

= Oba Chandler =

Oba Chandler (October 11 , 1946 ? November 15 , 2011) was an American man convicted and executed for the June 1989 triple murders of Joan Rogers and her two daughters , whose bodies were found , with their hands and feet bound , floating in Tampa Bay , Florida . Autopsies showed the victims had been thrown into the water while still alive . The case became high @-@ profile in 1992 when local police posted enlargements of samples of a then unknown suspect 's handwriting , found on a pamphlet in the victims ' car , on billboards . Chandler was identified as the killer when his neighbor recognized the handwriting . This was the first such use of billboards by law enforcement in the U.S. ; billboards became useful tools in later searches for missing people .

Prior to his arrest , Chandler worked as an unlicensed aluminum @-@ siding contractor . He testified in his own defense , against the advice of his attorneys , saying that he had met the Ohio women and had given them directions , but that he never saw them again aside from in newspaper coverage and on the billboards set up by authorities . Police originally theorized that two men were involved in the murders , but this was discounted once Chandler was arrested . Following his conviction , Chandler was incarcerated at Union Correctional Institution , and , during his seventeen years of incarceration until his execution , he was notable for not having had a single visitor .

Chandler was executed on November 15 , 2011 . He wrote a last statement to prison officials which said , " You are killing a [sic] innocent man today " . The statement was read at a post @-@ execution news conference . In February 2014 , DNA evidence identified Chandler as the murderer of Ivelisse Berrios @-@ Beguerisse , who was found dead in Coral Springs on November 27 , 1990 .

= = Early life = =

= = = Background = = =

Chandler was the fourth of five children born to Oba Chandler Sr. and Margaret Johnson , and was raised in Cincinnati , Ohio . When he was 10 years old in June 1957 , his father hanged himself in the basement of the family 's apartment . Chandler reportedly jumped into his father 's open grave at the funeral as the gravediggers were covering the coffin with dirt . Chandler fathered eight children , reportedly by seven women ; his youngest child was born in February 1989 . Between May and September 1991 ? ? ? concurrent with the police investigation of the Rogers family triple murder ? ? ? Chandler was an informant for the U.S. Customs Bureau 's Tampa office .

= = = Crimes and incidents = = =

When Chandler was 14 , he began stealing cars and was arrested 20 times as a juvenile . As an adult , he was charged with a variety of crimes , including possession of counterfeit money , loitering and prowling , burglary , kidnapping , and armed robbery . He was also accused of masturbating while peering inside a woman 's window . In one incident , Chandler and an accomplice broke into a Florida couple 's home , held them at gunpoint , and robbed them . Chandler told his accomplice to tie up the man with speaker wire and took the woman into the bedroom , where he made her strip to her underwear , tied her up , and rubbed the barrel of his revolver across her stomach .

= = = Murder victims = = =

On May 26 , 1989 , Joan " Jo " Rogers , 36 , and her daughters ? ? ? Michelle , 17 , and Christe , 14 ? ? ? left their family dairy farm in Willshire , Ohio , for a vacation in Florida . They had never before left their home state . Authorities believe that the women became lost on June 1 , during the return drive from Orlando to Willshire , and had decided to take an extra vacation day in Tampa . While looking for their hotel they encountered Chandler , who gave them directions , and offered to

meet them again later to take them on a sunset cruise of Tampa Bay . The Rogers women had left Orlando around 9 : 00 a.m. and checked into the Days Inn on Route 60 at 12 : 30 p.m. Photographs , developed from a roll of film in a camera found in Rogers ' hotel room , showed Michelle sitting on the floor ; the last photo was a shot taken from the hotel balcony showing the sunset beginning over Tampa Bay , confirming the women were alive , and had not left their hotel room as the sunset began . They were last seen alive at the hotel restaurant around 7 : 30 p.m. It is believed they boarded Chandler 's boat by the dock on the Courtney Campbell Causeway (part of Route 60) between 8 : 30 p.m. and 9 : 00 p.m. , and that they were dead by 3 a.m. Chandler may have used the fact that he was born in Ohio to lure them into feeling a connection to him . Chandler knew the women were not from Florida because he saw the Ohio license plates on their car .

