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Man pleads guilty to 1979 killing of 8-year-old Gary boy

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BY RUTH ANN KRAUSE Post-Tribune correspondent

David Bruce Bowen showed no sign of hesitation as he admitted Tuesday he strangled and stabbed 8-year-old Kenneth Duane Conrick after molesting the boy.

Bowen, 43, of Portland, Maine, was 16 on Oct. 15, 1979, when he and Conrick walked in a wooded area behind the Salvation Army, 4804 Harrison St., in Calumet Township, where the boy's body would be found almost two weeks later.

Bowen admitted he forced Conrick to perform a sex act. An argument ensued when the boy stopped. Bowen became enraged and strangled Conrick, then stabbed him numerous times with a stick in the chest area before he picked up a piece of glass and cut Conrick on his upper body.

The boy's body was found tied to a tree on Oct. 28, 1979.

Conrick's mother and her boyfriend reported Conrick missing on Oct. 15, 1979, when he failed to return home from Melton School.

Investigators got a break in the case in December 2005 when Gary police Sgt. John Lashenik, who was nearing retirement, sent DNA samples from Bowen's sister for comparison to DNA recovered from Conrick's clothing.

The result of that analysis was enough to obtain a warrant for Bowen's DNA. He submitted a blood sample in March 2007, which was a match for DNA found in semen on cords used to strangle Conrick.

Lake Superior Court Magistrate Natalie Bokota, who was filling in for Judge Clarence Murray, reviewed the plea agreement with Bowen.

"Did you commit the acts described here?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," Bowen said.

The plea agreement caps Bowen's sentence at 50 years. At the time of the homicide, the sentence for murder was 30 to 60 years in prison.

Bowen's sentencing hearing is scheduled for Oct. 7.

Defense attorney Timothy Ormes said his client has a 1984 robbery conviction, a drunken driving conviction and a domestic battery case dating to the mid-1990s. Bowen is divorced and has a daughter in her teens, Ormes said.

"He's about the most remorseful person I've ever seen," Ormes said. "It's been eating at him."

After the hearing, deputy prosecutor Karen Villarruel met with Conrick's mother, sister and a family friend. Conrick's family declined comment.

