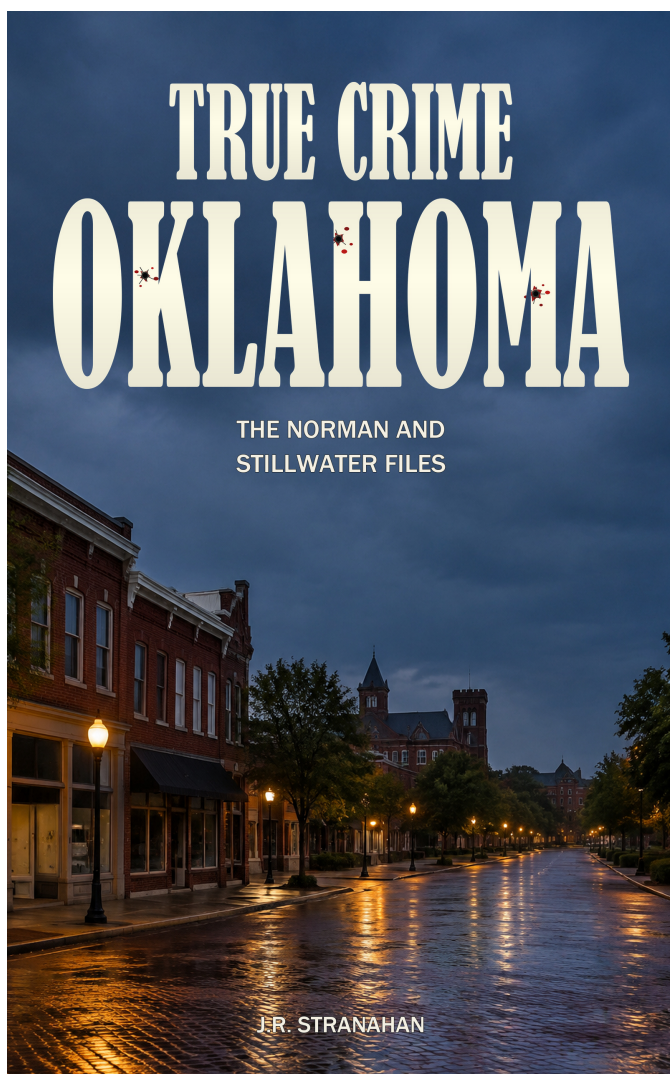




True Crime Oklahoma: The Norman and Stillwater Files

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The Morning Juli Was Going Home

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Chapter 1: The Morning Juli Was Going Home

Juli Busken had already packed most of her things. Her parents were coming to Norman on December 20, 1996, with a trailer, and she was going back to Arkansas with them. She had finished the course requirements for graduation at the University of Oklahoma, where she studied ballet. Graduate school was part of her plan. First came the less momentous business of moving out: belongings to collect, friends to see, a college life to leave behind. 1

On her last evening, she exchanged Christmas presents and said goodbyes. One of the friends she saw was Megan Schreck, who needed a ride to Will Rogers Airport early the next morning. Juli offered to drive. They decided to stay awake rather than try to fit a night's sleep around the departure. At about two in the morning they ate at the Kettle. They returned to Schreck's apartment on West Lindsey Street around three. Juli slept briefly, and at about four-thirty they left for the airport. 1

Schreck was dropped off around five. Juli drove away in her red Eagle Summit, still bearing its Arkansas license plate. Her apartment was at Dublin West on East Lindsey Street. The airport trip should have been one of the last errands of her time in Norman. 1

Roughly half an hour after the drop-off, people at Dublin West heard a woman screaming. William Alves, a Norman police officer who lived there and provided off-duty security, went outside. He did not see what had happened. Another resident, Jackie Evans, heard a man's voice ordering a woman into a car. She heard a door open and close, footsteps, another door, then an engine and a quick departure. A police officer answering a 911 call arrived at about 5:51 a.m. He found nothing suspicious. The noise had ended before anyone could give him a clear account of where the woman had gone. 2

Those sounds would later help investigators place Juli's abduction in time. On that morning, however, the residents did not have the information that would make the pieces fit. A scream in a parking lot, a car leaving, an apartment whose occupant was not inside: each was known by someone, but no one yet possessed the whole sequence.

