



G7 “Oscar”: The Final Chapter

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand some principles of homicide investigations that are within the usual, and beyond the usual, time and technique expectations.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating action-orientated perseverance in cold case investigations. Specifically, as forensic science techniques advance in accuracy and application, the science can return to decades-old cases and bring new insight to light which, as in this case, identifies a 34-year-old unknown homicide victim, who is a 57-year-old missing person.

The identification of missing and unknown persons has been an effort since the beginning of time. It has been documented in forensic odontology from the Roman Agrippina and Lollia Paulina. The science made a quantum leap in the “Bazar de la Charite” fire disaster in Paris 1897. Dr. Oscar Amoedo coordinated colleagues in collecting and comparing antemortem/postmortem victims’ dental records for identification. In recent decades, the same is modeled in DNA comparisons.

The unknown homicide subject of this presentation was found in a galvanized trash can during the excavation of a mall site and hence nicknamed “Oscar” by scene investigators because at the time he had no name. The year was 1985 in Maryland, and evidence materials found with the remains have been analyzed repeatedly by all disciplines of forensic sciences over the decades as new techniques developed.

This case has been presented twice to the Academy in an effort to generate new leads. Serious as homicide is, this unknown was continually referenced in local media as “Oscar” and, therefore, was presented this way at the AAFS Bring Your Own Slides session in 2003. The hope was that there may be a pattern of other homicidal dispositions via galvanized trash cans. No positive outcome resulted.

With perseverance and advancing technologies, “Oscar’s” jurisdictional law enforcement agency engaged Parabon® Nanolabs to generate and publicize his phenotypic, biometric profile to facilitate new leads in a cold case. This included illustrations in *National Geographic* magazine. In 2017, these latest scientific advances on “Oscar” were again presented to the Academy for easier identification, and for encouraging young investigators to persevere by applying the newest technologies to their own cold cases.

In recent years, familial DNA research has been applied to the criminal world. In concert with law enforcement holding “Oscar’s” DNA, these newest technologies were applied. During the last week of June 2019, the Anne Arundel Police Department Maryland publicly announced their success in a press conference and revealed the identity of this long-term 1985 unknown person.

Frequently, the process of investigating missing and unidentified person homicides is to presume that the time of death is somewhat near the abduction or body recovery time, or within a year of the cycle of seasons and advancing decomposition. In this case, the 1985 autopsy report read, “. . . strands of skin were still present on the body . . .” and “Minimal remnants of soft tissue are noted in the trunk and they are not recognizable.” This suggested a reasonably recent death, and his postmortem age assessment was about 20 years.

However, he is now identified. He was a local resident, a 1961 graduate of the local high school, and according to the family, voluntarily left home in 1962. Applying postmortem time-of-death assessments to this new family history, the time of death is not early 1980s per the time of body recovery, but early 1960s. The investigation continues to determine a motive and perpetrator.

Cold Case, Identification, DNA