

# The Lariat

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WACO,

## REVIEW

### Stowers revives Lake Waco murders

By Lisa McWhorter

Lariat Reporter

When a gruesome triple murder occurs in a small town, the residents of that town feel the impact of the deaths almost as much as the victims and their families.

On the night of July 13, 1982, three teenagers were viciously murdered in a local park near Lake Waco. Jill Montgomery, Raylene Rice and Kenneth Franks were the victims of a mistaken identity murder. After running out of leads in the case, the Waco Police Department decided to let it cool off for a while, but Truman Simons, then a Waco patrol sergeant, was determined to solve the case.

"Careless Whispers" is billed as "the true story of a triple murder and the determined lawman who would not give up." The author, Carlton Stowers, spent two years researching the Lake Waco murders in order to write the book. Its tone is somewhat matter-of-fact, and Stowers assures his readers in the preface that all occurrences and conversations in the book are based on the recollections of at least one of the parties involved. "I am comfortable the ring of truth is here," he writes. But Stowers may make the murders, as well as other actions of the suspects, more graphic than they really were; however, he captures and holds the reader's attention with this.

The law and politics of the Waco Police Department and the District Attorney's office are present in the book as well, but the author doesn't dwell on them. He seems to be more concerned with the public finally finding out the truth.

"The determined lawman who

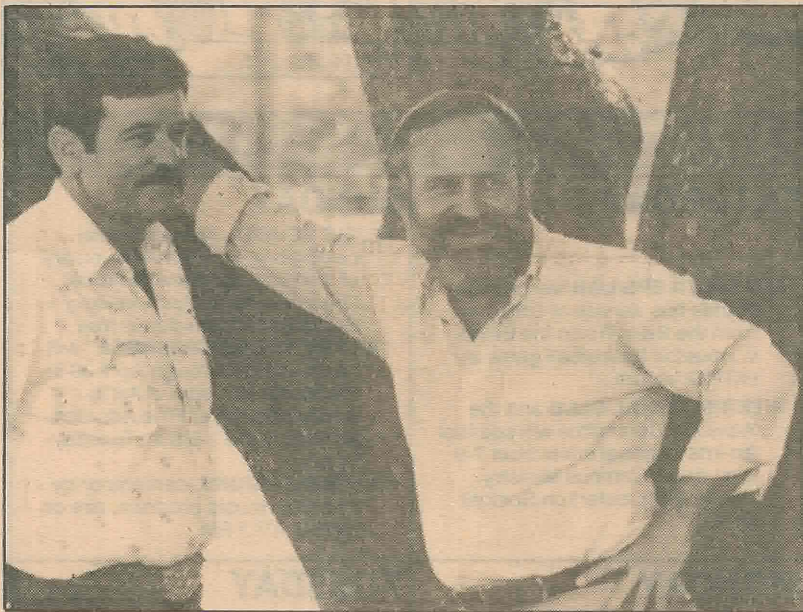


Photo courtesy of Taylor Publishing

Former Waco patrol sergeant Truman Simons (left) is with author Carlton Stowers (right). Stowers spent two years researching the gruesome triple murder that occurred the night of July 13, 1982, in Koehne Park.

## BOOK

"Careless Whispers"

By Carlton Stowers

1986 Taylor Publishing

Critic's grade: A

would not give up" was Truman Simons. In the book, Stowers writes that for years in the WPD "there had been suggestions that once Simons got on a case he would do whatever was necessary to solve it... he (Simons) had heard the rumors of how he supposedly bent the rules to make cases. They were untrue, of course, but... it hurt to know that some people believed them." In fact, Simons left the police force and began working with the sheriff's department. "There, somehow, he was going to solve the murders of the three teenagers," Stowers writes.

Simons is still with the sheriff's department today.

Four men were convicted for the murders. Vic Feazell, just coming into the District Attorney's office, was the prosecuting attorney. David Spence and Muner Deeb, the principal defendants, are now on death row waiting for appeals of their convictions. Brothers Gilbert and Tony Melendez received life sentences in exchange for their testimonies.

Growing up in Waco, one can feel the impact of the triple murders greater than an outsider. Even if the person did not know the victims, their families or the suspects, it does not take away the obsession with wanting to know what happened. Koehne Park and Speegleville Park, where the murders occurred, are two favorite weekend and sum-

mer gathering places for many Waco teenagers. After the murders, the parks were patrolled by police and closed before midnight. The Lake Waco parks are still a popular place to meet friends, but even now, after almost five years have passed since the murders occurred, police still patrol and the 12 a.m. curfew still exists.

David Spence's house on N. 15th Street looks just like the picture in the book. Deeb's grocery store, The Rainbow Drive Inn, and the little apartment behind it are still around. No one lives in Spence's house and it's for sale now. The Rainbow Drive Inn is deserted and probably will remain so. After reading "Careless Whispers," one can drive by these places and, by recalling what Stowers wrote, the places seem to live with a sense of evil and violence.

Some people are appalled that someone could write a book about what could be the most hideous crime to have occurred in Waco, then sit back and collect the royalties. In addition, a movie may even be made. They both may make money, but the reasons for researching, writing and filming may also be for the public to finally know what happened in Koehne Park that July night.

"Careless Whispers" was just nominated as one of the five finalists for the Edgar Allan Poe Award of the Mystery Writers Association and is on the regional best sellers list for Dallas-Fort Worth and B. Dalton Book Stores.

Stowers has written 22 books and has had his work published in magazines such as "People," "Parade," "Rolling Stone" and "Texas Monthly."