Episode 302: The Tragic Death Of Two Teens

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 thousands of friends and families who have lost loved ones, thousands of people who got away with a crime, and thousands 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 gone cold, baffled investigators or just needs that one witness to speak up. This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory.

Steve Gregory

LA County Sheriff's homicide case number 016-18368-2116-011, the shooting death of 16-year-old Danah Rojo-Rivas.

Steve Gregory

Detective Adam Kirste told me he needed some help to highlight a cold case from 2016. We met up at the LA County Homicide Bureau in Monterey Park, he sets us up in a small interview room at the back of the building. The same room where murder suspects are questioned. Detective Kirste begins with an overview of the case.

Detective Kirste

This is an absolute American tragedy, it's the textbook definition of innocent victim. November 23, 2016, which that year was the day before Thanksgiving, it was a Wednesday. Danah, her mother and her brother had spent the day at church over at a church right at the Compton Lynwood border, and 9:00 / 930, they leave. Danah's mother is driving, her brother's in the front seat, and Danah's in the backseat. They proceed eastbound, Euclid approaching Long Beach Boulevard, where they're going to make a left hand turn to go to the freeway to go back home to I think they lived in Gardena at the time. The light was taking forever, so they're sitting there. Afterwards we pull video we can see traffic is just kind of like stacking up, eastbound on the street or westbound on the street, excuse me. And while they're waiting, unbeknownst to them, there's a car chase going on between two cars and the chase vehicle comes eastbound on Euclid, and when it hits the backed up traffic when it approaches it, it veers into oncoming traffic. I should say that Euclid right at that point, it's just a two lane highway, one lane East one lane west, a dual lane roadway. It sees the back up traffic it's being chased, and so it veers into the oncoming lane of traffic, and so now it's traveling eastbound, in the westbound lane of Euclid Boulevard approaching Long Beach Boulevard. Unbeknownst to everybody, somebody is making a right hand turn onto Euclid, which prevents the chased vehicle, the intended targets, from proceeding any further. So now they're essentially trapped, the people doing the chasing are behind them and uninvolved vehicles in front of them. So they stop the car and both occupants get out. One of the occupants runs south across Euclid, and they're very near the intersection so he's basically running for the sidewalk to go south on Long Beach Boulevard. The suspect or suspects start shooting at that man who's running south.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so the people that we're in the car doing the chasing open fire.

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Okay.

Detective Kirste

The suspect vehicle, the persons inside, start shooting at the person running south and Danah hears the commotion, goes to turn and see what's happening, and a stray round comes into the back of Danah's mom's car and strikes Danah, and ultimately, obviously it kills her. The intended target was never hit with any gunfire, he ran. We ultimately ended up finding him and talking to him, he literally ran out of his shoes, one of his shoes was right there at the corner of Long Beach Boulevard and another one we found a little bit further south. So, you know, with all the commotion, the cars move, and Danah's mom, Sandra turns and stops right there at the corner of Long Beach and Euclid on Long Beach, gets out to see what's going on, knows that something's wrong with Danah in the backseat, and to compound this tragedy, in the commotion, Danah's dog, which was in her lap, gets out of the car and runs across Long Beach Boulevard, and Danah's dog gets hit and killed. So not that the dog is anything compared to Danah's life, but to compound the tragedy, you know, Danah died there on the sidewalk on Long Beach Boulevard for no good reason.

Steve Gregory

Along with her pet.

Detective Kirste

Along with her dog.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so going back, what kind of car were they in? Danah, what kind.

Detective Kirste Danah, they were in a Ford Mustang

Steve Gregory Ford Mustang. So where was Danah hit?

Detective Kirste She was hit in the upper torso.

Steve Gregory And was she hit multiple times or?

No.

Steve Gregory

No, just one time.

Detective Kirste One time.

Steve Gregory And how many shots were fired in total, do you know?

Detective Kirste

Seven or eight, if I remember correctly from the casings that were recovered at the scene. Could there have been more, you know, casings have landed in the car perhaps but I remember we had six to eight casings at the scene.

Steve Gregory All from the same weapon?

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Okay. So obviously, since we're talking about the case, both the suspect and the person that the subject of the chase are gone, they've disappeared, right?

Detective Kirste

The suspects are in the wind. Ultimately, we did track down the two intended targets.

Steve Gregory

You did?

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Okay. So what kind of information were they able to offer?

Not much. I mean, to their credit, the one the driver of the chase vehicle came back to the scene as soon as the threat had passed, I suppose. The man who ran we tracked him down a day or two later. You know, they told us, you know, it was a car that was chasing them, they didn't know who it was. Each of them told us, you know, it was the other guy they must have been intending to shoot at because it wasn't me. There's nobody that would be shooting at me is essentially what they told us. And yeah, we we did talk to him.

Steve Gregory

Okay, we're talking with Adam Kirste, a detective with the LA County Sheriff's department's Homicide Bureau about the tragic shooting death of Danah Rojo-Rivas back in 2016. You know, all too frequently detective, I have to always ask this question, but all too frequently it comes back to it was this is there a gang nexus?

Detective Kirste

We believe so.

Steve Gregory

You know, and and this is a yet another case of an innocent girl and she was 16-years-old at the time, right?

Detective Kirste

Yes, she was.

Steve Gregory

16-years-old, caught in this crossfire and or not crossfire but caught in gunfire for an intended target. And so the guys that you spoke with it that were the intended targets. Were they in a gang or are they in a gang?

Detective Kirste

The driver of the car wasn't necessarily a at least as we would call it a documented gang member. The passenger he was.

Steve Gregory

Gang affiliation?

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Connections.

Yeah, they were

Steve Gregory

Not active.

Detective Kirste

Correct.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so how does it work? You know, when you got someone who might just be affiliated does that mean they hang out with people in gangs? What how do you define that?

