

## UNSOLVED WITH STEVE GREGORY, EPISODE 203: THE MURDER OF WILLIE PIGRAM III

### TRANSCRIPT

Announcer

KFI AM 640 heard everywhere on the iHeartRadio app.

Steve Gregory

On any given day in Southern California, hundreds of investigators are working more than 10,000 unsolved cases. That's 1000s of friends and families who have lost loved ones 1000s of people who got away with a crime and 1000s of murderers who still walk the streets, killers who may be your neighbor, go to your church, or could be dating a close friend. For the next two hours, we'll highlight cases that have gotten cold, baffled investigators or just needs that one witness to speak out. This is unsolved with Steve Gregory.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's homicide case number 004 - 00113 - 3199 - 011 The murder of Willie Pigram III.

Detective rich Tomlin called me about the case of Willie Pigram, a 20 year old man who had a promising future, a young man who did everything right. This case has been a tough one for Tomlin, and he said he was one of the responding investigators on the night of September 26 2004 Tomlin who recently retired but now works as a cold case detective says he wants to close this case, says it's unusual for a detective who rolled out to the murder scene in 2004, to still be working it 18 years later. So we head down to homicide bureau in Monterey P ark Tomlin gives me an overview.

Detective Tomlin

Basically, on September 26, of 2004, at approximately 2am, Willie Pigram drove to the Lowe's parking lot, located at 2800, West 120th Street in Hawthorne, with a large group of people without warning or provocation, the above, excuse me without warning or provocation. A suspect approached Willie while he was sitting in his car and shot him to death.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so that sounds just pretty... I don't want to say basic, but it just sounds like out of this seems very random and out of nowhere.

Detective Tomlin

Well. Basically what happened was this. Willie was a young man who grew up in the city of Carson. Very well liked, very mild mannered. He had no gang affiliation whatsoever, hung out with a very good group of friends. One of his friends discovered two weeks prior, that there are a group of a car enthusiast that cruise the area of Crenshaw Boulevard, from El Segundo down to basically 120th Street. His friend told him that, hey, it's a great time. There's a lot of girls outside and everybody's just, it's just a good time hanging out, hanging out. Willie actually went once enjoyed himself. And so the following week, he decided to go back a second time with his friends. Willie was with one of his friends in a green El Camino and his other two friends were in a different car while cruising with approximately 100 other vehicles. The they got word that the Hawthorne police were setting up a roadblock a DUI checkpoint. So all the

cruisers decided to go into the Lowe's parking lot located on 120th Street. Now, if you're familiar with the area, if you're driving down the 105 freeway at Crenshaw, if you look to the south, you will see a huge parking lot anchored by with several stores, but it's anchored basically by the Lowe's parking the Lowe's business store, once in the parking lot the cars reassembled and now you have several people just hanging out just standing around cars while others are cruising up and down the aisles. In fact, we later on where you will obtain video of the parking lot and you see how some of the cars are doing donuts. And everybody's basically showing off having a good time. Well, at one point, Willie and his friend, were driving down one of the The aisles went and two African American men walked over to him. Now you have to remember, it's it's approximately 75 cars that there. There are people outside and actually this parking lot is so large, you actually have stop signs within the within that parking lot. Willie was stopped briefly at a stop sign two African American males walked over to him and said, one of them said the magic words "where are you from?" In the streets, if someone approaches you and says those words, they are it's two things. One, the person who says it is identifying himself as a gang member. And two, he's questioning you to see if you are a gang member. Willie, obviously with no gang affiliation, responded were from nowhere. The male suspect, then replied, You better be from nowhere and walked off. Willie and his friend continued in the long line, there was approximately 10 lines with approximately 10 cars. And approximately five minutes later, that same individual walks over. leans into the driver's open driver's side window, pulls out a gun without any provocation without saying another word and shoots Willie multiple times. His friend seeing what's going on. And seeing that there's other people outside of his car door that he wouldn't be able to open it up, dives through his open passenger window and begins running where he hears additional shots. Willie, probably fatally injured at that time, slumps over the drivers. His hands are in the driver's wheel, and his foot is on a gas pedal. And he slowly proceeds where he collides into several cars and then ultimately crashes into a fence at the Lowe's curb line store curb line and comes to rest.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with detective Rich Tomlin with the LA County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Bureau about the shooting death of Willie Pigram III in the city of Hawthorne. So the car comes to a stop. And you see by then his passenger was able to escape the car, correct? Yes. So nothing happened to him. He was able to get away?

Detective Tomlin

able to get away. But it's interesting to know, while we're doing the scene, the we recovered two different types of shell casings, which indicated there were two shooters. Future witnesses said they heard multiple gunshots and they could tell that it was two different guns being used. but his friend escaped unharmed.

Steve Gregory

Detective, was there any indication that the shooters or the were the two shooters acting by themselves, or were they were they part of a bigger group or gang?

Detective Tomlin

So when we got there that morning, there were no witnesses, everyone had scattered once the gunshots happened. Everyone left this is a little after two in the morning after two in the morning. And actually, Willie was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead. When we did follow up, later on the next couple days, we were able to identify a few people that were at the scene. And we learned that these individuals were identified as being gang members. And they were happened to be in the large group

Steve Gregory

okay, they were part of the group that were already there for the cars.

