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LOCAL CRIME

SUSPECT SURFACES IN 1994 KILLING

By John Ingle

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Bob Elliott remembers Oct. 30, 1994, for many reasons.

He was celebrating his 47th birthday, driving a cattle truck somewhere in Texas.

That same day, Florence Kate Martin, 69, a person he and others in Baylor County called "Grandma," was killed in her home near Mabelle, northeast of Seymour.

A birthday hasn't gone by, he said, that he hasn't thought of the unsolved, execution-style killing by an unknown assailant.

But closure may be on its way as a Paris, Texas, man sits in the Jack County Jail, his DNA linking him to the homicide that shocked a community almost 18 years ago.

Jack Wesley Melton, 50, is charged with murder in connection with the 1994 killing.

Elliott said Melton was arrested by Paris Police Department officers May 9 when a warrant was issued for a parole violation connected to a sexual assault.

Elliott said that when someone commits a felony, normal procedure is to collect a DNA sample and store it in a database. Through standard procedures, Melton's DNA matched that of Martin's assailant.

Elliott, Baylor County sheriff, said he went to Lamar County and picked up the suspect on the murder charge.

"It's kind of like fingerprints," he said. "You can't deny them."

According to Times Record News reports after the homicide, Martin, an employee at Allsup's convenience store in Seymour, didn't show up for her late-night shift, something that was uncharacteristic of the 69-year-old.

When sheriff's deputies went to check on her, newspaper reports indicate, they found Martin face down on her bed with three bullet wounds from a .22-caliber rifle in the back of her head.

"There's a lot of questions that we hope he answers," Elliott said. "What? When? Where? Why? It just seems random."

The sheriff at the time, Jerry Barton, and his staff were criticized for what some might call a sloppy job investigating the homicide. That simply isn't the case, Elliott said.

"Evidence gathered at the time of the murder is what broke this case," he said. "There were a lot of negative things said about the case at the onset, but because of what they did, we have a suspect."

Barton died several years ago, not knowing the ending to this case.

Harry Battson, director of public information for the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles in Austin, confirmed that Melton is on parole in connection with a 30-year prison sentence after he was convicted of a July 30, 1988, burglary.

Melton was released from prison in 1991 and spent roughly the next four years in an intermediate sanction facility, or halfway house, until August 1995.

Although Melton faces a murder charge in Baylor County, Battson said the parole board would hold a preliminary hearing to determine the facts of the case, or the individual could waive the preliminary hearing.

However, the board won't make a decision in regard to a person's status until after the criminal court process has played out.

According to www.publicdata.com, Melton was charged with attempted murder and aggravated sexual assault in August 1988.

The attempted murder and aggravated sexual assault charges were dismissed Dec. 21, 1988.

Melton is listed as a registered sex offender on the Texas Department of Public Safety website. Under the "offenses" section of the website, information indicates that he was prosecuted for burglary of a habitation with intent to commit another felony offense.

It also lists a 61-year-old female as a victim.

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