Detective Kirste

I would agree with that assessment. You know, they're hanging out with folks who are in gangs and you know, trying to be on the fringe, trying to be cool, trying to you know, perhaps you know, find ways to make money or you know, sustain their, their lifestyle, whatever that may be.

Steve Gregory

More with Detective Kirste, but first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.

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, simply press the red microphone button and leave your message. We've been talking about the shooting death of 16-year-old Danah Rojo-Rivas, a teenager who was killed while sitting in the backseat of her mother's car at a red light in Lynwood. When the shooting happened back in 2016 detective, I mean, obviously, it was a very chaotic scene. But why did the intended target come back to the scene? That seems a little unusual, or does it?

Detective Kirste

Well, when he was in his family's vehicle, I could only assume he would have figured we probably would have figured out who it was and maybe his motivation was only to try to get his vehicle back that night. But for whatever his motivation was, he did come back and it least he was overtly cooperative with us whether he was trying to, you know, send us down wrong paths.

Steve Gregory

By then had first responders arrived? So when he returned back to the scene, did he...

Detective Kirste

Yes,

...he approached somebody, did he report to somebody?

Detective Kirste

Yes, he came back and talked to the patrol deputies who held on to him until we got there an hour later, or whatever the case may be and we talked to him that night.

Steve Gregory

What is your experience tell you on something like this? Does it, does it, do you think this guy's story checks out in terms of you know, he doesn't know why he was an intended target?

Detective Kirste

No, I don't think that's the case. He's probably not directly involved with what we think, and it's just a theory might have been an issue, which was some they call it beefs, just arguments or disagreements, for some issues going out on Long Beach Boulevard. And he might have been related to some people that were dealing on Long Beach Boulevard, so we think they may have just been after him as, as he was related to people that they had an issue with.

Steve Gregory

When you said that you believe there was at least a mild gang nexus with the with the intended target, the intended or the shooters of the intended target. Are these two known rival gangs?

Detective Kirste

Yeah, yeah, I would say that they are rivals.

Steve Gregory

I guess all gangs are rivals technically, right?

Detective Kirste

To an extent, there are some times where you'll find that, you know, what is it money makes strange bedfellows or something of that nature, where you know, certain gangs will, you know, for the benefit of their pocketbooks, 'click up' for lack of a better term, and they'll go out and commit crimes together. This we kind of think is probably related to prostitution along Long Beach Boulevard. And like I said, the driver of the chase vehicle, may have been related to somebody who was in that business that the suspects had a beef with.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so you've spoken with the intended targets? What about the shooters? What do you know about them? What about the other vehicle? What do you tell us what you know about them?

Pretty quickly thereafter, we were able to come up on surveillance video of portions of the chase, as it came from Long Beach Boulevard onto the street south of Euclid and we actually have the shooting on video. I mean, it's nighttime. So the quality of any video at nighttime especially in 2016 only six years ago, wasn't that great. But you can clearly see in the video pull up and somebody hanging out the side of the car shooting and when I say clearly if you know what you're looking for, you can see that...

Steve Gregory

Sure, the trained guy

Detective Kirste

...figure out out the window the car. But we you know, I looked at this and I was working the streets long enough, I saw that car and I said 'oh that's a sure to be a Ford Taurus to me,' and we never found this car in the initial stages of our investigation like we have this flyer here, there's a it's currently at \$20,000 originally this case cause so much outrage to private business owners from Lynwood each ponied up \$5,000, so the original reward was \$30 or excuse me, \$30,000 because these business owners thought that this was just, this is not how we, we can live like this, this isn't civilized. They've since moved on, so the reward is still \$20,000 through the Board of Supervisors. But we do have the surveillance video of this car.

Steve Gregory

So the the reward itself, I mean, I mean, that's unusual for businesses to kick in money like that, especially, you know, when there's no connection, right? It's just it was just strictly a goodwill gesture.

Detective Kirste

It was outrage on the part of the business owners that this, I always call her a little girl, she was 16, this little girl got killed in for lack of better term, you said it a minute ago, crossfire, I mean, people shooting at other people, and she has no connection to any or it.

Steve Gregory

And to clarify, and because I said the word crossfire, the intended targets there, they never had a gun or returned fire.

Detective Kirste

No, not at all.

Steve Gregory

No, okay, so it was just one way shooting. And what kind of weapon was it?

Detective Kirste

A nine millimeter handgun.

Handgun?

Detective Kirste

Yeah.

Steve Gregory

Okay. And then. So the \$20,000 reward? Did you get any, because of the outrage and the reward, did you get any tips early on, and did they any of them get you anywhere?

Detective Kirste

No, bottom line? No. I haven't had personally the greatest luck with tips or excuse me, rewards for persuading people or causing people but you know, I can go tag, you know, touch three people in that office back there who absolutely got their cases solved, because we put out a reward. And a couple of people were like, this is just wrong, anonymous tip and then they gave it up.

Steve Gregory

Sure.

Detective Kirste

That wasn't the case for us. We're still almost six years later on this.

Steve Gregory

So let me ask you now, are you further along today? Are you closer to solving this thing today than you were yesterday?

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Okay. Hold that thought we'll talk more about that. But first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.

Steve Gregory

KFI-AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. To leave us a comment, hit pound 250 on your cell phone and say the key word Unsolved, or press the red microphone button on the iHeartRadio app. Also, you can email the team unsolved@iheartmedia.com That's unsolved@iheartmedia.com

Welcome back, we're talking with Detective Adam Kirste with the LA County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Bureau about the shooting death of 16-year-old Danah Rojo-Rivas, it was November 23, 2016, at the intersection of Euclid Avenue and Long Beach Boulevard in Lynwood, she was in the backseat of her mother's vehicle, when she was hit by one round from someone trying to gun down a possible member of

a rival gang. With respect to gang activity going on in South LA, Detective, even this seems like an unusual case, because you don't hear about many innocent victims getting hit by errant gunfire do you?

