

Scott Schulte

COMING SOON! Roger Staubach, Mitt Romney, Olympic Gold Medalist Rulon Gardner and Emmy Award winning producer of Disney's High School Musical and High School Musical 2, Don Schain.

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TUESDAY, JULY 10, 2007

When Evil Walked Our Streets - Davis County Clipper



Ted Bundy's image is not here because that is what he sought - to become famous. I refuse to place his image next to Debbie Kent, the victim, and Viewmont High School, a place that is wonderful and where he caused terror.

Nov. 21, 2006

The kidnapping of Viewmont High School student Debbie Kent at the hands of confessed serial killer Ted Bundy may be considered by some residents a mere dark moment in Bountiful history. But for those who knew and loved the perky 17-year-old along with those who searched for years to find her, the nightmare is as vivid today as the night it occurred.

“It’s not something that ever goes away,” said Debbie’s father, Dean. “It’s just one of those things we have had to learn to live with as our lives have gone on.”

Each year, the Kent family experiences bitter sweet emotions as a scholarship in the memory of their daughter is awarded at Viewmont High.

“That’s a difficult time because we think of her, and we are back to where it all began.”

The beginning of this never-ending nightmare began as innocently as the event which the Kent family was

attending. Enjoying a play being performed at Viewmont on the night of Nov. 8, 1974, Debbie was asked to make the short drive from the high school to the Rustic Roller Skating Rink at the south end of the city to pick up her younger sibling.

What exactly occurred when Debbie left the auditorium remains a mystery, but after a lifetime of searching and reviewing the case, Bountiful resident and retired Sgt. Ira Beal, who was one of the lead investigators in the case, has put together a likely scenario.

“We know Bundy was lurking in the area because other people had seen him and his VW Bug that night,” said Beal, who now works for the City of Bountiful. “We have two theories about how Bundy took Debbie.”

One thought was that Bundy, as he often did, used his good looks and charm to lure young ladies into his clutches. The other thought, the one Beal believes led to Debbie’s abduction, was much more brazen.

“I think he came up behind her and grabbed her and possibly threatened her so she wouldn’t scream,” Beal said. “I believe there was some kind of struggle and he was able to subdue her get Debbie to his car.”

For those who have studied Bundy, this would make sense. Earlier that evening, a young Carol DaRonch barely escaped the clutches of evil when Bundy lured her into his car. DaRonch, unlike most of his Bundy’s victims, was able to escape.

Perhaps not wanting to risk another mishap, it is likely that Bundy chose to attack Debbie rather than risk losing another potential victim.

Beal said he recalls Debbie’s purse and keys being discovered in close proximity to her car as evidence supporting his theory.

“I didn’t know when I first became involved in the case that night that this would be a case that I’d still be talking about 32 years later,” Beal said. “But I get at least two to three interview requests a year about the case.”

As days turned to weeks in 1974 Beal said it was a simple key that first linked the case to Bundy, who was initially stopped for a routine traffic violation in August 1975.

“We had found a key near where Debbie was taken that went to a set of handcuffs,” Beal said. “It’s not something you’re going to just stumble upon every day.”

“When Bundy was first stopped by Officer Bob Hayward, police found weird items in his car like rope, tools and plaster of Paris (Bundy often tricked women by wearing fake casts), a stocking mask, an iron bar and two sets of handcuffs in his car.”

One of the sets of handcuffs matched the key found at Viewmont High School.

And while the Kent’s and residents of Bountiful prayed for a happy ending, Bundy began his charade with police.

“Bundy just played games with everyone,” Beal said. “He knew we didn’t have enough strong evidence to keep him and he had the audacity to say to Det. Jerry Thompson, ‘you have a couple of strands of straw...keep looking and you’ll find a broom.’”

Despite his arrogant demeanor, Bundy stumbled.

“He told us he’d never been to Bountiful, but then we found a receipt for gasoline from the night Debbie disappeared, from a Chevron station on Main Street in Bountiful,” Beal said. “But it still wasn’t anything hard. It was a bunch of little things that together pointed at Bundy, but nothing solid.”

Finally, a lineup was arranged and DaRonch, the girl who could have been his victim that fateful

November night, confidently pointed out Bundy as the man who tried to kidnap her. This led to Bundy's 15 year conviction for aggravated kidnapping. The Debbie Kent case, however, remained a mystery.

