

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

Introduction

Focus

In this *News in Review* story you'll learn about the trial of Robert Pickton, accused serial killer. You will also learn about the missing women of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and how they lived their lives with hope and determination despite the horrible reality of their daily lives.

WARNING: This story contains disturbing subject matter and may not be suitable for all viewers.

Did you know . . .

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is considered to be the poorest neighbourhood in all of Canada, plagued by those suffering from drug addiction and poverty.

In January 2006 the trial of Robert William Pickton began in a courtroom in British Columbia. Pickton, commonly known as Willie, is charged with murdering 26 women who disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. However, he is presently being tried for six murders. The other cases will be tried later.

This is a heartbreaking story. Heartbreaking because the families have to listen to the details of their daughters' brutal deaths, and heartbreaking because these women represent the gravest failures of Canadian society: our inability to deal with poverty, the failure of social services to provide loving, safe homes for children in need, the evils of drug addiction, and the desperation of women who have to sell their bodies to finance an addiction they can't break.

Robert Pickton stands accused of murdering 26 of these women. Ultimately, there may be more charges laid against him, as he has bragged to police interrogators that he wanted to kill "an

even 50, but that he got sloppy." If Robert William Pickton is the serial killer police believe, then how was such a monster created? What in his past could possibly have led him to be capable of such cruel, horrific acts? Or was he born a sociopath and it was just a matter of time before he acted on his basic impulses to degrade and humiliate others?

And as a society, how do we deal with this information? Although the trial is the most sensational murder trial in Canadian history, do we really want to know all the information? Is it appropriate for children to be exposed to the horrific details that are being revealed during the trial? What type of balance should be struck between a free press and our right to protect ourselves from information that many find to be too disturbing?

There are no easy answers to these questions. But by exploring the larger issues presented by this case we can do more to help the most disenfranchised in our country.

To Consider

The families of many of the victims have criticized police for failing to take action about the missing women sooner. They believe that because many of the missing women were from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, were poor, were addicted to drugs, were sex-trade workers and were often Aboriginal, they simply didn't matter to the police.

In a small group, discuss the following points:

- a) Why might poor, drug addicted women matter less to the police than those from another group?
- b) What factors influence how actively the police pursue a case?
- c) Why might women from such a group become the target of violent offenders?

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

Video Review

Note: The material in this *News in Review* video may be disturbing to some. Teachers and students should use their discretion before watching the video.

Did you know . . .
As of February 2007 the cost of the Pickton investigation was estimated at \$112-million.

Pre-Viewing Activity

Before you watch this story, discuss the following questions with a classmate or in a small group. Record your responses in your notes.

1. The victims in most murder cases are rarely remembered after the initial media attention of an arrest and a trial. How might the families of the victims be feeling now that the trial has begun? What might they be hoping for?
2. The details of this case are quite disturbing. How much detail should be included in media accounts of the trial? Should certain details be withheld because children may be exposed to news accounts of the case? Explain.
3. If found guilty and convicted, Robert Pickton would be the most deadly serial killer in Canadian history. How is it possible that a man could commit so many murders, over such a long period of time, and not be discovered?

Viewing Activity

Respond to the following questions while viewing the video.

1. Answer the four "W" questions below:
 - a) Who is on trial? _____
 - b) What is he on trial for? _____
 - c) Who are the alleged victims? _____

 - d) When did the alleged crimes occur? _____
2. Outline three main points from the Crown's opening arguments.

3. Outline three main points from the opening arguments of the defence.

4. Record two reasons why some members of the victims' families chose to attend the trial.

5 a) How did Canadians respond to the first news accounts of the case?

b) How did news companies respond to these concerns?

6. In this video, we learn some of the details about one of the victims—Marni Frey. Record the major events and/or turning points in Frey’s life.

7. Explain how the murder of her mother has affected the life of Brittney Frey.

Post-Viewing Activity

1. a) Read the following statements made by members of the victims’ families in this *News in Review* video.

“They weren’t just garbage. They weren’t throwaways. We all need to realize that and remember that these girls that have gone were human beings and were all loved by everybody.” — Lynn Frey (victim’s stepmother)

“I’m here for my mom to support her, and I’m also here for the other family members that have lost people, and I’m here for myself. I just want closure. I want justice.” — Brittney Frey (victim’s daughter)

“All you guys here ask how we feel or all that. You know, of course, how would you feel if that was your daughter?” — Rob Papin (victim’s cousin)

b) Review your response to Question 1 in the Pre-Viewing Activity. Modify your response in light of these statements.

