

THE UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | DEAD BY DAWN

EP73 Transcript

KIM SINK: The fire was out, of course, already and the EMTs were there, the fire department was still there. The next thing you know, you see all kinds of police and the coroner and, you know, after a while, you know something's wrong. Ronli's Daddy kept saying, "Oh, she left a candle burning, or whatever," and I said, "No, Robby, that's not what it is. Something is wrong."

NARRATION:

ON THE EVENING OF APRIL 14, 2004, 24-YEAR-OLD RONLI RATLIFF DRIVES FROM HER SMALL APARTMENT IN MOORESVILLE, INDIANA TO A VACANT HOUSE ON RURAL DAYHUFF ROAD, 10 MINUTES SOUTHEAST OF TOWN. THE HOUSE BELONGS TO RONLI'S MOM AND STEPDAD, AND RONLI'S BEEN STAYING THERE ALONE WHILE HER LANDLORD MAKES SOME REPAIRS. SHE PLANS TO MOVE BACK INTO HER APARTMENT THE NEXT DAY AND IS LOOKING FORWARD TO SLEEPING IN HER OWN BED AGAIN. BUT TRAGICALLY, SHE NEVER GETS THE CHANCE. IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS, AN UNKNOWN ASSAILANT PAYS A VISIT TO THE HOUSE AND RONLI DOESN'T LIVE TO SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "DEAD BY DAWN."

DETECTIVE DOWNING: The fire was reported at about 6:30am by a neighbor who had come out to leave for work. He noticed that there was smoke coming from the residence. He alerted his wife to call 911. He then went to the residence and seen that there was a car in the driveway. He attempted to gain entry into the residence and awaken anyone that might be in there. He was unable to do so. He said that the door was extremely hot. By that point in time, the fire department was on their way.

NARRATION:

DAN DOWNING IS THE CAPTAIN OF INVESTIGATIONS FOR THE MORGAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE IN MOORESVILLE, INDIANA. HE BEGAN HIS CAREER WITH THE DEPARTMENT IN 1997 AS A CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATOR AND WAS PROMOTED TO DETECTIVE IN JANUARY OF 2004. THE FIRE ON DAYHUFF ROAD WAS ONE OF HIS FIRST CASES AS A LEAD INVESTIGATOR.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: After the fire was extinguished, then they were doing a search of the residence and they located a body. It was just prior to 7am, and I was contacted by my supervisor at the time who informed me that there was a fire related death in the northeastern portion of our county, and he requested that I respond to the scene. When I arrived, of course, there was a great deal of emergency activity going on. Once I made my way into the scene, it was very apparent to me that this was not a fire related death — that this was a homicide. The evidence was particularly visible to me, but it also appeared that the fire had been set after the crime had occurred, probably in an effort to cover up the crime itself.

NARRATION:

THE CHARRED BODY IS 24-YEAR-OLD RONLI RATLIFF. SHE HAD GROWN UP IN THE AREA, GRADUATED FROM MOORESVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, AND STILL LIVED AND WORKED IN TOWN, A QUIET COMMUNITY OF LESS THAN 10,000.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Mooresville, Indiana basically is a community that is directly south of Indianapolis, Indiana. It's more or less a bedroom community. Most of the folks in Morgan County travel to Indianapolis for work. We averaged about four homicides a year during that time period, so our homicide rate was extremely low. We mostly had property crimes and we also, of course, had some personal crimes, but homicides were not high ranking as far as our number that we had during that time period.

NARRATION:

WITH THE HOUSE ESTABLISHED AS A CRIME SCENE, DETECTIVE DOWNING BEGINS INSPECTING RONLI'S BODY FOR ANY CLUES THAT MIGHT REVEAL HOW OR WHY SHE WAS MURDERED.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Ronli's body was laying face-down on the floor in front of the couch in the living room area. She was wearing pajama pants and a T-Shirt. Her face was covered with some cloth, and she was partially nude. There was a theory that she was possibly sexually assaulted due to her being partially dressed. However, the autopsy examination found that she was not sexually assaulted. So, we believe that being partially nude at that point in time occurred during a struggle prior to her death.

