

## L07: CODIS Cold Case

In 1978, a 61-year-old man was stabbed to death in his apartment in Nebraska. The suspect appeared to have used the victim's bathroom to clean up before leaving the apartment, allowing the police to collect latent fingerprints and palmprints from the crime scene. Police were also able to collect additional latent prints from the victim's stolen car which was found in Illinois. In 1978, there was no central database for prints, so the police checked against local and state fingerprint files as well as a handful of other agencies outside of Nebraska, but no matches were found.

Near the end of 2008, over 30 years later, senior crime laboratory technician Laura Casey decided to search the prints against the FBI's central database for fingerprints based on an inquiry that the Omaha Police Department received on the case. Within five hours, this central database that didn't exist in 1978 was able to return some possible matches. After examining the prints, Casey was able to make a positive match for a man named Jerry Watson. Once a positive id was made, the case was reopened and assigned to a member of the cold case squad Doug Herout. After some investigation, Herout learned that Watson was currently serving time in an Illinois prison for a burglary charge. Herout traveled to Illinois where he issued Watson with an order to obtain a DNA sample. It was determined Watson's DNA matched DNA recovered from the crime scene in 1978. On October 17, 2011, Watson was sentenced to life in prison.

I believe that DNA samples from people who are not convicted of a crime should not be kept without the consent of that person. I think that if a DNA sample is collected from someone who is not convicted of a crime, then that person should be notified that a DNA sample has been collected and they should have the option to request that their DNA sample be destroyed. While I see the benefit of keeping such DNA records for potential future cases, it does not seem fair that someone who is not convicted of a crime be treated differently than any other innocent person.

## References

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (n.d.). *30-Year-Old murder solved*.  
<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/30-year-old-murder-solved>