The women 's bodies were found floating in Tampa Bay on June 4 , 1989 . The first body was found when several people on board a sailboat , crossing under the Sunshine Skyway , saw an object in the water . The second body was seen floating off the pier in St. Petersburg , two miles north from the first . While the Coast Guard went to recover the second body , a call came in about a third , which was seen floating 200 yards to the east . All three female bodies were found face down , bound with a rope around the neck , and naked below the waist .

Autopsies showed all three women had water in their lungs , proving they had been thrown into the water while still alive . Michelle ? ? ? identified as the second body found ? ? ? had freed one hand from her bonds before she drowned . The partially dressed bodies of all three women indicated that the underlying crime was sexual assault . Concrete blocks were tied around their necks to ensure they died from either suffocation or drowning , and that their bodies were never found . However , the bodies bloated as a result of decomposition , and floated to the surface .

= = Investigation = =

The women were not positively identified until a week after their bodies ' discovery , by which time they had been reported missing in Ohio by husband and father , Hal Rogers . On June 8 , a housekeeper at the Days Inn said that the women 's room had not been disturbed , and the beds had not been slept in . The hotel manager contacted the police . Fingerprints found in the room were matched to the bodies ; final confirmation of their identification came from dental records . Marine researchers at the University of South Florida estimated from currents and patterns that the women were thrown from a boat ? ? ? and not from a bridge or dry land ? ? ? between two and five days before they were found . The Rogers car , a 1984 Oldsmobile Calais with Ohio license plates , was found at the boat dock by the Courtney Campbell Causeway .

= = = Facts and arrest = = =

The case remained unsolved for over three years , partly due to the volume of tips received by police investigators . The biggest tip was from a Madeira Beach police bulletin describing a similar rape of a 24 @-@ year @-@ old Canadian tourist some two weeks before the murders (See below under " Witnesses ") . Chandler was arrested for the murders on September 24 , 1992 . His handwritten directions on a brochure found in the Rogers ' vehicle , and a description of his boat written by Jo Rogers on the brochure , were the primary clues that led to him being named a suspect . Local police posted images of Chandler 's handwriting on the brochure on billboards in the Tampa Bay area , leading to a call from a former neighbor who provided a copy of a work order that he had written . This was the first such use of billboards by law enforcement in the U.S. and billboards became useful tools in later searches for missing people . Through handwriting analysis , the two samples were matched conclusively . Another of Chandler 's neighbors , and one of the secretaries on the investigative task force , thought that Chandler resembled the composite sketch of the suspect in the seemingly related rape case . A palm print from the brochure was also matched to Chandler . He had sold his boat and left town with his family soon after the billboards appeared . In 1990 , when the television show Unsolved Mysteries was about to report on the deaths of the Rogers family , Chandler and his then @-@ wife moved from their home on Dalton Avenue in

Tampa to Port Orange near Daytona Beach .

= = = Second suspect theory = = =

Investigators originally theorized that two men were involved in the murders of the Rogers women and this was reenacted in a 1990 episode of Unsolved Mysteries . This theory was dismissed when Chandler was arrested . No evidence of a second man ? ? ? other than a former prison cellmate 's claim that Chandler said another man , whose identity the cellmate claimed to know but would not reveal ? ? ? has ever surfaced . The second @-@ suspect theory was belied by Chandler 's approach of the two Canadian female tourists ? ? ? that he was willing to approach more than one potential target by himself .

Hal Rogers 's brother John was also considered a suspect even though he was in state prison serving a sentence for the rape of a woman who had shared his trailer , at the time of the murders . Police , investigating the woman 's rape allegation , found evidence indicating that he had also sexually assaulted Hal 's daughter Michelle , although charges involving this assault were later dropped because of her reluctance to testify . The St. Petersburg Times said that John may have planned the murder as he had visited his parents ' property near Tampa a month before the murders . However , as the police established John could not have hired a professional killer , did not have accomplices , and could not have known the timing of his sister @-@ in @-@ law 's and nieces ' trip , he was dismissed as a suspect .