Detective Tomlin

Yes. And and what's unfortunate at that time, as I said, is a lot of cars 50-75 to 100 cars. There apparently were of some gang members in the group of people that were cruising that evening.

Steve Gregory

Before we get back to more of detective Tomlin I want to tell you how you can contact the Unsolved team. If you're listening on the iHeartRadio app, just simply press the red microphone and record your story, idea tip or comment or press pound 250 on your cell phone and say the key word Unsolved. That's pound 250 And the key word unsolved more on the death of Willie Pigram but first, this is unsolved with Steve Gregory on KF I am 640 Time now for a news update.

## **Segment 2**

Steve Gregory

KF I am 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. If you're listening on the app, you can send us a tip about a case, a story idea, or a comment about the show. Just tap the red microphone on the app and record your message. I'm talking with detective Rich Tomlin with the LA County Sheriff's Homicide Bureau about the shooting death of Willie Pigram III, it happened September 26 2004. Detective, before the break you were telling us about Willie being a part of this sort of this car club or car enthusiast club and he'd already been showing off his car. And by the way, you had provided some photos that were sitting here thumbing through, it's really nice looking green El Camino with some specially our specialty rims. So you said there were about 75 cars in the group that night that were all kind of showing off, right?

Detective Tomlin

Yes. And and I want to clarify, Willie wasn't part of a car club. Okay. But what happens is, he learned about, again, the old movie American Graffiti, people are cruising up and down a street. He has a nice car. It's a good time.

Steve Gregory

But then what was there a was there an organized group and he just kind of become just kind of followed in or just a gathering? It's just a just an informal gathering. Informal gathering, it was a Saturday night because there are many very organized car clubs, that do this very thing.

Detective Tomlin

Yes, this was not this is just guys, people getting together and just, again, doing what young people do just having a good time.

Steve Gregory

And you said that you believe that there might have been at least two shooters based on the fact you found two sets of shell casings, two different sets of shell casings. But you say witnesses have told you they believe that the two shooters were part of the group of people there to enjoy the cars.

Detective Tomlin

Yes, those individuals that did the shooting were amongst the crowd, once they were in the Lowe's parking lot. Whether they were in an actual car, we were never able to determine that. But they were on foot. As I said, once the group went over to the Lowe's parking lot and reassembled. There were people inside the cars and other people just milling around, just hanging out

Steve Gregory

based on your experience. Detective. You've been covering cases like this for many years. You said something that really caught my attention. When the guys first approached the car. And you said, quote, When they asked the magic words, where are you from? If you're not from that area? What should someone say?

Detective Tomlin

Unfortunately, there is no right answer. When somebody challenges you, and we've seen this, I've seen this personally over and over again. They're not paying it, they don't, they don't care. They don't care when you tell them I'm not from anywhere. And I don't want to stereotype. But it's obvious when someone is in a gang, and it's obvious when people aren't. And it would have been very easy to identify that these two guys, quote, are from nowhere. And so at that point, though, you can't get into the mind of a man who's a gang member who's determined to do a shooting?

Steve Gregory

Well, in my experience, the two things I always hear about with respect to gang shootings are actually three retaliation, initiation, Mistaken Identity.

Detective Tomlin

Well, it's funny you mentioned that because during this investigation, one of the leads we had one of the leads, or one of the some of the information we developed was the week prior there had been a shooting. And that individual who had did the shooting was in a bluish green, El Camino. So our theory was that the gang member saw that vehicle and made it up in his mind determined in his mind that those occupants were responsible for the shooting that had happened the week prior. And that's why Willie became a target.

Steve Gregory

Is that plausible?

Detective Tomlin

Absolutely. We've we've had I've I've personally had cases where innocent individuals are killed because the suspects later on, say that well, we thought they were involved in a previous shooting against me personally or their gang.

Steve Gregory

So it was an intended retaliation but ended up being mistaken identity.

Detective Tomlin

Yes, that was one of the theories that was one at some of the information that we had received. How frequent is that happen? It happens more than anything. Because these guys are so reckless, they don't take the time to figure out what's really going on. And a lot of innocent people suffer the consequences.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with detective Rich Tomlin with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's department's Homicide Bureau about the shooting death, very odd shooting death of Willie Pigram III in the city of Hawthorne. Where's Willie from?

Detective Tomlin

He lived in Carson.

Steve Gregory

He lived in Carson?

Detective Tomlin

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Then did you have to make notification to the parents?

Detective Tomlin

Unfortunately, I did. I have made over 100 death notifications in my career. And this particular notification was one of the hardest that I've ever had to do. And it still is very vivid. In my mind, we knock on the door. Mr. Pigram, Willie father answers. And when we told him when I tried to tell him that his son had been killed, he doubled over in pain. I'm getting emotional, just talking about it. He doubled over in pain, grabbed his stomach as if he was being shot right there. Like I said, it was, it was so obvious a father's love that it will I will never forget that

Steve Gregory

how soon after the shooting, or that he was pronounced dead? Did you have to make that

Detective Tomlin

that was within two hours, two hours?

