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# The Fayetteville Observer

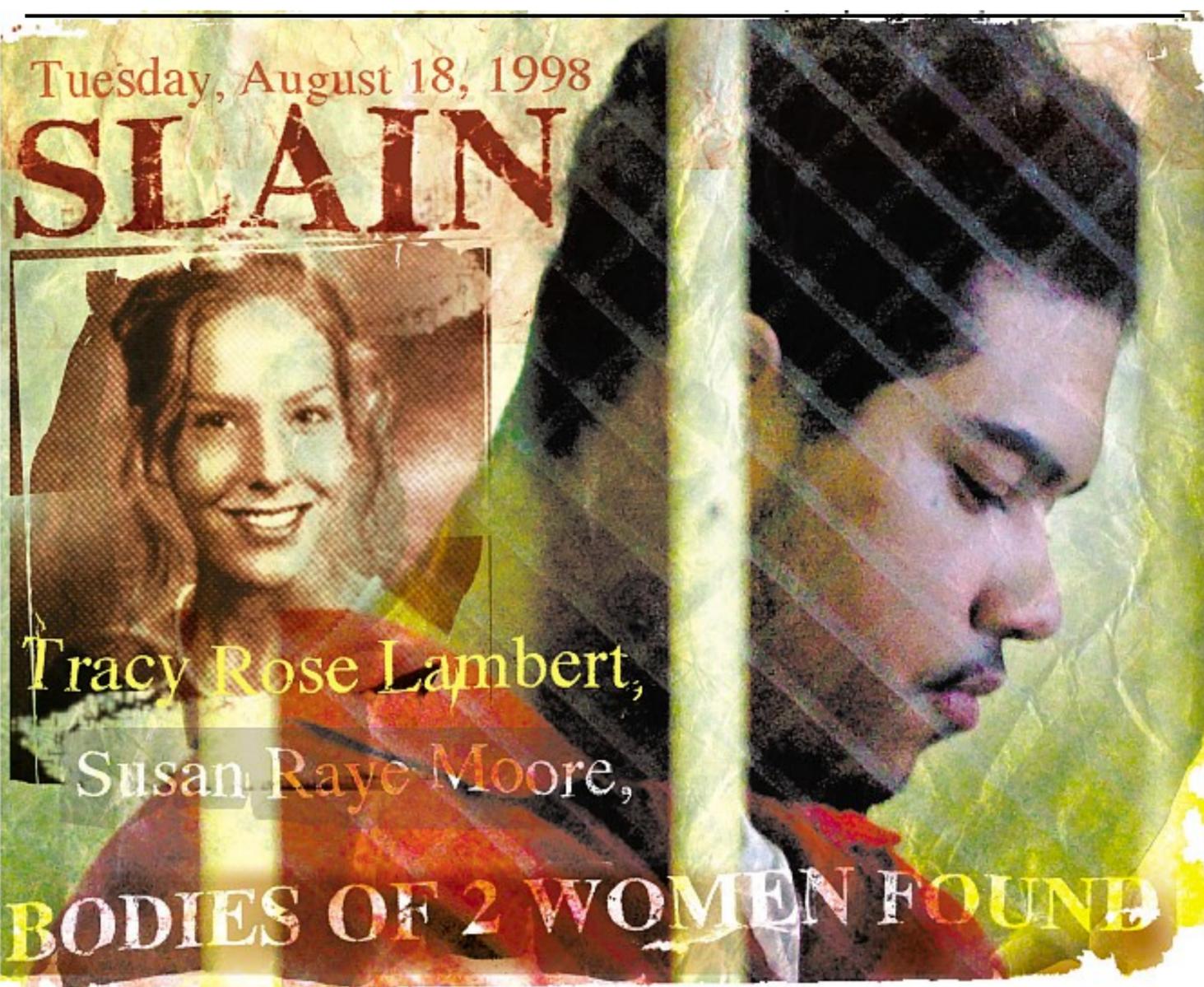
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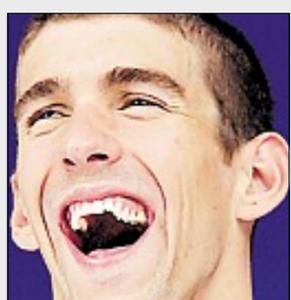
Tuesday, August 18, 1998  
**SLAIN**

Tracy Rose Lambert,  
Susan Rave Moore,

**BODIES OF 2 WOMEN FOUND**

Staff illustration by Mariano Santillan

## GOLD RUSH



MICHAEL PHELPS WINS A RECORD NUMBER OF OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALS  
STORY, PAGE 3C

## Florida braces for Fay's approach

A staff and wire report  
Residents and tourists in the Florida Keys prepared Saturday for Tropical Storm Fay, which forecasters said could strengthen to a hurricane and begin battering the island chain as soon as Monday.

