

22-YEAR SEARCH FOR CINDY ENDS

In girl's wooded grave, a family finds closure

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BY AMBER HUNT • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • August 5, 2008

To anyone else, it is merely a hole -- a 4-foot-deep opening in the middle of the forest next to a serene riverbank.

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But to Ed Zarzycki, it's the answer he has been seeking for 22 years.

This is where his daughter Cindy had lain for two decades, her 13-year-old body beneath the earth, the spot unmarked and undisturbed since she disappeared in 1986.

Last month, Cindy's remains were unearthed after her killer led investigators to the plot of land off 23 Mile Road in Macomb Township. Arthur Ream, 59, is set to be sentenced Thursday to life without parole. Even without a body, a jury convicted him in June of first-degree murder.

A week after investigators discovered Cindy's bones, her father -- who for years had prayed for her return, hoping she'd run away or gotten amnesia -- visited the spot with Eastpointe Detective Derek McLaughlin, the man whose persistence solved the case.

"Look," Zarzycki quietly said to his wife, Linda, pointing at some overgrown brush.

"Wild raspberries."

The two clasped hands, looked at the Clinton River branch flowing gently behind them. Then they embraced.

"I had to come here," Zarzycki said. "I knew I needed to see it."

McLaughlin knelt over the burial site, describing how Cindy's body lay for all those years.

"It's a peaceful place," he said.

Cold case consumes McLaughlin

McLaughlin, 48, known as Mac, first learned Cindy's name in 1996 when a supervisor slapped the cold case file on his desk and told him to solve it.

The Zarzyckis' story was gut-wrenching: The last time Ed Zarzycki saw his blond-haired, softball-loving daughter, she was leaving their East Detroit house on a Sunday morning. The city has since been renamed Eastpointe.

Cindy told her father she was meeting friends at the Dairy Queen and they were going to walk to church -- but that, Zarzycki now knows, was a lie. She actually wanted to sneak out and see her boyfriend, Scott.

Ream is Scott's father. During the trial, Assistant Prosecutor Steve Kaplan painted a haunting picture: Ream lured Cindy to the Dairy Queen by saying he was throwing his son a birthday party. After he picked her up, Kaplan said, Ream raped her, killed her and hid her body.

The case languished for years.

Detective turns to psychics

During the next decade, Eastpointe police occasionally reexamined the case. When it got to McLaughlin, he zeroed in on Ream, who had piqued detectives' suspicions early on but was never treated as a suspect because without a body, Cindy was treated as a runaway, not a murder victim.

Ream had since been imprisoned for sexually assaulting a 14-year-old girl.

Though police had no real evidence, they did find a telltale keepsake in Ream's belongings: a missing-persons flyer from the mid-'90s with Cindy's picture. And they caught Ream lying, saying he'd never met Cindy when the teen had told her mother about how much she felt she could trust her boyfriend's father.

The modus operandi fit, McLaughlin said: Ream has an admitted fetish for teenage girls, and, according to those who knew her, Cindy was the type to fight back -- a struggle that McLaughlin said likely led to her death.

But McLaughlin said he felt he wasn't yet prepared to deal with someone as manipulative as Ream. He took a course to learn interrogation techniques. There, he met Jennifer Leibow, an investigator and forensic interviewer with the training company.

"After talking to Mac, his dedication and his motivation on this case was absolutely contagious," said Leibow, 26. "Everybody felt it."

Normally, investigators refer to cases by their numbers. The Zarzycki case is 86-4651 Y/B -- but no one calls it that, Leibow said. They call it "Cindy's case."

She and McLaughlin talked almost daily for three years, she said, as McLaughlin chased countless leads. He even turned to psychics, he said. One told him last spring that Cindy had died a violent death, was buried next to a river and was being sought by a peacekeeper who already knew who the killer was.

"He told me, 'You're going to be talking to him real soon,' " McLaughlin said. "That was the end of April. On May 4, we interviewed Ream. It was crazy, bone-chilling stuff."

McLaughlin said when investigators interviewed Ream, his behavior was telling.

