

Ghosts of Highway 20

Noelle Crombie

Dedicated to

Marlene Gabrielsen

Kaye Turner

Rachanda Pickle

Melissa Sanders

Sheila Swanson

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Introduction

Trigger warning: This story includes details of a rape. If you have experienced sexual violence and need support, contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.

Kaye Turner vanished 40 years ago while running along an empty road in a rustic central Oregon retreat. She was kidnapped and killed, her remains dumped in the deep woods.

Then Rachanda Pickle went missing from the desolate highway compound where she lived, never to be seen again. She was 13.

It wasn't long before teenagers Melissa Sanders and Sheila Swanson disappeared from a camping trip to the coast. Their bodies were found off a logging spur.

It now appears their killer was the same man. The breadth of his crimes has never been revealed until now.

John Arthur Ackroyd was a longtime state highway mechanic whose route along U.S. 20 wound through some of Oregon's

most spectacular scenery from the Cascade foothills to the coast.

From the outside, he seemed to lead an ordinary life: Raised in small-town Oregon, he hunted and fished, held a steady job and married a woman with a couple of young kids.

But detectives long suspected Ackroyd preyed on women who disappeared along or around Highway 20 from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. They could prove only a single case – Turner’s 1978 murder. The rest haunted investigators who had pursued him through the years.

They were still after him when Ackroyd died alone in his prison cell two years ago.

By then, The Oregonian/OregonLive also was investigating Ackroyd.

We interviewed key witnesses and reviewed thousands of pages of police and court records, some of them previously secret, to hold Ackroyd accountable and give some measure of justice to the women he attacked.

We went back to 1977.

That’s when Ackroyd picked up a woman from the side of the road, dragged her into the woods and raped her. The young mother managed to survive.

She was his first known victim.

If police had believed her, she might have been his last.

CHAPTER I

Marlene Gabrielsen

Sisters, 1977

It was Marlene's first night away from her baby girl.

She hadn't been out since her daughter was born three months earlier. It was late spring. She and her husband planned to spend a night at the Sisters Rodeo. Marlene found a friend to care for her baby, pumped breast milk and wrote out a napping schedule.

That day, she tied her hair back and pulled on her green Levis. She wore the buckskin boots her husband bought even though the couple couldn't afford them.

"Mommy loves you too much," she whispered to her daughter, asleep in a bassinet. "Be a good girl."

The couple drove about 90 miles from their home in Lebanon and set up camp near the rodeo grounds. They sat around the fire drinking beer. Later that night, Marlene and her husband argued when he said he wanted to head off with a couple of friends.

Marlene, then 20, got up to leave. She wanted to go home to her baby.

It was dark, around midnight. She was looking for a ride and wandered out of the campground onto Highway 20, the route that leads through the heart of Sisters, back then little more than a dusty outpost amid pine forests in central Oregon.

She returned to the campground, where a stranger said his buddy, John Ackroyd, could give her a lift.^[1] Marlene had hitchhiked plenty and didn't think twice as she squeezed into the front seat between the men.

As the truck motored west, the man in the passenger seat wanted out. Marlene, dizzy from alcohol, watched as he reached through the open window to unlatch the door from the outside. He rolled up the window and slammed the door.

Marlene glimpsed a .22-caliber rifle on a rack in the cab and a hunting knife stuck in the lid of an old coffee can near the driver's seat.

She was alone with Ackroyd, a big man who reeked of sweat and freshly cut wood.

1 Police interview with Marlene Gabrielsen; Linn County Sheriff's Office, 6/16/77 ([source](#))

A thought skittered across her mind as she drifted to sleep:
The inside door handle was gone.

She was trapped.

* * *

Marlene was still asleep when, about an hour later, Ackroyd turned off Highway 20 and onto an old wagon road.

She woke to find his fingers squeezed tight around her legs as he dragged her out of the truck.^[2] Her head slammed into the door frame. She gasped.

She felt the cool blade of Ackroyd's hunting knife against her neck.

"You're going to do what I tell you," Ackroyd said, speaking for the first time, his low, raspy voice laced with a bit of a drawl.

He ripped off her jeans with such force, the pants split from the waist to the ankle along the inseam. He sliced off her boots and her underwear and threw her to the ground.

After the rape, Ackroyd slapped the knife against his grimy jeans held up by orange suspenders.

Marlene slowly stood, wearing only her T-shirt.

He glanced around the dark woods.

"I'm not sure what to do with you."

"You could take me home," she said.

2 Police interview with Marlene Gabrielsen; Linn County Sheriff's Office, 6/16/77 ([source](#))

“I don’t know if I want to do that.”

“I have a baby that’s not even a year old,” she pleaded. “Please take me home.”

Ackroyd considered her for a long moment, then reached into the back of the truck and held out a dingy pair of plaid pants. Marlene put them on, holding tight to the waist to keep them from slipping off.

They climbed back into the truck and continued west on Highway 20.

He made a brief stop at the house he shared with his mother in Sweet Home, his hometown. He went inside to get a soda and use the bathroom.^[3]

Marlene waited in the truck, afraid to move. She’d need evidence so police could find him later. She couldn’t see the house number from the truck.^[4]

When he returned, she asked for his phone number to help identify him but also to make him think she liked him. She wrote it down on a pack of cigarettes.^[5]

“Maybe we can see each other again,” Ackroyd said.

3 John Ackroyd’s mother, Betty Gerlund; Linn County Sheriff’s Office, 9/21/77 (Gerlund has died) ([source](#)); Linn County Sheriff’s Office interview with John Ackroyd ([source](#))

4 Police interview with Marlene Gabrielsen; Linn County Sheriff’s Office, 6/16/77 ([source](#))

5 Police interview with Marlene Gabrielsen; Linn County Sheriff’s Office, 6/16/77 ([source](#))

He drove another 12 miles down the road and stopped in front of her mother-in-law's house in Lebanon, where she'd asked him to drop her off.

Marlene flew out of the pickup, a blur moving toward the house. He drove off as she banged frantically on the door. She clung to her boots, which she'd grabbed from the clearing. Her hair was matted with sticks and dirt.

"Oh my God," her mother-in-law said, opening the door. "What happened?"

"Call the police," Marlene said.^[6]

* * *

Ackroyd told police that Marlene had seduced him in the front seat of his dirty truck.

He said he gave her a pair of pants because she had torn hers while taking them off.^[7]

His mother told a detective that she'd peeked out the window that night and seen Marlene in the front seat of her son's truck. She said her son was shy around women.^[8]

The other man in the truck told police that Ackroyd wasn't the violent type and the woman was drunk.^[9]

6 Dialogue recalled by Marlene Gabrielsen in interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive, multiple interviews

7 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 1977 ([source](#))

8 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Betty Gerlund, John Ackroyd's mother, 9/21/77 ([source](#))

9 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with David Harris, John Ackroyd's friend, 6/16/77 ([source](#))

Investigators talked to Marlene's mother-in-law, too. She recalled how Marlene had arrived at her house, sobbing, saying something terrible had happened.^[10]

She handed police a brown paper bag with clothes Marlene wore on the night of the attack.^[11] At the hospital, an officer noted scratches on Marlene's back.^[12] A doctor identified bruising on her back, legs and knee.^[13]

Still, police seemed skeptical.

Marlene and Ackroyd agreed to be polygraphed.

A couple of weeks later, Marlene sat in the back of an unmarked police car as two officers drove her to the lie detector test. They led her into a small room with a desk. An examiner asked a series of questions: Did she tell the truth about being raped, did she feel she'd been raped, was there a question she was afraid to answer?^[14]

A sergeant's conclusion went into a typed report, which was placed in a file: Marlene was lying. He offered no explanation.^[15]

10 Lebanon Police Department interview with LaVonne Gabrielsen, Marlene Gabrielsen's mother-in-law, 6/12/77 ([source](#))

11 Lebanon Police Department interview with LaVonne Gabrielsen, Marlene Gabrielsen's mother-in-law, 6/12/77 ([source](#))

12 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 1977 ([source](#))

13 Hospital report from sexual assault exam on day of rape, 6/12/77 ([report](#), Marlene Gabrielsen agreed to have The Oregonian/OregonLive publish this document)

14 Lane County Sheriff's Office polygraph of Marlene Gabrielsen, 6/28/77 ([source](#)) (Marlene Gabrielsen's name is misspelled in various reports)

15 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 9/7/77 ([source](#))

Cops asked Ackroyd four questions.

“Did the girl ask you to pull over and have some fun?”

Yes, he said.

The others: Did you force her to have sex at knifepoint? Did you have a knife in your hand when you had sex? Did you tear off her bra?

No, said Ackroyd.

No deception detected, the polygraph examiner determined.^[16]

What followed likely altered the path of Ackroyd’s life, along with those of at least five young women and everyone who loved them:

The district attorney delivered his decision on whether to prosecute. It was a single handwritten sentence.

Ackroyd would face no charges.^[17]

* * *

More than two years later, another set of investigators went looking for the police report detailing Marlene’s account.

A state police sergeant and a lieutenant from a local sheriff’s office tracked down Marlene at home. She recounted the attack in detail, how the man cut off her underwear and boots. She’d hung onto the damaged boots and showed them to the men.

16 Oregon State Police polygraph of John Ackroyd, 9/21/77 ([source](#))

17 Linn County Sheriff’s Office report; 11/2/1977 ([source](#))

The investigators left.

