



FATAL

FEMALES

13 CASES THAT GRIPPED A NATION

LIBBY-JANE CHARLESTON

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To my boys, Luke, Joshua and Dash. I'll love you until the Statue of Liberty sits down.

To the memory of victims of crime, especially Zahra Baker, a child who survived cancer only to be killed so senselessly by the stepmother she was so frightened of. May she rest in peace.

~~emotional reactions and in their whole approach to life and death, when they murder, do~~
‘Women being different from men in their mentality, thought processes, intuition,
the deed in a way that a man often would not contemplate. Their crime does not bear
the mark of Cain, it is stamped with that characteristic subtlety and horror that has
distinguished the rare evil women of all times.’

– Judge Gerald Sparrow, author and barrister

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INTRODUCTION

I've always been fascinated with female criminals. Being such a goody-two-shoes for much of my life, I felt like the idea of a woman being ghastly was something worth investigating. My job as a news reporter put me in the perfect position to get my hands dirty; I was never going to join the ranks of these ladies, but at least I could write about it.

It started when I was cutting my teeth as a young radio news reporter in Western Australia in 1989. The words on everybody's tongue at the time were 'the Birnies' – Catherine and David Birnie who went on a rampage, kidnapping, raping and killing four young women. Their horrific crimes were only halted when one woman managed to escape and took off into the streets, naked and running for her life. I was eager to cover the story because I loved doing the court round, which was always an adrenaline rush.

My over-protective news director did not want to subject me, an unsullied young woman, to the sordid details of that case. Yet the story was so horrific it was impossible to escape it. Everybody in Perth was talking about the Birnies. My then boyfriend lived around the corner from one of the victims, and every time we passed the house he couldn't help pointing out, 'That's where one of the dead girls lived.'

Then I befriended a woman who was sleeping with a man linked to Catherine Birnie's legal team. Eager for gossip, I tempted my friend with a drink, only to discover her lips were almost sealed. Almost. She let one bit of information about Catherine Birnie slip: 'Apparently *she* is even crazier than *he* is.'

Women are supposed to be law-abiding, loving, nurturing Madonnas – not crazy gun-toting or knifewielding killers, not hijackers, not bogus vampires and definitely not people who would be up for an early morning strangulation episode in their lover's wife's garage. Women should be willing to die for their children, not to kill them. Yet it's no secret that the number of female criminals is increasing and there's no shortage of women throughout history who've been anything but law-abiding. Many experts blame drugs and alcohol abuse, as well as the rise of a culture in which some young women are behaving as badly as men. (In the UK, it's referred to as the 'ladette culture'.) The New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research claims that from 2011 there has been a 15 per cent rise in crime involving women – a statistic that has increased twenty-one times faster than the rate of male crime. Yet, in spite of the rise in crime at the hands of the 'fairer sex', a woman usually has to do something incredibly bad to get a significant sentence.

If a woman is found guilty of being an evil child killer, it's easier for society to brush it off with 'Well, she must be crazy' – even if the female criminal is found to be perfectly sane. A man is more likely to be seen as 'bad', while a woman committing the same crime is usually written off as being 'mad'. (Abattoir worker and murderer Katherine Knight might have had borderline personality disorder, but psychiatrists who testified in court claimed that she was *not* insane.)

If there's one thing criminologists will agree on, it's the fact that men are more likely to commit murder and to be a victim of murder than women. Usually when women kill, they take the life of a partner or a child. Yet the motivation for a woman to murder a partner is generally different from that of a man. Women are rarely motivated by jealousy or depression (the dominant themes for men); most women who kill a partner are responding to violence. Of course, there will always be exceptions of the headlinemaking kind; who could possibly forget the one that read, 'Killer was devil's wife with power to control minds'?

We are all capable of doing something stupid. Who's to say some of the women in this book weren't just having a bad day – or a bad month – and snapped? Next time we go to brand a female criminal 'crazy', maybe we should ask ourselves a question: how many of us, crazy or not, are just one bad day away from a catastrophe?

STRANGER THAN FICTION

‘I wonder how I got here? Why did I make these choices? The Crown likes to suggest this is like a puzzle. My life is not a game. If it is a game, then game on.’

Everybody has a theory about Keli Lane: she sold baby Tegan to a childless couple; she suffocated Tegan and threw her in the ocean; she gave birth in secret and, keen to attend her friend’s wedding on a cool September day shortly after the birth, hid the infant under a gum tree in the bush. Some people would rather believe anything than think that a mother could kill her daughter.

In all, Keli had eight different versions of what happened to her second child. But it was the story that she settled on – a story that led to the largest police man-hunt in Australian history – that would prove to be her downfall.

The Keli Lane case has fascinated many Australians. And no wonder: the fact that Keli changed her story numerous times, and kept multiple pregnancies and adoptions secret from family, friends and even boyfriends, makes her story stranger than fiction.



Born in 1975, Keli was your typical Australian ‘golden child’, growing up in the bayside ‘burbs of Sydney’s north and enjoying a life revolving around pristine Manly Beach. Keli’s father, Robert, was a well-known local – a rugby player, surfer and highly respected senior police officer – while Keli’s mother, Sandra, was said to be a loving, attentive mum.

Keli, an attractive girl with an infectious smile, tanned skin and a solid build, was a natural athlete who excelled at water polo. She was constantly training and dreamed of one day making the Australian team. She attended Mackellar high school, where she was known as a cheerful tomboy who loved to socialise, then went on to study a Bachelor of Arts – and join the Australian University water polo team – at the University of Newcastle.

