

CSABA FENYVESI<sup>1</sup> – VANESSZA FÁBIÁN<sup>2</sup>

## Criminalistical turns of murder case in pécs on palahegy street from 1974

### I. 1974–1976

On October 29, 1974, the police received a report from a neighbor (Mrs. G), following which the body of Mátyás Erdélyi, a 69-year-old woman who had not moved or given any signs of life for several days, was found with a bloody head in her house at 44 Palahegyi út, Pécs. in his upset, sooty kitchen. The lifeless body, fully clothed, was lying near the iron stove.

The on-site inspection committee of the county headquarters carried out the investigative act corresponding to the “first strike”. As a result of the inspection, as well as primary witness statements, data collection and expert opinions, it was established that the following answers can be given to the basic forensic questions.

*What happened?* The childless lady, who lived alone, was brutally beaten to death.

*When was the murder?* Thursday, October 24, 1974, from 2 to 3 p.m. So five days before the body was discovered.

*Where exactly was the victim killed?* The perpetrator killed his victim in the house of the victim in district I (eastern part of the city), in the kitchen.

*How did the perpetrator kill, what method and means did he choose?* The unknown perpetrator hit the victim’s head 22 times with a charcoal iron of considerable weight (also called a tailor’s iron or charcoal iron) owned by the victim, and then lit a fire to erase the marks. He then left somewhat hastily. (There was also information that there were two fights with irons between the participants on the spot.)

*Who and with whom committed the brutal act?* There were witnesses (Mrs N, G) who saw the perpetrator enter the victim’s house alone, and others (H. Ferenc) saw the lone woman leave alone. All three provided the following personal description:

- The guilty lady approx. 24-25 years old,

- approx. 160-165 cm tall,
- wears long, straight, middle-back brown hair, which is parted in the middle of the head,
- average build, with thick ankles,
- his teeth are yellowish (brownish, unkempt), as is usually the case with chain smokers.

Witness N even told the law enforcement officers that she learned the following nine personal details from the woman(s):

- married, her husband is a miner,
- they live poorly, her otherwise well-earning husband only brings home enough money, which is just enough for the household,
- they used to live in a one-room apartment around Felsőmalom Street,
- their second child was born in 1970
- afterwards they got an apartment from the mine in Újmeszes,
- His grandmother died in 1973,
- during their long conversation, he lit a cigarette twice, namely on Románc,
- was looking for a single person, as Mrs. N indicated that her son would come home, he would no longer be alone,
- the witness accompanied him to Mátyásné Erdélyi, who lived alone.

*Why did the perpetrator commit it?* Presumably (and this was also included as an investigative version) it is a tricky (swindle, con man) fraudster and/or thief, who visited single women under the pretext of council aid requests and support for the elderly, taking advantage of their good faith and momentary inattention, (in this case HUF 1,000 in cash and two gold rings), appropriated or requested (for example) for application duty stamps. In this case, the victim could have noticed the deception, committed theft and reprimanded him, and demanded his jewelry and money back. The trickster panicked and began to beat the unwanted witness with the handy object, the heavy iron, until he snorted to the last breath.

In his haste, the casual criminal carrying two leather shoulder bags decorated with metal rings left behind a greenish silk scarf, as well as the writing on the shopper’s tag of the injured store. He wrote:

1 Full professor, University of Pécs, Faculty of Law.

2 PhD student, University of Pécs, Faculty of Law.

**Bélané Szabó**  
**19 Vilmos Zsolnay Street**

The inspection committee managed to initially record a piece of material that looked like a strand of hair, presumably from the perpetrator, as well as a Romanian cigarette end and a crumpled, empty Romanian cigarette box resting in a trash basket. No fingerprints, footprints, odor or other material residues were found. (Nor on the silk scarf.)

Elderly neighbor witness H. Ferenc saw when the alleged perpetrator came out of the victim's house alone on October 24th at around 3 p.m. Thank you to each other. The witness noted her well because he found her to be a very pretty lady. Based on the testimony of a total of three witnesses who saw the perpetrator (H. Ferenc, Mrs. G, Mrs. N), with the help of a Budapest draftsman, the investigative authority created a phantom image of the perpetrator, which they tried to spread among the public and the media (such as *Kék Fény*) to distribute, asking for their help, data provision, and valuable information in order to identify the person.

As a result of investigative data collection, verification of possible versions and threads, the authority learned the following:

1. About two weeks after the murder, an unknown woman with two children appeared at 19 Zsolnay Vilmos utca, Pécs, and asked for Bélané Szabó. However, such a person has never lived at the existing address.

2. 1969–1974, there was one (or two?) pushy, but at the same time polite, well-mannered swindler-stealing woman in Pécs I–II. districts. According to his legend, he came from the council and obtained support for apartment exchange, aid, and placement in a social home for the elderly, from whom he stole HUF 200–500 from their apartment or cheated them with some pretext: for example, he asked for money for a tax stamp for an aid application form. After October 24, 1974, the people of the area did not see any of them again.

