Halloween Crimes- Written by Chris Eggertson

Answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper

Introduction:

While the most famous of all Halloween-themed movies – John Carpenter’s classic 1978 slasher named for the holiday – is a complete work of fiction, there have nevertheless been several real-life murders carried out on Halloween night that are far more disturbing than any film. B-D’s Chris Eggertsen recently set out to unearth several such cases, coming up with four true crime Halloween horror stories so riveting they could have been plotted by a Hollywood screenwriter. If you enjoy reading about true crime or simply possess a morbid curiosity – and who among us doesn’t? – take a peek inside for all the details on these bloodcurdlingly true stories.

Article by Chris Eggertson:

Let me first begin by saying that while vicious acts of murder in our favorite horror movies can be whole heaps o’ fun to witness, the real-life crimes described below destroyed real people, with real lives, and I am not attempting to diminish what happened to the victims and their families by writing this article. At the same time I’m not naïve enough to believe that posting these stories on an entertainment site like Bloody-Disgusting – particularly as a Halloween-themed piece – doesn’t in some way “package” the details of the crimes in a way that’s meant to serve as an enjoyable diversion for our readers.

And I’m not ashamed of that. Nor am I ashamed of my status as a bona fide true-crime aficionado. I wouldn’t go so far as to say I’m proud of my fascination with the subject, but I also don’t believe that indulging in this fascination is an immoral activity in and of itself. There is a curiosity about death, in particular violent death, which I believe to be a normal and healthy component of being human, and so I make no apologies for highlighting the following true-life Halloween horror stories for your perusal.

1. Why might someone consider an interest in crimes to be “immoral?”

Murder in Greenwich

Victim: Martha Moxley
Year: 1975
Place: Greenwich, Connecticut

The Crime: On Halloween morning 1975, 15-year-old Martha Moxley is found bludgeoned and stabbed to death beneath a tree in the backyard of her family’s home. A six-iron golf club is found shattered into four pieces near her body.

Background: Born in San Francisco, California in 1960, Martha Moxley moved with her mother, father and brother to Belle Haven, an affluent section of Greenwich, Connecticut, at age 14. She became friendly with neighbors Michael and Thomas Skakel, 15 and 17, the nephews of Ethel and Robert F. Kennedy (who was assassinated in Los Angeles in 1968 during his run to win the Democratic nomination for president).

On the night of October 30, 1975, Martha and several friends ventured out to engage in “Hacker’s Night”, during which the neighborhood kids would pull minor pranks like toilet-papering houses and chucking eggshells at passing cars in anticipation of Halloween. Eventually Martha and her friends ended up at the Skakel home, where Thomas, Michael and their other four siblings had been left mostly unsupervised (their mother had died of cancer two years before and their father was away on business).

Though Michael was attracted to Martha, she preferred his more popular older brother Thomas, and by the end of the night Thomas had successfully insinuated his way into her affections while Michael and most of the others left the Skakel home for another party at a cousin’s house. As Martha’s friends were leaving, the last they saw of her was she and Thomas kissing and falling behind a fence in the backyard.

When Martha didn’t return home that night, her mother Dorothy began to panic and eventually got the police involved. Though an exhaustive search was performed around the neighborhood, the one place they neglected to look was the grounds of the Moxley home itself. The next afternoon, 15-year-old Sheila McGuire, a neighbor girl and school acquaintance of Martha’s, found Martha’s battered, half-clothed body when she was taking a shortcut through the wooded portion of the Moxley’s backyard.

