

STATE

# Mystery still surrounds '87 killings

CARBONDALE, Ill. — Five years after the slaying of a young Southern Illinois family, the mystery of who did it, and why, still remains.

On a cool November night in 1987, somebody savagely beat Elaine Dardeen and her 3-year-old son, Peter, while they were in their trailer home near Ina, 35 miles northeast of here.

The beating induced labor in the woman, who was 30 years old and 7 1/2 months pregnant. When a daughter was born prematurely during the attack, that child also was killed — by blows to her head.

The body of Dardeen's 29-year-old husband, Keith, was found

about a mile and a half away, on the campus of Rend Lake College, with three bullets in his head. His red, 1981 Plymouth was found around the corner from the police station in Benton, about 11 miles south.

The killings happened in the late hours of Nov. 16 or early hours of Nov. 17, authorities said. They found a bloody baseball bat at the scene of the beatings, but have not determined whether it was the murder weapon.

"It's just been so hard to accept. Very hard," said Joeann Dardeen, mother of Keith Dardeen. "We've gone over the same stuff over and over again.

"It's so unreal they were mur-

dered, because of the type of people they were," she said, describing them as quiet and conservative. Dardeen was a laborer at the Rend Lake Water Department and his wife a secretary at a Mount Vernon office supply company.

Authorities have been unable to determine a clear motive for the slayings. No money appeared to be stolen, and a videocassette recorder and portable movie camera were left in the trailer.

Two sheriff's departments and the state police put about 30 investigators on the case fulltime when it first broke. Today, about six officers work parttime tracking down any leads, which have trickled to

about one a month, said Capt. Mike Anthis of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department.

"The thing that makes this case baffling is that you can't come up with a direct motive," said Anthis, an 18-year law enforcement veteran. "We use this case to teach our investigators to avoid tunnel vision, because you have to consider every possible theory."

Joeann Dardeen, who was one of the last people to see her son alive, has developed her own theory over the years. She thinks the murderer was someone he knew and brought to his trailer the night of the slayings.

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