Steve Gregory

How do you I can't imagine doing that. You say you've done quite a few of these. What happens next, when you tell a parent that their child's been shot? And for no apparent reason? How do you.. what's next when you're with a parent?

Detective Tomlin

Well, you know, you you, I don't think there's any way you can say you can console them. It's such a shock, I can't even imagine. I can't imagine the shock they feel. So you just give them the information where their loved one is at. You provide them obviously with my information, my me and my partner's information, how they can get in touch with us. And then we do tell them once things are settled, we are going to have to go back and speak to them. Because part of an investigation is we have to learn who the person was that was killed. And it was quite obvious talking to the family and friends that this young man who was very well loved, minding his own business, and just was trying to just making it through life as a young man progressing through life. So and why is that important? Because you do need to know who you're dealing with. If he was a gang member, now you're looking at okay, what was his life about? What was he doing? Is this a retaliation? Is this a direct reaction to something he had caused previously?

For more about this case, and others head over to [KFIAM640.com](http://KFIAM640.com) key word Unsolved. More with detective Tomlin but first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640 Time now for a news update.

### **Segment 3**

Steve Gregory

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Detective Tomlin

Correct. And I believe he was going to school at the time and he was working. And I one thing that always stands out is he went with three other friends that evening, and one of his friends had just gotten back from college that weekend. And they were you know, happy to see him and they were all going out. And I mentioned that because this is the type of people he hung around because that's something else you want to see. You know, the old adage you are who your friends are. All his friends were very squared away young men, again, figuring out what they're going to do with their lives. Law abiding citizens, and just that evening, wanted to go out, just have a good time. Never expecting that something like this could happen.

Steve Gregory

Well, what were his prospects? Was he about to go to school and where

Detective Tomlin

I believe I can't remember I believe he was already in attending, already in school. Attending a junior college, I believe.

Steve Gregory

so siblings?

Detective Tomlin

No siblings, is an only child. And, and what I remember about this, talking to his friends, they were excited. This was this was a new adventure. They didn't know anything about people getting together and cruising up and down the street. So this, like I said, so. I didn't confirm this with the family. But what I took as as he was pretty sheltered, if you will, he was just in his own little cocoon, his own little world. And he stepped out of it by going down to Crenshaw Boulevard.

Steve Gregory

But see he had this car I mean, did he have a job?

Detective Tomlin

Yes. I believe he was working. Yes. Yeah.

Steve Gregory

Any idea where he was working?

Detective Tomlin

No,

Steve Gregory

I know what I mean, he was able to afford this car. A really nice green El Camino with these custom rims. And so it sounds like he was sort of like you said, stepping out of comfort zone.

Detective Tomlin

They live in a very nice neighborhood in Carson. You could see the family was doing well. And so we had his whole life in front of him.

Steve Gregory

You know, what's interesting is, this is a cold case. And very seldom do I get to talk to the detective that started the case. And now is still on the case this many years later.

Detective Tomlin

Well, what happened is I retired, officially retired in March of 2021. And then I was rehired specifically to work cold cases. One of my biggest disappointments in my career was never been able to solve this case. So when I had the opportunity to come back, now, under that title, under that guise, I have, I can now put my efforts into trying to resurrect this case. Hopefully, now I can go back re interview people that we had identified as being there that evening. And what am I hoping I'm hoping that years later, it's, it's been 15-17 years later, going on 18 years later, people now that were there that was young, now they're mature. Now, they probably have children themselves. So maybe now there'll be more empathetic and now be more willing to step forward and, and give this family some type of closure.

Steve Gregory

Have you spoken to his parents?

Detective Tomlin

I spoke to Mr. Pigram last week, and I told them, Steve, what a great job you do and what a great opportunity this is to try to resurrect the case again and try to get information and Mr. Pigram was very open and very willing to participate.

Steve Gregory

The friend that night that the person that was in the car with Willie, that got away, were you able to get him pretty quickly and talk with him?

Detective Tomlin

Yes. Oh, everybody was very cooperative. All his friends were very cooperative and He was able to provide us with a description of the suspect. And that description is he's an African American male between 18 and 22 years of age. He was approximately 5'10 to 6 foot tall. And he weighed between 150 and 160 pounds.

Steve Gregory

By now he would be in his 30s?



Detective Tomlin

Yes. Now what was interesting about also the description he provided, the individual was wearing a durag, a yellow do rag and

Steve Gregory

describe what that is

Detective Tomlin

a durag is a basically a stocking, a scarf, if you will, that guys would tie over their head. And that was yellow, and he was wearing a back then in 2004. There was a rage of people wearing the NASCAR.. I don't know if you're familiar with the NASCAR racing, they had these nice jackets. And this individual had a NASCAR

Steve Gregory

it's usually what the colors black, red and white.

Detective Tomlin

Yes. And this one though, had yellow. So again, it was yellow, black and red. And it stood out. So yes, the witness was he was able to give a very good description actually sat down with our sketch artist. And, and we were able to obtain a photo, a sketched photo of the suspect.