In 1994, she met rugby player Duncan Gillies. The two fell in love and, although Keli still lived with her parents, they started spending lots of time together at Duncan’s home in Gladesville. Keli was now studying to be a PE teacher, as well as working part-time at Ravenswood School for Girls in Sydney’s North Shore. She and Duncan had a good life together, drinking and socialising frequently with friends. Later, Duncan would tell the court that Keli’s life ‘revolved around sport’. And although Duncan cheated on Keli twice during their relationship – once with one of her water polo teammates – he also told the court he had no reason to believe that Keli had ever cheated on him.

On 14 September 1996, the couple attended a friend’s wedding in Manly. A photograph of Keli from the event shows her with the ‘Mona Lisa’ cool-as-ice demeanour that would come to puzzle many at her future court appearances, but Keli’s mere presence at the wedding would also garner significant attention in the troubled years ahead.

By the end of 1996, Keli’s relationship with Duncan was over and he was engaged to another

woman. In 1999, Duncan received a strange letter from Virginia Fung, a social worker with Anglican Adoption Services. Enclosed with the letter were photos of Keli and a newborn baby: Duncan's baby according to what Keli had told the authorities, which was why Virginia was writing to him. Keli had given birth the previous month and planned to give her child up for adoption. Shocked, Duncan immediately phoned Virginia to tell her he couldn't possibly be the baby's father because he and Keli had split up years ago. In truth, the child had been conceived with a man Keli had met in the months following their relationship breakdown.

After speaking with Virginia, Duncan arranged a meeting with Keli to learn about her secret life. She confessed she'd had two terminations before she met him. That she hadn't told him this was not surprising; many women keep abortions a secret. What was shocking to Duncan was that Keli also said she had given birth to two babies while she was in a relationship with him: her firstborn, whose name can't be given for legal reasons, and a baby named Tegan, born on 12 September 1996 – just two days before the couple attended their friend's wedding – when Keli was twenty-one.

It's hard to imagine that Duncan had no idea his girlfriend had hidden not one but two pregnancies from him, even if, as he would explain in later court appearances, the two of them often adopted the 'spoon' position in bed.

'I understand how [my ignorance] looks ...' he would eventually admit, 'it seems ridiculous.'

Keli would go some way towards explaining how she kept it secret, telling police: 'I'm a big girl anyway so [the pregnancy] was very wide.' She also stated that she dressed in loose T-shirts and tracksuit pants when she was with Duncan.

'I just never was around him with my clothes off. I'd get up early in the morning,' she said.

In 1999 Keli was still working at Ravenswood, where she was a much loved teacher. Her close knit family, her circle of friends and her new boyfriend had no clue she had given birth to three children. But her secret life would soon be exposed by John Borovnik, a district officer with the Department of Community Services (DOCS).



After Virginia Fung had been subjected to a barrage of lies and contradictions about the baby's father – as well as the lie that the baby was Keli's first – she began to worry about Keli's state of mind. Perhaps she was having second thoughts about giving up her baby. Keli was directed to talk to a psychiatrist, but there were no signs of postnatal depression or other mental issues: in other words, she was fine. Keli's baby was placed in foster care – and that's when the file landed on John Borovnik's desk.

Borovnik was certain that Keli was lying about her new baby, so he made enquiries at Ryde Hospital. That's when a hospital administration worker let slip that Keli had been at the hospital three years previously for the birth of her other child – Tegan – even though Keli had insisted this latest child was her first. It was all Borovnik needed to probe further.

He discovered that on 7 September 1996, Keli went to Ryde Hospital in pain, telling staff her baby was due the next day; she was discharged following an examination. Three days later, she went back to Ryde Hospital and was discharged again. She returned the following day, complaining of pain but was once again discharged. Later that same day she took herself to Auburn Hospital, telling staff she was two weeks overdue. She was discharged but told to return the following morning. Keli attended Auburn Hospital around 8 a.m. on 12 September and was induced two hours later. Tegan Lane was born at 7.52 p.m.

But where was Tegan now? Surely she was adopted out too. Borovnik dug deeper, phoning the

DOCS adoption branch. Right away, Borovnik was asked if he was enquiring about a baby born in 1995: Keli's first child, who had been legally adopted out. But of her second child, Tegan, there were no records. When Borovnik phoned Keli to ask about Tegan, Keli denied her existence. Virginia Furber also contacted Keli and pressed her for more information. Eventually, Keli admitted there had been three children but stated: 'The middle child lives with a family in Perth ... they befriended me just before I had her.'

Nobody believed that story. After all, the official records showed that one of her three children had disappeared without a trace. It was time to get serious. The Manly police were notified and an investigation began. But it would be another eleven years before the matter went before a court. The delay would eventually lead to the coroner finding that the Manly police had not acted in a timely fashion, saying:

I am far from satisfied that any senior officer at Manly had any input at all into the matter, or took any meaningful responsibility for ensuring that there was a timely and efficient investigation into [Tegan's disappearance].

By the time Keli was finally interviewed by police in February 2001, she had given birth to her fourth child – this time with her then husband, whose identity cannot be revealed. She kept the child and was apparently an excellent mother. When it came to Tegan, though, Keli had changed her story yet again. She claimed she gave the infant to the baby's father, Andrew Morris, with whom she'd had a brief affair during her relationship with Duncan. Keli had discharged herself and Tegan from hospital before a routine DNA sample could be taken, so it is impossible to prove whether Duncan was the father.

During another police interview in May 2003, Keli was asked, 'Did you kill the child?' and she answered, 'No, I did not. I did not do anything like that.' She said she had given Tegan to the baby's father, Andrew *Norris* – Keli claimed she could not recall if his surname was Morris or Norris – and his female partner, Mel, in the car park of Auburn Hospital. She could not name anyone who knew Morris/Norris, even though she said she had attended his thirtieth birthday party.