The Case: Thomas Skakel, the last person to have seen Martha alive, as well as the Skakel family’s live-in tutor Kenneth Littleton, both quickly became suspects in the murder, bolstered by the fact that the golf club used to kill Martha had been traced back to the Skakel home. However, the investigation was botched; Belle Haven was a peaceful, upscale community with an inexperienced police force unaccustomed to dealing with crimes of this magnitude. As a result of this poor handling, the police ended up running out of leads and the case remained unsolved for close to 25 years.
It wasn’t until the late 1990s when the case would be given new life. Mark Fuhrman, the notorious O.J. Simpson investigator, published a book that examined the evidence and concluded Michael had been the one to kill Martha. Among other things, Fuhrman pointed to the fact that not only had Michael been jealous of his older brother’s romantic involvement with Martha, but that two of Michael’s ex-schoolmates said he’d had boasted of committing the murder but would not be punished because he was “a Kennedy”. Fuhrman also noted that during a private 1992 re-investigation of the case, Michael had contradicted his own alibi by saying that he had not in fact been at his cousin’s house during the time Martha was murdered but rather had gone to the Moxley home and masturbated while sitting in a tree outside her window. A grand jury was soon convened, and after a re-examination of the evidence Michael was indicted and later convicted of the crime.

Michael received a sentence of 20 years to life in prison, and is not due for a parole hearing until April 2013. However, questions still surround the case, with many – including Michael’s cousin Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has tirelessly lobbied for Michael’s release – claiming he was wrongly imprisoned. Indeed, since Skakel was convicted new leads – including testimony from one man claiming that a friend of his had actually committed the murder and that he was a witness to it – have arisen, leading to further doubt of his guilt.

Image: [Martha Moxley/Michael Skakel]

2. Why did the case remain unsolved for so long?
3. What evidence led Mark Fuhrman to believe that Michael was the killer?
4. Do you think Michael should have gone to prison? Why or why not?

Wine Country Nightmare

Victims: Leslie Mazzara & Adriane Insogna
Year: 2004
Place: Napa, California

The Crime: On Halloween night, Lauren Meanza (27) finds her two roommates, Leslie Mazzara (26) and Adriane Insogna (26) brutally stabbed in their upstairs bedrooms. Lauren dials 911, but the two girls die before the paramedics can reach the house.

Background: Napa locals Lauren Meanza and Adriane Insogna shared a two-story house on Dorset St. in Napa, California together and later brought on another roommate, South Carolina beauty queen Leslie Mazzara, who had recently moved to the area to be closer to her mother. Lauren coached volleyball at a local community college and Adriane worked as an engineer for the Napa sanitation district. Leslie got a job as a greeter at a winery owned by director Francis Ford Coppola.

The three roommates spent Halloween night passing out candy to neighborhood kids before turning in at around 10:30 – Adriane and Leslie to their rooms upstairs and Lauren to her room on the ground floor. At around 1am, Lauren awoke to the sounds of a struggle and screaming coming from upstairs. Terrified, she hid in the backyard before hearing someone running down the stairwell and exiting out a downstairs window.

After she was sure the intruder was gone, Lauren rushed upstairs to find that her roommates had been viciously and repeatedly stabbed; Leslie had already died and Adriane was just barely clinging to life. Afraid the killer might return, Lauren fled from the house and dialed 911, but Adriane died from her wounds before they could get to her.

Detectives arriving on the scene began piecing together the likely sequence of events – that Leslie had been attacked first, and that after awakening to hear her crying out, Adriane had engaged in a vicious fight with the killer. Though she was ultimately overpowered, detectives discovered blood (aka DNA evidence) belonging to the intruder on the scene – meaning Adriane had succeeded in injuring him before he made his escape. Several cigarette butts presumably left by the killer were also found outside the house.

The Case: The murders of the two women shocked the quiet community, leading residents to begin bolting their doors at night. Suspicion almost immediately began to surround several men who were said to have dated or been dating Leslie Mazzara, including Brian West, who’d rather bizarrely built a tribute website to her after breaking up. There was also ex-boyfriend William Lee Youngblood, who Leslie had broken up with shortly before moving to Napa, and whose father, strangely, still called her on a regular basis and seemed to have become obsessed with her.

However, the search finally ended 11 months later when police released more information (strategically withheld before) on the cigarette butts found at the scene of the crime – Camel Turkish Gold, a new and relatively rare brand. Within two days, Eric Copple – the then-fiancé and now-husband of Lily Prudhomme, a close friend of Adriane’s, sent letters to his parents admitting to the murders and voicing the desire to kill himself.