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist declared a state of emergency because Fay "threatens the state of Florida with a major disaster," he wrote in an executive order.

Forecasters predicted Saturday afternoon that the sixth named storm of the 2008 season would make landfall somewhere along the western coast of Florida on Tuesday as a hurricane, said Corey Walton, a hurricane support meteorologist at the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Brandon Vincent, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Raleigh, said forecasters will know better by Monday whether North Carolina will get substantial rain from Tropical Storm Fay.

"The rainfall could really help with the drought," Vincent said.

But there always is the possibility of tornadoes accompanying any tropical storm.

As of 11 p.m. Saturday, the storm was expected to strike the west coast of Florida, proceed through central Georgia and arrive in North Carolina sometime Wednesday or Thursday.

See **STORM**, Page 5A

## 'I'm still here'

By Michael N. Graff ■ Staff writer

Somehow, she knew she would live. But first, she had to play dead. Just for a little while. Until they were gone. So she didn't fight back. She didn't scream. She didn't cry. She just took it. One bullet after another pelted her, each one with blue fingernail polish painted on its tip. A crowd of young people surrounded her, each one wearing a blue bandana over the mouth. Crips. "Shoot her in the head," she heard one of them shout. Already six shots into a nightmare, Debra Cheeseborough needed to brace for one more. Lying on her stomach, with her head resting on her left ear and her right hand up near her face, she waited. "I never for a moment thought I was going to die," she said. Then, over her shoulder, the last blue-tipped bullet came flying. Its sole responsibility was to hit her head. Its fate was not. It slid safely past her right cheek, hitting her glasses and then her thumb. Finally, they left. She stayed there, still as the soil, for the next hour, hoping they wouldn't come back. They wouldn't. They'd already moved on to find more victims. Across town, Tracy Lambert and Susan Moore were just getting off work. It was early in the morning of Aug. 17, 1998, and Fayetteville was about to be awakened to a growing gang problem.

See **CRIPS**, Page 6A



Debra Cheeseborough was kidnapped in August 1998 by Crips gang members outside the Bojangles where she worked. She was shot seven times and left for dead.

### ON THE WEB

■ For archived stories about the Crips case and photos of the investigation and trials, go to [www.fayobserver.com](http://www.fayobserver.com).

### 'IT'S NOT WORTH IT'

■ What gang veterans would tell your kids, **Perspective**, Page 15A

### AND MORE

■ A who's who of Crips members, **Page 6A**  
■ A wake-up call for Fayetteville, **Page 7A**

## Developer thinks big: 30 stories big

■ The Prince Charles Hotel's owner sees potential for a skyscraper near the historic building.

By Andrew Barksdale  
Staff writer

John Chen saw prime real estate when he snatched up the beleaguered Prince Charles Hotel in an auction last year.

Queens, N.Y., said the main reason he bought the property for \$1.9 million was the potential to develop some of the land that adjoins the historic hotel.

His vision? A 30-story

commercial and residential building that would be unlike anything Fayetteville has ever seen.

Such a tower, if it ever becomes reality, would dwarf the 11-story Systel building's claim as the tallest downtown structure and introduce the city to the kind of mixed-use high-rises more common in Charlotte and, in

recent years, Raleigh.

Chen acknowledges that his idea will take some selling and research. First, the soil may not support a building of that size. Second, he is not sure the city will cooperate in terms of permitting and incentives.

He is thinking big, nonetheless. "In order to be a destination, See **HOTEL**, Page 4A

### INSIDE

■ John Chen talks about Prince Charles, **Page 4A**  
■ Myron B. Pitts is pulling for Chen's skyscraper, **Page 1B**

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**TOMORROW**  
■ **Power plant:** What would fuel a proposed Sampson electrical power plant has some troubled.  
■ **Local & State:** Kim Hasty is in Broadway to find out about a damaged historic bank building.

**WEATHER**  
Sun, thunderstorm; high around 88, **8B**



# Crips: Survivor's life was forever changed

From Page 1A

"I'm still here," Debra Cheeseborough said over the phone a few weeks ago, her voice sounding soft, comfortable and enthusiastic.

In the 10 years since she was left for dead in those woods, Cheeseborough, now 50, has tried to lay low. Not run. Just lay low.

She uprooted her family immediately after she was released from the hospital. She moved to two different states — one south, one north. She agreed to be interviewed for this story only on the condition that her current location be kept secret.

For about three years, the only time she spent in Fayetteville was in court trying to put away the nine people — Crips — who murdered two women she'd never met, but two women she will never forget.

Tracy Lambert and Susan Moore were innocent, too. But for some reason she survived and they didn't. Cheeseborough has considered it her duty to tell the story of that night so people don't forget about gangs, so people don't forget about Tracy and Susan.