Detective Kirste

No, fortunately it is the exception and not anything close to a rule. But it happens and you know, that's what we're stuck with here on this one.

Steve Gregory

And, you know, I asked you before the break, if you were any closer to solving this case today than you were a few days ago, or even a couple years ago, you said yes. Why don't you explain that?

Detective Kirste

Emphatically yes, you know, over the course of time, the tips that we've gotten haven't necessarily come from the public, with exception of one, and I'll get to that, but we have, you know, talked to a couple of people here and there who have pointed us in the right direction, or what they believe to be the right direction. There have been people who pointed us in the wrong direction, and we were able to disprove the theories that they gave us. I mean, emphatic, emphatically disproved the theory.

Steve Gregory

I gotta ask you something, and I pardon the interruption, it just dawned on me, if you're having anyone give you tips to intentionally lead you down the wrong direction.

Detective Kirste

I kind of think on this particular case over the course of the this investigation, fairly recently, we spoke to an individual, and they told us third hand information, that it was absolutely Person A. In doing the research for this case, we were able to completely disprove that person's belief that it was Person A because that person was in a vastly different portion of California at the time of the shooting. There was no two ways about it, so.

Steve Gregory

So you believe that was intentional?

Detective Kirste

At least as the information was given to that person, I think so the person that gave it to me, might have been just trying to help, because that person also gave us information that did make sense.

Steve Gregory

So unbeknownst to them,

Detective Kirste

Unbeknownst to them.

But have you ever had anyone try to deflect direction by giving you false information?

Detective Kirste

It's happened a couple of times, but in you know, in 2022, there are 100 different ways to prove or disprove a theory, camera phone records, you know, other people's, you know, statements that make more sense. So it happens. No one wants to go to jail for murder for the rest of their life.

Steve Gregory

Sure. Okay. So back to your original discussion, you were talking about the tip coming in? So, and you said this was a good one?

Detective Kirste

Yes. We recently received a tip. And after five and a half years, we were able to track down the actual license plates of the vehicle used in the crime. We know that the car and we can connect that car at the time to some of the folks who we believe may be involved as our case continues to be built. But the tip came in completely anonymously. I don't know when how or why they saw anything that had the picture of the vehicle on it. We hadn't necessarily just done any sort of press conference. But the person called told us who that vehicle belonged to at the time, and stated they were anonymous. They didn't want any sort of phone call, they didn't want, just here's the information. What was weird was that almost exactly 24 hours later, the same person called and gave the same information again, I don't know if they thought that I didn't get it the first time.

Steve Gregory

What, a voicemail?

Detective Kirste

Yeah, voicemail, they called my desk, I wasn't sitting in there, it was after business hours.

Steve Gregory

So it just came into the switchboard at homicide bureau.

Detective Kirste

Yes. Yep.

Steve Gregory

Now is that is that a number that comes up on the on the flyer here?

Detective Kirste

All these flyers have the the main number to homicide bureau 323-890-5500.

Attention Detective Adam Kirste. So yeah, so that you do have the direct...okay.

Detective Kirste

So you know somebody calls that number or security officers answer the phone and they say, 'Hey, I have a you know, I need to talk to Adam Kirstie' or whoever they want to talk to and the desk, just transfers them to, to that person's desk. When I say the desk, that's what we call the front desk, the switchboard, whatever you want to call it. And if you leave me a voicemail, and I'm not there, that goes straight to my county phone, I have my email on my county phone, so I was at home, voicemail popped up, I said okay, we'll check this in a second I finished putting away my clothes or whatever and listened to it and holy cow, couldn't quite believe what they said ...

Steve Gregory

Did you say holy cow?

Detective Kirste

I probably said something else that was probably not suitable for the radio, and called a partner of mine to kind of have them start working it up.

Steve Gregory

This is the actual call left on Detective Kirste's email. It's a little hard to make out, but investigators were able to decipher it. Now we're keeping out the identifiers to protect the caller and the potential suspect.

Voicemail audio

The little girl that got killed on Euclid and Long Beach Blvd., her name is Danah, the white car is (redacted) he's in jail, but that's his car on the picture, I'll call you back or I call the Crimestoppers back. Can't leave my name because they know me and I know him real good, so I'll call you back. So you can get (redacted) he's in jail, that's his car.

Detective Kirste

The analyst because it's Friday, you know, it was Friday, literally five o'clock, there's not a lot of people around. So the analyst wasn't able to connect it right then and there. I went into work the next day, and played with the computer and I was able to find the car and it was one of those watershed moments where you just after five and a half years, I mean, I was in a patrol station because it was closer to my house and I was just ecstatic that I found it. I couldn't believe it.

Steve Gregory

And I didn't mean to make light of it. But I mean, you literally, you know, these are the moments you live for as a detective.

Detective Kirste

Yeah, it's short of, you know, making an arrest and getting a case filed. And then getting a conviction. You know, when you get these things that you've been looking for, for five years, five and a half years, every different way to where it kind of like, I don't want to say dominates your life, but you know, if I was driving around in the early portions of this, whether it be on you know, when I was at work, or you know, with my family, and I would see a silver Taurus, I was thinking, 'I wonder if that's the car I wonder,' I took a couple of pictures of Taurus', I was just driving around, you know, never was able to make any sort of connection with any of them, but, you know, I see a Ford Taurus, this model, and my immediate thought is, 'is that the car involved with Danah?'

Steve Gregory

Wow. And then this is only one case that you're working.

Detective Kirste

It's one. But nobody deserves to be murdered. But, you know, some of these cases become special, and this girl was I mean, the light of her parents life, obviously, most kids are. Good student played softball. I had a daughter, I have a daughter who was similar in age back here who also played softball, so there was a, you know, immediate, you know, for lack of better term connection to this and you know, she was innocent, I, you know, I don't know what to say she was an absolute innocent, beautiful little girl had her whole life in front of her and was just ripped, ripped away from her and her mom and her brother.

