

UNSOLVED WITH STEVE GREGORY, EPISODE 104

TRANSCRIPT

SEGMENT 1

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 will 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 Police Department case number nine 6-0315096, first known as the Teardrop Rapist. Now referred to as "the Attacker Series".

It takes some work to convince agencies to participate in this program. You got to pitch your idea to captain's commanders and detectives, even deputy chiefs, you have to build trust. I've worked with the Los Angeles Police Department since my arrival at KFI in 2005. Over time, I've built great working relationships and gathered numerous sources. But this time I had to start over this was a whole new deal. I had an in person meeting with Deputy Chief Chris Pitcher, he's in charge of detectives at LAPD, who then introduced me to Captain John Tippet. He's the officer in charge of the robbery homicide division. You see the LAPD doesn't work with media outlets in this way. Sure, you'll see some detectives on documentaries or new specials but they're typically retired or have moved on. On rare occasions that department may participate with a news crew to help advance a case. But mostly the detectives of the elite robbery homicide division or HD keep to themselves. So landing this interview was quite a coup for us. After a successful meeting with Chief Pitcher and Captain Tippet. I was referred to Charlene Johnson and Donetta Menifee, the detectives in charge of the Teardrop Rapist case we're going all the way back to 1996. A period between '96 and 2012, when 39 at least 39 that you know of incidents of sexual assault, all with the same MO. And there's an interesting story behind Teardrop Rapist. We'll get into that a little bit later. But detective Johnson Why don't you give us the background get started and give us the very beginning that you know of.

Detective Johnson

So in the early 2000s around 1999-2000 LAPD's Robbery Homicide Division. At the time it was called Rape Special Section received a series of they identified approximately 19 cases that were all connected.

One of those cases was from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. The remaining 18 cases were LAPD cases. And this was a series of kidnap sexual assault attempt sexual assault that occurred primarily in the South Central area of Los Angeles. And the suspect would approach victims, early morning hours, usually between five and eight in the morning. He'd initiate a conversation, usually ask them a question about maybe where a street was. And then when the victims acknowledged the suspect. He would brandish a handgun, and would then force them to a more secluded location like an alley behind a building where we'd either assault them or attempt to sexually assault them. They investigated the initial series very strongly. You know, a team of detectives at the rape special section focused on it, I would say probably for all of 2000 and through 2000, late 2000 to about the beginning of 2003 is where all of the leads that they had any clues that they had given had pretty much been vetted out and you know at that point, they started assuming other investigations and the actual teardrop investigation became more of a side investigation instead of a main focus at that time.

Steve Gregory

What leads you to believe that in and I know you weren't the detective at the time but what what leads an investigator or detective to to conclude that they're all related?

Detective Johnson

The MO was very very distinct. The approach on foot the victims were generally at a bus stop the hours between like five and eight in the morning people going to work. How he approached them politely asking a question, producing the handgun. In most of those cases, a handgun was described the same, moving them to the secluded location. These are all very specific aspects of the modus operandi or what we call the MO. That led us to believe in addition to that there was his description as well. He was described as a shorter man, he was between 5'2 and 5'6, more on the slim side weighing between maybe 130 to 170. He always wore some type of a headgear, whether it was a bandana, a baseball cap, or he had on a hoodie. He was always wearing long sleeves, he was always wearing pants. And many of the victims described him as having a tattoo of a teardrop. Some victims describe one tattoo, some said there was two teardrops, some said it was on the right side under the right eye. For some it was on the left side under the left eye. But that was a pretty specific MO and description that it was easy to say many of these are linked, and some of them were also linked through DNA.

Steve Gregory

So what were the distances the time between each of the attacks? Was there any any significance to the time between attacks?

Detective Johnson

No. It was at some point at regular intervals. But when they received the investigation, you know, they do Crime Analysis run. So they were able to obtain cases back from when they first picked up the case.

So when they're working in 2000, they determined discovered there are some cases from the 1990s, the late 1990s that were potentially connected as well.

Steve Gregory

So when you look back at these cases, you didn't necessarily know they were all connected. And then all of a sudden, you saw similarities.

Detective Johnson

Yes, the investigators at the time, they would review the cases, they'd look at the MO The suspect description, they would get calls from the Division saying I think this case is connected, they would look them over. And then they would add a case, when they were doing the Crime Analysis runs, they would actually go back and look at previous cases that they did determine. And then there was also cases that were connected through DNA.

Steve Gregory

Detective, do you have is there some sort of a litmus test then if you look at the similarities or the MO's, how many of the similarities have to line up for you to say they're connected?

Detective Johnson

I wouldn't say that there's an exact number it's you review something and you get a feel for it. Like I feel like this is connected and and I will be honest with you, you know, just was really we have now 39 cases, there is a good possibility that although these 39 cases are connected and yes, 12 are connected through DNA, that leaves a huge number that could easily be other suspects

Steve Gregory

Sure.

Detective Johnson

But we would rather bring them in on the chance that we're not leaving something out. Then leave something out. Just to make sure we're not including ones that aren't.

Steve Gregory

You want to err on the side of it all Exactly. Sure. That makes perfect sense more with Detectives Johnson and Meniffee, but first I want to remind you about our #250 system. If you have a story idea or a tip on a case we've been highlighting here on Unsolved, call #250. From your cell phone, say the keyword "unsolved" and leave your brief message.

