

**12/18/24** [Long Island's "Gilgo Beach" killings](#) took the lives of eight women, a man and a two-year old girl between 1993-2010. In July 2023 DNA found on "pizza crust, bottles and human hairs" and cell-site information placing him at critical locations led to the arrest of a Long Island, N.Y. architect for the sex-related murders of three of the women. Rex Heuermann, 59, [has since been charged with the deaths of four additional women](#). Among them is his earliest known victim, Sandra Costilla, who disappeared in 1993. And only days ago he was charged with killing his seventh victim, Valerie Mack. Her remains were discovered in 2000; genetic testing identified her in 2020. Heuermann protests his innocence. [Wikipedia entry](#)

**12/3/24** In February 1979 Lewis Randy Williamson notified Riverside County, Calif. authorities that he found a 17-year old girl's body on a roadside. Williamson was "argumentative" but passed a polygraph. He led a seemingly normal life until his death in 2014. Using genetic genealogy, authorities recently used DNA from crime scene semen to identify a woman. She turned out to be Williamson's mother. Nearly five decades after the crime, a blood sample from Williamson's autopsy proved to be a perfect match.

**10/28/24** In 1992 the body of a 29-year old woman was found on a North Carolina highway. She had been strangled to death. Three decades later forensic genealogy identified Warren Luther Alexander, a long-haul trucker now in his seventies, as her assailant. [He was arrested in 2022](#) and his DNA profile was entered on FBI's national CODIS system. [That, in turn, enabled California authorities](#) to connect Alexander to the murders of three L.A.-area women who were strangled to death in 1977. He's now awaiting trial on these killings as well.

**8/12/24** Two years ago North Carolina authorities [used a DNA genealogy service](#) to link Mississippi man Warren Luther Alexander to a woman's 1992 murder. He was arrested, and his DNA profile was entered into the FBI CODIS system. Meanwhile, Ventura, California police were using DNA to reexamine the unsolved 1977 murders of three sex workers. Alexander's CODIS profile proved a perfect match. (He had once lived in Oxnard, Calif.) North Carolina deferred their case and sent Alexander to the Golden State to be tried for the three killings. A fourth California murder that fits his m.o. is under review.

**5/31/24** Ordinary folks send their saliva to genealogical databases to track their family histories. And in a reported first for NYPD, detectives used the same process to identify the killer in a brutal 2009 murder. Instead of saliva they sent in crime scene DNA to a private lab, which uploaded the profile to several consumer databases. A likely suspect was ultimately identified (he lived in Florida), and police there followed him until he

dropped a plastic fork. Its DNA proved a match. He's the son of the brother of the victim's ex-wife. And he's been extradited.

**3/13/23** In 1970 police searching through the woods found the body of Maryland high-school student Pamela Conyers, who had gone missing after a trip to a mall. Her killer's identity was a mystery. It so remained for fifty-two years, until detectives used a public genealogical database to connect a Virginia family to DNA recovered from the scene. From there they identified its source. Forrest Clyde Williams III was 21 when he murdered the teen. Williams, who had a "minor" criminal record, died in 2018.

**3/6/23** Harold Carpenter's DNA was collected when he was accused of a 1994 sexual assault in Washington state. But no charges were filed, and his DNA was never tested. And there it sat until this year, when a grant let the state process untested DNA and submit profiles to the FBI's CODIS database. And that's how it was matched to DNA recovered from the exhumed cadaver of Patricia Carnahan, who was murdered in California in 1979. In 2020 a familial search ad gotten California authorities as close as Carpenter's uncle. Harold Carpenter, now 63, has been arrested and awaits trial.