Steve Gregory

We're gonna get final thoughts on this case with detective Adam Kirste of the LA County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Bureau but first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI-AM 640, time now for news update.

Steve Gregory

KFI-AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved.

Steve Gregory

Welcome back, we're talking with Detective Adam Kirste of the LA County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Bureau. We're wrapping up the case of 16-year-old Danah Rojo-Rivas, she was shot while sitting in the backseat of her mother's car on November 23, 2016, as they sat at an intersection in Lynwood. Before the break detective you were telling us that you finally found the car that you believe the shooters were using the day of this attack. So you called in as soon as you got the anonymous tip on the voicemail through the front switchboard through your security officers. And they just, they simply left the voicemail and no name nothing no callback or nothing, right?

Detective Kirste

No, absolutely not

Steve Gregory Do you have caller ID?

Detective Kirste I do.

And nothing came up, huh?

Detective Kirste

A number did come up, and it's a company cell phone.

Steve Gregory

Oh, okay.

Detective Kirste

I was able to figure out that it belongs to a particular company through a little bit of detective work, and we called that company, and they basically said it's a very large company, they don't keep track of who has what phone, so...

Steve Gregory

Really?

Detective Kirste

Yeah.

Steve Gregory

Well, then let's make it perfectly clear. The information is anonymous, even though you know, the company where this individual might work, you're still keeping all this information anonymous, right?

Detective Kirste

Absolutely.

Steve Gregory

I mean, I don't want people to think that you're snooping around and trying to find these people. But you're also doing your due diligence.

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory

You got to verify that this is legit.

Detective Kirste

Yep, absolutely and I, this person has managed is going to manage to be able to remain anonymous, because I just don't know who has the cell phone.

...and doesn't want a reward.

Detective Kirste

Nope.

Steve Gregory

Apparently...

Detective Kirste Nope.

Steve Gregory Okay.

Detective Kirste

Absolutely not.

Steve Gregory

So now you've called your partner you said and who started working the plate number, right?

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory

What did you get next?

Detective Kirste

You know that by the end of the evening, Friday, we had the registered owner kind of a quick little, quote, unquote, workup on him, and a vehicle that that side of our office was able to kind of come up with, which wasn't this vehicle. And I'm not trying to get into too many of the weeds, but I thought to myself, I'm gonna give it a shot myself. And like I said, I went over to a station closest to my house, worked on a couple systems, and I was able to find that find the plate in a deputies log, and then ran the plate so that it was a Ford, you know, the crescendos building, and then I was able to take the plate and use like license plate readers, which snap pictures of plates. And also, you know, when they take a picture of a plate, usually most of the car comes into it, and there it was.

Steve Gregory

Where was it?

It's been all over the place. But you know, pictures of the car. You know, we have picture of it from 2015 to...

Steve Gregory

Oh so, it's in the system. It's in your system, then.

Detective Kirste

Yeah.

Steve Gregory So it's been involved in other crimes?

Detective Kirste No, just it's had its picture, like a lot of cities will have license plate readers at fixed intersections.

Steve Gregory And it's just it's from a database then?

Detective Kirste Yes.

Steve Gregory Okay.

Detective Kirste Yes. Yeah.

Steve Gregory And so then, obviously, you were able to trace the owner.

Detective Kirste Working on that part as we speak.

Steve Gregory

Okay, because my next question was going to be any connection to the owner of the vehicle and the person who opened fire.

Detective Kirste

We think that we can make that connection as we have right now.

So going back to the very beginning of the case, and you said that you saw a surveillance video showing someone leaning out the window shooting, so that would indicate there were more than one there was more than one person in the vehicle?

Detective Kirste

Yes.

Steve Gregory How many people do you think were in the car?

Detective Kirste Three.

Steve Gregory Three.

Detective Kirste We think there are three people.

Steve Gregory Three, three people, including the cars owner.

Detective Kirste Unclear at this point. We don't know yet.

Steve Gregory How close are you?

Detective Kirste A couple more pieces of a puzzle and we'll have a fileable case.

Steve Gregory Okay, so now we're talking about it. What can the audience do to help give you those pieces?

Detective Kirste

They need to call if they know something if somebody has told them something. It's time for Danah, who should be you know graduated college by now well should have graduated college by now and be, you know, living some fantastic life, to have some sort of justice. I would venture to guess that at least half

the people that are listening to this are parents and they can't fathom the pain that Sandra is going through. If the shoe were on the other foot, they would want anybody that knew anything, regardless of what circumstances, you know, maybe behind the situation, they would want somebody to tell us. They want justice for their kid, so they need to look inside themselves and say, 'You know what, this is ridiculous. This is what happened." Call me, they need to call me so that I can I can figure it out. It's not, it's not right.

Steve Gregory

And if that isn't motive enough, then there's still a \$20,000 reward.

Detective Kirste

Yes, there is.

Steve Gregory

Because obviously, this caller wasn't interested in it, so...

Detective Kirste

Nope, and I've seen that be the case before.

Steve Gregory Really?

Detective Kirste

Yeah.

Steve Gregory Are you confident you're going to put this thing to bed?

Detective Kirste

Yes. Yep. You know, full steam ahead, there's no iceberg in front of us, we're not going to crash into anything. We're gonna get it.

Steve Gregory

But all you need, though, is if you have one little piece, one little piece of information from anyone listening out there, whether it's driven by guilt, doing the right thing or money.

Detective Kirste

I don't care what motivates you...

That could that could put the whole thing to rest.

Detective Kirste

Absolutely.

Steve Gregory

Detective, I wish you well, I wish you success and I certainly hope you get your man or your men.

Detective Kirste

I certainly hope so. I think we will.

Steve Gregory

Thank you, detective.

Detective Kirste

Thank you. I appreciate it.

Steve Gregory

Coming up, we head out to Pomona for another tragic case this time, a 16-year-old boy who was killed a few doors down from his house. He had just finished celebrating the birthday of a one-year old-neighbor. But first this is KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.

