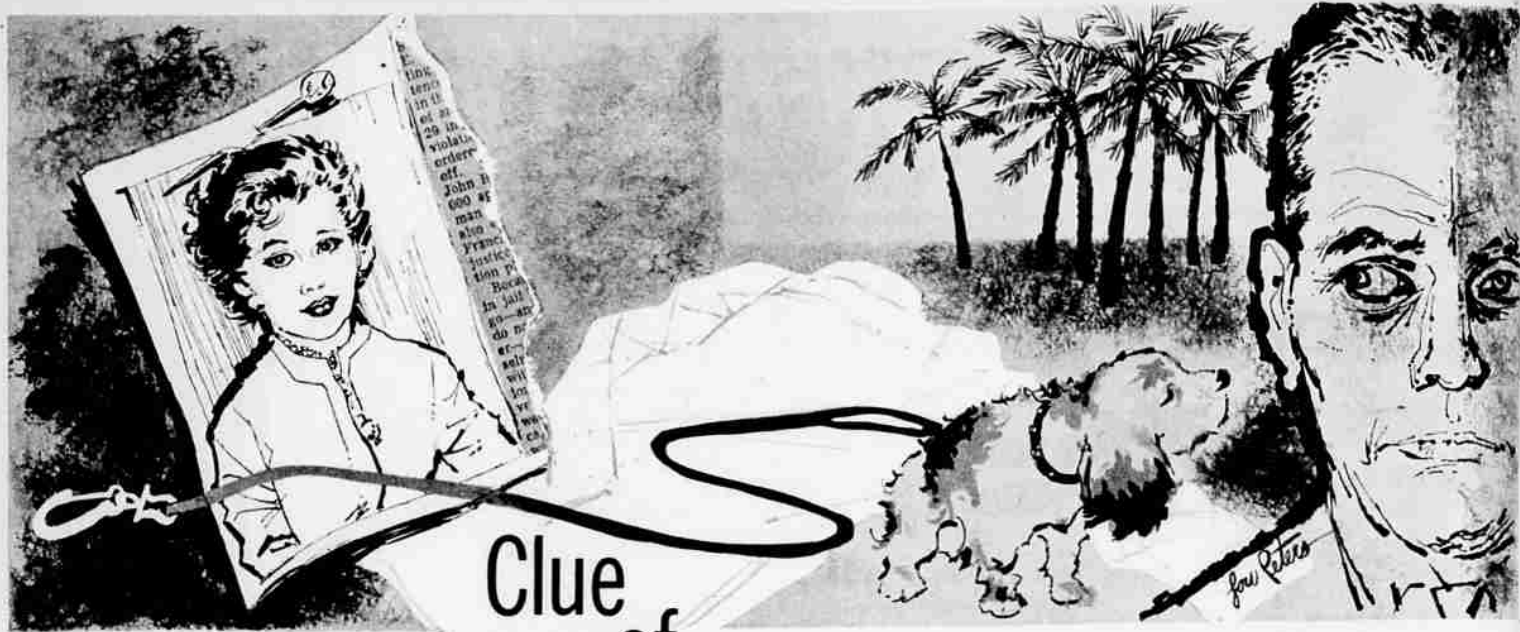




by William T. Brannon

Art by Lou Peters

Clue of The Tattered Shirt

It was about eight in the evening when Mrs. Gertrude Mosier, 45, left her home in Gulfport, a quiet suburb of St. Petersburg, Fla., to walk her dog. She said she might stop at the shuffleboard court nearby.

When she failed to return by 1 a.m., her frantic husband notified police.

The Mosiers' closest friends, the Irwin E. Hawleys of St. Petersburg, who had been neighbors back in Michigan before both families moved to Florida, were routed from bed by searching officers. Rubbing sleep from their eyes, the shocked couple said they hadn't seen Gertrude for several days.

Six hours later, the missing woman's body was found beside a clump of bushes on the outskirts of town.

Five blows had crushed her skull and she had been stabbed. A dog leash was looped around her neck and strips of white cloth had been stuffed into her mouth. Obviously, this was the work of a man consumed with passionate hatred for Mrs. Mosier.

Officers were sent to check into her private life. Capt. John Siers and Officer Ike Mitchell came from St. Petersburg to help. Deputy Sid Saunders came from the sheriff's office.

