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CATCHING COLD CASE KILLERS

How the LAPD uses new science to solve old murders

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FORGOTTEN

SINCE THE **LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT'S COLD CASE UNIT** BEGAN OPERATIONS 10 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH, DETECTIVES HAVE ARRESTED SEVEN SERIAL KILLERS, AND DOZENS OF OTHERS, WHO THOUGHT THEY HAD—LITERALLY—GOTTEN AWAY WITH MURDER. HOW THE LONG, SLOW CONFLUENCE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, PAIRED WITH THE GRIT AND DETERMINATION OF A HANDFUL OF PEOPLE, GOT COLD KILLERS OFF THE STREETS.

BY MATTHEW MCGOUGH



1.

THE GRIM SLEEPER

Lonnie Franklin Jr., arrested last year, is suspected of murdering at least 10 women in Los Angeles.



from a discarded piece of pizza—and Franklin’s genetic profile was compared to the Grim Sleeper’s: they matched. In arresting Franklin, the LAPD wrote a new page in the history of DNA forensics: never before in American history had an active familial search been used to solve a homicide. California is one of only four states where familial searching is legal, but the LAPD’s success in the Grim Sleeper investigation has become a prime argument for expanding its use.

Today, a quarter-century after DNA analysis was used in a murder investigation for the first time, the LAPD has become renowned worldwide for its skill in using DNA to solve homicides. It wasn’t always this way.

Ten years ago this fall, the LAPD’s Cold Case Homicide Unit was born. When it opened its doors, the brand-new unit had seven detectives, and a staggering caseload: more than 9,000 unsolved murders committed in Los Angeles since 1960. The officer in charge of the new unit was a veteran LAPD homicide detective named David Lambkin. Lambkin retired in 2007. He and his wife, Jane, a former LAPD civilian employee, live in a small town on the Olympic Peninsula, northwest of Seattle. Violent crime of the type Lambkin routinely handled as a detective is nearly nonexistent there. The living room of the Lambkins’ modern home looks out on a slate-colored bay. In concert with an overcast sky, the view from the picture windows appears a study in grays. Los Angeles feels very far away.

Asked to recount the first days of the cold case unit, Lambkin speaks with the frankness of someone who’s proud of his association with the LAPD, an institution he served for nearly three decades but no longer feels beholden to—if he ever did. He does not whitewash the monumental task faced by the new unit when it went operational.

His list of victims could read like a yearbook:

Debra Jackson, 1985; Henrietta Wright, 1986; Barbara Ware, Bernita Sparks, and Mary Lowe, 1987; Alicia Alexander and Enietra Washington, 1988. Then, after a break of more than a dozen years—the “sleeper” period that inspired his nickname—Valerie McCorvey, 2003. Four years after that—Jenica Peters, 2007.

All of the victims were black women. They were as young as 18 and as old as 36 when he ended their lives. Most were sexually assaulted and then shot, their bodies left in alleys or trash bins along a stretch of Western Avenue in South Los Angeles. It is a poor, predominately black neighborhood hemmed in on all sides by freeways. Prostitution and drug activity are common. Murders committed there typically receive little media attention. The South L.A. cases did not become a priority for the LAPD until 2007, when DNA analysis revealed the women had a common killer—one who had gone undetected for at least 22 years and was presumably still active.

A task force of six detectives was assembled to hunt for the suspect, who the media dubbed “The Grim Sleeper.” Countless leads were pursued but, frustratingly, none panned out. Detectives hoped his DNA profile might already be on record for some other offense, but it wasn’t. The investigation seemed to have reached a dead end—save for a new and controversial data-mining technique called “familial searching.”

In violent cases when conventional DNA searches fail to produce a match, and all other investigative leads have proved fruitless, there is a last-ditch option: searching the database for near-matches who are likely to be close relatives of the suspect. In the Grim Sleeper case, the familial search turned up the DNA profile of a felon who shared multiple genetic markers. The man was too young to have committed the earliest murders, but detectives quickly honed in on his father, a resident of South Los Angeles named Lonnie Franklin Jr. A surreptitious DNA sample was collected—

Using relatives' DNA

If the DNA left at a crime scene does not precisely match a profile in a criminal database, California authorities may look for similar profiles to find relatives of the perpetrator.

Heredity

Children inherit one genetic marker, or allele, from each parent at every location on a chromosome; in forensic DNA tests, each allele is assigned a number to designate its type.

