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Son's DNA leads to Pasco arrest in 1992 sexual battery

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Jeffrey Crum

NEW PORT RICHEY — DNA evidence has helped the Pasco County Sheriff's Office crack a 1992 cold case in which a 17-year-old female victim survived an attack described as "horrific" and "evil" by Sheriff Chris Nocco.

DNA collected from the incarcerated son of Jeffrey Norman Crum, 53, led to Crum's arrest Wednesday. Crum was staying at the Darlington Residential Treatment facility in Holiday when detectives found him, Nocco said.

Crum is charged with attempted felony murder and sexual battery in the Jan. 16, 1992, attack that left the victim with skull fractures and severe lacerations of the face and head, sheriff's records show.

"This is the first case that's yielded an arrest in Florida based on familial DNA evidence," sheriff's spokeswoman Melanie Snow said.

Sheriff's officials credited the Florida Department of Law Enforcement with aiding the investigation. Crum claimed that he had no knowledge of the crime when he was arrested, sheriff's detective David Boyer said.

"He was surprised," Boyer said. "He denied everything."

It was not clear why Crum was at the treatment facility.

The attack occurred around 3 p.m., Jan. 16, 1992, at a time when the victim's family said the girl would normally have been home from school and watching "General Hospital," Nocco said.

The girl was attacked in a wooded area not far from her bus stop near U.S. 41 and Twin Oaks Drive in Spring Hill, records said. Authorities believe Crum struck the girl with a blunt object before sexually assaulting her and "leaving her for dead," Nocco said.

He said the girl might have died had her family not initiated its own search, finding her about two hours after the attack.

At first, clues were hard to come by.

The victim offered a description of a 30- to 60-year-old man with a full beard, no teeth, bad body odor and breath that reeked of alcohol, records show. Three years after the attack, the victim was able to help an artist produce a rendering of her attacker.

The rendering closely resembled photos of Crum from that time period.

Nocco and FDLE officials on Thursday credited advances in DNA technology for helping capture Crum.

In 2001, Crum was sentenced to 30 days in the Hillsborough County Jail for violating probation related to a domestic violence battery case, and he was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol in Hillsborough in 1995, according to the county clerk's records.

In Pasco in 2007, Crum was found guilty of driving on a suspended or revoked license.

Jeffrey Crum, II, the son whose DNA helped link his father to the 1992 attack, is currently serving state prison time at Gulf Correctional Institution in Wewahitchka.

In 2012, Crum, II, was found guilty of two counts of robbery with a gun or deadly weapon and another charge of robbery, according to state prison records. He is expected to be incarcerated until 2041, Nocco said.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's website, familial DNA searching is now being used in "several jurisdictions" in the U.S., but has been used extensively in the United Kingdom since 2003. Since then, such searches have helped solve about 40 serious crimes, the FBI said.

Familial DNA testing is typically conducted "after a routine search has been completed and no profile matches are identified," according to the FBI. The purpose is to identify close relatives of people whose DNA is found at crime scenes, the agency said.

“In 1992, DNA (testing) was in its infancy,” said Melissa Suddeth, a crime lab analyst supervisor with the FDLE. “As science has advanced, we can now get minute quantities of DNA, and (the material) can be in poor condition.”

Nocco said that means that more perpetrators of unsolved crimes can expect law enforcement “to kick in your doors.”

“We don’t ever let a case go,” he said.

Nocco said the victim’s mother was grateful that an arrest in the case was made.

“She told me about her daughter,” Nocco said. “She was an honor roll student and deeply enjoyed attending their church in Land O’ Lakes. She told me that her daughter read the Bible every morning, and she knew she read the Bible on the day she was attacked.

“She said she’s the kind of daughter any mother would want.”

It was not immediately known if the victim suffered permanent injuries. The victim’s mother was not available for comment.

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