More from the robbery homicide division of LAPD but first this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 2

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app, see composite sketches of "the Teardrop Rapist" on our website at KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". And don't forget to subscribe to our podcast "Unsolved with Steve Gregory" on the iHeartRadio app or wherever you get your podcasts. We've been talking with Charlene Johnson and Donetta Meniffee, detectives with the LAPD's Robbery Homicide Division. We've been discussing "The Teardrop Rapist" an unsolved case which goes back to at least 1996. And over that time, there have been at least 39 rapes and sexual assaults when we broke Detective Johnson, we were talking sort of the background on the case. You obviously weren't with the case back then when did you pick it up?

Detective Johnson

So on November 10 2011, I was working robbery homicide. At that time, they had renamed Rape Special Section to Special Assault Section. So I was working Special Assault Section when I received a call out to Southwest Division for a kidnap sexual assault. I responded I handled the case. The MO now looking back was the exact same MO as the original series, but having not worked Robbery Homicide. At the time of the original investigation. I was unaware of the teardrop case. We did our investigation and then on November 29 2011, I received a DNA hit to the initial series. When I received the notification, I was unaware of what it was. But my partner at the time Jesse Alvarado was aware of the series because he had worked on HD during the initial case. He informed me what it was. And he said that it was a very prolific case from the early 2000s. When I started pulling case files, which unfortunately, we found very few case files from the original investigation, we had to piece a lot of it together and there is still a lot that's missing. I discovered not only the original investigation between 2002-2003. But between 2003 until approximately 2007. The case was investigated often on and during that time, the series actually went from 19 cases up to 26, including an additional two Sheriff's Department cases. So now there was 23 LAPD cases with three LASD cases. So when I picked up the case, my case became case number 27. So there was a lot of information to go through, we did find a box of clues we in reviewing all of the crimes that occurred, I noted that in one of the Sheriff's Department cases, the suspect had used a knife. Now we know this case is connected because we had DNA. But this is the first time we were aware that he used anything other than a handgun in the assault. So we expanded our crime analysis run to include attacks of the same MO with the same suspect description the same time a day, the same time approach but including knives. And by doing that, we very quickly expanded the case to approximately 32 LAPD cases. And we also did initial, you know, additional CAD runs to make sure that there was

nothing else with a handgun missed because as I said, the case really hadn't been investigated in depth since 2003. So between adding the knife as a weapon and doing an additional CAD run for other cases, we very quickly as I said rose to 35 cases. 32 being LAPD with the three LA Sheriff's Department cases.

Steve Gregory

Detective, I want to go back a couple questions you were talking about when you started to dig a little deeper into this. And you noticed there were files missing in this was missing. How does that happen?

Detective Johnson

Unfortunately, it's it's hard to say it could have been something as simple as when we moved buildings. You know, we used to be in our career center over to here it's possible that something inadvertently was left behind in a room it's possible that in the move something was misplaced. It was routed to the wrong location and could be sitting in a warehouse somewhere. It's possible when it was archived. It was miss marked in archives. You know, it changed hands with investigators. It's possibly that an investigator at one point that had the case, put it someplace and then moved or retired or moved to another division and forgot about it and never went back and pulled that case is, unfortunately there. There are things that happen in cases and you just you don't know but we I think we went through 700-800 archived boxes we went through every single box archived by a robbery homicide division just to make sure it wasn't Miss marked in archives. But we searched very hard, but did not find the original case files but was able to find a lot of stuff to rebuild the case anyway.

Steve Gregory

And, um, based on your experience, you were talking about the difference between the suspect using a gun and then now you found out he was using a knife in your experience does is that common where someone switches their MO up - nuances in their MO?

Detective Johnson

You do see it, especially in sexual assaults. And although I've never worked homicide, or here happens in homicides as people serial offenders commit crimes, they try to find what works best for them. And oftentimes what is working for them now doesn't work for them in the future. They need more, they need something different, to keep to satisfy whatever they need that's causing them to commit these crimes. It's possible that at one point he did not have a firearm available to him yet he still felt the need to go out and commit these crimes. But he had a knife available. It could have been that he was no longer getting the thrill he needed from the firearm and he chose to use a knife. But it is not unusual for MMOs to develop and change over time. And you're looking here over an extensive amount of time. We're not talking two or three years we're talking, you know, initially 10,11,12,13 You know 17... We're talking a long time for an MO to change and develop.

Steve Gregory

We'll explore that and more but first, this is KF I am 640 timed out for a news update.

SEGMENT 3

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. This is Unsolved. I'm Steve Gregory.

For a deeper dive on these cases go to KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". also download the podcast. It's on the iHeartRadio app, Apple or wherever you get your podcasts. We're talking with Los Angeles Police Department detectives, Charlene Johnson and Donetta Meniffee about the Teardrop Rapist. And before break, we were about to head into your pair of eyes on this, your fresh set of eyes, and your partner here, Detective Meniffee and kind of what your approach is on this older case.

Detective Johnson

As I mentioned earlier, we ended up with a, you know, in the spring of 2012, approximately 35 cases overall, including the three Sheriff's cases. You know, we have the benefit, I guess you could say, of hindsight of looking at a lot of the stuff that had been done in the original investigation, a lot of the you know, cases having now 35 To look at when they initially only had 19. We also had a lot more information to go by. But it's it was also very concerning, you know, to the command staff and to the community, that it's now known to them that there's somebody out there that's been doing this for such a long time and was much more prolific than they thought it was. So I think that's about the time that the command staff decided that we needed more resources than we had at the time. And they wanted to create a task force and the day they called I was not at work. But Detective Donetta Meniffee was and she unfortunately got the call.

Steve Gregory

Unfortunately, it's the one day that you don't want to answer your phone, I suppose. Yeah.

