a local TV station posted a \$5,000 reward for information leading to Rosansky's murderer. The reward was double what the show had offered in the past.

Within days, several residents reported to police disturbing comments made by a man they all knew: Thomas Cress.

Among them were Walter Moore, a jailed felon, his brother Terry Moore, their sister-in-law Candy Moore and Candy's sister, Cindy Lesley.

The accounts of these witnesses, taken together, accused Cress of admitting that he gave Rosansky a ride that February morning, provided her with marijuana, then raped and killed her after she refused sex.

Lesley -- who spoke to police before the TV program aired, but did not mention a confession until afterward -- collected the \$5,000 reward.

At Cress' 1985 trial, two other witnesses impressed jurors. Shirley House testified she was standing outside one day when she overheard Cress say he "had to kill the bitch" for sex. At a bar, Cress told Emery DeBruine essentially the same story, DeBruine later testified.

When prosecutors finished, Cress took the stand.

He was a divorced father of three and, at age 28, had spent his entire life in Battle Creek.

Cress had disabilities that kept him from reading or writing. Before his arrest, Cress worked odd jobs as a custodian, a carpenter and a newspaper deliveryman. He sometimes earned extra cash by collecting defective boxes of cereal from the Kellogg's plant and selling them door to door.

He drank too much and smoked pot. He had two petty theft convictions. He admitted to "nervous problems" when his marriage foundered.

Sitting before jurors, Cress acknowledged that he knew Rosansky, who lived a few houses away. But he claimed that on the morning Rosansky disappeared, he was delivering papers, not cruising schoolyards. His account was corroborated by his partner on the paper route.

But the prosecution witnesses proved overwhelming. In closing arguments, Calhoun County Prosecutor Conrad Sindt told jurors that the only thing Cress could not explain was why all these witnesses would take the stand and lie.

The defense had no real answer. Cress was convicted of first-degree murder and ordered to spend his life behind bars.

New path of death

Although the Rosansky case was closed, detectives were no nearer to solving the deaths of Hume and Evans.

But early in 1986, four years after Hume's death, Battle Creek police detective Dennis Mullen caught his first break in that case.

Mullen, a former combat medic in Vietnam, received a phone call from Arkansas police about a man held there for the slaying of a 19-year-old woman. His name was Michael Ronning, a drug dealer and thief from Battle Creek.

He was a suspect in the death of Diana Hanley, who had been abducted from her home in Jonesboro, Ark., and driven 40 miles to the town of Pocahontas. She was found bound and apparently strangled, with stab wounds through the throat, in the woods near town. Her body had been covered with branches.

When Arkansas police questioned Ronning's wife, Vicky Ronning, she hardly seemed surprised.

She suggested police might want to probe the murder of another woman, in her hometown of Battle Creek.

She said the woman had been found in the apartment above theirs in 1982. Vicky and Michael had left that day for Texas.

She was describing Hume.

As he mined Ronning's past, detective Mullen discovered that Ronning had indeed lived in apartment 13, below Hume, when she was killed -- and left for Texas that day in August 1982.

Mullen called Ronning's cousin in the Dallas suburb of Arlington, where Ronning often bunked on his travels.

The cousin didn't disappoint. He remembered Ronning's surprise visit that summer. In fact, the cousin said, he believed Ronning was behind the murder of a woman who lived with the cousin at the time.

In September 1982, one month after Hume's death, 20-year-old Annette Melia left the cousin's Arlington home one evening to walk to a convenience store for a soda. She never returned.

Squirrel hunters found her skeleton three years later in a wooded area used as a dumping ground in nearby Bedford. She was covered by roofing shingles.

The more Mullen probed, the uglier Mike Ronning became.

Ronning had run wild as a teenager in Battle Creek, drinking, smoking pot, brawling. There were reports Ronning liked to torture animals. He once went after a female relative with a hammer.

He soon graduated from stolen cars and burglary to arrests, in the late 1970s, for attempted rape in California, indecent exposure in Oregon and armed robbery, again in California. Five months before Hume's rape and murder, Ronning was arrested, but not charged, on suspicion of raping a drugged prostitute in San Diego.

Galvanized by his first break in the Hume case, Mullen flew to Arkansas in 1987 to interview Ronning in prison.

Ronning refused to talk.

Mullen had more luck with Vicky Ronning. He found her back in Michigan, serving time for drunken driving.

Day after day, Mullen visited Vicky Ronning, prodding her for details to connect her husband to Hume.

Vicky recalled Michael was out the evening Hume was killed. He often vanished for hours, even days, and never told anyone where he had been. She also remembered he was wearing a new pair of moccasin-type shoes with a distinctive herringbone pattern in the soles. Vicky later identified the shoe in a Sears catalog.

