

Body found over 35 years ago in King County park finally ID'd

by KOMO News Staff

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SEATTLE - After more than 35 years of wondering, a family finally has learned what happened to their missing loved one - thanks to a collaboration between the family and experts with the King County Medical Examiner's Office.

The case began in October 1984 when officials investigated the death of a young man whose body was found in a local park. The man had no identification, said Dr. Kathy Taylor of the Medical Examiner's Office.

She said investigators used all methods available at the time in an attempt to identify the man, including obtaining a full set of fingerprints.

The fingerprints were regularly run through the Automated Fingerprint Identification System in the years following his death. His profile and a sketch were posted on publicly accessible websites including the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System and the Doe Network. Despite those attempts, no positive leads were made to link the dead man to any missing person.

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Meanwhile, a woman living out of state began to investigate what happened to her uncle, who had been missing since the early 1980s. As part of her search, she read a decedent's profile on NamUs and the Doe Network and noted strong similarities to what she knew of her missing uncle.

The in the fall of 2019 she contacted Dr. Taylor to see if she could help. No DNA was available so a different approach was needed.

Taylor says she asked the family if they had kept any letters sent to them by their missing loved one. As it turns out, the man's sister had kept a letter he sent to the family in 1981.

The family provided the letter to Dr. Taylor, and she turned it over to King County fingerprint experts. They were able to lift two faint latent prints off of the letter provided by the family.

A team of fingerprint experts compared the lifted prints to the print card of the dead man taken when his autopsy was conducted back in 1985. One print matched and provided a positive identification of the dead man after 35 years.

"The family is very grateful to finally know what happened to their missing loved one and to have the opportunity to formally grieve their loss," said Dr. Taylor. "Mr. Mark L. Ashland was 30 years old when he died, and now, the family finally has answers as to what happened to him."

She said unidentified cases can take years to be solved but the work to do so is ongoing.

"The King County Medical Examiner's Office never gives up on identifying the unidentified," said Dr. Taylor. "Every person deserves to have their name restored after death and every family of a missing person deserves to know what happened to their loved one."