It was not only the police who were having trouble believing Keli's story about giving Tegan to Andrew Morris. On 9 January 2004, police intercepted a phone conversation between Keli and her mum that suggested Sandra Lane was also struggling to believe her daughter.

SANDRA: You know, you told me this young guy has taken the baby to raise it, which is really unusual, you must admit yourself. Was his family behind him in this?

KELI: Yep.

...

SANDRA: I have been trying to sort of reason things out ... because it is really unusual. So he took the – when you left the hospital, he took the child home with him?

KELI: On that day, yep.

SANDRA: To his family, I assume?

KELI: Yep.

SANDRA: Because it is just so unlike a young bloke to want to raise a child. It's just, that's the thing I just can't get a grip on, but obviously that's what you agreed, isn't it?

KELI: Yeah ... well, I didn't really have too many options.

SANDRA: You could have put the child up for adoption.

Keli did not reply.

The investigation continued into what had happened on 14 September 1996 after Keli and Tegan left hospital. But, because the investigating officers failed to find either baby Tegan or Andrew Morris, Manly police referred the case to the coroner and a formal inquest began in June 2005.

The inquest ran until 15 February 2006 and Keli's father, Robert, attended every day, usually walking into court holding Keli's hand. He told the court that when Keli had eventually told her parents about her three babies, he and his wife did not ask many questions. This admission seemed odd with Keli's repeated claims that she did whatever she did because she was frightened of her parents' reaction. Indeed, State Coroner John Abernethy expressed great surprise at Robert's revelation. Perhaps the family had wanted to believe Keli was telling the truth; if they had dug further they might have received some unpleasant answers.

During the inquest, Robert was asked how he would have reacted if Keli had told him that she was pregnant. 'I would have supported her,' he said. But when asked if she would have been aware of this, he replied, 'Not necessarily.'

The journalists covering the inquest were desperate for Keli to take the stand. Would she confess to anything? Or would she stick to her 'Andrew Morris' story? There had been repeated public calls for people to come forward with any information about Tegan or the mysterious Andrew Morris, but nobody ever did.

In the end, the media were disappointed. When Keli took her place in the witness box on 15 February 2006 and was asked, 'Can you tell this court what happened to Tegan Lane around 2 p.m. on 14 September 1996 when you left the hospital with her?' Keli simply said, 'I do not wish to answer that question.' She'd been instructed not to give evidence, and the inquest hit a dead end. In concluding, Coroner Abernethy said, 'I am comfortably satisfied that Tegan Lane is in fact deceased.' On hearing this, Keli collapsed in her father's arms.

The case was handed to the Homicide Squad for assessment and, if necessary, further investigation.



One of Keli's biggest mistakes was to give the police a name: Andrew Morris – or Norris. By giving them a name, she gave them something to disprove. If she had been very shrewd and said she became pregnant following a one-night stand with a man whose name she never knew, then she would have been off the hook. A man-hunt is futile if you don't know the name of the man you're hunting for.

And so began a missing persons search – what would be one of the biggest in Australian history, taking over two years – for Tegan and her alleged father, Andrew Morris. Police wrote to 949 primary schools asking if any pupils had a parent named Andrew Morris or Norris. This led to a shortlist of 516 girls, including two named Tegan Lane. But that turned out to be nothing but a cruel coincidence; neither of the two Tegan Lanes were found to have any connection to Keli Lane.

A team of fifteen police officers also relentlessly checked official name changes, electoral rolls, Centrelink and other government payments for children, immigration records – there was always the

slight possibility that Tegan was in her father's care overseas – police records, drivers' licences, tax records and many other official databases. It took a team of six people just to search hospital birth records and the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, in case Tegan had been registered under a false name.

But it looked like Tegan had slipped through the net. People who believed in Keli's innocence came up with all sorts of theories: Tegan's father might have told Keli a false name, and taken Tegan interstate or overseas and changed her name; or maybe a foreign couple took Tegan away using a false passport. Unlikely, certainly, but police couldn't rule out all of the possibilities.

After two years of searching, when police had exhausted every option, they referred the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Nicholas Cowdery. On 17 November 2009, he charged Keli with Tegan's murder. On 4 December, she pleaded not guilty. There would be no committal; the matter would go straight to trial.



Court 3 is one of the oldest courtrooms in the Supreme Court of New South Wales, located at the top of King Street in Sydney's CBD. It would be here, in this ancient room with creaking floorboards and a slightly creepy 'old world' feel, that Keli Lane's trial would unfold from 9 August 2010. The senior Crown prosecutor, Mark Tedeschi, QC, was assisted by members of the Unsolved Homicide Team. Keli's solicitor was Keith Chapple, SC, a softly spoken grey-haired man of great experience and a sombre yet determined air.

The media attention on Keli was constant from the moment she stepped onto the footpath and walked from her lawyer's office to the courtroom. Despite the cameras and journalists in her face, she always managed to look incredibly composed and confident. She was smartly dressed, her shoulder-length blonde hair perfectly groomed. Her supporters stayed away for the first few weeks of her trial and she had to front court as a lone figure. Her face gave very little away, although one imagines she would have been in emotional turmoil.

Lisa Davies, court reporter for *The Daily Telegraph*, said Keli did not always look cool and composed in court:

Keli did occasionally look very stressed and upset at times during the trial, although once outside the court her face returned to a face of composure. It was like she had an emotional suit of armour on once she was out in public.

Because the case was circumstantial, the Crown would have to disprove any reasonable counter-theory to its claim that Keli had murdered baby Tegan. Keli's 'Andrew Morris' story made the Crown's job relatively simple because they had something to disprove, even though there was no physical evidence related to what had happened to Tegan in the hours after her birth.