	Location	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Father ♂	First allele	16	10	28	12	16	9	8
	Second allele	17	14	30	12	19	11	9
Child A	First allele	16	11	24	12	11	9	8
	Second allele	18	14	28	15	16	11	10
Child B	First allele	17	14	27	12	11	9	9
	Second allele	19	17	28	13	16	14	12
Mother ♀	First allele	18	11	24	13	11	11	10
	Second allele	19	17	27	15	13	14	12

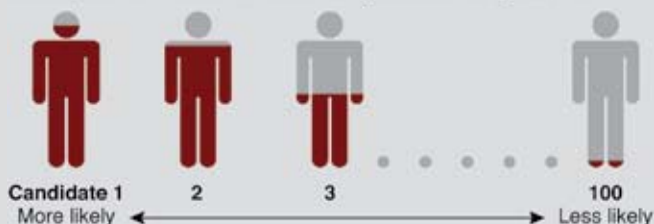
California's strategy

If a crime is serious and all other leads are exhausted, authorities allow one of two approaches to finding relatives via a DNA search:

Partial match Profiles that don't match exactly but share at least 15 alleles; partial matches can occur by chance, however, and this kind of search often fails.

	Location	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Suspect profile	First allele	16	10	24	12	16	9	8
	Second allele	18	14	28	15	16	11	10
Possible parent	First allele	16	10	28	12	16	9	8
	Second allele	16	14	28	12	19	11	8

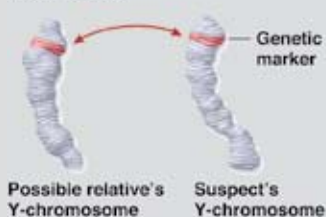
Targeted search Takes into account the rarity of each allele; it produces a list of 100 candidates ranked by the odds that they are related; this more effective method still generates many false hits.



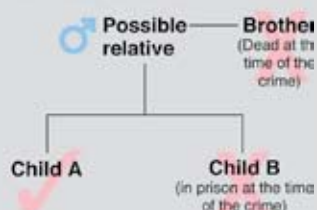
Further investigation

After potential relatives have been identified, additional steps are taken to eliminate false leads; state investigators must:

Look for more shared genetic markers on the **Y-chromosome** to indicate possible paternal or fraternal ties



Use **public records** to identify family members who could have committed the crime



Not only was each team of detectives responsible for more than 3,000 cold cases, but nothing had been allocated in the LAPD's budget for basic investigative necessities—like cars and computers that actually worked. "We weren't given any fleet cars, only old cars that had been taken out of service because they were deemed not usable anymore," Lambkin recalls.

Unlike fresh homicides, where the majority of suspects and witnesses are typically still in the city, with cold cases it is common for people to have moved far from Los Angeles, and for detectives to have to go greater distances to interview them. And Lambkin had to call in favors to be able to scrounge up one computer for every two people. The new unit was crammed into a 250-square-foot former utility closet with no windows and a broken ventilation system. All the telephone jacks were along one wall, so phone handsets were constantly being passed across the room. A *Los Angeles Times* reporter who came in to write a feature on the new unit told Lambkin the office was the worst he'd ever seen.

But Lambkin felt there was no more dignified work than trying to solve murders that society seemed to have forgotten. For victims' families, he says, "this stuff never goes away. After awhile, they get tired of dealing with the department, and they quit calling. So there's a huge moral reason to be looking back at them, now that we have these new tools." The new tools were the revolutionary DNA, ballistics, and fingerprint databases that had come online in the 1990s. Lambkin had avidly followed their evolution. He knew these databases were rapidly improving detectives' ability to identify people who very likely believed that they'd gotten away with murder.

In countless cases, Lambkin had seen firsthand how technology had made it possible to divine new leads from old crime-scene evidence. Given the number of long-unsolved murders on the LAPD's rolls, and how much unanalyzed evidence the department was sitting on, Lambkin had no doubt that a cold case unit would be successful. For almost a decade, he'd lobbied for the LAPD to create one.

As of Nov. 19, 2001, for the first time in its history, the LAPD had a team of detectives focused exclusively on solving cold case homicides. The unit would be run on a shoestring, but Lambkin had enough years on the force, and had weathered enough LAPD budget crises, to know how to wring results from paltry resources.

2.

HEAVY LOAD
David Lambkin
and some of the
thousands of
cold case files at
the LAPD.

David Lambkin was an unlikely candidate to become an LAPD homicide detective. During high school, in Wisconsin, he got around town on a Harley-Davidson, and his classmates called him a “long hair.” He and his friends, he told me, were “the guys that made a brief appearance at prom without dates, wearing leather pants and jackets, just to hang out and make people uncomfortable.” In 1975, after graduating from college with a double major in theater and political science, he decided to pursue a career in fashion photography. He was accepted to the Art Center College of Design, a prestigious school in Pasadena, so he headed west. In Southern California, he moved in with his sister and brother-in-law, both of whom worked for the Los Angeles Police Department.

Quickly, Lambkin realized how hard it would be to make it as a fashion photographer. “When it went from being a hobby to starting to become a career, I learned to hate it,” he says. He dropped out of art school and signed up for criminal-justice classes at a local college. One of his instructors was a retired FBI agent named Robert H. Morneau Jr., a pioneer in sexual-assault investigations. Lambkin was riveted by the psychological aspects of the work. “Most of those guys tend to be serial offenders. You don’t get to work a lot of serial cases in other disciplines, not ones that are that interesting,” he says. “Sexual offenders are really a unique breed.”