So she has. In court, she told it bullet by bullet, face by face, detail by detail.

And one case after the other, they went down. Six of them were sentenced to life in prison or death. Two more received sentences of 20 years or more. The other received a much lighter sentence because she turned on her gang and testified for the prosecution.

Once members of the same gang, the nine Crips involved in Fayetteville's most notorious gang crimes were scattered throughout North Carolina. Seven of them remain in prison. One, Eric Queen, hanged himself while awaiting death row. Another, Ione Black, completed the sentence she received in return for giving up the rest of her gang.

The others involved — the gang members, the surviving victim, the families and this city — still live with that night.

A decade later, Fayetteville still has gangs. Despite new and sophisticated deterrents, law enforcement counts 300 members in Cumberland County.

And a decade later, Cheeseborough still is trying to rebuild her life. She had to leave her home here. Her husband had to come out of retirement.

All plans changed. She went back to work last year, starting a job in retail. Her husband is pulling double shifts, inching closer to re-retirement.

All in all, she's doing fine, she insists.

But some wounds remain. Two of the blue-tipped bullets always will be lodged inside her body. She still needs a cane to keep her balance.

Then there are the mental scars.

She doesn't walk alone in the dark anymore. She struggles to sleep. She didn't drive for two years. She spent nearly eight years in therapy. Her husband, a retired soldier, also had to see a therapist. Her son, an active-duty soldier, walks behind her in public, always scanning for a potential risk. She's uneasy around young people in baggy pants.

And she struggles with Sundays.

Debra Cheeseborough's mother, Mary, loved Sundays. They'd go to church. They'd talk. They'd be mother and daughter.

On June 14, 1997, Mary died of a heart attack. She was 58.

Cheeseborough found out while she was at work.

"It was nothing that I was prepared for," she says now. "She was the focal point of our family."

Sundays are inventory days at Bojangles. As a manager, Cheeseborough handled inventory. It was her only night shift of the workweek.

In the year following her mother's death, Cheeseborough's staff knew not to bother her during the first few hours of work on Sundays. She used that

## NIGHT OF TERROR

**SUNDAY Aug. 16, 1998**

### Afternoon

Members of the Crips initiate lone Black into the gang by having six members beat on her.

### Sometime before midnight

Crips members gather at Christina Walters' trailer at 1386 Davis St.

### Sometime before midnight

Walters, Tameika Douglas and an unidentified male go to Wal-Mart to steal toiletries and gun cartridges. The gang members later use fingernail polish to paint the tips of the bullets blue — the identifying color of the Crips gang.

**MONDAY Aug. 17, 1998**



**12:30 a.m.**  
Debra Cheeseborough, left, finishes weekly inventory at the Bojangles at 4554 Raeford Road.

While walking to her car, she is abducted by gang members Carlos Nevills, Black and Douglas.

### 1 a.m.

Eric Queen, Walters, Douglas and Carlos Frink drive Cheeseborough's car to Smith Lake on Fort Bragg. Walters shoots Cheeseborough multiple times in the back, side, leg, chest and hand.

### About 2:10 a.m.

Susan Moore, 25, calls her mother to tell her she's on her way home from work and that Tracy Lambert, 18, is with her. They stop at Hardee's on Raeford Road near Skibo Road for a late-night meal. Around the same time, the gang members reconvene at Walters' trailer and realize they need a second car to leave town. They set out to find one.

### After 2:10 a.m.

Using Cheeseborough's car, gang members Queen, Walters, Frink, Black, Douglas and Darryl Tucker Jr. follow Moore's 1989

Pontiac Grand Prix to Lambert's home near PermaStone Lake. They abduct the women at gunpoint, then head back to Walters' trailer.

### About 2:30 a.m.

The gang members take the women to Linden and an isolated field off Laura Ray Road.

### About 3 a.m.

Moore calls her mother from the trunk. Moore's mother would later tell The Fayetteville Observer that the last words she heard her daughter say were, "Please don't hurt her. Please don't hurt her."

The gang members pull Lambert out of the car first. Queen shoots her while she is standing up. Francisco Tirado, one of the gang's leaders, gets Moore out of the car. He puts a knife to her throat, then backs off and shoots her in the back of the head.

### About 7 a.m.

A farmer finds the bodies of Moore and Lambert in the field.

### About 2:15 p.m.

A passer-by sees Cheeseborough, lying near a road and still alive despite the seven gunshot wounds she suffered 12 hours earlier.



Law officers investigate the field — south of Linden where the bodies of Tracy Lambert and Susan Moore were found on Aug. 17, 1998.

**MONDAY & TUESDAY Aug. 17 & 18, 1998**

Gang members hide out in Myrtle Beach, S.C., until investigators are able to find them using cell phone records and other tips.