Detective Meniffee

So actually, I it wasn't a call, I was actually at work. And I just came to our HD in 2012. And at the time, I just started working sexual assaults because I never worked sexual assault section before I was coming from Newton Division, working robberies and burglaries and things like that. So sexual assault section was new to me. But that being said, when I came to the section, and I was tasked with this, it was an eye opener for me. It was somewhat overwhelming because it was a series of sexual assaults that they were talking about. So it was actually the lieutenant from Homicide, that came to me and said that Deputy

Chief Albany's wanted a task force in regards to the teardrop case, of course, I had no idea what he's talking about, because I never heard of it before. And so I was scrambling around to try to find something about the case to go to his office to talk to him about what we were going to do to put this taskforce together and what this case was about, because I didn't want to go up there and look like a moron didn't know what I was talking about. So of course, the lieutenant homicide, you know, he didn't know anything about the case, because he worked homicide. So we were scrambling around trying to put something together and trying to find out how many cases were involved. And that's when I realized how huge this case was and how many sexual assaults that had occurred.

Steve Gregory

Detective, I want to ask you this real quick is that, you know, when you hear the term "Task Force", you know, I think people conjure up all these interesting images. But what is a task force in this particular case? What does it do? And why is it valuable?

Detective Meniffee

Well, in when deputy chief or our lieutenant or someone is asking for a task force, it's almost like your bread and butter, it's a it's a great thing, it's a good thing, because that means that you can give the community what they really want is for law enforcement to get out there and try to solve this case has been that's been on the books for years, and to try to get this guy in custody. And that would Intel where there is detectives from different divisions or specialized units or law enforcement officer police officers out there to try to get out there and canvass and try to find this guy. And even if it means getting connected with outside agencies to try to get out there and put out flyers and door knock different areas where this guy have committed these crimes and try to talk to people out in the area where the crimes are committed and see if we can find this guy.

So how many people were on the task force?

Detective Johnson

It was total of 20.

Steve Gregory

Wow. Okay.

Detective Johnson

That included Juvenile division and Detective Division,

Detective Menifee

We had people on loan as well, that stayed right in our unit that helped us that were on loan actually.

Steve Gregory

So then you have a task force, now you have resources, you get to focus and concentrate. What do you do with a team like that.

Detective Menifee

Then we used what we call a case management, and we have certain people in the unit that are tasked with certain things to put to look for certain things within that task management system, whether it to be to look at all the field identification cards to look for MO's, to look for certain, like, identification marks, like for the tattoos, or anything that's saying, say, for instance, you you get a preliminary investigative report, and the victim is saying that something happened where the suspect had turned a certain way, and he had a tattoo on his chest, then they're gonna look in the Crime Analysis report and look for something similar to that, you know, so you have certain people tasked with different things that they're going to be looking for. And then at some point, like, I think she's going to show you afterwards, we're gonna go through all those folders to show what that information is.

Steve Gregory

It's very tedious work.

Detective Menifee

Yes. Takes a long, long time.

Steve Gregory

And, you know, I think the average person thinks you solve crimes in 47 minutes, like they do on Law and Order, right? That's not the way to happen. So how much time did you put into this task force?

Detective Johnson

The task force itself, at its maximum style size, ran from April through September of 2012. In 2012, they did send to people that were on loan went back to their divisions. But during that time, like detective Menifee said, you know, people were assigned tasks we had received, not only were we getting

hundreds of clues, but they actually were tasked with reinvestigating, all of the original clues from the case as well. Then there was teams that were tasked with tracking down all 35 victims and re-interviewing all 35 victims. So there was a lot to do in that short time from April to September.

Detective Meniffee

So if any of those victims, it's possible, you know, some victims remember things that happened to them that they didn't remember at the time and that that always happens. And so then they have to go and investigate reinvestigate those things. So it's, it's a lot of work. It's and so the whoever the investigator is at that time, they they're tasked with just on that one investigation with moving forward with that one when they may have other cases. So it takes a long time this case, we investigated this for how long this this went on for.

Detective Johnson

We investigated the Teardrop very strongly, I would say up until 2015-2016 was when I really started assuming additional cases.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with detectives Charlene Johnson and Donetta Meniffee about the Teardrop Rapist. When we come back, we'll talk about the fact that it's no longer the Teardrop Rapist and we'll explain why. But first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 4

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. We're at the Robbery Homicide Division of the Los Angeles Police Department in Downtown Los Angeles where we're speaking with detective Charlene Johnson and Detective Donetta Meniffee, they are tasked with the case of the Teardrop Rapist. But detective Johnson, I understand the term "teardrop" sort of changed and you sort of pushed for that?

Detective Johnson

Yes. It was around 2012 When we were doing the task force, and so task forces ending we did a lot with this case. And when I say a lot, we obtained a reward from the City Council. And it was \$50,000. Initially, it did eventually go up to 75. From the City Council over the years, the FBI has added another 25. So currently, we do have an active \$100,000 reward for any information leading to the arrest in the conviction of the suspect. But as we were distributing flyers, which I will let you know, we distributed well over 40,000 flyers in the community. Part of what we did as a task force was we went probably 20-30 Detectives door to door through a huge section of South Central Los Angeles. And we we handed out

