

Best Of



2009 WINNER

Best Cold Case Solved Contest

Redding Police Department

Number of sworn officers: 112

Number of non-sworn: 38

CASE SUMMARY

88-34132/187 P.C.

Victim: Judith (NMN) Hasselstrom DOB: 06/12/1945

On Sunday August 7, 1988 at approximately 1403 hours officers from the Redding Police Department were dispatched to Caldwell Park where they located the body of a deceased female. The female was later identified as Judith Hasselstrom DOB 06/12/1945.

V/Hasselstrom's body was located approximately 15 feet south of the portion of the Sacramento River Trail that runs behind the Redding Museum. V/Hasselstrom's body was in some brambles and was partially concealed beneath vegetation which was later determined to be bamboo stalks. The bamboo stalks that had been laid over V/Hasselstrom's body had been recently cut and placed over V/Hasselstrom's body in an apparent effort to conceal it. Bamboo was found growing in the park along the river near where V/Hasselstrom's body was located.

V/Hasselstrom's body was found clothed only in a bra and underwear. The bra was pulled down exposing V/Hasselstrom's breasts and her underwear were pulled down exposing her vaginal area and buttocks. There was a small amount

of dirt around V/Hasselstrom's face near her mouth and eyes. V/Hasselstrom also had numerous scratches on her body which appeared to have been caused by the bramble bushes her body was located in. A set of keys and a shoulder pad common to women's clothing were found nearby. The keys were later determined to belong to V/Hasselstrom. V/Hasselstrom's clothing was not located at or around the scene and has never been recovered. V/Hasselstrom's personal belongings such as her purse and any jewelry she was wearing have also never been recovered.

During the processing of the crime scene, fingerprints located by Redding Police ID technicians on the bamboo stalks which were found covering V/Hasselstrom's body. The ID technicians carefully dusted the bamboo for latent prints, and upon locating prints, photographs were taken and held as evidence. Blood was also located on the bamboo leaves. Both the blood and the fingerprints were preserved as evidence. A pair of women's shoes was found several days later approximately 150 yards northwest from where V/Hasselstrom's body was located. The shoes were located in a patch of tall weeds and were consistent with shoes V/Hasselstrom had been described as wearing when she was booked into the Shasta County Jail on August 2, 1988.

An autopsy was conducted on V/Hasselstrom's body on August 8, 1988, at approximately 1650 hours. The cause of death was found to be asphyxiation due to manual strangulation. V/Hasselstrom's hyoid bone was also found to be fractured which can be associated with strangulation. A sexual assault kit was conducted at the time of the autopsy. V/Hasselstrom was found to have a superficial vaginal laceration during the examination.

The blood sample which was located on the bamboo covering V/Hasselstrom's body was submitted for DNA analysis in July of 2002. The male DNA which was recovered from the blood sample was entered into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) for the state of California. The male DNA profile was searched against known offender DNA profiles for several years without producing a match. The fingerprints located on the bamboo stalks were also compared with hundreds subjects involved in the investigation of V/Hasselstrom's murder over a period of several years; no match was made. The DOJ lab located in Redding for 20 years compared the latent prints obtained from the bamboo stalks to prints submitted to their office in hopes of locating a match to the suspect.

The case eventually went “cold”, and although it was periodically reviewed by numerous different investigators over a 20-year period, no new viable suspects emerged and the case remained in the “cold case” locker at the Redding Police Department.

On November 7, 2007 Brian (NMN) Harper, DOB 05/30/1969, was arrested for robbing the US Bank located at 1700 Pine Street in Redding (RPD Case 07-74241). Harper confessed to the robbery when he was interviewed by investigators. During the interview, Harper told investigators he had legally changed his name to Brian Harper from his given name, which was William Duane or Billy Duane Leiferman. On January 28, 2008, Brian Harper pled guilty to one county of 211 P.C. in Shasta County Superior Court. This was Harper’s first conviction that would require him to submit to a DNA sample. Harper’s DNA sample was obtained and entered into the CODIS system.

On February 18, 2009, investigators from the Redding Police Department were notified by the California Department of Justice that the DNA sample which had been submitted to CODIS as a part of the investigation into V/Hasselstrom’s murder had been matched. The DNA was matched to that of William Duane Leiferman, A.K.A. Brian Harper. Prior to the DNA match, S/Harper was never a subject of the investigation. Two palm prints obtained off the bamboo stalks have also since been identified as belonging to Brian Harper by D.O.J. Criminalist Mark Fisher.

Investigators began working the case as if it were a fresh homicide. Dozens of original witnesses in the case were tracked down and re-interviewed. Investigators traveled to Colorado to interview one of the original persons of interest who was in custody on un-related charges. Witnesses expressed appreciation to investigators that the case was still being investigated after all these years and recalled how the murder of a young woman in a busy, popular city park had haunted them.

Investigators also contacted numerous women who had been involved in past relationships with S/Harper. Being careful not to reveal the nature of the investigation, investigators learned from talking to S/Harper’s past wives and girlfriends that he had a short temper and that he had been violent towards

women in the past.

Investigators wanted to collect as much background history and information as possible on S/Harper prior to interviewing and confronting him regarding the murder of V/Hasselstrom. Investigators made plans to have the closest members of S/Harper's family contacted and interviewed approximately one hour before S/Harper was to be interviewed in prison. Investigators felt this was the only way to gather important information regarding S/Harper and his history while minimizing the chances his family would have time to contact and warn him regarding the investigation.