They noted in their report how the original officers had failed to pursue the rape case even though physical evidence corroborated Marlene's account. ^[18]

But the rape allegation wasn't their priority that day. They were investigating the killing of a young woman on an isolated stretch of road outside Sisters.

The area was about a half-hour drive from where Marlene was raped.

The suspect: John Ackroyd.

18 Oregon State Police report, 5/4/80 ([source](#))

CHAPTER II

Kaye Turner

Camp Sherman, 1978

Kaye Turner threw on a T-shirt, long-sleeved pullover and yellow shorts, then laced up her Nikes.^[1] She stepped into the sunshine, the frosty air heavy with the scent of ponderosa pine.^[2] It was the day before Christmas. Her Timex wrist-watch read about 8:15 a.m.^[3]

She planned an 8-mile run. She'd be back in an hour, in time for breakfast.

1 Oregon State Police interview with Noel Turner, Kaye Turner's husband, 1/3/79 ([source](#))

2 Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon's handwritten notes for his opening statement in 1993 trial: "Clear, bright, unseasonably warm ... day a Eugene runner dreams of. Full lungs with clear central Oregon/Cascades air. Ran through scent of ponderosa pines." ([source](#))

3 Timeline from Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

Kaye and husband, Noel, had joined friends on a holiday getaway at Camp Sherman, a vacation and fly-fishing retreat along the pristine Metolius River off Highway 20 with a two-room school, country store and 200 year-round residents. The friends shared a meal the night before, then sang carols.^[4] Christmas presents Noel bought for his wife were wrapped and in the car.^[5]

The Turners lived in Eugene, where Kaye, 35, had worked at Planned Parenthood and then as a manager at a local public health agency.^[6] Raised in southern Oregon, she was an only child who remained close to her parents and had recently returned from a visit. Before she left, she had slipped into her father's workshop in the garage, writing "Hi Dad, I love you, Kaye" in neat cursive on a yellow legal pad for him to find later.^[7]

Earlier in the year, she'd finished a marathon, run two half-marathons and climbed Mount Washington and Three Fingered Jack.^[8]

4 Notes from grand jury testimony of Kaye Turner's friends, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

5 "Husband fears kidnap; Turner searchers losing hope," The Oregonian, 12/28/78 ([source](#))

6 "Eulogies fill Kaye Turner memorial," The Register-Guard, 8/21/79 ([source](#))

7 Letter from Kaye Turner's mother, Catherine Gray, 4/30/92 ([source](#))

8 "Eulogies fill Kaye Turner memorial," The Register-Guard, 8/21/79 ([source](#))

She talked about her plans to run in Camp Sherman, inviting a friend to join her that morning. The woman demurred.^[9] Kaye headed out alone, her feet pounding a two-lane camp road tinged red from volcanic ash.

She hadn't been out long when a state highway worker named Thomas Hanna spotted her, running south, alone. Hanna was returning to his place in Camp Sherman after working the night shift.^[10]

He saw another highway worker driving through Camp Sherman that morning.

It was John Ackroyd.^[11]

* * *

By 10 a.m., Kaye hadn't returned.

Noel Turner drove through Camp Sherman to look for his wife. Finding no sign of her, he panicked and called police.^[12]

The memory of an infamous crime, one year earlier, was still fresh in central Oregon. A stranger had driven his pickup over two young women as they slept at Cline Falls State Park, less than an hour southeast of Camp Sherman. Armed with an ax or hatchet, he attacked the women, both students at

9 Notes from grand jury testimony of Marie Knudsen, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

10 Timeline from the Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

11 Oregon State Police interview with Tom Hanna, 1/11/79 ([source](#))

12 Notes from grand jury testimony of Noel Turner, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

Yale University. They were critically wounded but survived. No one was ever charged.

Now, a woman had gone missing, triggering a massive search that made headlines clear to Portland: “Husband fears kidnap: Turner searchers losing hope,” one read in *The Oregonian* four days later.^[13]

Ackroyd’s name emerged early on. Hanna told police he’d seen both the highway worker and the runner in Camp Sherman that morning.

Ackroyd had indeed come across Kaye but didn’t go to police, even though he saw posters with her picture at the nearby Santiam Junction highway compound, where he lived. He mentioned it only after a pair of state police troopers approached him a couple of weeks later.^[14]

Then 29, Ackroyd had worked for the highway department for nearly a year.^[15] He was raised in Sweet Home, a modest logging town along Highway 20. He was the only son of an office worker at the local police department and a maintenance man. He was the middle child between two sisters.

13 “Husband fears kidnap; Turner searchers losing hope,” *The Oregonian*, 12/28/78 ([source](#))

14 Oregon State Police report, 8/20/79 ([source](#)); transcript of Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon’s closing argument, 10/5/93 ([source](#))

15 John Ackroyd’s statement to Linn County Sheriff’s Office, 3/11/92 ([source](#))

Ackroyd earned low grades in school; ^[16] his high school diploma was marked “special education.”^[17] He was a loner, ^[18] bullied and beaten by classmates.

Accused of felony theft as a teen, ^[19] he opted to enlist in the Army and was stationed in Korea, Thailand and Germany, where he worked as a mechanic. Overseas, he was investigated for selling marijuana and going AWOL. He was caught trying to steal equipment and supplies. ^[20]

He showed signs of a disturbed mind. An acquaintance told a detective how he once watched in horror as Ackroyd, then a young man, hacked up puppies using a machete, saying the dogs were his and nobody else could have them. ^[21] Later, Ackroyd would drive backroads, shooting squirrels and cutting off their tails. ^[22]

16 School report cards ([source](#))

17 Sweet Home High School diploma ([source](#))

18 Oregon State Police interview with Butch Winslow, John Ackroyd's childhood acquaintance, 5/4/80 ([source](#))

19 Oregon State Police report, 7/25/90 ([source](#)); Oregon State Police polygraph of John Ackroyd, 9/21/77 ([source](#))

20 John Ackroyd's military records ([source](#))

21 Steven Pickle, Rachanda Pickle's biological father, told Linn County Sheriff's Office Detective Mike Harmon that Ackroyd told him “these are my dogs and nobody's gonna get them.” ([source](#))

22 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Jennifer Persinger-Turner, Rachanda Pickle's cousin, 8/20/18: “He got off on really scary movies and scaring us kids all the time. He thought it was funny. ... He would take us out target practicing with the guns and shooting squirrels, cutting their tails off. ... That's mean. I wouldn't do it now but back then it was a game. ... The game was from one trip when we started on a dirt road until we ended up on the black top, how many tails we got and whoever got the most got a hundred dollar bill.”

Once home from the Army, he got a state job, where he earned generally positive reviews, though supervisors noted his occasional laziness and frequent time off.^[23] Burly and barrel-chested, Ackroyd favored jeans and blue work shirts from the local Sears.^[24]

His work meant long hours alone on Highway 20, the route that bisects Oregon from east to west. His stretch of it twisted through Bend, logging towns, Corvallis and on to the coast. Even today parts of the road are so narrow and quiet the highway has the feel of a country lane.

Back then, if traffic was light and his window was rolled down, Ackroyd would have heard the South Santiam River rushing alongside the highway as he headed west out of Sweet Home. He knew how to navigate its hills and hairpin turns during winter, when fierce storms swept through the Cascades.

Ackroyd knew, too, the dirt spurs that led off the highway and into the forest.

It was on one of them that he'd raped Marlene Gabrielsen the year before Kaye Turner disappeared.

* * *

Ackroyd's first statement to investigators on the Turner case was spare.^[25]

23 Work evaluation, 1978 ([source](#)); Lincoln County District Attorney's Office interview with John Ackroyd's supervisor, 2013 ([source](#))

24 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 3/11/92 ([source](#))

25 John Ackroyd's statement to Oregon State Police, 1/11/79 ([source](#))

He was based in Santiam Junction, about 25 miles from Camp Sherman, and said he'd gotten off work at 6:30 a.m. A while later, he drove through the camp, planning to hunt coyotes.

He passed by a runner, he told police.

Detectives didn't dwell on the highway worker. Instead, they focused on Kaye's husband and possible ties between Kaye's disappearance and extramarital relationships she had with two men at the time. Her calendar at work noted recent liaisons with the men.^[26]

The day after Christmas, experienced trackers who'd joined the search made a disturbing discovery in a clearing near the area where Ackroyd last saw Kaye on the road.

The trackers noticed two sets of footprints preserved in the frozen ground. One resembled the waffle soles of Kaye's Nikes. They mingled with another set that belonged to what appeared to be a large man.

The markings indicated a scuffle.

The larger person had dragged the smaller person away.

Local police didn't put much stock in the accuracy of the trackers' findings. The men were told to drop it.^[27]

26 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with former Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon: "Well you know within a week or a few days after she disappears they go through her desk in Lane County and they find that in the last six weeks she spent two extended weekends away with two, two other boyfriends each of whom was married. So the cops, you know, they have five suspects, five potential suspects. They've got a husband, they got two boyfriends and two boyfriends' wives."

27 Letter from tracker Melvin Hoke, 5/1/92 ([source](#)); transcript of Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon's closing argument, 10/5/93 ([source](#))

* * *

Eight months later, one day in August, Ackroyd walked into the Camp Sherman Store.

He was anxious and beaded with sweat even though the afternoon heat had faded.

The shopkeeper, Christine Weston, recognized him.^[28]

He'd stopped by a half-dozen times since Kaye had gone missing. One of those visits stood out: She'd discovered him fondling himself while looking at *Oui*, an explicit men's magazine sold at the store. Disgusted, Weston went to find her husband, but Ackroyd was gone by the time the couple returned to confront him.^[29]

That late summer day, Ackroyd headed straight for Weston.