Lambkin was sworn in as an LAPD officer in February 1978. While working patrol in North Hollywood, he volunteered for morning jail watch; it was the shift with the fewest bookings and the most time for studying to become a detective—the status he needed to investigate sex crimes. He was later transferred to the LAPD’s Automated Information Division, where he learned to search crime databases on behalf of detectives from throughout the city. The DOS-based searches would queue to a citywide mainframe computer and could take as long as 24 hours to process. However primitive the technology may seem today, it was cutting-edge at the time. To Lambkin, learning how to use the LAPD’s criminal databases was invaluable.

In 1981, Lambkin passed the LAPD detective exam. But to his dismay, he was selected for an administrative detective position at the Police Commission. So he respectfully requested an investigative position. Finally, he was granted a transfer to his division of choice: Hollywood. In six more months, he was working with the Sex Crimes Unit.

Two detectives, both male, were assigned to the unit. They typically had 30 to 40 sexual assaults to investigate each month. The learning curve was steep—Lambkin believes solving sex crimes “takes the most investigative expertise of any crime.” Unlike most homicides, “you have to deal with biological evidence in virtually every



case.” Working directly with living victims required empathy and nuance. In many cases, there was also the pressure of knowing that you were looking for potential repeat offenders. Lambkin recalls the frustrating search for one particularly elusive serial rapist. “This guy was really good at what he did. He wore gloves, bragged to victims about being a professional, and would withdraw and ejaculate in a towel and take it with him, so he wouldn’t leave semen behind.” The suspect later killed someone. “It’s not a great feeling when you are looking for a guy who has raped 15 or more victims, and the next one he murders,” he says. (The suspect was eventually killed by Santa Monica police when confronted during his 19th, and final, assault.)

Lambkin enrolled in a course on violent offenders given by the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit. Soon, he was training emergency room nurses in how to properly collect evidence, and reaching out to rape counselors and survivor groups, asking them how the LAPD might work more effectively with victims. At the time, doctors “were getting paid 15 bucks to do a sex kit. The hospitals didn’t want [the victims] there,” he says, because they were seen as a hassle to deal with and a drain on resources.

“We had incidences where we’d have a sex-crime victim driven around for eight or 10 hours to three different hospitals.”

Now Lambkin was simultaneously teaching a number of courses, writing countless extensive LAPD policy reports known as “projects,” and carrying a full caseload of sex-assault investigations. Each case, he felt, deserved more attention than he was able to give. And, the department wasn’t allocating the resources he thought necessary. “All of a sudden, I can’t do it anymore, because I feel like I’m overloaded, and the cases aren’t getting done the way they should be.” So he requested a transfer, within Hollywood Division, to the homicide unit. It was granted in early 1991.

By that time, sex crime detectives were working with DNA evidence in just about every case. LAPD homicide detectives, by contrast, were not. Lambkin’s skill in processing sexual-assault crime scenes quickly proved an asset in his new assignment. Within a few years, he was teaching the LAPD’s first class for detectives on how to investigate sexually motivated homicides.

Then came a sea change in technology, and detective work.

Nearly 30 years earlier, in 1963, a waitress named Thora Rose had been brutally murdered in her apartment off

Sunset Boulevard. Detectives collected fingerprints, but in the days before computerized databases, only so much could be done with prints and no suspect. On television shows, Lambkin says, “they’d lift a fingerprint from a scene—before we had a computerized system—and somehow they’d identify the guy. The fact was, in the old days, if you had fingerprints from a scene, you had to develop a suspect first.” In the years after the Rose murder, Hollywood homicide detectives worked the case intensively, but were unable to identify a suspect. All trails went cold.

In 1990, an LAPD fingerprint analyst interested in testing a new automated fingerprint database randomly selected some prints from 50 unsolved homicides, including Thora Rose’s, and uploaded them to the new system. To his surprise, he got a match in the Rose case: the prints of a man named Vernon Robinson. In 1963, when Rose was murdered, Robinson was an 18-year-old Navy recruit stationed in San Diego. In the early 1970s, he was convicted of assault and served three years at San Quentin. After his release from prison, he turned his back on crime. When he was arrested in December 1990 for Rose’s murder, Robinson was a 45-year-old executive at a Minneapolis building-maintenance company.

The *L.A. Times* story on his arrest hailed the police and a “Merlin in their midst, a statewide computer network that can do in moments what used to take investigators weeks to accomplish.” In 1993, 30 years after Rose was killed, Robinson was convicted of her murder. He is now serving a life sentence. The stunning case convinced Lambkin of the potential of new technology to solve old murders. Finally, it was becoming possible for the police to use fingerprints and ballistics evidence and get the kinds of results they did in, well, Hollywood.



