

New Hope in Hunt for Rapist

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By M.S. Enkoji

The rapist had invaded household after household with terrifying stealth, leaving behind dozens of devastated victims, frustrating Sacramento detectives for almost two years.

He held eastern Sacramento County hostage from 1976 to 1978: Women feared nightfall; men were edgy in their own homes.

As the East Area Rapist grew bolder and crueler, sheriff's investigator Carol Daly knew one thing for sure. "We really feel he was getting ready to kill," said Daly, who interviewed all 36 of his victims in Sacramento County.

Apparently that's exactly what he did.

Because of similarities in his attacks, authorities linked him to 45 rapes, first in Sacramento County, then in the Bay Area.

And now a criminalist in Contra Costa County, using long-shelved DNA evidence, has connected him to a series of Southern California murders -- the killings of four couples and two women in Orange, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties from 1979 to 1986.

Armed with a DNA profile, authorities in Southern California met recently with Sacramento and Contra Costa county law enforcement to renew their effort to find the rapist-turned-killer.

Even if they come up with a suspect, he will never go on trial for the Northern California rapes because the time limit for arresting him has long since expired. Murder has no time limit.

Though rape evidence was typically tossed after the time limit, criminalists in Contra Costa County held on to evidence, believing he would surface.

"It had always been set aside in a special place in our lab," said Paul Holes, supervising criminalist at the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Crime Laboratory.

Holes contacted Southern California authorities to follow up on earlier theories that the rapist had moved south. The string of murders and sexual assaults there seemed similar to the Northern California attacks. Early attempts several years ago to match DNA from both crime sets were inconclusive, but newer, better methods paid off recently with a match.

Now, additional evidence from Northern California, besides the DNA, could lead Southern California investigators to the killer, said Jim Amormino, an Orange County Sheriff's Department spokesman.

He declined to say what the evidence was. "We're just optimistic that it will lead to an identification of a suspect," he said.

A name and face would end a mystery that has haunted investigators involved in the most expensive manhunt in Sacramento County.

There was nothing like it before, and nothing since, former investigators said.

"If I had to hear one more woman tell me how this man treated her," said Daly, 61, who retired as the department's undersheriff.

After the rapist left town, Daly left sexual-assault investigations. "I can't do this anymore, I said. I hated what men could do. For a time, the only man I liked was my husband," Daly said.

She and other investigators have carried around details in a mental catalog, still waiting for that final purchase.

They remember roosting in trees, hiding in ditches, and at times, bending the Constitution attempting to find a cunning, evil, methodical rapist.

"It was a bad time to be a young man going to work at 4:30 in the morning," said Ray Root, 65, a retired Sacramento County Sheriff's lieutenant who headed a task force that racked up \$2.5 million, mostly in overtime.

Investigators have no clear picture of the armed man in a ski mask who snarled at victims through clenched teeth and blinded them with a flashlight. Their best description is a white, slender man, light-haired, probably in his late teens or early 20s.

With no positive description, the phone lines buzzed, said Richard Shelby, a retired detective who first linked the series of rapes. Tipsters implored deputies to check out neighbors, relatives and former boyfriends.

The rapist cased his victims with eerie diligence, which led some to believe he had military or law enforcement training.

Sometimes, he would first slip into their homes, swiping a photograph, or other small items that barely raised suspicion. He would gather details, like the floor plan, how the garage door operated, how an outside light timer worked or the names and schedules of occupants. At one home, he removed bullets from a gun tucked under a mattress, then put it back.

Then, he would come back during the night, armed with a gun or knife, carrying shoelaces to tie up his victims. He started with women living alone but soon moved to couples.

For up to three hours, he would administer terror. He kept the men from moving by putting dishes on them, threatening to kill if he heard anything break. He would attack the women, disappear quietly in the house -- eating pumpkin pie at one place -- then come back again. The victims never knew for sure when he was gone. Sometimes he dumped soda cans as he left the house.

In later rapes, he grew more violent, more forceful in his threats, Daly said.

"This man was really out to terrorize and control," she said.

In Southern California, he also invaded quiet neighborhoods. He chose women who were alone: an 18-year-old girl whose family was on vacation and another woman whose husband was in the hospital.

Or he chose couples. He would sometimes prowl beforehand, then slip in through unlocked windows or doors. He would bring his own cord to tie up victims. He would sexually assault the women before bludgeoning them to death.

In Sacramento County, the rapist seemed to taunt a swarm of investigators, who often thought they were closing in, only to be derailed. "He practically knew where we were going to work," said Ted Daly, Carol's husband, a retired deputy.

The rapist was bold. He would telephone victims after the attack and seemed to know which lines were tapped. At town-hall meetings set up by authorities, as many as 700 people would jam inside. At one, Carol Daly recalled, a couple got up to speak, raising doubts about the rapist's methods, questioning his existence.

"They were the very next victims," said Daly, who is sure he was there, watching.

Sacramento County sheriff's investigators got conventional help from the FBI and California Highway Patrol and less-conventional help from dozens of psychics, trackers who picked up trails in riverbeds, scientists from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, tree-top cameras from the state Department of Forestry used to catch arsonists and military movement detectors used in the Vietnam War.

"None of it worked," Root said.

Altogether, 5,000 suspects -- names on 3-by-5 cards -- were checked and eliminated. Among the groups closely looked at were delivery people, military, deputies and police officers.

Those who lived in targeted areas took up guns, barricaded windows and doors, hired private security, brought dogs inside and lived in fear. The rise in gun sales

coupled with hair-trigger tensions prompted deputies in unmarked cars to wear uniforms as they patrolled at night.

Coming home from her night shift, Lisa Ward remembers that as a 19-year-old, she would sit paralyzed by fear in the driveway of her parents' Orangevale home, too afraid to get out of the car and lift the garage door open.

"I would sit there and sit there and wait to get the courage to open the door. I was almost hyperventilating because I didn't want to get out," said Ward, who occasionally baby-sat for one of the victims.

Inside, her mother stayed awake, waiting for her, and her father kept a Remington 10-gauge by his bed.

"It was a weird time," said Ward, a state worker who lives in Placer County.

She had lived off Main Avenue in a new neighborhood of ranch homes and worked nights for the state Department of Motor Vehicles when the East Area Rapist hit across the street and a block behind her.

Ward refused to sleep. She watched TV until test patterns popped on, running to the window at every noise. She would doze, then jerk herself awake.

As dawn broke, relief would wash over her: She had made it through the night. She would sleep until noon, but she never felt rested.

Her father, Edward Barbero, now 72, installed a garage-door opener, then drilled holes for pegs in all the window frames and the patio door. His house still has bolted windows.

Even though the closeness of the attacks unnerved him, Barbero remembers feeling guilty about his relief. "Thank God it didn't happen here," said Barbero, who has two other daughters.

The couple Ward used to baby-sit for soon divorced and moved away. "It just tore them apart," she said.

That's what happened to many of the victims, said Daly, who became confidant and counselor for most of the victims who ranged from their teens to the 30s. Without an arrest, some of them couldn't move on, she said.

Even with the prospect of an identified name and face looming after so many years, Daly is skeptical about how science linked the rapes and murders. She wants to make sure.

"I'd want to be cautious," she said, "I'm not sure what I would feel. Doubtful, maybe."