WAYNE ADAM FORD VICTIM IDENTIFIED 25 YEARS AFTER HER MURDER

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

Kerry Ann Cummings

A 25-year mystery has been solved and a family is finally getting closure thanks to a partnership between the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), the California Department of Justice (CA DOJ) and Othram Inc.

In October of 1997, a duck hunter located a dismembered female torso in the Ryan Slough, just north of Eureka. The remains were recovered, however, attempts to identify the female victim were unsuccessful. In January of 1998, additional remains were located and recovered on Clam Beach.

On November 3, 1998, Wayne Adam Ford arrived at the HCSO's Main Station in possession of a female body part. He subsequently admitted to murdering several women throughout the North State, including the unidentified female. Investigators interviewed Ford numerous times, obtaining descriptive details of the female. Ford's encampment was searched as part of the investigation. Investigators located additional remains belonging to the female recovered from the Slough. Attempts to identify the female were made, but ultimately were unsuccessful.

In June of 2006, Ford was convicted of four counts of first-degree murder in a San Bernardino County court and was sentenced to death.

Through the years, HCSO investigators never gave up on attempting to identify Ford's unknown female victim, routinely searching missing persons reports from all of the West Coast to obtain leads. Using DNA, investigators were able to confirm that the remains located on Clam Beach were also that of the unknown female. The DNA was entered into both the California Missing Persons DNA database and the National Unidentified Persons DNA index. The DNA profile was routinely searched against profiles from both missing persons and other human remains in the Combined Index System. No profile matches were ever made.

HCSO Sheriff William Honsal created the Cold Case Unit in 2021, assigning two investigators to exclusively review HCSO's unsolved cases for new leads. In December of 2022, the HCSO and the CA DOJ partnered with Othram Inc, a forensic genealogy lab, to determine if advanced forensic DNA testing could help establish the identity of the unknown female, or a close relative.

"During our review of cold cases, we identified multiple cases that could benefit from this DNA technology," HCSO Cold Case Investigator Mike Fridley said. "Earlier this year we were able to identify another unknown person by using this technology. We were eager to submit this case for consideration and to finally bring some closure to the victim's family."

The case was determined to be eligible for advanced forensic DNA testing and the HCSO sent Othram a DNA extract from the remains. Othram scientists used Forensic Genome Sequencing to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the female. Utilizing this profile and forensic genealogy, a potential DNA match was developed for a close relative. Investigators contacted the relative, inquiring if they had any missing family members. The relative stated that their family member, Kerry, had been missing since the mid-1990s.

HCSO Investigators were able to track down Kerry's sister who confirmed that Kerry's last contact with family was in 1997. Kathie provided investigators with a DNA sample which was then compared to the DNA sample from the unknown female's remains. These DNA profiles were confirmed to be a genealogic match- officially identifying the remains as that of Kerry Ann Cummings, born in 1972.

Kerry Ann Cummings

During her last contact with family in 1997, Kerry was suffering from untreated mental illness and told family that she was couch-surfing in the Eugene, Oregon area. Despite multiple offers from her family, she refused to come home.

"Kerry was beautiful, funny, smart and an artist. She was great at making us laugh," Kerry's sister, Kathie Cummings, told investigators. "It is devastating what mental illness can do in a span of only two short years.".

Kathie told investigators that after Kerry went missing her parents tried to report her as missing in Arizona and Oregon, and even hired a private investigator, but due to laws surrounding the report of missing persons at that time, a missing persons report was never taken. Therefore, Kerry was never listed as a missing person or entered into any national missing persons databases.

"Unfortunately, back then they were told that Kerry was an adult, that she had chosen the lifestyle, and that if she wasn't a threat to herself or others, there was nothing that [law enforcement] could do," Kathie said. "As the internet expanded, I took to searching the NamUs website when I was missing her, scanning for mention of her tattoo and searching through the pictures of the Jane Does. She was dearly loved."

The Humboldt County Coroner's Division is working with family members to release Kerry's remains for burial with other deceased family members.

"I'd like to thank the California Department of Justice DNA Lab and Othram for once again providing outstanding work and assistance in solving this case," Sheriff William Honsal said. "While we can't take away the pain of loss, we hope that this identification can help bring closure to Kerry's family and the community. I'm thankful for the dedication of our

investigators who never gave up on Kerry and continue to seek resolution for the outstanding cases that remain to be solved."

The HCSO is continuing its partnership with the CA DOJ and Othram, and is reviewing other missing and unidentified persons investigations for the use of this DNA technology. This effort is partially funded by the county's Asset Forfeiture Fund, with additional grant funding anticipated in the near future to continue this work.

Anyone with information about this case or other unsolved homicides is asked to contact HCSO Investigator Mike Fridley at 707-441-3024. A full list of the HCSO's unsolved cases and current missing persons can be located at: https://humboldtgov.org/2772/Unsolved-Cases