

Thawing cold cases

Several slayings on SFPD hot list are in District 6

BY TOM CARTER

THE murder of a 9-year girl in her Tenderloin apartment building is among several cold cases in District 6 that homicide Inspector Joseph Toomey and his partner are investigating, Toomey told those assembled at the Tenderloin police captain's meeting Feb. 26.

The crime occurred nearly 24 year ago in the five-story apartment building at 765 O'Farrell St. DNA is expected to play a major role, if the special investigative unit created a year ago is to solve the case.

On April 10, 1984, Mei Leung and her 8-year-old brother, Mike, were returning home. As they got close to the building's steps Mei dropped a dollar bill. Police believe the bill blew under a door to the basement or somewhere inside the building.

Mei told her brother she was going into the basement and would

look for the bill near the elevator. Mike took the elevator upstairs alone and went inside the family's apartment but didn't say anything to his mother. It was nearly 15 minutes before she noticed Mei was not around.

Mike went to the basement and found his sister

dead, hanging over a water pipe naked and bloody. Police believe she was sexually assaulted, stabbed and strangled.

Toomey and his partner Inspector Holly Pera work out of the Hall of Justice, relying heavily on lab work and a statewide DNA identification bank in Sacramento. Most felons arrested in California in the last two years have their DNA on file. DNA has been used in court more effectively than fingerprints since the 1990s, but Toomey said fingerprint technology has greatly advanced, too. Bloody prints on a wall were always easy to take. But now, a chemical spray can pop up invisible prints.

The team recently solved a 36-year-old case with the murder conviction of John Puckett, 74, a repeat sex offender, guilty of assaulting and stabbing to death a 22-year-old UCSF nurse in her Sunset District flat. Puckett had DNA on file from previous sex-offender convictions. He was arrested in Stockton after a match with DNA that had been worked out of evidence preserved from the old crime scene.

What resurrects a cold case is new evidence or other new interest. Sometimes, as the Mei Leung case was with Pera, it's a poignant memory. "I pulled the Mei Leung case because I remembered it from my days as a patrol officer when I was at Northern Station," Pera later told The Extra. "I thought it was worth looking at."

There were sufficient fluids from the crime scene for the lab to exam-

"People don't realize what impact a murder has on a family."

Holly Pera
SFPD COLD CASE UNIT

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P.O.,
WE WON'T
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Residents
protest for full
post office

PAGE 2



PLUSH
MYSTERY
SOLVED

Stuffed
animals' lives
find meaning

PAGE 4

DISTRICT 6
DRUG CASES
SOARING

Grim stories
told at TL
Safety Forum

PAGE 8

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA

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ORIGINAL JOE'S

PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Frank, owner and night bartender at the 21 Club near Original Joe's, sorely misses the restaurant and like so many in the neighborhood, hopes it will reopen.

Hole in the 'hood

Tenderloin's not the same without Joe's

BY TOM CARTER

EARLY on a miserably cold and wet night in January, Frank, owner and night bartender at the grungy 21 Club in the middle of the Tenderloin, is doing a brisk business. Bundled-up customers fill every bar stool. They coddle their beers in the dim

light. The smell of old booze and damp clothes hangs in the sweet and sour air. The bar's colored advertising lights wink like a miniature carnival. Jimmy Buffett's nostalgic tequila anthem, "Margaritaville," wafts from the jukebox.

"I just wish Marie would open up," Frank says, pausing at the end of the bar in a reference to Marie Duggan, the co-owner of Original Joe's restaurant. "But I think she's still fighting the insurance company."

Duggan is co-owner with husband, John, of the iconic, 70-year-old restaurant up the block on Taylor Street. Some of the restaurant's 70 employees favored nightcaps at Frank's bar.

The 21 Club is itself a Tenderloin landmark, as close to an artists' bar as you'll find in the neighborhood. And everybody who's been there knows Frank, but they don't all know his last name. And he wants to keep it that way. So you'll see a picture of him on our front page, but you'll have to kneecap us to get us to cough up his last name.

But nightcaps and all other routines to and from O.J.'s ended abruptly on that dark Oct. 12 when a \$2 million fire started in the kitchen flue. It set off sprinklers upstairs in the Moderne Hotel and water showered down through the ceiling. Waiters, cooks, busboys, porters and cashiers fled across Taylor Street where they huddled in the rain and watched the billowing smoke and heard the sickening crunch of Fire Department axes. When the fire was out and the firefighters gone, the restaurant and kitchen lay in soggy ruin.

The Tenderloin has reeled ever since from that hit in its solar plexus. Not just



Original Joe's has been closed since a kitchen fire Oct. 12.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6