Steve Gregory

KFI-AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Pomona Police Department homicide case number 07-077080, the shooting death of 16-year-old Raymond Garcia. This is our first episode with the Pomona Police Department. We learned about the murder of Raymond Garcia from a couple listeners who emailed us asking if we could shed some light on the case. I reached out to Police Chief Mike Ellis. Chief Ellis was kind enough to connect me with Detective Jon Edson, who handles cold cases for the department. Detective Edson invited us to meet him at the Pomona Police Department headquarters. We sat inside a very small interview room used to interrogate suspects. After a brief introduction, Edson provided an overview of the case.

Detective Jon Edson

Okay, May 19, 2007, there was a birthday party for a one-year-old down in the south side of the city on Colony Street. The victim Raymond Garcia was attending that party, it was one of his neighbors and a family friend. So along with a bunch of his friends from school, they attended this party. The party started going you know, later in the evening, and shortly after midnight, the party started shutting down. And coincidentally there was a party across the street on a T intersection street, so it was kind of caddy corner to the party that Raymond was at. As the party goers were leaving the house, they were walking out into the front yard, the street area of the party. And as the as the group was kind of mingling out on the front yard area of the house and even on the sidewalk, a light colored minivan was driving down the street. Some of the witnesses said the van stopped because there was a lot of congestion with the the people standing in the street and also with vehicle traffic leaving the other party. At some point, an argument between the partygoers that were in the street and the occupants of the van began and witnesses said

that a couple of the occupants of the van threw out a local gang name so indicating they were gang members. As the argument continued, at some point, some fists were thrown and a fight started. As the fight was going on, witnesses said they observed another occupant of the van exit and come around the van holding a handgun and everyone started running away as quick as they can. The suspect with a gun fired either one or two shots. One of those bullets struck Raymond Garcia who was just standing on the street corner, kind of watching what was going on, he wasn't involved in any of the argument or the fight. He got struck by the bullet, he collapsed at the scene, e was transported to the hospital but unfortunately he did pass away based or due to the gunshot.

Steve Gregory

How soon before officers arrive?

Detective Jon Edson

It was within minutes. The initial officers, the first responding officers they did get there and they let our dispatchers know there was a large group, you know, they needed other officers for crowd control. A lot of Raymond's friends were there. They were trying to help him out. They were extremely emotional, too, so the officers were just trying to control them and calm them down.

Steve Gregory

And the two parties were going on in the neighborhood at the same time and they were completely unrelated?

Detective Jon Edson

Yeah, that is correct.

Steve Gregory

Describe the neighborhood the area where Raymond was shot?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, it's just it's a residential neighborhood. You know, nothing special about it. Again...

Steve Gregory

Is it like more retired, younger professional or is it mixed?

Detective Jon Edson

It's basically a mix of everyone. There are a lot of older folks that live down there. But there were a lot of families with young kids teenage kids. So yeah, just basically a mix of everyone.

Steve Gregory

So then what happens?

The detectives the homicide team has responded to the scene. When they did get there they did interview several other party goers, and again, these partygoers, are, you know late teens early teens. So, during their interviews, you know, they were giving up some information. However, they would stop short, you know, of identifying any of the suspects. And this could be based on a couple of factors, you know, not wanting to be identified as a snitch, or being fearful of retaliation if they were indeed gang members in the car. So the detectives continued on with their interviews. And let me back up just a little bit, there was very little physical evidence that was left at scene. So this case is essentially based on witness statements.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with detective Jon Edson about the shooting death of Raymond Garcia in 2007. I didn't mean to interrupt you, but you did say there was no physical evidence. So no casings of any kind?

Detective Jon Edson Correct. Yes, there was...

Steve Gregory

You hesitated.

Detective Jon Edson

Yes, I was just thinking back. I was actually I took myself back to the crime scene and what was left maybe what the suspects were doing. But yeah, so at this time, you know, we can say that there were no casings left at scene? And you know, that could be for variety of reasons.

Steve Gregory

Can you give us a couple of reasons? I mean, I'm sitting here thinking in a situation that's chaotic, and you got a bunch of people around, does the shooter in this case have the forethought to go around and pick up casings?

Detective Jon Edson

This one was a very fast moving incident, I don't suspect that was the case. You know, it could have been, you know, a revolver. But yeah, as quick as the suspects left the area in the van, I don't think they had time to walk around and collect any evidence they left behind.

Steve Gregory

So which brings me to the next question. You said it could have been a revolver, so you don't really know what type of weapon you're dealing with?

Detective Jon Edson No.

Really?

Detective Jon Edson

Yeah.

Steve Gregory

So was the round retrieved, or was it still inside Raymond?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, right now, yeah, we don't want to discuss that part of the case. You know, that's something we want to you know, keep within ourselves while we're doing the interviews.

Steve Gregory

OK so let me ask it to you in a different way. Did you retrieve any forensic evidence that might help?

Detective Jon Edson

I hope so. Recently, I did submit items to the crime lab to be reanalyzed. So it's just...

Steve Gregory Really?

Detective Jon Edson

...you know, we're gonna wait and see. Well, the one thing that I look at with these cases is was something analyzed and can it be reanalyzed if nothing was found...

Steve Gregory

With new technology and stuff?

Detective Jon Edson

Right, right. And, you know, dealing with the LA County Crime Lab, they, they do say that their technology has advanced enough where they could reanalyze evidence. So on all the cases I do review that's what I look for.

Steve Gregory

More with detective Jon Edson about the shooting death of Raymond Garcia in Pomona, but first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.

KFI-AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. If you are listening on the app, you can send us a tip about a case, a story idea or comment about the show, just tap the red microphone on the app and record your message. We've been talking with detective Jon Edson with the Pomona Police Department about the shooting death of 16-year-old Raymond Garcia. Before the break detective, you were talking about resubmitting forensic evidence to the LA County Crime Lab in hopes that new technologies or techniques might shed some light on this case, which dates back to 2007. Now, I want to ask you a question and I think I know the answer. Can you tell us what was submitted?

