

## Unresolved deaths leave residents cautious

By Paul de la Garza

Associated Press writer

INA, Ill. — The brutal killings of a young family one year ago today has left townspeople leery not only of strangers but of each other, especially since the killer remains loose.

"It's unbelievable that it could be somebody walking the streets and you might know him," said Joan Sneed, owner of the Ina Cafe in this southern Illinois town of 450.

"People were really trusting here," said one woman, who like others interviewed earlier this week requested anonymity. "After that happened, that trust isn't there anymore."

The woman lives near the tan trailer where a sheriff's deputy found the badly beaten bodies of Ruby Elaine Dardeen, 30; her son, Peter Sean; and the baby girl she gave birth to during the attack on Nov. 18, 1987.

Authorities said the baby, later named Casey Elaine by her grandparents, was born alive and killed with blows to the head. Her body was found near her mother's on a bed.

Mrs. Dardeen, who had been 7½ months pregnant, and her son also were beaten to death. A bloody bat was recovered at the scene.

The body of Russell Keith Dardeen, the 29-year-old husband and father, was found by hunters the next day on the campus of nearby Rend Lake College.

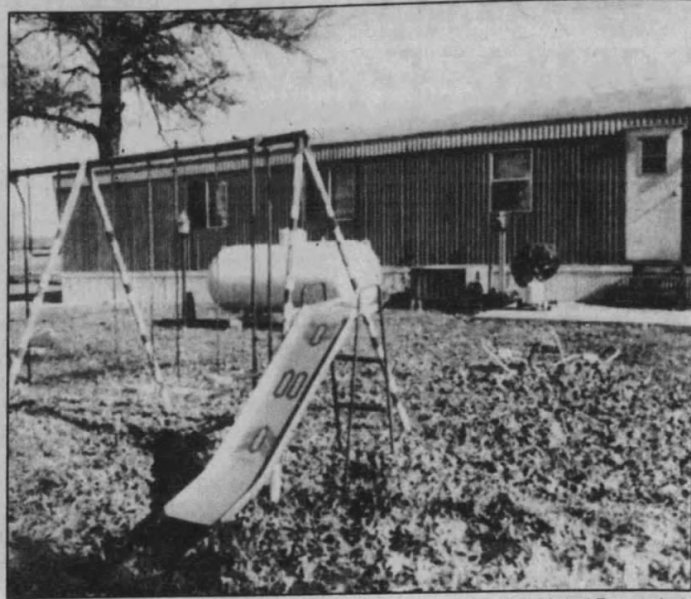
Dardeen had been shot three times in the head, police said.

The family died between 5 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Their red 1981 Plymouth was found in Benton, about 11 miles away.

But after 822 interviews that have led investigators all over the country, a \$10,000 reward from the Dardeen family and a steady stream of leads, the case remains unsolved.

"Any closer to a suspect or an arrest? No," said Capt. Mike Anthis of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, who heads the investigation. "We don't see that around the corner."

"It's one of those situations it could be tomorrow, next week, next month



Associated Press photo

### Killing of young family year ago still unsolved

— you don't know. It may be another year from now. It's kind of like working a 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle."

Anthis and Lt. Fred Smith of the Illinois State Police Division of Criminal Investigation, the other agency looking into the murders, refused to talk about specifics.

Police have "no fixed motive" in the killings, said Anthis, who acknowledged that the longer the case went unsolved, the more difficult solution becomes.

He said he is convinced "there is a person or persons who have some type of information who's thinking, 'I don't want to get involved,'" and urges anyone with information to come forward.

"It kind of looks like the middle-class, all-America family and you look at it and wonder, 'Why would somebody do this?'"

Rick Hobler, the attorney who represents the Dardeen estate, said relatives were frustrated there had been no break in the case but believe investigators are doing a good job.

"There's not been a giving up of hope," Hobler said. "The families are religious families and they both believe that their prayers will be answered. They're convinced that

something that's right will happen."

Before the killings, residents of this town — surrounded by freshly harvested farmland and bounded by bustling Interstate 57, Illinois Route 37 and railroad tracks — thought nothing of leaving their doors unlocked before the murders.

They now exercise more caution, though their hospitable, small-town habits remain.

"I'll admit that we lock up more," said a housewife with two children tugging at her dress who allowed a reporter inside her house.

"I'll be honest with you," she said, "I prayed that the Lord would protect me when I answered the door."

She asked that she too not be named.

Down the road less than a half mile, a "For Sale" sign lay in the front yard of the slain family's mobile home, curtains drawn. Autumn leaves littered the yard.

No one lives there anymore.

The slayings are no longer the primary topic at the four-table Ina Cafe, but people still think about the Dardeens.

"It's always in the back of everybody's mind," said Mrs. Sneed.

"Who did it? And why?"