Steve Gregory

And we of course, will have all of this posted at KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". I'm looking at, which I assume looks like the DMV photo of of Willie. And then the suspect sketch on the right. And I gotta be honest with you, detective, I mean, this just looks like an average kid.

Detective Tomlin

Exactly. And that's what's unfortunate. He was an average looking young kid. I want to step back to.. just for a second to show how serious this matter was. And how, what a nice kid Willie was that the city of Carson put up a \$25,000 reward for the for information leading to the arrest and conviction.

Steve Gregory

Is that still active?

Detective Tomlin

You know what? I would have to check? You know, I could only imagine that they would honor that. That reward they placed it back then and Yes.

Steve Gregory

And do you know if there's a plan to ask the Board of Supervisors for help on this?

Detective Tomlin

Yes, that that is also in the works, to have them also contribute and maybe if we can get a larger amount of money here, give people incentive, again, years later to step forward. And to help solve this case.

Steve Gregory

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#### **Segment 4**

Steve Gregory

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Detective Tomlin

Well, there's two theories, too. When I say theories, there was two areas that we really concentrated on that we were getting information about. Number one, the area where the cruising initially was going on was the Rollin' 60s Crips, okay. But where the shooting happened, we kept getting information that it was some UG Crips or Underground Crips, and during this time period, that particular gang was very, very active. And in fact, we had gotten a clue of one particular person that had been identified. But once we looked into that we found out at the time of that shooting, that person had already been was already in custody on another charge. So that eliminated that

Steve Gregory

if you are looking at the UG Crips. Do you believe that that's who the shooters were from?

Detective Tomlin

I believe. Our strongest indication is that's where they're from. And then we could be wrong. But it it kept coming back the information we were receiving, it kept coming back to that particular

Steve Gregory

do confidential informants help you and stuff like this. Did you have access to that?

Detective Tomlin

And that's where we had one confidential informant. And informants. This particular informant did not have direct knowledge. They give you information word on the street, the street rumors, and that we had two confidential informants on this thing. And that's the information they were providing, like, you need to look at the UG Crips. What was very frustrating with this case. And as I said, we had obtained video from the Lowe's parking lot. It was very grainy, but you could see the large amount of cars a large amount of people that were out there. So there were witnesses to this shooting. And it was very frustrating to this day, that people would just say I wasn't there, or I didn't see anything. And you know, they have information. And that's a again, that's why this is a plea for help. That years later. We're hoping that people matured. Maybe they they just been weighing on their conscious. And this is a way through an avenue through your radio program, that they can step forward and provide information.

Steve Gregory

You'd like to think people would step forward to do the right thing. But unfortunately, people seem to be more motivated by cash.

Detective Tomlin

Yes, I know. Yeah. But yes, but cash is definitely a big incentive. And that's why we want to get this back out there that there is a reward leading to the arrest and prosecution of a suspect. Or to.

Steve Gregory

So there was, you know, you say that the evidence showed you there were two different guns used. But the witnesses only described one shooter.

Detective Tomlin

Yes. And the unfortunately the ballistic evidence that we obtained from the body of Willie, it was just one shooter for him. I said we're thinking the other shooter was shooting at his friend.

Steve Gregory

Okay. Do you know that how many times Willie was hit?

Detective Tomlin

He was shot eight times

Steve Gregory

eight times?

Detective Tomlin

Yes. At point blank right at point blank range.

Steve Gregory

In your experience, this many years later, and you were talking about you hope someone you know that's matured a bit maybe? Maybe guilt plays a role. Maturity plays a role. Is it your experience that even now, most of these people are going to be in their 30s, maybe early 40s? Would they still be a member of a gang

Detective Tomlin

it's hard to tell you have some data, still active members

Steve Gregory

then, in your experience, what percentage of people that are very active in a gang in their 20s, fade out of the gang activity,

Detective Tomlin

I would say the majority fade out because either through or they're either in prison, they're dead, or they slowly disassociate themselves. In this particular case, there were so many people out. I would venture to say it was just a very few amount of gang members. So these are just common everyday folks that were there. And this is what we're really impressing upon them, please step forward. Please give us the information that you have to help us solve this.

Steve Gregory

Yeah. Because if I heard what you said in the beginning, is that this was an unintended location. Because the street because there was the checkpoint with the police department, right? Yes. So this was not a planned gathering spot.

Detective Tomlin

No, it was just an impromptu. Hey, everybody, let's head over to the Lowe's parking lot and continue doing our enjoying our evening.

Steve Gregory

You know, this whole thing was just a spontaneous accident.

Detective Tomlin

And in all old information we have this murder was spontaneous. This individual decided that he was going to shoot somebody that evening. For whatever reason he identified Willie, again, we believe because of the car that he was in this guy associated that car with a shooting the week prior. And approached. Willie,

Steve Gregory

does the father still have Willie's car?

Detective Tomlin

I don't know. You know, I don't know.

Steve Gregory

Well, Detective, I wish you all the best. And I wish you all the luck on this one. We'll certainly do our part. If you find out about the reward, let us know.