Detective Jon Edson

No, I cannot do that at this time.

Steve Gregory

Well, I thought I would try. So let me ask you, it's it's fascinating. You said he didn't have any physical evidence like casings, and you can't talk about the fatal round that struck Raymond or where that whether even, or whether you even retrieved it from his body. So you obviously have some evidence? Is this the kind of evidence that if you got any kind of a hit, that it could solve the case?

Detective Jon Edson

Absolutely. 100%? Yes.

Steve Gregory

So let's see, you know, back in '07 cellphone cameras weren't as advanced and no one was obsessed with social media like now, there was no TikTok or Instagram, so you don't have any bystander video or anything like that?

Detective Jon Edson

No, not at all.

Steve Gregory

What about surveillance from the nearby homes? Any kind of crude surveillance?

Detective Jon Edson

No, they did do a search of the area, and there was no surveillance videos that they could capture.

Steve Gregory

Okay. So when you run into roadblocks like these, where do you go next?

Detective Jon Edson

Yeah, well, I'm gonna touch on that a little bit. The detectives who were initially handling this case, you know, they continued their investigation well into 2008. And what I mean by that, too, they re-interviewed witnesses, just trying to get them, you know, to either be, you know, be truthful and say what happened, or see if there's anything else they can remember, they re-interviewed several witnesses several times, to

see, you know, if they did remember something, and in mid 2008, it just looks like the case, you know, kind of hit a roadblock. At that time, you know, there were no leads coming in, they had already reinterviewed as many witnesses as they could. And so, kind of mid 2008, the case just kind of went cold. I know, throughout the years, you know, it's been 15 years, you know, since this happened, the family has stayed involved in this investigation, and they've continually called the Pomona Police Department to get updates on Raymond's murder. And the way I got involved in this, you know, I was recently hired as a cold case investigator with the city and I had our PIO put out a cold case story on our social media. And the mother of Raymond Garcia put a comment on there and I had her call me so I can discuss her son's case. And it just piqued my interest and of course, we don't like to see anyone murdered but a 16-year-old an innocent 16-year-old who was not the intended target. It's just heartbreaking and I want to do as much as I can for the family and and continue this investigation and see what I come up with.

Steve Gregory

You know, it's interesting, you say that, I was gonna ask you about the night the family was notified. I mean, it's one thing to tell someone that their relative is dead. But I would think it's a completely different deal to tell the parents of a 16-year-old that their teenage son, their child, has been killed for being an innocent bystander. Can you even begin to walk us through what that might be like?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, I'll discuss this notification first, because Raymond was actually, he lived a couple of doors down from where the party occurred. So his family members heard the commotion, they heard the gunshot, and they actually ran out and they were there with Raymond when the first officers arrived. But any notification is heartbreaking, you know.

Steve Gregory

So wait, they were they were actually at the scene?

Detective Jon Edson

Yes.

Steve Gregory

Oh, that's, I mean, that's got to be heart wrenching.

Detective Jon Edson

Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I know, when a Raymond's brothers was running down and saw his brother laying there, so it's affected the family to this day. I mean, when I talk to the family now, it's like this incident happened yesterday.

Steve Gregory

You know, so much time has gone by, and I think the one thing I've learned about covering a lot of these cases, when you talk about what appears to be gang related, this context being a gang rivalry, more than a decade passes. A lot of these people may have grown up may have gone on to have a family of their own may have kids. Have you ever seen where some of these cases have been solved, or you even get a tip because they're riddled with guilt after all these years, knowing the impact that they had on other people's lives? Do you ever feel like any of that makes a difference or might help, and come forward after so long or even calling a tip anonymously?

Well, I'm hoping so, you know, I was a homicide detective, you know, several years ago, and you know, when a case does go cold, you kind of tuck it away. I'm new to this cold case position and I'm actually anxious and excited to see what happens and I am reaching out to a lot of witnesses, you know, specifically this case, and, you know, a lot of them live out of state. So it's catching up with these folks, and I have my fingers crossed that they do talk to me a little more about what they saw.

Steve Gregory

How many witnesses were interviewed?

Detective Jon Edson

There were probably between 30 and 40 people outside. There was a couple of handfuls of people that were actually watching the fight, and they saw what happened. The other party, there were a lot of people there, but they were not aware of what was going on on the street. Third, there was probably 40 or 50 that were interviewed at that party, and they hadn't, they were just oblivious to what was going on out there.

Steve Gregory

And we typically don't like to give attention to gangs. We don't even like to validate a gang but in this case, I think it might help to jog someone's memory. So what were the gangs involved?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, the one particular gang that was thrown out by the suspects in the van was 12th Street and that's one of our larger gangs here in Pomona. The one thing that is piquing my interest is you know Raymond was at this birthday party for a one-year-old. A lot of his neighbors and friends were there and classmates from school. Some of them associated with gangs or tagging crews, what have you, but it just seemed like they all lived in the same neighborhood and they all got along. So when the van came by, yeah, I just don't know if there was a gang dispute or if, during this argument, they threw out the gang maybe to intimidate the party goers, but it did escalate, you know, into a fistfight and then the shooting.

Steve Gregory

More with detective Jon Edson on the murder of Raymond Garcia. But first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.

Steve Gregory

This is KFI-AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. To reach the Unsolved team through the iHeartRadio app, just press the red microphone and leave us your story idea, tip or comment. Or you can press pound 250 on your cell phone and say the key word unsolved. We've been speaking with Pomona police detective Jon Edson about the shooting death of 16-year-old Raymond Garcia, a boy who was an innocent bystander to a possible gang rivalry. Detective, before the break, we were talking about how you've been reaching out to witnesses. But since this is a cold case, I imagine a lot of the people you need to talk to may have moved out of state. I mean, they're 15 years older, what kind of a challenge is that?