As time passed, life slowly went back to normal for most Bountiful residents. The story of Debbie Kent's abduction became the stuff kids told at sleepovers. But as the Kent family struggled with the realization that something evil had entered their family, Beal and other investigators remained diligent as Bundy was elusive, even behind bars.

"We still didn't have an answer as to what had happened to Deborah," Beal said. "We were all pretty confident that Bundy had been behind her vanishing, but we still didn't have any hard evidence to prove he had taken her."

That break wouldn't come for more than two decades. After escaping from custody in Utah and then Colorado, Bundy was finally arrested, convicted and sentenced to die in the electric chair for the murderous spree he went on in Florida. Once the man who could seemingly escape anyone was finally faced with certain demise, Bundy showed the coward he truly was by torturing his victims once more in offering to speak of his crimes with investigators.

"At the point when he knew he was going to die Bundy decided he wanted to start talking," Beal said.

Investigators from Utah were sent to Florida where they endured Bundy's ramblings.

"I've listened to the tapes of Bundy talking about Debbie and others," Dean Kent said. "It was obvious to me that he was only looking to prolong his own life."

During those moments, Bundy not only confessed to the kidnapping and murder of Debbie, but gave specific instructions about where her remains could be found. The sleepy town of Fairview, in Sanpete County, Bundy told investigators, had been the dumping ground for the pretty high school girl.

"When I heard him give the directions to that spot out near Fairview I knew he wasn't lying about the location," Beal said. "I knew he at least knew the place and that gave us hope."

Bundy was executed on Jan. 24, 1989 at 7:07 a.m., EST, shortly after the interview, leaving with detectives and the Kents directions to the possible resting place of Debbie. Unfortunately, like the frustration of the previous years, investigators and the Kent family would have to endure months of waiting until the spring thaw allowed a search to be conducted.

Beal recalled the search.

"I remember driving to Fairview and doing an intense search over about two square miles," Beal said. "We found many bones that were determined to belong to animals."

"But then there was this one..."

A small bone found among the others. A knee cap. A human one.

"I thought we were on to something when we found that knee cap," Beal said.

The bone was sent to the state pathologist and it was determined to be that of a human and a match for someone the size of Debbie Kent.

"At that point I felt we had found her," Beal said. "Given everything we were told by Bundy, the fact that he had such minute details in his directions, then finding the bone and having it be the right size to be hers."

"It all fit."

“We went down there to Fairview and we told about the knee cap,” Dean Kent said. “At that point we pretty much came to the conclusion that it was Debbie. That it was her final resting place.”

In 1989, however, there was no such thing as DNA, high tech forensics that could match people through science. According to Dr. Albert Harper, director of the Henry Lee School of Forensics at the University of New Haven, Conn., a DNA sample could be taken from the knee cap and matched against the DNA of her parents.

“It’s almost like a paternity test,” Harper said. “Once a lab has the DNA from the bone, they could then match it against the DNA of the parents.”

Dean said he would be open to such a test.

“It would be nice to have a definite, positive answer,” Dean said.

Unfortunately, the knee cap is more than likely gone.

“When we found the knee and received the results from the pathologist and connected all the dots and the Kents felt like they had an answer we considered the case closed,” Beal said. “We had taken the case as far as we possibly could given it was 1989.”

The state medical examiner’s officer refused any comment concerning the bone, but a worker at the office said the only way it would be further investigated would be due to an official request by the Kent family.

Such a request has yet to be filed.

Dean recently said he used to scan airports, emptying movie theatres, streets or any other place where people met in search for his daughter.

“I used to always look,” he said. “It was almost automatic. I didn’t even realize I was doing it half the time.”

After all the time, the hard work, the emotional drain, and ashed dreams, Dean said, “I don’t look anymore.”

This was one of most difficult stories I've ever written. Interviewing Mr. Kent and seeing the sadness in his eyes is something I will never forget. I don't pity the Keny family, though. I see them as true heroes. They have fought all these years to keep alive the memory of their daughter who, by all accounts, was as fine a person as members of the media have made her out to be. As for Ted Bundy, I believe he was a pure evil human being. I have no feelings of compassion toward him over his upbringing and things he had to endure as a young person as difficult as they may have been. Many people experience childhood pain and do not become maniacs and turn to torture and killing others to medicate their sickness. Ted Bundy was also a coward. It was obvious the way he tried to prolong his life by dragging on his confessions. In many cases I do not believe in the death penalty (unless someone is caught red-handed or confesses to a brutal crime), but in this case I believe justice was almost served. How could justice be completely served when this man brought such horror to our world.