RIGHTING WRONGS Tim Marcia still works at LAPD's Cold Case Homicide Unit.

3.

Murder books—case files—from unsolved

homicides were usually stored at the divisions where the crimes occurred. LAPD homicide detectives had always been free to work cold cases—as time permitted. They had incentive, because clearances are credited to detectives the year the case is solved, not the year the crime was committed. During slow periods, a detective might pull a book, but as soon as a new homicide came in, it went back on the shelf. The attitude, Lambkin says, was: “Hey, those cases are 20 years old. They can wait another three weeks.’ Then, before you know it, six months have gone by.”

Lambkin started digging more systematically into the backlog at Hollywood. He discovered that some cold cases seemed relatively easy to solve using the new ballistics and fingerprint databases. The late 1980s and early 1990s, when homicides were topping 1,000 a year, offered plenty of candidates. In some divisions, the murder rate was so high that detectives “literally worked a case for maybe five or six days, wrote it up, and never looked at it again. Some of these guys were getting three homicides a week.” The information needed to solve the murders was right there in the book. “They were just hand-me’s,” he says. “They just couldn’t get to it.”

In 1997, Lambkin’s 15 years as detective, and his standing as an expert on training and investigations, helped propel him to officer in charge of Hollywood Homicide, one of most high-profile detective posts on the LAPD. Tim Marcia, who came up as a detective in Hollywood and later worked with Lambkin in the Robbery-Homicide Division, recalls him being a deft manager of a difficult bunch. He cites the monthly unit breakfasts Lambkin instituted. “We would sit around a circular table, and he had each one of us talk about our cases,” Marcia recalls. “By relating your own investigation, somebody over there can say, ‘Did you do this? Did you do that?’ without him saying, ‘This is what you should do.’”

Lambkin asked Marcia to create a list of all cold cases. During slow periods, Lambkin assigned teams of detectives to work them, but time was never on their side. Other units in the division would get overloaded, and lieutenants and captains who outranked Lambkin would draft any detectives not working fresh homicides. Lambkin became convinced that to effectively investigate cold cases, detectives needed to be completely isolated from all other responsibilities—without exception.

4.

WITHIN THE L.A. DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE, a deputy D.A. named Lisa Kahn had carved out a role parallel to David Lambkin’s at the LAPD: DNA evangelist-in-chief.

A native New Yorker, Kahn had moved to Los Angeles during college and worked briefly for Michael Ovitz and Ron Meyer at their new talent agency, Creative Artists, when she decided to enroll in law school. “I thought I was going to law school to be a better agent, and to get into TV and motion-picture packaging,” Kahn told me. After taking the California bar exam, though, Kahn took a law-clerk position at the D.A.’s office. Her supervisor was a deputy D.A. named Lance Ito, who was preparing a multiple-murder case for trial. (Years later, Kahn would coordinate the DNA testing in the O.J. Simpson case.) Kahn was captivated by what she calls “the greatest drama around.” By the time her clerkship ended, Kahn had made up her mind: “I never looked back, and got a job as a D.A.”

In 1989, after five years on the job, Kahn became the first prosecutor in Los Angeles history to introduce DNA evidence in a criminal trial. After winning a conviction against that defendant, a serial rapist, Kahn was asked to assist with the next DNA case. By the early 1990s, her status as the Los Angeles D.A.’s resident DNA expert was solidified.

DNA D.A.
Lisa Kahn was the first prosecutor in L.A. history to introduce DNA in a criminal trial.



By 1994, the federal government and many states (including California) had established DNA databases, but DNA processing standards varied between states and there was limited interagency connectivity. This changed in October 1998 when the FBI's national DNA database—the Combined DNA Index System, or CODIS—went online. From their respective perches, the prosecutor and the detective watched the CODIS rollout, and other DNA milestones, with keen interest. Kahn and Lambkin knew each other well; they had worked together on dozens of prosecutions and several interagency committees. Both grasped that DNA could not only solve past crimes but prevent future ones. “That was our mantra,” Kahn recalls. She made the case so frequently that she eventually developed a formal presentation. “I had all these PowerPoints, and I went everywhere showing how having DNA on this first sexual assault meant these other 10 women wouldn’t have to be raped, because we could’ve stopped them dead in their tracks. David understood that. He knew it was coming.”

In 1998, Lambkin was granted reassignment to the Rape Special Section of Robbery-Homicide Division, an elite detective squad that works out of police headquarters. Rape Special investigated all sexually motivated homicides in the city, as well as any serial-rape case that

crossed division lines. The officer in charge was Lt. Debbie McCarthy, who Lambkin calls “a great, intuitive supervisor.” McCarthy had risen quickly in the LAPD, moving from patrol officer to sergeant to lieutenant. She was young and had far less investigative experience than the detectives under her command. But her staff loved her, possibly because, as Lambkin says, “McCarthy’s attitude was: Keep the administrative crap off the detective’s desks so they’re free to work cases.” Lambkin also had an ally in McCarthy’s boss, Capt. Jim Tatreau, the commanding officer of Robbery-Homicide, who had brought Lambkin to that division from Hollywood.