3. No person with such a description (face) worked at the council (today municipality).

4. After it emerged that in the eastern part of Pécs, in the (modest-looking) area of Pécsbánya, close to the victim's house, people of Roma origin lived in a separate yard, and that the culprit could have escaped from among them, all the people living there were thoroughly checked, but no incriminating information was found. Based on the photo itself, the perpetrator did not appear to belong to the community.

5. Among the sadistic, pyromaniac, criminal record persons registered in the modus operandi, no data related to the crime scene, the victim, the method of commission or the perpetrator was found.

6. The detailed mapping of the close and extended family members of the victim did not yield results either.

7. Even the routine check of the relevant witnesses (Mrs. G, N and H. Ferenc) did not raise any incriminating or suspicious information about them.

8. They also checked the thread recorded on the spot in the forensic institute. According to the quick opinion: female hair, however, they will give a more precise one if there is a comparable (load or potential load) sample.

9. Six thousand women were checked – along with their

writings - in various parts of the country (not only in Pécs and Baranya), but no culprits were found.

Two years after the act, in 1976, the wide-ranging investigation was terminated after the investigation remained fruitless.

## II. 1989

Thirteen years later, in 1989, however, a turning point occurred. Lieutenant-Colonel Dr. Ferenc Kodba, the (new) head of the Criminal Department of the Baranya County Headquarters, who was not involved in the 1974 events, renewed the investigation.

He created new versions after studying thousands of pages of investigative files. According to his conclusions (guessings):

- A) the unscrupulous offender is unlikely;
- B) there is no need to search the whole country, the perpetrator was local;
- C) the culprit should not be sought among the Roma, he was not the culprit;
- D) it is not certain that there is a direct connection between the swindle (tricky) fraudster/thief and the murder.

During the new investigation, new women and handwriting came into view. In a year and a half, six writing experts were employed, who examined thousands of writings, but found no identity.

The number of women in sight gradually decreased. Seven hundred, three hundred, and finally five women could be considered as potential perpetrators. However, alibi checks ruled them out as well.

After all this, in April 1989, the police published newspaper advertisements in various daily and weekly newspapers. The ads featured the female phantom image above and asked the big question: who knows the lady in the picture? Anyone who knows anything about his person or whereabouts should report it to the investigative authorities.

Within a short time, a postal letter arrived from Budapest, in which the unknown sender indicated the acquaintance who was later given the pseudonym Maya. According to him, the middle-aged woman he marked resembles the picture to the point of speaking.

The pseudonym was given by Ferenc Kodba to the lady who walked into the police station with great peace of mind when summoned as a witness. The one who immediately raised his first question: are you suspected of murder?

There was no mention of this at the time, but – despite his declaration of innocence – his data eerily matched the 1974 data series.

- 1) He just turned 41. (Just to remind you: the witnesses thought he was 25–26 years old 15 years earlier.)
- 2) His height is 170 cm, close to the previously mentioned 160–165 cm.
- 3) She wore straight, long brown hair, which she had worn before.
- 4) In 1974, he lived in Pécs, namely in Felsővámház utca.
- 5) Mother of two children.
- 6) Her husband worked as a miner, but they divorced,

then he moved to a village in Baranya. (The husband was also interrogated in detail about his ex-wife.)

- 7) After the birth of their second child in 1970, they moved to a larger apartment.
- 8) Between 1970–74, he attended evening high school on Thursdays. (His working day on October 24, 1974 was checked by the scouts, but there the school day was also marked as a working day, the two were blurred.)
- 9) His grandmother's name was Béláné Szabó. (His grandfather died in 1973.)

After all these nine settlements, the investigators active in this case in 1974 – together with the director of the new investigation – rightly became particularly excited and at the same time optimistic. (It's true that Maya didn't have yellowish-brownish teeth, because she didn't smoke either.)

It seemed obvious as a first step to have H. Ferenc, who still enjoys a good memory and mental abilities after a decade and a half, carry out the photographic identification. Maya's photo was placed among nine similar-looking ladies. H. Ferenc decidedly, clearly and surely chose Maya, about whom he declared:

HE WAS THE KILLER!

After the tenth match, a presentation for personal recognition was also held, where Maya was lined up among several women of similar age and appearance. Witness H. Ferenc examined each one carefully and then testified:

ONE OF THEM LOOKS LIKE THE OFFENDER,  
BUT I'M NOT SURE. I DON'T RECOGNIZE IT FOR  
SURE.

Without hesitation, Maya submitted herself to the polygraph examination as a witness (potential defendant), as a result of which the experts concluded that: she did not give an answer that would have questioned her true, innocent religion. The machine did not indicate an untrue (false) statement.