The pattern matched prints detectives lifted from the air-conditioning unit below Hume's second-story apartment. Police say the killer used the unit to hoist himself onto Hume's balcony.

Vicky talked **of** her cross-country excursions with her husband. He hustled jobs in construction as they hopscotched through Battle Creek, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana and California.

At times, Vicky said, they would settle into a routine in Sacramento, say, or New Orleans, only to have Michael barrel through the door one afternoon and announce they were leaving. Immediately.

Vicky's story sounded scattered, but Mullen documented much **of** it through phone records. The couple, who were cousins, shared a grandmother in Pocahontas, Ark. They also shared grandma's phone card.

Mullen called the grandmother, who cheerfully supplied the detective with years **of** billing invoices. The records placed Michael Ronning in neighborhoods where women and teenage girls seemed to turn up dead. The records showed he was in Battle Creek when Hume was killed; in Texas when Melia died; in Arkansas at the time **of** Hanley's death. And, the detective learned, Ronning appeared to be linked to the 1985 death **of** Sandra Williams, 38, **of** Sacramento, Calif.

She was last seen checking into the Berry Hotel there on July 6, 1985, with a white male. She was raped, bound and strangled with a telephone cord.

Phone records placed Ronning at several Sacramento hotels that summer, including the Berry. He worked as a handyman there.

He had a key to every room.

'You just ride it where it takes you'

In late 1991, Mullen received more grim news from Texas.

Police in Bedford, where Annette Melia's body was found, had identified the skeleton **of** a second female. She was 16-year-old Melissa Jackson. Her remains were discovered in a wooded field just 800 yards from where Melia's body had been found. Jackson had been covered in plywood.

Mullen checked the phone records. Sure enough, Michael Ronning was near her home in Grand Prairie when she vanished in 1983.

She was the fifth dead female linked to Ronning.

By now, Mullen was sure Ronning had not only killed Hume, but also Patricia Rosansky and Karry Evans, the other Battle Creek-area women.

Again, phone records were crucial. They placed Ronning around Battle Creek at the time **of** each murder. Other **evidence** also pointed his way.

Rosansky was found only 1 1/2 miles from the River Apartments, where Ronning lived, and where Hume had died.

After Rosansky disappeared in February 1983, Mike and Vicky Ronning moved to a ranch home north of Battle Creek, about five miles from Bellevue. On March 1, 1983, Michael Ronning enrolled his younger sister in the Bellevue School District and began driving her to school each day.

Twelve days later, Bellevue schoolgirl Evans disappeared while walking down Main Street. Her body was dumped in the woods near a shooting range, a mile from Ronning's home.

As **evidence** mounted against Ronning, detective Mullen became convinced Cress did not kill Rosansky.

The detective mentioned his concerns one day to Calhoun County Prosecutor Conrad Sindt, who convicted Cress in 1985.

In Mullen's version, Sindt suggested that he keep his views to himself, unless he had some **evidence** to back it up. They never discussed Cress again. Sindt declined to talk for this story.

Mullen realized his investigation had taken a sensitive turn.

In chasing Hume's killer, he had become entangled in murders involving other police agencies: Karry Evans, the sheriff's case, and Rosansky, which State Police had closed with Cress' conviction.

Yet he couldn't help himself.

"A criminal investigation is like riding a bucking bronco," Mullen said. "You don't take it anywhere; you cannot control it; you just ride it where it takes you."

In late 1991, Mullen decided to pay another visit to Ronning in Arkansas.

He contacted the new Calhoun County prosecutor, Jon Sahli. Sahli had been appointed to succeed Sindt, who had become a judge in Battle Creek.

As Mullen and his commander, Joe Newman, recall the conversation, they informed Sahli of the **evidence** linking Ronning to Hume's murder. They say they also told Sahli that Ronning may have killed Rosansky as well.

Sahli, who now works for the Saginaw County prosecutor's office, remembers the talks differently. In his recollection, the detectives said they suspected Ronning in the Hume case and "other murders."

"There had been no mention of Michael Ronning's being even remotely connected to the Thomas Cress case," Sahli said.

In any event, Sahli agreed that the detectives should re-interview Ronning. In return for confessing to any murders in Battle Creek, Ronning would be offered the chance to serve out his life term in Michigan, closer to family.

There was another reason they believed Ronning would accept the offer. By locking into a plea deal with Michigan, he would be shielded from potential murder convictions in Texas or California, states with the death penalty.

This time, Ronning talked.