The Crown's major challenge was to prove Keli's guilt, which was why the DPP also charged her with three counts of perjury for the lies she'd told hospital and adoption workers over the years. This helped the Crown present strong evidence not only about her lying, but also her attitude towards having children.

The murder trial became as much a trial about Keli's lies as it was about Tegan. One psychiatrist, Dr Michael Diamond, appearing for the Crown, told the court he believed her motive related to 'her wish to be pregnant in the face of having to abort two previous pregnancies'. (Keli had had the

terminations when she was a teenager.) Even though Dr Diamond never actually interviewed Keli, he'd studied the material in relation to her case back in 2005, and he came to the conclusion that Keli might have deliberately made sure her contraception failed. Dr Diamond believed Keli continued to fall pregnant, even though each pregnancy caused her emotional turmoil, because 'the compulsion to repeat the behaviour [was] powerful'. He also told the court Keli's lies and the way she hid each pregnancy were evidence of her need to control the situation. There was no evidence to suggest that Keli had a mental illness, but Dr Diamond told the court Keli had signs of a personality disorder, as seen in 'her ability to shut down emotionally and to experience emotional numbing or detachment'.

The Crown persisted with its assertion that one reason Keli would abandon her children was her ambition to play water polo for Australia in the 2000 Olympic Games. Because Keli had had difficulties during the adoption process for her first child, it was also possible she was worried people would discover her secret if she went through the adoption process a second time. Getting away with it once was one thing, but a second time? Maybe her confidence had worn off.

The Crown argued that after she gave birth, Keli wanted to find permanent solutions to her 'problems': adoption for the first child and murder for the second. They also used an intercepted phone conversation between Keli and her friend Kati Cummins to prove that Keli did have some kind of guilty conscience. In the conversation, Cummins seemed puzzled that Keli would be worried about a visit from a detective.

'But he's got nothing,' said Cummins. 'So how can something come out if he's got nothing?'

'Because that's, he wants to, he wants to find out what he doesn't have,' said Keli.

Later, Cummins said, 'The worst thing that can happen is, the hardest thing you'll ever do is telling [your parents you gave away Tegan]. And once you've told them, it'll be alright.'

'It's going to keep going on, that's the thing. If I knew that by telling them that would end it, that would be great. But it's not,' Lane replied.

The Crown also argued that three of Lane's lies – those concerning Andrew Morris and the story that she gave Tegan to a Perth couple – were lies a jury might consider an indication of guilt.



In court, Keli was sticking to the account she gave police: she'd given Tegan to the baby's biological father. Keith Chapple told the court Keli had made some 'mistakes' in the paperwork during the adoption process because she was feeling very emotional.

'People can be wrong, people can be confused, people can have bad memories,' he said. One thing was clear: after all this time, the Crown still did not have one piece of direct evidence about what had happened in the hours after Keli Lane took her daughter out of Auburn Hospital. On Monday 6 December 2010, the jury retired to consider its verdict.

A week later, the jury foreman said a decision on the murder charge still hadn't been reached. The judge then informed the jury that he'd accept a majority verdict of eleven to one. (This is not unusual in cases where juries have taken a long time to reach agreement.)

The jurors went out again but, later that day, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Whealy, QC, told the court that there was 'some emotion being experienced' in the jury room.

Shortly after lunch, the jury returned and the foreman announced to the court: Keli Lane was guilty of murder. The decision was made by a majority of eleven to one. Keli's mother, Sandra Lane, shouted, 'Oh no!', while Keli cried out before collapsing and hitting her head on the floor. Paramedics tended to Keli until she managed to compose herself, while her legal team applied for bail. Justice Whealy refused the bail request but he made a point of telling the court he had 'great sympathy' for

her.

~~Keli Lane, who had twice refused to give evidence about what really happened in the two days following Tegan's birth fourteen years ago, was led away to spend the first of many nights in jail.~~

When Keli returned to court for her sentencing, Judge Whealy said Keli 'clearly knew the nature of her actions and was able to discern right from wrong'. He agreed with Dr Diamond's psychiatric assessment that, in light of the emotional trauma of the two abortions she'd had as a teenager, her repeated pregnancies were an attempt to 'have the baby she couldn't have'. Whealy told the court he was bound by the jury's verdict, which found beyond reasonable doubt that Keli had deliberately and intentionally caused Tegan's death. And so Keli Lane was sentenced to eighteen years' jail for the murder of her second child. Her non-parole period is thirteen years and five months, and she will be eligible for release on parole on 12 May 2023.

Due to the circumstantial nature of the Crown's evidence, many legal experts expressed shock at Keli's sentence. Prominent lawyer Chris Murphy told Channel 7, 'I could not in a million years, under any circumstances, safely conclude that she killed her baby to the high degree of certainty required for proof of murder.'

Following the sentencing, a taxi driver came forward to claim that he had picked Keli up from Auburn Hospital in September 1996. He said Keli instructed him to drive to Manly, where she left her baby with a bottle beneath a tree. But that story came to nothing; the taxi driver was said to have some 'mental issues'. Later, a man named Andrew Morris spoke to Channel 7 and admitted to having had a fling with Keli Lane in 1994. They'd had unprotected sex after meeting at a Sydney hotel. But he denied being Tegan's father and he denied ever having a partner called Mel. In other words, he was calling Keli a liar.

Keli eventually gave an interview of sorts to the media. Her new fiancé agreed to appear on Channel 7 while he talked on the phone to Keli in prison. The viewers could hear Keli say things like 'the only reason for the lies and the secrecy is to be private'.

The producers were also given access to a diary Keli had kept during the trial. In it she wrote:

I wonder how I got here? Why did I make these choices? The Crown likes to suggest this is like a puzzle. My life is not a game. If it is a game, then game on.

