

Karen Tait Disappearance & Murder Synopsis

On September 26, 2002 a hiker discovered the badly decomposed body of a female while walking in the Greenbrier State Forest in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. An examination of the body determined it to be that of a young, small framed female of Asian descent. Further, it was determined the victim had met with foul play that had likely occurred about a month prior to her discovery. She would remain unidentified and listed as a "Jane Doe" in a West Virginia morgue for over a decade while West Virginia State Police worked the cold case.

In stark contrast, the whereabouts of Karen Santillan Tait was an unknown mystery during that same ten year period nearly 200 miles away in Waynesboro, Virginia. In 1997 Karen immigrated to the United States from the Philippines with her American husband, Thomas Tait.

In March 2011, Thomas Tait fell under suspicion for child sexual assault and possession of child pornography. Detective Alyssa Campbell of the Waynesboro Police Department was assigned to this case and as part of her investigation she began looking into the whereabouts of Karen. According to Campbell, Thomas would become evasive and hostile when asked about his missing wife. He maintained she had abandoned him and their young daughter ten years ago to return to the Philippines where her own parents and siblings still lived.

It was because of the relentless investigative work of Detective Campbell that the truth of Karen's fate would become known in October 2012. A DNA sample was collected from Karen's biological relatives and was compared with a DNA sample from the Jane Doe resting in the West Virginia morgue. The results of this testing proved that the remains were those of Karen Tait. This match ended both the mysteries of Karen's disappearance and the identity of the Jane Doe found in WV however; it was just the beginning of the search for her killer.

Her husband Thomas, who was already incarcerated in Virginia on numerous convictions of possessing child pornography, was zeroed in on by both West Virginia and Virginia authorities as the sole suspect in her death. In November 2012, Thomas Tait was charged with the murder of his wife, Karen by the West Virginia State Police. On Valentine's Day 2013, he pled guilty to the charge. The combination of his convictions in both states means that Thomas Neal Tait will likely never see freedom again.

As of now, eight months after Thomas Tait's guilty plea for his wife's murder, her remains have not been sent back to her parents in the Philippines due to the expense involved. The Waynesboro Police Foundation, Inc. will be conducting a fund drive to raise the necessary money to send Karen's body home to her native land and help bring closure to this still grieving family.