

Margaret Unger - Murder

Sunday, June 4, 1989

Police seek killer *Woman slain by shot to head*

By Lisa Priest

Winnipeg police are searching for the killer of a 55-year-old woman who was shot in the back of the head in her kitchen Sunday.

Staff Sgt. Don Peters said because officers didn't know they were dealing with a homicide until late Monday, it will be more difficult to find the killer.

"There's still a lot of question marks but the investigation is coming along well," Peters said.

Initially, police thought Margaret Unger had fallen on something sharp and hit the back of her head, causing it to bleed.

"There was some blood on the floor, which was consistent with that of her falling," he said.

But an autopsy completed at St. Boniface General Hospital on Monday revealed the cause of death was a single shot to the back of the head.

"There were no visible entry and exit wounds," Peters said, adding that the wound was made with a small-calibre weapon.

Peters said further tests are being done to show when the woman, a Canadian Red Cross driver, died.

The first call police received was after Unger's ex-husband, Hank, went to visit her at her home at 1325 Manitoba Avenue on Sunday afternoon because he hadn't been able to reach her by telephone earlier.

"He knocked on her door and then went to another family member to see if they should check on her because no one answered," Peters said.

Unger was found about 4:30 p.m. There appeared to be no signs of a break-in and she had not been assaulted, Peters said.

Neighbor Jean Keating described Unger as a fine woman, who lost her son 11 years ago in a fatal car crash.

It was about that time, she said, when Unger and her husband separated.

She said Unger's daughter, Sonya, is in town but did not want to discuss the killing, which has left the family devastated.

"I knew her very well. We used to talk all the time," Keating said.

"We used to talk about gardening. It's really left the whole neighborhood sad because she was such a friendly woman."

Janice Bartley, public relations manager for the Canadian Red Cross in Winnipeg, said Unger had been a driver with the blood transfusion service since September 1972.

Margaret Ann Unger, a 55-year old driver for the Canadian Red Cross Blood Services, was found murdered in the kitchen of her Manitoba Avenue home on the afternoon of Sunday, June 4, 1989. She had been shot once in the back of the head at close range, execution-style.

Her ex-husband, who had dropped by her home to deliver some items that he had been given for her by their daughter, found Mrs. Unger. When he arrived, the back door was ajar; her truck was in the driveway; and when he did not get a response at the door, he went inside with another relative to check on her well-being. As Mrs. Unger had a foot operation six weeks earlier, she could not walk very well, and the fact that her truck was still in the driveway suggested something might have been wrong when she did not answer.

Mrs. Unger's activities leading to her death are well documented. Several neighbours saw her doing some yard work between 11:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Saturday afternoon. Shortly after 2:30 p.m., she left in her truck and went to a relative's place to get assistance in moving a china cabinet. The china cabinet wasn't moved, and Mrs. Unger returned home at 6:30 p.m, making arrangements to move the china cabinet the next morning.

The last time Mrs. Unger was seen alive was at "dusk" (about 9:00 p.m.) on Saturday night by a neighbour who saw her letting her cats out. When her relatives tried calling her the next morning between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. to move the china cabinet, she never answered the phone. Her ex-husband found her body several hours later.



Mrs. Unger was found in the kitchen of her home, wearing a housecoat and nightgown. She had been standing in her kitchen, holding a full cup of coffee, when she was shot from behind. The police found a nearly full pot of coffee on the kitchen counter.



According to her relatives, Mrs. Unger was a creature of habit and usually followed a daily routine that began with a fresh pot of coffee around 7:00 or 7:30 a.m. when she awoke. She would then sit around her living room, wearing her housecoat and drinking her coffee for about an hour. Her glasses, cigarettes, an ashtray, a pocketbook, and the TV remote control were on a table beside her chair in the living room. Based on her manner of dress and the partly full cup of coffee, it is possible that the murder happened sometime between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. that morning.

From this evidence, it is believed that Mrs Unger was sitting in her living room having a cup of coffee, smoking her cigarettes and reading a book when the suspect called at her back door. She either knew the suspect, or they had an excellent con; regardless, it appears that the person was allowed entry into her house.

While her back was turned, possibly to fill a cup of coffee (for the suspect or herself), one shot was fired into the back of her head, killing her instantly. Ballistics testing from a spent cartridge case in the kitchen determined that the gun was likely a Llama .22 calibre semi-automatic pistol (an inexpensive weapon imported into Canada from Spain). The gun had been brought to and removed from the scene by the killer.

A further examination of the house determined that there were no signs of forced entry. As Mrs. Unger had been the previous victim of two burglaries, she was very conscious about security and kept her doors and windows locked at all times. As such, it is possible that she knew the suspect and let them into her house. However, as part of her morning routine, she would let her cats out, thus leaving her door unlocked and possibly providing the suspect with the means to enter the house without notice.

Regardless of the method of entry, it appears that the murder was the sole act committed by the suspect, as there was no evidence that any other crime was committed. As such, the motive behind her death was probably very personal in nature (ie: for anger, revenge, or personal gain). Unfortunately, Mrs. Unger was a very private person, and the identity of any enemies (let alone friends) that she may have had was unknown to her family, neighbours and co-workers. Although she had been separated for 13 years, there was no indication that she had any boyfriends or other serious relationships.

No suspicious noises or persons were heard or seen by any of Mrs. Unger's neighbours, and it appears that the killer escaped undetected.