For the two men who learned through the trial that they had fathered children to Keli – children they had no idea existed – it was no game. During the police investigation, both men were asked to provide DNA samples, as they were known to have had sex with Keli. The men were informed that they each had a child to Keli: her first and third children, who had been legally adopted. Neither man had been aware of her pregnancies. One of the men spoke of his devastation at learning he had a child who, due to adoption laws, he could not contact until he or she turned eighteen. These men's stories are testament to the fact that every tragedy has more than one victim.



In the aftermath of the trial a friend of Keli's, who wishes to remain nameless, told this writer of a lead the friend hoped the police would investigate: a man called Juan Ramirez. Ramirez had lived with Keli's ex-boyfriend Duncan Gillies back in 1996 and allegedly told police that he and Duncan had discussed Keli's 'secret birth'. But this story, reported back in 2005, has never been repeated. Said Keli's friend:

[Keli] would love the cops to investigate him because she knows that Juan knew Andrew Morris and could help her case, but ... he only told the cops what they wanted to hear, nothing more.

At the time of writing, Keli's legal team is preparing her appeal. They will argue that Keli was unfairly prejudiced from the start because the jury should have been instructed to consider manslaughter and infanticide as alternative charges to murder. Her legal team is hopeful Keli will be released on bail. Said lawyer Benjamin Archbold:

Ms Lane was on bail until she was convicted by the jury, and any successful appeal would almost certainly see her released from custody. Notwithstanding our grounds of appeal, Ms Lane maintains her innocence. She absolutely did not kill her daughter, and will continue to fight for an acquittal.

The developments in relation to the appeal came after the trial's judge, the now retired Supreme Court Justice Whealy, revealed to journalists he did not personally believe the Crown had proved its case against Keli. Whealy also stated that he was unconvinced of her guilt.

Another point that may be argued during the appeal is that the guilty verdict is unsafe because it can't be supported by evidence. Keli's lawyers submit that even if Tegan is dead her body has never been found, so the Crown can't point to any deliberate act done by Keli to cause her daughter's death. 'Keli's confident because she hasn't done anything wrong,' Mr Archbold said:

She really does maintain her innocence. It's been a long fight and she's looking forward to her appeal and she's excited by it. There's been no baby found, there's been no cause of death – nothing can be ruled out.



Where is Tegan Lane? It's a question we might never know the answer to. At one point in Keli's trial, prosecutor Mark Tedeschi tried to show the court an aerial photograph of Sydney, showing the location of Auburn Hospital. Just north-east lies what in 1996 was a vast construction site full of holes in the ground: the Sydney Olympic Park. Four years before the Olympic Games, the site would have been deserted on a Saturday afternoon. Could Keli have buried her baby there? But the Crown had no evidence that anything of the kind had happened, so Justice Whealy refused to allow the photo to be shown to the jury.

One reason this case has fascinated so many people is not only that Keli got away with remaining silent for so many years, but because she was convicted of murder when there was only ever one piece of evidence – that some time on 14 September 1996, the day Keli gave birth to Tegan, mother and baby parted ways. Nobody saw Keli and Tegan between the time they left Auburn Hospital at lunchtime and when Keli arrived home alone by night-time. There are no fingerprints, no baby clothes, no photographs and no DNA. We will never know how the jury came to its conclusion that Keli killed Tegan, but one thing is for sure – clearly they did not want her to get away with 'disappearing' her infant daughter. Something happened, but we may never know what; Keli might take the truth with her to her grave.



~~Six months after Keli's sentencing, a retired private investigator who believes Keli is innocent~~ decided to stake out the home of a woman with an adult son named Andrew Morris. The PI undertook surveillance on the house on Mother's Day, believing that if the now teenage Tegan was alive, perhaps her father would take his daughter to her grandmother's house for a visit.

'The heat would be off him now that Keli has already been sentenced. He wouldn't have to keep her in hiding,' said the PI.

In the weeks following Mother's Day 2011, a series of cryptic emails passed from the PI, his assistant, a lawyer and this writer, reporting that a 'suspicious' girl had been identified. One email read:

We have a lookalike suspect and all checks out so far for Tegan. Right leads. Time near I might need [to] talk to her. We've put months into it and don't want to move and embarrass the schoolgirl.

Could this girl be Tegan Lane? If so, does that mean Keli's 'Andrew Morris' story really happened – only with a *different* Andrew Morris than the one who told reporters he'd slept with Keli in 1994? Or is it totally implausible to imagine a man wouldn't come forward when confronted with the knowledge that the mother of his child was on the verge of facing a lengthy jail term unless he confirmed her story?

Whatever happened to baby Tegan, one person knows for sure. In the years to come, will Tegan Lane be paraded in front of the media like a precious long-lost artefact? Or has the truth not yet been uncovered?

THE COLLIE KILLERS

‘We just did it because we felt like it. It is hard to explain. I knew we had wanted to kill someone before. We knew it was wrong, but it didn’t feel wrong at all, it just felt right.’

Who would have thought killing somebody could be so easy? And, what’s more – that it could feel so ‘right’?

When you’re a teenager, it seems anything is possible. So if you had a big Saturday night hanging out with friends, experimenting with a few party drugs, the idea of committing a murder the next day wouldn’t really be that out of the question – would it?

Life in the West Australian mining town of Collie is not the stuff of teenage dreams. Collie local council made an effort to turn its reputation as a ‘dirty mining town’ on its head, winning the Tidy Town award in 2006 for its commitment to recycling and beautification. Still, when you’re a teen, it doesn’t really matter whether your town is tidy if there is sweet nothing to do. Unless you want to venture down the rocky road of recreational drugs and, if you feel so inclined, end the life of one of your best friends.