Well I have been able to track down a couple of witnesses that do live out of state and fortunately, you know, they've made something of themselves, and they have good, you know, a good family life, and, but unfortunately, they tried to remember back to that day, and you know, they had difficulties doing so, you know. After so many years pass a lot of times some people forget about some of the things that they saw, but, you know, there's still several witnesses out there that every day I'm tracking down, so...

Steve Gregory

What would you be able to get from witnesses now that detectives back then couldn't get?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, like we discussed, you know, that back 15 years ago, they might have been hesitant due to, you know, fear of being retaliated against or being labeled a snitch, you know, as a teenager, that's not the label you want to have, you know, because I feel that a lot of these people went to the same schools, they know the same people. So 15 years down the road, you know, you're, you know, you've changed your life, you're, you know, and you might want to come clean it and say what happened, you know, and I'm hopeful for that. This case is based solely on, you know, witness statements, so, you know, I'm hopeful that they'll talk to me.

Steve Gregory

How many witnesses do you think are still in that neighborhood?

Detective Jon Edson

Surprisingly, probably 70, 80% of them.

Steve Gregory

Really?

Detective Jon Edson

Yeah.

Steve Gregory

How many of them have you spoken with?

Detective Jon Edson

There's several of them I've spoken to? Some of them are, to me, they still are hesitant to talk to me about it. So I'm hoping I do find those right witnesses that, you know, saw what happened, and they're they're willing to talk to me about it.

Steve Gregory

Being that the party that night, was for a one-year-old birthday party, I imagine there were a lot of people from all different kinds of ages and backgrounds. Any idea, the oldest witness that was there, and who the oldest you've interviewed?

Well, I've spoken to the homeowners where the party was, they were out front, but they didn't see really what was going on with the suspects, so. You know, they're in their late 30s or 40s. But most of them are in their early 30s. So, yeah, that's that's my witness base.

Steve Gregory

You said you have resubmitted evidence, and you're talking with witnesses. So how active is the 12th Street Gang here in Pomona still?

Detective Jon Edson

Yes and No, I mean, they are. They've, you know, fizzled out over the years, as you know, a lot of gangs have. They're still active. They're just not out there doing the same crimes they were back in 2007.

Steve Gregory

You know, you told me we were talking before we got started today that your background was in some pretty dicey areas and places during your time at the LAPD Hollenbeck division, South LA. So, based on your experience, do gang members come and go? Do they cycle through? So what I mean is like the gang members who were in that gang in '07, would they still be active today, regardless of age?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, I would like to describe it as yes, they are, but they're just not active.

Steve Gregory

So they're just always a member for life, just not active. So does that mean the odds of them ever coming forward or being a witness or giving you a tip, does that make it better or just about the same?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, regardless of who you are, or what gangs you belong to, there are some motivations that get people that talk, whether that be financial, or, you know, if they're incarcerated, if they think it might lower their sentence, you know, in jail, so. There are, matter of fact there was a witness back in 2007, who is currently incarcerated, and I did go and talk to him. I know he probably knows a little bit more than what he's telling me. Raymond was his best friend. But you know, because he is in custody, you know, he's a little reluctant to talk about it because he doesn't want to face any retaliation in jail or, you know, be labeled a snitch at this time.

Steve Gregory

So this guy you're talking about, has he ever been in a gang or is in a gang?

Detective Jon Edson

No, not at the time.

So now, this is hypothetical. But if this individual knows more, like you say, could he really help the case?

Detective Jon Edson

I think at some point he could.

Steve Gregory

So do you think whatever he's incarcerated for that, you would be able to help him?

Detective Jon Edson

No, I will not. No, not at this time.

Steve Gregory Interesting. Reward?

Detective Jon Edson

You know, interestingly, the mom told me that there was a reward back then I've been researching that, you know, to see if I can resurrect it or not. But we do encourage people to use Crimestoppers you know, the website Crimestoppers, you know, if you give us some information that we could use to identify the suspects or any useful information, you know, there is a financial gain from that through Crimestoppers.

Steve Gregory

Yeah, you don't know about anything local or through the LA County Board of Supervisors?

Detective Jon Edson

No, no, no.

Steve Gregory

Might that be something you would explore?

Detective Jon Edson

Oh, absolutely. You know, a lot of people are motivated, you know, by financial means, and, unfortunately, that does get people to talk and, you know, that's a tool I need for this investigation and I'm willing to look into that.

Steve Gregory

When we come back we'll wrap up the case and we'll also hear from Raymond's mother, but first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.

This is 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, you can send us a tip about a case, a story idea or a comment about the show. Simply tap the red microphone on the app and record your message. We're wrapping up with Pomona police Detective Jon Edson about the shooting death of 16-year-old Raymond Garcia back in 2007, following a birthday party for a neighbor. It appears Raymond was an innocent bystander caught in the middle of a gang rivalry gone bad. So to recap, detective, you said that you have forensic evidence, you've turned something over to the LA County Crime Lab, hoping that new technologies or techniques might yield some new results. You said Raymond was not a member of a gang no affiliations whatsoever, correct?

Detective Jon Edson

That is correct. He was not affiliated with any.

Steve Gregory Any members of his family in a gang?

Detective Jon Edson

I don't recall.

Steve Gregory

Any siblings?

Detective Jon Edson

Yes, he has two sisters and a brother.

Steve Gregory

So you're a cold case detective here at the Pomona Police Department, you said you were actually with the department back in 2007, when this all happened, but with a different detail. So when you grab this case and see something that far back and you see it for the first time, what do you look for, what what jumps out at you?