Hal Rogers was also considered a suspect because he had posted bail for his brother , knowing he had abused Michelle . He later said that he had promised the family he would post bail and would not renege on his promise . Investigators from Florida and Ohio also discovered that Hal Rogers had withdrawn US \$ 7 @,@ 000 from his bank at the time of the disappearance , which he was able to account for . He had planned on using it to look for his wife and daughters before he was notified of their deaths . Investigations proved conclusively that he had never left Ohio during that period . The rape of Michelle Rogers , and gossip by local people , was one of the reasons for the Florida trip , so she and her sister and mother could distance themselves from the incident .

= = Trial = =

= = = Chandler 's testimony = = =

At his trial in Clearwater , Florida , Chandler said that he met the Rogers women and gave them directions , but he never saw them again except in newspaper coverage and on billboards . He never told the authorities that he had seen the women again . He acknowledged that he was on Tampa Bay that night ? ? ? the police had evidence of three ship @-@ to @-@ shore telephone calls made from his boat to his home during the time frame of the murders ? ? ? but Chandler maintained that he was fishing alone . He claimed that he had returned home late because his engine would not start , which he attributed to a gas line leak . He said that he had called the Coast Guard and the Florida Marine Patrol , and had flagged down a patrol boat , but both were too busy to help . He said that he subsequently fixed the line with duct tape and returned safely to shore . However , there were no records of distress calls from Chandler to either the Coast Guard or the Marine Patrol that night , nor were there any Coast Guard boats on the bay the following morning that could have helped him . According to a boat mechanic , who testified for the prosecution , Chandler 's explanation of repairing the boat 's alleged gas leak was not tenable because the fuel lines in his boat ? ? ? a Bayliner ? ? ? were directed upward . A leak would have sprayed fuel into the air rather than into the boat , and the corrosive gasoline would have eaten away the adhesive properties of the duct tape Chandler maintained he had used to repair the purported leak . Under interrogation from Pinellas County prosecutor , Douglas Crow , Chandler then said he could not remember .

== Witnesses ==

A woman named Judy Blair testified that on May 15, 1989, two weeks prior to the Rogers murders, Chandler invited her onto his boat in nearby Madeira Beach for a boat trip on Tampa Bay, raped her, then returned her to shore. Blair had been with her friend Barbara Mottram, who refused Chandler's offer to join them on the boat. After she was allegedly raped, Blair returned to her hotel room where Mottram was waiting. He was not charged or tried for this crime. Blair testified during Chandler's murder trial to establish his pattern of attack and to show the similarities between the two crimes. Blair testified that on May 14, Chandler gave his name as Dave Posner or Dave Posno when the three first met at a convenience store in Tampa. He told Blair and Mottram he was in the aluminum siding contracting business, which subsequently helped lead investigators to him. It also inspired the name of the investigation to capture him: "Operation Tin Man". The facial composite produced from Blair's description was posted on the billboards along with the handwriting samples.

A former employee of Chandler's testified that he bragged about dating three women on the bay that night, and that the next morning he arrived and delivered materials for a job by boat and immediately set out again. In an attempt to establish Chandler's whereabouts on the night of the murders, investigators found records of several ship-to-shore telephone calls made from his boat to his home between 1:00 am and 5:00 am, which may have been attempts to explain his absence to his wife, and to provide himself with an alibi for the time of the murders. Chandler's daughter, Kristal May Sue, testified that her father had talked about killing three women, and that he was afraid of returning to Tampa. A maid, who worked at the motel where the Rogers women stayed, testified that she walked past Chandler on June 1 as she was heading for the Rogers' room for room service. She said that she did not realize the significance of this sighting until Chandler's arrest in 1992; the sighting has never been confirmed. Michelle's boyfriend and Hal Rogers also took the stand during trial.

== Sentence and aftermath ==

Jo, Michelle and Christie Rogers were buried in their hometown on June 13, 1989, after a funeral service attended by about 300 family and friends. Numerous police officers were present to keep news media and TV crews out of the church during the service.