NARRATION:

ROBERT ALLEN, RONLI'S STEPFATHER, ARRIVES SHORTLY AFTER DETECTIVE DOWNING. HE OWNS THE HOUSE ALONG WITH RONLI'S MOTHER, SANDY, BUT THEY HAVEN'T LIVED IN IT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. ROBERT IS ABLE TO IDENTIFY RONLI'S BODY AND HER CAR IN THE DRIVEWAY. HE TELLS INVESTIGATORS THAT SHE'S THE ONLY PERSON WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE HOUSE THAT NIGHT.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: The family would use the house occasionally on weekends to have get togethers. They would use the lake behind the residence and things like that, but no one was actually staying there until Ronli moved in there while her apartment was being remodeled. She had only been there a couple weeks prior to her death. And this was actually supposed to be the last night that she stayed at this residence before returning back to her apartment in Mooresville.

NARRATION:

IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG FOR NEWS OF RONLI'S DEATH TO REACH HER AUNT, KIM SINK, WHO IMMEDIATELY RACES TO THE SCENE. KIM WAS LIKE A SECOND MOTHER TO RONLI WHEN SHE WAS GROWING UP AND THE SUDDEN LOSS IS DEVASTATING.

KIM SINK: A friend of mine, she came and picked me up and we went out there to the house. When they pulled her out, covered up like that... I was just destroyed. We were pretty close. I'd always had her growing up. I spent a lot of time with her and we went camping. I took her to

drive ins and cookouts and spend the night. She had long hair, kind of a sandy blond. She had pretty blue eyes and still had her big cheeks that she was born with. She's very pretty. When she smiles, you can't help but smile with her. She was a typical young lady. She wanted everything that everybody else had. She wanted love and she wanted warmth, and she wanted trust. Ronli liked to laugh, but she did more crying than she did laughing.

NARRATION:

RONLI'S CHILDHOOD WAS A DIFFICULT ONE. BOTH HER MOTHER, SANDY, AND HER STEPFATHER STRUGGLED WITH DRUG ADDICTION FOR MANY YEARS. HER MOTHER'S DRUG PROBLEMS HAD A PROFOUND AND DAMAGING IMPACT ON THE YOUNG AND SENSITIVE RONLI.

KIM SINK: Ronli was more there for her mother than her mother was there for her, if that makes any sense. They had gotten arrested, Sandy, my sister, and her husband and that was the first sign that I really had of that all that drug use and stuff. And then, I could tell from that point on, it was just horrific. I don't know all the extent. I know how bad my sister was. Her face looked horrible. She couldn't do anything. Sandy was rude and mean to Ronli. If she had anything to say to Ronli, it was usually not in the most positive way. She was always critical of Ronli. But Ronli, she just bared through it. Her mom was basically the big issue towards the end of her life. That is pretty much all she thought about for several years was just trying to get her mom back. All she wanted was her mom better.

NARRATION:

RONLI KEPT A DIARY FOR MUCH OF HER LIFE AND STORED IT IN THE ATTIC OF THE HOUSE WHERE SHE WAS KILLED. FOR INVESTIGATORS, IT'S A WINDOW INTO HER THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS WHILE GROWING UP SURROUNDED BY DRUG ADDICTION.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: We were able to basically create victimology for Ronli and retrace her history as she wrote in her diaries, telling about her life. She talked in depth about her struggles and her concerns about her younger sister and the rest of her family, and her concerns about her mom's drug use, and the drug use in and around the body shop.

NARRATION:

AT THE TIME OF HER DEATH, RONLI'S STEPFATHER, ROBERT, OWNED ALLEN'S BODY SHOP, A TOWING AND COLLISION BUSINESS IN DOWNTOWN MOORESVILLE. HE INHERITED THE BUSINESS FROM HIS FATHER, AND BOTH HE AND RONLI'S MOTHER SANDY WORKED THERE. ONCE A THRIVING BUSINESS, THE SHOP HAD FALLEN ON HARD TIMES, AND BY 2004 IT WAS CENTRAL TO THE ILLEGAL DRUG SCENE IN MORGAN COUNTY.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: We do have information and evidence that there were individuals in the body shop and around the body shop that were dealing in drugs at that point in time, and that there was a lot of drug activity that was going on at the family body shop. The drug activity was a big part of this business and how it was staying afloat, even though it was barely afloat. The environment at the body shop was one that Ronli disagreed with. Ronli's mom and stepfather were struggling with drug addictions, as well as most of the employees that were in and around

the body shop at that point in time. She struggled to get her mom away from that type of environment. Ronli also had a younger sister who she was greatly concerned about, because her sister was in the care of her mother and stepfather. So, she spent a lot of time at the body shop trying to keep her mother out of the drug environment as well as protect her sister from the surroundings and hoping that she wouldn't get involved in the same aspects that her mother and stepfather had been involved in.

