



The rest of the house looks like a tornado passed through, the detective thought. But the basement — tidy, for the most part. Smells clean, too. Like disinfectant.

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And gather any and all information on the owner of 12 Burns Place.
"I want to know everything about him. I want to know what he had for breakfast this morning."

Up the Mountain on Burns Place, Constable Kathy Stewart waited nervously outside the house for backup to arrive.

Her first crime scene. Don't blow it. She had not worn her police uniform cap when she had talked to the woman and examined the garbage bag. She went back to the cruiser and put it on. Uniform protocol.

Another cruiser pulled up. Stewart expected a veteran to be sent to a scene where body parts had been discovered. Instead, out stepped a uniform male colleague who had been on the job maybe a year.

"You?" Stewart said. "This is who they send?"
"What do you have?" he asked.

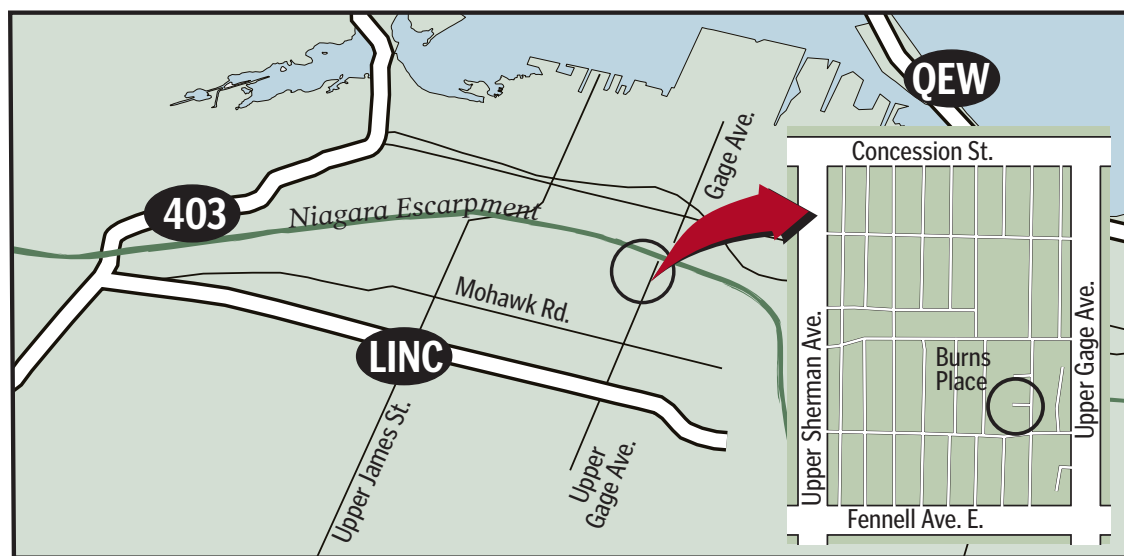
Stewart told him about the human flesh.
"Want to take a look?"
"No."

"What, are you chicken?" she said, then instantly regretted the remark.

"If you made the call, and you know what you saw, you don't need me to look at it," he said.
The officer told her to get ready for the Major Crime brass to show any minute. Get the cruiser out of the driveway. He reached over and tucked Stewart's gold chain inside her shirt collar out of view. Protocol.

At 7:10 p.m., Ident arrived — the forensic identification services van. Out stepped veteran Hamilton police forensic detective Ross Wood, and rookie Gary Zwicker.

The Ident detectives had been working at Central when the call came in, Zwicker dusting a stolen au-



Burns Place, where body parts were found on Easter weekend, 1999, is a cul-de-sac running off East 38th Street on Hamilton Mountain. Police needed a warrant to search the house, but they were able to walk through it without one. Forensic identification officers did so — with their eyes and their noses open.

to in the police garage for prints.

It had been a busy time for the section, a couple of homicides on the go early in the year. One was a stabbing case, a lot of blood at the scene.

