

No DNA match on possible killer of Holland Twp. man and fiancée 62-year-old still 'person of interest' in California murder

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Santa Rosa, Calif — DNA taken from a fugitive killed by New Mexico authorities does not match DNA from the 2004 murder scene on a California beach, Sonoma County sheriff's officials said.

Still, sheriff's officials say 62-year-old Joseph Henry Burgess continues to be a "person of interest" in the deaths of Jason Allen of Holland Township and Lindsay Cutshall of Fresno, Ohio. Each was shot in the head while camping on an isolated Sonoma County beach on Aug. 18, 2004. The couple were counselors in a Christian summer camp and planned to be married in September of that year.

Sonoma County detectives went to New Mexico last week, after Burgess was killed in a shootout with police in the Jemez Mountains.

"We were surprised. This man has been on the run for 37 years. We know he was considered a person of interest in our case," said Delores Allen about hearing of the death of her son's possible killer. "At this point, anything is possible. We're not convinced he is the one. It needs to be checked out, and that's what they're doing."

Even if definitive evidence were found exposing Burgess as her son's killer, she said, "It's only half of the mystery. The other half is why he did it, and that would never be answered."

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Burgess remains a strong candidate on a list of potential suspects, Capt. Matt McCaffrey of the Sonoma County sheriff's office said.

The simple fact that Burgess is alive and resurfaced after so long makes him a stronger possibility.

"It's rare for someone who's committed that kind of crime to be able to stay underground and undetected for that long," McCaffrey said. "Not only was he alive, he was armed."

Burgess also seems to have traveled from Canada — where he is tied to a similar crime — to New Mexico with California as a possible stop over, McCaffrey said.

A .45-caliber bullet from Burgess doesn't match the murder weapon, a Marlin rifle, although the rifle also uses .45 caliber bullets, officials said Friday.

"It's unusual to have a rifle that fires a 45 pistol round," McCaffrey said, but not unusual enough to definitively tie Burgess to the murders.

Another weapon found by New Mexico investigators matched one connected to a missing person last seen in the forest nearby.

The next step is two-fold, McCaffrey said: "We keep our fingers crossed that New Mexico comes up with something new. ... and we comb back through our information, our data bases."

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