He announced that he'd found Kaye's remains in the nearby woods while hunting rabbits with his dog, though as a seasoned hunter, he must have known the area was an unlikely choice for spotting rabbits.^[30]

"I'm in real trouble," he confided. "I was the last one to see her alive."^[31]

Alarmed, Weston went to get her husband, who called state police.

28 Jefferson County Sheriff's Office report, 11/16/91 ([source](#))

29 Oregon State Police report, 9/16/93 ([source](#))

30 Oregon State Police report, 8/20/79 ([source](#))

31 Notes from grand jury testimony of Christine Weston, Jefferson County District Attorney case files, ([source](#))

Ackroyd led investigators into the brush, about a half-mile off the road where Kaye had gone running the previous winter.

How odd, they thought. A hunter would likely overlook the bits of cloth and bone as nothing more than trash and animal carcasses. What had led Ackroyd to conclude the items in the ponderosa pine thicket were Kaye's? ^[32]

Forensic experts and search-and-rescue workers spent nearly a week looking for her remains. They found her lower jawbone and yellow shorts. A scrap from her blue pullover, her underwear and a remnant of the heel from one of her Nikes. They found the other sneaker, mostly intact.

Kaye's gold Timex watch with the vinyl band was there, too. Something, likely a struggle, had knocked out the stem, stopping the watch. ^[33]

The time and date stood still: 9:27 a.m. on Dec. 24.

As investigators scoured the woods for clues, a state police trooper rested against a tree. He glanced skyward.

High in the lush canopy, he noticed a bird's nest perched on a branch.

Something was tangled in the twigs and sticks.

32 Oregon State Police report, 8/20/79 ([source](#))

33 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with former Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon, multiple interviews: "It had a stem that you could pull out and you wound it. ... Only three ways the watch could have stopped. It could have run down and we eliminated that or the stem gets pulled out or it can have a substantial blow ... either by grabbing her arm or pulling off her shirt. That stem got pulled off somehow."

It was Kaye's blond hair.^[34]

* * *

Ackroyd became the prime suspect in Kaye's abduction and murder.

Investigators' suspicions deepened as his story began to shift.

Initially, he told police he'd passed Kaye without stopping.^[35]

Now he admitted he'd not only stopped but also had spoken with her.^[36]

Over time, Ackroyd added incriminating details to his account. In one stunning development, he revealed that he'd seen Kaye's decomposing remains two months after her disappearance but never thought to call police. He said her body was lying in the same wooded area where scraps of her clothing and bits of bone were found.

Her breast had been punctured by a bullet, he said, and her throat was slashed. He claimed he'd reached down to touch the slain woman's arm and hair.

The gruesome details implicated Ackroyd and suggested to investigators that he'd returned to Camp Sherman weeks after the killing to check on Kaye's remains.

34 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with former Oregon State Police detective Clayton Durr, 3/7/18: "We went back the next day with a Scout troop and searched the area. We found the watch, the lower jawbone and I found hair made into a bird's nest."; handwritten notes from Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon's opening statement in 1993 trial ([source](#))

35 John Ackroyd's statement to Oregon State Police, 1/11/79 ([source](#))

36 Oregon State Police report, 8/20/79 ([source](#))

Ackroyd disclosed yet another curious detail: He hadn't been alone on Christmas Eve morning.

He said was with his friend and hunting companion, Roger Dale Beck. The men at first said they'd hunted coyotes but later changed their stories to say they were poaching deer.^{[37][38]}

Despite all the tantalizing coincidences and Ackroyd's apparent eagerness to place himself at the scene of the crime, investigators could find no physical evidence definitively linking him to the killing. He steadfastly maintained his innocence, admitting only that he had seen Kaye that morning and found her remains.

Then a confession by a convicted murderer sidetracked detectives before they determined he was lying.

Eventually, the investigation stalled. Ackroyd returned to the periphery.

It seems remarkable in hindsight that he managed to elude police despite such compelling circumstantial evidence and his rape a year earlier of another woman off Highway 20.

Yet Ackroyd went on working for the state, responding to broken down cars, clearing wrecks and fixing state rigs along the highway, alone.

He married a local woman named Linda and they lived with her young kids, Byron and Rachanda.

37 Oregon State Police report, 3/11/92 ([source](#))

38 Oregon State Police interview with Roger Dale Beck, 8/25/79 ([source](#)); Oregon State Police report, 1980 ([source](#))

Beck left Oregon. He was convicted of a sex crime in Minnesota, served seven months in prison and moved to California.^[39]

Kaye Turner's killing became a faded memory. Her case remained unsolved. Detectives moved on.

Then Rachanda Pickle, Ackroyd's 13-year-old stepdaughter, disappeared.

39 Minnesota Department of Corrections spokesman said in email to The Oregonian/OregonLive that Roger Dale Beck was sentenced on 4/22/88 in Wright County, Minnesota, for third-degree criminal sexual conduct. He entered the prison system on 5/4/88 and was released from prison to supervised release on 1/22/89.

CHAPTER III

Rachanda Pickle

Santiam Junction, 1990

Rachanda Pickle's stepfather could turn angry in a flash.

Once, when a clock fell off a shelf, he beat her with a home-made paddle.^[1] When it snapped, he smacked her repeat-

1 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Byron Pickle, Rachanda Pickle's brother, 4/2/18: "They had paddles. We were smacked by paddles and a lot of people who are, are like, 'Oh big deal, a paddle.' No, there was paddles that were designed with holes drilled in them and stuff and they would brag about it, you know, helps cuts through the air so you get a harder spanking." John Ackroyd was "very predominant in discipline. ... If I put 50 dollars on a gamble that there wasn't punishment in a week I would lose that 50 dollars."

edly with his open hand.^[2] At other times, friends saw her with a black eye and a wound from where he'd ripped out a patch of her hair.

She was 13.

The family lived at the state highway division compound at Santiam Junction, where U.S. 20 and Oregon 22 meet. Stockpiles of cinder rock towered near the buildings inside the complex. Plows stood ready to rumble onto the mountain pass during winter storms. It was a 30-minute drive to the nearest store for milk.

A dozen or so work crews called the junction home. Few kids lived there and the ones who did weren't Rachanda's age.^[3]

John Ackroyd had an unusual arrangement with Rachanda's mother, Linda. The couple married in the mid-1980s but divorced after a year. They continued to live together, though, raising Linda's two kids, Rachanda and her older brother, Byron.

2 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Byron Pickle, 4/2/18: "When John snapped, it was scary. I remember him spanking her over one of those old school windup alarm clocks and it got broke and he was trying to fix it and stuff and him and mom were talking about it and they were both getting heated. ... Mom said to line them up and spank them until (one confesses). ... They were getting ready to line us up. My sister was denying it. ... She admitted it could have been her. That beating she got was over, over the top. It was scary. My mom was yelling at John to stop. It was scary. He was using a paddle at that time. They were thin slats of wood. It took a lot of force to break them. That's when it got broken, over her rear. Then he started swinging at her with his hand."

3 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Byron Pickle, 4/2/18: "In winter, more manpower would show up but no kids."

Rachanda was a good kid, helping around the house^[4] and taking care not to stray far. She rode her bike in the lane just outside the door and took a bus to grade school in Sweet Home.^[5] She listened to pop stars Debbie Gibson and Wilson Phillips in her bedroom^[6] and teased her brother who was her protector and playground companion.

Her family called her Channy.

To some, she seemed lost, almost invisible.^[7] When parent conferences rolled around, no one showed up.^[8]

In fifth grade, something shifted.^[9] She seemed withdrawn and tired. In class, she counted down the minutes, a sense of dread rising as the end of the school day approached.

She confided in two girls who were sisters. She cried as she told one of them that she was terrified of returning to the junction alone. She asked if she could sleep over. One time,

4 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Linda Monville, Rachanda Pickle's mother, 3/19/18: "I would give her a list of things to do in the house. In fact, there were a lot of times when she would say, mom, if you tell me what to do, she says I'll do the laundry for you and I'll say 'oh cool.' Or if I wanted her to put meat in the oven, OK, follow the directions here and this is what you do and put it in at this time and she would do it. She was very helpful."

5 Linn County Sheriff's Office interviews with William and Sharon Fullen, John Ackroyd's neighbors at Santiam Junction, 7/11/90 ([source](#))

6 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Byron Pickle, 5/24/12 ([source](#))

7 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 3/28/91 ([source](#))

8 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Mary Widmark, Rachanda's teacher, 1/17/91 ([source](#))

9 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Linda Monville, 3/19/18: "She asked me, 'Mom do you have to go to work?' So there was something going on, but I just didn't see it then.;" Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Laura Knight, Rachanda's elementary school classmate, 12/13/90 ([source](#))

she made a scene when it was time to go. Another time, they snuck her into their bedroom closet.

The sisters knew why she was afraid.

Ackroyd was molesting Rachanda.^[10]

* * *

On the morning of July 10, Rachanda was awake early to help her mother get ready for the day. She French-braided her mom's hair, then settled on the couch to watch cartoons in her pajamas.

Linda and John Ackroyd left for work, she as a housekeeper at Black Butte Ranch, a resort community about 30 minutes away, and he as a highway mechanic. They weren't expected back until afternoon.