**TUESDAY — THURSDAY Aug. 18 — 20, 1998**

Investigators arrest the suspects who fled to Myrtle Beach and bring them back to Fayetteville. Getting out of the police van, the men spit and curse at reporters, with Tirado shouting, "I ain't killed nobody. I ain't no Crips."

**Jan. 2000 — Nov. 2001**

All nine gang members are sentenced to prison terms for the murders and attempted murder. Black, who called 911 and testified for the state, receives the lightest sentence, about five years.

Source: Court documents and interviews with Debra Cheeseborough and some gang members, who contradict some of the accounts. Staff graphic; staff photo

time to think about her mother.

"I wouldn't talk for two hours," she says.

That was her routine. She followed it every week.

Sunday, Aug. 16, 1998, started the same way, with her thinking about her mom.

Michael Cheeseborough is an old-fashioned guy. He didn't like it when his wife left work alone late at night.

But after several deployments — including one in Desert Storm — he started to believe her when she said she could take care of herself.

He had long since retired from the Army by 1998. He pitched in around Bojangles part time. He went to bed early that Sunday night because he had to work early Monday.

Debra and Michael's daughter, Seneca, was a rising sophomore at Westover High School. She usually waited up for her mom, but she had spent the day with friends at the movies, and she was tired.

Seneca and Michael slept through the night, resting easy, like most people in the city, totally unaware that a gang problem had arrived.

Fayetteville had no clue. "It was always in other places," Cheeseborough said.

After that night, we started to learn.

We learned about Francisco Tirado and how he was an "OG," an original gangster,

one of the leaders.

We learned about Christina Walters and how her nickname was "Queen," given only to the top female member of a set.

We learned about Eric Queen, Carlos Frink, Carlos Nevills, John Juarbe, Darryl Tucker Jr. and Ione Black. And we learned about Tameika Douglas, just 15 years old and on her way to a life behind bars.

We learned that many of them — not all — came from broken homes. We learned that they sought friendship from other people with similar, troubled backgrounds.

We learned about tattoos, colors, bandanas and rites of passage.

We learned the problem was on our streets, in our schools and growing every day.

We learned about the senselessness and the ruthlessness.

We learned about gangs. We learned too late.

But what did they learn? What did those who pulled triggers, those who wore colors, those who drove three innocent women into the middle of nowhere and left them for dead — what did they learn?

His eyes are the first thing you notice. Still so disturbing. Still so sure. Still with those angry brows that race down hard toward the top of his nose.

He walks slowly down the white-walled hall in Central Prison in Raleigh, wearing some kind of prison garb, probably a neutral color. Hard to tell. All you notice are his eyes, burrowing and brown.

Francisco Tirado sits down. A wall and reinforced glass divides the room. He's on one side, behind a protective wall. But he still owns the room.

After brief introductions, he leans in.

"Let me tell you a story," he says. "This wasn't here. This was in another state."

His eyebrows start to relax. He's 10 years old again.

He hadn't seen his mother for a few weeks. Dad was totally absent. No siblings.

And he wanted friends. So he found them.

He rode with them out to a field. They had a woman with them. Random woman. He didn't know who she was. Maybe a teacher. Maybe a clerk.

His new friends told him to shoot her, to prove his loyalty.

"Yo," he tells them. "I didn't sign on for this. We shoot Bloods. We don't shoot civilians."

He wouldn't shoot. His friends did. He got a face full of something. Tasted like salt and copper. He still won't eat salt on his food.

His friends threw the woman into a blue trunk. Then they threw him in with her.

They put the trunk in a hole. He heard dirt hitting it. He heard the shovel packing it. He couldn't breathe. He started screaming.

They dug up the trunk. They pulled him out.

"Next time we tell you to do something," they told him, "you're either with us or against us."

A pair of thunderstorms passed over Scotland Correctional Institution one evening last week.

Carlos Frink hates thunderstorms. They scare him. The lightning gets closer, the thunder louder.

"Relax," one of his fellow inmates tells him. "If God wanted you, there's no way you can hide."

Often, we make them absolutes. There is life. And there is death.

But gangs live in the middle. Call it a gray area if you want. But it's more dark.

It's a spot where toughness is only a blanket for the paranoia.

It's where you live to avoid death.

Frink knows that place.

He lifts his left pants leg to reveal a mini-crater in his calf, just one of the battle scars he received in his years before being locked up for his role in the 1998 Crips killings.

Frink started showing up on the police blotter in 1994, when he was 17. In June of that year, he was charged with shooting two other teenagers. The next year, Frink's name showed up again. This time, he was shot. The person charged was one of the two teens he'd shot a year earlier.

"If you know anything about gangs, you know what it's going to lead to," Frink says now. "You're either in here or you're dead."

The lifestyle follows them into prison.