His family convinced Eric to turn himself in, and when interviewed by police he told them that, though he could hardly recall committing the murders, he’d had a bitter fight with Lily on Halloween – the day before their wedding – and felt that her relationship with Adriane was somehow negatively affecting her commitment to him. Obsessively afraid of losing his fiancee, he’d concluded that to salvage their relationship Adriane needed to die (he could not account for why
he’d killed Leslie). He later pleaded guilty to avoid a lengthy trial and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

5. What were the Cause and Mechanism of death for Mazzara and Insogna?
6. What role did the cigarette butts play in the investigation?

**Pixy Stix Poisoning**
- **Victim:** Timothy O’Bryan
- **Year:** 1974
- **Place:** Deer Park, Texas

**The Crime:** After eating a Pixy Stix candy laced with cyanide, eight-year-old Timothy O’Bryan becomes violently ill and goes into *convulsions*. He dies within an hour of arriving at the hospital.

**Background:** Ronald O’Bryan was a seemingly normal family man who’d recently fallen on tough financial times – he’d gone delinquent on a number of loans and had recently been forced to sell the family home in order to try and pay them off. Strangely, however, he’d started telling several friends that he was expecting to come into more money by the end of the year that would improve his financial situation.

Around the same time, Ronald increased the life insurance policies on Timothy (8) and Elizabeth (5), his two young children, and by October 1974 they were up to $30,000 apiece. He also began trying to obtain cyanide, first through his job at Texas State Optical and later at the Curtin Matheson Scientific Company in Houston. After being told they only sold the deadly poison in large quantities, a salesperson directed him to where he could buy a more minimal amount.

On Halloween night, O’Bryan, his wife and his two children went to dinner at the home of the Bates family in a nearby town, after which they planned to take the kids trick-or-treating. O’Bryan offered to accompany the children, and Mr. Bates volunteered to go along too, along with his two children and another adult and child from the neighborhood. During the trick-or-treating expedition, O’Bryan at one point produced five Pixy Stix he said he’d acquired from one of the neighbors and later distributed them amongst his children and the Bates’ two children, as well as one other neighborhood child who came trick-or-treating at the door.

After arriving home, O’Bryan told Timothy and Elizabeth they could have one piece of candy before they went to bed, and allegedly urged them to choose the Pixy Stix. Only Timothy ate the candy and as he swallowed it he complained about its bitter taste. O’Bryan gave his son Kool-Aid to wash it down, and soon thereafter Timothy began vomiting uncontrollably and went into *convulsions*. He died soon after arriving at the hospital, and a cyanide was discovered in his blood and stomach fluids. Luckily, none of the other children who were given the Pixy Stix had consumed them.

**The Case:** Directly following the horrible event, police began searching for who had allegedly given Mr. O’Bryan the deadly candy; O’Bryan claimed it was someone at the home of the Melvin Family, who had opened the door to their dark house only a crack and produced the Pixy Stix. However, Mr. Melvin was able to produce an alibi and he was cleared of suspicion. After surveying other households in the neighborhood to see who may have purchased Pixy Stix, it was discovered that none of the other neighbors had bought that particular brand of candy.

A few days after Timothy’s burial, the police received a call from O’Bryan’s insurance company to report that O’Bryan had attempted to take out the life insurance policies on his two children without consulting his wife, and O’Bryan immediately became the prime suspect. After questioning O’Bryan’s co-workers at Texas Optical, it was discovered that he’d been asking around about cyanide in the months leading up to Timothy’s death.

Police then searched the O’Bryan family home and discovered a pocket-knife on which traces of plastic and powdered candy were found. O’Bryan was quickly charged with Timothy’s murder and put on trial, where it was alleged that he had distributed the cyanide-laced Pixy Stix to the rest of the children in an attempt to use the frequently-circulated urban legend of poisoned Halloween candy as a cover for his crimes. In May 1975 he was found guilty, and nearly nine years later executed via lethal injection.

