



H38 Buried Secrets: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Solving a Half-Century-Old Homicide

Elizabeth M. Sepulveda, BA, Islip, NY 11751; Ruth E. Kohlmeier, MD, Suffolk County Office of the Medical Examiner, Hauppauge, NY 11788-0099*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how law enforcement and the different forensic specialties interact, the importance of teamwork in solving cold cases, and what an impact police investigations and forensic sciences can have on the surviving family members and loved ones of the deceased.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by revealing how a team of investigators and forensic scientists worked together to solve a half-century-old homicide.

In early October 1966, a Long Island woman disappeared, leaving behind her 11-year-old daughter. She was last seen getting into her boyfriend's vehicle and was never seen alive again. In an era of hushed mouths and limited investigative resources, the mystery and scandal surrounding this woman's departure remained unknown until March 2018. It was a reporter with the *Suffolk Times* who took an interest and began to dig deeper, which led to a guilt-ridden widow's confessions being told. Law enforcement agencies, including the New York State Police, the Southold Police Department, and the Suffolk County Police Department investigated further and eventually interviewed the boyfriend's ex-wife. She described to police how her husband had placed this woman in a burlap sack and then buried her in a grave he had dug in the basement of their home in eastern Long Island.

After three attempts at locating this missing woman, in March 2018, the remains were found in the basement of the boyfriend's house approximately six feet below the surface. In addition, two .38 caliber projectiles were also recovered from the grave. The forensic anthropologist stated there was near complete recovery of the skeleton and described the remains as being that of a Caucasian female, 22 to 50 years of age, and approximately 5 feet 6 inches in height. There was no trauma identified. Although there were no antemortem dental records available, the forensic dentist was able to conduct a survey and noted a moderate amount of restoration. The restoration material was then analyzed by a colleague, and it was noted that the material was in use in the 1960s. The morgue supervisor, along with a deputy medical examiner and firearms examiner with the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's office, examined the recovered clothing and noted defects on the front of various articles of clothing that were consistent with gunshot wounds. Finally, the woman was positively identified via DNA using exemplars from the decedent's daughter and brother.

This case exemplified extraordinary teamwork, which lead to the discovery, identification, and cause of death of a woman who had been missing since 1966. This case also demonstrates the impact law enforcement investigations and forensic science can have on the surviving family members and loved ones of the deceased.

Homicide, Cold Case, Forensic