It was just another Saturday night in Collie. Two sixteen-year-old girls, ‘Michelle’ and ‘Rachel’ (the names have been changed because the girls were minors at the time and their identities are protected) had been at a local party with their fifteen-year-old friend Eliza Jane Davis. They’d taken the methamphetamine ice – not for the first time – and apparently had a fun evening getting wasted. Eliza Jane spent the night at the house Michelle and Rachel shared. But the next day, the two girls made a pact to kill their friend. As you do.

‘Sunday morning me and [Rachel] woke up, and we were just talking, and for some reason we just decided to kill her,’ Michelle told police. Said Rachel:

We just did it because we felt like it. It is hard to explain. I knew we had wanted to kill someone before. We knew it was wrong, but it didn’t feel wrong at all, it just felt right.

That morning, on 18 June 2006, Michelle and Rachel changed into old clothes as they planned their attack. The girls waited until Eliza was distracted. She was sitting on the living room floor flicking through some old school yearbooks, making the occasional comment about friends and enemies alike, when Rachel and Michelle pounced.

Michelle snuck up behind Eliza and wrapped a speaker wire twice around her throat, quickly tightening it as Rachel held her down, pressing a chemical-soaked cloth into her mouth. Rachel told police:

She started not being able to get her breath, and we just kept going. She was just yelling at us, ~~‘What the fuck, what are you doing? Oh you freaks, what’s wrong with you psychos?’~~

The girls had chosen strangulation as their method because one of them had to travel to the city that afternoon and they wanted a quick and ‘non-messy’ killing.

‘As [she was] our friend, we did not really want her to suffer,’ explained Michelle. ‘We didn’t really expect to get away with it. We were willing to take the risk.’

When Eliza stopped struggling, the girls carried her body outside and, after digging a shallow grave under the house, they buried their friend. Around lunchtime Eliza’s family became anxious that she hadn’t come home, so they questioned Michelle and Rachel. The girls told Eliza’s mother that she’d left that morning. When Eliza still hadn’t appeared by early afternoon the police were called and a search was carried out – Michelle and Rachel even helped.

But four days after Eliza’s death, the girls turned themselves in.

For reasons the girls never disclosed, they decided to walk into separate police stations – Collie and nearby Clarkson – where they each confessed to the killing, leading officers to where they’d buried the body. They told police they’d realised the grave was too shallow, and somebody would eventually find her body under the house.

During several hours of interviews with detectives, neither Michelle nor Rachel showed any remorse. Apparently both girls regretted the ‘fuss’ that the killing had caused, but there were no words of sorrow for the loss of their friend.

‘If she had died another way it probably would have bothered me ... but it just did not,’ said Michelle.



Little is known about Rachel’s background, as no family member has ever spoken to the media. Her mother was killed in a car accident when Rachel was ten and, for a short time, Rachel was cared for by Michelle’s mother when her foster arrangements fell through. (Rachel had never known her father and, because she was a close friend of Michelle’s, her mother offered to take Rachel in.)

But we have more insight into Michelle, as her mother has given several media interviews expressing how mystified she is that her slightly built, naive, ‘sweetheart’ daughter could spiral so drastically out of control.

The youngest of four children, Michelle grew up in a loving, Christian home. She took up modelling and learnt the guitar. She seemed to be enjoying the onset of her teenage years, but things went downhill when she turned fourteen. She started self-harming and, to make matters worse, she was also smoking cannabis and experimenting with party drugs. She and Rachel immersed themselves in the emo subculture and distanced themselves from their families.

One evening, when Michelle’s mother refused to let one of her friends stay the night after a party, Michelle announced she was going to leave home. She told her mother, ‘If she’s going to be on the streets, then so am I.’

‘And with that she went into her room, packed her bag and took off ... basically from that day on things started to go downhill,’ said Michelle’s mother.

Repeated calls to police and the Collie Family Centre did little to help the situation. A counsellor told Michelle’s mother that there was nothing to be gained by forcing her back home. She was almost sixteen and would soon be free to leave the family home if she chose to. Michelle’s mother said of her experience:

I just felt so helpless. All my parental control was taken away from me. Anyone in the community that knew me knew my standing. I wasn't down at the pub getting drunk every night. They knew that I brought my kids up in a Christian, loving environment.

By the end of 2005, the Collie Family Centre found accommodation for Michelle: a caravan on the front lawn of a foster carer's house. She moved into the caravan with Eliza but, a few weeks later the girls had to leave when the arrangement with the foster carer fell through. Michelle then drifted around the town, sleeping on friends' couches and squatting in abandoned buildings.

Three months before Eliza's murder, Michelle's mother moved to Perth with her other daughter who was starting university in the city. They tried to talk Michelle into joining them, but she only stayed a few weeks before returning to the coalmining town. Collie was where she wanted to live, mostly thanks to the drug- and alcohol-fuelled parties held at the weekends by a succession of bored teenagers.

Shortly before Michelle walked into the Collie police station to confess to Eliza's murder, she sent text messages to her mother and sister: 'Goodbye. Sorry. I love you.'

Later, Michelle told her mother, 'There is a lot more to the story and you don't want to know.'



Alyssa Bustamante

Elizabeth Olten hadn't even been missing from her home in St Martins, Missouri for an hour when her mother contacted the police. It was completely out of character for the nine-year-old to disappear, so her mother panicked immediately. She was only going for a short walk down the street. Had she been kidnapped?

She had only been gone around forty-five minutes. This means it took less than an hour for the Oltens' fifteen-year-old neighbour, Alyssa Bustamante, to kill her victim.

Initial fears were that a male predator had grabbed Olten as she walked home alone through the dark woods. But before long, a different type of character was mentioned as a person of interest.