2. Review your response to Question 2 in the Pre-Viewing Activity. Now that you know more about the details of the case, what additional information needs to be added to your initial response?

3. Review your response to Question 3 in the Pre-Viewing Activity. Now consider the following:

- The majority of the victims in this case were women who lived in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.
- Many of the women were drug addicts who engaged in prostitution to pay for their drug habits.
- Many of the women also happened to come from First Nations’ communities.

How might these factors have played a role in how long it took police to make an arrest in this case? Explain.

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

Victimology

Did you know . . .

Plans are already underway at CTV to make a movie based on this horrible story. Do you think that the murders should be given a film treatment? Will a film respect the women who were murdered?

Did you know . . .

Health Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca) reports that Aboriginal women are three times more likely to experience a violent death than non-Aboriginal women. The rate rises to five times for Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 44. (*Herizons*, Fall 2005)

Remembering Six Women

Robert Pickton has been charged with murdering 26 women. He is currently on trial for the murder of six women: Sereena Abotsway, Mona Wilson, Andrea Joesbury, Brenda Wolfe, Georgina Papin and Marnie Frey. Below you will find a brief description of each of these women. While reading, consider the factors that led each woman to a life of addiction and poverty, and the ways each woman tried to live a “normal” life despite her desperate situation.

Sereena Abotsway

Both of Sereena Abotsway’s biological parents died when she was quite young. She lived with her foster parents—Bert and Anna Draayers—from the age of four until she was 17. She was hard to control at home and at school and was eventually placed in a group home. Bert Draayers said that at the time, no one really knew why Sereena’s behaviour was so out of control. But he also realizes that today she would have been diagnosed as suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome.

One of Abotsway’s boyfriends introduced her to drugs and sent her out to the streets to work as a prostitute. She was once beaten into a coma by a bad trick, and she endured several abusive relationships. At the time she went missing she had few teeth left, and there was a warrant out for her arrest for stealing chocolate bars.

Despite living a life on the streets, Abotsway called home to the Draayers every day. She loved Barbie dolls and teddy bears and attended church downtown where she worked and lived. She

also participated in community marches calling for deeper investigations into the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside. Abotsway disappeared in August 2001 at the age of 29.

Mona Wilson

Mona Wilson was born on the O’Chiese First Nation in Alberta but was removed to a treatment centre after suffering physical and sexual abuse at a very young age. Between the ages of eight and 14, she lived on a hobby farm in Surrey, British Columbia, with the Garley family. Her foster brother, Greg Garley, remembers her as a girl with a big smile who loved to race around the farm, feeding chickens and helping her foster mother tend the garden. He also remembers how much Wilson loved it when the family took a trip to Disneyland.

Garley recalls that the first time he saw Wilson break down about the violence she experienced as a child was when she got her first period. Despite the fact that the women of the Garley household had prepared her for this event, it seems that her period brought back memories of being raped as a child. Apparently she sobbed for an entire day.

After six years with the Garleys, Wilson was placed with a single mother who had a 14-year-old son. By 16 she was living on her own in Vancouver’s east end. She still called the Garleys once a month, but refused to visit. Greg Garley says that the family didn’t know she had become addicted to heroin and had turned to prostitution to finance her habit.

The phone calls to the Garleys

Further Research

The Sisters in Spirit Initiative is trying to raise awareness of the alarming number of Aboriginal women in Canada who go missing and are murdered in Canada. Unofficial estimates place the number of women gone missing over the past 20 years at 500. Learn more about this initiative by visiting www.sistersinspirit.ca.

stopped in November 2001. She was 26 at the time of her disappearance.

Andrea Joesbury

Heather Joesbury says that her sister Andrea was the type of big sister who every little girl dreams of having. Andrea included her baby sister in big sister things like meeting friends and sharing secrets. She read countless children's stories to her. She watched out for her. She spent hours dancing with her little sister. And she was beautiful, with a big smile.

Despite the smile, Joesbury experienced a lot of heartache early in her life. Growing up, she witnessed alcoholism, physical abuse, and mental illness. In search of a father figure, she got involved with an older boyfriend while she was in her mid-teens. Her boyfriend, who was a drug dealer, persuaded her to move from Victoria to Vancouver with him.

Joesbury became a drug addict and ended up desperate to find a way to finance her drug habit. Her sister, Heather, says the pimps in Andrea's life were ruthless. She recalls one occasion when Andrea was too sick and drugged-out to work. The pimps came all the way to Victoria to try to force Heather to go and work for them.