Her mother left behind a short list of chores. Load the dishwasher. Vacuum the house. Take hot dogs out of the freezer.^[11]

10 The Oregonian/OregonLive interviews with sisters Mandy Cook and Michelle Seiber, Rachanda's childhood friends, 8/14/18 and 8/15/18. Cook: "She never went into detail, but like I said before, we never felt like she had to because we were kind of going through the same thing at home so with that she didn't have to tell me, but it's not OK for him to go into her room at night. It was never OK and I always felt like he was raping her." Seiber recalled being in school one day listening to music on headphones and she looked up to see Rachanda crying. "And she said, 'I'll be back' and she got up and left and came back to the library about 20 minutes later and she said, 'You know what you told me about what happened to you? That's happening to me, too.' I was like oh, OK. I kinda knew but after she said that, that is when she was more vocal to me and Mandy about it." Seiber remembered Rachanda telling her she was doing dishes and Ackroyd called her to the couch. Seiber said Rachanda told her: "He started tickling me and actually tried to rape me." Seiber said she became scared for her friend. "I was like, oh my gosh. I was just scared for her. Really scared."

11 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Linda Monville, 7/11/90 ([source](#))

Later that morning,^[12] the door to the house opened unexpectedly.

John Ackroyd was back.

Rachanda was never seen again.

* * *

Ackroyd spun the same story from then on.

He dropped off Linda at the resort and continued east on Highway 20 to the state maintenance shop in Bend. He'd planned to fix snowplows but decided to take the day off after learning parts hadn't arrived,^[13] a claim that baffled his supervisor who said there was plenty of work to keep Ackroyd busy.^[14]

He said he returned home to find his stepdaughter under a blanket on the couch. The television was on. The family's kittens were curled up on the girl's lap, he said.

He claimed he invited her to join him on a drive to photograph deer on back roads near the junction.

Rachanda declined, citing the chores her mother expected her to finish, he said. Then he said he left.

12 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Linda Monville, 7/11/90 ([source](#)); Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/11/90 ([source](#))

13 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/11/90 ([source](#))

14 Deschutes County Sheriff's Office interview with a highway division supervisor, 7/17/90 ([source](#))

By his account, Rachanda was gone when he returned in a couple of hours.

Ackroyd did little to look for her and later picked up Linda from work.^[15]

When the couple pulled into the compound that evening, Rachanda wasn't hanging around outside like she had the day before.

The home showed no signs of foul play. Rachanda's green nightgown was on her bedroom floor. Her mother noticed the girl's hairbrush, makeup and earrings were still there. The dishes weren't in the dishwasher and the floor wasn't vacuumed.^[16]

The girl who was good about leaving notes if she headed out to play Nintendo at a neighbor's house hadn't left one.^[17]

The couple ate; then they had sex, significant because they almost never did. Ackroyd's low libido^[18] was the source of such open conflict that Linda's teenage son, Byron, knew

15 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/11/90
([source](#))

16 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Linda Monville, 3/19/18; Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Linda Monville, 7/11/90
([source](#))

17 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Linda Monville, 7/11/90
([source](#))

18 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Linda Monville, 7/11/90
([source](#))

of their troubles.^[19] “It was great,” Ackroyd would later tell detectives.^[20]

“Where is she?” Linda asked Ackroyd as darkness enveloped the highway compound. “You should know. You were here with her.”^[21]

He said he didn’t know. He told Linda to wait until the next day to call police.^[22]

In the morning, she dialed 911.

She was calm as she told the dispatcher that her daughter, a homebody, had gone missing. When the dispatcher asked why she hadn’t called sooner, Linda said she assumed she had to wait 24 hours to report a missing person.

“No,” the bewildered dispatcher said, “that’s not true, not with children.”

The dispatcher asked: “Who was the last person that saw her, do you know?”

Linda’s reply was matter of fact.

“Her stepdad.”^[23]

19 Linn County Sheriff’s Office interview with Byron Pickle, 5/24/12
([source](#))

20 Linn County Sheriff’s Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/11/90
([source](#))

21 Dialogue recalled by Linda Monville in interview with The Oregonian/
OregonLive, 3/19/18

22 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Byron Pickle, 4/2/18.
Pickle said he told his mother: “You guys need to call the cops.” His mother
said: “John says we can’t call for 24 hours.”

23 911 recording, 7/11/90 ([audio clip](#))

Police swarmed the highway compound.

Word that Ackroyd's stepdaughter had vanished spread quickly to neighboring Jefferson County, where Kaye Turner had been killed more than a decade earlier.

Bill Hanlon, the district attorney in Jefferson County, wasn't surprised when the call came from a prosecutor in Linn County, where Ackroyd lived.

"Ever heard of John Ackroyd?"

Hanlon, who'd spent his career practicing law in rural Oregon, knew of Ackroyd from reading a slim three-ring binder stashed in a cardboard box left behind by his predecessor.

He'd pored over Ackroyd's police interviews from 1979 when the highway worker admitted he was the last to see Kaye Turner. He knew it was Ackroyd who had eventually led police to her remains.

The DA knew Ackroyd had changed his story and admitted he had talked to Kaye the morning he encountered her on a run.

Sure, he knew of Ackroyd.

"John Ackroyd killed Kaye Turner," he replied.^[24]

The next day, Hanlon hopped in a car with a Jefferson County deputy for a briefing on the search for Rachanda. The men drove by Santiam Junction, slowing as they passed the eastern

24 Dialogue recalled by former Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon in interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive, 8/24/17

edge of the highway compound where Ackroyd's manufactured home backed up to the woods.

There was Ackroyd, standing at the back of his Ford pickup. He was painting the tailgate.

Covering his tracks, thought Hanlon.

This time, the district attorney -- and the cops who believed Ackroyd had gotten away with Kaye Turner's killing -- were determined to get the highway worker off the street for good.

* * *

Ackroyd didn't seem bothered that Rachanda was gone^[25] and spoke about his missing stepdaughter in a way no panicked parent ever would. He rattled off the girl's weight and bra size but couldn't remember her birthday.

He thought she was pretty, he said, and noticed that she'd begun to develop.^[26]

Over the course of the investigation, he acted strangely. He basked in attention from police. He appeared to become sexually aroused when shown a pair of pants that police had found in the woods and initially suspected belonged to Rachanda.^[27]

He even pretended to aid in the fruitless search for the girl.

25 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with Beverly Tucker, who lived at Santiam Junction at the time of Rachanda's disappearance, 10/17/12. ([source](#))

26 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 7/18/90 ([source](#)); Oregon State Police report, 7/25/90 ([source](#))

27 Jefferson County Sheriff's Office report ([source](#))

Ackroyd's grim speculation about the harm that had likely come to Rachanda echoed gory stories like the ones he'd replayed over and over in "Friday the 13th" and "Texas Chainsaw Massacre."^[28]

Once, he invited neighbors over to watch horror movies, becoming so animated over scenes of women being chopped up that he hit rewind again and again. His friends became sick at the sight and left.^[29]

He wondered aloud if Rachanda had been dumped and buried in the woods or threatened with a knife,^[30] tied up and gagged, her body rolled in plastic.^[31]

Maybe it was the girl's development, he told police, that drew a predator to the junction.

"Somebody could have just come in," he said, "knocked her over the head, throw her over the shoulders and just walk out without anybody seeing her. ... Maybe they just walked in, seen an opportunity and grasped at it."^[32]

* * *

The officers assigned to interrogate Ackroyd were direct:

28 Reports from Linn County Sheriff's Office, 7/13/90 ([source](#)); Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, 7/20/90 ([source](#)); and Oregon State Police, 7/25/90 ([source](#))

29 Jefferson County Sheriff's Office interview with couple who lived at Santiam Junction, 7/28/92 ([source](#))

30 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/11/90 ([source](#))

31 Oregon State Police report, 7/25/90 ([source](#))

32 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/11/90 ([source](#))

The highway worker had hurt Rachanda, stuffed her into a garbage bag and hauled her away, Linn County Sheriff's Detective Jim Salsbery said during one of their interviews. His partner, Detective Will McAnulty, sat nearby. The men spent hours talking to Ackroyd.

By now, investigators knew who they were dealing with. Ackroyd would recycle the same stories. They kept their exasperation in check, rarely raising their voices as they combed fine details for any new revelation.

For a man suspected of murder, Ackroyd was impassive under intense grilling by Salsbery and McAnulty.

Occasionally, he'd reach for one of the Fireball candies he carried in his pocket.

"You know," he said, "both of you sitting there pointing your fingers at me, and I didn't do nothing."

"Didn't do anything to Kaye Jean Turner?" McAnulty asked, his voice cool.

"No."

"Didn't do anything to Channy?" the cop pressed.

"No."

"Didn't do anything to anybody else?"

"No, what do you think I am?" Ackroyd said, his voice rising in rare agitation. "A sadistic killer goes around killing people, taking girls off somewhere? ... I did not do nothing. At the wrong place at the right time."

“A bunch of times,” McAnulty said.

“Twice,” Ackroyd snapped.

“Twice that we know of,” said McAnulty.^[33]

Wasn't it strange that he was the last person to see Kaye and Rachanda alive?

“You could win the lottery four or five times before something like that would happen,” Salsbery said.^[34]

The interview sputtered to a halt. Within months, without a body or physical evidence implicating Ackroyd, so did the investigation.

Yet they knew Ackroyd was a killer. They had to get him.

They returned to Kaye Turner.

* * *

Detectives dug into Kaye's killing once more and soon stumbled on their biggest breakthrough.

