

Remains: DNA is 'not the magic bullet everyone thinks it is'

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the elected attorneys balancing heavy legal caseloads with death scene investigations, decisions about who should be autopsied, and searches for next of kin.

As such, Bigelow is part of the loosely organized nationwide network of family members, cops, volunteers and others who try, against long odds, to match the names of the missing with the remains of the unidentified.

There is plenty of work for them to do. According to the National Institute for Justice, there are as many as 85,000 active missing persons cases in the U.S. at any given time. About 4,000 new unidentified remains are found every year, and about 1,000 of those have not been identified after a year. Experts believe there are at least 40,000 known unidentified human remains in the U.S. NIJ Journal editor Nancy Ritter has called the situation "a silent mass disaster" — a crisis with casualties that accumulate continuously.

Recognizing the need for a centralized source of information about missing persons and unidentified and unclaimed remains, the institute created the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or "NamUs" database in 2007.

NamUs lists 565 missing people in Washington alone, stretching all the way back to spring 1951, when 20-year-old Alvin Matlock disappeared from his home on Brown's Mountain in eastern Washington. The real numbers are probably higher — some disappearances are never even reported to police, much less entered into the national database.

Bones on river banks

The source of so much life, the Columbia River's deep waters and swift currents are also implicated in a lot of deaths. According to an ongoing Oregonian analysis, at least 36 people have drowned in the Columbia since August 2006.

The river also inevitably tempts individuals faced with the pressing dilemma of where to dispose of a body. In September 2006, a couple found a large bag floating in the river near Portland. It contained the dismembered remains of Doug Adamson,

52. In August 2012, Grant County, Washington, deputies recovered 75-year-old Toshio Ota, a missing Seattle man. He was the victim of a homicide by blunt-force trauma. In January 2015, boaters discovered the body of Jessica Newton, 40, on Bachelor Island near Ridgefield. She, too, had died a violent death.

Bigelow knows all about the misfortune that can wash in with the tide. In 1998 — well before he was elected — a local found a dead woman on a small island in the river. To his regret, no one has ever been able to identify her.

"I am going to keep it until I can hand (the remains) to her next of kin and they can give them a respectful burial. There's someone out there who's missing that person ...," Bigelow said, but he acknowledged that he has exhausted all of his ideas for finding her identity.

"I can't think of a single thing I can do to contribute to that investigation," he said.

In 2013, a beachcomber discovered an accumulation of bones strewn along the riverbank. Some of them appeared to be human, including a partial skull with the upper row of teeth still intact.

Bigelow sent the bones to Washington State Forensic Anthropologist Dr. Kathy Taylor, who determined which were human, and sent them on to the forensic laboratory at University of North Texas. Experts there extracted DNA from the bones, and entered the results into the FBI's Combined DNA Index System, a database of DNA records.

Nearly two years after the discovery, Bigelow and Taylor had an answer: The bones belonged to 44-year-old Molly Newton-Waddington, a beloved but troubled Kelso mother and wife who was last seen in Kelso on March 14, 2012. Kelso police continue to investigate Waddington's death, which they consider suspicious.

'That was when I realized the heartbreak'

Coroner duties constitute a relatively small part of Bigelow's workload, but he takes them seriously. By carefully examining the latest remains, he found a few clues: The man spent at least a little time in western Washington, died after spring

Missing persons statistics

Since it was founded in 2007, more than 26,000 documented missing persons cases had been entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as of April, 2016, and more than 10,500 cases had been resolved.

Around 13,300 unidentified persons cases were entered during the same period, and just 2,150 cases had been resolved.

7 Number of unsolved disappearances in Pacific County.

125 Number of unidentified remains cases in Washington.

141 Men went missing in Washington during the time when the Pillar Rock man likely died (roughly two years beginning in spring, 2013, according to NCIC).

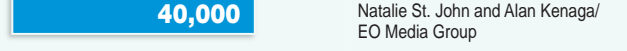
565 Number of unsolved disappearances in Washington.