NARRATION:

THE DEDICATION TO HER MOM AND SISTER TOOK PRECEDENCE OVER EVERYTHING ELSE IN RONLI'S LIFE AND DRAMATICALLY AFFECTED HER FUTURE.

KIM SINK: After she graduated, her and her best friend Reese was planning on going to college together. Unfortunately, Ronli's mother spent most of the money that Ron would've had for college. So, Ronli didn't get the chance to go to school like she wanted to. She was working at the body shop. She had previously worked at banks, worked as a phone answerer at Blair Magazine. She worked at a bar a little bit, just different things. She just trying to get out there and find herself. And at 24, she was starting to get into her confidence, which was something she never really had. She just was too worried about her mom. I mean, she was just worried about Sandy all the time.

NARRATION:

INVESTIGATORS SET ABOUT TRYING TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY OF WHO MURDERED RONLI RATLIFF AND WHY. THEY COMB THE CRIME SCENE FOR ANY EVIDENCE THAT MIGHT POINT THEM TO A SUSPECT.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: We basically took every item of evidence that was in conjunction with Ronli's body. The rug that she was lying on, her clothing. We also took other items that could help identify people that were at the residence prior to the murder. So, we took all of the cigarette butts that were located in an ashtray next to her body. We also took beer cans and other items that could have been used for potential DNA in the future.

NARRATION:

TO CREATE A TIMELINE OF HER FINAL HOURS, DETECTIVE DOWNING CONDUCTS EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH RONLI'S FRIENDS AND FAMILY, AS WELL AS EMPLOYEES OF THE BODY SHOP. HE'S LOOKING FOR ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY THAT MIGHT HAVE OCCURRED THE LAST NIGHT SHE WAS SEEN ALIVE.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: She was actually at the body shop in the evening hours prior to her death. She had been there working and communicating with some friends of hers via AOL messenger. Ronli told her mother that she was going to go home, and she wanted to practice her brushstrokes for her art class that she had recently started. So, we know that she left the body shop about 9 to 9:30pm on the evening before her death. She did go home. She spoke to some friends while at home. We did not find any phone calls that evening after she left the

body shop. And then after that, we don't know anything about what Ronli was doing at the home.

NARRATION:

THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO KNEW THAT RONLI WAS STAYING AT THE HOUSE WERE HER FAMILY, SOME OF THE WORKERS AT THE AUTO BODY SHOP, AND A COUPLE OF HER CLOSE FRIENDS. NO ONE IN THE NEIGHBORING HOMES RECALLS ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS ON THE NIGHT RONLI WAS KILLED, AND THERE'S NO SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE FOR INVESTIGATORS TO REVIEW. TO FIGURE OUT WHAT LED UP TO RONLI'S MURDER, DETECTIVE DOWNING MUST CREATE A WORKING THEORY BASED ONLY ON THE EVIDENCE FOUND AT THE CRIME SCENE.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: So, evidence shows that the killer or killers entered the back door of the residence. It was apparently known to the family, as well as coworkers and friends of the family, that the back door was normally left unlocked, and it did appear that this door was unlocked at the time that Ronli was killed. It was definitely apparent that there had been a struggle in the residence. There were several items inside that were knocked over. We found a clock that had been knocked over at approximately 3:30am, we believe, during an altercation. When that clock was knocked over and it struck the floor, the battery came out of the clock. That clock, of course, stopped at 3:30. So therefore, we believe that the altercation began, or was going on, at 3:30 in the morning of the date of her death. It was later determined that the fire was set with an accelerant that was used in outdoor candles, which leaves pour patterns behind which is completely different than a natural fire would occur, from an electrical outlet or something like that. The fire was in the middle of the room and did not have any other ignition sources that could have potentially accidentally set that fire. It's not an uncommon practice for killers to set a fire after they have committed a homicide. It, actually, most of the time, destroys a lot of evidence. It also conceals, a lot of times, the cause of death. In this particular case, it was completely unsuccessful because the fire did not continue to burn. It basically smoldered for quite some time.