It started when a supervisor in the Linn County Sheriff's Office assigned McAnulty to organize press clippings from the early days of the investigation. It was the kind of menial task you might give a rookie detective. McAnulty, who'd been promoted to detective just 10 days earlier,^[35] dutifully examined old newspaper articles and reports.

33 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 11/14/90 ([source](#))

34 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 11/14/90 ([source](#))

35 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with former Linn County Sheriff's Office Detective Will McAnulty, 1/23/17

He read about how Ackroyd had been with an old hunting buddy on the morning of Kaye's killing.

That friend was Roger Dale Beck. Beck and his wife lived in a trailer not far from Camp Sherman, where Kaye disappeared. His wife Pam said the two men were around the trailer for most of the morning, which helped give Ackroyd an alibi.

The couple had since divorced and Pam had moved to California.

McAnulty wondered if an ex-wife might see the events of the distant past in a different light.^[36]

He talked his boss into letting him drive 750 miles to California to find out.^[37]

By then, Beck's ex-wife had lost touch with Ackroyd but remained fond of him.^[38] The two had history that extended to childhood. When she was 12, Ackroyd tattooed his initials on her arm.^[39] Two years later, at age 14, she married Beck. Time had fogged her memory, but on one point she was

36 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with former Linn County Sheriff's Office Detective Will McAnulty, 1/23/17: "I had all of this information about the case and I knew from my previous experience one of the best weak spots in a lot of things is an ex-wife. I had a hunch and that is all it was at the time, that Pam Ramirez would have better information now or at least someone should double-check her story."

37 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with retired Linn County Sheriff's Office Detective Will McAnulty, 1/23/17: "I drove 750 miles to Porterville. They wouldn't fly me for that." In all, McAnulty said he went to California 11 times.

38 Affidavit of Pam Ramirez, Roger Dale Beck's ex-wife, Jefferson County District Attorney case files, 9/1/92 ([source](#))

39 Notes from grand jury testimony of Pam Ramirez, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#)); she has died.

clear: The men ordered her to lie if police asked where they were that morning. ^{[40][41]}

“I lied like hell back then,” she told McAnulty. ^[42]

The truth, she said, was this:

On Christmas Eve morning, Ackroyd showed up at the house. The men ate and left to poach deer, not returning until the next day, she said. Their clothes were spattered with so much blood that she got rid of Beck’s jeans and shirt. ^[43]

Later, the men told her that they’d mistaken Kaye for a deer and fatally shot her. ^[44]

Over time, the story took on even darker tones.

40 Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon’s grand jury notes: “She said John came over on the 26th. She said Roger and John were talking about some policemen might come because a girl was shot up there. They shot her by accident. This occurred in the front room. Those present were Pam, Roger and John. They said they killed her but John said he didn’t know for sure if they shot her. They asked her to tell the police if they came that they got home at noon that day. She said she didn’t ask any more questions. When asked who asked her to lie about it she said Roger did but John was agreeing.”

41 Notes from grand jury testimony of Pam Ramirez, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

42 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with former Linn County Sheriff’s Office Detective Will McAnulty, 1/23/17: “I got up to Pam’s door, knocked at the door, tell her who I was. She says, ‘Oh, I’ve been waiting for you.’ She wasn’t the least bit surprised. I want to talk to you about what you talked about in the Turner case. She looked at me and she says, ‘Oh, I lied like hell back then.’ At that point everything I had suspected was right out there in front. I know I was on the right track.”

43 Notes from grand jury testimony of Pam Ramirez, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

44 Notes from grand jury testimony of Pam Ramirez, Jefferson County District Attorney case files ([source](#))

Kaye had been raped and shot, Beck told Pam. She said he threatened to “do to me exactly what they did to Kaye Turner.”^[45]

* * *

By early 1992, investigators were closing in on Ackroyd.

He'd returned to Sweet Home to live with his mother and split for good with Linda. After Rachanda's disappearance, Ackroyd was transferred out of Santiam Junction,^[46] where his connection to the case and his behavior made women uncomfortable.^[47]

Ackroyd worked out of Corvallis and continued to roam the highway.

Sometime after he moved, Ackroyd was in his truck with the daughter of an old friend. She spotted two young women she knew. Ackroyd stopped. She introduced the women to him and they climbed in.^[48]

45 Affidavit of Pam Ramirez, Jefferson County District Attorney case files, 9/1/92 ([source](#))

46 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 10/11/90 ([source](#))

47 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Carol Krog, wife of highway division supervisor, 1/17/17: “We didn't want him up there. The ladies didn't want him around.”

48 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Rachanda Pickle's cousin, Jennifer Persinger-Turner, 8/20/18. Persinger-Turner was friends with Melissa and Sheila. Melissa and Persinger-Turner lived in the same trailer home court in Sweet Home. She recalled that some time before the teens vanished, she introduced them to John Ackroyd, who was married to her aunt. She recalled hanging out with Melissa and Sheila in a Les Schwab parking lot. “And then I see my uncle coming up on 18 and Tamarack going home so I motioned him over.”

Melissa Sanders was 17 and from Sweet Home. Sheila Swanson was 19 and from nearby Lebanon.

They were restless and broke, living an itinerant existence, drinking too much and keeping dangerous company.

Most nights, the pair could be found at Shari's in Lebanon, where teens and adults gathered to talk on CB radios and drink coffee.

Ackroyd, too, hung out there. He was drawn to Melissa and Sheila, making a point to chat them up.^[49]

At the same time, a half-dozen investigators working the Turner case seized on Ackroyd's shifting accounts. They pressed him again and again about his interactions with Kaye.^[50]

Cops went to search a storage unit Ackroyd had rented the year before only to find he'd cleared it out days earlier.^[51]

Ackroyd was a prime suspect and he knew it. A grand jury would hear the case.

His arrest was imminent.

Within weeks, Melissa and Sheila were dead.

49 Linn County District Attorney's Office interview with James Bevel, an acquaintance of the Melissa and Sheila, 12/14/14 ([source](#))

50 Linn County Sheriff's Office interview with John Ackroyd, 3/11/92 ([source](#))

51 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 1992 ([source](#))

CHAPTER IV

Melissa Sanders and Sheila Swanson

Newport, 1992

Melissa Sanders and Sheila Swanson made their final call from a pay phone in the dark,^[1] the sound of the Pacific Ocean churning in the background.

The two friends had gone camping with Melissa's family at Beverly Beach State Park, a windswept strand of sand and headlands on the central Oregon coast. The restive pair quickly grew bored and wanted their boyfriends to pick

1 Telephone tolls from phone booth at Beverly Beach State Park; two calls placed to the Lois May residence, one at 9:10 p.m. and the other at 10:57 p.m. The first call lasted 52 seconds; the second call didn't pick up. ([source](#))

them up. When the men turned them down, Melissa and Sheila said they'd hitchhike instead.^[2]

The teenagers had met six months earlier. They grew up in small towns about 90 minutes inland on Highway 20 and shared a history infused with drugs and alcohol.

They were scrappy and streetwise high school dropouts. Sheila often slept away from home but stayed in touch with her mother. Melissa had a turbulent life, too. She once showed up at Sheila's with bruises on her face and asked if she could stay.^[3]

The two spent evenings at a Shari's restaurant along Highway 20, where they hung around with other teens and locals, including a state mechanic named John Ackroyd.

By then, Ackroyd was a suspected killer who had frustrated police for more than a decade. He had raped a young woman, led detectives to a runner's remains off an isolated road in central Oregon and was the last person to see his stepdaughter alive.

Vulnerable and adrift, Melissa and Sheila knew nothing of Ackroyd's sinister background when he entered their lives.

Sheila, then 19, was the older of the two but seemed younger. She carried her baby book as a reminder of a time when she

2 Sweet Home Police Department report, 5/19/92 ([source](#))

3 Lincoln County Sheriff's Office report, 10/10/92 ([source](#))

was happy.^[4] She often wore a black leather jacket that her parents paid for on installments.^[5]

At 17, Melissa was tough-talking and independent. The spring camping trip to Newport was supposed to mean time with family, but she and Sheila took off the first chance they got.^[6]

Melissa's parents awoke to find the young women gone, their tent empty. They assumed the two had gotten a ride from friends.

When the family returned to Sweet Home later that week, Melissa wasn't there. Her father waited a few more days before calling police, then the FBI. Word reached police in Lebanon, Sheila's hometown, that she, too, hadn't shown up.^[7]

Local cops tracked down Sheila's mother. She'd gone around town hanging missing posters but hadn't called police.^[8]

What they didn't know: The teens likely were already dead.

* * *

Around that time, Marvin Laront was working the graveyard shift at the state highway shop in Sweet Home. Ackroyd

4 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Bart Swanson, multiple interviews: Sheila had baby pictures in a white and pink album. It was "almost like a journal for her. Kept it in her room or took it" with her, Swanson said. "She always knew where it was."

5 Lincoln County Sheriff's Office report, 10/10/92 ([source](#))

6 "Friends pay tribute to Melissa Sanders," Albany Democrat-Herald, 10/14/92 ([source](#))

7 Sweet Home Police Department report, 5/19/92 ([source](#))

8 Sweet Home Police Department report, 5/19/92 ([source](#))

would park his personal truck there before taking a state rig to work in Corvallis.

Laront and a coworker sat on seats salvaged from old vans, talking about the night ahead. They'd noticed that Ackroyd's truck was still parked outside and his work rig wasn't there. That meant he was on the road unusually late.

The men heard a truck pull into the yard.

Strange hour for company, they thought.

It was Ackroyd.

His shirtsleeves were rolled up. Dried blood covered his arms and hands.