Detective Tomlin

Yes, I will, sir. And I appreciate your time. And I know the family and friends of Willie, appreciate your time and he has not forgotten and we still need to bring closure. At least that part. Because he will never be complete closure. But at least that part of solving who who did this.

Steve Gregory

Thank you for your time. Coming up, my conversation with the father and uncle of Willie Pigram III. If you have a tip about this case, or any one that we've featured on the show, just dial #250 on your cell phone and say the key word "unsolved". This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

## **Segment 5**

Steve Gregory

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Mr. Pigram

He was a I'm gonna say, super good guy. You know, he was born in California. And he grew up in the city of Carson. So everything was really going.... Really, you know, ever since he was a kid, played baseball, played some basketball, played football. He ended up going to Mayfair, played football down there. He was really great son. It's things that happened, you know, in his life that you know, I remember I remember. I'd got on him because he had an accident. And I told him, Hey, you know, son, you got to be careful, you know? And he says, Dad, you know, you know, I didn't try to do it. I said, No, no, I understand that. But you have to, you know, be careful.

Steve Gregory

This is a car accident?

Mr. Pigram

It was a little car accident when he was in high school. So that pass, then maybe three weeks later, he had another accident. But he called me on the phone. He said, Dad, I was just in an accident. And I said, Okay, what happened? What was going on? He says, I was sitting at the light. And the woman she just ran into me. So he says, I'm okay. And then the woman says, Let me have the phone. Let me talk to your dad. And she says, Sir, you know, I ran into your son, she says, but what I want to tell you is that, you know, he jumped out of the car and he came back to make sure I was okay. He said, she says when he came out of the car, I thought he was gonna jump on me. Because I ran into him. And he says, no, no, are you okay? No, she said, you know, the doors were locked, and she says, When I realized that, you know, he cared more about me than what he cared about himself. She said, she just felt so good. And she had to get on the phone to actually let me know that he didn't have anything to do with the accident.

Steve Gregory

You know what, sir? It's interesting. That's the first story you think about was him. This was high school. Was he a good kid growing up?

Mr. Pigram

Oh he was fantastic.

Steve Gregory

What, what about him really jumped out at you in terms of his ability? What did you think he was going to be?

Mr. Pigram

Well, I thought it could be anything that he wanted to be. He played football. And I remember him telling me he said, Dad, you know, I made to football team. I said, Okay, that's great. And then he says, he made the JV team. And when it was time to elevate, you know, when the team was going to the playoffs, he says, they moved me up to varsity. So I'm gonna play varsity. And I didn't know anything about, you know, really football. And he moves up to varsity. And he says, Dad, you know, I don't know if this is gonna work out. I says, What do you mean? He says, you know, they, they're using us to be I don't know what they call him. I wear the varsity. He gets to run you over. You know, you're the other team. Yeah. Right. Yeah. So he was like that. I'm not used to this. You know, these guys just run and I can't do anything back. He said, so. I don't think I'm gonna move up to varsity. I think I'm going to tell him that Thanks, but no things. And that's what he did. He said, No, I'm not I'm not gonna do that.

Steve Gregory

So sports was his thing.

Mr. Pigram

Yes, sports. He coached low league baseball, he did the basketball. There was something else that.. Oh, he did wrestling for Mayfair. And he really really enjoyed the wrestling. You know, that was one one on one type deal. So, yeah, that's what he enjoyed doing.

Steve Gregory

Were you close?

Willie's Uncle

I was really close to him because I'm actually the youngest brother. Willie's brother, but I'm the baby brother. So I was the closest to Will.

Steve Gregory

So how old were you?

Willie's Uncle

I think I was still maybe 20 years older than Willie. Oh, okay. Yeah. So so it was still still gap. But I can remember when he was he was playing football, I believe. Not sure what sport but he was actually good. And me and him went out to the front yard and we play like, Okay, well got some skills. And Big Willie was telling me how he was in track also. And I'm like, Okay, I say, Well, I say lil Will, if you can beat me, that means you can beat the rest of your uncle's because I'm the youngest. And we went to the school and this was at like, seven o'clock at night. And we were going to run, run a mile. And I figured I could beat him. And I took off running and I'm running and he's just jogging. He's just jogging. And I'm running. So I'll say, Okay, you ain't gonna run. I'm gonna smoke you. I'm gonna beat you bad. I'll make it halfway around, I get tired. And he's just jogging. And he's getting closer. And closer. He got closer, I start running. I get tired again. And he's just going at the end of that now. He ended up in, beat me. And I was like, Wow, this kid here. You know, Will - whatever he set his mind to actually do, he was able to do it and do it. Do it Well.

Steve Gregory

You say you're the youngest of the uncles.

Willie's Uncle

I'm the youngest.

Steve Gregory

How many uncles?

Willie's Uncle

It's four of us total? Four uncles? Well, it's three, three uncles. Three uncles and his dad.

Steve Gregory

So did you get together frequently for dinner for gatherings? I mean, was the family close like?

Willie's Uncle

The family was pretty close every like holiday. It was it was normally here, because my mother's here. And my father was here. So we would celebrate, you know, at the same same house.