Ryan James expected to see Juli for lunch. They worked together at the OU golf course and were close friends. When he arrived at her apartment at about eleven, her car was gone. He returned to work. At about four that afternoon he tried again, this time hoping they could have dinner. She was still absent. 3

James checked with his grandparents because Juli often visited them. She had not been there. He and his grandfather began looking for her, including a trip to the airport. His grandfather knew OU Police Chief Joe Lester. Early that evening they contacted Lester to report Juli missing. Her parents, Bud and Mary Busken, were also coming into a city where the arrangements they had made with their daughter no longer explained what was happening. 3

Elsewhere, a man named Randy Lankford was returning to something he had seen at Lake Stanley Draper. Around noon he had noticed an object along the shore. After dark he went back with his wife. In their lights, they could make out a body. They reported it to a nearby police station. Officers went to the water and began preserving the scene. The description in the missing-person report from Norman gave Oklahoma City police a likely identity. 3

Lester informed the Buskens that their daughter had been found dead. They had arrived to take her home.

What remained beside the water

The investigation began with evidence spread among three places: the apartment complex where Juli had apparently been abducted, the lake where she had been killed, and the car that had carried her between them. Police had to work backward from objects and observations. No witness had watched the entire crime. 2, 4

At the lake, Juli's hands were bound behind her with black shoelaces. She had been shot in the head. The medical examiner recovered a .22 Long Rifle bullet and documented injuries consistent with a sexual assault. Her clothing and the swabs collected at autopsy became essential evidence. An opal-and-diamond ring that her parents had given her was missing. 4

A pink leotard lay nearby. It bore the initials JB. Investigators also documented tracks in the soil: two sets going toward the water, one set coming back. One corresponded to the hiking boots Juli was wearing. The second became a question for shoe examiners and, eventually, for a jury. 4, 8

The leotard mattered because of the biological material on it. Criminalists found sperm on several items associated with the crime. Later work would produce a usable male DNA profile from material on the leotard and Juli's underwear. Other samples would produce less definite results. From the start, therefore, the physical evidence was uneven. Some items could answer a narrow question with considerable force. Others could do no more than remain consistent with a developing account. 4

Witnesses helped narrow the hours in which the crime occurred. Janice Keller remembered a small red car near Lake Stanley Draper between about 6:45 and seven that morning. She saw a young man driving and a younger-looking woman in the passenger seat. After she heard about the murder, Keller contacted police. She was not interviewed until two years later. She drew the man's profile herself and assisted with a composite drawing. 5

Her account was useful, but it had limitations that became important at trial. Keller estimated the driver to be in his mid-to-late twenties. The man eventually prosecuted had just turned eighteen. Her observation could not simply be converted into a positive identification. The defense would return to that age estimate when challenging the state's reconstruction. 5, 9

Another motorist, David Kill, remembered the red car for a different reason. He was returning from a night shift at Tinker Air Force Base. At approximately 7:10 to 7:15 a.m., a compact red car with Arkansas plates cut him off while traveling away from the lake. A man was driving alone. Kill was angry enough to follow the car at high speed toward Norman. He turned off at Alameda Street, watching the other driver continue toward Lindsey. After news of Juli's disappearance appeared, he realized the car he had followed might have been hers. He contacted police and helped prepare another composite. 5

Keller's sighting placed two people near the lake before seven. Kill's placed a lone driver leaving the area a little afterward. Neither account described the assault or the shooting. Together, they gave investigators a possible interval and direction of travel. They also left questions, including where the sexual assault had occurred and whether the witnesses had accurately judged the driver's appearance. Those uncertainties did not disappear when a suspect was identified years later. They remained part of the evidence the jury had to weigh. 5, 9

Late on December 20, university police found Juli's Eagle Summit near Dublin West, across the street from the apartments. Someone had brought it back to the neighborhood. Several belongings were gone, including her cellphone, CD player and radar detector. A pair of pajama bottoms in the car contained biological material. Investigators obtained a partial profile from that item, but the eventual DNA comparison was inconclusive. 6

The missing cellphone produced a record of a different kind. It was used after Juli's death. A call on December 21 went to a number investigators

would later associate with Anthony Sanchez's former girlfriend. Other dialed numbers resembled numbers associated with his acquaintances. In 1996, police did not yet have his name attached to those details. The significance would emerge after the DNA identification. 6

There was an important difference between recovering evidence and understanding it. Police could store the garments, photograph the prints, obtain the telephone records and interview the witnesses. Those steps kept information available. They did not immediately tell investigators whose information it was.