A search of the scene turned up several clues. Mitchell carefully preserved the strips of cloth for microscopic examination. In the bushes near the body, he found a white shirt, freshly done up. Had it been dropped by the killer?

Deputy Saunders found fresh tire tracks in a road nearby and these were photographed. It was established that the leash belonged to Mrs. Mosier's dog; the dog itself was found later.

The officers could find no hint of scandal in the life of the dead woman. She never went out alone at night except to walk the dog. She had often

been seen watching the shuffleboard games, but she'd always been alone. She was devoted to her husband and 14-year-old daughter. All her friends scoffed at the idea of a secret romance.

Mitchell found a faded laundry mark on the shirt. It appeared to be the word, Carl. But none of the local laundries could identify the mark.

Then Mitchell studied the strips of broadcloth. They apparently had been torn from a shirt, but what interested Mitchell was the distinctive weave. If he could find where shirts of this material were sold, he might trace the killer. He visited every men's shop in the county; many sold broadcloth shirts, but none with this weave.

Mitchell had studied the unusual cloth so much he was sure he would recognize the weave if he ever saw it. He found himself constantly staring at shirt fronts looking for that particular fabric.

Pictures of the tire tracks indicated that they were new, but they were a common size and brand.

WITH the case about to bog down, Captain Siers ordered detectives to question Mrs. Mosier's friends again. They were asked to search their memories for some small incident, snatch of conversation, or bit of gossip that might provide a clue to

the killer's identity. The detectives questioned two dozen couples, but none could shed any light on the case.

"There must be something," Siers insisted. "Have all those couples come to headquarters. I want to question them myself."

From the door of the police laboratory, Mitchell and Saunders watched the parade as couple after couple was ushered into the office of Captain Siers. Suddenly, Mitchell gestured excitedly to Saunders. "See that couple? Let's go outside and have a look at their car. Bring your pictures."

While Saunders squinted at the tire treads, Mitchell looked inside the car. Tools were scattered on the floor in the rear. Protruding from under the back seat was a bit of white cloth. Mitchell lifted the seat and found a crumpled shirt with the tail torn off. It was smeared with several dark stains.

Saunders studied the tires. They were new and the treads matched those found at the murder scene.

"Let's go to the lab," Mitchell said.

Under the microscope, he compared the torn shirt with the pieces stuffed in the victim's mouth. It was the distinctive broadcloth weave he had been searching for!

Then he spread the shirt out and put the pieces into the missing tail. They fit perfectly. A quick analysis of the dark spots revealed they were blood.

Mitchell and Saunders hurried into the captain's office. "You had Mr. and Mrs. Hawley here. Where are they?"

"They went home," Siers said. "Why?"

Mitchell told him. Saunders didn't wait. He ran to his car and sped after the Hawleys, catching up with them as they arrived home. Hawley protested, but Saunders arrested him.

Confronted with the evidence of the shirt, the blood stains, and the tire

treads, Hawley confessed. At 56, Hawley fancied himself a ladies' man. He always carried a clean shirt in his car just in case he should arrange a date. It was his shirt found at the scene of the crime.

Hawley said he'd had a crush on Mrs. Mosier for years—even before the two families had left Michigan. But it had been a one-way affair. Mrs. Mosier laughed off his advances and told him he was threatening the friendship of the two families.

Her continued rebuffs worked Hawley into a frenzy. He had watched her home and noted that some evenings she left to walk the dog. On the fatal night, he drove behind her as she walked toward the shuffleboard court and followed her when she started home. He drew up beside her and invited her to sit in the car and talk. Then he yanked the leash from the dog and drove off.

When Mrs. Mosier tried to fight him off, he struck and stabbed her, then knotted the leash about her neck. He tore a piece from the tail of his shirt and stuffed it in her mouth, then hid her body in the bushes.

Investigation cleared up the mystery of the laundry mark. Hawley's middle name was Earl and that had been the mark on the shirt, but it was so faded police thought it was Carl.

Hawley was indicted for murder but was found insane. He died three years later in the Florida State Hospital.

Asked why he had suspected Hawley, Mitchell said: "I didn't. The Hawleys and Mosiers had been close friends for years, and he seemed the least likely suspect. But I had been looking at thousands of shirts. When Hawley came to headquarters for questioning, I automatically looked at his. I knew he was the man as soon as I spotted that unusual weave!"