like I said over 40,000 flyers. But one of the things that I noticed and what really brought it to light to me was I got a call from a patrol officer one afternoon saying that they had detained a subject which they believed was potentially "the Teardrop Rapist" because they matched the suspect description and the composites on the flyers. So when I asked for information about the person that was detained, and they gave me the date of birth, I realized the subject they had detained would have been nine years old when the first crimes occurred. So when I explained to the officer that the person we were looking at is much older, the officer was very focused on but they have the teardrop tattoo, and they look just like the composite. And we were getting a lot of that with clues that people would call just because somebody had a teardrop tattoo. And they were completely disregarding all of the other descriptors of the suspect. So I started I didn't want to I don't want to say I started pushing for I went to my supervisors and I said, Listen, we are getting a lot of unusable information and clues from the community because all people are focusing on is the fact that there's a teardrop tattoo. And if you look at our cases, over broad spectrum, there was not always a tattoo. It was sometimes described as a scar. Some people said he had a mark. Some described it as like I mentioned earlier, one tattoo or two tattoos, sometimes it was on the right side. Sometimes it was on the left side. Some person described it as just an outline. Some people described it as filled in it was described as a scab, it was described as a mole. So we began to really look at does this person even have a tattoo? Is it something that was fake? Is it something that maybe they had at one time and it was removed? But people were focusing so much on that tattoo, they were forgetting everything else. And I think we might have missed out on some very valuable calls because of this focus on teardrop rapists, teardrop rapists. So I asked and recommended that we renamed the series "the Attacker Series" to take the focus off of the teardrop and my supervisors were fully supportive of that. Between 2012 and 2013. If you look at media releases, the term actually went from "teardrop rapist" to "attacker series". And it was a little bit of confusion at first whenever we submitted paperwork and we talked about it we always talked about the Attacker Series formerly called the Teardrop Rapist. Because we really felt it was important to look at the overall description of the suspect, not just focus on one small aspect that we don't even know if it existed

Steve Gregory

Teardrop tattoos are extremely popular in in gangs and in South Central LA. I've noticed a lot of that. Yes, there's one of the most popular tattoos out there.

Detective Johnson

They are gang tattoos there. It's considered a prison tattoo. Some people do it just because they think it looks cool. So it is a very popular tattoo, as you mentioned.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with detectives Charlene Johnson and Donetta Menifee with the LAPD's Robbery Homicide division about now "the Attacker Series" and we'll keep referring to it now is the attacker series moving forward now that you explained how that how that works. And what's interesting about that is it's

usually the media because I was thinking "Hillside Strangler". I was thinking, what was the oh my gosh, what was the one that Richard Ramirez? Yes. Oh gosh. Now I can't believe drew blank. "Night Stalker". Thanks, Tony. So, it but the media tends to do that because the public wants to attach it they need something an easy identifier, something simple they can throw out there. So, Attacker Series is not very conversational. It's not very memorable. But has that worked? Has that that move shifted for you now? Are you do you think that? Have you stopped getting Intel tips or anything like that?

Detective Johnson

Well, I don't know that we can say the move has or has not worked. Because we made the move over during the height of the investigation and the media exposure of this. It did not diminish any of the exposure. I would say just to give you an idea, we have had almost 550 clues associated with this series. Since its inception clues meaning tips or lose our tips, call them by the community tips call them by the community or some clues that we have what we use them for was one of the things that we did was as an example, we did a geo graphical profiling of the area. The reason we did this is because the the series did not occur just in South Central Los Angeles. It hit Wilshire division, Rampart Olympic division, Newton division, Southwest division, 77 division, South East Division, and the Firestone Florence area of the Sheriff's Department. With such a wide map of instances we needed to try to focus in on where do we think this person came from. And one of the ways we did this was through geo profiling. So a doctor that created this system actually took the data for where the crimes occurred and was able to create what he believed was a hotspot of the nexus of this crime. And using that hotspot, which focus much tighter and more like the southwest area, and part of South East Division, they were able to do some computer runs. And we came up with approximately 1200 subjects who had been arrested for sexual assault crimes around the time that the series occurred that were linked to this hotspot. And some of those 1200 people well, we actually vetted through all of them, and we were able to locate and eliminate and identify all but 37 which were unidentifiable, we could not locate them so it's possibly they were people that had you know, given false information when they were arrested.

Steve Gregory

And we're gonna have you pause there because we have take a break when we come back let's finish up that thought... Geo profiling. Never heard of it before. Fascinating. More with the two detectives but first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 5

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory, and this is Unsolved. Before the break, Detective Johnson, we were talking about something fascinating. I had not heard before geo-profiling. And you were talking about how this scientist came up with this map of where crimes had been committed, and what do they do with that data?

Detective Johnson

So I don't know exactly what they do with the data. Because I am not the doctor that did it. I gave them my data. And they did it for me. But I do know that it's a Dr. Kim Rossmo, out of Texas State University. He is the one that created the geographic profiling. And they were able to take our data and give us back a, what they call, like I said, a hotspot, it's a nexus of where the suspect either lives has family works in the area, or there's something important to them in that area that links him to that area. So out of that, as I mentioned, we had developed approximately 1200 people that had been arrested during that timeframe for sexual assault, and those 1200 we were able to eliminate all but 37, who we could not identify or locate. We had been talking about clues. And you had asked if all of the clues came from community tips. Most of them did however, some of them were from information we brought in such as the geo profiling subjects that we were unable to locate.

Steve Gregory

So and this question is for either of you, detectives. You mentioned earlier DNA, that you had DNA hits, yes. To assume, based on the fact that we're talking about this case right now, and you don't have someone in custody, that the DNA is not in the system?

Detective Johnson

Correct. We have not hit to any offenders in the CODIS database,

Steve Gregory

but there is usable DNA. And so you were able to match that DNA with each of some of the victims?