A defendant without a name

For years, police worked through people who knew Juli or might have crossed her path. Detectives obtained DNA samples from almost two hundred people. According to the later appellate opinion, they interviewed virtually everyone they could find who had known her or might have had a reason or opportunity to harm her. Her friends would testify that they did not know Anthony Castillo Sanchez as a friend or acquaintance of Juli's. Before July 2004, police had not interviewed him, contacted him or considered him a suspect in the case. 7

In 2000, prosecutors took the unusual step of filing charges against an unknown person identified by the DNA profile. They had a biological identifier associated with the crime but no name to put beside it. The filing reflected both the strength of the evidence and the frustration of the investigation: a person had left recoverable genetic material, and yet the ordinary process of asking who knew the victim had not found him. 7

Sanchez lived close to Juli. His former girlfriend, Christin Setzer, later testified that she and Sanchez had lived on Drake Drive in southeast Norman between 1994 and 1996, about a mile from Dublin West. Proximity alone did not put him at the crime scene. At the time, it had not even put him on the investigators' list. 10

The identification came through a separate criminal case. Sanchez went to prison in 2002 for a second-degree burglary committed the year

before. Oklahoma law required collection of a tissue sample from him. The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation developed a profile and entered it into the state's Combined DNA Index System. In July 2004, OSBI criminalist Ken Neeland notified an Oklahoma City cold-case detective that Sanchez's profile had produced a hit on the unknown profile from Juli's case. 7

The database result redirected an investigation that had been open for more than seven years. Police obtained a warrant for a fresh sample. That step gave examiners new material for comparison, rather than relying solely on the profile already stored in the database. The state then prepared to show a jury that the profile from Sanchez matched the sperm fractions obtained from two separate garments: Juli's underwear and the leotard found at the lake. 7

At trial, the DNA expert described agreement at all sixteen tested genetic locations. The statistical estimates of a random match were extraordinarily small. But the profile did not stand for every item recovered in the case. The comparisons involving the anal swab and the pajama bottoms were inconclusive, a distinction preserved in the appellate opinion. The prosecution's strongest DNA evidence came from the two garments. 7

Nor did a profile, by itself, narrate what happened. It could connect biological material to a person. The jury still had to decide what that connection meant when considered with the abduction, the location of the discarded leotard, the injuries, the car's movements and the other evidence. Sanchez's defense challenged the state's movement from a sexual-assault connection to proof of the killing. The distinction was central to the trial and the appeal. 9

Sanchez also challenged the collection of his prison sample. His lawyers argued that authorities had taken his genetic material without the individualized suspicion ordinarily associated with a search. The Court of Criminal Appeals rejected the argument. It treated the collection as a search but held it reasonable in light of the limited intrusion, the reduced

privacy expectation of a convicted prisoner and the state's interest in identification. The ruling allowed the result that had broken open Juli's case to remain in evidence. 11

Shoes, a calendar and a bullet in a wall

After the DNA hit, investigators could return to earlier evidence with a specific person in mind. Setzer's recollections and records provided several leads. One came from a calendar. An entry dated October 14, 1996, recorded that she and Sanchez had bought matching Nike shoes. 8

Police had compared the photographed impressions from the lake with shoe designs and believed they resembled the soles of Nike Air Max 2 shoes. Nike supplied imprints and overlays for comparison. Setzer remembered buying the shoes, but she could not positively identify the exact model years afterward. That limited what her testimony established. It supported ownership of similar shoes shortly before the murder, not recovery of the actual pair that had made the tracks. 8

The calendar helped her give a date that her independent memory could not reliably supply. Its use also created an evidentiary dispute. A witness can sometimes read from a record made when a memory was fresh, even though the document itself does not automatically become an exhibit for the party calling that witness. The court found the reading permissible and the admission of the actual calendar page improper but cumulative. The error did not change the outcome. 8

That distinction is easily lost in a compressed account of the case. The shoe evidence was admitted. It was relevant. It was not an individual identification of Sanchez's foot at the lake. The prosecution asked the jury to consider it with the DNA and the phone records; the defense argued that the association between a common shoe design and Sanchez was too weak. The appellate court held that the jury could decide its weight. 8

Setzer also told investigators about gunshots inside the Drake Drive home during the years she lived there. She said only Sanchez and his stepfather were in the room when shots were fired. Later she saw holes in a wall. In 2004, police obtained a warrant and opened the wall to look for projectiles. They found damage in a stud and a piece of foam consistent with a bullet strike, but no bullet. 10

The owner vacuumed the area after police left. When he later searched the vacuum bag, he found an object identified as a .22 Long Rifle projectile. The recovered bullet and the one taken from Juli's body had the same general barrel markings: sixteen lands and grooves with a right-hand twist. Examiners could not positively determine that both had been fired by the same gun. 10