"He didn't ask us why we were there," McLaughlin said. "He just said, 'I knew this day would come.' "

Offer to find body is rescinded

Everyone -- the Zarzyckis, Leibow, McLaughlin, even prosecutors -- wanted to find Cindy's body more than they wanted a first-degree murder conviction.

They tried to persuade Ream. Investigators took him to the grave of his son, Scott -- Cindy's budding boyfriend, who was killed in 1994 by a drunken driver -- and let him lay flowers.

"I said, 'Art, you have your son to bury. Why don't you give the Zarzyckis the same peace and the same closure?' " Leibow said. "He just shook his head and looked at me and said, 'That was a low blow.' "

Though Ream's lawyer, Tim Kohler, questioned during the trial whether Cindy was even dead, Ream made an eleventh-hour offer to lead investigators to the girl's body.

McLaughlin and the Zarzyckis were game, but the jury would never hear about it. Ream decided to gamble on the jury and rescinded the offer.

Inmate reveals burial site

After the conviction, the Zarzyckis resolved they might not ever find Cindy's body.

"We decided if God wants us to have her, He'll bring her to us," Linda Zarzycki said. "If He's protecting us because maybe the truth is too hard to hear, we're OK with that." But on July 8, Ream drew McLaughlin a map of the Macomb Township land his friends owned. When the map proved too difficult to follow the next day, Ream was driven from a county detention facility to the land off 23 Mile Road.

With his hands and feet shackled, he crossed a rickety bridge over the Clinton River and pointed to an area near the riverbank.

Some of Cindy's family members came to the scene and waited; Ed and Linda Zarzycki stayed at their home about an hour away in St. Clair County's Lexington to await McLaughlin's phone call.

After seven hours, investigators had found nothing. That's when Al Shier, whose property abuts the area, offered to use his front-end loader to help dig.

McLaughlin spotted a purse. Another layer of dirt came off, and he saw a human leg bone.

Next came shoes. They belonged to Cindy.

But the most identifiable belongings were in Cindy's purse: homemade audiotapes that her family knew she lugged with her no matter where she went. While too old to play, her father believes they contained music by her favorite bands: Mötley Crüe, RATT or Jefferson Starship.

The mood in the woods was both excited and somber, McLaughlin said. He didn't see bones; he saw a 13-year-old girl who he'd come to know.

For McLaughlin, bringing the Zarzyckis to the spot by the riverbank was important in=20that he'd made good on his promise: He found Cindy for them.

When he took Ed and Linda Zarzycki to the burial site last month, they noticed a pair of twigs that someone had fashioned into a makeshift cross.

"Well, look at that," Linda Zarzycki said as she pulled her husband to her. Birds chirped in the trees overhead.

The couple stood silently for another minute, looking into the hole that to anyone else would simply be just that: a hole.

Then they walked out of the forest holding hands.

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Ed and Linda Zarzycki embrace near the hole in which the body of Ed's 13-year-old daughter, Cindy Zarzycki, had been buried

for 22 years. The two visited the burial site for the first time on July 18, nine days after Cindy was unearthed. "I knew I needed to see it," her father said

During the trial, Cindy's sister, Constance Johnson, kept notes in a journal, along with Cindy's missing person's flyer.
(AMBER HUNT/DFP



Arthur Ream, who was convicted in June of Cindy's murder, is set to be sentenced Thursday to life without parole



Eastpointe Police Detective Derek McLaughlin shows Ed and Linda Zarzycki the hole in which the body of Ed's daughter, Cindy Zarzycki, had been buried since 1986. After being convicted of first-degree murder, her killer, Arthur Ream, led investigators to the plot in Macomb Township. Cindy's parents, Ed and Alice Zarzycki, had divorced several years before their daughter's disappearance .

Murder case to reach conclusion

Thirteen-year-old Cindy Zarzycki disappeared in 1986 when she headed to a Dairy Queen supposedly to meet friends and was never seen again. On June 18, 22 years later, her killer, Arthur Ream, was convicted of her murder. He is set to be sentenced for first-degree murder on Thursday.



MARTHA THIERRY/Detroit Free Press