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Naples Daily News

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Flowers rest on top of Anthia Jill Piper’s gravestone at the Naples Memorial Gardens in Naples on Aug. 27. Piper, who was 16, was shot to death by her ex-boyfriend, Harold Gene Lucas, on the morning of Aug. 14, 1976. Lucas, now 77, is scheduled to be executed today, Sept. 1.

JONAH HINEBAUGH/FORT MYERS NEWS-PRESS & NAPLES DAILY NEWS/USA TODAY NETWORK-FLORIDA

Lucas execution: Final chapter of tragic story

Murder ended era for Bonita Springs

Charlie Whitehead and Amy Bennett Williams
Fort Myers News-Press & Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

It has been almost half a century since 24-year-old Harold Gene Lucas murdered 16-year-old Jill Piper. Both lived in Bonita Springs, a community that will see the final chapter in a long saga when Lucas is executed today, Sept. 1.

In the summer of 1976, Anthia Jill Piper, known as Jill, was a 16-year-old growing up in a Bonita Springs so small that nearly everyone knew everyone else, and certainly knew the Pipers.

The pioneering Piper family was a strong, vivid thread in the fabric of the community. Jill’s grandfather Lester and great-uncle Bill Piper were Gladesmen who founded the Everglades Reptile Gardens, later renamed Everglades Wonder Gardens, on the banks of the Imperial River in 1936.

The brothers stocked their iconic roadside attraction with Florida pan-

thers, bears and alligators, becoming celebrities in their own right and befriending Marlin Perkins of Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom fame.

Area kids would catch the brothers snakes and turtles, hoping to see them exhibited, and the Pipers were also known to buy fish to feed the animals on display. Lifelong Bonita resident Alan Glazier thinks it was less that they needed the supply and more a chance to give their neighbors a hand.

“They were quite benevolent, you know – they helped people out and probably didn’t really need it as much, but it was a chance to help,” he said.

The Pipers’ black bear Tom starred in the movie “The Yearling” in 1946. Crowds gawked at Big Joe, the 1,200-pound North American crocodile famed as the largest in captivity. Les Piper was ahead of his time, breeding Florida panthers and releasing them back into the wild.

Jill was his granddaughter. Court records, old coverage and TV interviews archived online paint a portrait of an animal-loving girl her big brother used three words to describe: loving, sweet, fun. By 1976, Jill had left high school and was seeing Harold Gene Lucas, eight years her senior. The two had



Piper

dated on and off for several years.

By August of that year, she was pulling away from Lucas.

Testimony in court transcripts shows a teenager who stood up for herself. Jill had started seeing someone else. After Lucas threatened her, she called the police and told a friend that if he came “around her house messing with her,” she would “blow his s*** away.”

But on Aug. 14, 1976, Lucas shot and killed her.

Tomato fields, the dog track: Bonita Springs’ long-gone small town vibe

Almost 50 years later, as Florida prepares to execute Lucas on Sept. 1, the murder remains a dividing line in the memories of people who knew Bonita Springs back then, when it was a tiny, isolated community just beginning a transformation that would eventually render it almost unrecognizable.

Before, “we were kind of on our own,”

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‘Perfect storm’ looms for disaster aid in FL

Amendment 3, FEMA cuts stirring concerns

Curt Anderson
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Florida’s proposed property tax reductions coupled with potential cuts in federal disaster aid could be a financial “perfect storm” that would threaten hurricane recovery, according to a new analysis.

The property tax measure, constitutional Amendment 3, is on the ballot in November. It would slice about \$12 billion from local governments across the state when fully implemented, according to a state revenue estimate, and must be approved by 60% of voters.

Meanwhile, a Federal Emergency Management Agency Review Council established under orders from President Donald Trump recommended in May reducing the amount of

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Painful dengue virus lurks in SWFL

Chad Gillis
Fort Myers News-Press & Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

In some places, it’s known as the “break-bone” virus due to the extreme pain it can cause.

Dengue is on a lot of minds in Florida, and Southwest Florida is smack in the middle of the state’s two highest concentration of infected residents — Tampa and Miami.

“Dengue fever is called break-bone fever because of how painful it can be,” said Keira Lucas deputy executive director of the Collier Mosquito Control District. “And if you get it a second

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