**12/31/22** Genealogical DNA is credited for leading authorities to the alleged killer of four University of Idaho students, who were stabbed to death in November as they slept in an off-campus apartment. Bryan Christopher Kohberger, 28, a criminology graduate student at nearby Washington State University, was arrested in Pennsylvania and will be returned to Idaho to face charges. He also had a white Hyundai, same as the vehicle allegedly used by the killer. A motive remains unknown. (See 2/27/25 update)

**11/12/22** In 2003 three knife-armed intruders burst into the residence of a Maryland family and badly wounded the husband. Mistaking the car mechanic as the owner of a gas station, they rifled through the home looking for money, using socks they found to avoid leaving fingerprints. Seventeen years later a detective matched the DNA from inside one of the socks against the DNA database profile of Stacy Howard Moore, a local man who served five years for a similar 1994 robbery but had supposedly gone straight. Moore recently pled guilty and was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment.

**8/11/22** A Sunnyvale, Calif. teen was raped and stabbed to death in 1982. Over the years, new DNA techniques led authorities to establish her assailant's DNA profile. But no matches were found in official databanks. In 2021 a tip led detectives to focus on male members of a certain family. DNA contributed by his daughter (apparently, to a public databank) led to the arrest of Hawaii resident Gary Ramirez, 75.

**7/27/22** Genealogical DNA testing recently tracked down the killer of two Southern

California women who were sexually assaulted and murdered in the late 1980's. According to the Orange County D.A. and Garden Grove police, their killer was a local resident, Reuben J. Smith. Shortly following these murders he was charged with sexual assault in Las Vegas and committed suicide.

**6/11/22** In 1966 Idaho Falls man Christopher Tapp, 20, was twenty when a friend, Brian Dripps Sr., raped and murdered an 18-year old woman. But police came to suspect Tapp because he was friendly with a man who committed another rape. During a long series of interrogations, police persuaded Tapp to slowly involve himself in the crime, and ultimately to confess. He spent 21 years in prison until DNA and its genetic trail led to Dripps. He confessed, and Tapp was exonerated. He will receive \$11.7 million.

**4/12/22** Othram is a private laboratory that extracts and sequences crime-scene DNA and uses consumer databases to track down possible matches. And it accepts donations. In one example, \$45,000 contributed by the friends of two Las Vegas teens and a third victim killed in decades-old Las Vegas rape-murders [led to the crimes' solutions](#).

**1/17/22** In September 2021, thirty-seven years after Alaska troopers unearthed the corpse of one of [notorious serial killer Robert Hansen](#)'s many victims, "Horseshoe Harriet's" true identity was revealed. After inputting her DNA profile into a "public access genealogy database" (which one wasn't said) a family tree was built, and DNA furnished by a "very close relative" confirmed that the murdered woman was Colorado native Robin Pelkey, who was nineteen and living in Anchorage when she disappeared.

**12/25/20** Developments in "probabilistic genotyping," which uses software-driven algorithms to estimate a mathematical likelihood that DNA profiles match, are helping analysts deal with complex mixtures. However, not every profile has enough data, and some samples still prove too complex.

**12/8/20** Authorities identified Joseph De Angelo by uploading his profile to the MyHeritage consumer DNA database, which produced a match to a close relative. But MyHeritage, whose "terms of service" cautioned that it responded to "official inquiries," wasn't informed that police were behind the search.

**6/29/20** "Golden State Killer" Joseph De Angelo pled guilty to thirteen murders and a host of other crimes before a Sacramento, Calif. Superior Court judge. Court was being held at the local Cal State campus, the same place where De Angelo earned a criminal justice degree in 1972. (He was fired from a police job seven years later for shoplifting.) De Angelo will be sentenced to life without parole.

**5/7/20** Last year the FBI's national database matched DNA evidence from a 1991 Tennessee murder to DNA from two 1992 killings in Wyoming. "Commercial genealogy databases" were then used to identify a potential suspect, Iowa man Clark Perry

Baldwin, a long-haul truck driver. Collected through surveillance, his DNA proved a perfect match. Baldwin was arrested for the three killings and is being looked at in others.

**3/30/20** “Grim Sleeper” Lonnie Franklin, one of the first serial killers identified through familial DNA, died of apparently natural causes while awaiting execution. He had been on death row since his 2016 conviction for committing ten murders in South Los Angeles between 1985 and 2007.

