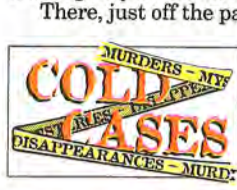


Police hope new technology, leads can help solve old crimes

The slaying of 11-year-old Frank J. Zadrozny IV is one of dozens of unsolved homicide cases dating back to 1975 now being re-examined

By Maureen Boyle
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

BROCKTON — Frances D. Zadrozny led two plain-clothed detectives through the woods to the homemade fort crafted by her missing 11-year-old brother.



There, just off the path used by children as a shortcut from Southfield Gardens to the Davis School, was the fort — and something else.

"One of the officers noticed something on the left side of the fort," she recalled. "They told me to get my father."

In that moment, the then-14-year-old girl knew her little brother, Frank, was dead.

Today, 23 years later, she and her sister are still waiting to learn who killed him.

"We need to know one way or the other," said Catherine Campbell, who was 12 when her brother was killed.

The slaying of Frank J. Zadrozny IV is one of the dozens of homicide cases dating back to 1975 that are now being re-examined by teams of prosecutors and state police in Plymouth County.

"If it is unsolved, that means for the most part that there is someone who committed murder walking around," Plymouth County District Attorney Timothy J. Cruz said. "We have an obligation to look at this and, hopefully, solve these cases."

Plymouth County authorities started sifting through the old case files more than 20 years ago.

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The murder of 11-year-old Frank J. Zadrozny IV of Brockton garnered front page headlines, like this one from May 18, 1981. But the crime was never solved.



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Suspect in cold case eluded police until death

COLD CASE/From Page A1

two months ago, looking at what physical evidence could be retested using new technology, what leads can be still followed and what cases could likely wind up prosecuted.

"We have had some success with cold cases in the last few years," Cruz said. "We want to see what more we can do. People have a right to know what happened."

But in some cases, the investigation could raise more questions than answers, Campbell and her sister, now Frances Lunn, fear.

Their brother, a fifth-grader at the Davis School, left his family's Carl Avenue apartment at Southfield Gardens for school the morning of May 15, 1981, with his best friend.

They planned to stop first to put an exit sign on their fort, then keep following the path in the woods to school.

"All the kids in the neighborhood used that path," Campbell recalled.

Frank was never seen alive again.

His sisters said the boy with their brother never made it to school and was later found at home, under a table holding a hammer.

"He was crying, huddled under the table, saying 'The clowns did it. The clowns did it.' Whatever that means. The family moved to Florida shortly after that. He was scared," Campbell said. "His mother was very protective of him and wouldn't let anyone talk to him."

A night wracked with worry

Frank's father reported him missing that night after the family searched the neighborhood. Frances was the first to notice her brother still wasn't home by dinner. Her father later called Catherine at an aunt's home.

"I went to my aunt's for the weekend. They picked me up about 5. My father called probably around 8 or so that Friday, saying Frankie wasn't home," Campbell said. "They don't know where he is and asked did I know. I had a horrible feeling. I remember being very scared. Something didn't seem right."

She didn't know until the next morning how wrong things were.

Lunn remembers being up most the night, listening to her father — who was raising the three children alone — worry. "It was scary," she said.

Around 9 p.m., the elder Zadrozny called police. "They kept asking if he ran away," Lunn said. "My father kept telling them he didn't."

The woods that separated Southfield Gardens and Davis School were searched that night before heavy rains forced its halt.

"The Civil Defense came. They lit up the school area. The whole area was pretty much lit. They searched until 2 or 3 in the morning," said Helen Crawford, who still lives in the area and whose husband was a police officer at the time.

When the search resumed in the morning, Frances led police to the fort her brother and his friends had crafted.

There, the little boy was found on his back. His corduroy pants were pulled down. A school textbook was found near his body.

He was dead.

An autopsy showed he had been strangled, likely by a cord or rope. Semen was found on his clothing.

"It was horrific," said Robert Morrill, the now-retired Brockton



BROCKTON PATROLMAN John J. Crawford, left, now retired, and Hall Funeral Home mortician Richard W. Green followed by Patrolman Mario R. DiLiddo and Andrew Klecha of the funeral home carry the body of 11-year-old Frank Zadrozny from the woods in back of the Davis School on Plain Street in this file photo from 23 years ago.

police lieutenant who worked on the case. "It was an extremely difficult case."

Lunn remembers her father's grief when her brother was found. "I just remember my father screaming," she said.

