

Testimony of
Ms. Rosemary Serra

July 31, 2003

Testimony of Ms. Rosemary Serra Before the
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts

Department of Justice Oversight: Funding Forensic Sciences - DNA and Beyond

Thursday, July 31, 2003
2:00 p.m.
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 226

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I was a victim for 28 years. On July 16, 1973 my only sibling, 21 year old Penny Serra, was stabbed to death on a sunny afternoon in a parking garage not more than 2 miles from our home. Penny was not only my sister and best friend, but also my surrogate mother since our own mom had died when I was six and she was 11.

Although the murderer left behind a calling card of evidence, he was not apprehended until June 1999, almost 26 years to the date of Penny's murder. During those years, I graduated from high school, attended college, dealt with false arrest of a person who the police suspected murdered my sister, an acquittal, four primary suspects, my father's death, and my becoming an adult.

Although at the time of the murder DNA was not much more than letters of the alphabet, the Crime Scene Investigators took meticulous care in collecting, preserving and logging the evidence found at the scene. Throughout the next 26 years the key pieces of evidence, a tissue box with a thumb print, a hanky with fluid, paint chips, and a bloody parking ticket were hauled from the police department to the Chief States Attorneys office, and from one forensic lab to the next. From 1973, and for close to three decades, this evidence went through every technological advance of testing that was available. Literally thousands of manpower hours were spent in laboratories from coast to coast.

The finger print on the tissue box seemed to always split the investigation into two schools of thought. One was that the print was that of the assailant, the other was that the murder was a crime of passion, hence the fingerprint was not a key factor. Both theories were pursued.

As years went by my father's perseverance on keeping the case active was heart wrenching but successful. I however, had lost hope of ever finding my sister's murderer. My life as I knew it was over and the hope of closure seemed to diminish as years passed. Unknown to me, as I was trying to build a new life, strangers were working furiously to find my sister's murderer. Christopher Grice, a forensic lab technician in Connecticut, was one of those individuals.

On July 30, 1994, Edward R. Grant was fighting with his girlfriend. After a heated exchange that took place at her home in a nearby town in Connecticut, Grant beat his girlfriend enough that she filed charges with the local police department. Grant was taken into custody and booked on an assault charge. His fingerprints were taken as part of routine police procedure, and entered into the FBI regional fingerprint database.

Christopher Grice, working from the Connecticut State Police Forensic Sciences Laboratory in Meriden, had been involved with our case since the early days of the investigation. Then a print specialist in the detective bureau of the New Haven Police Department, Grice had memorized the whirls and ridges of the thumb print found on my sister's Kleenex box as he sifted through literally thousands of prints for a match. Of course at the time no computer databases for criminal fingerprints existed - there were just dedicated individuals hovering over black and white cards tracing an individual's unique markings.

Mr. Grice, who now administers the Automated Fingerprint Identification System, or AFIS, routinely runs checks for all of the unidentified prints associated with unsolved cases in the state. This was the process he undertook on July 21, 1997 with respect to my sister's murder case. Several possible matches were found, and by process of elimination, Edward R. Grant's print appeared on the screen with a match of at least 12 points.

After 3 years of tireless effort, the state prosecutor and his team built a strong forensic case against Grant and we entered Superior court armed with everything but a motive. The print on the tissue box was unquestionably Grant's. The DNA in the blood on the parking ticket matched Grant's DNA by a ratio of greater than one in one billion people. The paint chips found at the scene matched the paint used at the autobody shop which Grant owned. Edward R. Grant was prosecuted and convicted in May 2002 solely on forensic science. He is now serving a 25 year sentence for the murder of my sister, and hopefully will never see another day of freedom. On the day of Grant's sentencing, my long awaited ache for closure was achieved, and my days of being a victim were over. In the past year I have adopted a beautiful daughter, Jessica Anne, and look forward to new beginnings.

This story could have died along with my sister if it were not for the qualified and dedicated personnel who worked on this case, or the wide spectrum of forensic science analysis available in this country. Edward Grant would still be walking the streets a free man, and I would still be looking over my shoulder for the person who stole my youth and my beloved sister.

I am not a scientist, and would be lying if I said I understood the mechanics of forensic science. I am just one of many who depend on forensic science professionals for justice. To spend government money solely on DNA would be a travesty and an injustice to all of the victims and families with unsolved cases in this country. Please think of Penny Serra when you think of forensic science, and be aware that this case, along with 50% of all other homicides, cannot be prosecuted on DNA alone.

I would like to submit my written statement for the record, and I thank you for your time.