Although the LAPD had improved its handling of sex-assault cases since Lambkin’s early days, the state of affairs still plagued him: “Rape victims weren’t getting the investigations they deserve,” Lambkin says. “It totally ruins their lives.” Lambkin estimates that in Los Angeles in the late 1990s, only 1 in 7 rapes was reported to police.

Lambkin, McCarthy, and Tatreau proposed a three-year plan that would bring all sex crimes in the city under the jurisdiction of Robbery-Homicide Division, and eventually would result in the creation of a special unit that solely worked sexual assaults. The proposal was ready by Christmas of 1999. With Tatreau and McCarthy behind it, it was quickly approved.

The first year went according to plan. But then the department started laying on new responsibilities without adding new detectives to handle them. Lambkin says the lack of foresight is typical. “There’s no long-range planning to understand how many people you need, especially with the new improvements in technology,” he says of the LAPD. “They don’t plan, so it’s always running from behind. It’s like having 10 fires burning and one fire extinguisher.”

Detectives across the city had become invested in the promised reforms, and many were furious when the plan fell apart. “I had a lot of sex-crime detectives mad at me,” Lambkin says. He had to send copies of the original plan to several of them to prove it was the departmental follow-through, and not the design, that had been lacking.

Lisa Kahn recalls the attitude at the LAPD on any project involving sex crimes or DNA was: “Give it to Lambkin.” When the legislature lengthened the statute of limitations for rape—another indication of how DNA was revolutionizing the ability to investigate old crimes—Lambkin was tapped to analyze the impact on the department.

On Jan. 1, 1999, the California Department of Justice implemented new DNA-analysis standards that simplified evidence collection procedures, conformed to new national standards, and made it possible to get DNA from much smaller samples than before. The sole but significant downside: all of the DNA profiles developed using the old technique were incompatible with the new database. Hundreds of evidence samples already tested by the department’s crime lab would need to be tested all over again. The logistics fell to Lambkin: “We had to coordinate a whole citywide project to go back and look at all the cases that had DNA, and all of them had to be resubmitted. We had a notebook like this thick”—he holds a hand 4 or 5 inches above the table—“from all the divisions, all the cases.” The flood of new submissions further taxed the capacity of the LAPD’s perpetually budget-strapped crime lab. (Just this spring, Chief of Police Charlie Beck announced that the department had finally worked its way through an embarrassing backlog of more than 6,000 rape kits that had never been DNA-tested.)

5.

In 2000, another Robbery-Homicide detective asked Lambkin about an old case, the 1965 homicide of a young woman named Stephanie Gorman. The detective had met Gorman's older sister at a party, and the sister, by then in her 40s, had mentioned the unsolved case. When Lambkin and Marcia reviewed the files, they were chilled by the brutality of the murder: Stephanie, a 16-year-old junior at Hamilton High School in West Los Angeles, had been sexually assaulted and shot to death in her family home. Her 19-year-old sister discovered her body, and had gone screaming into the street for help.

Lambkin and Marcia pored over the files and found a previously unidentified fingerprint collected at the scene. The detectives had the print uploaded to the federal fingerprint database, and received a match. The print belonged to a man who had once been arrested for receipt of stolen property. The detectives thought this was hardly the type of crime to presage rape and murder—the property was a typewriter that the man didn't even know was stolen. But when they tracked down a photo, the man bore a resemblance to a sketch drawn from the description of a peeping-tom seen around the time of the murder. And the fingerprint analysts were certain: the man's prints matched those found at Stephanie Gorman's house.

In cold case homicides, detectives are typically far more in control of the pace of the investigation than when working fresh murders. In most cold cases, a fingerprint or DNA hit does not immediately precipitate an arrest. Rather, detectives build to the interview, the moment they can sit a suspect down and have in their favor the dual advantages of preparation and surprise. The more the detectives know going in, the more easily they can recognize lies and evasions that can be recounted later in court.

For months, Lambkin and Marcia dug into the suspect's whereabouts in 1965, and his life since. "I'm kind of leery for a long time," Lambkin remembers, "and then right before we get him, I'm convinced he's our guy." But when they rang the man's doorbell, the man invited the detectives into his living room and offered them a seat. Lambkin knew right away he wasn't their guy. "We tell him that we're there about an old murder, and he goes, 'Oh, is this about that girl that was killed back then?' He sits right next to me on the sofa, which no suspect's going to do, because

they're not going to be that comfortable, if they did it." The man explained that on the day of the murder, he'd been visiting a friend near the Gorman house when he heard Stephanie's sister screaming. He ran to the crime scene to try to help. When police arrived, they ordered everyone out of the house. He complied, but must have left a print behind. Thirty-five years later, the detectives were devastated: they'd been so certain they had their guy.