In a report dated Jan. 13, 1992, one week after interviewing Ronning, Mullen wrote that Ronning "insinuated" he was responsible for as many as six murders and "could clear the man that was in prison on the Rosansky murder."

Ronning also "indicated" that he killed Karry Evans. And he offered to take a polygraph exam to back his claims.

In the same report, Mullen wrote that Ronning's connection to "the murder **of** Patricia Rosansky ...was passed to Prosecutor Jon Sahli."

In the months that followed, Battle Creek police called Sahli's office repeatedly to push for a plea agreement that would allow Ronning to confess to the Battle Creek murders, police reports show.

By April, Mullen's frustration showed. "The prosecutor's office," he wrote, "reminded me **of** an organization that doesn't do anything."

On May 4, 1992, Sahli received a routine, two-page form from the Michigan State Police asking permission to destroy all the **evidence** in Rosansky's death. State Police noted that Cress' appeals had been exhausted. They said they needed to destroy the **evidence** to make room in storage.

On May 14, Sahli signed the order, as he had signed so-called purge orders in other aging criminal cases.

In the months that followed, which included more meetings with Battle Creek police regarding Ronning -- meetings in which police say Ronning's connection to Rosansky's murder was again made clear -- Sahli never mentioned signing the **evidence** -destruction order.

One such meeting took place in Battle Creek on Aug. 22, 1992. It was attended by Sahli, Mullen, an assistant prosecutor, Matt Glaser, and Keith Hall, an Arkansas attorney who represented Ronning.

In an affidavit, Hall, now a prosecutor in Arkansas, said there was "a detailed discussion" **of** Ronning's confessions to murders in Michigan, "including Patricia Rosansky."



If true, that would have given Sahli a chance to cancel his order to have the Rosansky **evidence** destroyed. That did not happen.

State Police burned the **evidence** that October. Lost forever were the hairs found clutched in Rosansky's hand and traces **of** DNA-bearing semen on a sanitary napkin under her body.

Sahli insists he did nothing improper, that he never learned **of** Ronning's alleged link to Rosansky until years later.

"If I thought there was a remote chance **of** any connection," he said, "I probably would have said, 'Don't destroy that **evidence** . Hang on to it for now.' "

A dead-end plea deal

Ronning's hoped-for plea deal did not take shape until 1996, when the governors **of** Michigan and Arkansas agreed to it if Ronning could prove he committed the Battle Creek murders.

Ronning passed a polygraph arranged by police in which he answered yes to the question, "Is three the true number **of** people you killed in Michigan?"

In March 1997, Ronning sat before a video camera in the Kalamazoo County Jail and confessed in a sometimes-rambling narrative to the murders **of** Hume, Evans and Rosansky.

His description **of** Maggie Hume's death was clearly the most impressive. He drew a detailed map **of** her bedroom and recalled how her dresser was angled in a corner. He described the grassy area near the apartment complex where he tossed Hume's billfold after the murder, a detail that had never been made public.

Ronning was less impressive in describing Evans' abduction from Bellevue. He said he snatched her using the same ploy as with Rosansky: by driving beside her as she walked to school, pretending to ask directions, then raising a starter's pistol to her face and ordering her in the car.

But he said Evans was abducted in the morning; Bellevue police say she vanished in the afternoon.

Ronning also recalled that Evans' body was dumped closer to a road than it was, and he was unable, 14 years later, to locate the death scene when driven through the area by police.

His confession to Rosansky's murder also presented problems. He had the right time **of** morning in which she was abducted, and he compellingly described the girl's journey to the woods outside town, near an abandoned water-pumping station. After forcing Rosansky into the woods, Ronning said, he offered her marijuana, forced her to remove all her clothes and strangled her with his left arm after trying to have sex.

He said he then smashed her once in the back **of** the head with a large rock. Just to be sure.

But Prosecutor Susan Mladenoff, who had defeated Sahli the previous November, and assistant prosecutor Nancy Mullett, were skeptical. To them, Ronning's confession was vague in some respects, plain wrong in others, and could have come from reading news stories.

Rosansky was not nude when she was found, only partially nude. And Ronning failed to note that she was found in a ravine, near the Kalamazoo River. There also was conflicting **evidence** about Rosansky's head injuries. Ronning said he hit her once with a large rock, while experts disagreed on how many times she was struck, and some suggested a club was a more likely weapon.

Finally, Ronning could not find the path where he said he turned off Custer Road to kill Rosansky.

To Mullen, this last failure was understandable. The area where Rosansky died had changed dramatically over the years. What was once a desolate stretch **of** country road was now dotted with offices and auto shops. The dirt path Ronning described in his confession had been covered by a church parking lot.

