



OFFICE OF THE  
**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
EL DORADO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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VERN PIERSON, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

## **CASE SUMMARY**

On August 20, 1977, the nude body of a deceased female was found partially buried near the Sunset Stateline Stables in South Lake Tahoe. Female clothing and a purse were found in close proximity to where the body was located. The purse contained identification in the name of Brynn Ellen Rainey, 27 years old. Brynn Rainey had been reported missing approximately one month earlier and was later identified as the partially buried murder victim. The cause of death was “undetermined” due to the amount of decomposition, but the attending pathologist said he believed the cause of death was either strangulation or suffocation. He wrote in his report in regard to a defect in the hyoid bone, “Its presence, however, does suggest the possibility of dislocation of the hyoid by virtue of strangulation.”

On July 1, 1979, a deceased female was discovered on the side of the road on Sundown Trail north of Golden Bear Trail in South Lake Tahoe. The deceased female was later identified as 16 year old Carol Ann Andersen and the autopsy determined the cause of death to be strangulation. During the autopsy, examination of Andersen’s wrists revealed marks as if she had been bound. Per protocol at that time, swabs were collected from Andersen’s body. Carol Andersen was last seen at a party in South Lake Tahoe.

Despite diligent efforts by both the El Dorado Sheriff’s Office and the South Lake Tahoe Police Department, there were few leads and the investigation into these cases eventually went cold. The murder of Brynn Rainey and Carol Andersen eventually became two of approximately 60 unsolved murder cases in El Dorado County.

In 2007, District Attorney Vern Pierson established a Cold Case Task Force (“CCTF”), a team comprised of prosecutors and investigators from the District Attorney’s Office, a Forensic DNA Analyst from the CA Dept. of Justice, experienced Detectives from both the Sheriff’s Office and the South

Lake Tahoe Police Department. The CCTF placed a renewed emphasis on solving these cases using cutting edge forensic technology coupled with dedicated investigative resources. The CCTF reviewed all unsolved murder cases in order to determine whether there was physical evidence that could be re-examined, witnesses to re-interview, leads that could be followed. The task force used social media to publish short videos on unsolved cases in order to solicit assistance from the public. Although these efforts resulted in forward progress in several cases, the Rainey and Andersen murders remained frustratingly unsolved.

In 2012, a significant break in the Carol Andersen investigation occurred when the CCTF's Forensic DNA Analyst was able to locate a male DNA profile on swabs collected from Carol Andersen during her autopsy. The DNA profile was uploaded to the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), which is a database of DNA profiles from both known offenders and unidentified suspects in unsolved cases. This search, however, did not reveal any matches to the suspect DNA collected from Carol Andersen.

In 2013, a similar break occurred when the CCTF's Forensic DNA Analyst was able to identify a partial male DNA profile from a bloodstain on the shirt found with Brynn Rainey. This DNA profile was uploaded into CODIS, but like the Andersen profile it did not result in a match.

In 2017, the CCTF decided to re-examine the DNA evidence in the Rainey case using more advanced DNA testing methods that had developed since 2013. This resulted in the identification of a more robust DNA profile on November 7, 2017.

Just ten days later, on November 17, 2017, the CODIS Hit Outcome Project (CHOP) made a case to case match of DNA recovered from the Brynn Rainey and Carol Andersen murders. The DNA profile from the bloodstain on the shirt found at the Brynn Rainey crime scene matched the DNA recovered from Carol Andersen. This provided strong evidence that Brynn Rainey and Carol Andersen were killed by the same person. Investigators had not previously found any evidence linking the two cases. The DNA profile continued to be routinely searched in CODIS, but there was still no match.

In 2018, the CCTF employed Parabon Nanolabs to conduct genetic and genealogical research of the male DNA profile found at the Brynn Rainey and Carol Andersen crime scenes. Parabon Nanolabs uses genealogy databases to build a family tree around an unidentified suspect's DNA profile. By building this family tree they have successfully assisted law enforcement in identifying previously unidentified suspects. Parabon Nanolabs created a family tree for the previously unidentified suspect DNA recovered from the Carol Andersen and Brynn Rainey crime scenes. Their conclusion was that it is highly probable the DNA contributor was one of three brothers. All three of these brothers are deceased. As described below, the CCTF was able to determine that one of the three brothers, Joseph Holt, was the source of the DNA recovered from Brynn Rainey and Carol Anderson.

On August 16, 2018, the CCTF obtained a DNA sample from Joseph Holt's biological son. The DNA sample from was tested and further supported the likelihood that Joseph Holt was the DNA contributor from the sample recovered at the Brynn Rainey and Carol Andersen crime scenes.

On October 17, 2018, Joseph Holt's son provided investigators several items that he said had belonged to his father, including a toothbrush. On January 15, 2019, the CCTF's Forensic DNA Analyst confirmed that the DNA from the toothbrush matched the DNA recovered from Carol Andersen and Brynn Rainey.

The CCTF was able to establish that at the time of Carol Andersen's murder, Joseph Holt lived .3 miles and a 6 minute walk from the residence where Carol Anderson was last seen and approximately 1.5 miles from where Brynn Rainey was found murdered.

On January 23, 2019, the CCTF executed a search warrant to collect Joseph Holt's personal property from a garage where it has been stored following his death in 2014. Among Joseph Holt's property is evidence suggestive of other criminal conduct. For example, one of the items seized during the search warrant was a cut out newspaper article from Los Gatos entitled, "Pair Grapple With Suspect, One Shot." Hand written in ink on the newspaper clipping was "Thur January 30, 1975." The CCTF contacted Los Gatos Police Department Detectives and discovered that this shooting was an unsolved crime. The shooting occurred when two men interrupted a

white male adult who was burglarizing a vehicle. The two men, one of whom owned the vehicle and the other a witness to the crime, confronted the burglar who fled. The victim and witness gave chase and when they caught up to the burglar he pulled out a handgun and shot the victim twice in the upper body. The witness then tackled the burglar and wrestled the handgun away from him. The burglar fled and the witness shot at him with the handgun but missed. The burglar escaped and the victim survived his gunshot wounds. The original detectives made a composite rendering of the suspect with the witnesses. The rendering strongly resembles Joseph Holt in the mid 1970's. In addition, the handgun that the burglar used was reported stolen from a cab driver in South Lake Tahoe. At the time of this crime, Joseph Holt was known to frequent both South Lake Tahoe and the Los Gatos area. The investigation into this case continues.

Given the forensic evidence, as well as circumstantial evidence identified by CCTF investigators following the identification of Joseph Holt as the source of the male DNA at each crime scene, the El Dorado Cold Case Task Force has concluded that Joseph Holt is responsible for the murder of both Brynn Rainey and Carol Andersen. The investigation of Joseph Holt is on-going; if anyone has information concerning Joseph Holt, or any other unsolved case please call the El Dorado County Cold Case Task Force's Tip Line at (530) 621-4590.

It is important to note that Joseph Holt's family has been cooperative throughout this investigation. None of them knew that Joseph Holt had committed these crimes. We ask that you respect the privacy of Joseph Holt's family.