Joesbury repeatedly tried to turn her life around and she kept trying to kick her heroin addiction. It was actually her doctors who reported her missing in June 2001 after she stopped picking up her methadone treatments in Vancouver. She was 23 when she disappeared.

Brenda Wolfe

Not a lot is known about Brenda Wolfe's early life, but she was born in 1968, most likely in southern Alberta. She appears to have battled drug addic-

tion at an early age, spending some time in a treatment facility when she was only 17. Like many drug addicts who are poor and in desperate shape, she ended up in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Wolfe was tall and strong. Her intimidating presence and her ability to fight resulted in her working as a bouncer in a downtown bar and as a street-enforcer-for-hire. As a street enforcer she would help out people who had problems to solve—like recovering money owed to them—but who were too scared to approach the person alone. Often carrying a knife, she would go and stand beside the person as the dispute was discussed.

Wolfe liked to dance; she enjoyed country music and jazz. And she liked a good joke. She went missing in February 1999, at the age of 31.

Georgina Papin

When people who knew Georgina Papin reminisce about her life, they often talk about how proud she was of her Aboriginal heritage. Her daughter, Kristina Bateman, thinks of her mother every time she smells sage. Sage is burned during many First Nations rituals, and she remembers it being burned at a 1997 powwow in Mission, British Columbia, that she attended with her mother.

Kristina was separated from her mother at the age of two, when Papin left her daughter to be raised by her paternal grandparents in Las Vegas. Despite having been separated from her mother since she was a little girl, she heard from her mother on every birthday and Christmas. Papin also sent her daughter parcels and letters in the mail.

When Kristina turned 12 her mother met her for the powwow in Mission. Papin had arranged for her daughter to

be given a traditional name—Snowbird—and had made her an outfit to wear for the ceremony. The outfit included a dress and moccasins. Kristina remembers her mother braiding her hair and handing out sage packets during the ceremony.

Ruth Bateman, Kristina's grandmother, says that Papin left her daughter with them so that Kristina could have a chance to live a life different from her own. Papin and her eight siblings had been placed in foster homes as young children. By the time she was 18, Papin had lived in dozens of different homes and institutions and was addicted to drugs.

She went missing in March of 1999. She was 35 years old.

Marnie Frey

Family and friends describe Marnie Frey as the type of girl who would give you the shirt off her back. Her dad says Frey would often arrive home from school without her new jacket or new shoes. She would have given her jacket to another child who didn't have one.

Analysis

The families of the women who have gone missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside have been critical of the media for presenting the women simply as drug addicts and prostitutes. They strongly feel that depicting the women in this way dismisses them as unimportant. Based on the profiles of the women you have just read, prepare a statement that demonstrates why these women mattered. Your profile should be one or two paragraphs long, and should begin: "Every life matters."

Or she would have traded her new shoes for a pair full of holes if she was concerned that her friend had cold feet.

In addition to her generosity, Frey had great curiosity, a love of animals, and a love of the outdoors. Her stepmother recalls Frey as being the only child playing out in the street after bad weather drove everyone else inside. She also spent countless hours playing with and keeping an eye on the family animals.

Her family says that Frey was introduced to drugs by a local gang and she quickly became addicted. She drifted away from her family and ended up living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside to try to finance her addiction. Despite this, she kept in regular contact with her family, often calling several times a day.

The Freys last heard from Marnie on August 30, 1997, her 24th birthday.

Source: Canadian Press report entitled Missing Lives. (January 16, 2007) Available online at www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/missinglives.html

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

The Accusations

How did the police come to arrest and charge Robert “Willie” Pickton with 26 counts of murder? It was a long process. As you read the chronology below, ask yourself why it has taken so long for this trial to come to court. Why might it be very difficult to gather evidence in this case?

February 2002

- Police execute a search warrant for illegal firearms at the property owned by Pickton and his two siblings. During this search of the property, personal items belonging to a missing woman are found.
- A second court order to search the farm is obtained as part of the British Columbia Missing Women Investigation.
- Based on their search of the farm, Pickton is arrested and charged with two counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of Sereena Abotsway and Mona Wilson.

April 2002

- Five more charges are added, for the murders of Jacqueline McDonell, Diane Rock, Heather Bottomley, Andrea Joesbury, and Brenda Wolfe.

September 2002

- Four more charges are added, for the slayings of Georgina Papin, Patricia Johnson, Helen Hallmark, and Jennifer Furminger.

October 2002

- Four more charges, for the murders of Heather Chinnock, Tanya Holyk, Sherry Irving and Inga Hall, are laid, on October 3, 2002.
- This brings the total charges to 15, making it the largest serial killer investigation in Canadian history.

