

COP FINDS A BREAK IN UNSOLVED MURDER CASE BUT 44 YEARS LATER, THE SUSPECT IS DEAD

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A West Bloomfield Township police detective has identified a retired carnival worker as a suspect in the rape and slaying of an 7-year-old girl that shocked metropolitan Detroit more than four decades ago.

But the suspect in the death of **Barbara Gaca** is dead.

Lt. Tim Sheridan said the suspect, William H. Redmond of Grand Island, Neb., was identified through the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension System, which develops profiles of suspects based on details of a crime.

Redmond was one of two names the FBI identified based on Sheridan's information. Sheridan said the other suspect was in jail at the time of the girl's slaying and has been cleared.

Redmond, 69, died Jan. 2, 1992, at a Grand Island hospital. He had been free on bond since 1988 while awaiting trial in Philadelphia in the April 1951 strangulation death of 8-year-old Jane Marie Althoff. Her body was found at a carnival southeast of Philadelphia where Redmond operated a Ferris wheel.

Redmond's fingerprint was found in the truck cab where the girl's body was found. He allegedly confessed to the Althoff slaying, but the trial was delayed by defense motions, including one to free Redmond on bond because of ill health, Sheridan said.

While in custody, Redmond indicated to another inmate that he might have killed three other girls. Police identified him as a suspect in similar killings in New York and Cleveland, but Redmond declined to be interviewed after speaking with his attorney.

But in January 1988, Grand Island Sheriff's Detective Lt. Gregg Ahlers helped Pennsylvania State Police Trooper Malcolm Murphy interview Redmond at Nebraska State Patrol offices in Grand Island.

"He admitted to it," Ahlers said of Althoff's killing. Redmond, who suffered from emphysema and heart trouble, could not be brought back to face trial, authorities said.

Gaca disappeared March 24, 1955, while walking from her east-side Detroit home to school, six blocks away. A search by hundreds of people found nothing until a week later, when her body was found in a dump in West Bloomfield Township, 25 miles from her home. She had been raped and strangled.

Many suspects, including a Roman Catholic priest, were investigated but police were unable to solve the crime. The case has haunted detectives, some of whom continued searching for leads even after they retired.

Barbara's father, Frank **Gaca**, who now lives in White Lake, said he hopes the police can finally solve the riddle that has troubled him for years.

"We've been going through these so many years," said the 75-year-old **Gaca** . "We always figure that some day, someone who knows about it will confess or want to clear his conscience. So we keep waiting."

Sheridan said he is checking Social Security records to trace Redmond's whereabouts in March 1955. Redmond also was known to work for the Baltimore & Ohio railroad in Lima, Ohio, which ran trains to and from Detroit.

Anyone with information about Redmond in 1955 is asked to call West Bloomfield Township Police at 1-248-682-9200 anytime.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Caption: Photo Photos by WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press.

Barbara Gaca, top, was 7 when she was raped and murdered in 1955. Detectives haunted by the case have worked on it since. Her parents Frank and Rita **Gaca**, above, hope police can finally solve the puzzle.

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