Detective Johnson

Yes, we matched it to 12 of the cases. Another thing that we have done with it is during the clues that we were vetting out, we contacted approximately 70 individuals that were either given to us by the community or they were part of the 1200 from the database from geo profiling, that we collected DNA from that they voluntarily gave DNA for direct elimination purposes. So having the DNA has been very helpful and us not identifying at this point, but definitely in eliminating potential suspects.

Steve Gregory

Detective Menifee, based on your experiences, I'm looking at these composite sketches here. Am I missing the similarity between all of them? Is there a similarity?

Detective Meniffee

No, not really. But you have to keep in mind that in some of these cases, that the victims were young, like you have victims that were 14, and you have some victims that were a lot older. So you you gotta keep in mind that it's the perspective of a young victim of what the suspect may have looked like some victims, I think at 14, they were saying the suspect was in his late 20s. And, and, of course, the victim that was older, we would think that they're more closer to same with the suspect his age really was. And that's the same thing, how we would look at the suspect as far as the, you know, when they gave us a sketch of what the suspect may look like.

Steve Gregory

Yeah, because we're looking at composites that are dated back to '99. Is that earliest?

Detective Meniffee

Right, right.

Steve Gregory

Up to '02. Right. So we have a 12 sketches from '99-'02. Could you clarify again, so what are the ranges in age of the victims?

Detective Meniffee

You have from age 14 to 41. And you have a victim that's 36 years old. I mean, I'm sorry, the victim for the youngest victim is 14 years old, the oldest is 41 years old.

Steve Gregory

So then, again, based on your experience, and what you've been able to glean from this, did the the attacker have a favorite type of victim? Was there any similarity in the victims ethnicity and obviously age, there's a wide range there.

Detective Meniffee

He didn't. He didn't have a particular type. I think it was a just a type of He was an opportunist if it was there, and he thought, I think the suspect will look. Since he is, or a predator, he will look more into if it was an easy target, it was more of that more than of the age or, or what the person looked like, if it was an easy target most predators, that's what they're gonna look for.

Steve Gregory

Is that typical on something like that on a predator like that, it's just, it's just more opportunity than it is a favorite

Detective Meniffee

Most of the time it is. And although that, of course, we've had cases in the past that, that they have been just a, it's a favorite, but most of the time in the areas that we deal with, it's an opportunist at the time.

Steve Gregory

And I know this is going to be a very sensitive and potentially graphic question, but I'm just wanting to clarify this individual, we're calling him "the Teardrop Rapist" in the beginning, we're now calling "the Attacker Series", but the nature of the assaults themselves. Were they all rapes? Or were they assaults are a combination?

Detective Meniffee

Some were attempts and some were sexual assaults.

Steve Gregory

Everyone survived?

Detective Meniffee

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Okay. So there were no fatalities in these cases. Obviously, trauma plays a really big role in this. And you mentioned it earlier about how, you know, years later, that when you had to go back and re interview witnesses, that sometimes their memories jogged or sometimes it was blocked, subconsciously, right, and things loosen up a bit over the over time, has that changed your direction? Or focus on how you're approaching the case now has, have you gotten a lot of new information as a result of delayed trauma? Or you know what I mean, the trauma that's been sort of relieved over the years.

Detective Meniffee

No, not anything additional, that's going to change that. You know, that's going to make us say, Okay, now we can finally locate the suspect. Not not in that way. But it does. Like my partner Charlene, and I, you know, we used to teach sexual assault and one thing, you know, that it's always been said, and teaching the class and the one thing that Charlene always says that, you know, we always tell the students to look when, when the victims talk about the crime of sexual assault, they always tell, talk about things in pieces, like sticky notes that you put on the board. And they never tell exactly what happened to them as far as the rape in an order, although the patrol officer or the detective wants to know exactly what happened. Okay, when did you do this? When did you do that? What, when did he do this to you, but they can't tell you that because they're traumatized at the time. So they may tell you, he sodomized me at this time, when in fact, that didn't happen till the end. But at the time, that's all they remember is that they were sodomized. And you may think it happened in the beginning. But in fact, that happened at the end. But you know, sometimes law enforcement may think, Oh, well, she could be she may not be truthful, and that maybe not occurred. And it's not that it's just that they're traumatized at the time. So that being said, when victims are talked to years later, or two days later, they may remember something later because now they're calm, and then they're in a different place in their life. And they will talk to you and say, Oh yeah, he did this to me or he said this to me, I remember a scent about him because we always ask them when we interview them, could you smell something different about him and that's that's unique and we need to know that that's that's because we need to know if the other victims may know that so it's a it's a lot it's a different techniques that we you know, we ask victims because it may be something that's going to fit the MO on another case.

Steve Gregory

Was there a smell?

Detective Meniffee

That we know of in these cases, no. No, there wasn't like a cologne or smell.

Steve Gregory

And you know what I suppose to some of these victims don't want to talk.

Detective Meniffee

We have that some time. But by the time a robbery homicide gets the cases. I don't think we've ever had a problem with talking really victims at this point.

Steve Gregory

More with detectives Johnson and Menifee, but first this is KFI AM 640. Time now for news update.

SEGMENT 6

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app, download and subscribe to the Unsolved with Steve Gregory podcast on the iHeartRadio app, Apple podcasts, Spotify or wherever you get your podcast. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. We're talking with detectives Charlene Johnson and Donetta Menifee, both with the Robbery Homicide Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. We're in Downtown Los Angeles inside of headquarters, we've been talking about "the Attacker Series" formerly known as "the Teardrop Rapist". Detective Menifee, before break, we were talking about some of the methods that you use to try to get information and extract information, that's going to be a very delicate dance for lack of a better word in trying to get people to tell you because you desperately need this information. And time is always of the essence here. How do you how do you balance the patience and respect of the victim with knowing you got to get this information?