"What the heck happened to you?" Laront asked.

"Ran into a deer," Ackroyd said. "I had to gut him out."

Laront asked what Ackroyd had done with the carcass.

"Threw him into the brush," he said.

Bewildered by the explanation, the men watched as Ackroyd washed up. Then he left for home.^[9]

Later, they mentioned the bizarre encounter to a foreman, but the anecdote never made it past shop gossip.

Laront didn't think of it again until that fall when he heard the news on the radio. Hunters had found the bodies of two young women who had vanished during a camping trip on the coast.

9 Dialogue recalled by Marvin Laront in interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive, 7/10/17

They'd been dumped off the highway along Ackroyd's route from the coast to Sweet Home.

Sheila's ankles were bound with leggings. Her sneakers and socks were still on her feet.

A used rivet was discovered near her body. Investigators suspected the rivet – a quick fix used in field repairs – had fallen out of the pocket of her attacker.^{[10][11]}

Parts of Melissa's body were gone, probably dragged away by animals. She was nude.

The medical examiner speculated that the young women had been strangled, but the condition of their remains made it difficult to determine a cause of death for either.

Laront remembered the night when a bloodied Ackroyd came into the shop. It was earlier in the year, though he couldn't recall the date.

"Wait a minute," Laront thought, "how come he is coming back so late at night?"

"How come he had all this blood on his hands?"^[12]

* * *

10 Oregon State Police report, Linn County District Attorney case files: "... a broken rivet was found near her fingers and is believed to be from an automobile that of the offender and was clutched during a struggle with the offender."

11 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Lincoln County District Attorney's investigator Ron Benson, multiple interviews: "I actually think this is something that would have fallen out of Ackroyd's pocket. The rivet remnant would likely be a leftover from a repair made earlier."

12 Dialogue recalled by Marvin Laront in interview with The Oregonian/OregonLive, 7/10/17

Melissa and Sheila vanished as police closed in on Ackroyd in the killing of Kaye Turner, who had disappeared 14 years earlier on a back road near Highway 20.^[13]

Weeks after the teens disappeared, Ackroyd was finally arrested for Kaye's murder and booked into the Jefferson County jail in Madras. Detectives wondered if he took a chance to kill again before his arrest.

Kaye had been an avid runner with deep ties to Eugene, where she worked as a manager at a local public health agency. On Christmas Eve morning in 1978, she went out for a run in Camp Sherman, where she, her husband and friends planned to spend the holiday.

She encountered Ackroyd and his hunting partner on a deserted road. Months later, the highway worker led police to the wooded area where scraps of her clothing and her jawbone were found.

Ackroyd dodged the accusations at the time, but police revived Kaye's case in 1990 amid an unsuccessful investigation to solve the disappearance of Rachanda Pickle, Ackroyd's 13-year-old stepdaughter.

Now, two years after Rachanda went missing without a trace from the family home, the young women who left a camping trip were dead. Within days of the discovery of Melissa and Sheila's bodies, police zeroed in once again on the highway worker.

13 Investigators conduct extensive interview with Ackroyd in March. Melissa and Sheila go missing in May. ([source](#))

Even before hunters had stumbled upon the teens' remains, Ackroyd told a friend: "They are assuming it's me."^[14]

Police scoured his work truck.^[15] One detective took time to sketch Ackroyd's loose connections to Melissa and Sheila -- how he and the teenagers knew some of the same people in Sweet Home, his hometown.

While recordings from his earlier police interrogations on the Kaye Turner and Rachanda Pickle cases filled hours of tape, Ackroyd was silent on Melissa and Sheila.^[16]

A detective reached out to request an interview. This time Ackroyd's lawyer responded. The answer was no.^[17]

Just as before, police turned up no physical evidence linking him to Melissa and Sheila.

Ackroyd was one of many leads they pursued. The teens had managed to build a sordid social circle in their young lives, so investigators had plenty of violent men to consider. Police at one point speculated that Melissa's alleged theft of glassware from a local meth cook might have gotten them killed.

None of it went anywhere.

* * *

14 Interview with Clinton Lawson by Lincoln County District Attorney's investigators Linda Snow and Ron Benson ([source](#))

15 Oregon State Police report, 11/5/92 ([source](#))

16 Lincoln County Sheriff's Office Detective Ralph Steele's request to John Ackroyd's attorney, Duane McCabe, 2/11/93 ([source](#))

17 Response from John Ackroyd's attorney, Duane McCabe, 2/25/93 ([source](#))

Two decades passed.

Sheila's parents had died, leaving her younger brother to carry on alone with his grief. Melissa's mother died, too. Her father Richard Sanders kept her jewelry box, which looked like a miniature china cabinet, under a counter in the old trailer where he lived outside Sweet Home.

Melissa and Sheila had joined a list of girls last heard from or seen late at night in coastal Lincoln County. In all, five teens disappeared on or around highways in the county from 1984 through 1995.

Their cases lingered in the community's collective memory and the local district attorney decided to reopen them in 2012, eager to identify potential suspects.

The unglamorous task fell to Ron Benson, an investigator for the district attorney, and Linda Snow, a retired legal assistant. They complemented each other: Benson, a veteran cop who'd had a hand in investigating some of Lincoln County's most memorable and notorious crimes, and Snow, a quick study with an impressive memory and a knack for spinning a mountain of clues into theories.

They met once a week in Benson's office to dive into thousands of pages of old files, spending hours devouring details about the case.

What had the original investigators overlooked?

A lawyer from central Oregon heard the cases had been reopened and called with a suggestion: Take a look at an old highway worker named John Ackroyd.

Benson made a four-hour trek to a courthouse three counties away where a metal filing cabinet held Kaye Turner's case. Snow worked the phones, digging up numbers for highway workers, many of them long retired.

Over time, the two made painstaking progress. They located the woman who had introduced Melissa and Sheila to Ackroyd. She told them how Ackroyd had once offered the young women a ride.

The anecdote revealed that Ackroyd knew Melissa and Sheila and that the young women were comfortable enough with him to climb into his truck.

Others told the investigators that Ackroyd started hanging around the Shari's in Lebanon after he met the teens. It was there that witnesses heard Ackroyd try to lure Melissa and Sheila to a party he said he'd planned to host in Newport -- just down the road from where they would be camping.

Old coworkers told Benson and Snow how they'd seen Ackroyd around a highway project near a gravel logging road off Highway 20. It wasn't far from where the teens' remains were found. Ackroyd was spotted there at least three times after they went missing.^[18]

18 Lincoln County District Attorney's investigator Linda Snow in correspondence with The Oregonian/OregonLive: "The time card reflects that he worked 8 hours on 5/4 & 5/5, 2 hours on 5/6. Off 5/7 & 5/8. Back to work on Monday 5/11."

The investigators sifted through the evidence collected from the woods where hunters came across Melissa and Sheila's bodies. There was the rivet found near Sheila and a beaded seat cushion used at the time in cars and trucks.

Highway workers told them the rivet was a common part they carried on the job. And a seat cover, they said, could have been in Ackroyd's state rig. Some workers used them to keep cool in summer months.

* * *

A white board went up in Benson's office.

He drew an orange grid, each column dedicated to a victim assaulted or killed, likely by Ackroyd.

First: Marlene Gabrielsen, raped in 1977.

Kaye Turner was killed in 1978, followed by Ackroyd's stepdaughter, Rachanda, in 1990.

Then Melissa and Sheila in 1992.

The two investigators crowded Benson's office with more white boards, scribbling fine points from each case. They looked for similarities -- how none of the victims had been buried, for example. Ackroyd had once speculated to police that his stepdaughter might not have been buried either. Her body had never been found.

And then there was Ackroyd's eerie talk of hunting. He told police he was poaching when Kaye was killed. He said he'd gone to photograph wildlife when Rachanda went missing. His excuse for his bloody arms and hands around the

time Melissa and Sheila vanished was that he'd just gutted a roadkill deer.

They wrote down his habit of taking time off around the disappearances, as he'd done with Kaye and Rachanda. He took off a couple of days the week Melissa and Sheila had gone camping.

Late in the investigation, they heard the strange tale from a few of the old highway workers about Ackroyd's bloody arms. The story was secondhand and not in any of the police reports.

Too good to be true, Snow thought. But what if the case turned on that clue?

Snow and Benson set out to find the men who had the strange encounter with Ackroyd. Highway worker after highway worker said they weren't there that night, they couldn't vouch that it had happened.

Then one finally offered: Try a woman who worked at the Sweet Home shop back then.

It took weeks -- the woman had changed her name since the early 1990s -- but she remembered the men and their names.

The investigators called Marvin Laront. His voice came through the speaker. He recalled the blood, Ackroyd's unlikely story and the odd timing. In a separate call, his old coworker told the same story.

Of course they remembered. How could they forget?

The investigators glanced at each other, stunned by the damning account all these years later.

It was as close to a breakthrough as they'd get.

Four years after they started, Benson and Snow had strung together enough evidence to take the double murder to a grand jury.

Their theory:

Melissa and Sheila had waited until dawn to leave the family's campsite. They began walking along U.S. 101, covering more than six miles to the turnoff to Highway 20, then headed east. Ackroyd, going to Newport for work that day, encountered the teenagers somewhere along the highway and offered them a lift, just as he had in the past. This time, he drove them up a logging road and into the woods.

The body count tied to Ackroyd was now up to four.

CHAPTER V

Who was John Ackroyd?

