Why True Crime?
Why True Crime?
Why True Crime?
Enter.... The Pandemic

March, 2020: All libraries closed.

Libraries remain closed until October.

Reopened to limited services.
Enter.... The Pandemic

No outreach until June 2021.

Limited in-person programming July 2021.

How do we get teens back?
The Ground Rules

• Do NOT glorify or focus on the criminal.

• No S.A. or death of children.

• Nothing too gory or controversial.

• If possible, tie it to STEAM.
Finding the Right Case

“If possible, tie it to STEAM.”

Solution: pick an old case, and make the program about how forensics and law enforcement tech has changed.
Finding the Right Case

Rhonda Fortney

Murdered 1969, age 20.

Coldest case in Yuma County… possibly coldest case in Arizona.

Photo: Yuma Police Department
Finding the Right Case

Why this case?
• “Simple” shooting – no gore, S.A., torture etc.
• Rhonda was young enough teens would relate to her.
• Long ago enough that technology has changed DRASTICALLY.
• Interesting due to the unsolved nature and the fact that some people still living in our community were alive when it happened.

Photo: Yuma Police Department
Community Buy-In
Yuma, Kofa and Cibola offer:
   Forensic Science
   “You and the Law”
   Law and Public Safety

Would the teachers offer extra credit if the students attended my program?
Community Buy-In

Kofa and Cibola say yes.

Yuma High teachers offer an alternative – would I present to their class?
What We Discussed:

• 911 and difficulties in calling police.

• Security cameras and lack thereof.

• Mishandling of evidence by police and bystanders.

• Problems with eyewitness testimony
What We Discussed:

- Computers (lack of), databases and searching.
- Difficult fingerprint comparisons.
- DNA, contamination and blood evidence.
- Racism and race in the context of the time and the criminal system.
Program Outcomes:

• 32 teens showed up to the first presentation.
• They were one of my most engaged audiences ever.
• Invitations to do the program at schools.
• ACTUAL PHONE CALLS FROM TEENS! WHAT??????
• The birth of a program series.
True Crime for Teens as a Program Series

• Every other month, total of 6 so far.

• Rhonda Fortney, Yuma’s Coldest Case.
• Maura Murray: “The First True Crime of the Social Media Age.”
• Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: World’s Biggest Art Heist.
• D.B Cooper: Skyjacker
• What Happened to Bryce Laspisa?
• The Sodder Children: Accident or Arson?
Tips, Tricks and What’s Next?

- Start local (see info sheet on cold case resources)
- Narrow your focus.
- Avoid the obvious stuff they can learn about anywhere. Teens love to be “in the know” about obscure stuff.
Tips, Tricks and What’s Next?

• Older is usually better….
• Unless it involves someone close to their age.
• Unsolved = GOLD!
For Further Exploration

• Forensics STEAM Kits ($200 - $1,000 depending on topic).

• Solve-a-Crime boxes, such as Deadbolt Mystery Society