Detective Menifee

Well, sometimes, you know, when we teach the class, Charlene and I, you know, we always explain to them, it's all about patience, you have to be patient, you know, with the victim, and, and for the class and we tell the students or law enforcement, you have to be patient with a we understand that you have to get certain things out there right now, because you're trying to catch the bad guy. And the things that you need to get out there now is of course, a description of the suspect. Of course, you need to get that information out there now, but as far as the details, you can always get that at a later time. And we've always stressed that, that as far as getting details about the actual sexual assault, you can always get another day. But as far as the information of what the suspect look like, get that now and let the person you know, take a take a rest. And you can get that information a little later. Sometimes, it may be that the victim may not want to talk to you but may want to talk to a female and may want to talk to a nurse. And and sometimes you may allow or let the victim do that instead of talking to you sometimes the victim may not want to talk to me for whatever reason and may want to talk to my partner. I don't take that personal, whatever it is, it's going to make them feel comfortable. That's what you allow them to do.

Steve Gregory

Detective Johnson, is the guy still out there?

Detective Johnson

Yes, he is. Is he alive? We don't know. You know, we talk about the description and Donetta mentioned. You know, one of the 14 year old victims described him as late 20s. I think the actual age was 28.

Steve Gregory

I'm sorry, one of the 14 year old victims?

Detective Johnson

Well, I did I say one, a 14 year old.

Steve Gregory

Okay, I want to make sure that multiple juveniles that had been attacked,

Detective Johnson

There might have been more than one under the age of 18. But I think there was only one actual 14.

Steve Gregory

Okay, okay,

So you did have juveniles?

Detective Johnson

Yes, we did have minors. Some of the victims were minors, the youngest one, the 14 year old did describe him as young like 28 years old. But as Donetta mentioned, her perspective, the older victims did describe him as older, the oldest he was described was 45 years old. And that was in 1999. So if you figure we had an age range between 28 to 45, multiple victims described him in the mid to late 30s, or the early to mid 40s. And this is back in the early 2000s. So you fast forward to when we were investigating the case. And 2011 and '12 and '13 and '14, we believed at that time, it was more likely he was in his 50s or possibly 60s. And you fast forward now to 2021. It's very likely this person is in their 60s or 70s. Now, or if he's not 60 or 70 years old. He may look that old. He had we have not received any cases on this case that we're aware of. There's been no DNA hit since 2013. So that's a long time and the person could have left California, he could have left Los Angeles he could have something else going on his life right now that he no longer feels the need to do this. He may not be physically able to do this anymore. There's no knowing knowing that the age that we're looking at what has happened to him, but I do believe if he's not deceased, he is still out there somewhere.

Steve Gregory

You know, that's so interesting because you talk about when a younger girl will see someone who she thinks is a certain age that whole different perspective, further clouds the case and further makes it complicated. I get it. But is it typical that an attacker stays in the area where the attacks happen? Or does that attacker come from another part of town and come into this area?

Detective Johnson

Well, that's something that we won't know about this particular attacker until he's arrested, because there are different typologies offenders. And some of these offenders only attack in the areas they know, some of these offenders don't attack close to home, because they're known in their community, and they only attack outside of their areas. And historically, there have been offenders that only attack when they're actually out of town, like other states, because they want to get that distance from where they're known. And from, you know, to minimize the possibility of them being, you know, identified, we were very, we went very broad. As far as getting information on on this case, we went so broad that part of our calls and tips includes we got we're not just from California, we got calls from all over the United States, we got calls from Europe. So it is it was a went out to the media pretty much worldwide. So we believe that this may be somebody that like I said, the hotspot, he may not live in that area, he may work in that area, or he may just have family in that area. There's a lot unknown and you don't know, really until he's caught and you're able to talk to this person to find out why he chose the area he's chose to target.

Steve Gregory

And the time of the day that the attacks happened. That's got to be significant.

Detective Johnson

It could I believe it's like Danette has said a lot of its opportunity. If he's looking for easy targets, you're looking for lone females, a lot of women on their way to work by themselves waiting at bus stops. That's where almost every one of the victims were contacted, if you were walking on their way to the bus stop, or walking to work or walking to school. But there that is a time of day where people are often alone, they're commuting to work. And if you're somebody that commutes by foot or by bus, you're alone. between that time of day, depending on the time of the year, it's usually darker. So you're not going to be as obvious there aren't as many cars on the street at certain times.

Steve Gregory

When you're talking about time of the year, so there was there was a similarity between the times of the year and let you know let's hold on that because we need to take a break. When we come back we'll get more into the background of "the Attacker Series". This is 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. We're speaking with detectives Charlene Johnson and Donetta Meniffee, both with the LAPD's Robbery Homicide Division. You said something that sort of just put a red flag up for me, you mentioned before break about the opportunity for the attacks. And whether or not this guy was choosing specific times of the day, you've identified that, that they were usually early in the morning between 5:15am and 8am. But did I hear you correctly? Did you say something about the time of the year that he would choose? Was there a specific time of the year he did that?

Detective Johnson

No. When I say the time of the year, I'm talking more like daylight savings time. It may change his timing for what time he goes out. Because the sun either you know, it's earlier, sun comes out earlier, sometimes out later, during different times of the year.

Steve Gregory

Now being that most of the areas were all originating around bus stops. There were no witnesses or people didn't because I mean, where the city bus stops. And I mean, like for regular just city buses, or..

