



F37 Traffic Stop Leads to the Discovery of Three Bodies

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This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating the principles listed above.

On June 17, 1991, a 9-year-old child was kidnapped from her home in Chula Vista, a city just south of San Diego. Her name was Laura Arroyo. She died as a result of "multiple chop wounds of the head, multiple stab wounds of the chest and abdomen, and asphyxiation." She had answered a doorbell at her residence while her parents were upstairs. When she did not return, her parents found the front door open and there was no trace of Laura at 9:00 p.m. Early the very next morning, two women arriving at work at a Chula Vista business complex found her body fully clothed, face-up on the sidewalk. Underneath her body, investigators found triangular depressions in the cement sidewalk. These depressions were directly under her left chest, which displayed eight through-and-through injuries. In one of the injuries, medical examiners found the front of her pajamas deep into the wound, indicating that whatever implement caused the injuries was not particularly sharp because the material was not pierced. Over the frontal bone fractures were various lacerations, approximately two inches in width.

The murder weapon was never recovered in the searches at the crime scene or at the residence of an early suspect. Blood splatter on ceiling supports close to the victim indicated that the homicide had occurred where the victim was found. Shortly after, at the autopsy, swabbings taken from the child's body and clothing were transferred to microscope slides. Apparently, there was not a complete transference of the material and no DNA indicators were recovered. The case eventually became a cold case until 2003, when a San Diego Police Department criminalist, employing a new sophisticated DNA technology, re-examined the evidence and clothing. This new evidence was compared to hair DNA taken from Manuel Bracamontes, the early suspect in 1991. The comparison revealed that the suspect's DNA matched the biological material originally taken from the young victim.

A retired detective, Bob Conrad, was assigned to the case as the lead detective. The San Diego District Attorney's Office requested that the author assist the Chula Vista Police Department in the ensuing investigation. The author was shown photographs of the autopsy, which revealed through and through penetration of the mandible and a scapula. The actual mandible and scapula were also examined. The suspect, a municipal bus driver was arrested and charged with special circumstances in connection with the homicide. The death penalty was sought by the San Diego District Attorney's Office.

The author visited the crime scene with criminalists and investigators to collect evidence of the indentations in the sidewalk. Debris was removed from the depressions and impressions of these areas were completed employing Exafast NDS impression material. These "plugs" were removed upon setting and were observed to be of a triangular pattern. Detective Conrad had suggested that the murder weapon might have been a small pickaxe known as a pick-mattock. Court exhibits were constructed displaying the relationship of the weapon to the injuries discovered in the scapula and mandible. The author testified as to the relationship of the weapon and the scapula and mandible injuries, fractures seen on the mandibular and maxillary incisors as well as the sidewalk indentations. This presentation will present a step-by-step demonstration of the principles in this case.

After attending this presentation, attendees will know how forensic dentists may often assist investigators in complex cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating how forensic dentists may assist in cases other than identifications, bite marks, and age determination.

While in a pursuit of a Hummer, on September 15, 2003, San Diego County Deputy Sheriffs made a chilling discovery when the vehicle finally stopped. It had almost overturned in a canyon in Ramona, California, a mountainous area just northeast of the city of San Diego. The deputies were chasing this particular vehicle because reportedly it had been involved in a hit and run accident earlier that morning. As the officers approached the tilting Hummer, they observed a male exit from the driver's seat at 0517 hours. Mark Jensen, who was operating the vehicle, crawled out of the driver's side window and tried to flee the area. Deputies kept their distance because the suspect was armed with a weapon. He fell down a small embankment and took refuge. Deputies kept yelling at him to drop his weapon, but he refused. He told deputies that he had two people in the Hummer and they should "check on them." He also stated that he wanted to commit suicide and "wanted to see his last sunrise." A SWAT team was dispatched to the scene due to the standoff. After a lengthy interval, this suspect shot himself in the head at 0700 hours. SWAT members secured the weapon. When they broke out the right rear window of the vehicle, they found two bodies inside. Also inside, but very much alive, was the girlfriend of the individual who shot himself just minutes previously.



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Apparently, the four individuals had been at a party at the home of the individual who owned the new Hummer when the female survivor became exceedingly intoxicated and asked to be driven home. All four were in the vehicle when the male who committed suicide shot the car owner and his girlfriend. As the resulting investigation unfolded, detectives discovered that the individual who shot the victims was a parolee and had been released from prison one week before the murder-suicide. The victims were believed to be the third or fourth persons killed by this same individual during his lifetime. The female survivor told investigators that she really did not know what had occurred because she had "faded in and out of consciousness during the ordeal." At the postmortem examination, it was obvious that the female victim had suffered a penetrating gunshot wound of the left side of the face.

At autopsy, a linear defect in the right side of the face of the female victim was noted and an ovoid defect in the left side of the face. The lead detective contacted the author in an effort to determine the cause of the cheek indentation listed above. The survivor female was known to carry a straight razor. A blood stained straight razor was found in the Hummer. A straight razor consists of a blade, which retracts into the handle. At the end of the blade there is a rounded portion called the "tang." The tang is restrained by the fingers during a shaving procedure so that the blade does not fold into the handle. On 11-19-03 at 08:05 hours, the author examined images of the right cheek indentations found below the zygomatic arch and posterior to the corner of her lip. This horizontal lesion was caused by a small rigid object and appeared to have been delivered in an anterior to posterior direction.

It was the author's opinion that this right face wound was consistent with the feature of the tang described above. Although the horizontal margins of the wound appear to be 3mm apart, whereas the tang's width was slightly more than 2mm, this slight discrepancy was explained by the fact that tissue tends to separate when the epithelium and connective tissue are penetrated. Therefore, it is certainly possible that the tang portion of the razor in this case caused the described injury.

Subsequently, the female suspect plead guilty and received a sentence of 12 years in prison.

Straight Razor, Tang, Homicide-Suicide