

# Police won't say why sexual assault cold case reopened

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reveal too much about where their investigation has taken them, except to say that officers are "generating new persons of interest" and all DNA collected from new sex assaults is being checked against the assailant's genetic markers.

"If he ever leaves his DNA behind, it's a certainty he will be caught," Doherty said.

The Woodland Rapist case haunts seasoned investigators as it did when his reign of terror gripped the Oakville community in the days after a joint Halton-Peel-Waterloo task force released disturbing details in 1995.

Police conducted nightly canvasses in the area, believing the dangerous pedophile lived among them. They also sought help from a Texas-based company to see if a Russian satellite had captured an image of the plates on the suspect's reddish-brown Blazer or Bronco that was likely parked during the time he repeatedly raped his last captive.

Police believe he also tried to unsuccessfully sexually assault three other youngsters around the same time as two of his known rapes. He tried to sexually assault a young boy in Kitchener the day before he raped an 8-year-old boy at knifepoint in Kitchener's Idlewood Park, at 11:15 a.m. on Aug. 21, 1992. His victim was enticed into the park on the pretence of being shown a stolen bicycle.

He raped a 10-year-old boy playing in Brampton's Norton Place Park about 6 p.m. on Sept. 29, 1994, after failed sexual attacks on female victims in Brampton on Sept. 16, and in Oakville on Sept. 25.

This second known victim was enticed deeper into the park to help look for a missing wallet. "I don't think he was practicing ... they were just unsuccessful attempts," Doherty said.

Unlike most criminals, pedophiles rarely boast about their deeds, he said. "Rapists generally keep their dirty secrets to themselves."

Investigators have looked at sexual assaults across Canada and the United States, even abroad in a bid to catch the Woodland Rapist.

The initial joint task force created to hunt him said the Oakville victim was sexually assaulted at different locations in the park over five hours, each time tied to a tree. She was able to provide investigators with several clues, including enough of a description for a composite sketch.

The victim was approached as she walked along a wooded trail in the park located at Dorval Drive and the QEW. He pulled out a small handgun,

"He was about 18 to mid-20s back in 1995, so he would be still a young man today."

■ *Blaise Doherty, a former Peel homicide detective now heading up a sexual-assault cold-case squad*

pretending he wanted to rob her, and led her into the bush where she was attacked. He also videotaped the assault.

Over the years, police have received more than 1,300 tips. About 1,000 potential suspects were investigated, including a few men arrested for sexual assault, whose appearance was strikingly similar to his description: 5-foot-8, 140 pounds with freckles and hair worn in a ponytail.

"He was about 18 to mid-20s back in 1995, so he would be still a young man today," Doherty says.

Several hundred people interviewed also voluntarily submitted their DNA. Nearly 200 police forces in states bordering southern Ontario were also contacted.

In the Oakville attack, the assailant left behind a partial palm print, a black golf shirt with a unique emblem of a drake wood duck, and stained underwear, which he had worn on his head during the assaults. Police have never been able to determine where the shirt was made, although they traced the underwear to a Kenyan manufacturer.

Doherty said it is not unusual for a pedophile to attack boys and girls. "From my experience investigating these cases, pedophiles do cross over from gender to gender."

Investigators don't believe he would have changed his sexual preference to adults but that hasn't stopped them from checking all adult sexual assaults against his DNA.

"If a person is focusing their offences on children, he might be considered a higher priority for us to check to see if it's him, but all sexual offenders get their DNA checked in the databank," Doherty said.

At one point, investigators were certain he preyed on his victims, planning his attacks in advance. But Doherty won't speculate on whether the assailant operated that way or whether his victims were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The new unit was formed about eight months ago, after investigators with the force's Special Victims Unit realized there were several unsolved cases in their files.

"The vast majority of our cases are solved and usually very quickly, but we decided to take another look at the ones that weren't," Doherty said.

Project Shadow, another case getting a second look, deals with a series of indecent exposures involving masturbation in 2001 where the suspect escalated to rapes at gunpoint in 2004 and 2005.

"The indecent acts started in downtown

Brampton (Main and Queen Sts.) and the first gunpoint sexual assault (a 20-year-old woman grabbed while waiting for a bus) was near Ceremonial Dr. and McLaughlin Rd. in Brampton on July 12, 2004," Doherty said.

In the second known attack, a 16-year-old girl was attacked at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 11, 2005, as she walked along a footpath near Emmanuel United Church on Cloverdale Dr. near Balmoral Dr. in Brampton.

The assailant was armed with a silver handgun and threatened to kill his victim before sexually assaulting her behind a tree.

Police don't know why he

started out committing indecent acts (banging on store windows then masturbating when he got a woman's attention) before disappearing for nearly three years and inexplicably escalating into more violent sexual assaults.

More than 2,500 people have been interviewed and more than 1,000 DNA samples voluntarily obtained.

The new unit is also re-examining a series of molestations linked to one man on 11 young female adults in 2000 in the Bloor-Dixie area of Mississauga, as well as a sexual assault by two men on a woman in 2002 in a car in a Mississauga townhouse complex.

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