

A serial killer ‘tried to erase his victims.’ But three bodies hidden in barrels have now been identified.



New Hampshire Assistant Attorney General Jeffery Strelzin shows a slide of the three identified victims, Marlyse Elizabeth Honeychurch, left, and her daughters, Marie Elizabeth Vaughn and Sarah Lynn McWaters, at a news conference on Thursday. (Michael Pezone/Concord Monitor/AP)

By [Allyson Chiu](#)

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The first barrel was spotted in November 1985. It was lying on its side behind a spindly cluster of naked trees near the sprawling Bear Brook State Park in Allentown, N.H.

Inside the industrial receptacle, state authorities made a grisly discovery: the badly decomposed remains of a woman and a female child.

Without the victims’ identities or any solid leads, the case went cold until 15 years later when investigators happened across an eerily similar scene. Another dark-colored barrel was found in the same heavily wooded area in May 2000. It contained the bodies of two unidentified young girls.

For more than three decades, law enforcement officials worked to not only find the person responsible but also identify the victims. In 2017, half of the mystery was solved when alleged serial killer Terry Peder Rasmussen, who went by several aliases, was named as a suspect. Now, with the help of the victims’ family and friends, DNA testing, genetic genealogy, and a librarian interested in missing persons cases, officials announced Thursday that they’ve made another breakthrough — confirming the identities of the woman and two of the three girls.

They are Marlyse Elizabeth Honeychurch, 24, and her two daughters, Marie Elizabeth Vaughn, 6, and Sarah Lynn McWaters, 1. Rasmussen was believed to have been Honeychurch's boyfriend, New Hampshire Assistant Attorney General Jeffery Strelzin said at a [news conference](#) Thursday.

The known drifter, described by officials as a "chameleon," has been linked to the 1981 disappearance of a New Hampshire woman investigators suspect that he was dating at the time and was convicted in 2003 of murdering another partner in California. Rasmussen allegedly beat his victims to death and dismembered some of them, New Hampshire police said. He died in 2010 when he was 62 years old while serving time for the California murder.

"Together we have been able to uncover the identity of the Allentown killer, a murderer who tried to erase his victims and hide in the process, tried to hide who he was and what he did, but ultimately he wasn't successful," Strelzin said. "We know what he was, we know what he did and now we know who his victims were."

Strelzin noted that investigators are still looking into the identity of the fourth girl and that they are "hopeful of positive results in the future." DNA tests indicated Rasmussen was the girl's father, but she was not related to Honeychurch or her daughters.

Honeychurch was last seen by her family around Thanksgiving 1978, according to a detailed timeline [released](#) Thursday by the attorney general's office. She had taken her two daughters to her mother's house in La Puente, Calif., a city about 20 miles east of Los Angeles. Honeychurch also brought along a man she introduced to multiple people as Rasmussen.

During the visit, Honeychurch got into an argument with her mother "over a trivial matter" and left with the two young girls and Rasmussen, New Hampshire State Police Sgt. Matthew Koehler said at the news conference.

None of her family members ever saw her, the girls or Rasmussen again, Koehler said.

Police believe the couple ended up in New Hampshire, where Rasmussen adopted the name "Bob Evans" and worked as the head electrician at a mill in Manchester. At least two official documents dated from 1980 listed a woman named Elizabeth as his spouse. But by 1981, Rasmussen, still going by Evans, appeared to be linked to another woman, Denise Beaudin. She went missing that same year with her 6-month-old daughter and Rasmussen.

Several years went by before Rasmussen resurfaced again, this time in California under a new name. In the summer of 2002, his partner, Eunsoon Jun, disappeared and her body was discovered buried under cat litter in the basement of her Northern California home, NBC News [reported](#) at the time.

According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), Rasmussen was arrested and pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to 15 years to life and died in 2010 of natural causes in a California prison.

In January 2017, New Hampshire authorities used DNA to name Rasmussen as the man responsible for the Allentown slayings, only he was known to them as "Bob Evans."

Later that year, Rebekah Heath, a librarian from Connecticut with "a hobby for missing persons," was on an ancestry website's message board when she noticed someone had shared a post about a woman named Marlyse McWaters and her daughter Sarah who were both missing, Koehler said. Heath immediately posted a response asking if it was possible that the woman and young girl were the victims found in New Hampshire but never heard back.

Then, a year later, as Heath was listening to a New Hampshire Public Radio [podcast](#) about the murders, she recalled the post and reached out to the person who wrote it, Koehler said. Heath was put in touch with one of Sarah's relatives, who said Rasmussen was the last person to have contact

with Honeychurch, according to Koehler. Meanwhile, the New Hampshire Attorney General's office had only recently [announced](#) that DNA and investigative work revealed that "Bob Evans" was Rasmussen.

"The relative was not aware of Terry Rasmussen's history, however ... Ms. Heath was aware of the significance of Terry Rasmussen," he said.

Heath called in her tip to California authorities who had worked with genealogists to identify Rasmussen, the Boston Globe [reported](#). The call then set off a flurry of activity as the New Hampshire authorities were made aware of the potential lead and began reaching out to family members, who not only provided DNA but also photos and anecdotes, Koehler said. Additionally, they enlisted genealogists, including Barbara Rae-Venter, who helped bring the Golden State Killer to justice.

The rise of consumer genetic tests has provided law enforcement with new tools that have the potential to break open cold cases. (Daron Taylor, Taylor Turner/The Washington Post)

DNA taken from the remains were tested against samples from the victims' relatives and revealed a familial relationship, police said. Genealogy research led to the final confirmation that the bodies were Honeychurch and her daughters.

Soon, the full story of Honeychurch and her children started to come together. Authorities learned that Honeychurch, the second oldest of five girls, was born in January 1954 in Connecticut. She had been divorced twice by the time she met Rasmussen. Her two daughters, both born in California, were from different fathers.

Photos shared during Thursday's news conference showed Honeychurch playfully licking the beaters of an automatic hand mixer. Another picture captured Marie, Honeychurch's oldest child, blowing out candles at a birthday party.

"This restores a level of dignity and respect to those that lost their voice over 33 years ago," Col. Christopher Wagner, director of the New Hampshire State Police, told reporters. "Certainly gives us a level of appreciation to who they were and how they lived."

On Thursday, several of the victims' relatives, who asked to remain anonymous for privacy, were present at the news conference. In a statement read by Strelzin, the family thanked everyone "who spent decades working tirelessly to identify our loved ones."

"This day comes with heavy hearts," the statement said. "Marlyse, Marie and Sarah were so loved by our families and they are greatly missed. We take solace in finally having the answers we have longed for."

Strelzin said officials have not been able to connect Rasmussen to any other cases but added that there may be additional victims.

"He's your atypical serial killer," Strelzin said. "This is somebody who forms relationships and clearly is having social attachments. There could be a variety of women out there who could be potential victims."