Suspect eludes searchers

Investigators got a list of known sex offenders released from the Bridgewater Treatment Center for the Sexually Dangerous. "We went to the jail and the center in Bridgewater and got a list of all the sex deviates. We got copies of who was released and we checked them out," said now-retired detective Thomas Thibeault. "I was in shock how many there were and they were all living around playgrounds."

They talked to neighbors, to teachers, to children, to the driver of the ice cream truck.

The stack of interviews grew. "We went and did everything we could," Thibeault.

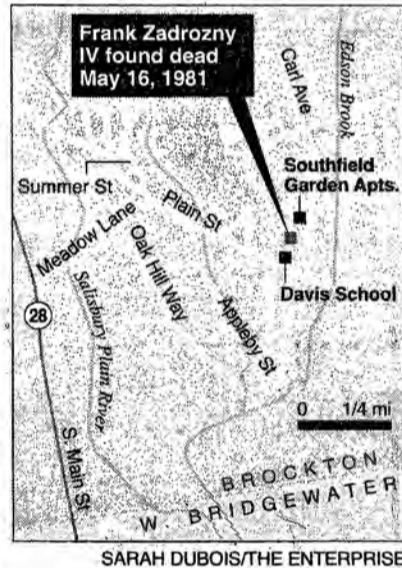
Then, a month later, the mother of a 10-year-old boy who lived next door to the Zadrozny family called police. She just learned a family friend had been repeatedly molesting her son in their apartment.

After interviewing the boy and his mother, Thibeault obtained a warrant in connection with the sexual attack for the arrest of Richard Beede, 39, a man with a criminal record that spanned 14 years and included arrests ranging from rape to assault and battery.

"He disappeared right after that," Thibeault said.

Beede, a veteran, never gave the military a forwarding address for his benefits checks, making the trail for the suspect more difficult, Police Chief Paul Studenski said.

As police searched for Beede,



the Zadrozny family tried to piece together their shattered lives. The summer after Frankie was killed, his two sisters were sent to stay with aunts — one to Weymouth, the other to Marshfield.

"My father was getting calls, saying we were next," Campbell said.

When the girls returned home that September for the start of school, the family had moved from Southfield Gardens to another part of the city. Their father would lose 60 pounds in the next year and couldn't work. He watched his daughters' every move.

"He was paranoid of us going out," Lunn said. "We didn't go out, period."

In their house, a pall hung over the family. His daughters said their father kept photographs of Frankie in his room and would fall silent when his name was mentioned.

"It was a lost feeling," Lunn said. "It was like a bad nightmare."

The elder Zadrozny would eventually remarry but his

thoughts were never far from his slain son. He is now deceased.

"He missed him terrible," his widow, Helen, said.

A cross-country hunt

Over the years, Thibeault would slowly track Beede from the Midwest to Louisiana. But each time, Beede was long gone.

"He had been throughout the country," said police Capt. Emanuel Gomes, who resumed the search for Beede a few years ago.

"It shows you the flaws in the past computer system. We were 50 different countries when it came to sharing data and information," Gomes said. "You could stop a guy in Swansea but if he was wanted in Providence, you would never know it. Every state had its own system and it wasn't until recently that we developed an open and clear access where we could communicate easily with each other."

Gomes said he hoped Beede could either shed light on the slaying — or be finally excluded as a suspect.

By the time Beede was located, it was too late.

In the summer of 1993, Beede was living in an old trailer that caught fire behind a mill once used to make shingles in the tiny community of Redway, Calif. He was flown out of town to the hospital but died on Aug. 2, 1993, at UCB Medical Center in Sacramento, California. The cause of death was complications of extensive thermal burns.

The fire was considered arson but the death of Beede caused little flurry in town.

"They never did prove anything," said Harrell Snodgrass, who runs a machine shop about 300 yards from where the trailer once stood. "The investigators decided it was an arson. There were some other incidents there that

same night. The fellow they thought set the fire, maybe a year later, he overdosed and killed himself."

Snodgrass said Beede rented the trailer for six months to a year. "I saw him a few times but I never talked with him," said Snodgrass, who lived in Redway since 1944. "I didn't even know his name. I think from hearsay, he was on disability or something."

When Beede died, no one took much note in town. Few even remember the fire.

"It doesn't ring a bell," said Bill Wells, the former fire chief. "It's a small town, everybody knows everybody. I can't even remember it."

Peter Lawsky, chief of the Telegraph Ridge fire district in Redway, about 189 miles north of San Francisco, Calif., said the fire likely occurred when the yearly Reggae on the River festival took place — an event that helps swell the Redway population of 1,200 to 10,000 in the summer.

