

Woman may have known her killer

Several leads developed Wednesday in the slaying of Jo Ann Tate, including a possible link between the killer and Mrs. Tate, St. Louis homicide detectives said.

Mrs. Tate, who has been described by friends and relatives as "a gentle person who wouldn't hurt anyone," apparently knew the attacker who plunged a knife into her chest and slashed her two daughters, detectives said.

Her brother, Dan Clenney, said his sister, who played the piano and accordian in church, often tried to help people with their problems.

"SHE TRUSTED people and figured they had the same good intentions as she did," he said.

Lt. William Wilson, acting commander of the homicide division, said the investigation "is progressing, but there's a lot of work to be done. . . . A vicious crime like this is usually committed by a psycho."

Wilson declined to say why police believe Mrs. Tate knew her assailant,

Police have several leads in slaying of mother and slashing of her daughters.

but investigators noted there was no sign of forced entry to her apartment in the Hyde Park area at 1418 Farrar St., and no indication that she had been robbed.

Mrs. Tate, he said, apparently had not been receiving threats and had no known enemies. Officers said they believe Mrs. Tate's dog would have attacked an intruder.

An autopsy showed Wednesday that Mrs. Tate, 35, died from a single knife wound to her chest, according to Dr. Elizabeth Laposata, a pathologist with the St. Louis medical examiner's office. The knife punctured a lung, she said.

Tests also showed that Mrs. Tate was sexually molested after she was killed, Dr. Laposata said. "It was a vicious kind of assault," she said.

MRS. TATE'S daughters, Melissa Davis, 7, and Rene Tate, 4, both were

listed in fair but stable condition at a hospital. Police asked that the name of the hospital be withheld for the girls' protection. Both are under guard, police said.

Detectives said they had not talked at length with the girls, who were found wounded in their beds after Mrs. Tate's body was discovered shortly before 10:30 a.m. Tuesday in the middle room of her apartment.

Another brother of Mrs. Tate's, Nathaniel Clenney, and Jerry Woodward, who was identified as her boyfriend, found her body after friends said they had been unable to reach Mrs. Tate by telephone, police said.

Melissa, a first-grader at Clay School, 3820 N. 14th St., had been stabbed several times in the chest, and Rene had stab wounds in the right side and cuts on her neck, police said.

Mrs. Tate, a divorcee who occasionally sold Avon products in her neighborhood, was unemployed "and made do with what she had," said Dan Clenney, an insurance agent. She was unable to work because of a disability from an auto accident in 1975 and received state assistance, he said.

"I DON'T know how much she got, but it wasn't very much," he said.

Clenney said he bought her a small health insurance policy "so she could go to a quality hospital if she ever needed to," but said she had no life insurance policy.

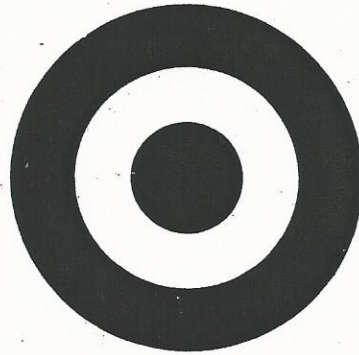
A fund has been set up and donations are being sought to help pay the funeral expenses for Mrs. Tate and the medical expenses of her daughters.

Donations, which are not tax-deductible, may be made to the "Jo Ann Tate Fund," c/o Northwestern Bank, 1500 St. Louis Ave., St. Louis, Mo., 63106. Envelopes sent to the bank should be marked for the attention of Carol Haie, according to a relative of Mrs. Tate's.

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