



Cold Case Research Resources for Unidentified, Missing, and Cold Homicide Cases

By Silvia Pettem

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Cases in which all investigative leads appear to be exhausted are frustrating for both investigators and victims' families. Cold cases can range from those only a few months old to others that go back for decades. Presenting profiles and actual case histories, *Cold Case Research: Resources for Unidentified, Missing and Cold Homicide Cases* illustrates how investigators can successfully apply resources that will enable them to reopen and solve cases gathering dust in the file room.

Today's investigators have found that, to solve cold cases, they need to be internet savvy and make the best use of the rapidly changing methodologies of the twenty-first century, but they also have to be time travelers and open the door to the past. This volume weaves together the nearly forgotten skill sets of traditional historical researchers with the latest online tools, including TLO, a premier investigative system; and NamUs, the revolutionary database for missing persons and unidentified remains. Along with practical applications, *Cold Case Research* gives investigators the tools they need to save time and money and to jump-start their cold cases, while keeping others from going cold in the future.

Topics discussed include:

- Implementing cold case units
- People searches and working with databases
- Overlooked DNA in PKU cards
- The plight of the missing and unknown
- Applying historical and geographical context
- Online and off-line newspaper research
- Public and published records
- The use of volunteers
- Contact with co-victims

- Cold-case review teams and information-sharing resources
- Taking advantage of the media

Using a thinking-outside-the-box approach, this volume helps fill major gaps in traditional cold case investigation training and techniques, enabling investigators to confidently reopen and crack the mystery of cases long thought unsolvable.

Silvia Pettem was quoted in a January 29, 2012 article on missing persons in the Colorado Springs Gazette.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Revolutionary. Reads like a page-turner yet will educate even the most experienced investigator?cold case or otherwise."

?Richard H. Walton, Ed.D., author of *Cold Case Homicides: Practical Investigative Techniques*

"For the investigator, Pettem's work will undoubtedly jump-start many a stalled investigation and keep others moving forward. For cold case unit managers, it opens up a world of new opportunities—the opportunity to expand the capacities of their units, take advantage of free resources, and to institute changes that address the outdated attitudes, policies, and procedures that, in the past, prevented some cases from being solved. At the same time, **Cold Case Research** promises to keep others from going cold in the future."

?From the Foreword by Detective James Trainum, Metropolitan Police Department (Retired), Washington, D.C.

"WOW! The book reflects the compassion of the author - smart and fascinating! This is the "textbook" for missing, unidentified and homicide investigations. A valuable addition to any investigating agency's library as a resource and training tool. A wise and informative guide for advocates and volunteer organizations. Well done!"

?Todd Matthews, Media Relations /DoeNetwork.org & Communications and Outreach Manager for NamUs @ UNTHSC

"The literature on cold case investigations tends to fall into two genres; practical resources for cold case investigators or true crime public interest books dramatically depicting unsolved murders for an interested public. While this book falls firmly into the former category, designed to be a useful resource for cold case detectives, it nevertheless also manages to successfully straddle the latter camp, by providing interesting case study examples of cold case investigations and investigations into missing persons and the unidentified dead. It is this mix of practical resources and vivid case study examples that sets this book apart from other similar texts."

?Cheryl Allsop, Lecturer of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Glamorgan

From the Author

COLD CASE RESEARCH

Resources for Unidentified, Missing, and Cold Homicide Cases

Q & A with author, Silvia Pettem

Q. How did you get interested in cold case research?

A. My interest in cold case research grew out of my background in history and has become sort of a passion.

Q. What do you mean?

A. After decades of work as a historical researcher, newspaper columnist, and author of more than a dozen books, my life took a new turn, in 1996, when I stumbled upon the gravestone of a Jane Doe--a murder

victim in Boulder County, Colorado, from 1954. I wanted to give her back her name, so I took my research skills to my local sheriff, then we teamed up with forensic experts of the Vidocq Society. Our unique partnership had a profound influence on my life and led to the successful determination of the young woman's identity. I've chronicled the case in *Someone's Daughter: In Search of Justice for Jane Doe*.

Q. Are you working on other cold cases?

A. Yes, all the time. I'm now an associate member of the Vidocq Society, a volunteer in the Detectives Section of the Boulder Police Department, a NamUs Academy graduate, and a NamUs instructor in classes sponsored by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation. In addition, I correspond with colleagues and co-victims from all over the country.

Q. Why did you write *Cold Case Research: Resources for Unidentified, Missing, and Cold Homicide Cases*?

A. I was asked to write *Cold Case Research* by Richard H. Walton (author of *Cold Case Homicides: Practical Investigative Techniques*), after he wrote the Foreword for *Someone's Daughter*. He convinced me that a book on cold case research was a gap that needed to be filled.

Q. What is the definition of a cold case?

A. The term "cold case" varies from agency to agency, but I like the wording of the National Institute of Justice--"any case whose probative investigative leads have been exhausted." Therefore, cold cases can range from those that are a few months old to others that go back for decades.