NARRATION:

HOPING TO GENERATE LEADS, INVESTIGATORS USE THE LOCAL NEWS MEDIA TO ALERT THE PUBLIC ABOUT RONLI'S MURDER. THEY ALSO SET UP AN ANONYMOUS TIP LINE AND RECEIVE PLENTY OF LEADS, BUT NONE THAT LEAD TO RONLI'S KILLER.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Of course, early on, we had lots of tips that came in. Some of those tips were good. A lot of them were just people that had theories on the death. Most of those theories were not even close to being accurate. We also had people that were giving tips implicating family members of theirs for whatever reason. We had other people that were providing tips because they had purchased narcotics from a dealer who made a statement that, "You don't want to end up like the girl dead out by Mooresville." So, why people say those things, I don't know. But we've had numerous tips that have been false and misleading.

NARRATION:

THE MORGAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE HAS PURPOSEFULLY WITHHELD THE CAUSE AND MANNER OF RONLI'S DEATH, IN ORDER TO VET ANY POTENTIAL SUSPECTS AND WEED OUT FALSE INFORMATION. OTHER THAN THE INVESTIGATORS, ONLY RONLI'S KILLER WOULD KNOW EXACTLY HOW SHE DIED. BUT WHY WAS RONLI RATLIFF MURDERED? THE HOUSE SHE WAS STAYING IN WAS WELL KNOWN TO PEOPLE IN THE LOCAL DRUG SCENE. COULD RONLI HAVE SIMPLY BEEN IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME?

DETECTIVE DOWNING: The area that Ronli's family owned the house, basically at this point in time, was in an area that was relatively safe and it wasn't uncommon for houses in Morgan County, for folks to leave their doors unlocked when they slept at night. It was not a high-crime activity area. If someone had come to the residence with the intent to burglarize or to steal property from the residence, knowing or even not knowing that the back door was unlocked, it was pretty simple for them to gain entry into the residence at that point in time. One theory could be that this was a crime of opportunity, and that someone came to the residence either for drugs or for property that was kept inside the residence in an attempt to burglarize, and stumbled upon Ronli sleeping on the couch. And the identity of that person or persons was known by Ronli, and therefore they had to silence her so that they did not get in trouble in the future.

NARRATION:

COULD A BOTCHED ROBBERY HAVE LED TO RONLI'S DEATH? NOTHING WAS REPORTED MISSING FROM THE RESIDENCE, BUT THE PROPERTY'S CONNECTION TO THE ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE MEANS INVESTIGATORS CAN'T RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY. WHETHER OR NOT ANYTHING WAS STOLEN, DETECTIVE DOWNING DOESN'T BELIEVE THE KILLER ENTERED THE HOUSE WITH MURDER IN MIND.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Evidence shows that the person or persons that killed Ronli Ratliff knew her, and that was the reason that her face was covered with the cloth material so that she could not see them and they could not see her during the act that was occurring. I don't think that the evidence indicates that they came there with the intent to kill Ronli. The scene was not a very well-organized scene, so it didn't appear that it was a premeditated or preplanned murder, that it was a murder more or less of opportunity, or that the circumstances had gone too far and Ronli ended up dead. So therefore, I don't believe that there was an intent for someone actually come there to kill Ronli specifically.

NARRATION:

THE ACCELERANT FOR THE FIRE AND OTHER ITEMS USED IN RONLI'S MURDER HAD BEEN STORED ON THE PROPERTY, WHICH MAKES RONLI'S AUNT KIM STRONGLY SUSPECT THAT THE KILLER MUST HAVE BEEN THERE BEFORE.

KIM SINK: Whoever did this had to know everything about that house and everything around that house and in the garage that was disarray that you couldn't see anything. You had to know what you were doing if you went into that garage. So whoever did it knew everything about

that property. All the neighbors around there knew of the situation that was going on at that house out there. Everybody knew.

NARRATION:

KIM DOESN'T BELIEVE THAT RONLI'S MURDER WAS A RANDOM ACT. RONLI HAD SPENT YEARS TRYING TO GET HER MOM OFF DRUGS AND AS A RESULT SHE KNEW MOST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE LOCAL DRUG SCENE WHO FREQUENTED ALLEN'S BODY SHOP. OVER THE YEARS, RONLI HAD THREATENED TO REPORT THEIR DRUG DEALING TO THE POLICE.