The bullet was therefore corroborating evidence with an explicit boundary. It supported the possibility of access to a weapon of the relevant type. It did not conclusively identify the murder weapon. Another witness recalled Sanchez having a small pistol, but his recollections about its caliber varied between .22 and .25. The prosecution used his earlier statement to challenge his account at trial. No responsible description of the case should smooth that uncertainty into a recovered gun with a laboratory match. 10

The phone record was another piece of the circumstantial case. The state argued that a call from Juli's missing phone to a number associated with Sanchez's former girlfriend connected him to property taken during the crime. The call occurred well after Juli was dead. In the prosecution's reconstruction, the phone had traveled with the man who returned her car to Norman. 6, 9

By the time the case reached a jury, the state was presenting a combination of different kinds of proof. The strongest biological results were highly specific. The shoe comparison, bullet markings, proximity and witness descriptions were less so. The telephone records had meaning because investigators could connect numbers to people. Each item had a separate history and a separate limit. Their combined force

was the prosecution's case.

The trial and the restraints

The jury found Sanchez guilty of first-degree murder, first-degree rape and forcible sodomy. After the sentencing phase, it selected death for the murder, forty years for rape and twenty years for sodomy, with fines on the two sexual offenses. Judge William Hetherington pronounced judgment on June 6, 2006. 12

The defense had called no witnesses in the first stage, and Sanchez had not testified. His decision did not relieve the state of its burden. Through cross-examination and argument, his lawyers challenged identification and the reconstruction of the crime. They pointed to the lack of fingerprints matching him inside the car, Keller's estimate of an older driver and the narrow interval between the two sightings near the lake. They proposed that the evidence left room for another person to have committed the murder. 9

On direct appeal, the judges rejected the argument that the evidence was insufficient. They considered the garment profiles, the discarded leotard at the scene, the cellphone call and the shoes together. The inconclusive result from the pajama bottoms remained inconclusive. The court nevertheless held that a jury could infer, in light of the other evidence, that the biological material there came from Sanchez. That was a judicial assessment of an inference, not a new laboratory result. 9

The appeal also exposed a problem unrelated to what happened at the lake. Before trial, the judge had required Sanchez to choose between physical restraints and an electrical shock sleeve. Sanchez objected. He feared that an accidental shock would interfere with his ability to concentrate, and he declined the sleeve. He wore leg irons instead. 13

At the time of the original order, the record did not show that he had disrupted court or threatened to do so. The restraint decision had rested on a security request. The appellate court criticized that reasoning. Responsibility for the courtroom belonged to the judge, and a general

concern from custodians did not supply the particular justification the law required. 13

After oral argument, the appellate court sent the case back for a hearing to establish what the jury had actually seen. Matching black curtains had surrounded the prosecution and defense tables. Officers moved Sanchez in and out of the courtroom when jurors were absent. Jurors testified that they had not known he was restrained. Most had noticed the curtains without attaching significance to them. 13

The court found that the shackling order violated Oklahoma law. It also found no demonstrated substantial effect on the outcome. The conviction remained in place. For future trials, the court required a factual record explaining why restraints were needed, an opportunity for the defendant to object, and a specific finding supporting their use. 13

The ruling did not declare the trial free of error. It identified an error and explained why that error did not require a new trial. That is the difference between what the opinion actually decided and the simpler claim that every defense objection had been rejected. Sanchez's convictions and sentences survived, but the judges placed a clear limit on the procedure used in his courtroom.

The last application

Sanchez continued to deny responsibility. Years after the state appeal, and with his execution approaching in 2023, his lawyers presented a claim involving his deceased father. A former girlfriend of the father said that he had claimed responsibility for raping and killing Juli while threatening her. She said fear had kept her from coming forward sooner. The allegation became the basis of a request to reopen the case. 14

It was a reported confession, relayed by another person after the supposed speaker's death. It was not a confession made in court, a verdict against the father or a scientific identification. The state court rejected the application. In September, Sanchez sought permission from the Tenth Circuit to bring another federal habeas petition. That court

also considered the allegation and the earlier evidence. 14

The judges explained that a successive petition faced legal requirements beyond the presentation of a new statement. They also addressed the factual weakness they saw in the claim. The trial evidence had distinguished a father's DNA from a son's: relatives share genetic characteristics, but the two would not have an identical profile at all the tested locations. Sanchez's profile had matched material from both garments. 14

A footnote in the September 19 order described an OSBI report dated February 22, 2023. According to the court, comparison with the father's sample did not match him to the crime-scene DNA. It instead supported the conclusion that he was the father of the person who had contributed the sperm profile from the leotard. The Tenth Circuit held that the new allegation did not overcome the existing evidence or satisfy the requirements for another petition. 14