Chandler was found guilty of the murders, and was sentenced to death on November 4, 1994. He maintained his innocence, and continued to pursue legal appeals while on Florida's Death Row. He admitted to the Madeira Beach incident but said the sex was consensual, and that the victim changed her mind during the act. Since Chandler had already been sentenced to death for the Rogers family murders, and prosecutors did not want to subject Blair to the emotional trauma of a rape trial, he was never prosecuted for Blair's rape.

He served his sentence at the Union Correctional Institution. Shortly after the trial and conviction, his wife Debra filed for divorce and their marriage was formally dissolved a year later. Chandler was no longer allowed to see his daughter Whitney, and, in accordance with his ex-wife's wishes, he was not allowed to see later photographs of her. In July 2008, Chandler was on Florida's short list of executions. Profiling experts speculated that Chandler may have killed previously, based on the belief that a first-time killer would not be experienced, or bold enough, to abduct and kill three women at once. Chandler remained a suspect in the 1982 murder of a woman found floating off Anna Maria Island until 2011, when the body was identified as 29-year-old Amy Hurst and her husband was arrested and charged with her murder. Chandler was never charged with another murder. All of his appeals of his 1994 conviction were denied; his last was in May 2007.

After his conviction, Chandler was named by media as one of Florida's most notorious criminals. He said that his last words before his execution would be: "Kiss my rosy red ass". In May 2011, comparisons were drawn between Chandler's case and trial in 1994, and the murder case and the upcoming trial of Casey Anthony. In both cases heightened media attention forced the selection of

jurors who lived outside the county where the crime had been committed . One of the jurors in Chandler 's 1994 trial , identified as Roseann Welton , said that : " He scared some of the jurors when he would sit there and stare at you and have that stupid grin on his face . He would make your skin crawl . "

The judge presiding over the 1994 trial and that ultimately sentenced Chandler , died of lung cancer in April 2016 at the age of 73 . In a 2011 interview the judge described Chandler as a man with no soul , and further commentated the trial , " It 's the worst case as far as factually , and as far as a defendant without saving grace , that I ever handled . And I represented plenty of people who were not necessarily good people . "

= = Execution = =

On October 10 , 2011 ? ? ? the day before Chandler 's 65th birthday ? ? ? Florida Governor Rick Scott signed Chandler 's death warrant . His execution was set for November 15 , 2011 , at 4 : 00 pm . His lawyer , Baya Harrison , said that Chandler asked him not to file any frivolous appeals to keep him alive . Harrison said :

He is not putting a lot of pressure on me to go running around at the end to find some magic way out . He is not going to make a scene . He 's not going to bemoan the legal system . What he has told me is this : if there is some legal way that I can find to try to prevent him from being executed , he would like me to do what I reasonably can .

Harrison also said that Chandler suffered from high blood pressure , coronary artery disease , problems with his kidneys and arthritis .

On October 12 , 2011 , Harrison said that although he was preparing to file a motion regarding the violation of his client 's Fifth and 14th Amendment rights in the case , he was unsure that Chandler was willing to travel to Clearwater , Florida for the court hearing , or would agree to the filing of the motion . " He hates coming down to Clearwater . He doesn 't like the ride and he 's not well , " Harrison said . On October 18 , 2011 , Harrison filed a motion against the execution on the grounds that the way Florida imposes the death penalty is unconstitutional . A jury makes a recommendation on a life sentence or a death sentence , but under Florida law the judge makes the final decision . A hearing on Chandler 's motion was set for October 21 at 1 : 00 pm ; Chandler did not attend . On October 24 , Chandler 's appeal was rejected because he had already filed an appeal to the Florida Supreme Court prior to the decision . This appeal was heard in a court in Tallahassee at 9 : 00 am on November 9 , 2011 . The Florida Supreme Court had already upheld Chandler 's death sentence twice ; once in 1997 and again in 2003 .