The writing left on the spot was also checked. Maya's school notebooks from 1974 were also searched by the investigators. Two handwriting experts considered these writings to be similar to the incriminated one, but they asked for test writing samples to be sure. The detectives made it with the cooperating Maya. This was also examined by László Vargha, an internationally respected writing expert who was the third to join (incidentally, he is a professor of criminal procedure law and criminology at the Faculty of Law in Pécs). All three clearly and categorically excluded Maya. It was not his hand (brain) that was left on the spot "Szabó Béláné Zsolnay Vilmos u. 19." text.

As a new twist, the famous psychographer, "The letters speak". volume (Magvető, Budapest, 1985), Klára Rákosné Ács, also examined the incriminated writing.

After the primary investigations, he turned to the head of the investigation and asked:

IS THIS WOMAN STILL ALIVE?

Seeing the surprised look, he explained that the lyricist suffered from a serious lung disease when he wrote it. By the way, he

had at most a secondary school education and nailed many numbers during his work.

Finally, he declared that it was definitely not Maya who wrote the two lines.

There was still the hair-like material residue test, which could be considered as a "judgment final", because now there was finally a hair sample that could be compared. Maya willingly gave her long brown hair for comparison.

The central forensic laboratory sent the results of the thorough investigation, which everyone was eagerly waiting for:

THE FIBER SENT TO THE LABORATORY,  
SEARCHED ON THE SITE, FOUND, FIXED IN THE  
ORIGIN IS ACTUALLY **CAT HAIR** AND NOT HU-  
MAN HAIR. (CANNOT BE MIXED WITH MAYA'S  
HAIR PATTERN.)

(Possible further examination of the Romanian cigarette end or the crumpled paper box biscuit did not arise.)

### III. 2018

The final conclusions of the head of the investigation and the lessons learned from the case:

- 1) It can be completely ruled out that Maya did not commit the 1974 murder.
- 2) According to our version, it was committed by a person who presumably resembled Maya structurally, who at the same time knew Maya's personal circumstances, and thus presented himself and his stories as a legend, a "cover story" during his predatory visits to elderly people living alone.
- 3) It is still searchable and can be found in 2018 approx. 69-year-old culprit. Even after 44 years, it is possible to find out who may have been Maya's close acquaintance, friend, colleague, confidant who came into the investigation's field of view in 1974, who looked like her and had access to her personal data. (Ferenc Kodba was employed by another organization from 1990, he no longer headed the criminal department. Thus, he had no further insight into the work of the sub-unit, any further investigation.) (Those who like the mysticism of numbers can discover that in 2018, in 1974, 25 44 years later, the victim is just 69 years old. The 44 years that have passed are the same as the victim's house number. Do these also indicate that another turn of events is expected in 2018?)
- 4) It would be even more worthwhile to search for the "alterego" culprit, since the act is part of the Penal Code. according to it, it belongs to non-statutory, (for several reasons) classified (classifiable) homicides. (Even in the case of the death of the abuser in the meantime, his disclosure is important; just think of the relatives of the victim, our sense of justice and our eternal desire for justice, the many years of efforts of law enforcement officers.)

- 
- 5) The on-site inspection is an important investigative act, the weaknesses and shortcomings of which cannot be made up later.
  - 6) Every police station is worth as much (relevant, quality) data as it has, and the basic source of this principled idea of forensics is the location itself as an open book from which one must be able to read. (The importance of the first strike covers an extremely important forensic principle.)
  - 7) Finding, recording, and preserving traces and material remains can serve as a basis for identification methods learned (even years or decades) later. Just think of the DNA analysis developed in England by Alec Jeffreys and used for the first time in 1986/87, which was introduced in our country in 1992 and used to detect and prove specific criminal cases. (Perhaps our question is not unrealistic these days: With the current techniques that see more and more sharply and deeply, is it possible to record the picogram amount of material residue [e.g. sweat] that points to the culprit from the Romanian cigarette end or box, which could be suitable for DNA-based identification?)
  - 8) In every case, it is not possible to conclude with cer-

tainty about identity (hit, success), even on the basis of nine (ten) identification matches.

And finally, ninth again:

9. There is never a closed unresolved (so-called “dead”) case. The flattening culprit can never rest. The old detective wisdom can always prevail: the biggest policeman is chance!

## **IV. In conclusion**

---

On September 28, 2018, the authors presented the above reasoning and the twists and turns of the investigation in front of an audience of 350 people in the framework of the annual Researchers’ Night at the Faculty of State and Law of the University of Pécs. They secretly hoped that the real perpetrator would appear at a public performance for everyone over the age of 14 and, tormented by his conscience for decades – perhaps not knowing the Hungarian Criminal Code in sufficient depth, trusting in the statute of limitations – would stand up and announce his guilt. This did not happen, but the authors still hope that it will happen as a result of this study.