Christina Walters, the shooter in the attempted murder of Cheeseborough, is one of only four women on North Carolina's death row.

Eric Queen, who shot and killed Lambert, also was on death row. But he hanged himself in a closet last year.

And then there's Tirado, who shot and killed Moore. He was initially sentenced to death, but the sentence was reduced to life because of a technicality.

Sometimes, he wonders which is worse.

"I lost any potential I ever had. I'm sitting here waiting to die, every day," he says. "I'm sitting here waiting to die so much that I want to die. I'm tired of living."

If that's true, then prison has done to Tirado what Tirado's fellow gang members could not do to Cheeseborough.

It's broken him.

■ ■ ■

Mice. Please, Debra Cheeseborough thought as she lay face down in that soil, don't let there be mice.

In the previous hour, gang members had abducted her outside her work, thrown her in the trunk of her car, robbed her, then drove her to the woods and shot her seven times.

And her biggest worry was mice.

"I am scared to death of mice," she says now, laughing in that soft tone over the phone. "That's the only thing I was terrified of — 'If I see a mouse, I am going to die.'"

■ ■ ■

At the same time, in another remote area of Cumberland County, near Linden, Susan Moore and Tracy Lambert had fears far worse.

Using Cheeseborough's car, the Crips had followed Moore, 25, and Lambert, 18, home from Hardee's, where they had grabbed late-night dinner. The gang trapped the car on a dead-end street and threw the women into the trunk, same as they'd done with Cheeseborough.

They robbed them, regrouped, then drove to a pea field near Linden.

They took Lambert out first. There was some arguing. But, in the end, Queen had the gun in his hand.

Around 3 a.m., Moore called her mother from the trunk.

"Please don't hurt her. Please don't hurt her," her mom heard over the phone.

Then, silence.

They took Moore out of the trunk and made her kneel. Tirado, according to court records and sworn testimony, put a knife to Moore's throat. She asked him not to cut her but to shoot her instead.

Eight years after being the boy gangster who wouldn't fire, Tirado was the teen "Original Gangster" who would.

He backed off from Moore and shot once. She was dead.

Then, the Crips left Moore and Lambert.

Four hours later, a farmer would find their bodies. The gang would see a news flash on television: a double homicide in Linden.

The Crips left town and headed to Myrtle Beach, S.C. As long as they kept their stories straight, they figured, they would be safe from the police hunt.

After all, the only witnesses were in their group. Everyone else was dead, they thought.

When Debra Cheeseborough was a kid, she had terrible migraine headaches.

Her mother was the only person who could make her feel better. She simply put her hand on Debra's forehead.

As day broke that Monday morning, around the same time the farmer found the bodies of Moore and Lambert in that Linden field, Cheeseborough spotted a tree stump. It was about 50 yards away.

She started to crawl toward it, hoping someone would see her.

"The strangest thing ... I didn't feel any pain," she says. "Even when I tried to move myself, I wasn't in any pain."

When she reached the stump, she couldn't get up. It frustrated her. Just like a migraine.

What happened next is sworn into several court testimonies and seared into Cheeseborough's memory.

Her mother appeared on the stump.

She put her hand on her daughter's forehead.

"She told me she was with me from the time I got out of Bojangles until the time I got shot," Cheeseborough says.

"Then she told me she was going to put me near the road where someone could see me."

Everything went dark for Cheeseborough after that.

Six hours later, around 2 p.m., along a rural road near Smith Lake on Fort Bragg, a passer-by saw Cheeseborough. She was

See **CRIPS**, Page 7A

## CRIPS KILLERS



**CHRISTINA "QUEEN" WALTERS**

■ Age then: 20  
■ Age now: 30

■ Current location: North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women

■ Reported prison infractions: 7

■ No release: Walters is one of only four women on North Carolina's death row.



**FRANCISCO "PACO" TIRADO**

■ Age then: 17  
■ Age now: 27

■ Current location: Central Prison

■ Infractions reported: 17

■ Projected release: March 2085. Tirado originally was sentenced to death, but that was reduced to life in prison because of a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court ruling banning the death penalty for people under age 18.



**DARRYL TUCKER JR.**

■ Age then: 18  
■ Age now: 28

■ Current location: Columbus Correctional Institution

■ Infractions reported: 6

■ Projected release: March 2035. Tucker pleaded guilty to two counts of second-degree murder and two counts of first-degree kidnapping and armed robbery.



**TAMEIKA DOUGLAS**

■ Age then: 15  
■ Age now: 25

■ Current location: Unknown

■ Infractions reported: 0

■ Projected release: Life. Douglas was moved to another state, according to North Carolina Department of Correction officials, who declined to say where she was located.



**CARLOS FRINK**

■ Age then: 21  
■ Age now: 31

■ Current location: Scotland Correctional Institution

■ Infractions reported: 30

■ Projected release: Life.