Wood, Zwicker's training officer, walked into the garage. Woody had been a cop coming up on 30 years, the last nine in forensic identification. He had seen it all, attended about 50 autopsies during his career, attended crime scenes where the sights and smells of murder were so ripe they sent even hardened cops for counselling.

"You ready, Zwicker?" he said. "We got another one."

"Isn't it someone else's turn?" Zwicker cracked.
Zwicker was pretty green on the job, had not even taken the basic Ident course yet. He would reflect later that this new case would be a baptism by fire.

Up at the scene, Stewart took the two forensic detectives up the driveway, showed them the garbage bag, the box, explained what she had done. Ross Wood examined the inside of the bag.

"Yep," he said. "It's skin. Exterior skin."

Later, Wood examined more contents of the bag. Among the items was a suede jacket wrapped with a foam pad. He cut the tape around the box that Stewart had not opened. Inside, more human tissue packed in bags and small containers. Flesh with skin. Hair attached to a piece of scalp. Reddish tone to the hair colour. Internal organs.

The air was thick with moisture, a thunderstorm brewing. They needed to get the evidence covered with a tarp, and ultimately get the body parts to Hamilton General Hospital morgue for examination.

Stewart was relieved at the scene. She was required down at Central Station to tell her story.

She took a breather in her cruiser parked in the street. It was now 9 p.m. and she was starving. She finally opened the bag of Doritos and shoved some into her mouth.

Tap-tap.
Stewart, mouth full, looked out the window. Abi-Rashed.

"Mmm-yes?" she said, garbling the word, looking up at him.

"They asked me to check on you to see if you're all right," he said. "If you're eating, I think you're all right. Get down to Central and I'll talk to you later." Good, she thought, she was not in trouble for the munchies. She ate the rest of the Doritos on the drive downtown.

Stewart didn't get home to Selkirk that night until after 3 a.m., still wired. Her husband was sleeping on the couch. She woke him up. Couldn't tell him much, just the basics.

A difficult thing for a rookie cop to experience, seeing human tissue like that. Wasn't it? Her excitement and strong stomach surprised her.

"Do you think it's weird this isn't bugging me?" she asked him.

Her training had kicked in, and she had performed very well at the scene, senior officers agreed. She now had a taste of homicide investigation — and liked it. Stewart went to bed, barely slept, and reported back to work four hours later.

Media had descended on the scene at Burns Place, reporters kept at bay by yellow crime scene tape. The coroner, Dr. Richard Porter, also arrived.

A decision was made that investigators should take a quick look inside the house. If there had been an attack in that house, there might be another victim. And they're standing outside while someone's bleeding to death inside?

They would need a search warrant to do the full exploration of the house. For now, though, under the provincial Coroner's Act, they could lawfully do a walk-through.

Ross Wood, Gary Zwicker and Porter approached the front door. They gingerly entered the house, careful not to touch anything.

Through the living room, bedrooms, bathroom. Kitchen. Broken dishes, smashed furniture. Upstairs, and then down the eight stairs to the basement, around a corner, the rec room. Dark red carpet with a black swirl design in it. Pool table dominating the room. Padded brown bar. Mirror panelling on the walls and half-panel wainscoting. Couple of pool cues on the floor. A small fruit cellar, a fan on the floor, more mirror panelling on one wall.

Without a warrant, there was no opportunity to search for clues, to use alternative light sources, spray chemicals that would reveal the hidden signs of life and death.

But before they exited, Ross Wood's naked eye was zooming in on possible clues as they moved throughout the house. Dark smear. On the bathtub. Frame of the rear door to the house. Blood?

Curious thing about the basement, too. Rest of the house looks like a tornado passed through, he thought. But the basement — tidy, for the most part. Smells clean, too. Like disinfectant.

And his eye picked up on something else. Seemed to be a significant number of flies in the house. And the largest concentration was in the basement.

Monday: Catch me if you can



It was a suspected homicide, and Detective Sergeant Peter Abi-Rashed was in charge. He started making calls, handing out assignments to the investigators.

GRAVEONLINE: Why do some killers dismember their victims? Find out at thespec.com