For most teenagers, taking a Friday off school means a day of slacking off around the house after a long sleep-in. But when Alyssa Bustamante took Friday 17 October 2009 off school, she dug two holes in the woods, to be used as graves. Then she waited. (Later, there was speculation the two graves were intended for Bustamante's younger siblings – twin boys.)

Four days later, opportunity knocked. On 21 October, Bustamante's neighbour Elizabeth Olten was walking home alone through the woods. Bustamante followed the little girl and then attacked her with a knife, burying her just a couple of metres away from where she fell.

When Olten didn't come home, police wasted no time in conducting a search. At first, there were no clues. Then a friend of Bustamante's handed police some written material that led them to the teenager. That, coupled with the fact that she'd been the only high school student missing from school (an unexcused absence) the day Olten disappeared, was enough

for officers to investigate. When Bustamante was cornered, she immediately led police to the body. Olten's body was in the woods where hundreds of people had been searching for days. Apparently, the body had been very well concealed in a shallow grave covered with leaves.

Olten's autopsy revealed she'd been strangled, her throat and wrists slashed with a knife, and then she'd been stabbed. And the motive? A friend of Bustamante's, Jennifer Meyer, came forward and told police Bustamante had confided in her, 'she wanted to know what murder felt like'.

Bustamante was a juvenile, but under state law she could be tried as an adult, making her eligible for the death penalty. After much debate, a decision was made to try Bustamante as an adult. During the trial, the court listened to a handwriting expert read a page from Bustamante's diary that she had unsuccessfully tried to scratch out. It read:

I just fucking killed someone. I strangled them and slit their throats and stabbed them. Now they're dead. I don't know how to feel ATM. It was ahmazing. As soon as you get over the 'Oh My Gawd. I can't do this' feeling it's pretty enjoyable. I'm kinda nervous and shaking though right now. Kay, I got to go to church now LOL.

On 8 February 2012 Alyssa Bustamante was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole.

Michelle and Rachel were charged with Eliza's murder and, at the Perth Children's Court hearing both defence lawyers pointed to the girls' troubled pasts and drug use as mitigation for the murder. But, beyond that, they were at a loss to explain why the teenagers killed their friend.

Michelle's lawyer, Michael Clarke, said his client's unhappy and drug-riddled life was out of control by the time the murder occurred.

'The homicide was a misplaced type of aggression, perhaps an act of desperation, to resolve the crisis,' said Clarke.

Rachel's lawyer, Gillian Braddock, SC, said her client was very vulnerable, due to being effectively orphaned by the time she was ten. Braddock claimed Rachel was led by Michelle, who had a fascination with death.

'Nobody has been able to provide an explanation,' said Braddock. 'It does seem that [my client] may not have offended on her own.' Yet no-one could deny that both girls took an active role in the killing, with Michelle strangling Eliza while Rachel held her down as she fought and begged for her life.

It seemed everyone, including the psychologists who had carried out lengthy interviews with the teenagers, struggled to find a reason behind the sadistic, cold-blooded murder. As prosecutor Simon Stone put it:

There is no sensible explanation in any of the materials I have seen to explain the killing. It is not a result of rage or jealousy. It appears the accused are still holding back information as to why or what motivated them to kill ... it is a mystery, Your Honour, what happened.

Mr Clarke argued his client had expressed remorse by way of her guilty plea. But Mr Stone

contended that at no time had the girl admitted feeling sorry about killing Eliza. Police evidence on behalf of the prosecution included testimony that one of the girls (the court did not specify which) when she confessed to the crime, spoke about what it was like to watch her friend die, as her emotions changed from anger to fear, to the realisation that she was going to die. But at no stage did either girl express any remorse or emotional pain. And neither girl ever made any attempt to stop the other from carrying out the murder, which led Stone to surmise that both girls were equally guilty. Even though they had taken cannabis and ice the night before, Stone said it was not enough to affect their sense of right and wrong.

The prosecution conceded both girls had serious mental health issues, but still called for them to be sentenced to life in prison.

On 8 May 2007, the girls fronted court to hear their sentences. Outside the courthouse Eliza's mother, Erin Davis, told journalists the girls should get the maximum punishment:

They should stay in jail for the rest of their lives and no-one else should have to go through what we are going through. If we had the death penalty they should get the death penalty.

Court President Denis Reynolds sentenced the girls to life in prison, with a minimum of fifteen years. He described the murder as 'gruesome and merciless in the extreme'. The girls were ordered to do their time in separate prisons because it was found the girls had an 'enmeshed' relationship, and when they were together they would continue to pose a risk to others in custody.

Erin Davis is still deeply distressed since the murder of her daughter and believes others may have helped the sixteen-year-old killers murder Eliza and bury her body. But police never found any evidence that the girls had any assistance.

Meanwhile, Michelle's sister says she has nightmares about the crime and will never return to Collie:

We don't condone what she's done, but we just can't believe she's done it. I don't think she would ever have done it without drugs. I'll never go back [to Collie]. I'll never set foot in that town again. It's almost like that place took my sister away. I hate it.

Few stories capture the public's horror as much as when a teenager kills for no apparent reason, and even more horrifying – when the perpetrator cannot offer any explanation whatsoever. It is impossible to make sense of a senseless death. Michelle and Rachel might have withheld information about the reasons for killing Eliza Jane, or perhaps they were telling the truth – there was no reason for the murder. They were just caught up in a moment of madness.

LOVE ON THE RUN

‘Peter and I were together, and that’s all that mattered. It was our first time in public ... our first date, if you like. It was special.’

When you’re a hot-blooded female prison guard surrounded by alpha males of the most challenging kind, is it really that surprising that you would fall for one of your charges? 27-year-old Heather Parker, whose marriage to another prison guard, Mick Parker, was ending, didn’t think so. When Parker fell in love with inmate Peter Gibb, nothing – not steel bars, concrete cells or prison walls – could get in her way. So she did what any prison guard who’d fallen for an inmate would do: she used her inside knowledge to get him the hell out of there.