But to prosecutors, these descriptive failures confirmed their theory: Ronning was falsely confessing to the Battle Creek murders to move back to Michigan.

They declared the deal dead.

Witness takes back testimony

But for Cress, the confessions signaled a new beginning. His lawyer requested a new trial. Cress took a lie-detector test and was found to be truthful in denying any role in Rosansky's death.

Mullen also located one **of** Cress' chief accusers at his 1985 trial, Candy Moore, whose last name had since changed to Cross. In a videotaped interview, Cross said she did not recall her earlier testimony implicating Cress.

She now said, "He never talked to me about killing nobody."

Cross also said her sister, Cindy Lesley, falsely accused Cress to collect the \$5,000 reward. "I think it is a setup deal," Cross told Mullen. "Cindy is money-hungry."

Cross later claimed that Mullen coerced her to recant.

Also coming forward was Thomas Clark, who testified that Walter Moore -- who had committed suicide in jail -- had once confided he falsely accused Cress for the reward money.

In December 1997, Calhoun County Circuit Judge Allen Garbrecht ordered a new trial for Cress, citing the lack **of** physical **evidence** linking Cress to Rosansky's murder, the recanted witness testimony and Ronning's confession.

Garbrecht expressed doubts about that confession, but noted "specific details may be sketchy," given the lapse **of** time.

Prosecutors appealed. And in an abrupt turnabout, Garbrecht reversed his decision in March **of** last year. Among the reasons he cited was new expert testimony that indicated Rosansky had been struck multiple times in the head, not just once, though the judge conceded the **evidence** was "contradictory."

Garbrecht also cited shortcomings in Ronning's confessions -- discrepancies that the judge viewed as understandable in his earlier order. The judge did not address the polygraph exams taken by Ronning and Cress, nor the destruction **of** DNA **evidence** .

He denied Cress' motion for a new trial in Rosansky's death.

"The jury heard Mr. Cress testify, and they didn't buy it," Assistant Prosecutor Nancy Mullett said **of** Cress' conviction. "Absent something credible, believable and compelling, there's no reason to second-guess that jury."

Mullett says she takes Sahli, her former boss, at his word when he says he never heard Ronning's name linked to Rosansky's murder before he signed the order destroying **evidence** . She concedes, however, that she hasn't directly asked him what he knew.

"Without asking Sahli the question or hearing the answer, I know what it is," she said. "I don't need to ask him specifically."

Karry Evans' case remains unsolved and has not been actively investigated for years. Battle Creek police accuse the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department **of** doing little to locate Evans' killer.

"I've written afternoon memos that are more extensive than their investigative report," said Police Chief Jeffrey Kruithoff.

Newman, the police commander, was also scathing. "With Karry Evans, it was like nobody cared," he said. "It was a woefully inadequate investigation."

Sheriff's Lt. Bill Burgess calls the criticism an "exaggeration." His office declined to release a copy **of** their investigation to the Free Press, after consulting with prosecutors.

The death **of** Maggie Hume, however, may soon be in the news again. Mullett, the assistant prosecutor, said she believes she can resolve the case by year's end.

She will say little beyond that. And she declined to say whether Ronning is a suspect, though Battle Creek police have sought for years to charge him in Hume's death.

Cress still keeps the blame

As for detectives Mullen and Newman, they are on the outside looking in.

Newman retired in February to run a building firm. He said he left the force convinced that Ronning killed the Battle Creek women, and that Cress is innocent.

"We were just a couple **of** cops swimming upstream, trying to show these people that they made a mistake," Newman said.

Newman said his frustrations pale in comparison to what Mullen endured. "There was nothing in it for Denny Mullen," he said. "It's just a hell **of** a way for him to end his career."

Mullen, who keeps in touch with Cress, retired in December, 16 years after being assigned Maggie Hume's murder. Weeks before he left, Chief Kruithoff removed him from the case after deciding it was more important to repair relations with prosecutors than continue to fight with them over who killed Patricia Rosansky.

"I'd really had it with this investigation," Mullen said. "I don't have any credibility with the prosecutor's office anymore. I knew they were looking at me as some kind **of** rogue cop."

In his heart, Mullen said, he knew it was time to retire. He had dealt with killers his whole career, but his pursuit **of** Ronning finally overwhelmed him.

"There came a time when all **of** a sudden it bothered me -- the extreme inhumanity that one person can do to another," he said, "how vicious and cruel a person is who takes the life **of** another."

There were times when Mullen could not sleep, when cynicism and bitterness overtook him. "You wake up fitfully and you imagine what's happening to the victims, and how they must have suffered," he said.

Meanwhile, David Moran, an appellate lawyer from Detroit, has asked the state Court **of** Appeals to grant Cress a new trial.

