

Eight years later, identity of Sonia Varaschin's killer still a mystery



By Mike Pickford

Eight years on and Ontario Provincial Police investigators are still working on tracking down the individual responsible for Sonia Varaschin's 2010 death.

With today marking another haunting anniversary of the Orangeville nurse's murder, Detective Inspector Shawn Glassford of the OPP Criminal Investigation Branch is keen to ensure this case remains in the public eye. After spending the past five years chasing leads and following up on tips, Mr. Glassford is eager to track down the missing link that will connect investigators to Ms. Varaschin's murderer.

"This is something that continues to weigh on myself, it weighs on all of the investigators each and every day. We want to solve this case. We want to bring whoever is responsible for this to justice," Det. Insp. Glassford told the Citizen.

The horrifying story surrounding Sonia's murder dates back to Aug. 30, 2010, when she was first reported as missing. Later that day police discovered her Toyota Corolla, stained with blood and abandoned behind a local business near Orangeville Town Hall. In their follow-up investigation, police discovered a similarly bloody scene at Sonia's townhouse on Spring Street. It was there that investigators believe Sonia was killed.

Following an extensive six-day search, police eventually located Ms. Varaschin's remains on Sept. 5, 2010. She had been wrapped in bedding from her home and dumped in a wooded area north of Beech Grove Sideroad in Caledon. Her death was immediately ruled a homicide.

While police continue with their work to piece things together, Det. Insp. Glassford strongly believes the local community holds the key to cracking the case.

"I think the public is the key in this case, they're the key in any case. We're still speaking to people and hope to continue to talk to anybody who thinks they have information on this case," he stated. "Somebody out there knows, whether it be a girlfriend, a wife? Somebody has information they may not even this is that important. Pick up the phone, let us be the ones to decide whether or not it's important."

A \$50,000 reward has been offered by the Ontario government in hopes of enticing anyone with information that could potentially lead to an arrest to step forward. That reward remains unclaimed.

After informing the Citizen last year of his hope that a breakthrough in DNA technology could help police identify the owner of DNA recovered at Sonia's apartment shortly after the murder, Det. Insp. Glassford remains optimistic that scientific advances could help push the investigation forward.

"We're still taking advantage of new technology with DNA and we're actively investigating," he said.

One potential avenue the OPP is not, currently, able to take advantage of is familial DNA searching. The controversial technique, used to some effect in cases in the UK and USA since its adoption in the early 2000s, is a two-phase process that, essentially, attempts to find a partial match for a person of interest's DNA in a national database. Often, familial DNA searches will bring matches to siblings, children, parents or other blood relatives, of the original DNA owner.

A theoretical description of how familial DNA searching works is described on [criminal.findlaw.com](#) as "Let's say, for example, DNA from a crime scene might not match any DNA in federal databases, but if the person's son had been recently incarcerated and

thus his information entered into a DNA database, a familial DNA search could lead police to the son, and ultimately to their suspect.?

Currently, no law agency in Canada makes use of familial DNA searching, although RCMP officials last year stated they were looking into it. In this particular case, Det. Insp. Glassford indicated familial DNA searching was not a possibility.

?I can tell you we are not able to access the national DNA databank for the use of familial DNA searching,? he said. ?Whatever DNA resources we have at our disposal, we are using.?

While there have been rumours throughout the community that the individual responsible for Ms. Varaschin's death may have been responsible for other troubling incidents, notably the vicious attack on Shelley Loder in a local photo studio back in December of 2010, Det. Insp. Glassford stated there was no reason for police to believe Sonia's murder was anything but an isolated incident.

?I'm not aware of any crime happening that is similar to this, or could be related to this,? he said. He went on to confirm his belief that Sonia's killer knew the Orangeville-area well, and, likely, knew Sonia, too.

?I'm no different to anyone else. The fact that this case remains unsolved is absolutely troubling to me. We need to get information that leads us into the right direction,? Mr. Glassford said. ?We're hopeful that we can get something that will help us piece this together to find out what happened to Sonia.?

Anyone with information is encouraged to call the Orangeville Police Service tip line at 519-941-2522, or CrimeStoppers at 1-800-222-8477. CrimeStoppers does not subscribe to call display, meaning your identity will remain anonymous. Any information presented to CrimeStoppers leading to an arrest could result in a cash reward of up to \$2,000.