Another interesting note about this story is that my son, Taylor, recently graduated from Viewmont High School, the place where Debbie was kidnapped by Bundy. I am an assistant wrestling coach at Viewmont as well. Since investigating this story I find an uneasy feeling when I am in the area police suspect Debbie was abducted. It's hard to explain, but it feels like sacred ground.

Posted by Northside Wrestling at [4:18 PM](#)
Labels: [Bundy](#), [kidnapping](#), [murder](#), [Viewmont](#)

8 comments:



Jenna Marie said...

you should keep blogging. I was doing a search online not related to this story at all but ended up reading the entire thing anyway. I graduated from Viewmont and grew up a block away so the story was told growing up, but never like you did. Thank you.

[June 30, 2010 at 4:53 PM](#)



The Moloney Family said...

im debs nephew she never met, as proof deans my grandpa, belva(his wife) is my grandma and my mom was her sister. my mom has only told me stories about how nice debbie was to her, and how she felt like there was nothing left undone between them, except the rest of their lies. ive been alive thirteen years and when ever her anniversary comes my mom almost doesnt want to get out of bed. we call my grandparents and we all always end up crying. my granpa told me that debbie would have liked me, but now i will never know for sure. because of ted bundy.

when i was younger my sister would always pray that debbie would come back to life, unfortunatly thats not really how it works. but even though she wont come back to life i know that i will see her again, and i cant wait - aidan

[December 17, 2011 at 1:44 PM](#)



Juan said...

It's one of the most mysterious cases, I've been trying to find out more info about this case, and I found your blog, thank you so much, I think this work is perfect we don't have to forget Debbie and so many others, thank you again.

Juan

[April 28, 2012 at 2:31 PM](#)



Ms Masterson said...

It is nice to see someone has enough respect to honor the victim of a maniac by posting HER picture and not that of the maniac. It has always bothered me when I see Bundy's photo close to photos of the young women he murdered.

[August 12, 2013 at 10:26 PM](#)



William Kent said...

This comment has been removed by the author.

[April 8, 2014 at 3:07 PM](#)



Willie Kent said...

This was very well written. I can feel my grandfather heartache when you wrote about him still searching for her. I wish we could test the knee cap with our modern day technology. This subject is something my family does not like to speak about unfortunately, so I wouldn't know how to even bring up the suggestion to do so. I would have loved to meet my aunt, she seemed like the type of person people need to strive to be. -William Kent (son of Edward Kent) (grandson of Dean & Belva Kent) (Cousin to Aidan Maloney who posted 12/17/11)

[April 8, 2014 at 3:16 PM](#)



Unknown said...

Thank you everyone for the comments & Scott for the story. I have reread it several times since it was published.

I also attended VHS (a few years later) and remember well those nightmarish days in Nov 1974 as though they were just a few years ago rather than over 40 years ago.

One note of clarification: Isn't Debbie's name actually spelled Debi?

That's the correct spelling according to other family interviews and per her VHS yearbook.

Also, Debi's headstone lists her given name as Debra Jean.

I met her parents this past year. So impressed with them!!

Also impressed with her nephews who posted here.

Wish I could have met Debi. I know a few of her fellow alumni that admired and loved her and miss her to this day.

To borrow / modify a line from Elton John & Bernie Taupin:

"Goodbye Debi Jean, though I never knew you at all, you had the grace to hold yourself, while those around you crawled. I would have liked to know you but I was just a kid. Your candle burned out long before your goodness ever did."

(I was an 11 year-old paperboy scared to see the Wanted posters in the store windows at 5am for many dark mornings on Main Street in late Nov 1974).

[January 12, 2015 at 12:31 AM](#)



Gina Royer said...

I went to school with Debbie, I was 2 yrs younger than she was but I knew who she was. She lived down the street from my friend Anna May and I practically lived with Anna. So I remember this travesty, I will never forget. I remember her happy smile and that she was shorter than I, I am tall. She seemed like a very kind person, she looked kind. I am sorry this happened to you Debbie and hope to meet you one day in heaven. RIP.

Gina Royer

Viewmont High

[June 14, 2015 at 5:41 PM](#)

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