May 2005

- Twelve more charges are laid against Pickton, for the killings of Cara Ellis, Andrea Borhaven, Debra Lynne Jones, Marnie Frey, Tiffany Drew, Kerry Koski, Sarah Devries, Cynthia Feliks, Angela Jardine, Wendy Crawford, Diana Melnick, and Jane Doe (unidentified woman), bringing the total number of first-degree murder charges to 27.

January 2006

- Pickton’s preliminary trial begins. He pleads not guilty to 27 charges of first-degree murder in the British Columbia Supreme Court. The trial takes most of the year and determines what evidence can be admitted before the jury. The charge for the murder of Jane Doe is dropped for lack of evidence, so Pickton faces 26 charges.

January 2007

- The trial on the first six counts of murder began.

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

Profile of the Accused

Did you know . . .
Apparently one of the large parties at the Piggy Palace was attended by 1 700 people.

Robert Pickton is a third-generation pig farmer. His grandfather, William Pickton, established his family as landowners and hog farmers in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, in the early 1900s. William died in 1927 and left his farm to his son Leonard, and Leonard's wife, Louise. They had three children: Linda, Robert William, and David.

Robert, known as Willie, and his brother, Dave, were well known locally for the wild parties they would hold at Piggy's Palace. Piggy's was a converted barn located on a property near the farm. The brothers claim that the parties were held to raise funds for The Good Times society, an organization dedicated to raising funds for local charities. Investigators on the Pickton case, however, state that the parties were drunken raves featuring entertainment provided by prostitutes from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

In a January 23, 2007, article in the *Toronto Star*, Dave Pickton said that his brother was often the target of "losers" who took "advantage of his simple nature and generosity with money." In the same article, a neighbour, Dave Sheppard, described Willie as "goofy."

Before he was arrested for murder, Robert worked the family's land, taking

care of the pigs. He also bought cars for scrap and tried to restore them. As well, he worked in his brother's gravel and demolition business.

Despite the parties at Piggy's Palace, Pickton can be described as a loner. Twenty years ago he was in love with a woman named Connie Anderson, who lived in the United States. But that relationship failed to develop when she refused to move to Canada and Robert wasn't willing to leave the family farm. Other than this one connection, it doesn't appear that he has had a serious relationship with a woman. He has never been married and does not have any children.

There appear to have been only two incidents that have had any noticeable impact on his life. The first is the fact that when he was 13 years old, his parents slaughtered the calf that he loved. Apparently Pickton came home from school one day and found his calf slaughtered and hanging up in the family barn. He was so distraught over the slaughter of his beloved calf that he couldn't speak to anyone for four days.

The other incident occurred in 1997, when a prostitute knifed him. It is reported that he was sliced open from his arm to his jaw.

Reflection

1. Why do you think we tend to be so fascinated by the background of those who commit horrific crimes?
2. What, if anything, in Pickton's background helps to explain why he might have committed the crimes he is accused of?

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

Sociopath Profile

Note

The material in this section of the Guide may be disturbing to some.

Did you know . . .

Another infamous Canadian serial killer is Clifford Olsen. He confessed to murdering 11 children in 1981. He is serving a life sentence for his crimes. He too committed his crimes in B.C.

Did you know . . .

A Canadian, Elliot Leyton, is one of the world's leading experts on serial killers. He is a professor at Memorial University in Newfoundland. He often assists Scotland Yard in London and the FBI in the United States. One of his most famous books is called *Hunting Humans*.

If Robert “Willie” Pickton is found guilty of the charges against him, he will become Canada’s deadliest serial killer. And there may still be other charges added to his file.

Whenever a case of serial murder comes to public attention people tend to be both horrified and fascinated. Horrified because of the sheer brutality of the crimes and the senseless loss of life; fascinated because we can’t quite believe that anyone could do such terrible things.

Inevitably, people start to ask questions about why someone would act in such a brutal manner. We wonder if some horrible trauma happened to them that turned them to violence, or whether they were simply “born evil.”

Characteristics of Sociopaths

Social scientists have studied serial killers for years, and often use the term *sociopath* (or *psychopath*) to describe the personality of these killers. Sociopaths share the following characteristics:

- They do not act spontaneously; they seek out their victims systematically.
- They always have a plan and usually target a particular group (e.g., prostitutes).
- They are aware of their actions; they are not out of touch with reality.
- They know right from wrong but do not care; they seem to lack a conscience.
- They have no ability to feel empathy toward others—that is, they are unable to understand or experience the thoughts or feelings of other people.
- This lack of compassion is evident in

the fact that serial killers usually kill their victims with their hands, which requires the killer to have direct contact with the victim.

