

Old murder case focused on DNA

POLICE ASK PUBLIC FOR INFORMATION

By SCOTT STEPHENSON
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DNA testing may help police identify the person responsible for the unsolved murder of a Sarnia teenager 30 years ago.

"We have exhibits from the scene that we believe could profile the person responsible," Det.-Insp. Randy Rosiak, of the OPP's criminal investigations unit in London, told The Observer.

Rosiak said the exhibits he wants tested were collected by investigators after a motorist found the body of 14-year-old Karen Caughlin on a back road in Enniskillen Township on March 16, 1974.

Rosiak said the timing of the release of information about the potential for DNA testing was done deliberately to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the unsolved killing.

By drawing renewed attention to the case, police hope someone will finally come forward and provide additional information on the person responsible for the crime.

Rosiak, who has been reviewing the case since 2000, said the former case manager, Det.-Insp. Wally Baker of OPP's criminal investigations branch, was reviewing the case exhibits to determine the feasibility of DNA testing when he retired.

"That's one of the primary

reasons for contacting the family now," Rosiak said.

Over the years, police have maintained a list of possible suspects in the case, "but I can't name suspects," said Rosiak.

He did confirm, however, that two of the suspects are currently in custody on other matters.

"We now have the DNA data bank which also helps."

Initial police reports, issued after Caughlin's body was found, stated she had suffered bruises and abrasions all over her body. Investigators also said it was possible the body had been dumped on 6-7 Sideroad, but it was difficult to determine how long the body had been at that location because of the road's condition.

The cause of death was later attributed to internal hemorrhaging caused by multiple injuries.

According to police, Caughlin was last seen alive shortly after midnight by friends who had dropped her off outside a girlfriend's home. According to family, she was to have stayed overnight at her girlfriend's after a night of roller skating at Rose Gardens.

But she never went inside.

Rosiak said Karen's whereabouts during the approximately nine hours between the time she was supposed to have been dropped off and the time her body was discovered remains a mystery.

Rosiak wouldn't specify what evidence police want tested, but indicated the procedure the OPP wants to use is relatively new and looks for mitrochondrial DNA (mtDNA).

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According to an FBI Web site, mitochondrial sequencing "is often used in cases where biological evidence may be degraded or small in quantity."

It further states, "cases in which hairs, bones, or teeth are the only evidence retrieved from a crime scene are particularly well-suited to mtDNA analysis."

Rosiak said the procedure, however, is not yet performed in Ontario. As a result, the OPP may have to go outside the province to get the testing done.

Although mtDNA analysis is relatively new as a crime solving tool, "there have been successes," Rosiak said. "Obviously, we're hoping for the same."

Rosiak said police are also seeking information from the public about some purple paint chips the original investigators found near Caughlin's body.

"I don't think it has ever been released that way back in 1974 there were paint chips found at the scene," said Rosiak.

He said the paint colour was known as metallic purple and was particular to 1970 to 1971, high performance Chrysler products such as Chargers, Challengers, Dusters, Demons and Swingers.

"If somebody remembers some damage to a friend's car of that type and colour back then, we'd be interested," said Rosiak.

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