Madras, 1993

John Ackroyd had nothing left to say when he finally went on trial for abducting Kaye Turner 15 years earlier as she was out for a winter run along a backwoods road off Highway 20.

He had done all his talking to investigators during hours of interrogations after Kaye vanished. Those contradictions, discrepancies and outright lies had led him to this moment.

All these years later, the Turner trial would be the first step in bringing the killer to justice.

“This day,” prosecutor Bill Hanlon told jurors, “has been long in coming.”^[1]

1 Transcript of Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon’s closing argument, 10/5/93 ([source](#))

For more than a month in late 1993, Ackroyd sat impassively in a courtroom at the historic Jefferson County Courthouse in downtown Madras, about an hour's drive^[2] across the high desert from where Kaye had disappeared.

Ackroyd, an opportunist who preyed on women, had worked for more than a decade as a state mechanic along the last 170 miles of Highway 20 from the Cascade foothills to the coast.

He eluded police even as their suspicions about him deepened. He had already raped a young mother by the time he happened upon Kaye the day before Christmas in 1978.

Ackroyd's explanations of his encounter with her never added up, but detectives found no physical evidence directly tying him to the killing. They filed it away, unsolved.

Then Ackroyd's teenage stepdaughter disappeared and a new group of investigators reopened Kaye's case. Two more young women disappeared about month before Ackroyd was arrested and charged in Kaye's death.

The murder trial made headlines around the state. Kaye's mother attended, but her father, shattered by the loss of his only child, didn't live long enough to see the case come to a close.^[3]

The jurors listened attentively and scribbled notes. They didn't hear from Ackroyd, who had decided not to testify.

2 1 hour and 15 minutes, per Google

3 Email from former Jefferson County District Attorney Bill Hanlon to The Oregonian/OregonLive: Kaye's father "was deceased by the time I was involved in the case. Apparently, he never recovered from the news that his daughter had been kidnapped, raped and murdered."

But they heard about forensic testing on Kaye's clothing. The testing, unavailable at the time of her killing, showed she'd been shot and stabbed. Prosecutors said she also had been raped.

Among the witnesses was a young woman who was running in Camp Sherman on the same day as Kaye. It turned out that Jane Morris had an earlier brush with Ackroyd as well, months before Kaye went missing.

Jane, then 24,^[4] was on her bicycle, headed home from a waitressing job when she noticed Ackroyd standing near his pickup parked along the side of the road in Camp Sherman. He pointed a handgun at her and ordered her to stop. Jane's heart raced as she crouched over her handlebars and sped toward the nearby country store, listening for the sound of the truck behind her.^[5]

In the courtroom, she turned to face Ackroyd. It was the first time she'd seen him since that summer morning. For a moment, she considered how lucky she had been to escape unharmed.

The trial came to a close and Ackroyd, dressed in cowboy boots, jeans and a studded belt with "John" in silver letters,^[6] sat and waited to hear his fate.

It took the jury just four hours.^[7]

4 Date of birth: April 1954

5 Jefferson County Sheriff's Office report, 11/16/91 ([source](#))

6 "Jogger's slaying tied to 'lust,'" The Bend Bulletin, 9/9/1993 ([source](#))

7 "Jogger's murderer quickly convicted," The Bend Bulletin, 10/6/93 ([source](#))

Guilty.

* * *

Even with the verdict, investigators would never really know what unfolded the morning Kaye died.

Ackroyd had offered his hunting buddy, Roger Dale Beck, as his alibi, but another jury found Beck guilty of murder in the Turner case, too. Beck had bragged to family members about killing Kaye.^[8] Both men received life sentences.

Yet neither man confessed to police. Kaye's final hours remained a mystery.

At one point before the trials, investigators had returned to Camp Sherman to re-enact theories of what had happened.

A young deputy played Kaye. In scene after scene, over a couple of long days^[9] as the Christmas holiday approached, the investigators playing Ackroyd and Beck would snatch her off the road. Sometimes they would drive away and turn back to get her. In other scenes, Beck grabbed her as Ackroyd looked on.

The deputy ran at a steady pace, the thrum of the truck approaching her from behind. She thought of how Kaye must have felt, the air so cold she could see her breath.

She fought back in every scene, but they all ended the same.

8 Notes from grand jury testimony of Sheila Beck, Roger Dale Beck's daughter, ([source](#)); affidavit of Pam Ramirez, Roger Dale Beck's ex-wife, Jefferson County District Attorney case files, 9/1/92 ([source](#))

9 Linn County Sheriff's Office Detective Will McNulty's notes from "Turner movie," 11/30/92 ([source](#))

Then it was time to go. Will McNulty, one of the detectives, suggested they run through the scene one more time. For Kaye.

Again, the investigator playing Ackroyd tried to grab the woman, only this time she wrestled the gun from his grip and pretended to fire a single fatal shot to his heart.

The killer was dead. The cops cheered. ^[10]

* * *

Just like with Kaye, detectives would never know what had happened to Ackroyd's stepdaughter, Rachanda Pickle.

The girl, 13 years old, had never been found. She went missing in 1990 -- 12 years after Kaye's killing and just down the highway.

The prime suspect all along, Ackroyd wasn't charged in the case. His story about inviting the girl to photograph wildlife that morning never made sense to Rachanda's family and friends. He seemed to relish gruesome speculation about what harm had come to her. Though investigators were certain he was behind her disappearance, they couldn't prove it.

10 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Jean Beriault, 3/9/17: She said the idea for ending the final day of the exercise on a different note was then-Detective Will McNulty's. "He's a bear of a man with a heart of a teddy bear so these cases get to him. He wouldn't kind of let that shine through because he's a very professional individual, but I know it was really affecting him emotionally and so the last day of filming he came up with this idea. ... It was a spur of the moment thing. He said to me, 'let's film this one more time and this time I want Kaye to win' and I said, 'wow, that's a really great idea.' And everybody thought this was a great idea and so we filmed it one more time with them putting a gun on me and trying to force me into the vehicle. In the last scenario I was able to take the gun away and I shot him and put him down, and I mean, cheers went up. Everybody just, it was the perfect ending to this traumatic event that we all wished it could have went that way, that Kaye could have won this battle and been alive."

The girl's mother eventually moved to California and re-married. Linda Ackroyd, who now goes by the last name Monville, says she doesn't know if Ackroyd molested her daughter. She denies that he beat her kids.

Rachanda's brother struggled to cope with the loss of his sister. The detectives who handled her disappearance retired.

Then, two decades later, in 2010, another detective picked up the file.

Mike Harmon, a longtime investigator with the Linn County Sheriff's Office, worried Ackroyd had a shot at parole.^[11]

Harmon wondered if time had softened the old highway worker. Was he ready to talk?

* * *

The cop arranged to meet with the killer at Oregon's maximum-security prison in Salem in the fall of 2012.

Harmon's manner was low-key and friendly as he tried to gauge Ackroyd's interest in pursuing parole. Ackroyd wasn't sure. He had diabetes and a bad heart. He worried he'd become a burden for his family.

Harmon kept the tone conversational as he directed Ackroyd back to Rachanda. He took out an envelope of old photos of Ackroyd, his pickups and Santiam Junction -- all from the

11 Oregon Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision chairman Sid Thompson told The Oregonian/OregonLive that Ackroyd would have been eligible to petition for parole any time after 2009. Ackroyd never sought a hearing, Thompson said.

original police file. Ackroyd, now 63, went over the timeline of the day Rachanda disappeared, spinning the same old lies.

Harmon tried to nudge Ackroyd. He got creative: What if cops and prison officials arranged for Ackroyd to share a Christmas or Thanksgiving meal with his family on the outside? Would he give up the body?

Ackroyd wasn't interested.

Harmon was more direct when he returned to the prison a second time.^[12]

"I work for Channy," he told Ackroyd. "Something bad happened to her. The prosecution is going to progress in this."

Ackroyd was in no mood to talk this time.

"I am totally innocent," he said, his breathing labored, "and I'll say that until the day I die."

Harmon thought back to the handful of cases from the 1970s that remained unsolved: the bodies or clothes of women and one young man found in the isolated wilderness of Linn County, not far from Highway 20, the route Ackroyd spent years traveling for the state.

12 Linn County Sheriff's Office report, 11/20/12 ([source](#))

Two were Jane Does.^[13] Another, a young woman from Lebanon named Elizabeth Mussler who disappeared when she was 22, was discovered in a shallow grave.^[14]

Two more teens disappeared but their bodies never turned up. Karen Lee, 15, and Rodney Grissom, 14, were friends. They ran away from home with plans to make it to California.

Their final call in the spring of 1977 came from a pay phone in Lebanon. Later, Karen's jeans, pages of her journal and the blouse she'd sewn for a school project were found off a logging road.^[15]

Her jeans appeared to have been cut.^[16] The clue bore a chilling similarity to two of Ackroyd's earlier assaults: Rape victim Marlene Gabrielsen's boots and underwear were sliced and so was the waistband on Kaye Turner's yellow jogging shorts.

Karen's mother, Violet Gillmore, long believed Ackroyd was behind her daughter's disappearance. Gillmore knew Ackroyd had abducted a runner near Highway 20. She also knew he was from Sweet Home, not far from where Karen had used the pay phone to call a friend in the Midwest, just one year before Kaye Turner died.

13 Linn County Sheriff's Office summary of original police reports. The agency declined to release the original investigative reports, citing the unsolved status of the crime. ([source](#))

14 Linn County Sheriff's Office summary of original police reports. ([source](#))

15 Linn County Sheriff's Office summary of original police reports. ([source](#))

16 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Linn County Sheriff's Office Detective Mike Harmon, multiple interviews

“Our ride is here,” Karen told her friend. “I have to go.”^[17]

She was never heard from again.

