

Beat: Local

Canadian man arrested in 1970s murders of 2 young girls

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USPA News - An elderly man has been arrested and charged in the murders of two young girls in British Columbia in the late 1970s, Canadian police announced on Monday after an investigation spanning nearly four decades. Garry Taylor Handlen, 67, of Ontario, was arrested without incident in Surrey on Friday and was charged with one count of first-degree murder in the death of 11-year-old Kathryn-Mary Herbert in September 1975 and one count of first-degree murder in the death of 12-year-old Monica Jack in May 1978. Both girls were taken near their homes.

Information about what led investigators to Handlen was not immediately released, but the suspect is scheduled to appear in court on Monday. "This matter is now before the courts and I'm not in a position to discuss the specifics around this particular investigation that brought us to this point," said Superintendent Ward Lymburner. "However, I can say that it is the very combination of information and evidence gathered from the very first days of both of the girls' disappearances, coupled with extensive and exhaustive policing efforts, that have brought us here today." Lymburner, who is the officer in charge of the RCMP's Special Projects Unit, added: "We recognize that the announcement of charges is a significant development in these two historic cases, but our work is far from over as we now have to prepare to bring decades of investigative material before the courts." Kathryn-Mary went missing after she left a friend's house in Abbotsford at 8:30 p.m. on September 24, 1975. She met another friend on her way home but they parted before the 11-year-old reached her home. She was never seen again. Her body was found in an undeveloped area of the Matsqui First Nation about two months later, and an autopsy confirmed her death was the result of a homicide. Monica disappeared on May 6, 1978, less than two weeks before she would have turned 13. She was riding her bike along Highway 5A just south of Quilchena, near the Nicola Ranch in Merritt, when she disappeared. While her bike was discovered a day later, it would take another 17 years before her remains were located in June 1995 in a rural area north of Merritt. Monica's mother, Madeline Lanaro, was notified of Handlen's arrest on Friday, which she said brought her mixed feelings of happiness, but she explained that "the hurt" never goes away. She told how Monica's father, who died years ago, had blamed himself for buying his daughter the bike she was riding on when she disappeared. "Monica's father passed away. He was terribly hurt and he, I know, blamed himself, as I blame myself, for her disappearance, as he had just bought her the bike about two weeks ago for her birthday, and I think that was the biggest regret he ever had throughout that time," Lanaro said. The mother said she didn't know Handlen but believes she had seen him in the Merritt area. Shari Greer, the mother of Kathryn-Mary, said she had waited for this moment for 39 years. "Finally, it's here," she said. "I promised her at her graveside that I would never give up. I didn't. I thought I failed her, I didn't. ... I want you to know that these two little girls, Monica and Kathryn-Mary, made a difference in this world while they were here. Garry Handlen couldn't take that away."

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