

# Unsolved Mystery

It has been twenty years since four teenage girls were murdered in a north Austin yogurt shop—and still no answers.

by Michael Hall  
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Robert Springsteen Jr., a suspect in the yogurt shop murders, is handcuffed in 1999.  
AP Photo/Charleston Daily Mail, Craig Cunningham

It's hard to believe it's been twenty years. On December 6, 1991, four teenage girls—Jennifer Harbison, Sarah Harbison, Eliza Thomas, and Amy Ayers—were murdered in an “I Can't Believe It's Yogurt!” shop in north Austin. The police investigation (which TEXAS MONTHLY wrote about in January 2001) was torturous, bizarre, incompetent, and heavy handed. Four boys—Mike Scott, Robert Springsteen, Maurice Pierce, and Forrest Welborn—were finally arrested in 1999. Welborn walked free after not getting indicted. Pierce eventually had his charges dismissed. But Scott and Springsteen confessed, and their confessions were the only pieces of evidence at their trials, in 2001 and 2002. By then both had recanted, saying police had coerced their statements, but they were enough. Each was found guilty; Scott got the death penalty, Springsteen life in prison.

In 2006 and 2007, both of their sentences were overturned by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals—neither defendant had been allowed to cross-examine the other about the confessions. Then in 2009, the DA dismissed all charges against them after a vaginal swab of one of the girls revealed a DNA profile that didn't match any of the four boys—or anyone else. It was an absolutely stunning end to a thoroughly screwed-up investigation.

Twenty years after the murders, absolutely no one is satisfied: not the parents of the girls, who still grieve daily for their daughters, who would all be in their mid-thirties with kids of their own; not the parents of the boys, who still believe in their innocence; not the members of law enforcement, who still believe in their guilt.

Those boys all became men, and they have scattered all over the place. Welborn lives in Lockhart and Springsteen in Charleston, West Virginia. Scott has left the state, according to one of his attorneys. And last year Pierce was shot and killed by an Austin policeman after Pierce stabbed him in the neck during a struggle. He had been disturbed since his 2003 release, believing the police were out to get him.