

LYONSWOOD INVESTIGATIONS AND FORENSIC GROUP WORKS ON FAMOUS COLD CASE

STRANGE JUSTICE

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Los Angeles police "lose" a murder file for 36 years

Comment from Australia

A 36-YEAR-OLD murder mystery involving Patricia Galea, the then-wife of Sydney racing identity Bruce Galea, looks set to be unravelled following the arrest of two Americans accused of killing her during a home invasion robbery in Hollywood. But even if the two accused, John Threlkeld, 57, and Leonard Turner, 64, are convicted, another more profound question remains unanswered: why did it take so long to arrest the two, who were identified at the time of the incident?

Los Angeles police have said the file containing the names of the suspects was somehow "lost" and for decades the two remained at large, until an accidental discovery of the file four years ago. So extraordinary is the lapse that a lawyer defending the men has tried to find whether there was any sinister influence in the series of events, including the misplacement of the file.

The defence lawyers have commissioned a Sydney private inquiry agent, Warren Mallard, of Lyonswood Investigations, to find out all he can about Ms Galea's life in Australia and her connections here. Ms Galea, then 24, a Sydney beauty, left her 10-month old baby, Emily, in the care of her husband while she travelled to the US. She was intent on setting up in business in the Hollywood-Beverly Hills area and in March 1974 returned to Australia to get \$6402 in funds. Ms Galea leased an apartment in N. Alta Loma Drive, West Hollywood, which she shared with a 22-year-old rock musician, Eugene Synegal. On April 14, Ms Galea and four friends, including Mr Synegal, left to catch a plane to New Orleans,

leaving her flat and her dog in the care of Kristine Murphy, 24.

At 1.30 am on April 15, three men, described as "Afro-Americans", buzzed the apartment from the entrance to the building. One of them said he was "Sonny", the name of Ms Murphy's former boyfriend. She let them in and opened the apartment door to be confronted by a pistol. The men tied up Ms Murphy and began ransacking the flat. Ms Galea and her friends missed their 2 am flight and returned to the flat between 2.30 and 2.45 am. When they buzzed on the intercom, the robbers forced Ms Murphy to let them in, then attacked them, apparently trying to cut Ms Galea's throat.

Ms Galea screamed: "Please don't kill me!" One of the robbers pushed a .410 shotgun into her mouth and pulled the trigger. Another stabbed Ms Murphy in the neck. Camela Bussey, 30, jumped from a window to the ground, breaking her leg. Mr Synegal had his throat cut, Mercury Washington, 27, was wounded in the throat and Dinell Smith, 25, was bashed in the head with a rifle butt. All except Ms Galea survived.

The robbers escaped with \$US400, two diamond rings, a cigarette lighter valued at \$US1400 and two mink coats. They missed Ms Galea's \$6402, which was hidden in her freezer. The same day, police interviewed four women, not involved in the incident, who all knew Threlkeld. Nothing was established to connect them and they were released. But police did discover that it was "common knowledge" among Ms Galea's friends, and Threlkeld himself, that Ms Galea had the relatively large amount of money.

When news of the murder reached Australia, Bruce Galea was overcome by shock and grief. "The bludgers just let go ... They shot her!" he said.

Police discovered that three of the surviving victims knew Threlkeld, including Mr Washington, who said Threlkeld had been his friend, and who also knew Turner. Ms Bussey knew Threlkeld and said the other two robbers came from the Detroit area.

Threlkeld and Turner fled in Ms Murphy's white Ford Pinto, which they abandoned in Mexico. On April 17, 1974, the district attorney signed a complaint against the offenders alleging murder, robbery and assault with a deadly weapon. The same day, Judge George Zuker, of the Beverly Hills Municipal Court, signed warrants for the arrest of Threlkeld, Turner and the third man, given the name "John Doe" and otherwise unidentified.

Threlkeld and Turner were tracked down to Detroit, where they were being held on other charges. Detroit County law officials said Los Angeles could have them after they were dealt with in Detroit. At this point, according to the detectives from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Homicide Division, the murder warrants for Threlkeld and Turner were "somehow" removed from their case files, and nothing happened for decades.

In late 2005 or early 2006, the owner of the apartment building in West Hollywood, making inquiries into its history, came across the murder and robbery and wanted to find out more.

Detectives could not find the paperwork and referred the matter to their cold case unit, specifically to a retired detective working with the unit, Robert Barrier. Mr Barrier found that the district attorney's file on the case was also missing. But through a check of names, addresses and social security numbers, he was able to identify Turner and Threlkeld. It was not hard to find them. Both had been taken into custody in August 2007. One was in prison, while the other was on parole. Since the events of April 1974, they had racked up convictions for armed robbery, bank robbery and manslaughter.

Why had it taken so long? "The ball was obviously dropped somewhere along the line," a detective said this week. "We can't tell exactly where, because the paperwork can't be found."

Threlkeld and Turner will appear in court in Beverly Hills on February 5 on charges of armed robbery and murder. There have been defence motions to dismiss the case, claiming the belated filing of the charges amounts to a denial of the pair's constitutional right to a speedy trial. In their search for new evidence, the defence is casting a very wide net.