Q. Are the resources that you include in *Cold Case Research* applicable to both time periods, i.e. recent cases, as well as those that are decades-old?

A. I've woven together traditional historical research methods with today's latest tools, and, in many instances, these resources need to be used together. For instance, investigators who put together witness lists from old cases (such as in the early 1980s) have found that public records are invaluable in tracing changes in women's names. Then, those new names can be plugged into online people-searches.

Q. Who do you think will benefit the most from your book, the older and more experienced investigators or those just entering the profession?

A. *Cold Case Research* is written for both. I've found that the older investigators are leery of new-fangled procedures and databases, so I've provided actual examples of how these resources are used by law-enforcement in the real world. Similarly, younger investigators will learn where to find items that are not online, such as city directories, old maps, bus schedules, and original newspaper clippings and photographs that help to place crimes in historical context.

Q. You mention volunteers and co-victims. What do they have to do with cold case research?

A. For agencies that lack time and money (meaning nearly all), vetted volunteers have proven to be invaluable in taking over tedious tasks such as data entry, as well as providing fresh sets of eyes in reviewing case files. Co-victim programs that incorporate victim advocates in their cold case units benefit both law enforcement and the victims' families with exchanges of information and mutual support.

Q. *Cold Case Research* lumps together cases of the unidentified and missing, along with homicides. Why?

A. There's really no way to neatly separate them. A murder victim may be found with no name, and a missing person's case can "turn into" a homicide. Cases of missing-and-presumed dead are, perhaps, the most challenging, and some can even be prosecuted as no-body homicides.

Q. What's a no-body homicide?

A. A no-body homicide is a case where the body is missing, but there are enough other pieces of evidence to solve and prosecute the case.

Q. Can you provide an example?

A. In one of the case histories, I relate the story of a missing 4-year-old Navajo girl, Surette Clark. Years later, changes in family relationships gave the Phoenix Police Department the evidence it needed--even without the child's body--to determine that she had been killed by her step-father, who was tried, convicted and sent to prison. (Surette's remains finally were found and identified. She had previously been another law-enforcement agency's Jane Doe.)

Q. Are all missing and/or unidentified cases also homicides?

A. Not at all. People go missing for many different reasons. Some die a natural or accidental death, while many have personal reasons to disappear. In the cases where missing adults choose to walk away, investigators respect their privacy, but they also let family members know that the persons have been found. In many cases, the knowledge that a missing person is alive and well is the resolution that the family member had been seeking.

Q. What's a good resource to find the missing and identify the unknown?

A. Number one on my list is the NamUs System--dual databases established in 2009. One database is of missing persons, the other of unidentified remains, and NamUs matches them together. These databases are accessible to everyone, including the public. This resource didn't exist when I worked on the Boulder Jane Doe case, but, if it had, we might have identified the victim years earlier.

Q. I thought cops and reporters have traditionally had adversarial relationships, yet you have a chapter on "taking advantage" of the media. Please explain.

A. As a newspaper columnist, I've seen this issue from both sides. Instead of fearing the media, I encourage investigators to use the media (defined as any information conveyed to a mass audience) to bring in new leads. In addition to dealing with print and broadcast reporters, I discuss social media, agency-run cold case websites, and even off-beat tools that include cold case playing cards.

Q. Why is reopening cold cases important, even if they might not be solved?

A. Reopening cold cases gives resolution to families, brings murderers to justice, and recognizes that in our society each of us counts. Of most importance, however, it provides justice to the victims. That's why we do what we do.

Q. Is cold case research a hot topic?

A. Absolutely.

Q. What's next for you? Do you have another project and/or book in the works?

A. For now, I will continue my work on cold cases. I'm open to all possibilities and will see where they lead.

About the Author

Silvia Pettem is a longtime historical researcher, newspaper columnist, and author of more than a dozen books. After decades of work for individuals, businesses, and governments, her life took a new turn in 1996, when she stumbled upon the gravestone of a Jane Doe, a murder victim from 1954. A few years later, Pettem applied her research skills to both old-fashioned detective work and the power of the Internet by entering into a successful partnership with her local sheriff and forensic experts of the Vidocq Society to determine the young woman's identity. Pettem chronicled their work in *Someone's Daughter: In Search of Justice for Jane*

Doe.

In 2008, the Boulder County Sheriff's Office gave Pettem a Sheriff's Commendation Award for doing the "lion's share of the research" on the Jane Doe case. Two years later, the Vidocq Society presented her with its Medal of Honor.

While continuing to volunteer for the Sheriff's Office, Pettem is now an associate member of the Vidocq Society, a volunteer in the detectives section of the Boulder Police Department, a NamUs Academy graduate, and a NamUs instructor in classes sponsored by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, expanding her expertise and working with colleagues all over the country.

For more info on this book and my other books, see silviapettem.com

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jamie Lundquist:

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