Steve Gregory

You've given me a background as has him growing up and it looks like he probably has a pretty good career ahead of him. Mostly, probably sports, athletics, scholarships. Was there anything like that going on?

Mr. Pigram

Well, he had a I'm gonna say the scholarship, he was going to school he was going to transfer to the college. And I'm trying to think what was going on with that? Because it's a his cousin was going to UCLA. I mean, USC, I play football for USC. So when Will graduate it will want it to go to USC, but he couldn't actually get in. So he started going to JC College, in order to do the couple of years to be able to get in. And that's when, you know, things kind of went bad. He was picking up his cousin from the airport. I'm trying to think yeah, because his cousin was playing for USC playing football. So he would pick him up from the airport. You know, when he went out of town and I was a lot going on back then. It was a lot going on, as far as since his cousin was playing football. Him and his cousin was together a lot. Yeah, he was going to USC he was busy. Yeah, he was he was having a lot, A lot of fun

Steve Gregory

More with the family of Willie Pigram III , but first this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

## **Segment 6**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory. And this is Unsolved. If you're listening on the app and have a tip, story, idea or comment, just press the red microphone button and leave your message. I've been speaking with the father and uncle of Willie Pigram III, a 20 year old man who was shot and killed in the city of Hawthorne. September 26th, 2004. When you get the call

Willie's Uncle

I wasn't there at the beginning, but I'm gonna give you a little information about before, before it happened. Okay, so I believe little Will was washing the car. And, you know, they would drive up and down Crenshaw, you know, the people with the nice cars. And he had one of his school friends that got back from college. So it was like, hey, you know, I'll pick you up and we'll just cruise up and down, you know, you know, everything is good there. So, before he could go, his dad told him Hey, you can't leave until you wash the dishes or something. Yeah. So he told me no, no, you can't leave. You know, you got to do your chores. Don't worry about it, dad. I got it. You know, so he goes in, knock the the chores out. And then that's when they went up and down Crenshaw, and the young people after they leave



Crenshaw, they go over to Lowe's. They just parked the cars, they got the music playing, you know, everybody's talking. And they said when he went in, couple guys had walked up to him and you know, asked him, where are you from? Do you gangbang? He was like, Nah, I don't you know, I don't gangbang. And they said, okay, and they left. So he goes over to his friends. He tells his friends, hey, you know what, there's some other guys here. You know, that's just not here for fun. You know how much I'm gonna go ahead and take off. So he had caught a couple of his buddies that was coming. And he told me don't even come, you know, don't look like it's, you know, good tonight. And when he was on his way out, that's when the two guys came back. And that's when they started shooting. So I didn't get the call until it was late. Probably if I'm not mistaken. 11 To 12 I really can't remember. But the crazy part is that I have a cousin that's a doctor and she was working at Martin Luther King hospital. So from what I hear the call came in about you know, shot the victim come in, she was in between shifts. So the next doctor came in the next doctor said we'll take that one see and up and left. And later on, she found out that that was wheel so it was really really it was.... it was bad.

Steve Gregory

Well, Willie. Did you get the call first?

Willie Pigram II

The neighbor came by a neighbor, happened to go down and she saw everything so she ended up she stayed down there for a while. Then she ended up calling and she says I'm gonna come by. I'm not gonna tell you over the phone. So she she came by and she told me that he had been shot. She said she she doesn't know really what happened. But I they shot him. He was still sitting in the car when she left. So that's how I got the message. So I wasn't sure where he was. Then I ended up getting another call and he was at Martin Luther King, you know, they had, I guess a trauma center there. So you know, that's when we got the call. So Me and the family. We jumped in the car and we drove down to Martin Luther King, you know, we pray and we pray all the way up. Prayed that everything would be okay. But when we got there, they said he had passed. And they picked him up. So we could at least go in it. You know, see the body? And so that's where it was.

Steve Gregory

I know, it's it's difficult for you, sir. And it's been a long time, a lot of years. And, obviously, it's feels like it was yesterday to you. I mean, I'm really sorry for your loss. And I'm sorry for what you're going through. But, I want you to tell people, if you can give them an insight as to how you go. Were you trying to process how this kid you just explained, was liked by everybody, good at sports, he had job offers. He had everything ahead of him. What was going through your mind as to why this would have happened?

Willie Pigram II

You know, I couldn't figure that out because when I say even people that were, I'm gonna say, like, gangbangers, people that were in gangs, when it happened, you know, they came to the house. And they told me, they says, and also they talked to the detective too, because I remember detective said that, you know, it was a certain individual down there that we would like to talk to, you know, we were sure that he has some insight, you know, maybe you know, what happened. And they said, if you can get in contact with this person, you know, it would be great. So everybody was coming over to the house,

