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Local filmmaker tackles 1970 killing in *Heritage Hill Bride: The Murder of Shelley Speet Mills*

Shelley Speet Mills was 19 years old and had been married for 17 days when she was stabbed 32 times. Her slaying the morning of Sept. 15, 1970, in her apartment at 314 College NE, was the first in a series of homicides known as The Heritage Hill Murders.

It's been almost 46 years and police—while they know a lot—still cannot name her killer. It's not for lack of trying. A new film about the case will premier Sept. 14 at Wealthy Street Theatre (1130 Wealthy St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506) at 7 and 9 p.m. The 75-minute film chronicles the crime, investigations, the story of Shelley's life and her family, and the impact of the crime on her loved ones and the community.

"This was a big undertaking," said David B. Schock, Ph.D., the film's producer. "Maybe that's why it's taken me ten years to finish this film. Viewers will not only get to see the story unfold, but get to understand when each segment was recorded."

And though the case is approaching half a century unsolved, that doesn't mean it's closed. There is no statute of limitations on murder. "That never tolls," said Schock. "The reason is because this is the most serious of crimes. And unsolved homicides leave marks on their communities. They represent unfinished business.

"Police officers often say that somebody knows something. I believe that's true. My goal is to reach out to the one person who can tell police what they need to successfully investigate these old crimes. In this case that might mean that the family and friends will learn who killed Shelley. They have waited a long time."

In fact, Shelley's mother, Vesta Speet, went to her grave without knowing who killed her daughter. She died in 2012 at age 94.

"She was the first person to talk with me about Shelley's killing," said Schock. At the time Schock was teaching at Hope College and was working with students on a murder-related film, what was to become *Finding Diane*. "Vesta Speet's daughter-in-law had found 'Diane's' body and we were waiting to interview her. Vesta lived just across the street and came to tell us that her-daughter-in-law was running a little late. And then she asked me 'Did you know I had a daughter who was murdered?' I told her I didn't and then turned around and asked the students if any of them heard a little bell. They hadn't, but I had."

Schock of Grand Haven often works with Hamilton videographer Phil Blauw. Together they have made several other murder-related films including *Who Killed Janet Chandler?*, *Jack in the Box*, *Finding Diane*, *Murder on the Third Floor: The Killing of Mina Dekker* (long-form interviews), *Into the Dark: The Murder of Shannon Marie Siders*, and *Death of a Phoenix: The Eastown Murder of Joel Battaglia*.

Police have solved most of the cases the pair have chronicled. Their murder films are emotionally and physically demanding. And expensive to make. "There is no underwriter for this work; it comes out of our back pockets," Schock said.

But there is motivation: "Murder is a violation of everything I hold true and dear. During the research on this project I was stunned by just how many young women have been murdered in that area over the years. ...Not just Shelley and the others identified as victims of a Heritage Hill killer. I think there is a need to tell their stories. I think it's important that we do not forget these victims and their families."

The public is invited to attend the premier. There is no charge for admission and Silent Observer is picking up the costs of popcorn. There will be Silent Observer staff there to answer questions and help people make anonymous tips. Donations for Schock's work will be accepted but are not expected.

His website dealing with crime is www.delayedjustice.com.

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Some extra material:

Schock also is the producer of a series of films about contemporary poets: *Jump Back Honey: The Poetry and Performance of Herbert Woodward Martin*; *StarbyStar: Naomi Long Madgett, Poet & Publisher*; and *Strong Words: The Art of Toi Derricotte*. He produced the acclaimed and prize-winning *The Road To Andersonville: Michigan Native American Sharpshooters in the Civil War*. He is the author of *Judicial Deceit: Tyranny and Unnecessary Secrecy at the Michigan Supreme Court* (with the late Elizabeth A. Weaver, Chief Justice, retired) and *The Dragon and The Rose*, a novel for young readers. He is a jazz trumpet player, appearing regularly in the Grand Rapids area.