Australia’s top 10 UNSOLVED MURDERS

Crime writer Megan Norris uncovers the details of the shocking cases that Australia will never forget.

BRITT LAPHORNE

A young woman vanished from outside a busy nightclub — but so far, her killer has not been apprehended.

The mysterious disappearance of Australian backpacker Britt Laphorne, 21, from Creation tourist town Dubrovnik in 2008 made international news. Among the troubling details that emerged was that during the initial investigation police did not question staff at a nightclub which three women say they had left shortly before being accosted by men lurking nearby.

Dubrovnik police failed to follow up reports of three attempted kidnappings of young women leaving the old city’s Fuogo nightclub between the Melbourne student vanished after partying with friends. Pressure from Britt’s family and Australian media forced the police investigation — which took a sinister turn when Britt’s body surfaced off the Adriatic Coast near Dubrovnik.

While Dubrovnik authorities insist there’s no evidence of foul play, suggestions her body had been weighted down support parents Dale and Elke Laphorne’s opinion Britt might have been abducted and killed. Her parents have vowed to fight for the truth to be revealed.

CLAREMONT MURDERS

Police believe hunting down this killer is only a matter of time.

After the most costly manhunt in Australian history, detectives from the Macro taskforce believe time will help capture the serial killer responsible for murdering at least three Perth women.

Despite no firm leads, police are committed to catching the monster who killed Sarah Spiers, 18, Jane Rimmer, 25, and Ciara Glennon, 23, who disappeared during the Perth suburb of Claremont’s infamous New Year’s Eve on January 3, 1996.

The Claremont Serial Killer’s last victim. And the grim discovery of 18-year-old Perth girl Kerry Turner’s body in 1991 poses the question — was Sarah Spiers his first?

LOUISE BELL

A tragic end for a little girl snatched as she slept.

In 1979, advances in forensic science and DNA technology led SA police to re-open the cold case of Louise Bell, nine, snatched from her bed in Hackham West on January 3, 1985.

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ELISABETH MEMBREY

Police are still hunting for the young student’s killer — and her body.

The agony continues for parents of budding Melbourne journalist Elisabeth Membrey after the acquittal of the man police accused of killing her. After two years in custody protesting his innocence, Shane Bond, 45, was cleared by a Victoria Supreme Court jury of the 1994 murder of the student and part-time barmaid.

After his Freedom Day release, Bond was last seen at 11.30pm on December 6 when she finished work at Regency’s Manhattan Hotel. A murder hunt was launched after her parents Roger and Joy discovered blood stains on Elisabeth’s matresses and in her unit. Her missing python wrapped the body, taking it in her Mazda to dump it in an unknown location before returning the car.

“We have not given up hope of finding shiru,” says Joy.

PORTLAND HAIRDRESSING MURDERS

A horrific double slayingocks a quiet town.

A new book on the chilling stabbing murders of hairdresser Claire Acocis, 49, and her client Margaret Penny, 58, whose throats were slashed at Claire’s hair salon in Portland on May 3, 1999, has prompted an anonymous message from a woman who claims she knows the killer’s identity.

The woman’s late-night message to author Leonie Wallace in the shampoo room of Portland’s Old London Coiffure suggests her body had been weighted down support parents Dale and Elke Laphorne’s opinion Britt might have been abducted and killed. Her parents have vowed to fight for the truth to be revealed.

BEAUMONT CHILDREN

Australia’s most infamous mystery still haunts the nation.

Over 40 years after siblings Jane, nine, Arna, seven, and Graeme disappeared from Glenelg beach on Australia Day 1976, Victoria’s longest-serving child killer Denis Pfenning admits he might have killed them — but he can’t remember.

Jailed for 18 years for the murder of Melbourne girl Yvonne Tushy, 12, Pfenning was in Adelaide at the time and is one of four prime suspects matching the description of the tall, fair-haired young man seen playing with them on the beach before they vanished.

Other suspects include child sex killer Steven John van Eem, who allegedly claimed he’d snatched three children from an Adelaide beach for experimental surgery and killed them.

Like van Eem, paedophile Arthur Stanley Brown also fits the description of the wanted man. His trial for the 1990 murders of two Queensland sisters was abandoned because of his dementia.

James Ryan O’Neill, jailed for life in 1975 for killing Tasmanian boy, was also named as a suspect who could have been in the area at the time.

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Mounted police search Dubrovnik's port.

British backpacker Katrina Macdonald, 19, was found dead in Dubrovnik in 1996. After a night out at the Fuego nightclub (below). Bubbly Britt was last seen at 11.30pm on December 6 when she finished work at Regency's Manhattan Hotel. A murder hunt was launched after her parents Roger and Joy discovered blood stains on Elisabeth's matresses and in her unit. Her missing python wrapped the body, taking it in her Mazda to dump it in an unknown location before returning the car.

“We have not given up hope of finding shiru,” says Joy.

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Derek Ernest Percy also remains a suspect in the deaths of Marianne Schmidt and Christine Sharrock, both 15, who disappeared from Wanda Beach, NSW, on January 11, 1965. On holiday in Sydney at the time, a young man matching Percy’s description was seen on the beach that day near the spot where the girls’ bodies were found next morning.

When the case was re-opened in 2007, a review of evidence revealed similarities between the teenagers’ injuries and those suffered by Percy’s 1969 victim Yvonne Touhy. This year DNA testing on a 47-year-old blood stain from one of the girls’ shorts identified a ‘weak’ male profile.

Two decades after the abduction and murder of Melbourne schoolgirl Karmein Chan, the former chief of the $4 million manhunt believes her killer was among 20 possible suspects police were unable to eliminate from the investigation. Commander David Sprague, former head of the Spectrum taskforce, is convinced the man he suspected kidnapped Karmein, 13, from her home on April 13, 1991, and raped and abducted two other girls, was frightened off by his interrogation and police scrutiny.

He says the man he believes is ‘Mr Cruel’ – a name the media gave to a serial child sex attacker operating in Melbourne – went to ground after Karmein’s body was found in 1992. But former taskforce colleagues dispute his suspect was the real Mr Cruel, who they insist will be trading internet kiddie porn and infiltrating kids’ chat rooms.

A $300,000 reward has been offered for information leading to Mr Cruel’s arrest.

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This year Tanner urged the Victorian Coroner’s Court to set aside the 1998 ruling and order a new inquest, saying new evidence found by ex-detective Ron Irwin would clear his name. Irwin’s book Blackened Tanner insists Jennifer’s death was suicide and claims Tanner has an alibi. But Chief Coroner Jennifer Coate ruled the evidence was not new and refused a third inquest.

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