Prior to the interview with S/Harper, investigators contacted the Department of Justice Criminal Profiling Unit for a psychological profile of S/Harper. The information obtained was found to be accurate and useful in obtaining the confession.

On Wednesday April 15, 2009, at approximately 1000 hours, Investigator Poletski, #179, and I traveled to Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, California, where S/Harper was incarcerated as a result of his robbery conviction. Just prior to contacting S/Harper, I contacted investigators in Redding who had just finished speaking with S/Harper's mother and brothers to learn the details of their interviews. With that information in hand, Investigator Poletski and I initiated contact with S/Harper. We interviewed S/Harper in regard to the murder of V/Hasselstrom. S/Harper waived his Miranda Rights and initially denied knowing or having ever had any contact with V/Hasselstrom. S/Harper said his DNA and fingerprints would not be on V/Hasselstrom's body or anywhere around the scene. Over the next several hours, Investigator Poletski and I dialogued with S/Harper, then confronted him with the DNA and fingerprint evidence that showed he was involved in V/Hasselstrom's death. At this time, he confessed to murdering V/Hasselstrom. The interview covered a period of approximately three hours.

S/Harper said that he and another subject, whom he could only identify as "Jack," met V/Hasselstrom after leaving a bar in downtown Redding. S/Harper could only describe "Jack" as a white male who was over 21 years and had thinning hair. S/Harper claimed to not know anything else about "Jack." Investigators would receive information later in the interview that questions whether or not

“Jack” ever existed or is an actual person. S/Harper said when he and “Jack” left the bar, the bar was still open and it was dark outside. He could not or would not recall the exact or approximate time he and “Jack” left the bar. He said he walked with “Jack” through downtown Redding towards Eureka Way. S/Harper was in Redding at the time visiting and staying with his mother who lived on Center Street. Center Street is approximately one third of a mile from the bar that S/Harper was at and one half of a mile from Lake Redding Park where the victim was found.

S/Harper said their initial contact with V/Hasselstrom occurred near the intersection of Market Street and Eureka Way in Redding. He said he was drunk and that V/Hasselstrom provided both him and “Jack” with some kind of unknown drug in the form of a round pill. He said they walked along with “Jack” to the area of Lake Redding Park just past the Market Street Bridge over the Sacramento River.

Once in the park S/Harper said he along with “Jack” and V/Hasselstrom walked and carried on a conversation. S/Harper said they walked from the southeast corner of the park near Market Street towards the museum. S/Harper said that when he and V/Hasselstrom were in the area of the museum in the park, V/Hasselstrom became “boisterous” and that she wanted sex from him. S/Harper said he was seated on a park bench near the museum and that V/Hasselstrom “came at him.” S/Harper said he did not want to engage in sex with V/Hasselstrom. S/Harper said when V/Hasselstrom came at him, a physical altercation ensued. S/Harper said at some point during the altercation he ended up taking V/Hasselstrom to the ground and placing his right arm across her neck. S/Harper said he was on top of V/Hasselstrom and placed his right forearm across the front of her neck or throat. He said V/Hasselstrom was screaming and struggling with him and that she was hitting him. S/Harper said he was probably “infuriated” that V/Hasselstrom came at him and that the rage of being incoherent from the drugs and alcohol he had consumed may have played a part in the altercation.

S/Harper initially said it was “Jack” that notified him that he had seriously hurt V/Hasselstrom and that when he heard those words he realized V/Hasselstrom was dead. S/Harper would later say that when he heard a voice tell him that he had seriously hurt V/Hasselstrom, he did not see anyone else around. Although S/Harper insisted “Jack” was present for the murder, he advised investigators

that he has heard “voices” in his head in the past. S/Harper said he heard voices when he robbed US Bank in Redding. S/Harper said he even experienced hearing voices as a child but never told anyone because it was embarrassing to him.

S/Harper claimed that everything after the physical altercation was in bits and pieces in his mind and that he thought he may have blacked out. S/Harper would or could not explain why V/Hasselstrom’s clothes were missing or why her bra and panties were pulled down. S/Harper said he could not remember and did not know what happened to any of V/Hasselstrom’s personal belongings such as her purse. S/Harper said he could not remember how far he drug V/Hasselstrom’s body before he covered it with the cut bamboo stalks. He said he could not remember where he obtained the bamboo or how he got it. He said he thought he probably put the bamboo over V/Hasselstrom’s body because he was sorry about what had happened. S/Harper denied having any sexual contact with V/Hasselstrom prior to her death.

S/Harper acknowledged that the evidence indicated only one person was involved in V/Hasselstrom’s murder. He also acknowledged that he probably did not have any help moving the body and that he was tired after the fight. S/Harper said he was not a very big guy and would not have been able to move the body far from where V/Hasselstrom was originally killed. Investigators asked S/Harper if anyone other than him had caused any harm to V/Hasselstrom during the physical altercation that resulted in her death and he said no. S/Harper advised investigators that he was the only person responsible for the death of V/Hasselstrom.

S/Harper said he did not sustain any visible injuries during the struggle with V/Hasselstrom and he did not know how his blood got on the bamboo stalks that he placed over V/Hasselstrom’s body. S/Harper could not recall the exact time that the murder occurred. S/Harper said when he left the park he returned home to his mother’s house on Center Street. S/Harper left the Redding area only returning to visit over the next few years. S/Harper returned to Redding in 1991 and has lived here since that time.

S/Harper remains incarcerated at Corcoran State Prison in Corcoran, California and has a scheduled release date in June of 2009.