As he awaits the ruling, Cress said in a phone interview from prison: "I have no bitterness in my system."

Now 44, Cress takes medication for schizophrenia and depression. He attends classes in personal growth and anger management.

"I've been through it three times now," Cress says **of** the anger class. "Every time, they give me a certificate saying I have no anger at all."

He has taken up cabinetry and would like to restore old houses if he is released. Asked whether he has other dreams, Cress thinks for a moment, then says no. Restoring houses would be enough.

Michael Ronning continues to serve a life term at a maximum security prison in the Arkansas delta -- unable to get convicted in Michigan, unwilling to confess to murders elsewhere.

In an interview, Ronning doesn't shy from the tag serial killer. "I guess by definition I would be," he says.

He then leans across a conference table and confides: "I have to be very careful what I say."

He is talking about girls such as Annette Melia and Melissa Jackson, girls who died in states with busy execution chambers.

And he may have been referring to victims such as Sandra Williams in Sacramento, a case long closed that may soon be reopened. After the Free Press asked Sacramento police why they never attempted to match semen found in Williams to DNA samples taken from Ronning, they conceded that might not be a bad idea. They promised to look into it.

They won't get any help from Ronning.

"That might be paranoia, or whatever," Ronning says **of** his silence. "But I want to live a little longer if I can."

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#### TRAIL **OF** DEATH

Convicted murderer Michael Ronning has confessed to killing three women in Battle Creek in the early 1980s -- including a case in which jurors convicted another man. He's also a suspect in two Texas murders and one in California.

1. Aug. 18, 1982 -- Maggie Hume, 20, is strangled and sodomized in her second-story bedroom at the River Apartments in Battle Creek. Ronning lived below Hume. He left for Texas the day Hume's body was found.

2. Sept. 22, 1982 -- Annette Melia, 20, vanishes on her way to a store in Arlington, Texas. She shared a house with a cousin -- and Ronning. Her skeleton is recovered in a field in Bedford, Texas, three years later.

3. Feb. 3, 1983 -- Patricia Rosansky, 17, is abducted as she walks to class at Battle Creek Central High. She is raped and bludgeoned; her body is found two months later in a wooded area outside town.

4. March 13, 1983 -- Karry Evans, 17, is abducted on her way to Bellevue High near Battle Creek. She is strangled and her body is dumped in a wooded area one mile from Ronning's rural home.

5. Aug. 12, 1983 -- Melissa Jackson, 16, **of** Grand Prairie, Texas, is listed as a runaway. Her skeleton is found three years later, about 800 feet from Melia's body in Bedford, Texas. Police say Ronning is a suspect in both slayings.

6. July 7, 1985 -- Sandra Williams, 38, is strangled at the Berry Hotel in Sacramento, Calif. Ronning worked there as a handyman that summer and had a key to every room.

7. Jan. 6, 1986 -- Ronning abducts Diana Hanley, 19, from her home in Jonesboro, Ark. She is bound, apparently strangled, stabbed through the throat and left in a wooded area, covered with branches. Ronning is convicted and sentenced to life without parole in Tucker, Ark.

Source: Free Press research by DAVID ZEMAN

Caption: Photo WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press; Photo; Map MARTHA

THIERRY/Detroit Free Press; Photo CHRIS JOHNSON/Special to the Free Press

The victim: Patricia Rosansky. Murdered at age 17 near Battle Creek in 1983. The second **of** three young women killed in the area in a seven-month span. The convicted: Thomas Cress.

Sentenced in 1985 to a life term for Rosansky's murder. A lie-detector test supports his claim that he is not guilty. The confessed killer: Michael Ronning. Convicted **of** murder in Arkansas. Says he killed Rosansky and 2 others in Michigan -- Maggie Hume and Karry Evans.

The cop: Dennis Mullen. A former Battle Creek detective, standing in the ravine where Patricia Rosansky was killed, fought to clear Cress. He says prosecutors were told Cress might be innocent before **evidence** from the crime was burned.

CONFESSED KILLER: Michael Ronning, right, lived below Maggie Hume. In March 1997, when he confessed to killing Hume, Patricia Rosansky and Karry Evans, he drew a detailed map **of** Hume's bedroom on the second floor **of** the building above.

Jon Sahli: The prosecutor says detectives didn't tell him that Michael Ronning had been linked to Patricia Rosansky's murder before he ordered the destruction **of evidence** .

A former Battle Creek detective, standing in the ravine where Patricia Rosansky was killed, fought to clear Cress. He says prosecutors were told Cress might be innocent before **evidence** from the crime was burned.

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