you know, when it happened, you know, maybe it seemed like for a week, you know, if not longer people coming over every day, you know, for support, you know, bring us something to eat. And I talked to a few of the guys now there. And they said, Oh, yeah, you know, we know who that is. And they they told him, I said, Can you can you let him know that detective would like to talk to him. He could come by the house, you could meet, you know, at my house. So he said, Yes, he ended up saying, Yeah, I'll talk to the detective. And then he came by the house and he says, hey, you know, I just wanted to let you know that your son wasn't involved in any gangs. He didn't do anything like that, you know, he said, I used to go to your son because whatever I needed, he could get me as far as you know, like, if I needed, you know, the internet, that's when the internet was, you know, coming out it was big. So my son who had to get online and do a lot of things so they said yeah, Will would always, you know, help us point us in the right direction to get us the things that we wanted to get. And he says yes, I'll talk to the detective. And I he came by, detective came by they talked then the detective told me he says hey, he says only hear good things about you know, little Will that's what they call them, little Will, he says only hear good things about him. And he says that we wanted to talk to this individual because he was really you know, heavy, you know, into the gangs.

Steve Gregory

More with the family of Willie Pigram III, but first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

### **Segment 7**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Subscribe to this podcast on the iHeartRadio app and leave us a message by simply pressing the red microphone inside the app. I've been talking with Willie Pigram II. The father of Willie Pigram III, Uncle Melvin has also joined the conversation and before the break, Pigram was explaining how his son had been interviewed by a detective about someone whose son knew someone who had ties to gangs.

Willie Pigram II

He says, Yes, I'll talk to the detective. And I he came by, Detective came by they talked. Then the detective told me, he says, Hey, he says, only hear good things about you know, little Will. That's what they call them little Will, he says, only hear good things about him. And he says that we wanted to talk to this individual, because he was really, you know, heavy, you know, into the games. But he said that, no, no, Will wasn't doing anything. He said, I actually saw Will, he says, I told Will that no, no, you could stay you know, don't worry about it, you know, you could just still here with us. And he says, Will, no, no, I you know, I'm not, you know, involved in any of that stuff. So, you know, I'm just gonna go home, you know, and that's when you know, I will left to go home.

Willie's Uncle

Yeah, let me add on to that, that that was the part that was, you know, a lot of people thought was strange, because if you know anything about LA, Carson, Compton, Long Beach, you have different gangs. So you got the red, which is blood, you got the blue. That's Crips. So when cool or just from just being out the school and then being out. He worked on cars, you put in radios. So that's what he

did. Will, he worked on cars. And then by, you know, someone else will say, Oh, man, if you want that fixed, talk to lil Will, he'll fix it and he don't charge much. So you had people from both sides, actually dealing with little Will. So he was able to go wherever you want it to go and not had a problem.

Steve Gregory

Does that make any of you nervous? That he had that kind of connection with the Bloods and the Crips?

Willie's Uncle

No, no, no, Because we we knew that he wasn't out there. Gangbanging. So if Will would even help my buddies? My buddies, like I said, I was about maybe 15-20 years older than Will. But I can remember a time when one of my buddies had had a flat, they ended up and calling little Will. We'll fix that in 30 minutes. You know, so it wasn't it really wasn't nothing to be nervous about.

Steve Gregory

So then, after the shock, the initial shock wears off Willie. Detectives start to talk with you and try to figure this out. Did they ever give you any idea of what they thought might have happened?

Willie Pigram II

Yes, they said what happened was that Will was driving a grand El Camino and from what they could gather. El Camino wasn't green, but it was a different color. Did a drive by over in another area. So these particular guys came down, they had been coming down, which I had no idea. They had been coming down for probably a month, down to Crenshaw, wherever they would leave from Crenshaw they would go you know, park the cars. They had been coming down there for like a month looking for this particular person that was driving the El Camino come to find out they shot three, you know, counting Will they shot three guys drive in El Camino cars within that month. So, detective said that it was a mistaken identity. They mistake him for being somebody that did a drive by.

Steve Gregory

I gotta ask you this. And the one thing I've learned about doing a lot of these stories how does that? How does it feel knowing that, A young black man, 20 year old, young black man, that the first thing you got to do is make sure everyone understands he's not in a gang? You know what I mean? You got to start right off the bat by defending that he wasn't in a gang. He was a good kid, he did all these great things. Did that get tiring?

Willie Pigram II

You know, I didn't have to really do that. Because once they met him, you know, it was like, everybody took him in, like he was their son. Most adults were especially adults. You know, they said, we had a friend, he would always come by, he'd always wanted to, you know, I'm thinking he always coming by to see me. But he's, Hey, how's little Will doing. Because little Will had did something for him. You know, he needed something done low, Will did it for him. And he was always, you know, checking on you. I just want to see how Will is doing. So everybody took well in as being, you know, that special kids, so I never had to defend him being in a gang. Everybody knew he wasn't in a gang.