A second dispute concerned access to the case files. Sanchez's previous lawyers had withdrawn. New counsel, Eric Allen, entered the case in August. In September, the district court directed that the files be turned over to him. He sought a delay of execution to review them. The court declined, and the Tenth Circuit upheld the refusal. It found no sufficient showing that another review of the files would produce a successful claim. 15

The distinction between the two requests matters. One relied on a particular allegation about another perpetrator. The other asked for time to examine existing records. The courts addressed both; neither produced a stay. The defense's continued denial remained part of the history, but no court set aside the convictions. 14, 15

Oklahoma executed Anthony Castillo Sanchez on September 21, 2023. The attorney general issued a statement confirming the execution. Nearly twenty-seven years had passed since Juli's parents drove to Norman to help her move. 16

Juli's university also remembered her through a dance scholarship bearing her name. That memorial belongs to the part of her story that began before the police reports: years of study, performance and plans for the education still ahead of her. 17

The case record preserves her last night in small, ordinary particulars. Christmas gifts. Food with a friend before dawn. A ride to the airport. Most of her belongings already packed. Those details establish a timeline, but they also establish the life the crime interrupted. Juli had finished what she came to Norman to do. She was supposed to be going home.

Sources from the edition

Chapter 1: The Morning Juli Was Going Home

1. Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, *Sanchez v. State*, 2009 OK CR 31, 223 P.3d 980, paragraphs 2-3.

<https://okcca.net/cases/2009/OK-CR-31/>

[Return 1](#) · [Return 2](#) · [Return 3](#)

2. *Sanchez*, paragraphs 3-4. Witness descriptions are attributed and no dialogue is reconstructed.

[Return 1](#) · [Return 2](#)

3. *Sanchez*, paragraphs 5-6. The opinion's speculation about Lankford's thoughts is not adopted.

[Return 1](#) · [Return 2](#) · [Return 3](#)

4. *Sanchez*, paragraphs 7-9. Graphic detail omitted. Biological evidence and physical tracks described only to explain identification and investigation.

[Return 1](#) · [Return 2](#) · [Return 3](#) · [Return 4](#)

5. *Sanchez*, paragraphs 10-11 and 61. Times and estimated ages are witness estimates.

[Return 1](#) · [Return 2](#) · [Return 3](#) · [Return 4](#)

6. *Sanchez*, paragraph 12; phone evidence also discussed at paragraphs 62-63.

[Return 1](#) · [Return 2](#) · [Return 3](#)

7. *Sanchez*, paragraphs 13-15. Database identification, confirmatory sample and results distinguished. Random-match statistics are not used as a probability of guilt.

Return 1 · Return 2 · Return 3 · Return 4 · Return 5

8. Sanchez, paragraphs 54-60. Shoe similarity, calendar evidence and limitations.

Return 1 · Return 2 · Return 3 · Return 4 · Return 5

9. Sanchez, paragraphs 17 and 61-66. Defense sufficiency arguments, state reconstruction and appellate assessment. Inferences are distinguished from laboratory findings.

Return 1 · Return 2 · Return 3 · Return 4 · Return 5 · Return 6

10. Sanchez, paragraph 16. The opinion explicitly states that attempts to identify a common weapon were inconclusive.

Return 1 · Return 2 · Return 3 · Return 4

11. Sanchez, paragraphs 47-53. Collection of the prison sample and suppression ruling.

Return 1

12. Sanchez, paragraph 1. June 6, 2006 judgment and sentences.

Return 1

13. Sanchez, paragraphs 18-36. Restraints, remand hearing and harmless-error holding.

Return 1 · Return 2 · Return 3 · Return 4

14. U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, September 19, 2023 order in Nos. 23-6132 and 23-6137, printed pages 10-14, including footnotes 2-3, reproduced in Supreme Court docket 23-5617 appendix.
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Return 1 · Return 2 · Return 3 · Return 4 · Return 5

15. Same order, printed pages 8-9 and 15-17, file-access and stay requests. The order's stated disposition and reasons, rather than counsel's allegations, are the basis of this account.

Return 1 · Return 2

16. Oklahoma Attorney General, "Attorney General Drummond comments on Sanchez execution," September 21, 2023. <https://oklahoma.gov/oag/news/newsroom/2023/september/attorney-general-drummond-comments-on-sanchez-execution.html>

Return 1

17. Sean Murphy, Associated Press, "Man executed for the 1996 killing of a University of Oklahoma dance student," September 21, 2023. The chapter uses this reporting only for the memorial scholarship, fewer than 40 source-derived words.

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Return 1

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