



Physical Anthropology Section – 2009

H7 Living With Corpses: Case Report of Psychological Impairment and Neglect, Leading to the Death of Two Women

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After attending this presentation, attendees will possess a better understanding on the importance of scene and behavioral evidence in the examination of mummified remains in which there is no clear anatomical evidence relating to cause and manner of death.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by educating attendees on the examination of mummified remains and various testing methods which may be utilized to possibly determine cause and manner of death. Furthermore, the presentation will focus on the psychological aspects of individuals who co-habitat with remains of the deceased, and the use of entomological and other evidence to determine the length of co-habitation with the dead.

In June of 2004 the mummified and partially skeletonized remains of a 56-year-old Japanese mother and her 33-year-old daughter were discovered in a mobile home in south eastern Idaho. The partially preserved remains were located lying next to each other in a bed with blankets and sheets positioned neatly up to the level of their chest. Appearance of the women which included their position next to each other, clothing, and intact styled hair with hair bands gave the impression that both died naturally in their sleep.

The decompositional stench of the bodies was so strong within the mobile home that investigators had to wear masks including oxygen packs. Upon continued examination of the scene, investigators noted that another individual had continued to live at the residence, that being the husband/father of the deceased. Several dozen solid, air deodorant devices were found throughout the mobile home. The deodorizing devices were noted on multiple tables and shelves in every room, in hallways, and within all of the air vents located in the floor of the mobile home. In addition to the solid air deodorizers, multiple cans of various aerosol based deodorizers were found scattered around the residence.

The husband/father of the deceased was later picked up by police as a possible suspect in the deaths. Interviews of the suspect revealed that he was a senior engineer at local nuclear plant, who also possessed a high level security clearance in relation to his employment. Interviews with his employer also revealed the subject to have received graduate degrees in engineering and science from Cornell University.

Forensic examination of the mother found her to be in a completely mummified state. No evidence of abrasions, bruising, skin discoloration or other injury was discovered upon external examination of the remains. Internal examination of the body revealed the presence of decomposed remnants of the lungs, kidney and liver. Examination of the inner skull revealed no evidence of tears or hemorrhage to the dried remains of the dura. A small amount of highly decomposed brain and no fractures were present on the inner as well as the outer table of the skull. Dissection and inspection of the mummified tissues of the neck revealed no evidence of hemorrhage or significant discoloration. Similar findings were noted upon examination of the trachea, and the hyoid and ossified cartilages of the neck were undamaged. No injuries were found on any of the postcranial elements. Toxicology findings on the recovered organs were negative.

Forensic examination of the daughter found her to be in an advanced state of skeletonization with partial mummification. Significant mummified epidermal tissue covered the anterior plane of the body with skeletonization primarily observed on the posterior plane. The only evidence of damage to the mummified epidermal tissues was in the area of the right shoulder and left abdominal area, which was identified as the result of carrion insect activity. The internal chest wall, including the ribs and costal cartilages, could be viewed from the back of the deceased due to the lack of soft tissues. No tears or separation of the ribs and costal cartilages were noted and there was no evidence of discoloration of the internal chest wall suggestive of hemorrhage. No discernable tears, abrasions, or discolorations were present on the mummified epidermal tissues of head. The skull was absent of fractures or other injuries and the same was true for the postcranial skeleton. Based on the mummified state of the deceased and the absence of blow fly activity, death was estimated to have occurred either in the winter of 2004 or 2003.

Continued investigation by police revealed the daughter would lock herself in her room when her father was in the house and that the father last reported seeing the daughter alive in April of 2001. Diary entries in April of 2001 by the wife make reference to the daughter needing to eat. A later entry by the wife notes the screaming sound of killdeer (a common bird species) and the awful smell of something dead in the house. Later the father admitted that in June of 2001, as the result of a bad smell, he broke into his daughter's room and found her dead and decomposing on the bed. Later in February of 2003, the husband found his wife dead, placed her next to his daughter, and pulled the blanket and covers up neatly. The suspect never informed anyone of the deaths, and continued to live at the house and to go to work daily.

Although homicide could not totally be ruled out in this case, the absence of external and skeletal trauma to the remains of the deceased and negative toxicological findings lead to the conclusion that death possibly resulted from either illness or starvation, or a combination of both. In either possible case, medical attention



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was not sought by the mother, daughter, or the husband/father. The psychological state of the mother and daughter may have well contributed to their demise; however, the burden of care fell to the responsibility of the husband/father. In conclusion, the husband later pleaded guilty to two counts of involuntary manslaughter.

Mummification, Psychological, Scene Investigation