The fruitlessness of the investigation rankled Lambkin for another reason. Eleven years earlier, in 1989, much of the evidence from the Gorman case had been inexplicably destroyed, and with it any hope for an eventual DNA match. Physical evidence relevant to homicides is supposed to be retained forever. For reasons Lambkin was never able to ascertain, a supervisor in Van Nuys had signed a "dispo card," or disposal order, in the Gorman murder. "I have no idea how this guy even got the card," Lambkin says, since it wasn't even a Van Nuys case. "He saw it was an old case and just destroyed it," he says, disgusted still. "If it's a sex crime and it's not solved, you shouldn't even get a card." (Lambkin convinced LAPD to add a "hold indefinitely" option in all rape cases.) He is certain that if he'd had the physical evidence to test, DNA would have identified Stephanie Gorman's murderer. The case remains unsolved.

The disappointing end to the investigation spurred Lambkin, and Kahn, to get serious about an idea they had batted around for years: a coordinated effort by the LAPD and the D.A.'s office to tackle the city's large, and largely unexamined, backlog of unsolved homicides. Lambkin and Kahn knew that the technology was there to solve at least some of the many thousands of cold cases—no one had an exact count—on the LAPD's books.

6.

THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Steve Cooley has been a Los Angeles D.A. since 1973, and the top prosecutor since 2000.



Lambkin gave the completed project to his captain, Jim Tatreau.

On Friday, Sept. 7, Tatreau sent the document upstairs to his bosses in the LAPD's Detective Support Group. A week later—three days after 9/11—Tatreau and Lambkin were summoned to their offices, and informed the request had been denied.

Lambkin was stunned. The department loaned detectives all the time, he protested: between divisions; to various anti-crime task forces; to the feds. "They just said they couldn't spare any detectives," he recalls. It was the only time in his career that he lost his temper, he says, as he tried to explain what the loan of just two detectives would accomplish: "You are saving people's lives, doing this. Especially the sexual predators—they do not stop." But the answer was still no. "I was in disbelief. How could you not take advantage of this technology? How could you not provide the service to the families?"

"So I'm really upset, as upset as I had probably ever been," Lambkin recalls. "We're walking out, and I remember Tatreau's walking in front of me. He turned around and said, 'Don't worry about it,' and he winked at me."

Driving home that night, Lambkin's cellphone rang. "You got your cold case unit," Tatreau told him. "They want the names of five D-I's by Tuesday."

D-I is the most inexperienced detective rank, but Lambkin bit his tongue. "I was so grateful to get anybody," he says. "You know, at some point, you've got to keep your mouth shut."

Lambkin never asked Tatreau, who died in 2007, what favors he called in to make it happen. "I know without knowing, OK? He had to go to the chief. Nobody at any lower level can say you've got a unit with five D-I's."

Lisa Kahn was blissful. "It was a dream come true," she says.

IN NOVEMBER 2000, STEVE COOLEY WAS ELECTED district attorney of Los Angeles, and Kahn had a new audience for her DNA initiatives. She convinced Cooley to establish a Forensic Sciences Section within the D.A.'s office consisting of her and two other prosecutors. Lambkin was elated: If the D.A.'s office had a DNA unit up and running, it could pave the way for a parallel squad at the LAPD.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2001, Lambkin and Kahn designed a plan for a cold case homicide unit that would be palatable to their respective institutions. The two settled on a proposal for an interagency task force, and Cooley signed on. The D.A.'s office would provide three prosecutors and two investigators (likely retired LAPD detectives). According to the plan, the LAPD would loan two detectives—Lambkin and one other—to the group. The task force would be based out of the D.A.'s office. "A big part of that was to make sure we were out of sight, so we could just concentrate on these cases," Lambkin explains. A 2000 state grant had made \$50 million available to local police departments to fund DNA analysis in unsolved sexually motivated murders. Under the grant's terms, the laboratory costs of DNA testing—about \$1,200 to \$1,500 per piece of evidence—would be paid by Sacramento. But the grant was available only through the fall of 2003; the clock was already running.

Cooley sent a letter to then-LAPD Chief Bernard Parks, asking for a personal meeting to discuss the task force. For days, there was no response. Lambkin and Kahn were bewildered. Lambkin finally discovered that an overeager bureaucrat had waylaid Cooley's letter. Seeing multiple references to "DNA," he or she apparently assumed the letter required a scientific response. The high-level communication was assigned a "project" number and sent to the crime lab for review and comment. Lambkin tracked the project down, and had it reassigned to him at Robbery-Homicide.

