

Gold Coast Mystery

by Bill Jensen

Faceless Remains Found In Muttontown Pose More Troubling Case Than Chandra's

The first thing they saw was a skull.

A group of six men, out in the wilds of Muttontown Preserve, hard off Route 106, were practicing the ancient art of orienteering, or mapmaking, when one of them spotted a stark white object lying on top of the dead brown leaves of November, 2001.

What was left of the skeleton was found hours later, crunched in a fetal position between two small trees. Not even given the decency of a shallow grave, the body was most probably covered with leaves. Decomposition, aided by the hankering of local wildlife, had left the body free of all biological matter. No clothing. No shoes. No jewelry. Just bones, gnawed by animals and bleached white by the sun whenever it had the chance to peak through the preserve's thick trees.

While Chandra Levy's identity and image were on the minds of hundreds of police officers and thousands of volunteers searching for her in the wooded parks of Washington, D.C. last year, the woman who once belonged to the remains found in the woods of Muttontown is a mystery.

The first step — always the most difficult step — in the investigation is finding out who she is. Then police can toss around theories as to how she died, and at whose hands.

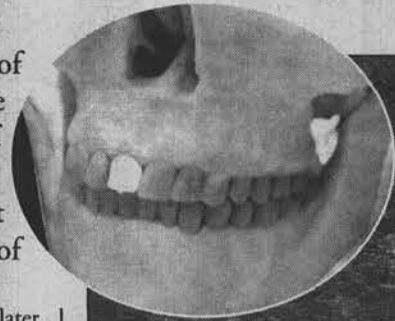
Horse Trails and Old Ruins

A stripe of yellow paint splashed across a three-pronged tree marks the area where the remains were discovered. Detective Greg Lefmeister, the first officer on the scene, made sure to mark the spot, as it is easy to lose oneself in the brush.

"In all likelihood, she was killed elsewhere and carried here," says Dennis Farrell, standing over the site where the body was found. Recently appointed the head of the Nassau County Homicide Squad, Farrell did not work this case when the bones were found last November. This is his first time at the scene inside the 500-acre preserve.

Well-off Gold Coasters on horseback had trotted within feet of the remains, situated in the middle of three intersecting bridle paths. The overgrown area sits an eighth of a mile away from the remains of Knollwood, the former home of exiled King of Albania, King Zog. The massive estate's colonnade, as well as garden stairs, still dot parts of the property, now frequented by equestrians and gardeners looking to lift some free Rhododendrons.

The killer probably would have parked on



An artist's rendition of the victim's missing tooth; the spot where the remains were found.

Muttontown Road and walked the 300 feet north to the spot. Police say it is more likely that the crime took place during the summer, as the park thins out dramatically in the winter months, providing less cover.

Year after year, leaves would cover the body in the fall, be pounded by snow in the winter and settle into mulch by the spring. Although clothing can wear out over time, the complete absence of any speck of fiber led to a conclusion that she was probably buried in the nude. The lack of clothing and the condition of the bones left the time frame of the murder wide open.

"This is the Gold Coast," Farrell says. "Who knows what could have happened here?"

The bones could have been from the Gatsby era.

A 25-Year Window

Upon examination, it was confirmed that the bones once provided the frame for a woman, at least 35 years old, between 5'1" and 5'3" tall. She is not Asian or Native American. The bones had been there for at least five years.

But there was one clue that could be the key to unlocking the identity of the woman. Her top front left tooth was missing, replaced by a plastic and metal denture. This particular model has only been around since 1970.

With little else to go on, detectives feel the missing tooth — and subsequent dental work — is the best piece of information culled from the body that could jog someone's memory.

Detectives pored over old missing person reports but failed to find a match. When unidentified female remains are found, signs often point to involvement in prostitution. For instance, in Washington state's Green River Killer case of the early '80s, only half of the 49 bodies found were ever reported missing.

Authorities can sometimes reconstruct the facial features of the victim based on the skull, then distribute pictures to the public. In this process, a cast is made of the

skull, then holes are drilled into it at certain points, which are then filled with rods that measure the depth of soft tissue. Modeling clay is then placed on the cast, starting from the neck up, barely covering the rods. The basic structure of the face is often fairly accurate. The guesswork comes in when developing the details — hair color and length, shape of nose and eye color.

Unfortunately, the poor condition of the remains found in Muttontown make reconstruction impossible. The whole bottom half of the skull, from the nose down, was missing (the denture and bottom teeth were found nearby). Whatever was left intact is riddled with gnaw marks from animals.

Having been killed more than five years ago, but less than 30, leaves the victim in the time frame of Joel Rifkin's serial killing era, during which he targeted prostitutes. But even though the disposal was haphazard, cops say the 300-foot walk into the woods still showed too much effort for Rifkin to have undertaken. Rifkin also did most of his disposal outside of Nassau County, kept souvenirs, such as clothing, driver's licenses and jewelry from his victims, and confessed to all 17 murders when he was caught in 1993.

Long Island's other serial prostitute killer, Robert Shulman, lived three miles south of the area. But he disposed of his victim's bodies in Suffolk and Yonkers.

Homicidal john, spurned lover, family argument that got out of hand — eventually police want to find the person (or persons) who carried this woman's dead body into the woods and buried it under a clump of leaves. But barring an out-of-the-blue confession, they have to find out who the woman was first. ■

If you have any information on this case contact Nassau CrimeStoppers at 1-800-244-TIPS or the New Island Ear at liconfidential@islandear.com.

The Non-Virgin Club of 1954

They were a gang. Their name: "The Non-Virgin Club." Their mission: promiscuous, underage sex with each other. Their turf: Babylon High School, 1954.

The "Non-Virgin Club" trend was a footnote to the Beat Generation, when teenagers' sexual future was placed in doubt daily by the threat of The Bomb. The first reported club was founded in Illinois. Then they were everywhere. Groups of about 25 high-school boys and girls would take an oath. An oath to have sex. At weekly meetings, they would draw numbers and pair off with each other. The girls, sometimes as young as 14, did the recruiting.

In Babylon, a girl named Barbara refused to join the club. Female members dragged her out of a luncheonette near the school and down to the railroad tracks. There they punched her. Again and again and again. When she finally got away, they gave her a warning: "You're not out of this yet."