1951 Year of the oldest unsolved disappearance in Washington.

Estimated number of missing persons cases in U.S. at any given time:



Estimated number of known human remains in U.S. that have still not been identified:



Sources: National Institute of Justice; National Crime Information Center; National Missing and unidentified Persons System
Natalie St. John and Alan Kenagal/
EO Media Group

2013, and had probably been dead for about two years. He was probably middle-class, and middle-aged. He probably died elsewhere, and his body then traveled up or down the river with the currents and tides.

Bigelow sent a detailed press release to media outlets and asked the public for tips, just as he had done in 2013.

"With Molly Waddington," Bigelow recalled, "all we had was a skull. We didn't know height, weight, gender, practically nothing. When I asked for assistance, the world called me. Everybody who was missing anybody. That was when I realized the heartbreak — how many people had people missing." Bigelow began to feel guilty about "giving so many people hope of closure."

"They have some particular person deeply at heart, and they're just scanning all the time, looking, and when they see one of these things, they pick up the phone and call," Bigelow said.

This time, he was able to provide more detail in his release.

"As a result, I got very few calls," Bigelow said. People are often slow to file reports about people who have transient lifestyles, but it's rare

for a middle-class person's disappearance to draw so little attention.

"This guy seems like the kind of guy that people would be looking for," Bigelow said. "He had Vibram-soled shoes — those things are like \$20 a toe. It's odd."

Getting to 'maybe'

With small staffs and little technology at their disposal, rural coroners research cold cases on evenings and weekends, or whenever they can borrow a few minutes from the reams of appeals, briefs and dense county reports that continuously pile up. And they seek help wherever they can find it.

Bigelow took the man's teeth to a dentist, who created records and turned them over to the Washington State Patrol. State patrol, in turn, entered them into the National Crime Information Center, an FBI database. The database compared the Pillar Rock man's tooth charts to records going back to the 1980s, and spit out a list of 141 men who had gone missing in Washington during the time period when he likely died. NamUs, other databases, and tipsters added still more names to Bigelow's ever-expanding list.

When investigators ran Waddington's DNA profile through the FBI's Combined DNA Index System, it quickly found her identity, but such clear-cut results are fairly rare.

"Sometimes, you can come pretty close to knowing," Bigelow explained. "Other times, depending on the quality of the dental records or the remains, all you can do is say, 'I can't exclude this person.'" After that, it was down to Bigelow to figure out which of the many missing men he could cross off of his list. Hours upon hours of reading, dialing, researching, and waiting, waiting, waiting on return calls, police reports, search results.

"There's a lot of detective work, even when there are other potential matches," Bigelow said.

All over the country, other investigators are trying to do the same thing.

"I got a call from a guy in Phoenix — a detective — about a guy who apparently disappeared from in front of a Circle K, leaving an 18-month-old baby in the car," Bigelow said. The Pillar Rock man's records looked like a possible match, but the timeline was all wrong.

"The baby is now old enough to drink. It couldn't possibly be the same guy."

Bones, everywhere

Bigelow again called on Taylor, the forensic anthropologist, for help. In her lab, Taylor will remove the man's remaining fatty tissue, then examine and preserve the bones. Just as with Waddington, she will send samples away for DNA testing.

A Washington native who earned her doctorate at the University of Arizona, Taylor has worked out of the King County Medical Examiner's office since 1996. Though it's a relatively new field, the demand for her unique services is growing.

"Let's just say I do not lack for work — I am very busy!" Taylor said.

Taylor sometimes responds to scenes when bodies turn up. People regularly call on her to

examine bones, or photos of bones found around the state.

"A lot of what I'm doing is evaluating a bone and asking, 'Is this human?' Because there are bones everywhere," Taylor said. In addition to using the databases, she works with police, the media, and other experts, including a forensic artist. She also spends a lot of time talking with the families of the missing, encouraging them to do their part to keep investigations active.

"We really try to explore every avenue," Taylor said. "If you know of somebody that's missing, you have to report them, and you have to be vigilant to make sure that somebody is getting them into the system."

