

SUMMARY

Jane Doe 1984 – Vernon County, Wisconsin

On Friday, May 4, 1984 between 11:15pm and 11:30pm, three area youth were driving along Old Line Road approximately 4 miles west of Westby when they encountered a dead human body lying at the side of the gravel road. The youth drove to a nearby farm and reported, by telephone, the finding to the Vernon County Sheriff's Office.

A patrol deputy was dispatched from the Sheriff's Office in Viroqua and that deputy met the callers near the scene. After a brief discussion, the reporting persons led the deputy to the location of the body. Upon arriving at the body at about 11:50pm, the deputy noted vehicle tracks making a U-turn on the freshly graveled road. The body appeared to be that of an older female that had been murdered by bludgeoning about the head. The female's hands were missing after being severed at the wrists. It also appeared that she was not killed where she was found and was likely dumped at the roadside by someone in a short wheel base vehicle that had made the U-turn. Once other officers arrived, the scene was photographed and processed with the assistance of the Wisconsin Crime Laboratory Bureau. After an autopsy was completed, it was determined that the woman died of head injuries. Her dentures, which contained some numbers, had been fractured in the course of being killed. In the following days and weeks, neighborhoods were canvassed, many tips pursued, the investigation was expanded to involve many outside agencies, and the female remained unidentified.

The next evening after television reports of the homicide aired, a couple from rural Westby called and reported seeing something unusual on Cut-Across Road near US Highway 14 between Westby and Coon Valley. The couple reported seeing a parked, bright yellow compact car with a man outside of it. The man was moving around to the driver's side from the passenger side at about 9:45pm on May 4, 1984. Investigators checked the area described by the couple and near some tire tracks, they found a piece of the fractured denture, some blood and a man's Seiko wristwatch. The watch's band had separated from the watch at one end. The tire tracks had fluffed up the gravel in an apparent rapid acceleration. Officers were able to theorize that the suspect had pulled off US Highway 14 and made an attempt to dump the victim there, when suddenly the couple interrupted him. As he drove away, the tires spun. The car then went south then west on Old Line Road about three miles and left the victim where she was found. The wristwatch was examined by Seiko and the Wisconsin Crime Laboratory. The couple was not able to determine the exact make and model of the compact car but did identify a bright yellow color associated with a 1982 Datsun from a color chart. Thousands of state DOT vehicle records and manufacturer archives were examined but no vehicle of significant interest surfaced at the time.

In the following months and the next 28 years, over 400 leads to missing females from age 50 to 65 have been investigated in trying to identify this homicide victim. She remains Jane Doe today. Bulletins have been designed and circulated through police and coroner circles, dental laboratory journals, and cold case groups across the country.

The Vernon County Sheriff's Office, as well as other law enforcement partners, continues to pursue the identity of Jane Doe and her killer. Current Sheriff John Spears supports the initiative. The Cold Case Unit of the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation and Crime Laboratory Bureau are again assisting in the investigation.