Detective Johnson

Yes, they were they were regular city buses, we never had witnesses, he was never anywhere where their video surveillance.

Steve Gregory

You think he chose it like that?

Detective Johnson

don't know if he chose it, or if he was just very lucky. But we never had any incident that occurred any place where he was caught on camera. As far as witnesses. When he approached these victims, and produced the gun, or the weapon, he wasn't blatant, putting it in their face, it was more like, you know, putting it in their the back, you're gonna walk with me. So if two people had seen them walking together, it's very likely they would have thought that they were just a couple together and not realizing that there was something going on.

Steve Gregory

This time of the morning, because, you know, especially down in that area of the city, or a lot of workers, a lot of people going to work at that time in the morning. A lot of laborers a lot of and no hits at all from anybody.

Detective Johnson

No, but unfortunately, if you also think about it, when people are commuting to and from work, a lot of them are very involved in what they're doing and aren't even paying attention to what's going on around them.

Steve Gregory

Yeah, interesting. What about in this particular case, when you're talking about these composites, and you're looking at these and you seem to think there's one person? Are you convinced it is one person, there's not the chance that there could be two people or..

Detective Johnson

Well, with the composites, the composites that you have are all from DNA hits. So we know those are all the same person. And, you know, to piggyback on what Donetta was saying earlier about the composites and the age and stuff, you know, you also have to realize different people focus on different things when they're being traumatized. So one victim may have focused on his eyes and other may have focused on his mouth, a mother may have focused on his nose or the shape of his face. So when you look at a composite, you, you kind of want to find out what was she focused on. So you may when we identify this guy, and he's arrested, you may be able to pick out certain features from each one of the composites that belong to Him. And you also notice the composites that have similar hair, hats all look the same as well. So headgear changes.

Steve Gregory

The other ones are beanies, and I want to I want to let everyone know that. These composites that we have here and the maps that the detectives are talking about, will be posted on our website at KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved", we'll have all of these visuals up here for you to take a look for yourself. Because now that you mentioned the beanie, the beanie, everyone with a beanie, it looks the same to me.

Detective Johnson

And that might be that yeah, so it could just be that depending on hair gear headgear, when people wear hats, they look a lot different than when they don't wear hats. When somebody wears a hoodie, it changes the shape of their face, it changes their perception and what people focus on. So when you start breaking down little things like that, you will start to see some similarities in the composites.

Steve Gregory

Detective Menifee, based on your experience to and you worked down Newton division, so, you know, a lot of gang activity. So in something like this, do you know that an attacker a sexual predator or sexual attacker like this, do they tend to brag about their crimes like people that commit homicides or something like that?

Detective Menifee

Sexual assault? No, no. Okay. No, that's that's kind of like a no no for gang members to brag about a sexual assault? No, that's that's kind of unheard of even here, you know, and I'm cases that you never really hear any one from a gang member says,

Steve Gregory

You know, homicides or other robbery something like that they tend to brag

Detective Menifee

right about the homicide or robbery or something like that. Yes, but a sexual assault, not with even if it's not a gang member, they know what could happen if they're actually do prison time for sexual assault if they say something about a sexual assault while they're in prison, that you just don't do that.

Steve Gregory

You talked about, you know, at least one of the victims being as young as 14 years old. Do you think he knew she was 14? I knew that she was underage.

Detective Menifee

I, I would have to see the report and see the victim to that. But you know, for, for this for this guy to for the suspect to do that and to rape victims across the board from 14 all the way to 41 when you're sold, even if he didn't know he didn't care, I mean, even if he didn't know that, but

Steve Gregory

because the pathology there for me, I'm trying to think about what there's if it's 14 to 41, it sounds like it's just the act.

Detective Menifee

But that's all that's all it is. Even if even if it was even if he didn't know he didn't care, you know, so. To him, obviously, it's not a big deal that she was 14 years old because he just wanted to do the act at the time.

Steve Gregory

and have you spoken to that? That girl who was 14?

Detective Menifee

I don't think so. No, I wouldn't know.

Detective Johnson

I did not speak to that 14 year old I did speak to some of the minors, yes.

Steve Gregory

Approximately how many minors were there?

Detective Johnson

I don't recall the exact number right now. I know there was more than one there was you know, maybe three or four. I don't have the exact number

Steve Gregory

no. And I don't want to go too deep in the weeds here. But what would what would miners be doing at the bus stop at 5:30am?

Detective Johnson

on their way to school. Okay, you know, a lot of students have not just after school activities a lot of school students have before school activities as well. So you know, they're on their way to the on the way to school. Some of the crimes occurred on Saturdays. They may have been on their way to the store you know, you're looking between five and eight. So seven o'clock is not an unusual time for someone to be going into the corner store for mom or something like that. So, you know, these are all of them. All ages, they were out for a legitimate reason. There was nobody that was just out hanging out screwing around they all had a legitimate purpose and reason in place where they were heading when this happened.

Steve Gregory

to see the sketches and maps from this case go to KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". When we come back we'll get final thoughts from the detectives. But first, this is KFI AM 640 Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 8

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. We're talking with detectives Charlene Johnson and Donetta Menifee, both with the Robbery Homicide Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. We're at headquarters, Downtown Los Angeles, we're wrapping up this case of "the Attacker Series" formerly known as the teardrop rapist. Ladies, as we wrap this up, Donetta I'll start with you tell us something about this case, whether it's personal or otherwise, that you've never spoken about publicly?

