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By Mike Harris, Associate Editor | 0 comments

Cynthia May Hernandez was just 18 years old when she went missing on Aug. 26, 1976. For decades the mystery of what happened to the pretty Glendora teen remained unsolved.

On Oct. 17 of this year, Larry James Allred, 62, was sentenced by San Bernardino County Superior Court Judge Richard Peel to life in prison for her murder.

The story of how the cold case was solved stretches from Covina, where Cynthia May Hernandez went missing after going to see a movie, to a cabin in Twin Peaks where some of the girl's bones were discovered. In between is a story of dogged detective work, a bit of luck and the use of DNA to tie the girl's remains to the killer.

It's also a story of a serial rapist and killer who used his family's Twin Peaks cabin to rape victims and where he may have disposed of the bodies of some of them.

Jerome "Punch" Ringhofer, who served as Twin Peaks station commander at the time, played an important role in solving the mystery puzzle. He spoke with the Mountain News about the Twin Peaks part of the story.

It goes back to 1977 when Capt. Ringhofer received a telephone call from a Los Angeles County Sheriff's detective.

"I was contacted in the last week of November (by the detective) asking if I would go up to the cabin and look around," Ringhofer said. "Detectives went out there and found (Larry Allred's) younger brother and a girlfriend, and took them back to the station" for questioning.

L.A. County Sheriff's detectives had told Ringhofer that three men were suspected of taking two underage teen girls to the Twin Peaks cabin, held them there and raped them. Allred supposedly was one of the three men. Ringhofer also was told there might be a grave near the cabin.

Roughly a year earlier, a dog had dug up a human skull from an area near the Allred family cabin which the dog's owner later gave to authorities, according to San Bernardino County Deputy District Attorney Denise Yoakum.

Ringhofer said that according to Allred's crime partners, Allred had killed and buried girls out at the cabin not far from Grandview Road.

"I went out on Dec. 3, a Saturday, did a crime scene search around the area, but didn't find anything," he said.

Ringhofer said he went back to the cabin.

"I'm wandering about the cabin, wondering what can I do," he continued. "On the west side, closest to Grandview Road, there was a porch, maybe six to eight feet long going east to west. It had the usual stuff, pine needles and oak leaves. I crawled under there, and the first thing I see are five rib bones. I grabbed them and crawled back out.

"What did I think? I had a gut feeling that his crime partners were right, that he had killed people up there. I suspect Larry Allred knew his brother was coming up, and I suspect he (Larry Allred) just threw them (the ribs) under the cabin."

The rib bones were turned over to the San Bernardino County coroner's office.

But it took until 2009 when DNA was used to connect the skull to the rib bones. The physical evidence and the DNA results were filed under a Jane Doe name for the victim.

Then in 2014 Glendora Police Chief Tim Staab decided to look into his department's oldest cold case, that of the missing Cynthia May Hernandez. DNA samples were gathered from Cynthia's mother, Gloria Densham, and Cynthia's sister.

In December, investigators linked the Hernandez DNA results to the bones found at the Twin Peaks cabin. At that point San Bernardino County sheriff's investigators took over.

Larry Allred in September pleaded guilty to murdering Hernandez. During sentencing, he said he wished he could have been committed to a mental facility earlier in his life and that against his counsel's advice he pleaded guilty to bring the murder case to a quick conclusion. He told the court that after two heart attacks he was ailing and thought he didn't have much longer to live.

It turns out Allred in 1975 had been convicted of raping a San Bernardino County woman, and in 1978 was found guilty of the rape and kidnapping of two teenage girls. He also admitted three additional rapes; he was never caught for those incidents.

Allred said he did not know Hernandez at the time of the 1976 murder. He told authorities he had pulled his car up next to hers in the Covina movie theater parking lot. Holding a knife, he forced her into the back of a pickup truck. But when he put down the knife in order to tie up Hernandez, she fought back. Allred panicked, according to Yoakum, and strangled Hernandez to death.

Allred then drove up to Twin Peaks where he buried the body in a shallow grave near the family cabin.

Ringhofer said the Twin Peaks cabin still exists, although it's been modified quite a bit.

"It was just woods when it happened 40 years ago; now there are houses up there," he told the Mountain News.

"There could still be bodies up there, we just don't know. But a search was done."

Ringhofer said using DNA to identify Hernandez' remains and linking them to her family was critical.

“God bless whoever it was that discovered DNA,” Ringhofer said. “It has cleared up so many cold cases. He (Allred) murdered 40 years ago and now he’s sentenced to life. Without DNA that would never have happened.”