It was 1992 and Heather Parker, wife and mother of two sons aged nine and twelve, was enjoying her job maintaining order as a prison officer at Melbourne’s Metropolitan Remand Centre. Perhaps it wasn’t her ideal job, but it kept her busy, paid the bills and put her in the right place at the right time for what would become the defining love of her life.

She’d been on the job for three years when she met prisoner Peter Gibb, a 38-year-old serving a ten-year sentence for armed robbery. He was not exactly textbook handsome, but with his thick dark hair, impressive prison tattoos and good physique, he was more than enough to catch Parker’s eye. He’d been in and out of the prison system since his mid teens, mostly for violent crimes.

According to fellow officers and prisoners, Parker and Gibb flirted openly and shamelessly and on occasion, would greet each other with a kiss when Parker opened his cell door. So great was the attraction, they seemed not to care who was watching. Parker had already built up a reputation for getting dangerously close to select criminals, but this time it seemed she’d taken the closeness a step further.

In May 1992, Parker and Gibb’s romance was exposed: they were caught on surveillance footage having sex in a broom cupboard. The highly scandalous incident sparked a stop-work meeting, with fellow officers demanding Parker be transferred away from Gibb. Parker was eventually sent to work at Pentridge prison, followed by a stint at St Vincent’s Hospital in the security ward.

But the love affair was far from over. Parker kept the home fires burning, staying in contact with Gibb, who was obsessed with planning an escape. He joined forces with inmate Archie Butterly, an armed robber who bragged about having killed at least nineteen people. The two men worked out the escape plan, and Gibb managed to persuade Parker to lend them a helping hand. A third person, whose identity has never been revealed, managed to get hold of Parker to let her know what she needed to do to help break her lover out of prison.

The facts surrounding Parker’s exact role in the breakout are still very murky, but police suspect she provided the jailbirds with explosives and organised their escape vehicle. There is no doubt that she provided an ‘escape pack’ for the boys, which included camping gear, mobile phones, food, police scanners, petrol, weapons and boltcutters. She even had the foresight to include a special camouflage

net, in case they had to hide from those pesky cops.

~~On Sunday 7 March 1993, Gibb and Butterly used explosives to blow up the window of their cell on the second floor of the remand centre on Spencer Street. They kicked the bars aside and slid down a knotted bedsheet, finding that they had badly misjudged the drop: the bedsheets stopped a full three metres above the pavement. The escape was not off to a great start, as both men injured themselves on the drop. Nevertheless, they limped towards the waiting escape car, a Ford Falcon station wagon, jumped into it and took off at tremendous speed. The car was driven so recklessly, powering through red lights, that the vehicle smashed into another car and eventually landed on a freeway ramp.~~

The men were bloodied and badly injured after the crash, but that didn't stop them sprinting from the wreckage and hijacking a motorbike by holding a gun to the head of the rider, who had kindly stopped to assist them. If it sounds like a comedy of errors, that's because it was.

All the while a very determined prison officer, Donald Glasson, had been following the men in a taxi. The taxi driver had no trouble giving chase, as the escapees drove the car, and then the motorbike, as though they were trying to get featured on *Highway Patrol*.

Gibb's stint as a motorbike rider was no better than his car-driving jaunt; he managed to smash the bike in record time. The men were attempting to steal another motorbike when two police officers finally caught up with them – but the escapees would not go quietly. A brawl erupted; they fought the officers, spraying a round of bullets, shooting one officer twice. Their attack didn't go unanswered. Gibb's arm was broken with a police baton – but that didn't stop him from snatching one officer's pistol, holding it to the head of the other officer, and threatening to kill him unless they backed off. So the escapees broke free, driving away in the cops' paddy wagon. This time Gibb drove less like a maniac and the van survived its brush with the duo, who drove until they found a less conspicuous vehicle: a Suzuki Vitara that belonged to Parker, who later tried to explain that the meeting was sheer coincidence.

With Parker at the wheel the trio drove to Frankston, where yet another getaway vehicle was waiting, filled with all the necessities Parker had provided for the fugitives. They drove to Gippsland, stopping at the local hospital so Gibb and Butterly could get some much needed attention for the wounds inflicted by the escape, the car crash, the motorbike crash and the brawl with the cops.

At this stage, the police knew of Parker's involvement. What they didn't know was that following hospital treatment, Parker and Gibb were busily making out in the back seat of the getaway car. Once the love fest was sorted, the trio drove to Victoria's High Country, checking in to the Gaffneys Creek Hotel near Mansfield, where Parker and Gibb made no attempt to conceal themselves; they were spotted enjoying drinks and music in the downstairs bar.

The police did not locate the escapees until the next morning, when they made the dreadful selfish decision to set fire to their hotel room. This was apparently an attempt to get rid of any evidence, such as the blood that had poured from Butterly's wounds. The historic hotel was completely destroyed while the threesome fled to Mansfield. Police set up roadblocks and sent in fifty officers plus a helicopter to search the area, but the trio had luck on their side and managed to evade all methods of capture.

Six days after the escape, the abandoned getaway car was discovered in the bush at Picnic Point near Jamieson. When the officers closed in on the escapees, who were hiding in the bush not far from the getaway car, Butterly opened fire, instigating a gunfight where about fifty shots were fired. By the time Butterly was finished playing Rambo, Parker and Gibb were waist-deep in the Goulburn River, trying to get away from the sniffer dogs that were tracking them. But it was futile. Soon enough the hideaway was exposed and they were forced to surrender. In the meantime, Butterly's body was found

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