

Wounds that time can't heal

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**10 years later,
survivors still grieve for
triple murder victims**

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It was the sort of horrific crime that made parents warn their children to stay away from the lake and then wait up anxiously for them to come home.

Time has eased the terror many Central Texans felt for years after the infamous Lake Waco triple murders. People no longer are as afraid to drive into the lake's parks

after dark.

But for Nancy Wiser of Waxahachie, the pain is just as intense as it was the night 10 years ago when her daughter, Jill Montgomery, didn't come home.

"It's been 10 years, but it is just as hard today as it was 10 years ago," Wiser said. "It still feels as fresh, and maybe that is because all the wounds that are there are still open because there are so many things yet that haven't been taken care of. This year may be the hardest, to realize that it has been 10 years and the feelings are still as strong as they are."

Fishermen discovered the bodies of Montgomery and Raylene Rice, both of Waxahachie, and Montgomery's friend, Kenneth Franks of Waco, dumped at Speegleville III Park at Lake Waco on July 13, 1982.

It was a crime that shocked the state. The numbness in Waco lingered for almost two years before arrests were made. Once the defendants were brought to trial, the drama was played out before packed courtrooms.

Now when Wiser gets a telephone message from someone associated with the case, her mind

races, wondering what new development the caller will tell her about next.

Has David Wayne Spence gotten a new execution date? Is there a new trial date for Muneer Mohammad Deeb? Did Gilbert and Anthony Melendez finally get paroled? They are questions that trouble her deeply and ones she lives with daily, she says.

"I am facing the possibility that not all of them will be taken care of," Wiser says. "If Tony and Gilbert get out on parole — this soon

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Long after the infamous Lake Waco triple murders in July, 1982, many people were afraid to drive into the lake's parks after dark.

Staff photo —
Rod Aydelotte

MURDERS

2 killers could be paroled any year now

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or even ever — to me, then that isn't taking care of it. I don't consider a few years in prison, or even life in prison, taking care of it for what they did. I wasn't happy with the pleas in the first place."

The Melendez brothers pleaded guilty in the girls' deaths in exchange for life prison terms. Their paroles were denied in January, but they become eligible for release annually.

Spence, who will be 34 on Saturday, is serving two death sentences for his role in the grisly slayings. He won a stay of execution from two federal judges in December, but he should be eligible soon for Judge George Allen to set a new execution date. He has been on death row since 1984.

Deeb, the alleged architect of the bungled murder-for-hire plot, won a new trial from the Court of Criminal Appeals in June 1991, after it ruled that testimony from a former cellmate of Spence's should not have been allowed at his 1985 trial in Cleburne.

Deeb, who was on death row, is in Johnson County Jail awaiting retrial in Fort Worth, which is scheduled now for September. The state district judge who was to have presided over the retrial in Cleburne transferred the case

to Fort Worth after an agreement between special prosecutors and Deeb's Houston attorney.

McLennan County District Attorney John Segrest disqualified his office from prosecuting Deeb again because Segrest, while in private practice, and Waco attorney Dick McCall wrote the appeal of Deeb's conviction.

Vic Feazell, the controversial district attorney who prosecuted Spence, Deeb and the Melendez brothers, has led perhaps the most eventful life of anyone associated with the case in the 10 years since the killings.

Thrust into the spotlight by the trial — some would argue that he eagerly put himself there — Feazell made jurors cry in his emotional final arguments in the Lake Waco murders.

After Spence and Deeb both were sentenced to death, Feazell was highlighted in Carlton Stowers' chilling, award-winning book about the triple murders, *Careless Whispers*, which came out in 1986.

But Feazell was indicted the same year on charges that he took bribes from a handful of defense attorneys. Feazell attributed the federal investigation to his "stepping on the wrong toes" and angering law enforcement officials with his probe into confessions made by Henry Lee Lucas.

A federal jury in Austin acquitted Feazell in 1987, after a six-week trial, and he resigned as district attorney in 1988 with almost two years remaining on his second term.

THE VICTIMS



Rice



Montgomery



Franks



File photo

Truman Simons (right) and other officials remove the body of one of three teen-agers killed July 13, 1982.

vinced Spence is not guilty.

If Spence is executed, Hunt said, an innocent man will die.

"I am convinced they have the wrong guy," Hunt said. "In fact, I probably feel more strongly about that now than I did before. And I say that because I have seen more evidence recently than I did before."

Hunt said he is referring to material filed in Spence's federal appeals by the Texas Resource Center in Austin, which to date has been rejected.

Another major player in the case and the "hero" of *Careless Whispers*, Truman Simons, is now a lieutenant with the McLennan County Sheriff's Department. He has been credited with solving the case.

"I think about the case every time July 13 comes around," Simons said.

Simons was a sergeant with the Waco Police Department in July 1982. After they were found, Simons knelt over the teens' bodies and promised them that he would find their killers.

He kept that promise, he says.

"I just wouldn't mind if they speeded Spence's execution up a bit," he said.

"I'll be down there somewhere

when it happens. I'll be burning the candle from the other end," he said, referring to candlelight vigils in protest of executions.

The girls, both 17, had taken a day trip to Waco from Waxahachie to pick up Montgomery's last paycheck from the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum at Fort Fisher. While they were in Waco, they stopped to see the 18-year-old Franks, Montgomery's friend from their days living at the Methodist Home.

They got some beer and were riding around on a summer evening. When they parked at Koehne Park off Lake Shore Drive to talk, Spence, who was once described as "the devil himself," drove up with two friends.

The girls were sexually assaulted and all three teens suffered multiple stab wounds.

Trial testimony indicated that Deeb reportedly hired Spence to kill Gayle Kelley, a Methodist Home resident who worked at Deeb's convenience store. Deeb bought a life insurance policy on Kelley and made himself the beneficiary.

Spence and the Melendez brothers apparently mistook Montgomery for Kelley, prosecutors said.

CONVICTED IN KILLINGS



Spence



Deeb



G. Melendez



A. Melendez

Last year, Feazell won a record \$58 million libel judgment against the Belo Broadcasting Co. and WFAA-TV in Dallas for a series of reports Channel 8 aired during the federal investigation of Feazell.

He settled with Belo in June 1991 for an undisclosed amount believed to be between \$10 million and \$20 million and moved to Austin in August 1991. He now lives in an 8,000-square-foot house on three acres in the hills west of Austin.

Feazell said last week that he would have remembered the anniversary.

"It is a very significant date," he said. "I still remember the day that it happened, and I wasn't even the DA at the time."

Feazell said he signed a contract in June and the screenplay is in progress for a TV movie based on his life. He declined to say which company will produce the film, but he said actor Aidan Quinn, who was in the movie *Avalon*, has been signed to play Feazell in the movie.

Waco attorney Russ Hunt, who squared off against Feazell as Spence's attorney, still is con-