

**SATURDAY**

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# Triple murders retraced

*Book examines crime's solving*

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One of the most tragic events in Waco history is the subject of a recently released book that details how the Lake Waco triple murders were solved.

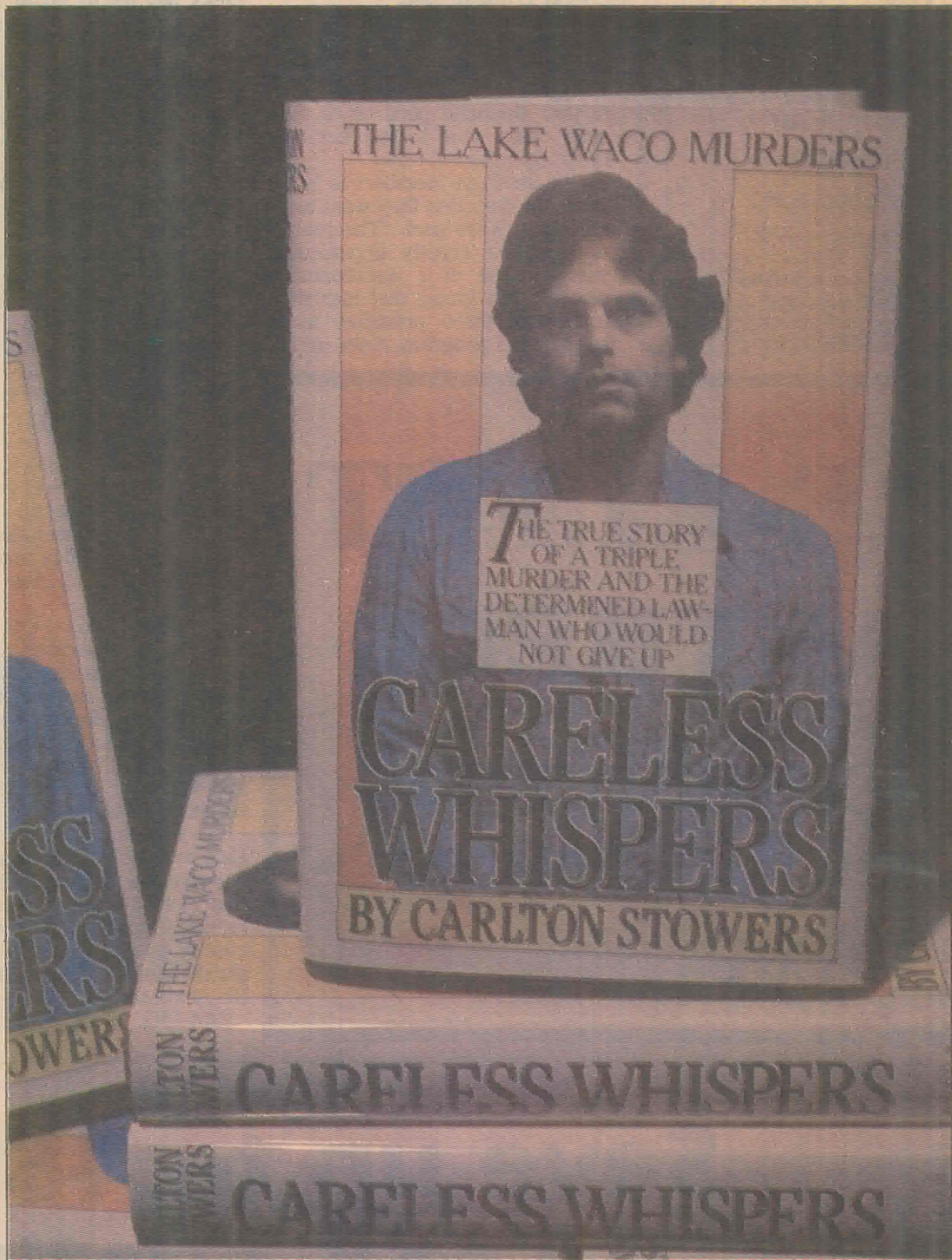
The book chronicles the dedication of a police officer who risked his career to find the murderers of three teen-agers.

*Careless Whispers*, by Dallas author Carlton Stowers, is a story of how Truman Simons found the people responsible for the murders of 18-year-old Kenneth Franks of Waco and 17-year-olds Jill Montgomery and Raylene Rice of Waxahachie.

"My family and I have gone through a tremendous amount of pain and suffering, and a lot of it was brought on by the Waco Police Department. If it wasn't for Truman Simons, this case never would have been solved," said Richard Franks of Waco.

Franks, father of Kenneth Franks, was considered the prime suspect by the Waco Police Department during the early stages of the murder investigation.

"Truman is a hero. He had the guts and determination to stay



Staff photo — Bobby Sanchez

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*Careless Whispers* details the Lake Waco triple murders investigation

## LOCAL

# Solving of lake crime recounted

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with it. I think the Lord was working with Truman, guiding him toward (Sheriff) Jack Harwell and placing him in a situation where David (Spence) could talk to him and Truman could hear the things David was saying to the other inmates," Franks said.

Spence and Muneer Mohammad Deeb eventually were convicted of the murders and sentenced to die by injection. Brothers Anthony and Gilbert Melendez pleaded guilty to the murders and were sentenced to life prison terms.

In *Careless Whispers*, Stowers details how members of a special task force created by Chief of Police Larry Scott to investigate the murders became convinced that Franks had killed the teen-agers.

The task force members also were distrustful of Simons, and deliberately kept important leads in the investigation from reaching Simons, according to Stowers.

Simons eventually quit the police department, took a cut in pay and joined the McLennan County Sheriff's Department as a jailer to continue the investigation into the lake murders.

While he worked as a jailer, Simons was able to win Spence's trust and eventually pieced together enough information to build a complicated murder-for-hire scenario that led to the murder convictions.

"I really didn't have a problem with the Waco Police Department; it was just a few particular people," Simons said. "I know that it is true that certain people sat on leads."

Scott said he did not plan to read *Careless Whispers* and had little comment.

"I'm not going to discuss the book," Scott said. "But if I thought there was anyone down here trying to sabotage the investigation, they would not be employed with us any longer."

Stowers spent two years researching the triple murders before writing *Careless Whispers*.

"I've read a lot of true crime stories, and they always seem to make the killer out to be a hero, but Carlton (Stowers) dealt more with the families and the way it affected them," Simons said.

"I think it's very fair and very truthful," said District Attorney Vic Feazell, who prosecuted the triple murders. "There's an awful lot that's left out. To tell the whole story would have taken six volumes."

Stowers and Feazell will be at The Book Nook at the Lake Air Mall between 1 and 5 p.m. Saturday to autograph copies of *Careless Whispers*.

For those directly involved in the murder investigation, the publication of the book still will not allow them to place the murders completely behind them.

"Anybody who is involved in law enforcement should avoid getting that wrapped up in a case, but I think everybody who was out there that day got overwhelmed," Simons said.

"It will never be possible to put Kenneth's death behind me," Franks said. "Every day when I pass Koehne Park going from home to Valley Mills Drive, I'm always reminded when I look out over the lake and see that beautiful sunset. The sun sets right where the bodies were found. It's there every day and it's something I've had to learn to live with."