'Everybody should get a name'

Taylor cautions that DNA testing is "not the magic bullet everyone thinks it is." Frustratingly, sometimes there's just not enough to work with, especially with old, weathered remains.

"What we have to do then is put it on the shelf and wait for the technology to get better, and then you resubmit it," Taylor said. "You never give up."

It's too soon to say whether this man's bones will provide usable DNA, or other clues to his identity. Without a name, investigators are unlikely to ever figure out how he died. Sometimes though, families do get answers against all odds. Taylor and her collaborators recently solved a seemingly hopeless cold case from 1989. When she finally met the victim's sister, Taylor's first words were, "I have been waiting 20 years to talk to you!"

"Every one of these people that are in my care have families and are loved by somebody. It's excruciating not to be able to figure out who they are. You know that they are being missed. You just don't know by whom," Taylor said. "You want to return them to their families. Everybody should get a name. They came into this world with a name. They should leave it with a name."

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TV LISTINGS

THE DAILY ASTORIAN | Evening listings THURSDAY | JULY 21

THURSDAY EVENING												A - Charter Astoria/Seaside - L - Charter Long Beach		JULY 21	
A	L	6 PM	6:30	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30	11 PM	11:30		
2 KATU (2)		KATU News		2016 Republican Convention (L)		BattleBots (N)		Greatest Hits "1990-1995" (N)		Wheel of Fortune	Jeopardy!	KATU News at 11	(35) Jimmy Kimmel		
3 KOMO (4)		KOMO 4 News		2016 Republican Convention (L)		BattleBots (N)		Greatest Hits "1990-1995" (N)		Local Programming		KOMO 4 News	(35) Jimmy Kimmel		
5 KING (5)		NBC Nightly News	KING 5 News	2016 Republican Convention (L)		Spartan "Championship" (SF) (N)		Spartan (SF) (N)		Dateline NBC		KING 5 News	(35) Tonight Show		
6 KOIN (6)		KOIN 6 News at 6	CBS Evening News	2016 Republican Convention (L)		Big Bang Theory	Life in Pieces	Big Brother (N)		Extra	Ent. Tonight	KOIN 6 News @ 11	(35) S. Colbert (N)		
7 KIRO (7)		KIRO 7 News	CBS Evening News	2016 Republican Convention (L)		Big Bang Theory	Life in Pieces	Big Brother (N)		The Insider	Ent. Tonight	KIRO 7 News	(35) S. Colbert (N)		
8 KGW (8)		KGW News at 6:00 p.m.		Live at Seven	Inside Edition	Spartan "Championship" (SF) (N)		Spartan (SF) (N)		Dateline NBC		KGW News at 11	(35) Tonight Show		
9 KRCV (9)		Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Modern Family	Modern Family	Legends of Tomorrow "Left Behind"		B. & Beast "Love Is a Battlefield" (N)		KGW News at 10	(35) Two 1/2 Men	(05) Two 1/2 Men	(35) King of Hill		
10 KOPB (10)		(5:00) PBS Convention Coverage "Republican Convention" (L)				Oregon Art Beat	Outdoor Idaho	DCI Banks "Buried"			(35) DCI Banks	"Ghosts"			
12 KPTV (12)		6 O'Clock News		Family Feud	Family Feud	Bones (N)		Home Free "Team Teardown" (N)		10 O'Clock News		11 O'Clock News	Loves Ray		
