

# Three Pierce County killers get reprieves

By ALEXIS KRELL

Staff writer, The News Tribune  
February 11, 2014 Updated 12 hours ago

Three of Pierce County's convicted killers are on death row and no longer face execution during the term of Gov. Jay Inslee.

## ALLEN EUGENE GREGORY



Gregory, 41, tied up, raped and slashed 43-year-old Geneine Harshfield before fatally stabbing her in the kitchen of her Tacoma home in 1996.

He was sentenced to death by two juries; the Washington State Supreme Court overturned the first conviction, citing judicial and prosecutorial error.

Prosecutors tried again for the death penalty, to which he was sentenced in 2012. That was appealed to the state Supreme Court, where it is pending.

Harshfield's mother, 78-year-old Lee Peden, said she first heard about the governor's decision to suspend capital punishment in the state from a reporter Tuesday morning.

"I'm not happy about it," she said. "My understanding was that he had talked to the families and decided it was fine with them to do that. I have not talked to the governor."

Had she been approached, she said, she would have told him: "He doesn't have the right to do this. This was voted in by the people of Washington state, and if it's going to be undone, it should be undone by the voters."

*Geneine Harshfield*



## **ROBERT YATES**



Yates, 61, admitted to killing 15 people over multiple decades in Washington.

Pierce County prosecutors obtained the death penalty against him in 2002, for the deaths of 24-year-old C in 1997 and 35-year-old Connie LaFontaine Ellis in 1998.

Yates shot the women in the head and was believed to have robbed them after he killed them.

He dumped their bodies in Tacoma, where they were found with plastic bags tied over their heads.

The state Supreme Court and U.S. Supreme Court refused to reconsider the death penalty decision.

*Melinda Mercer (left) and Connie LaFontaine Ellis*



Last year, he started an appeal of the sentence in federal district court.

For the other 13 killings he was convicted of, he was sentenced to 408 years.

Many of Yates' victims had ties to prostitution and drug use. Mercer had been working as a prostitute for 10 days when she got into Yates' van in Seattle.

Ellis had a long history of prostitution and drug abuse, spurred by the death of a child.

### **CECIL DAVIS**



Davis, 54, killed 65-year-old Yoshiko Couch in 1997 in Tacoma, as her invalid husband was home but couldn't help her.

Davis' first death sentence was overturned on appeal, and the second was upheld by the state Supreme Court last year.

Evidence at his trials showed he raped Couch with some sort of object and smothered her with towels soaked in toxic solvent. He took the wedding ring from her finger, beer and meat from her kitchen and cash from her purse.

His execution date was set for Dec. 17, 2013, but he is appealing his case before the state Supreme Court.

In a separate case he was convicted of murdering Jane Hungerford-Trapp. He's serving a life sentence for that conviction.

*Yoshiko Couch*



Alexis Krell: 253-597-8268

[alexis.krell@thenewstribune.com](mailto:alexis.krell@thenewstribune.com)

[www.thenewstribune.com/crime-news](http://www.thenewstribune.com/crime-news)

Read more here: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/2014/02/11/3041696/pierce-countys-killers-on-death.html#storylink=cpy>