Lambkin typed up a detailed evaluation of the D.A.'s proposal so LAPD brass would sign off. "This re-examination of unsolved sexual assault homicides will result in the identification and prosecution of perpetrators that have previously gone undetected," Lambkin wrote. "Solving these cases will bring closure to the victims' families, increase homicide clearance rates, and ensure that these violent and highly recidivist perpetrators are not free to reoffend." He also compiled an appendix: a sampling of more than 200 specific unsolved murders dating back to 1975 that he believed could be solved using the DNA, fingerprint, and ballistics databases that had since come into existence.

7.



LAPD VETERANS Left to right: David Lambkin, Tim Marcia, and Rick Jackson outside the Stephanie Gorman house.

LAMBKIN WAS GIVEN FIVE DAYS to find D-I's who were both skillful and willing. "A detective has to have the right temperament for cold case work. A lot of guys are action guys. They like moving and being on the move. They like the pursuit. But to give them stacks of paper to read through from 20 years ago—some guys are not cut out to do that."

Tim Marcia was the first on board. The next was Cliff Shepard, who was renowned for his ability to track down hard-to-find suspects. Vivian Flores had worked on a task force at Robbery-Homicide and spoke Spanish, an important skill to have in the unit. Richard Bengtson was recommended out of the Hollywood homicide unit. Jose Ramirez, who had gang-homicide experience, made five.

Lambkin went back to Tatreau with one more request: he wanted Rick Jackson, a Homicide Expert at RHD. Jackson was famed for his encyclopedic knowledge of L.A. crime history, and his people skills were legendary. A deputy D.A. who frequently works with Jackson offers this description: "You're on a plane. The plane crashes in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. You and Rick are the only survivors, OK? You guys manage to swim to an island full of natives that have never, ever left the island. OK? Never in their history. Ten of the 40 natives there greet Rick by name. And know him. That is Rick."

Tatreau assigned Jackson to the cold case unit as the assistant officer in charge. To Lambkin's great relief, the unit was put under the command of Lt. Debra McCarthy.

The brand-new Cold Case Homicide Unit went operational on Monday morning, Nov. 19, 2001, with a breakfast meeting around a table at the LAPD Police Academy near Dodger Stadium.

8.

Four months later, on March 25, 2002,

the unit solved its first cold case when it proved that Alfredo Agrelo had shot and killed Leo Betancourt, the owner of a Silver Lake auto-body shop, on Oct. 13, 1981. The day before, two men had come to the shop under the pretense that they wanted to test-drive a car Betancourt was selling, but the shop was closed. When they came back the next day, Betancourt took them for a test drive. Once in the car, they directed him to an alley and shot him. One of the men drove away; the other fled on foot. A number of people, including Betancourt's wife, saw the men at the shop, and others saw the shooting, but the case wasn't solved.

Twenty years later, Rick Jackson was interviewing a prison inmate, looking for information about homicides the inmate might have heard about over the years. The man told Jackson that Agrelo had mentioned the test-drive ruse, including a detail about a bullet that had struck a medallion Betancourt was wearing. Jackson and a Robbery-Homicide detective, Phil Vannatter, found an old booking photo of Agrelo and showed it to Betancourt's widow, and another witness. Both identified him. But Agrelo would never answer for the murder: he had died of natural causes a few years earlier, at age 55, in an Arizona prison. The Betancourt case was designated "cleared other," a category for cases where sufficient grounds exist for an arrest and criminal filing, but, for reasons outside police control, doing so is impossible. In short order, the new unit closed three more cases as "cleared other."

In February 2003, the unit cleared its first case by arrest: the unsolved 1983 murder of a young mother named Elaine Graham. After dropping her 2-year-old daughter off with a babysitter the morning of March 17, Graham had planned to go to class at Cal State University, Northridge. The next day, her car was found abandoned in Santa Ana, 60 miles away. Eight months later, hikers in a remote canyon about six miles from Northridge discovered her skeletal remains. Marks on Graham's bones suggested that she had been stabbed to death. At the time,

detectives suspected a 25-year-old drifter named Edmond Jay Marr; he had been seen in the area before Graham's disappearance, and showed up at his sister's apartment in Santa Ana that evening. When, a few weeks later, Marr was arrested for an unrelated crime, he was carrying a knife with blood in the crevices of the handle. Conventional blood testing established that it was the same blood type as Elaine Graham's, but the D.A. didn't think he had the evidence to file charges.

Twenty years later, Rick Jackson and Tim Marcia tracked Marr to the Palm Springs area. After securing wiretaps on his and his family's phones, they anonymously mailed Marr a copy of an *L.A. Times* article on the new cold case unit. In the article, Jackson and Marcia had said they were investigating Graham's murder. Marr's recorded phone conversations (he unconvincingly parried his family's questions about whether he was responsible) became part of the evidence used against him. But most damning were DNA results that proved that the blood on the knife was Graham's. The DNA match was made from a sample taken from Graham's daughter, who, by the time Marr was prosecuted, was nearly as old as her mother was when Marr killed her. Marr was sentenced to 16 years to life.