13 KPDX (13)		Mike & Molly	Mike & Molly	Big Bang Theory	Big Bang Theory	FOX 12's 8 O'Clock News on PDX-TV		FOX 12's 9 O'Clock News on PDX-TV		The Mentalist "The Blood on His Hands"		The Mentalist "Red Carpet Treatment"			
14 KCQP (14)		Name Game	Modern Family	Big Bang Theory	Big Bang Theory	Bones (N)		Home Free "Team Teardown" (N)		Q13 News at 10		Q13 News	Modern Family		
20 TBS (20)		Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Seinfeld	2 Broke Girls	2 Broke Girls	2 Broke Girls	2 Broke Girls	Big Bang Theory	Big Bang Theory	Conan (N)			
22 KSPN (22)		Two and a Half	Two and a Half	The Simpsons	The Simpsons	Modern Family	Modern Family	Q13 News at 9		Big Bang Theory	Big Bang Theory	Friends	Friends		
29 ESPN (29)		(5:00) Boxing Premier Champions (L)		E:60		SportsCenter		SportsCenter		SportsCenter		SportsCenter			
30 ESPN2 (30)		Basketball The Tournament (L)				30 for 30 "Requiem for the Big East"				Jalen & Jacoby (N)	E:60	Jalen & Jacoby			
31 NICK (31)		Henry Danger	Henry Danger	Crashletes (N)	The Thundermans	★ Open Season 2 (08, Animated)	Mike Epps, Joel McHale.	Full House		Full House	Full House	Friends	Friends		
32 DISN (32)		Liv and Maddie	K.C. Undercover	Girl Meets World	Liv and Maddie	Stuck Middle (N)	★★★ Princess Protection Program (09) Selena Gomez.			(10) Descendants	(40) Best Friends	(05) K.C. Underc.	Liv and Maddie		
34 FAM (34)		(5:00) Bedtime Stories	Adam Sandler.	★★ The Parent Trap (1998, Family)	Dennis Quaid, Natasha Richardson, Lindsay Lohan.			Pretty Little Liars "Along Comes Mary"		Pretty Little Liars "Along Comes Mary"		The 700 Club			
35 FMC (35)		★★★ The A-Team (10, Act) Bradley Cooper, Liam Neeson.		★★★ The A-Team (2010, Action) Bradley Cooper, Jessica Biel, Liam Neeson.				★★★★ Evil Dead (2013, Thriller) Shiloh Fernandez, Jane Levy.							
36 LIFE (36)		My Crazy Ex	My Crazy Ex	My Crazy Ex	My Crazy Ex	My Crazy Ex (N)		I Love "Dirty Talk/ Media Whore" (N)		I Love "Dirty Talk/ Media Whore" (N)		I Love You ... But I Lied			
38 ROOT (38)		Monster Jam "Atlanta"		ERA Rodeo		Bull Riding Championship		Ken Griffey Jr. 1/2	Ken Griffey Jr. 2/2	UFC 185					
39 FS1 (39)		(5:00) UFC 193				Fox Sports Live	TMZ Sports (N)	Speak for Yourself		Garbage Time	Best I Heard (N)	Fox Sports Live	TMZ Sports		
43 SPIKE (43)		Cops	Cops	Lip Sync Battle 1/2	Lip Sync Battle 2/2	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle	Lip Sync Battle		
44 COM (44)		(15) Futurama	(50) Futurama	(20) Futurama	(55) Tosh.0 "Lohanthony"	(25) Tosh.0		Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	The Daily Show (N)	Nightly Show (N)		
45 HIST (45)		Pawn Stars	Pawn Stars	Alone "Into the Abyss"		Alone		Alone (N)		(05) Mountain Men "The Wasteland"		(05) Mountain Men "Killer Instinct"			
46 A&E (46)		To Be Announced		The First 48 "Old Wounds"		The First 48 (N)	The First 48	The First 48 "The Invitation" (N)		60 Days In (N)		(05) To Be Announced			
47 TLC (47)		Say Yes-Dress	Say Yes-Dress	My 600-lb Life "Tara's Story"		My 600-lb Life "Brittani's Story"		My 600-lb Life "Pauline's Story"		Skin Tight "Lindsey and Derek" (N)		My Big Fat Fabulous Life "Fat Jokes"			
