

The Golden State Killer

Background: **Crimes:** Between 1974 and 1986, a serial rapist and murderer terrorized California, committing at least 13 murders, over 50 rapes, and 120 burglaries. The perpetrator was known by several names, including the "East Area Rapist" and the "Original Night Stalker."

Initial Investigation: Despite a massive investigation, the case went cold due to the lack of technology to connect the various crimes and a perpetrator who was extremely careful about leaving behind evidence.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2018, law enforcement used an emerging technique known as genetic genealogy. They uploaded DNA from crime scenes to an online genealogy database and were able to identify a relative of the suspect.

Identification: Joseph James DeAngelo, a former police officer, was identified as the Golden State Killer. He was arrested in April 2018.

Outcome: DeAngelo pled guilty to multiple counts of murder and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in 2020. The case is notable for being one of the first major cold cases solved using genetic genealogy.

The Murder of Michelle Martinko

Background: **Crime:** On December 19, 1979, 18-year-old Michelle Martinko was found stabbed to death in her car in the parking lot of a mall in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Despite extensive investigation, the case went cold for decades.

Initial Investigation: There was no clear suspect, and the forensic technology available at the time was insufficient to provide strong leads. The case remained unsolved for nearly 40 years.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2006, DNA evidence from the crime scene was reanalyzed, but it wasn't until 2018 that investigators used genetic genealogy to identify a suspect.

Identification: The DNA analysis pointed to Jerry Lynn Burns, who was arrested in December 2018.

Outcome: Burns was convicted of first-degree murder in February 2020 and sentenced to life in prison. The case is a significant example of how advancements in DNA technology can bring justice to cold cases.

The Murder of Sister Cathy Cesnik

Background: **Crime:** Sister Cathy Cesnik, a Catholic nun, disappeared on November 7, 1969, in Baltimore, Maryland. Her body was found two months later, showing signs of blunt force trauma. The case went cold amid rumors of her knowledge of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church.

The Murder of Sister Cathy Cesnik (cont)

Initial Investigation: Despite suspicions and theories involving Church officials and others, no solid evidence emerged to lead to an arrest, and the case remained unsolved.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2017, the case was brought back into the public eye by the Netflix documentary series *The Keepers*. This renewed attention led to new information and testimony coming forward, although no charges have been officially made against individuals involved.

Identification: While no new arrests have been made, the renewed investigation has pointed towards potential suspects who were protected by the Church, bringing unofficial closure and new insights into the case.

Outcome: The case remains officially unsolved, but the renewed focus on it has brought justice and recognition to the survivors of abuse who have come forward.

The Murder of Maria Ridulph

Background: **Crime:** In 1957, 7-year-old Maria Ridulph was abducted from a street corner in Sycamore, Illinois. Her body was found months later, but the case went cold for over 50 years.



By RainyMoons (RainyMoons)

cheatography.com/rainymoos/

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The Murder of Maria Ridulph (cont)

Initial Investigation: Despite early leads, the investigation did not yield a suspect, and the case became one of the oldest unsolved murders of a child in the United States.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2011, a former neighbor, Jack McCullough, was arrested after new evidence and witness statements came to light. His arrest was based on a reexamination of evidence and the testimony of a key witness who identified him as the last person seen with Maria.

Identification: McCullough was convicted in 2012, though the conviction was overturned in 2016 due to questions about the evidence and the fairness of the trial.

Outcome: The case was officially closed after McCullough's conviction was overturned, but it remains a significant example of how cold cases can be pursued even many years after the crime.

The Kidnapping and Murder of Jacob Wetterling

Background: **Crime:** On October 22, 1989, 11-year-old Jacob Wetterling was abducted at gunpoint while riding his bike near his home in St. Joseph, Minnesota. Despite a massive search effort, Jacob was not found, and the case went cold.

The Kidnapping and Murder of Jacob Wetterling (cont)

Initial Investigation: The case drew national attention and led to the creation of the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children Act. However, the investigation stalled without leads on Jacob's whereabouts or his abductor.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2015, a series of new leads, along with reexamination of evidence, led investigators to Danny Heinrich, a man who had long been considered a person of interest in the case.

Identification: Heinrich eventually led authorities to Jacob's remains in 2016 and confessed to the kidnapping, sexual assault, and murder of Jacob.

Outcome: Heinrich was sentenced to 20 years in prison on child pornography charges as part of a plea deal. The discovery of Jacob's remains brought a tragic closure to a case that had haunted Minnesota for nearly three decades.

The Murder of April Tinsley

Background: **Crime:** On April 1, 1988, 8-year-old April Tinsley was abducted, raped, and murdered in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Her body was found three days later. Despite the existence of DNA evidence, the case went cold.

The Murder of April Tinsley (cont)

Initial Investigation: The investigation stalled despite the perpetrator taunting police and the community with notes left over several years, in which he claimed responsibility for the murder.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2018, investigators used genetic genealogy to identify a suspect by matching DNA from the crime scene to relatives listed on genealogy websites.