7. Why did the fact that Mr. O’Bryan was expecting to “come into more money by the end of the year” make him a suspect?
8. What do you think *convulsions* means?
9. This is only one case of poisoning through candy. How could you prevent a child from getting poisoned on Halloween?
**The Trick or Treat Murder**

**Victim:** Peter Fabiano  
**Year:** 1957  
**Place:** Los Angeles, CA

**The Crime:** Peter Fabiano, 35, is shot and killed by a mysterious “trick-or-treater” after answering a knock on the door on Halloween night.

**Background:** Peter Fabiano had served in the Marines during WWII before marrying and settling down with his wife Betty in Los Angeles. Though they had no children of their own, Betty did have a son and daughter from a previous marriage. Peter owned two prosperous local beauty shops, one of which briefly employed a divorcee named Joan Rabel.

Going through a difficult period in their marriage, Betty and Peter separated, Betty moving out of the home they shared and bunking with Rabel, whom she had previously befriended (note: though it is not entirely clear in many of the news reports from the day, the implication is that the two women had become lovers and that this was the source of the rift between Peter and Betty). Betty soon had a change of heart and, after agreeing never to see or speak with Rabel again, reconciled with her husband and moved back into their house.

After Betty left her, Rabel became jealous with rage and began talking with her good friend – and possible lover – Goldyne Pizer, 40, about her wish to kill Peter in revenge for taking Betty away from her. Pizer, a shy and unassuming divorcee and lab technician at L.A. Children’s Hospital, was obsessed with Rabel and was thereby quickly drawn in by the other woman’s description of Peter as a monster who was abusive towards Betty and his stepchildren. The two women finally decided to carry out the murder, and Rabel, the apparent mastermind, convinced Pizer that she should be the one to pull the trigger. Rabel also decided that Halloween night would be the perfect time to go through with it, as it was the one night of the year when no one would become suspicious of someone walking around in a disguise.

In preparation, Pizer went to Pasadena and bought a .38-caliber handgun while Rabel put together a “Halloween costume” – jeans, a khaki jacket, hat, red gloves, face paint and a domino mask. At 9pm on Halloween night Rabel borrowed her neighbor’s car and drove in it with Pizer to the Fabiano residence, waiting for two hours until the lights went out in the bedroom. Pizer then shakily got out of the car in her disguise and, holding a paper bag with the gun hidden inside, proceeded to the front door, rang the doorbell, and shot Peter Fabiano – who believed the visitor to be a late-night trick-or-treater – in the chest. Betty heard the gunshot and ran to her husband’s side, but it was too late to save him – he died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

**The Case:** Though the authorities initially suspected that the crime may have been tied to Peter Fabiano’s past criminal history (he’d been faced with a minor charge of “bookmaking” several years previous), they were unable to come up with a connection. However, after Betty revealed to the police that Rabel had been a major source of she and Peter’s marital discord, they soon came to believe that the Rabel may have had motive enough to carry out the murder.

Rabel was questioned and released, but police still suspected her. Their suspicions were confirmed when the murder weapon was traced to a pay locker rented by one Goldyne Pizer, with further investigation revealing the link between the two women and the fact that Rabel had brought Pizer by one of Peter’s salons several times so she would recognize him.

Under intense questioning Pizer tearfully admitted to killing Fabiano but indicated that Rabel – who had cut off all ties with Pizer following that fateful Halloween night – had manipulated her into doing so. Rabel was arrested and the two women were charged with first-degree murder, but cut a plea deal for second-degree murder just before their trials were about to start. They were both sentenced to five years to life in prison, and while it’s unclear what became of Rabel records show that Goldyne Pizer was released from prison a few years later and died in Los Angeles in 1998 at age 83.

10. What was the cause of death for Rabel?  
11. What was the mechanism of death for Rabel?  
12. What was the manner of death for Rabel?

**Summary Questions:**

13. What do you think attracts criminals to commit crimes on Halloween?  
14. What do you think communities and families could do to keep people safe on Halloween?