In addition to these characteristics, serial killers have an incredible desire for power. They usually select women and children as their victims because those victims are physically weaker than they are. Researchers believe that it is this desire for power that explains why serial killers enjoy watching their victims beg for mercy. This need for power also explains the fact that they often mutilate the bodies of their victims.

Serial killers often share remarkably similar personality characteristics. They have calm and controlled personalities, rarely losing their tempers. This may be a reason why they appear “normal” and do not arouse suspicion. This may also be the one thing that leads to their capture. They appear calm and controlled because they have an unrealistic belief that they won’t be caught. This sense of invincibility may eventually cause them to make a mistake.

Why do people become sociopaths?

There is no absolute answer to this question, but many researchers seem to believe that serial killers are the result of a deficient human nature combined with a corrupt environment. Dr. John Douglas, a clinical psychologist with the FBI, believes that the brains of sociopaths lack the device that allows them to feel compassion. While we feel revulsion for the crimes of serial killers, the killers themselves do not. They enjoy killing and take pleasure in their own notoriety.

Dr. Park Dietz, a forensic scientist who has worked with the FBI, believes that serial killers inherit a pattern of fearlessness that leads to chronic risk-taking. In other words, there is no internal fear mechanism to stop their behaviour.

The majority of serial killers are white males. So far, researchers have been unable to explain why this is so. It seems unlikely that there is something biologically corrupt in white males, but perhaps our North American culture of “white privilege” leads white males to believe they will be able to “have it all.”

If this turns out not to be the case, they may search for others to victimize to assert their as yet unrealized sense of superiority.

When the backgrounds of serial killers are examined it is evident that most were physically or sexually abused as children. As a result, nurture—or the environment in which they were raised—must play a role in the development of a sociopathic personality. Sociopaths seem to have a compulsion to dominate others the way they themselves were dominated.

Analysis

Reflect on the information you have to date about Robert “Willie” Pickton. According to that information, does he seem to possess the characteristics of a sociopath? Explain your answer by using specific points from the information provided.

Extension Activity

You may choose to conduct further research on Robert Pickton and then submit a short report to address the question above.

THE TRIAL OF ROBERT PICKTON

Activity: Remembering the Victims

Further Research

As of March 2007, the Missing Women Task Force of the RCMP was still active and posting information and photos of other missing women at www.rcmp-bcmedia.ca/missing_women.jsp.

“What would it feel like if 50 people in a room just suddenly disappeared?”

This is the question Betty Kovacic, a Canadian artist, wants people to consider when they think about the victims connected to the Robert Pickton trial. In horrific and sensational cases like this one, people tend to focus on the person accused of the crimes. But Betty Kovacic and fellow British Columbian artists Zoe Pawlak and Pamela Masik believe it is important to give dignity to the victims involved in this case.

Their art projects involve individual portraits of each of the 26 women named in the Pickton case. As well, portraits have been made of the 69 women police have identified as having vanished from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside since 1978. Additional victims discovered will be represented by human-sized figures draped in silk shrouds. Each portrait will be accompanied by a personalized piece of prose or poetry contributed by various artists.

The three artists, brought together by media coverage of their work, all believe it is important to distinguish each victim and humanize each woman’s memory. In an article in *The Globe and Mail* on January 11, 2007, Kovacic stressed that: “We have to remember that each woman was a whole human being who had feelings and families and dreams.” She also said that creating the art has been a painful process and she’s cried over each one of the women.

Source for quotes: Alexandra Gill, “What would it feel like if 50 people in a room just suddenly disappeared?” *The Globe and Mail*, January 11, 2007

For Discussion

The opening quotation in this feature raises the question: “What would it feel like if 50 people in a room just suddenly disappeared?” Look around your classroom and think about this statement. If everyone in the room suddenly disappeared, what would the impact be? What type of action would be taken in response to the disappearance of all of you? How does this differ from the type of response that occurred after women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside disappeared? How can you explain this difference?

Your Task

The information used for the profiles of these six women was taken from a report prepared by the Canadian Press on January 16, 2007, entitled *Missing Lives*. This report provides details on all 26 of the women that Robert Pickton is accused of murdering. Read the report and prepare a brief report on one of the other women named in this case. Be prepared to share this report with your class. *Missing Lives* is available on the CBC News Web site at www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/missinglives.html.