Gary Holder, the police chief in Ferndale, Calif., was the commander of the sheriff's station covering Redway in 1992 and vaguely remembers the fire and Beede's name. "There were several trailers there, I believe," he recalled. "It probably wasn't noteworthy to us at the time."

Snodgrass remembers the fire but knows little about Beede's background or what drew the man to Redway.

"I didn't have anything to do with him. They weren't my type of people," he said. "I got a call from the coroner after he died at the hospital. They thought he was on my property and they were looking for information. I had no information to give to them. They were trying to find out who he was related to. That was the last I heard."

On his death certificate, Beede's occupation is listed as social worker at a youth center. There were no additional details listed.

Family's sorrow lingers

Frankie's father, Frank Zadrozny III, a machinist, died two years ago at age 59 of an embolism in the abdomen. His son's death haunted him to the end.

"He lost all trust. He was always wondering and looking behind him, wondering what he missed, what he could have stopped. He took on all the blame," Campbell said.

"He tortured himself with that. 'There wasn't a lot of talk about the past growing up. He would talk about him but it was in a way where he was almost holding it,' she said. "It was too much for him."

Frankie's sisters said they hope new DNA technology, unavailable when their brother was slain, may eventually shed light on who the killer is.

It is a simple hope that may still be difficult to realize.

Beede's DNA is on file in California. The pants little Frank Zadrozny wore, initially tested by the laboratory, have since been misplaced over the years. Authorities are now trying to track that evidence down, hoping to compare DNA found on the semen samples with Beede's.

While laboratory tests — if the evidence is found — may answer some questions, others will forever remain unanswered now that the prime suspect in the case is dead.

"He took some things to the grave with him that we would have liked to have known," Gomes said.

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Daughter of cop uses art skills to design program for medical examiners

The slaying of her classmate when she was 10 provides motivation for a Raynham woman to develop the computer software.

By Maureen Boyle
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

Coleen M. Crawford was 10 when her police officer father carried the lifeless body of her schoolmate from the woods abutting her Brockton home.

"They never found the person that did that to him and it always bothered me," she said.

The slaying of her classmate, 11-year-old Frank Zadrozny IV, in 1981 spurred Crawford as an adult to use her art skills to develop a special computer software program designed for medical examiners.

"They never caught the person and I thought, maybe if I could make a tool that could help medical examiners document things, it would help in the future," Crawford said.

The program — called DataFile 1.0 Medical Examiner Case File Plug-in — allows medical examiners to document detailed autopsy findings, link photos with autopsy charts and to send the file to prosecutors for review.

It can also be used in court — if needed — by prosecutors and witnesses to illustrate information about a slaying.

"I made sure the program was very clean and minimalist," said Crawford, now of Raynham. "It is clean and simple for the purposes of showing where the trauma was."

Crawford developed the program as part of her thesis project while a student pursuing a master's degree at the Massachusetts College of Art.

Crawford spent two years shuttling between classes and the state medical examiner's office in Boston, watching autopsies and detailing the steps documenting the process by the staff.

"I was there to observe their process, find out what their



COLEEN M. CRAWFORD stands in the woods behind the Davis School in Brockton where her classmate was murdered in 1981. Crawford has developed software to help medical examiners.

needs were and developed the software for their specific and general needs," she said.

Crawford said she wanted to make sure the program could provide the information in a format that would be ad-

missible in court and still help those in medical examiners' offices document findings with ease.

Crawford joined forces with a colleague, Ken Seier, to develop the final product. It was launched earlier this year at the 2004 American Academy of Forensic Science Conference in Dallas, Texas.

"We got tremendous response," she said.

Crawford is now looking at test marketing the program and is working on another program that would allow investigators to document findings in the field.

She said her parents initially were taken aback by her interest in forensics.

"My mother said, 'Now, tell me again, you're studying art but you're going to the medical examiner's office?'" Crawford said.

Her parents said they were initially surprised, then they realized the slaying of her schoolmate had spurred her interest.

"I said to her, 'You could have picked something a little less gory,'" said her father, John Crawford, a retired police officer.

"She lost a young friend when she was little and that was on her mind for a lot of years," he said.

Coleen Crawford said the death of Frank so close to her home made her think about the safety of her family — and the concerns her police-officer father had.

John Crawford joined the search for the child and helped authorities carry the boy's body from the woods.

"I can't even imagine what my father was thinking then. He had two daughters, we were about the same age, we played behind the school for recess," she said.

John Crawford said he hopes new technology — such as the type his daughter is developing — will help those in law enforcement today catch killers quickly.

One day, he said, the technology may even lead to the identity of the person who killed Frank Zadrozny IV.

"They never brought it to a conclusion, which is sad," he said. "He was a little angel."

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