Identification: John D. Miller was identified as the suspect and was arrested in July 2018.

Outcome: Miller confessed to the crime and was sentenced to 80 years in prison. This case, like others solved through genetic genealogy, highlighted the powerful new tools available to law enforcement for solving cold cases.

The Murder of Tammy Jo Alexander

Background: **Crime:** In 1979, the body of a young woman was found in a field in Caledonia, New York. For decades, her identity and the circumstances of her death remained unknown, and the case went cold.

Initial Investigation: Despite efforts to identify the young woman, investigators were unable to determine who she was or how she ended up in New York. The case became known as the "Caledonia Jane Doe" case.



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The Murder of Tammy Jo Alexander (cont)

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2015, advances in forensic technology and a renewed investigation led to the identification of the victim as Tammy Jo Alexander, a 16-year-old girl who had gone missing from Florida. This breakthrough allowed investigators to focus on the circumstances of her death.

Identification: The identification of Tammy Jo Alexander reopened the investigation into her murder, though her killer has not yet been identified.

Outcome: The case remains officially unsolved, but the identification of the victim was a significant breakthrough and an essential step toward solving the murder.

The Murder of Karen Klaas

Background: **Crime:** In 1976, Karen Klaas, the ex-wife of Righteous Brothers singer Bill Medley, was attacked and strangled in her home in Hermosa Beach, California. Despite extensive investigations, the case went cold.

Initial Investigation: The investigation at the time did not lead to any viable suspects, and the case remained unsolved for decades.

The Murder of Karen Klaas (cont)

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2017, DNA evidence from the crime scene was reexamined using modern forensic technology. Investigators were able to link the DNA to Kenneth Troyer, a convicted felon who had died in 1982 during a shootout with police.

Identification: Although Troyer was dead, the DNA evidence conclusively identified him as Karen Klaas's killer.

Outcome: The case was officially closed with the identification of Troyer as the perpetrator, bringing closure to the decades-old mystery.

The Disappearance and Murder of Etan Patz

Background: **Crime:** On May 25, 1979, 6-year-old Etan Patz disappeared while walking to his school bus stop in New York City. His disappearance led to nationwide changes in the approach to missing children cases but remained unsolved for decades.

Initial Investigation: Despite widespread media attention and a massive search, Etan was never found, and no suspects were definitively linked to his disappearance.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2012, Pedro Hernandez, a former store clerk who had worked in Etan's neighborhood, confessed to luring the boy into the store, choking him, and disposing of his body.

The Disappearance and Murder of Etan Patz (cont)

Identification: Hernandez had been on law enforcement's radar due to his confession to relatives years earlier, but it wasn't until a renewed investigation that he was formally charged.

Outcome: Hernandez was convicted of Etan's murder in 2017 and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison. The case, one of the most famous missing child cases in U.S. history, was finally closed after nearly 40 years.

The Murder of Pamela Maurer

Background: **Crime:** In January 1976, 16-year-old Pamela Maurer was found strangled in Naperville, Illinois. The case went cold despite efforts to find her killer.

Initial Investigation: The investigation yielded few leads, and the case remained unsolved for over four decades.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2020, genetic genealogy was used to match DNA from the crime scene to Bruce Lindahl, a man who had died in 1981. His DNA was found on Pamela's body, linking him definitively to the crime.

Identification: Lindahl was identified as the killer posthumously, solving the cold case after more than 40 years.

Outcome: The case highlighted the potential for cold cases to be solved even decades later using modern forensic techniques.



The Abduction and Murder of Amber Hagerman

Background: **Crime:** In 1996, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman was abducted while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas. Her body was found days later, and the case became highly publicized, leading to the creation of the AMBER Alert system.

Initial Investigation: Despite widespread media coverage and the implementation of the AMBER Alert system, Amber's killer was not immediately identified, and the case grew cold.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** Although the case has not been fully solved, advancements in DNA technology have given investigators new leads. In 2021, police announced they were re-examining DNA evidence with the hope of identifying the perpetrator.

Identification: The case remains officially unsolved, but renewed efforts and new technologies continue to offer hope for a resolution.

Outcome: While Amber's case hasn't been closed, it serves as a critical example of how cold cases can drive significant societal changes, such as the creation of the AMBER Alert system.

The Murder of Jessica Keen

Background: **Crime:** In 1991, 15-year-old Jessica Keen was abducted and murdered in Columbus, Ohio. Her body was found in a remote cemetery, but the killer evaded capture for years.

Initial Investigation: The initial investigation struggled with limited evidence, and the case went cold, leaving her family without answers.

Resolution: **Breakthrough:** In 2008, new DNA technology led to a breakthrough. Investigators re-examined DNA evidence from the crime scene, which led them to an individual, Marvin Lee Smith Jr.

Identification: Smith had a history of violent crime and was linked to the murder through DNA analysis.

Outcome: Smith was convicted of Jessica's murder and sentenced to life in prison. The case highlights the importance of revisiting old evidence with new technology, which can lead to justice even years after the crime.



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