**7/5/19** In 2000, only three days before the statute of limitations expired on three rapes with matching DNA committed between 1992-1994, California issued a “John Doe” warrant accusing the “John Doe” perpetrator of the crimes. A genealogy website recently helped track down a suspect, Mark Manteuffel, 59, and surveillance agents recovered matching DNA. He awaits trial.

**7/5/19** Now 56, William Talbott II never joined a genealogy website. But he had two second cousins who did. Genealogists helping investigate the 1987 murder of a Washington state couple built a family tree, and detectives used his place of residence to hone in on Talbott, a distant relative. Last month, thanks to a cheek swab that positively matched Talbott to crime scene DNA, jurors returned a guilty verdict. It’s supposedly the first time DNA from a genealogy site has been tested at trial.

**3/19/19** In 1999 Alabama police found two high school friends shot dead in the trunk of a car. Several days ago police arrested Coley McCraney, 45, for their murder. Crime scene DNA uploaded to GEDmatch yielded a familial hit, and investigation led to McCraney, a relative. His DNA proved a perfect match.

**3/12/19** Nearly four decades after a passer-by discovered the body of a baby in a ditch, police arrested Theresa Bentaas, 57, for murder in the long-unresolved case. Bentaas was tracked down by a familial search that revealed the child’s relatives still lived in Sioux Falls. Police focused on Bentaas as a potential mother (she was nineteen at the time of the death), and DNA gathered from her discards made a positive hit. Bentaas confessed.

**2/10/19** Newport Beach (CA) police arrested James Neal, 76, after a familial search of [FamilyTreeDNA.com](http://FamilyTreeDNA.com), a consumer DNA, linked him to DNA recovered from the scene of the July, 1973 murder of an 11-year old girl. A positive match was apparently made after Neal was placed under surveillance in Colorado.

**2/18/19** Minneapolis police arrested Jerry Westrom, 52, for the 1993 murder of a prostitute a quarter-century ago. DNA from a consumer database identified him as a suspect (he used to live in the area and was recently convicted for soliciting prostitution), and DNA from a napkin he threw away while under watch was consistent with crime scene DNA. His DNA was a positive match.

**1/26/19** More than a decade after a fatal sword-slaying, police in California arrested Zachary Bunney, 39. Crime scene DNA entered into a consumer database yielded an imperfect match, signifying a distant relative. Officers built a family tree, and after a lot of work they settled on Bunney as a logical suspect. A direct comparison with his DNA (obtained with a warrant) yielded a perfect match.

**10/15/18** According to [an article in \*Science\*](#) consumer DNA databases such as *GEDMatch* presently enable a “third cousin or closer match” for sixty percent of those with European ancestry. When combined with demographic identification, all such persons in America will soon be within reach.

**8/24/18** Fayetteville (NC) police arrested Darold Bowden, 43, for a series of rapes committed between 2006-2008. He was identified through a familial match by a Virginia firm, [Parabon](#), that offers forensic DNA services using GED Match.

**8/23/18** In an unprecedented move, six California counties joined forces to try alleged “Golden State Killer” DeAngelo for thirteen murders plus numerous other crimes in a single, consolidated trial. Its purpose is to benefit survivors who might not otherwise get closure in his or their lifetimes.

**8/13/18** “Golden State Killer” DeAngelo has been charged in the 1975 murder of a Tulare Co. (Calif.) man who interrupted his attempt to kidnap the man’s daughter. While that incident didn’t yield DNA, authorities matched bullets from the crime to a gun DeAngelo stole from another home.

**5/21/18** Police in Washington state uploaded DNA from the 1987 murder of a Canadian couple to GEDmatch, yielding a partial hit. A genealogist then identified a second cousin who once lived near the crime scene. Surveillance of the suspect led to the collection of DNA that was a perfect match.

**5/8/18** [Visalia \(Calif.\) police believe](#) that the Golden State Killer was likely the violent “Ransacker” of the mid-70s who terrorized their town. Meanwhile officers in Northern California [hope to match the Golden State Killer’s DNA](#) to that of the notorious “[Zodiac Killer](#)” of the 60s.