



D54 Justice Delayed But Not Denied - The Evidence Solved the Case

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Attendees will gain a greater understanding of the importance of the proper preservation and secure custody of items that may someday be evidence in violent crime investigations, even many years later.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing a greater understanding of the value of teamwork between the many disciplines that work together to solve cases and prosecute the guilty, as well as offer hope to those who seek justice.

Like many young people in New Zealand, Sandra wanted to travel abroad before she settled down in her career as a nurse. She started out on her solo trip in the state of Virginia then hitchhiked to Panama City, Florida. Her next destination was to be a youth hostel in New Orleans where she would renew her visa then travel to Colorado. She rose early on November 10, 1981, packed her belongings and walked to the highway to hitch a ride. She was picked up quickly by a black male in his 30s. Sandra was not familiar with the dangers of hitchhiking and did not realize they were headed in the wrong direction. The man turned off of the interstate in a rural area in Leon County and told her he wanted to drop off a package at a friend's house. Sandra asked him to stop the car so she could stay near the highway to get another ride. He kept driving and assured her it would be a quick stop. He turned down the first road he came to and appeared to be looking for an address. When he got to the end of the road, he turned around and drove his car deep into a wooded area. It quickly became clear that the subject intended to rape her. She tried to resist and escape but she was struck repeatedly. After the sexual assault, the subject tried to strangle her with the straps of her overalls. The last thing she remembered was kicking the windshield with her foot and seeing it crack. When she woke up, she was alone and bleeding. A broken tree limb and a cement slab that was covered with her blood were lying next to her head. She held her hands over her bleeding face and managed to make it more than 600 feet back to the road. A passing car slowed down and the driver said he would go and call the sheriff. The deputies and paramedics arrived quickly and the victim was transported to the hospital. The author was summoned as the lead detective was told the victim was probably not going to make it. Hinman was directed to go to the hospital and get as much information as possible before she died. An experienced detective is used to seeing horrible injuries but this case was different, the victim was alive. Her face appeared to be broken in half and most of her teeth were smashed off at the gums, but she was awake and she was talking.

In the days that followed the attack, the author returned to the hospital to question Sandra on a daily basis, but there was little more she could tell. When Sandra left for New Zealand all the only evidence was a composite of the offender, a positive identification from an automobile book that the car was an Oldsmobile, Tornado and several bags containing evidence of the crime.

Eventually, all leads went cold. As the years passed, the author thought often of the New Zealand girl. As the author's advanced career, Hinman wondered whether scientific advancements and/or additional subsequent training and experience could be used to solve her case. It was believed that the offender would most likely commit other violent crimes.

Fortunately, the original crime scene investigation had been thorough and the evidence documented and preserved. Knowing the recent enhancements in DNA technology and Databases, the crime scene evidence was transferred to the FDLE crime lab for reexamination, in October 1999, 17 years after the crime had been committed and before DNA analysis was available to Law Enforcement. It was not surprising when Mr. Dave Coffman, the DNA Database supervisor for FDLE notified the author that a CODIS hit had identified Willie Oliver as a DNA match to the evidence that was submitted for the New Zealand girl. Further investigation tied Oliver to the crime, supporting the DNA identification.

Through the professionalism, hard work, and dedication of everyone involved in every stage of this investigation, Willie Oliver was finally successfully prosecuted and convicted by a jury of his peers in Tallahassee in July 2004.

Violent Crime, Profiling, DNA Database