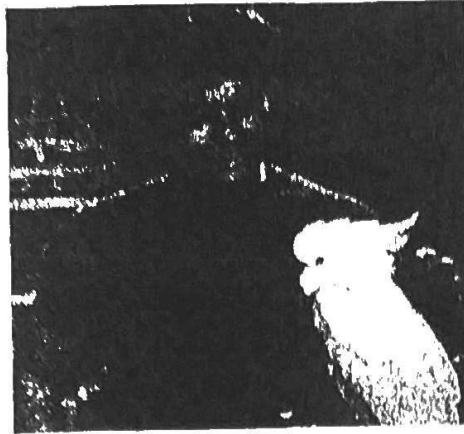


## The Mysterious Murder of a Hollywood Star's Wife

TV Star Robert Blake



Robert Blake is an American actor who was famous for his starring role in the popular 1970's TV series *Baretta*.

### The Murder

In 1999, Robert Blake had an intimate relationship with Bonnie Lee Bakley, who was a woman who allegedly had a history of exploiting wealthy older men for money. When Bakley became pregnant and informed Blake that he was the father, she was ordered to take a DNA test to prove the paternity. After DNA tests proved that he was the biological father, Blake married Bakley in November of 2000. It was Blake's second marriage and Bonnie Lee Bakley's tenth.

Five months later, on May 4, 2001, Blake took Bakley to a restaurant for dinner. Afterwards, Bakley was murdered by a gunshot to the head while sitting in Blake's car, which was parked on a side street around the corner from the restaurant. Bakley was shot once in the right cheek and once in the shoulder. Blake told the police that he had walked his wife to his car, then returned to the restaurant because he had left behind his revolver (which he carried for protection) under a booth. When Blake returned to the car he said he saw no one and found Bakley dead.

### The Investigation

There were no witnesses to the shooting. No one at the restaurant remembered seeing Robert Blake return to get his gun. Detectives swabbed Blake for gunshot residue about two and a half hours after the murder. Five particles of gunshot residue were found on his hands, while more residue was found on his black T-shirt, blue jeans, leather belt and leather boots.

The murder weapon was found the next morning in a garbage dumpster about 6 metres from Blake's car. It was an antique 9 mm Walther P-38 double-action, semiautomatic pistol that was standard issue for the German Army in WWII. The gun had no registered owner and there were no fingerprints found upon it.

Months into the investigation, police tracked down two retired stuntmen, both of whom claimed that Blake had tried to hire them to kill his wife. The police investigation occurred over the period of a year before Blake was arrested and charged with the murder of his wife. His longtime bodyguard, Earle Caldwell, was also arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder.

#### The Criminal Trial

After almost a year in jail, Robert Blake was granted \$1.5 million bail and allowed to go free while awaiting trial.

One key piece of physical evidence at the trial was the gunshot residue found on Blake. Defense lawyers argued that the gunshot residue found on Blake could have come from the gun he picked up from the restaurant. Blake's lawyers also pointed out the possibility that gunshot residue can be transferred onto a person after touching a surface containing gunpowder. Ultimately, the jurors agreed that the presence of gunshot residue on Blake didn't necessarily put the murder weapon in his hands.

On March 16, 2005, Blake was found not guilty of the murder of Bonnie Lee Bakley and not guilty of soliciting a former stuntman to murder her.

#### After the Trial

In late 2005, Bonnie Lee Bakley's four children filed a civil suit against Robert Blake, alleging that he was responsible for their mother's death. A jury found Blake liable for the wrongful death of his wife and ordered him to pay \$30 million. This led Blake to file for bankruptcy in early 2006 and he began working as a ranch-hand. Blake's eldest daughter adopted his young daughter, Rosie.

### Analysis Questions (please answer on separate sheet)

1. Was gunshot residue found anywhere else other than on Blake's hands?
2. What theory did Blake's attorneys propose to explain how gunshot residue ended up on Blake's hand?
3. "The validity of gunshot residue test results as seen by a jury depends a lot upon how convincing the other evidence is in the case." Explain how this quote applies in the Robert Blake case.
4. Why did Robert Blake file for bankruptcy in 2006?