Karen’s case and the others from that era were all but forgotten. No evidence, physical or otherwise, ever linked Ackroyd to any of them, but their timing and proximity to Highway 20 prompted investigators to wonder if the mechanic had a hand in them.

In prison that day with Ackroyd, the detective took one last shot.

“What about the other ones?” he asked.

“What other ones?” said Ackroyd.

“The other ones.”

“What you talking about?”

“Talking about some other people that are dead up in that area.”

“Oh,” said Ackroyd, “now you’re trying to lay some others on me?”

“No, I’m just asking you,” the detective said. “I’m just asking you.”

“I have never killed anybody in my life,” Ackroyd said. “I thought about it, but I never done it.”

Harmon returned to Rachanda.

17 The Oregonian/OregonLive interview with Violet Gillmore, 7/12/17

“So you don’t know where she’s at,” he asked. “Is that what you’re saying?”

“I wish I knew,” Ackroyd answered.

“Oh, I think you do,” Harmon said softly.

Ackroyd heaved his body out of the chair.

“If you change your mind and want to show me,” Harmon called out, “let me know.”

The aging killer headed to the door and returned to his cell.^[18]

* * *

It was the last time any cop talked to Ackroyd.

A few months later, in 2013, the Linn County district attorney took Rachanda’s case to grand jurors.

Prosecutors didn’t have a body. And Harmon hadn’t uncovered any physical evidence linking Ackroyd to Rachanda’s disappearance. But, worried about the possibility of parole in the Turner case, they took their chances.

Enough time had passed to conclude Rachanda was dead. A Forest Service ranger’s account of seeing Ackroyd that day in a sno-park near Santiam Junction -- hours later than Ackroyd claimed -- blew a hole in the highway worker’s alibi.^[19]

18 Dialogue from recording of Detective Mike Harmon’s interview with John Ackroyd at the Oregon State Penitentiary, 12/20/12

19 Linn County Sheriff’s Office interview with Paul Beadle, U.S. Forest Service ranger, 7/10/12 ([source](#)); Linn County Sheriff’s Office interview with John Ackroyd, 7/13/90 ([source](#))

And, most significantly, the teen's friends confirmed what investigators had long suspected: Ackroyd had been sexually abusing the girl before she vanished.

The circumstantial case rested on a basic theory: It was unlikely that anyone but Ackroyd, now a convicted killer, had harmed the girl.

The grand jury returned an indictment on a single count: murder.

Another Oregon courthouse provided the backdrop for Ackroyd's second prosecution. Rachanda's mother, Linda, didn't make the trip and the girl's father wasn't around.

The responsibility of speaking for Rachanda rested with her brother, Byron Pickle, then 37. The district attorney asked Byron if he supported a plea deal or if he wanted Ackroyd to stand trial.

If a jury acquitted Ackroyd, it could clear the way for him to seek parole.

Byron needed a moment to think.

He and his wife walked out of the county courthouse, where he paced and wept. He hadn't told his wife the full story of Rachanda's life and how he remained tormented that he hadn't hugged his kid sister the last time he saw her.

Their childhoods had been nightmarish under Ackroyd's roof. Byron recalled regular beatings. Rachanda was so uneasy living at Santiam Junction that she routinely brought a change of clothes to school hoping to stay with friends.

Though Ackroyd offered their mother stability, the teens dreamed of the day they could leave home for good.

Now the district attorney could use his sister's death to keep Ackroyd from hurting anyone else.

“I am not going to gamble this guy getting away with it,” Byron thought.

And so the case reached a quiet end in the fall of 2013. Ackroyd shuffled into the courtroom, where Byron sat in the gallery clutching a photograph of his sister. His wife sat by his side. Harmon, the investigator who spent hours interviewing Ackroyd, was there, too.

Ackroyd entered a no contest plea to his stepdaughter's murder. He wouldn't admit to killing the girl, but he wouldn't deny it either. In exchange, he agreed never to seek parole.^[20]

The extraordinary arrangement meant Ackroyd would die in prison.

As for what happened to Rachanda's body, Ackroyd gave no clue.

The hearing lasted about seven minutes.^[21] When it concluded, the judge sealed the court records. The reason for concealing the documents and who insisted on secrecy have been lost to time.

20 John Ackroyd's agreement with the state, 10/4/13 ([source](#))

21 Audio recording of the hearing in Linn County Circuit Court ([audio](#))

For years, only those in the room would know what had happened.^[22]

* * *

Three years later, by the end of 2016, the two investigators who had carefully stitched together a case against Ackroyd for the killings of Melissa Sanders and Sheila Swanson considered the work done. They believed Ackroyd picked up the teenagers sometime after they walked away from a family camping trip on the coast.

The district attorney said they had enough to take the case to a grand jury. But Ackroyd was already serving a life sentence. A new prosecution would be too expensive.

Case closed.

In late December, as the case wrapped up, the investigators read the news: Ackroyd was dead. The cause: heart disease.

The state police detective assigned to investigate the killer's death found Ackroyd on the floor of his cell, his sleep apnea machine still whirring and the breathing tube stuck in his throat, left over from last-ditch efforts to save him.^[23] His false teeth had been knocked to the floor.

22 The Oregonian/OregonLive sought to unseal the documents in the Rachanda Pickle case; that request was granted, 1/23/17 ([source](#))

23 Oregon State Police investigation into John Ackroyd's death, 12/30/16 ([source](#))

The state had continued to pay out Ackroyd's \$3,624 monthly public employee pension even while he was in prison.^[24] He stuffed his cell with food from the prison commissary -- dozens of packages of processed meats and cheese, candy bars and beans.^[25] He was beset with chronic health problems and hadn't left his cell much.^[26] His confidants were a pair of child molesters serving long prison sentences.^[27]

That morning, the detective looked around the disheveled cell and surveyed what was left: Ackroyd's stash of food, a cane and his prison-issued clothes.

For decades, investigators wanted peace for Rachanda, the lonely girl who was unhappy and out of place at the highway compound.

Had Ackroyd left a note telling them where to find her?

There was nothing.

24 Oregon PERS official, Marjorie Taylor, in June 6, 2018, email to The Oregonian/OregonLive: "Yes, the gross pension amount of \$3,624, is what would have been reported in the last data set he was included in. I see in the system that the benefit was a direct deposit, but I do not have information about that account."

25 Oregon Department of Corrections inmate personal property list, 1/1/17 ([source](#))

26 John Ackroyd discussed his failing health with Detective Mike Harmon in prison interview, 10/9/12 ([source](#))

27 A state police detective interviewed inmates in the cells next to Ackroyd: David Johnson and Fred Echols. Both men have sex crime convictions, according to the Oregon Department of Corrections. Prosecutors in both cases confirmed both victimized children.

Epilogue

This is a messy story with loose ends and unanswered questions.

It doesn't conclude with a dramatic trial in a packed courtroom. There were no somber words from the bench about justice served, no deathbed confessions.

There was no chance to give Rachanda a proper burial. Kaye's remains sat forgotten in the Jefferson County Courthouse until three years ago when court staff came across them. They were turned over to her husband and cremated.

Mystery still shrouds much of what happened during Ackroyd's final encounters with his victims, and that's not likely to change. In that way, the story feels unresolved.

Maybe that's why these are the cases that stuck with investigators.

Like Mark Foster, one of the cops who worked on the Kaye Turner investigation.

He returned to duty last year as a volunteer deputy with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. He spent Christmas patrolling Camp Sherman, quietly marking Kaye's disappearance decades earlier.

And Bill Hanlon, the prosecutor who helped put Ackroyd away. He runs in Kaye's memory every Christmas Eve.

Two of the victims' brothers have quietly suffered for years.

Today, both men insist they should have done more to protect Sheila Swanson and Rachanda Pickle from a killer.

Once in a while, Bart Swanson makes his way to the isolated logging road where Sheila's body was found just feet from her friend, Melissa Sanders. He lies down in the dirt and stares up: Is this what his sister saw before she died?

Rachanda's brother, Byron, still sees her so clearly, her sweet features framed by brown hair. Her face and name are tattooed onto his left bicep, a memorial to the aunt his children never knew. The last time the two saw each other, Rachanda was in the backseat of a Chevy Blazer headed home.

A father himself now, Byron gets a catch in his voice when he talks about it.

Kaye's husband, Noel, remarried. He's a grandfather now. Though they had grown apart in their marriage, he remembers Kaye with fondness. She was a bright and witty woman who seemed destined to live a full life.

Then there's Ackroyd's first known victim.

Marlene Gabrielsen is the one who got away.

In 1977, she told police that Ackroyd had raped her and they didn't believe her.

She lives in Hillsboro with her husband. They raised three kids. She went on to work at a local bank.

She didn't talk much about what had happened. Why bother? No one listened all those years ago.

Then she agreed to tell her story.

Over the course of hours of interviews with The Oregonian/OregonLive, she unburdened herself of every ugly detail.

She was at turns enraged and guilt-stricken. She had tried to warn police about Ackroyd.

Now Kaye, Rachanda, Melissa and Sheila are dead.

Victims of sexual assault often ask to remain anonymous. They don't want the stigma and the shame associated with these crimes.

Marlene K. Gabrielsen wants you to remember her name.

She told the truth all along.

It's 41 years too late, but finally she is believed.