

# Long, tortured hunt for Golden State Killer leads to arrest of ex-cop

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Reporting from CITRUS HEIGHTS, Calif. —

He slipped in through backdoors and windows in the dark. First he struck in the foothills east of Sacramento, raping at least 46 women, before he began killing and headed south.

From 1978 to 1986, he killed 12 people in attacks ranging from the Sacramento County city of Rancho Cordova to the Orange County cities of Irvine and Dana Point. In Ventura, he tied up a couple with a drapery cord and raped the wife before fatally bludgeoning them with a fireplace log. In Goleta, he bound a doctor and his wife, a clinical psychologist, and shot them both.

The unsolved slayings were not linked with each other for years, and not linked to the rapes until 2000.

Science allowed authorities to connect the crimes but did not lead to a suspect. Victims' families speculated that the unidentified killer might have died unpunished.

But on Wednesday, a local and federal task force announced it had arrested a man suspected of being the so-called Golden State Killer Tuesday afternoon at his home in the Sacramento suburbs. Joseph James DeAngelo Jr., 72, a former police officer, was charged with eight counts of murder.

Throughout Wednesday, authorities scoured his beige, single-story home in Citrus Heights, removing two cars, a boat and a motorcycle from the garage.

Four initial charges are for the slaying of two married couples — Brian and Kate Maggiore, who were killed in Rancho Cordova in 1978; and Lyman and Charlene Smith, who were killed in Ventura in 1980.

Sacramento County Sheriff Scott Jones said the task force had been conducting surveillance on DeAngelo and secretly retrieved his DNA from a discarded item, such as a soda can. The DNA matched the samples left by the killer. Authorities would not say how they initially came to see him as a potential suspect.

Sean Ragan, special agent in charge of the FBI's Sacramento office, said DeAngelo was a police officer decades ago, first in Exeter, Calif., near Visalia, and then in Auburn, near Sacramento. "The time frame of the crimes supports that the suspect was a police officer when he committed some of these crimes," Ragan said.

A front page article in the Auburn Journal dated August 29, 1979, says DeAngelo was dismissed from his position as an Auburn policeman for stealing a can of dog repellent and a hammer from a Sacramento drugstore.

Orange County Dist. Atty. Tony Rackauckas' office announced Wednesday evening that charges were filed against DeAngelo in four additional homicide cases. They include the killing of a couple in Dana Point and two separate slayings in 1981 and 1986 in Irvine.

"Finally, after all these years, the haunting question of who committed these terrible crimes has been put to rest," Rackauckas said.

On August 19, 1980, the killer entered the gated neighborhood of Niguel Shores in Dana Point and bludgeoned Keith and Patrice Harrington with a blunt object. The couple had been married just three months. He was a medical student at UC Irvine, and she was a nurse. Crime was unheard of in their community, surrounded by empty hills. Neighbors left their doors unlocked, and kids rode bikes and skateboards to the beach.

The slayings shocked then-sleepy south Orange County. The victims' families were in disbelief and spent the last 38 years trying to drum up information about the killer. They offered rewards and held news conferences.

In 2003, Bruce Harrington, Keith's brother, spearheaded a state ballot initiative to help solve cold cases by requiring all felons or people arrested of certain crimes to submit DNA to a state database. Proposition 69 overwhelmingly passed the next year.

Hope faded with every passing year, but never flickered out.

“It is time for all victims to grieve and to take measure one last time,” said Harrington, speaking in Sacramento at the announcement of DeAngelo’s arrest. “It’s time for the victims to begin to heal. So long overdue.

“Sleep better tonight, he isn’t coming through the window,” Harrington said. “He’s now in jail and he’s history.”

A number of people inside and outside of law enforcement refused to let the case go.

Crime writer Michelle McNamara became obsessed with the serial killer in 2007 and spent years writing about the case while trying to solve it. She dubbed him the Golden State Killer and wrote magazine articles about the case. She died unexpectedly before her book was finished, but her husband, comedian and actor Patton Oswalt, helped piece together the incomplete parts with her notes.

The book, “I’ll be Gone in the Dark,” published in February, was an instant bestseller.

On Wednesday, Oswalt said, “I think you got him, Michelle.”

Until recently, the case had not gained much notoriety, mainly because the murders and rapes were not connected until years later. And the crimes came as other serial killers were sowing nightmares up and down the state.