Frink avoided the death penalty because he wasn't a shooter on the night of the crimes.



**CARLOS NEVILLS**

■ Age then: 20  
■ Age now: 30

■ Current location: Bertie Correctional Institution

■ Infractions reported: 12

■ Projected release: Life.

Nevills had reached a plea agreement that would have allowed him to be released after 31 years in prison, but he changed his mind just before going to court.



**ERIC QUEEN**

■ Age then: 19  
■ Now: Deceased

■ Infractions reported: 0

■ Queen, who was on death row, committed suicide on Aug. 5, 2007, when he apparently hanged himself in a janitor's closet at Central Prison.



**IONE BLACK**

■ Age then: 21  
■ Age now: 31

■ Current location: Unknown

■ Released: In 2004, Black completed the reduced sentence she received for her cooperation as a state witness.

The Fayetteville Observer was unsuccessful in its attempts to locate Black.

**JOHN JUARBE**

■ Age then: 21  
■ Age now: 31

■ Current location: Marion Correctional Institution

■ Infractions reported: 9

■ Projected release: October 2025. Originally facing a dozen charges, Juarbe pleaded guilty to lesser charges and received a shorter sentence.

Staff graphic

# 1998 slayings were a wake-up call

By Drew Brooks  
Staff writer

Police saw signs of gang activity in Fayetteville as early as 1993:

Young people sporting gang signs as tattoos.

The number 187 — California penal code for murder — etched in a high school restroom.

Graffiti on street signs, overpasses and businesses.

Five years after the signs first appeared, many in Fayetteville still didn't take gangs seriously, Fayetteville police Capt. Mark Bridgeman said.

At times, Bridgeman said, he and other gang officers felt like street preachers without an audience.

That all changed on Aug. 17, 1998.

Early that morning, three women were abducted as part of an initiation into the Crips gang. All three were shot. Two of them — 18-year-old Tracy Lambert of Hope Mills and 25-year-old Susan Moore of Fayetteville — died.

Debra Cheeseborough was left for dead but managed to crawl for help. A man passing by found her the next afternoon, bloody and dirty.

Ten years after the shootings, Bridgeman said, the community's leaders and law enforcement are on the same page when it comes to gangs.

"They are no longer a new phenomenon," he said. "They are in every part of our community."

Bridgeman heads the state Gang Investigators Association, a group that Fayetteville police were instrumental in organizing in the months following the gang shootings.

In the past decade, he said, law enforcement has realized it can't arrest its way out of a gang problem.

"The prisons are full, we're not lacking on arrests, and we still have a problem," Bridgeman said.

Instead, lawmen have focused on working in the community to curb gang recruitment and provide as many safe alternatives as possible.

"Those individuals that don't want to change their lifestyle, those are the ones we want to see go to prison for a long time," Bridgeman said.

## Cumberland efforts

Bridgeman praised Cumberland County schools for taking what he called one of the most proactive approaches in the state — a stringent anti-gang policy. He also praised the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office's Gang Resistance Education and Training program, which is administered to students through school resource officers.

"They take it very serious," he said. Bridgeman said the school system and Cumberland County CommuniCare have become "go-to guys" in the battle to stop gangs from attracting more youths.

CommuniCare is an umbrella organization charged with organizing the county's resources and building collaboration among law enforcement, government, churches and others.

"Anybody we need, we pull to the table," said Robin Jenkins, the organization's executive director.

Through CommuniCare, parents, teachers, law enforcement and others can refer a youth suspected of gang involvement. The organization will



Staff file photo

Volunteers remove graffiti from the back of a shopping center on Ramsey Street during the United Way Days of Caring cleanup in May 2006. The vandalism could have been the work of gang members or others who wanted to copy gang activity.

then make sure the youth gets the help he needs.

"One of our key strategies is to use the positive support systems in their community to draw them away," Jenkins said. "There's no such thing as a de-gang program. What you do is you try to motivate the family and others around the child to provide a better alternative."

It sounds simple, but Jenkins said some children become embedded in gang culture at an early age, making it difficult for them to see that it is wrong.

"Some parents can do everything right and the child, for whatever reason, finds the gang life attractive," he said. "There is so much pressure, it's really hard for any parent to fight that battle alone."

Bridgeman said the community's awareness of gangs has consistently improved since the shootings in 1998. Media reports on gang-related crime and federal and state government grants have highlighted the issue.

Sometimes, it takes a tragedy to make people say "not in my community," Bridgeman said.

In May, he said, nearly 300 community leaders from across the region attended a symposium in Fayetteville to learn how to identify gangs and combat the problem in their neighborhoods.

But not everyone is sold on the idea that gangs have infiltrated their communities.

"You're always going to have naysayers," Bridgeman said. "But I think the gangs have proven that they're here."