KIM SINK: Ronli had threatened them several times, and Ronli's not a cusser, but she did say, "I'll turn every f-ing last one of you in." But that's how upset and disappointed that she would be. And I'd say every time that she would be upset like that, and cussin' at 'em, she'd be tears just rolling down her cheeks. So, it was a combination of anger and hurt. Each time that she would say it, there'd be a different kind of group, some of them the same people, but then others, you know, coming in and out. So, all of them basically knew it. And I think she told them all again she was turning them in, even though she knew it meant her mom also. And I think that's the main reason why she hadn't done anything. I'd tell her, "Ronli, you got to be careful. Just stay away from them." And she was starting to do that. But then again, her mom always was in forethought of her mind.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Ronli basically had come to the point where she was at wit's end and had no other recourse and had made a comment to her friend that she was considering turning her mom in so that it would force her mom into some type of rehabilitation or help for her substance abuse.

NARRATION:

WAS SOMEONE INVOLVED IN THE MOORESVILLE DRUG SCENE CONVINCED THAT RONLI WAS ABOUT TO REPORT THEM TO THE POLICE? IF SO, IT WOULD BE A COMPELLING MOTIVE FOR THEM TO KILL RONLI TO KEEP HER QUIET. INVESTIGATORS COMB THROUGH ALL THE KNOWN ASSOCIATES OF THE BODY SHOP, SEARCHING FOR POTENTIAL SUSPECTS.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: During our investigation, we have pinpointed persons of interest in this case. One person of interest was at the scene the morning that I arrived at Ronli's residence. That individual was a family friend and also an employee at the body shop. He stated that he had pulled into the driveway between the hours of 3am and 5am prior to Ronli's death being discovered. The first initial story that he gave us was that he had been traveling from Mooresville and was going to a nearby residence, and he stopped at Ronli's residence to use the restroom beside the detached garage at the residence. He stated that, when he pulled in, he did notice that Ronli's car was at the residence. However, the residence was dark and there was nothing unusual going on at that point. He was basically trying to help us establish a timeline that there was no smoke coming from the residence and there were no other cars there between 3:30 and 5, when he got there. However, he implicated himself in being at the crime scene prior to her being discovered. His story then later changed that he had pulled in there to separate some drugs that he had recently purchased, and that he didn't want to take

all of the drugs that he had on his person into the residence that he was going to visit. Over the years, his story has changed, and he has given us three different stories for his activity on that evening.

NARRATION:

COULD THIS FAMILY FRIEND HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN RONLI'S MURDER? HIS PRESENCE AT THE CRIME SCENE AND SHIFTING REASONS FOR WHY HE WAS THERE GIVE INVESTIGATORS PLENTY OF REASON TO BE SUSPICIOUS. HOWEVER, HE HAS CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED THAT RONLI'S CAR WAS IN THE DRIVEWAY WHEN HE ARRIVED THAT EVENING, THAT THE HOUSE WAS DARK, AND THAT HE SAW NOTHING UNUSUAL. AUTHORITIES ALSO DON'T HAVE DNA EVIDENCE THAT WOULD LINK THIS PERSON TO THE CRIME.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: This individual was at that point in time and still today considered a person of interest. His DNA was found inside the residence. He's cooperated. He's given us his DNA. It does match other items in the home, which of course, had a right to be there. He was there. He was a friend. He had visited the home before, but it doesn't match the particular items of DNA that were found on her body. So, the people of interest that we have, and they have given DNA, it doesn't match those two particular points of interest that we're looking for.

NARRATION:

WITHOUT HARD EVIDENCE TO TIE THEIR PERSONS OF INTEREST TO RONLI'S MURDER, INVESTIGATORS ARE LEFT TO PURSUE TIPS FROM THE COMMUNITY. BUT IN A SMALL TOWN LIKE MOORESVILLE, THERE ARE MANY REASONS PEOPLE WITH INFORMATION MIGHT CHOOSE TO KEEP IT TO THEMSELVES.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Early on, it was pretty difficult to get people to talk to us about Ronli's murder, basically, because a lot of them had drug involvement and they were concerned about themselves getting into trouble for their drug use and/or involvement with the body shop, and/or people surrounding it. We also had some issues where people were afraid of individuals that had been employed at the body shop and afraid of any type of retribution that may come from them talking. You know, it's been several years that have passed and my hope is that some of these people have got out of the drug world and are dealing with this burden on their conscience, that they have information, and that they'll come forward and basically say that, you know, this is what I know. And/or, if they were scared about at that point in time, you know, these folks are a lot older now than they were at that point in time of Ronli's death. So, I think their fear should be minimized at this point as far as any repercussions that come upon them.

NARRATION:

ALTHOUGH THEY WERE AT THE CENTER OF THE MOORESVILLE DRUG SCENE AT THE TIME OF RONLI'S MURDER, HER MOTHER AND STEPFATHER HAVE SO FAR BEEN EITHER UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO HELP AUTHORITIES DETERMINE WHO KILLED HER.