William Bonin, the Freeway Killer, dumped the boys and young men he raped and murdered by freeways, as did Randy Kraft. The two Hillside Stranglers preyed on young women. The Grim Sleeper murdered prostitutes in South Los Angeles. Charles Ng tortured people in his “dungeon” at a cabin in the Sierra foothills. And the Night Stalker, Richard Ramirez, launched his satanic spree of mutilation, hitting suburban homes from Mission Viejo to San Francisco.

Ramirez sparked widespread fear in California, killing at least 13 people in a year, seven just during two summer months in 1985.

In 2000, when detectives connected the Harrington case to other unsolved murders, they dubbed the killer the Original Night Stalker, because he first struck six years before Ramirez. He was alternatively known as the East Area Rapist for the rapes between 1976 and 1979.

Marcus Knutson, a case agent on the East Area Rapist investigation for the FBI's Sacramento Division, described the hunt for the killer in a 2016 interview posted by the agency on YouTube.

“If you lived in Sacramento during that time frame, you have a story of what happened and where you were and what was going on,” Knutson said. “Everybody knows about East Area Rapist/Golden State Killer here in Sacramento. During that time frame, everybody was in fear. We had people sleeping with shotguns. We had people purchasing dogs. I think locksmiths’ business went way out of control because of the fact that everyone was changing locks on their doors.”

The series of attacks began in June 1976 with the rape of a woman in the Rancho Cordova-Carmichael area of Sacramento. From there, the string of crimes extended to “24 different attacks here in Sacramento,” Knutson said. The man would pry open windows and rear doors and proceed to the bedroom where either a single woman or a couple would be sleeping. He would then shine a flashlight in their eyes.

“They would see a dark figure with the ski mask on. He would then bind, have the female bind, the male individual,” Knutson said. “He would then bind the female individual with shoestrings or whatever he could find. He would then proceed to retie the male victim.”

At that point, Knutson said, the attacker would ransack the house. Small items — rings, coins, sometimes cash — would be taken.

“Whatever he could find,” Knutson said. “This individual also had the audacity to go through people’s refrigerators and eat inside their residences while the victims were tied up.”

After eating, he would grab his female victim and bring her down the hallway. Sometimes, he would place plates or cups on the backs of the men and tell them that if they moved, or if he heard the plates fall, he would come back and kill him.

“The female would be raped in a separate room and then brought back to her male companion or, if no one’s there, left alone.” Knutson said. “And then our guy would vanish in the middle of the night.”

It is unclear why the assailant moved on to murder in 1978, or why he apparently stopped the attacks in 1986, after fatally bludgeoning 18-year-old Janelle Cruz in her family's Irvine home.

Jones, the Sacramento County sheriff, said he knew of no recent criminal record for DeAngelo. "He has a couple of minor things in his past.... Nothing of the magnitude that would raise a red flag."

He said investigators were scouring his house for physical evidence.

"There is a lot of material in his house," Jones said. "We're looking for mementos, things that might tie him back — whether it's a firearm, whether it's ammunition. Whatever it is, we're going to be looking for it."

Jennifer Carole didn't know how to react after hearing that someone had been arrested for fatally bludgeoning her father and stepmother, Lyman and Charlene Smith, in their Ventura home in 1980.

She half-figured the killer was dead.

But sometimes she feared he might still be out there, and she opted to use her previous name, Jennifer Smith, anytime she discussed the killings publicly.

"I've been afraid this whole time. I didn't ever want him to find me," she said Wednesday. "I didn't actually believe he was still alive, and to find out he's alive and they got him — it's hard to know what to feel."

Carole and her siblings lived with their mother at the time of the slayings. They remained in the Ventura area before they all moved back to the Sacramento area, where the family is originally from.

Carole and her family assumed — until the different slayings were connected — that her parents had been killed by a business partner or even a stalker obsessed with Charlene.

To find out he was not only alive, but living among them in Sacramento, was an overwhelming revelation, she said.

“It’s unbelievable,” she said. “How can he have just been here?”

A crush of police vehicles and media filled the quiet subdivision of winding roads and cul-de-sacs.

Residents said they were familiar with the story of the Golden State Killer and were shocked to learn that the suspect had lived among them.

“It’s a little surreal,” said Richelle Taylor, 42.

Jack Haddad, 51, and his wife, Hala Doumat, 35, live within view of DeAngelo’s driveway. Neither knew him, but Doumat said she regularly walks by his house with her three kids.

The couple said they had recently watched a documentary on the Golden State Killer. “I knew there was a \$50,000 reward,” Doumat said.

Her husband said he was shocked it had taken so long to solve the case.

“I have mixed feelings,” Haddad said about the arrest. “If something so horrific can happen so close to you, anything goes.”