

## New HBO Docuseries Revisits Austin's 1991 Yogurt Shop Murders

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Over thirty years after one of the most horrifying crimes in Austin, Texas's history, the 1991 Yogurt Shop Murders remain unsolved. But a new four-part documentary, *The Yogurt Shop Murders*, airing August 3 on HBO, aims to reexamine the brutal case and its lasting emotional toll.

The new HBO series, directed by Margaret Bro, is known for her work on *Descendant*, and integrates past and present in a thoughtful examination of grief, time, and the relentless pursuit of answers. The upcoming docuseries will also reflect on the deep trauma still felt by the families, investigators, and community while shedding light on the persistent absence of justice.

HBO's *The Yogurt Shop Murders* builds upon an unfinished 2009 project by Austin filmmaker Claire Huie, who initially focused on the release of two previously convicted suspects. Brown weaves Huie's archival footage with new interviews, placing a strong emphasis on the emotional experiences of those affected, rather than merely revisiting the crime scene or legal proceedings.

On December 6, 1991, four teenage girls, Amy Ayers (13), Eliza Thomas (17), and sisters Jennifer (17) and Sarah Harbison (15), were assaulted, shot execution-style, and then set on fire inside a yogurt shop in North Austin. The shocking violence stunned the city, which was then on the brink of growth and modernization. The phrase "Austin lost its innocence" recurs throughout the series, capturing the magnitude of the moment. At the time, law enforcement poured significant resources into the case, yet no one has ever been definitively held responsible.

The documentary pays particular attention to the impact the crime has had on individuals over the years. Viewers meet John Jones, a police officer who responded to the original scene and later developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He kept the shirt he wore that night, vowing to wear it again only if the case is solved. Also featured is Sonora Thomas, sister of victim Eliza Thomas, who articulates the profound, enduring grief faced by her family. Thomas has since become a psychotherapist, helping others navigate trauma. She offers a sobering reminder that, for families, the pain of this tragedy is felt every night, not just in headlines or documentaries.

The series does explore the investigation's evolution. In the weeks following the murders, four teenage boys became primary suspects. Two Michael Scotts and Robert Springsteens were convicted based on confessions they later recanted. Neither confession was corroborated by physical evidence. In 2008, DNA found at the crime scene was matched to an unknown individual, leading to the men's release in 2009. Another suspect, Maurice Pierce, was never tried and was killed in 2010 during a confrontation with police. Austin Police Department continues to pursue leads tied to the unknown DNA profile, but so far, no conclusive breakthrough has emerged.