KIM SINK: I believe they know. If Sandy doesn't know for sure, I know she's highly suspicious of somebody. But then again, she doesn't want to be in the middle of it anyway. I mean, basically the whole town, they don't want to get involved and I never understood that. I still don't understand. It still makes me so mad every time I think about it, but the whole town's that way. Everybody in Mooresville is connected.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: Ronli's mother and father have been relatively cooperative over the years. It doesn't appear that they're involved in drugs anymore. It is possible that they have more information in regards to who was responsible for Ronli's death than what came forward at this point. However, only time will tell whether or not that burden is going to bring them forward with that information.

NARRATION:

IN 2014, AFTER A DECADE OF WORKING ON RONLI'S CASE, DETECTIVE DOWNING HAS EXHAUSTED EVERY AVENUE OF INQUIRY POSSIBLE. HOPING THAT FRESH EYES MIGHT BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO THE INVESTIGATION, HE HAS PUSHED HIS DEPARTMENT TO CREATE A COLD CASE UNIT OF RETIRED VOLUNTEER DETECTIVES. THEIR FIRST ASSIGNMENT IS TO REVISIT THE MURDER OF RONLI RATLIFF.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: They have re-interviewed the majority of everyone that had been initially interviewed in this particular investigation. They've also established new people with information that they've also been able to interview. They have submitted probably close to 100 new items of evidence for advanced DNA. They've also had the ability to send the hard drives from the computers that were seized from the crime scene back for a refresher analysis with updated software and things that weren't available in 2004.

NARRATION:

THE COMBINATION OF NEW LEADS BEING GENERATED BY THE COLD CASE UNIT AND ADVANCES IN MODERN FORENSIC TECHNOLOGY GIVE INVESTIGATORS HOPE THAT RONLI'S KILLER OR KILLERS WILL EVENTUALLY BE IDENTIFIED. FOR DAN DOWNING, THE CASE IS PERSONAL, AND HE IS COMMITTED TO SEEING IT THROUGH NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES.

DETECTIVE DOWNING: This was my first homicide. This is the only homicide that I have that's unsolved. There's been thousands upon thousands of hours that were put into this case. From the first day of the homicide, myself and my mentor worked this case for eight months straight, six to seven days a week, until the case finally became so cold that there was nothing else for us to follow up on. After 26 years in law enforcement, this has become a part of my life, and I did the same with Ronli that I've done with every homicide victim and I promised them justice. And I did that the morning in 2004 and I want to be able to carry that out. Ronli's family deserves answers. Ronli deserves justice, and we will not stop and this case will not be closed until Ronli has that justice she deserves.

KIM SINK: Nobody deserves what they did to Ronli, and I do think about it all the time, what she must have been thinking, what she might have been seeing and, and what she might have been

begging for, and it hurts me to know that she hurt like that. What keeps me going is, I see Ronli's face, and I see her smile and I see her say, "Aunt Kimmy" every moment of every day. And I refuse. I refuse to let Ronli die in vain. Ronli was very much loved. She was very loved and she's missed. I miss her. I think about her all the time. I miss her so much.

NARRATION:

ENOUGH TIME HAS PASSED SINCE RONLI'S MURDER IN 2004 THAT THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS FOR MANY DRUG-RELATED OFFENSES HAVE EXPIRED. AUTHORITIES ARE HOPEFUL THIS MAY ENCOURAGE SOMEONE INVOLVED WITH THE MOORESVILLE DRUG SCENE AT THAT TIME TO COME FORWARD WITH NEW INFORMATION. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION THAT CAN SHED LIGHT ON THE MURDER OF RONLI RATLIFF, YOU CAN REPORT IT ANONYMOUSLY TO THE MORGAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE BY CALLING (317) 572-8477, OR EMAILING CRIMETIPSMORGANCOUNTY.IN.GOV, OR SUBMITTING YOUR TIP AT UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES:

JUDY POWELL FORREST: She called me that Saturday and said, "Ma, someone knocked on the door. And then they said that they were FBI." And she said, "I didn't open the door." She said, "I told them to show me some kind of ID, or a warrant, or something," because they put some kind of fake ID up to the peep hole. I was totally naive. I didn't think that it was gonna lead to somebody killing her.

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Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13, an Audacy company.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 73 of Unsolved Mysteries.