Detective Jon Edson

Well, anytime I look at a cold case. For me, surprisingly, I look at the evidence, I want to see if there's something I could again, submit to the crime lab, as I begin the investigation, you know, because the crime lab, you know, it could take months, you know, to get the results. So for me, I like to look at the evidence, you know, if there's something I can send in, I do that. And then I started looking at the witnesses or who's involved in this case and I like to reach out to the family of the victims and let them know that someone is looking into their case. On a couple other cases, the families were just shocked and they became emotional knowing that someone is still thinking about their loved one. So that motivates me and I'm hoping with this case, you know, the witnesses come forward. They can tell me what happened, you know, who they know, was there who they thought did it or who they know, did it, and, you know, I can give the family closure on this case. Everyone is in agreement, whether that's the witnesses, all the other party goers is that Raymond is a good kid was a good kid and he definitely did not deserve this, you know, he wasn't the intended target. You know, his life was cut short because of that random gunshot, you know, that was fired by the suspect.

You think the person who pulled the trigger is still alive?

Detective Jon Edson

I don't know. I don't know, you know, once you know, if I can come up with some names, and then I'll do the research on that. And I hope they are, you know, and hopefully, you know, that person, you know, if I am able to talk to them, they they can tell me why, you know, so the family can can have some sort of closure with this.

Steve Gregory

You think someone out there knows what happened?

Detective Jon Edson

100%. 100%. And I hope some of these listeners are witnesses, and you know, they they realize now that it's time to tell the whole truth. You know, I don't hold anything against the witnesses. I know, it was a tough time back there being a teenager, back in 2007. But, you know, I hope they've moved on from, you know, whatever lifestyle they had back then. And, you know, it's time to talk.

Steve Gregory

It's safe to say more than one person knows what happened or saw it.

Detective Jon Edson

I hope so, you know, with that many witnesses out on the street, you know, there's a good chance there's a handful of people that know exactly what happened and who was involved.

Steve Gregory

Now, of course, people can reach out to Crimestoppers or here on the show if they are more comfortable. Now if you have a tip, you can dial pound 250 on your cell phone and say the key word Unsolved, you can remain anonymous if you'd like. You can also press the red microphone on the talkback feature through the iHeartRadio app. Detective, I wish you the very best of luck. I hope it all works out.

Detective Jon Edson

Oh thank you.

Steve Gregory

And please give us an update on the evidence and the LA County Crime Lab.

Detective Jon Edson

Oh definitely, I will definitely let you know, You know if something promising comes up or we are able to identify, you know who did this and, you know, and definitely if we make an arrest.

Very good. Detective Jon Edson with the Pomona Police Department, thank you for joining us.

Detective Jon Edson

Thank you very much.

Steve Gregory

After we wrap up the detective brings in Loretta Garcia, Raymond's mother. She sits down across from me and tells me about the night her son died. We pick it up at the moment she arrived at the hospital.

Loretta Garcia

I was waiting I seen an ambulance came and I seen women with the stretcher coming in with the bandage around his head and I just talked to him and told him 'Raymond, mama's here, mama's here,' and then I went to the front desk and I asked him if I can go back there with my son. And they said, no that they were doing all kinds of tests and I just I kind of screamed at her and said, 'you know, what are they doing, why don't they save his life?' You know, just you know, a mother's thing. And so then we wait and then she let me go back there and we were there and his head was just wrapped and I just hold his hand, hold this hand to him and I was just talking to him, 'Raymond please, this is Mama, don't leave us don't,' you know, just a thing. So I was holding his hand and the detective told me 'don't touch his hand' and I said 'why,' they go 'because he was involved in the fight.' I go 'no he wasn't, he wasn't involved in a fight. I dont' know who gave you all this info, he was not in a fight.' So then I was just you know, okay, and he called it. That's just that's what happened.

Steve Gregory

When you held Raymond's hand, was he able to squeeze your hand? Did he know you were holding his hand?

Loretta Garcia

I think he heard me. He did hear me because, like, a tear came down from his eye.

Steve Gregory

Really?

Loretta Garcia So I think he heard me.

Steve Gregory

He knew his mother was right there with him.

Loretta Garcia

Yeah, he knew and I think he knew when he was coming in, because I talked to him and I think he heard me.

Does that give you any peace? A little bit?

Loretta Garcia

A little bit because I really thank God that when he got shot that he didn't die in the street. You know, people get shot and they die right there. I just think God, he didn't die like a dog in the street. I think really, I think he was waiting for me.

Steve Gregory

Feels like it was yesterday, huh?

Loretta Garcia

It's been 15 years.

Steve Gregory

15 years. When the detectives told you what had happened and you realize that Raymond was just an innocent bystander, wrong place wrong time.

Loretta Garcia

He was leaving already.

Steve Gregory

He was leaving the party.

Loretta Garcia

Yeah, at that time we didn't even know there was a fight that broke up in front. He had done nothing until he was coming out. The guy that they were after that was fighting with them, he I guess was going in the crowd and Raymond was coming out, This is what they I heard what they're saying. Raymond came out to go home, because he was gonna go to his aunt's because his aunt lived around the corner and his cousins were waiting for him. And I guess at that time, that guy was dodging, going through the crowd. Whoever had that gun started shooting and it ended up hitting my son. Now there's just so many stories you hear you don't even know what is true.

Steve Gregory

What are the, are you, are you comfortable? I mean confident that the detectives are going to solve this case.

Loretta Garcia

I hope so. Yes, I'll be I'll be at peace.

I do want to ask you though, before I let you go. Tell me, from the perspective of Raymond's mother. If anyone's listening out there that knows anything about this what is your message to them?

Loretta Garcia Can you please come forward? Our family needs closure. Thank you.

Steve Gregory Thank you, Loretta, thank you for your time.

Loretta Garcia You're welcome.

Steve Gregory

Thank you for telling us about Raymond, really appreciate it.

Loretta Garcia

You're welcome

Steve Gregory Good luck.

Loretta Garcia

Thank you.

Steve Gregory

And that's going to do it. 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 field engineer is Tony Sorrentino, the technical director is David Callaway. Coming up next, it's Coast to Coast but first, this is KFI-AM 640, time now for a news update.