On November 15 , Chandler chose a last meal consisting of two salami sandwiches on white bread , one peanut butter sandwich on white bread , and iced tea . The execution process started at 4 : 08 pm and at approximately 4 : 25 pm Chandler was pronounced dead after receiving a lethal injection at the Florida State Prison in Raiford . Chandler declined to make a last statement before being executed . Hal Rogers attended the execution . Former St. Petersburg homicide detective Cindra Leedy , who investigated the case , said in a press conference : " I 'm glad there 's finally an end to this . He doesn 't deserve to live , he needs to die . "

Chandler left a last statement with prison officials on a piece of paper , which was read aloud during a news conference after the execution . It said : " You are killing an innocent man today . " Shortly after signing Chandler 's death warrant Governor Rick Scott said : " [Chandler] killed three women , so I looked through different cases , and it made sense to do that one . There 's never one thing . It was the right case . "

Chandler 's daughter Valerie Troxell said in an interview after the execution that : " I believe they did execute an innocent man . I don 't think one person could have pulled off such a heinous crime . It would have to have been more than one person ... The forensic evidence was not there . The palm print would prove he did meet them and gave them directions , but it didn 't mean he killed them . I think the prosecution had a very weak case . " Troxell also said that she had sent a letter to Florida Governor Rick Scott asking him to commute Chandler 's sentence to life in prison .

Chandler 's son Jeff said : " I truly believe he was tried and convicted by the media long before he

went to trial . The media can pretty much convict you . I don 't think he got a fair trial . " After his execution , Chandler was described as the " loneliest man in the loneliest place on earth , death row " ; he did not receive a single visitor during his years in Florida 's death row unit .

Another one of Chandler 's daughters , named " Suzette " , said her father was a monster who got what he deserved .

= = Coral Springs murder = =

On February 25 , 2014 , investigators revealed that DNA evidence identified Chandler as the murderer of Ivelisse Berrios @-@ Beguerisse , who was raped and strangled to death in Coral Springs on November 27 , 1990 .

The 20 @-@ year @-@ old newlywed was last seen at the Sawgrass Mills Mall where she worked at a sporting goods store . When she did not return home her husband went to the mall and found her car , a 1985 Ford Tempo , with the tires slashed . It is believed that Chandler , after scoping out the victim over a couple of days , slashed the tires and showed up in the guise of a good samaritan and offered to help . Three hours after she was reported missing , her body was found under a residential mailbox , in a local neighborhood , by two men returning from a fishing trip .

When found , Ivelisse 's body was nude , had ligature marks on both wrists and legs , and brown tape stuck to her hair . The case is considered solved and closed according to police .

Law enforcement agencies across Florida are looking into other unsolved homicides and other crimes in areas Chandler was known to have resided . At the time of the Berrios murder he and his family lived some two miles from the mall .

= = Media on the subject = =

The Discovery Channel devoted a one @-@ hour episode of its series Scene of the Crime titled " The Tin Man " to the murder of the Rogers family . In 1997 , a series of articles titled " Angels & Demons " written by Thomas French , which told the story of the murders , the capture and conviction of Chandler , and the impact of the crimes on the Rogers ' family and community in Ohio , was published in the newspaper St. Petersburg Times . The series won a 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing . The Rogers murders were featured in an episode of Unsolved Mysteries in 1990 , which speculated that there were two attackers . The 2000 book Bodies in the Bay , by Mason Ramsey , is a fictionalized adaptation of the Chandler case . Author Don Davis in 2007 published the book Death Cruise covering the murders .

The case was featured in a 1999 episode of Cold Case Files on A & E entitled " Bodies in the Bay , " which also focused on the evidence in the case . In 1995 , Oba Chandler , some members of his family , and Hal Rogers appeared in an episode of the Maury Povich Show featuring the case . Chandler appeared via satellite link . Chandler 's case was featured in a full @-@ hour episode of Crime Stories . The case was shown on an episode of Forensic Files entitled " Water Logged " in December 2010 . In 2012 Investigation Discovery show On the Case with Paula Zahn aired two episodes called " Murder at Sunset " covering the case . In August 2014 , the ID series " Murder in Paradise " covered the case .