48 DISC (48)		(5:00) Naked: Countdown/ XL		Naked and Afraid: Countdown to XL		Naked "XL Cast Revealed: Darrin Reay"		Naked&Afraid XL "Lions at the Gate"		Naked&Afr. "South Africa Part 2" (N)		Naked and Afraid "The Danger Within"			
49 NGEV (49)		No Man Left Behind "Columbia Vice"		Life Below Zero "Ghosts of Winter"		Life Below Zero "No Boundaries"		No Man Left "The One That Got Away"		No Man Left Behind "To Hell and Back"		No Man Left "The One That Got Away"			
50 TNT (50)		Castle "Significant Others"		Castle "Into the Influence"		★★ Divergent (2014, Action) Kate Winslet, Miles Teller, Shailene Woodley.						CSI: NY "Down the Rabbit Hole"			
51 AMC (51)		(5:30) ★★★ Ghostbusters II (89) Sigourney Weaver, Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray.		★★★ Pretty Woman (1990, Romance) Julia Roberts, Jason Alexander, Richard Gere.				★★★ Pretty Woman (90, Rom) Julia Roberts, Richard Gere.				Law & Order: S.V.U. "Smoked"			
52 USA (52)		(5:15) ★★ 2 Fast 2 Furious (03) Tyrese Gibson, Paul Walker.		★★★ The Fast and the Furious (2001, Action) Michelle Rodriguez, Paul Walker, Vin Diesel.		★★ Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit (14) Kenneth Branagh, Keira Knightly, Chris Pine.				Queen of the South (N)					
53 FOOD (53)		Chopped "Amateurs' Brawl"		Chopped "In-Laws, In Teams!"		Chopped "Fake Cake, Real Stakes"		Chopped		Beat Flay (N)	Beat Bobby Flay	Beat Bobby Flay	Beat Bobby Flay		
54 HGTV (54)		Beachfront Hunt	Beachfront Hunt	Beachfront Hunt	Beachfront Hunt	Flip or Flop	Flip or Flop	Flip or Flop (N)	Flip or Flop	House Hunters (N)	House Hunters (N)	House Hunters	House Hunters		
55 FX (55)		(5:00) ★★ Star Trek: Into Darkness (13) Zachary Quinto, Chris Pine.		★★★ America's Choice 2016		★★★ America's Choice 2016		★★★ America's Choice 2016		Sex&Drugs (N)	Sex&Drugs&Rock	Sex&Drugs&Rock	Movie		
57 CNN (57)		America's Choice 2016		America's Choice 2016		America's Choice 2016		America's Choice 2016		CNN Tonight With Don Lemon		CNN Tonight With Don Lemon			
58 FNC (58)		The Kelly File With Megyn Kelly		Hannity		The O'Reilly Factor		The Kelly File With Megyn Kelly		Hannity		On the Record			
61 CNBC (61)		American Greed: Scam		Greed "The Spy Who Scammed Me"		American Greed "The Bar Girls Trap"		Amer. Greed "Psychic Fiend's Network"		American Greed: Scam		Paid Program	Paid Program		
63 BRAV (63)		Wives NJ "A Very Hairy Christmas"		Real Housewives "The Countess Bride"		Flipping Out "Ready Set Glow" (N)		Wives NJ "A Very Hairy Christmas"		WatchWhat (N)		Flipping Out			
64 TCM (64)		(5:00) The Taking of Pelham One, Tw...		★★★★ Dog Day Afternoon (1975, Action) Chris Sarandon, Carol Kane, Al Pacino.		(15) ★★ Saturday Night Fever (1977, Drama) Karen Gorney, Donna Pescow, John Travolta.						Shaft (71, Cri)			
65 SYFY (65)		(5:30) ★★ Deep Impact (98, Act) Morgan Freeman, Robert Duvall, Elijah Wood.		Live From Comic-Con "Night One" (N)		★★★ The Hulk (2003, Sci-Fi) Jennifer Connelly, Sam Elliott, Eric Bana.									
162 RFD (162)		SF Machinery	Small Town	Rural America "WLAC Championship"		Steve Lantvit	Rural Eve. News	Market Journal	GA Farm Monitor	SF Machinery	Small Town	Time Life Library			

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