

I was one of the policemen (still in the police collage at Bishop Lavis at the time) that were in the bush in Mitchell's Plain, looking for the bodies on the murdered and abused children in 1994.



Norman Afzal Simons:

Norman Avzal Simons (born 12 January 1967), also known as the "Station Strangler", is a South African rapist and serial killer who was convicted in 1995 on one count of murder and one count of kidnapping Elroy van Rooy, age 10. He was sentenced to 35 years (25 for murder and 10 for kidnapping) in prison.

The Story:

Eleven years after his conviction for the murder of just one of the 22 boys thought to have been the victims of the notorious Station Strangler, former Western Cape school teacher Norman Afzal Simons was back in court for the re-opening of the inquest into two of the boys, Donovan Swartz, 11, and nine-year-old Elinor Sprinkle. Simons, who is serving his sentence at the Drakenstein Maximum Correctional Centre in Paarl, was to give evidence in the inquest in the Mitchell's Plain magistrate's court.

The Station Strangler terrorised the Cape Flats from 1986 to 1994, as 22 boys were found face down in shallow sandy graves, their hands tied behind their backs and bearing the signs of having been sodomised. The case sparked national horror. Simons was eventually convicted of killing the last of the dead boys, nine-year-old Elroy van Rooyen (his body were among the last of the bodies found in early 1994). All the bodies were all found in the same position - face down in a shallow grave with their hands tied behind their backs and their pants wound tightly around their necks.



GRISLY FIND: In 1994 the police searched the bushes in Westridge, Mitchells Plain. Six bodies were found.

The killer's reign of terror started in October 1986 with the discovery of the body of Jonathan Claasen, 14, near Modderdam station in Bellville South. Nine bodies were found between 1986 and 1992.

In January 1987, Yusuf Hoffman, 14, was found in bushes near the sewerage plant in Mitchell's Plain. Altogether six bodies were found that year.

Mario Thomas of Manenberg was discovered in a field in Sarepta near Kuils River in January. In April an unidentified boy was found in bushes near Modderdam station.

In June the body of Freddie Cleaves, 12, was discovered in a ditch in Belhar and in August that of Samuel Nqaba, 15, was found in bushes off Modderdam Road in Bellville South.

In October an unidentified boy, aged about 15, was found near Modderdam station.

In 1988 only one body was found - that of Calvin Spire, nine, in a field near the University of the Western Cape in Bellville South.

Then there was a long pause.

In October 1992, the Strangler's ninth victim, Jacobus Louw, 10, of Beacon Valley, Mitchell's Plain, was found in the dunes near Mnandi Beach.

Then in January 1994 Cape Town was rocked by the discovery of 11 bodies in the Strangler's so-called killing fields on the outskirts of Mitchell's Plain.

The first was that of an unidentified man.

This was followed by Elinor Sprinkle, 10, of Lentegeur and an unidentified boy in the field next to Lentegeur Shopping Centre.

Next were Jeremy Benjamin, 12, of Westridge, Donovan Swartz, 12, of Beacon Valley and Jeremy Smith of Rocklands.

Then on January 27, one single horrific day, police found six bodies - those of Fabian Wilmore, eight, Owen Hoffman, 10, Neville Samaai, 14, Marcellino Cupido, nine, Elroy van Heerden, nine, and an unidentified boy.

Elinor may have been abducted by a gang of five while Donovan may have been lured away from home, police said.

Marcellino, of Eerste River, went missing on December 21, 1993 when he left his grandmother's Mitchell's Plain home for the nearby Town Centre complex.

Fabian and Owen went missing together on January 11, 1994. Their bodies were found lying together.

Cape Flats parents were terrified. Some refused to send their children to school and gathered in large groups to fine-comb bushes in Mitchell's Plain in an effort to come face to face with the mass murderer.

It became the largest hunt for a serial killer in South African criminal history.

The then minister of law and order Hennis Kriel offered an initial reward of R100 000 but subsequently increased it to R250 000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer.

Three months after Elroy's body was discovered, Simons, a Grade 5 teacher at Alpine Primary School in East Ridge was arrested for his murder. He stood trial for only one of the killings as police lacked evidence in the other cases.

His three-month trial followed in 1995, which saw him sentenced to 25 years for murder and 10 years for kidnapping Elroy.

In 1998 the Bloemfontein High Court of Appeal rejected Simons's appeal and increased his sentence to life imprisonment.

For many years, theories have abounded that Norman Afzal Simons was the fall guy who was jailed to keep the electorate happy, as the 1994 elections were looming.



Brian Shofer:



Another possible solution to the other 21 unsolved bodies might have been in the person of Brian Shofer. Two former landlords of paedophile Brian Shofer believed he was the Station Strangler.

Shofer hanged himself in the holding cells of Lentegeur Police Station last Friday, after he was charged with raping a 17-year-old boy.

The school teacher was arrested in London Village, Mitchells Plain, after his 70-year-old landlord saw his story in the newspapers and reported him to police.

Shofer made headlines after he advertised tutoring services for children on the internet.

It has since been revealed that self-confessed paedophile had been teaching at numerous Cape Flats schools after his release from jail in 2010.

His London Village landlord now believes he may have been the notorious Station Strangler, who terrorised the Cape Flats between 1986 and 1994.

The pensioner said Shofer "was loose on the Flats" during the same time.

Another landlord, Muhammad Effendi, who contacted the Daily Voice after seeing Shofer in the news, agrees with him.

"He told me he was arrested and sentenced for having sex with two 16-year-old girls, [this was] not the truth, as I have read in the paper since last week," a shocked Effendi said.

According to Effendi, Shofer was arrested in 1994, the same year as convicted killer and Station Strangler, Norman Simons.

Simons, also a former school teacher, was sentenced to 25 years for murder and 10 years for kidnapping, after the decomposing bodies of 22 boys were found across the Cape Flats.

But Simons was only convicted of one murder – that of nine-year-old Elroy van Rooyen.

The young victims were all sodomised and found face down in shallow graves with their hands tied behind their backs.

Criminal experts believe Simons had a partner, but this accomplice was never identified.