In September 2003, the cold case unit cleared four cases at once when Richard Bengtson and Vivian Flores arrested the unit's first serial killer, Adolph Laudenberg, who was suspected of murdering four women between 1972 and 1975. He was arrested after detectives nabbed a coffee cup he'd used, developed a DNA profile from Laudenberg's saliva, and matched it to the DNA left at the crime scenes.

In December 2004, Cliff Shepard and Jose Ramirez cleared 11 cold cases by arresting Chester Turner for the sexually motivated murders of 10 women and one unborn child—denoted as Baby

Washington in case files—between 1987 and 1998. Until DNA connected the cases, police did not realize they were searching for a serial killer. Later Shepard recognized Turner's modus operandi in three murders for which another man—a mentally disabled janitor—had been convicted. The man had already served about a decade of his life sentence. Shepard contacted his lawyers and suggested they test his DNA. He was exonerated in 2004 by the test results, and released from prison.

David Lambkin retired in 2007, but the other six detectives in the original unit remain on the job. Three still work cold cases, along with 10 other detectives. In 2009, the LAPD moved to a gleaming new headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The Cold Case Homicide Unit's squad room is a group of cubicles in a modern bullpen, with plenty of windows. Among snapshots of their own families, many of the detectives display photos of victims from cases they are investigating.

In 10 years, the cold case unit has solved the murders of 92 men, women, and children killed between 1960 and 2005. Sixty-seven of those cases were solved using DNA. The unit has arrested seven different serial killers, collectively believed to be responsible for at least 40 murders. To Lambkin, that proves that cold case work is not merely about providing families with closure. "What that unit's doing is preventing future rapes and saving lives. There aren't many other things in the budget that have the ability to do that. I guarantee there are people walking around Los Angeles right now who would be dead if it weren't for the work of the cold case unit."

The unit's most recent arrest was of Jose Hernandez, a suspect in the Sept. 26, 1995, murder of Amilcar Saravia in the Mid-Wilshire district of the city. Hernandez is one of 18 homicide suspects arrested by the LAPD's cold case unit who are currently awaiting trial. ¶

Justice Served

By prioritizing sexually motivated homicides, the LAPD's cold case unit has arrested seven suspected serial killers. Below are those men, their case status, and the names of the victims attributed to them.

ADOLPH LAUDENBERG

Files cleared March 17, 2004
Sentenced: 22 years to life
– Lois Petrie, 12/25/72
– Catherine Medina, 08/19/74
– Anna Felch, 09/04/74
– Leah Griffin, 03/20/75

CHESTER TURNER

Files cleared Dec. 21, 2004 & April 21, 2005
Convicted: death sentence
– Diane Johnson, 03/09/87
– Annette Ernest, 10/29/87
– Elandra Bunn, 12/16/87
– Anita Fishman, 01/20/89
– Regina Washington, 09/23/89
– Baby Washington, 09/23/89
– Tammie Christmas, 09/30/92
– Debra Williams, 11/16/92
– Mary Edwards, 12/16/92
– Andrea Triplett, 04/02/93
– Desarae Jones, 05/16/93
– Natalie Price, 02/12/95
– Mildred Beasley, 11/06/96
– Paula Vance, 02/03/98
– Brenda Bries, 04/06/98

WILLIAM CHRISTIANSON

Files cleared Jan. 23, 2006
Cleared other: deceased
– Paul Hodges, 06/29/80
– Jackie Smith, 09/12/80

MICHAEL HUGHES

Files cleared Oct. 14, 2008
Pending trial
– Verna Williams, 05/26/86
– Deanna Wilson, 08/30/90
– Deborah Jackson, 06/25/93

JOHN FLOYD THOMAS

Files cleared March 31, 2009
Convicted: life without parole
– Ethel Sokoloff, 11/25/72
– Elizabeth McKeown, 02/18/76
– Cora Perry, 1975
– Maybelle Hudson, 1976
– Adreienne Askew, 1986

VICTOR ALVAREZ

Files cleared Oct. 28, 2009
Pending trial
– Cordelia Ferguson, 08/16/92
– Hazel Hughes, 08/16/92

LONNIE FRANKLIN JR.

Files cleared July 7, 2010
Pending trial
– Debra Jackson, 08/10/85
– Henrietta Wright, 08/12/86
– Barbara Ware, 01/10/87
– Bernita Sparks, 04/15/87
– Mary Lowe, 11/01/87
– Alicia Alexander, 09/11/88
– Enietra Washington, 11/20/88
– Valerie McCorvey, 07/11/03
– Jenica Peters, 01/01/07