

# DNA helps ID another potential victim of Charlotte County killer

Twenty-seven years after his death, John Doe has a name and his family finally has some closure – and even played a role in identifying him.

Charlotte County sheriff's investigators said Wednesday that Gerald Lombard is a possible victim of a serial killer.

A construction worker found his body on Wyandotte Avenue and Tulip Street in Charlotte County in 1994. The body was badly decomposed and couldn't be identified, so investigators created an original clay model of the victim in the 1990s. In the 2000s, we saw advancements in DNA technology and genealogy testing, and a relative's DNA sample sent to Ancestry.com helped cold case detectives turn those unidentified remains and that clay model into a real person.

For nearly 30 years, Danielle Niemiec heard nothing from her father, Jerry Lombard. He left his home in the Northeast in the early 90s and never returned.

"I only have one memory my dad left; I'm guessing I was around four or five," she said.

She said she thought her dad's leaving meant he didn't want kids. Those thoughts turned even darker.

"Thought maybe he had passed away and was somewhere unidentified."

"He was always one never to sit still. He was always on the go," said his sister, Carole Dufresne.

Lombard would check in with his sister and 15 other siblings from time to time. Then months would pass with no phone call, no letter, nothing.

"By all standards, he fell off the face of the earth. I couldn't find anything on it at all," said Bob Dufresne, Lombard's brother-in-law.

More than a thousand miles away, in sunny Southwest Florida, a construction worker found a decomposing body in the woods. That was in 1994, and Charlotte County detectives called the body "John Doe #1."

"There was some inclination that something, you know, potentially maybe happened," Niemiec said.

A forensic anthropologist from Florida Gulf Coast University examined the bones and forensic imaging experts created a high-tech image of his face. The break in the case came when one of Lombard's nieces submitted her DNA to Ancestry.com.

Detectives asked more family members to provide DNA, and Lombard's son Ryan came back as a perfect match.

Lombard's family calls it a double-edged sword and bittersweet. They finally got some answers after 27 years, giving them a new perspective.

"Always take lots of pictures with the people you love. Good memories," Niemiec said.

Both of Lombard's parents have died. His siblings say their mother always knew something was wrong.

The suspect in his death, Daniel Conahan, is on death row for killing another man. That victim's remains were found about a half-mile away from where Lombard was found.

From 1994 to 1997, about five young men were found murdered in Charlotte and Lee counties and detectives believe Conahan could be connected to all of them. They believe Conahan lured his victims into the woods, forced them to get naked, strangled them and cut off their genitals.

Dubbed the "Hog Trail Killer," it was Conahan's M.O., to tie up his victims, take photographs of them and murder them, investigators say.

### **Earlier report:**

Cold case investigators with the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office have identified Gerald Lombard as a possible victim of a serial killer based on DNA from [remains found in 1994](#).

According to CCSO, on Feb. 1, 1994, they received a call from a local construction company worker who reported finding a decomposing human body in the woods near Wyandotte Avenue and Tulip Street in northern Charlotte County.

There was no identification found with the body and early attempts to identify the person were not successful, so the body was given the name of "John Doe #1." The cause of death was also undetermined.

On April 17, 1996, two county workers found human remains in the area of Trembly Avenue and Willow Drive in northern Charlotte County. Detectives discovered human body parts that were obviously dissected and decomposed.

While searching the wooded area for body parts, another human body was discovered. This body had recently been placed under some foam material. The man's genitals had been removed by a sharp cutting instrument. The body had been there for about a day and marks on the body indicated he was bound with rope or similar items and strangled. The body was quickly identified as Richard Montgomery of Punta Gorda. The Medical Examiner ruled both were victims of homicide. The decomposed body was eventually identified as Kenneth Smith of Fort Myers.

The body discovered in 1994 and the bodies discovered in 1996 were approximately 2,600 feet apart, or about one-half mile. After the discovery of John Doe #1 and before the discovery of Kenny Smith and Richard Montgomery, two other bodies were discovered in wooded areas of North Port. The scenes in all cases were similar in many ways.

When Smith's and Montgomery's bodies were discovered, CCSO was aware of the North Port cases. An investigative task force was formed and included the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, North Port Police Department, Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, State Attorney 20th and 12th Circuit, and Florida Department of Law Enforcement.



Suspected serial killer Daniel Conahan (Credit: WINK News)

Daniel O. Conahan, also known as the "Hog Trail Killer," was identified as a viable suspect in these serial killings. Conahan was 42 at the time of his arrest. He was later tried and convicted for the murder of Montgomery and sentenced to death. He remains on death row at Union Correctional Institution in Raiford.

Due to circumstances surrounding the death of John Doe #1, Conahan is considered a suspect in this case. Over the years, all attempts to identify John Doe #1 failed and the Cold Case Team recently decided to use the available genealogy resources.

In June 2013, Heather Walsh-Haney, a forensic anthropologist at Florida Gulf Coast University, who was working with the Cold Case Team, submitted a tooth from John Doe #1 to the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification for development of DNA and entry into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons and the Combined DNA Index System. It was determined through NAMUS that there was remaining DNA extract available for further testing.

In January 2020, CCSO contacted Steve Kramer, associate division counsel with the FBI Los Angeles Division and the FBI Forensic Genetic Genealogy team leader, after receiving his information from the regional coordinator of the NAMUS program. He recommended that CCSO contact Dr. Ed Green at the Biomolecular Engineering Department Laboratory at the University of California Santa Cruz. Green advised the laboratory could process the remaining DNA from UNTCHI and determine if it was suitable for forensic genetic genealogy.



Daniel O. Conahan (Credit: FDOC)

In June 2020, the DNA was forwarded to the laboratory at UCSC and in December 2020, the Cold Case Team was advised that there was sufficient data available to send to Fulgent Labs for necessary additional sequencing and there should be enough data for genealogy searches. The uncertainty would then be if there would be close relatives in the available genealogy databases.

In February 2021, the Cold Case Team was advised that the processing was complete at Fulgent Labs and there was a genotype file that contained sufficient data for genetic genealogy searches. The file and report were forwarded to the FBI FGG office in Los Angeles and the information was uploaded into available databases through Family Tree DNA and Gene by Gene. Mark James of the FBI FGG in Baltimore, which covers the East Coast, was contacted to assist in researching potential relatives of John Doe #1.

The Cold Case Team was then provided with the likely family name and potential relatives of John Doe #1. After contacting the family, it was determined that this was a large family of 17 siblings, and one of the brothers, Gerald (Jerry) Lombard had not been seen or heard from since approximately 1991 or 1992. The Cold Case Team also learned that a niece in the family had submitted her DNA to Ancestry.com a few years ago, which is likely how the genetic genealogy match was made.

In April 2021, the Cold Case Team was able to obtain DNA samples from a sister, a brother, and a son of Jerry Lombard. The DNA sample of the son was submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Laboratory in Fort Myers in May 2021, and in June 2021, FDLE reported that the DNA sample from the son was a positive match to the DNA of John Doe #1, verifying the identity as Jerry Lombard. Jerry was born in Massachusetts on Aug. 30, 1962. He lived in Lowell, Ma. According to the family, Jerry was a bit of a drifter and it was common for him to disappear for long periods of time.

Conahan drove a Blue Mercury Capri and a Grey Plymouth station wagon. Lombard had no vehicle.