Detective Menifee

Well, I think we can already talk about the description. So I won't get into specifics. It was something that he was wearing. That, you know, I don't know if it's already public or not. But I don't think Charlene talked about that. But if anything, for me, it would be I would love to have this case solved before I retire in six months. So that that would be great. But it's one of those cases that I would actually come back even after retirement just to be a part of trying to solve this case. Is that important to me.

Steve Gregory

Same question to you, detective Johnson, something you've never spoken about this case before, personal or otherwise.

Unknown Speaker

For me, there's really nothing. You know, I've I've been dealing with and talking about this case to people, the community, the media, other law enforcement, for over 10 years now. And anything that I'm

not prevented from talking about, because it's an ongoing investigation I've been very forthcoming with and so you know, I've I've always been very clear to everybody my feelings on the case, like Ginetta said, this is the case that I would love to see solved, whether it happens before I retire or not, which will be around the same time that Donita retires. And like she said, we've we've both discussed and with each other and agreed that this is definitely something that we would come back for in our retirement if this guy's caught and you know, going to trial definitely would come back in and Aiden, what other way I could

Steve Gregory

Talk about.. there's probably a lot of lessons learned from this. In terms of warning, women talk about that. What do women, anybody, but it's specifically women in these vulnerable situations? What do they need to pay attention to?

Detective Johnson

I think they just need to be aware of their surroundings. Unfortunately, in today's world of cell phones and instant demand, people have a tendency to wear their earbuds and be watching, you know, TikTok or social media. And they're focusing on their phones, and they're not focusing on their surroundings. And it makes it makes him such an easy target, because they're not aware when somebody walks up behind them. They're not aware when somebody is approaching them, or somebody suspicious is standing right behind them. If they're sitting on a bench. I think that's the time when you're out there alone in your commuting, you need to be aware, put the phone down, take the earbuds out so that you can hear what's going on around you. I think that's one of the biggest things and the advice that I would give not just women, all people when you are out and about, don't be focused on your phones and your devices, you need to be focused on yourself and your safety. And you can't do that if you're distracted,

Steve Gregory

Donetta, any final thoughts in that same topic?

Detective Meniffee

If you have to take the bus, maybe if if you have to sit on the bench maybe to make sure that no one's behind you. But I would suggest not even sitting on the bench maybe standing up and standing up against a fence. And most of the time, it's always in a residential area standing against the fence. So no one can be behind you. So you can see both ways and where people are walking in front of you. Instead of behind you.

Steve Gregory

Have either of you or both of you, ever been down to any of these scenes?

Detective Johnson

Yes, I've done walkthrough through most of the scenes and some of the walkthroughs with some of the victims.

Steve Gregory

and anything jump out at you anything relevant?

Detective Johnson

No, no, they're just your typical could be any bus off on any corner.

Steve Gregory

And just for my own edification. Are there parts of this investigation that you're not allowed to tell me?

Detective Johnson

Yes, yeah.

Steve Gregory

I love how you look at your face. If people can look at your face like yeah, dummy. The reason I asked that. And the reason I want the audience to know this is because you do have I mean, you're working hard behind the scenes. You haven't shown your whole hand. You do have things that you're working on. Has technology helped you at all?

Detective Johnson

New technology, new technology is always great, because anytime something new comes out, we want to give it a try. And we've tried just about everything we can. And like you've said, even though this case hasn't been actively investigated, I would say since 2016, there's always been something going on in the background of this investigation. We've always been moving forward in some way.

Steve Gregory

Are you closer now than detectives were back then?

Detective Johnson

I would say the only way I could say we're closer now than they were back then is because we've eliminated several 1000 people that they hadn't back then. But as far as knowing who this person is, we are not very much closer than they were back then. It's it's an unfortunate thing. But this is a person that has flown under the radar and knows how to fly under the radar.

Steve Gregory

Finally, ladies, I'll leave it to you. Who are we looking for? Who is this guy?

Detective Johnson

So as I mentioned earlier, if it's very likely, this person is someone that looks like they're in their 60s to their 70s. He's not a tall person, he's between 5'2-5'6 maybe weighs 130 to 170 pounds, he's always been described as slim. He does have a light complexion, you know, all of the victims describe him as Hispanic. One victim actually described him as white. So he has a lighter complexion. He's somebody that speaks English fluently. He speaks Spanish fluently. He has spoken English without an accent. He's also used broken English. So he's an intelligent person, he knows how to change up to be somebody different in some of these situations. I think, you know, if people out there think if they go on your website, and they see these composites or they see these descriptions, and it rings a bell, you know, this is something that if we get clues and we're able to go out and talk to these people, it's very easily to eliminate somebody through DNA. Some things about him that we've thought in the past is, you know, it's a potential that he is a person that has had a job that has brought him through areas even he could be a contractor he you know, a painter or somebody that does drywall, he could be some type of a delivery person. I'm not and when I say delivery, I'm not talking like an Amazon driver. I'm talking more like somebody that delivers parts maybe for an automotive store or, you know, work some kind of a job that takes him through areas on a regular basis.

Steve Gregory

That's gonna do it. For more on this and other cases, go to our web page at KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". And don't forget to download and subscribe to our podcast on the iHeartRadio app. Unsolved with Steve Gregory is a production of the KFI News Department for iHeartMedia Los Angeles, Robin Bertolucci, program director Chris Little, news director. The program is produced by Steve Gregory and Jacob Gonzalez. The digital producer is Andro Mammo. The field engineer Tony Sorrentino. The technical director is David Callaway. A special thanks to LAPD Deputy Chief Chris Pitcher and Captain John Tippet. Coming up next it's Coast to Coast but first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