## Wannabe gangs

Some in the community insist that Cumberland County gangs aren't "real gangs" — just people acting as if they are.

Bridgeman counters that someone who wants to be in a gang is just as serious as an actual gang member.

Most of the county's gangs are hybrids, meaning they have no clear ties to groups outside the county. But over the years, Bridgeman said, those gangs have increased their numbers.

"A lot of parents are in denial," Jenkins said. "It's not a problem for them yet because it doesn't impact them directly."

He said it's not acceptable to say, "This won't happen to me or it won't happen here. It already has."

The law enforcement counts the number of gangs has also changed in the past decade, becoming more selective.

In 1999, a state survey of law enforcement agencies counted 332 gangs with 5,068 members, but there was no set definition of a gang.

If the 1999 survey were held to today's definition of a gang — three or more people with a common name, sign, symbol or color that commits crime — only 97 of the 332 would qualify.

Even with the stricter definition, a study completed in March by the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety found 550 gangs in 62 counties with a total of 14,500 members.

In Cumberland County, the study found between 10 and 19 gangs with more than 300 members.

The study does not support a rise in gang numbers but rather a more accurate count than what was previously available. It points out that gang investigation units and gang-specific programs are much more common than in 1999, making it easier for agencies to provide a more accurate count.

In July, the General Assembly passed legislation aimed at stopping gang growth.

The bill created stiffer penalties for gang-related activity and made it a felony for people to stop members from leaving a gang or who are associated with one.

Bridgeman called the legislation, which would allocate millions of dollars statewide to gang-control efforts this year, a good start.

"Whether that's enough, we'll see," he said.

Cumberland County has benefited from grants to fight gang activity.

Most recently, the county gang prevention partnership received almost \$400,000 over two years to support the county's integrated gang

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 1993

The year signs of gang activity first started appearing in Fayetteville

# 300

The estimated number of gang members in Cumberland County

# 14,500

The estimated number of gang members in 62 North Carolina counties this year

To report gang involvement or criminal activity including graffiti and tagging, call the Cumberland Gang Hotline at (910) 433-1524.

unit. Part of that grant money went toward hiring social workers to ride along with gang officers.

Gang prevention efforts in Raleigh and Durham have received even more funding — a total of \$2.5 million in May. Gangs in those areas have proven to be more violent than gangs in Cumberland County, Bridgeman said.

Communities also have received help from the federal government.

Bobby Higdon, chief of the Criminal Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office, said his office has worked with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to combat gangs in eastern North Carolina.

"There's a growing gang problem

all across North Carolina," Higdon said. "There's no doubt that we are taking a serious look at crimes involving gang members."

Higdon cautioned that results will take time, but he said he is confident that his office is helping make progress.

"Aggressive prosecution makes a difference," he said. "If we can identify and attack these gangs, we can put them in prison and run them out of town."

In the past decade, Bridgeman said, gang presence has grown in Cumberland County.

"Obviously, as our population grew, that element grew along with it," he said.

## 'Things could be a lot worse'

In Raleigh, officials believe gangs were involved in recent violence at Triangle Town Center mall and what is being described as a gang-related hit on the campus of N.C. State University.

Bridgeman said the limited amount of major violence in Fayetteville is due, in part, to the community leaders who accepted the problem and took action instead of denying the threat like other cities.

"Things could be a lot worse," he said. "No doubt about it."

The percentage of Cumberland County youths involved in gang activity is "a very small number — less than one-half of 1 percent," Bridgeman said.

But that small group "can cause panic and fear in our community," he said.

The city and county gang investigation units share information and are housed in the same location. Bridgeman said that as other parts of the state began forming their own units, they turned to Cumberland County to ask how it is done.

Now, many of the gang units in North Carolina are linked through state databases and the state Gang Investigators Association.

Of the nine people charged in the shootings in 1998, Bridgeman said, seven were already identified as gang members. He said those gang links made finding everyone responsible for the shootings easier.

If a known gang member from Raleigh or elsewhere commits a crime in Fayetteville, police will know of his connections when they run his name through a computer. The databases also allow police to track gang members as they leave the area.

Bridgeman said gang members from Cumberland County have turned up in 20 other states, as well as Mexico and Canada.

He said communication among investigators is important because many gang members stay in touch through the Internet.

Through social networking sites such as MySpace or video-sharing sites such as YouTube, youths who may have no direct connections to gangs can easily learn the signs and symbols and connect to a gang member nearby, Bridgeman said.

"I look at gangs as a subculture," he said. "They have their own magazines, Web sites and even video games that glorify the lifestyle."

"And these are available to our kids. Parents just don't know the content."

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## Crips

From Page 6A

covered in bugs and bullet holes.

But she was alive.

■ ■ ■

The crime was too sloppy, Darryl Tucker Jr. thought. Too stupid, too.