Willie's Uncle

And, and I'll just want to add to it, I think with with that from, from your question, you know, is, is bad. You know, it feels bad that you sometimes have to think that I have a brother with five daughters, and one son. And me and him used to talk or we still talk. But years ago, he used to say, oh, man, I got all these girls, man. I don't know what am I have to do? You know? So he's speaking of protecting his daughters from not gangbangers, but just them getting .. getting pregnant or anything like that. And you know, we laugh, we talk. And I told him, Well, the thing about me because I have two sons. I said I don't have to worry about them getting pregnant. I said, but I do have to worry about them walking home and getting shot at or people thinking they're in a gang just because they're black. I said, you know, that's, you know, that's a bad bad feeling. You know, but the way we brought our kids kids up. Really, if you see him walking down the street, you may look but after you talk to him, shoot, this is a good kid. You know, we brought our kids up in a way that, you know, sometimes you may look a certain way, but if you can voice your opinion and let a person know that you're not that kind of guy, you know, it goes a long, long way. So yes, we had to tell him that, but that was because of the outside world. You know, but we really have a really good men in our family.

Steve Gregory

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## Segment 8

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. If you're listening on the iHeartRadio app and have a tip, story, idea, or comment, just press the red microphone button and leave your message. I've been talking with Willie Pigram II, the father of Willie pilgrim III. Melvin Pigram is Willie's uncle. And he's also been part of the conversation. The Pigram's were kind enough to invite me to their home in Carson.

Will you describe the the memorial service?

Willie Pigram II

I'm thinking speaking of the funeral. I'm gonna say, it just so many people that came to the funeral, you know, from, I'm just gonna say probably seemed like, just about everybody in the neighborhood. There was so many people there, to where they normally, you know, set seating aside for the family. And I didn't realize it was that many people, you know, that showed up. But they had our seats set aside for us. And when we walked in, it was like, this place is filled. You had people outside that couldn't get in. And when you speak it, gangbangers it was nobody down there, as far as you know, in, say, red colors or blue colors, gangbangers if they were there, we didn't see him. I mean, the funeral services went very well, everybody that got on the mic, and spoke. They got on the mic, and the said, you know, I just had to get on the mic. Because, you know, this was really a good kid.

Steve Gregory

Had any idea, he was that well loved?

Willie Pigram II

You know, I'm gonna say, I had an idea, but not love like that. I didn't think it was that many people that he touched. But he touched so many, you know, even the low job that he had, you know, he was a security guard. You know, they even came up and, you know, spoke about, you know, how good a guy you know, Will was and you know, how he was doing the job. And so, yeah, it was, the services were really nice.

Steve Gregory

You know, it's been a long time. 2004 is a lot of years ago. Do you think the person who pulled the trigger still out there?

Willie Pigram II

You know, I'm gonna say, I really don't think so. But I don't know. Detective told us at one time that the person that they felt that did it. Somebody ended up killing them. So I don't know. I don't know. He says, we don't have anything to where we have anybody to say that. I saw this person do it. He says, that's the biggest problem that we have right now. Because we don't have anybody stepping up to say, he did it, or he did it. Or they did it. You know, I saw them do it. That's that's a problem we have right now.

Steve Gregory

One of the things I have learned in doing this for a long time, is that, when these many years go by, some of the people involved in these crimes usually have families of their own. They've grown up and there's usually a bit of a guilt hovering over them. On the outside chance that the person or persons responsible are still out there. What is your message for them?

Willie Pigram II

My message has always been because I was raised in the church, you're either going to pay for it now or you're going to pay for it later. You know, it's something that you're not going to be just run from and think that you know, it's a done deal. So that's the way I look at it. Now. I know that the Bible tells me that he would never put more on me than what I could handle. And I'm just gonna say say that because it says that I believe that. And I believe that if they don't get him now, you're gonna get him later, but I would really be good, you know if they could get him now

Steve Gregory

as the interview comes to an end, Willie begins to tell me about things that remind him of his son, even a recurring dream he has about seeing and speaking with his son.

Willie Pigram II

Or, you know, same thing you know, riding down the street. You hear a certain song that just brings back those memories.

Steve Gregory

What's the song for you.

Willie Pigram II

Ah, trying to think what a song. I can't think of the name of the song. I know it when I hear it. But it was his favorite song. I really, and it'll come on the radio, and it just takes me all the way back. And just so you know, when I was dealing with the Justice for murdered children, parents murdered of children. I would talk to some of the parents that you know, it was just happened to them, that would say for me. I had a dream. My nephew had a dream also. But, you know, I had the dream and you know, "how you doing dad?". It wasn't like, "Son", you know, "you okay", he said, "Yeah, Dad, I'm, I'm good." I told him I was "Wow, are you sure, you Okay, is that I'm doing good?" And I said, "Will, you know, I gotta take you to see your mom" as "she would love to see you." And you know, now I'm really you know, it was so good. We jump in the car. And we're going see his mom. And then it was like that, "Dad, I gotta go. But I just wanted to let you know that everything is good." Then I woke up.

Steve Gregory

Well, guys, I hope you get your closure. I really do. Wish you all the peace. Thank you for your time.

Willie Pigram II

Great. Thank you. Thank you

Steve Gregory

and that's going to do it. Unsolved is a production of the KFI news department for iHeartMedia Los Angeles. Robin Bertolucci is our program director Chris Little is the news director. The program is produced by Steve Gregory and Jacob Gonzalez. Our digital producer is Andro Mammo. The field engineer is Tony Sorrentino, and our technical director is David Callaway. Coming up it's Coast to Coast, but first this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.