Tucker was a gang transplant who had arrived from California earlier that summer.

His dad was in the Army here. But after he fell out of favor at his dad's, he moved in with his girlfriend's parents. They kicked him out, too. He moved in with Christina Walters, a friend of the family from California. He called her "auntee."

Though court records show otherwise, Tucker insists he didn't participate in any of the activities that night. He said he was in Walters' trailer the entire time, until the gang wanted to go to Myrtle Beach.

Just before they left, Walters walked into her bedroom and hugged her two young children. Then she looked at Tucker, whose nickname was Junior.

"Junior, what did I do?"

she asked.

Tucker didn't have an answer.

Where he's from, Los Angeles, people die all the time in gang violence. But, he said, innocent victims aren't executed like this.

"You don't just go out and get Suzie or John that's going out to pump some gas and throw 'em in the trunk and take 'em to a field and kill 'em," Tucker said. "People were doing this to show that they were down."

Following the crimes, as nine people were arrested in two states over several days, people in this "gang" turned on each other.

First, Tucker said, Walters wanted to blame him for all the shootings. Then, Juarbe gave a statement to the police several dozen pages long, pinning everyone to the crimes but himself.

Fingers were pointed in all directions.

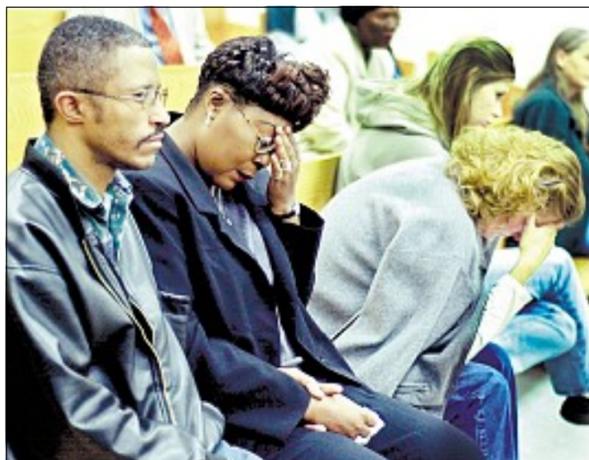
So many stories swirled.

But one witness had no reason to lie.

■ ■ ■

On inventory Sundays at Bojangles restaurant, Debra Cheeseborough never missed a thing.

She meticulously counted



Staff file photo

Debra Cheeseborough and Elizabeth Lambert, the mother of shooting victim Tracy Lambert, shield their eyes during the trial of Eric Queen and Francisco Tirado in March 2000.

every cup, every piece of chicken, every biscuit.

Everything.

On inventory days, no detail went unnoticed.

■ ■ ■

At 12:30 a.m., Cheeseborough walked out the door on the east side of the Bojangles. She turned and locked it.

She walked toward her Nissan Sentra. She noticed three people in the parking

lot. Kids. Close to the same age as her own.

She kept walking.

"Where you going?" one of them asked.

That's when Cheeseborough started taking mental pictures. Carlos Nevills put a gun to her head.

Ione Black was in the car. Tameika Douglas pushed her head between her knees.

Douglas, she would later learn, was 15 years old —

the same age as her daughter, Seneca.

But Douglas was from a different world. Seneca was a handful, but she would never do something like this. She was a good kid. These people, they were lost souls. This wasn't a generational thing.

Just ask Seneca, now 25, but still their peer.

"Who are they to play God?" Seneca asked last week. "I know they're all going to go to hell and rot there."

In the back seat of that car, Debra Cheeseborough kept her head between her knees. She had a feel for where they were going. She felt the car turn left onto Raeford Road. She felt the car take the ramp onto the All American Freeway.

Then she felt the car stop.

That's when they robbed her, taking her jewelry and wallet. They put her in the trunk, and she lost her direction.

But she still could hear.

When they stopped the next time, she heard people talking. She heard one boy comment about her wallet — "Hey, I know that name. I go to school with a Cheeseborough."

Darryl Tucker Jr. was a rising senior at Westover. (Tucker insists he didn't say

that. "I would put my life on that," he says).

Soon, the car started moving again. Minutes later, it stopped.

They pulled her out of the trunk and surrounded her.

Walters, the "Queen," had the gun. She told Cheeseborough to kneel.

Cheeseborough said no.

Angry, Walters immediately pulled the trigger.

The gun jammed.

"See, you don't have to do this," Cheeseborough told her.

But it didn't register. Walters didn't say anything.

She just shot again.

The blue-tipped bullet hit Cheeseborough in the right side, knocking her to the ground.

The instant she hit the soil, she knew how she could live. She had to fake death.

So she didn't move again. Not until they left.

Not until she felt comfortable saying the three simple words that form one simple phrase that means so much.

"I'm still here."

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