

DNA, footprints and a mystery stranger: parents' \$200,000 search for killer

NEW

Jenny Lin, 14, was murdered in her own home 30 years ago. Despite a host of evidence at the scene the trail went cold — but police are not giving up



Jenny Lin’s father John, right, found her on May 27, 1994 at their home in northern California

Andrea Blanco

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It has been three decades since John Lin came home from work, walked upstairs and found his daughter lying dead in a pool of blood on the bathroom floor.

Jenny Lin was a straight-A student and an accomplished viola player, on course to graduate as valedictorian of her middle school class in the northern California community of Castro Valley. She celebrated her 14th birthday two days before she was stabbed to death.

Early in the hunt for Jenny’s killer, detectives compiled several key clues — including boot prints and a broken window in the

Lins’ dining room. Bloodhounds tracked a scent into the field behind the house.



Jenny was a talented musician

But the trail was lost in the hills beyond. The killer disappeared. And 30 years on from the night of May 27, 1994, the case of who murdered Jenny remains a mystery. “The killer is still out there,” said Jenny’s mother, Mei-Lian Lin.

Detectives working on the case have not given up hope and now, in combination with law enforcement, the Lins are offering a reward of \$200,000 for information that finally brings justice.

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Solving a 30-year-old cold case

“It is very unlikely that it was a random attack,” Patrick Smyth, the lead detective, said. “In all likelihood, it was someone who was very familiar with the comings and goings and knew timelines, someone who knew what they were going to do.”

Every day that Mr Lin arrived home from his job in San Francisco, he would find his daughter practising her viola, with her nose stuck in a book, or chatting on the phone with friends. “I can remember every time I came home,” Mr Lin, who is now in his seventies, said. “First thing she would do, as soon as I sat at the table, she would jump on my lap. She always gave me hugs.”

But when Jenny was not there to greet him, he started searching the house. He found her at 6.45pm. The last person to hear from her was a school friend who spoke to her on the phone until 5.15pm.

The Lins’ house sat on a hill in their expensive neighbourhood, accessible only by vehicle. Smyth believes the killer entered the home after breaking a window, then hid and waited for Jenny to arrive from school.



Police at the Lins’ home after the murder

Although DNA recovered from the scene was limited, other evidence in the case was vast: boot prints, an encounter that Mr Lin had in the week leading to the murder, and one account from a witness who saw a man wearing a hat and dark jacket waiting outside the house.

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“People gave us a lot of information, they genuinely wanted to help,” Smyth said. “This wasn’t an area where people didn’t talk to police.”

One early line of inquiry concerned a stranger who had approached Mr Lin at a local fair two weeks before the murder. “I have a proposition for you,” the man said. “I got your daughter.”

Mr Lin walked away, checked that both his daughters were safe, and dismissed the incident. The run-in was investigated in the weeks after Jenny’s murder, but authorities were not able to

identify the man, and have since said they do not think he is connected to the crime.

In 2006, Sebastian Shaw, a serial killer and rapist from Oregon, was named as a suspect but charges were not brought against him due to a lack of evidence. Shaw died in prison in 2021, and he has since been ruled out as Jenny’s killer through the use of modern DNA technology.

Still Unsolved
Reward Increased to
\$200,000



The 14 year old talented and well-liked student was stabbed to death in her home on Palomares Hills in Castro Valley, California, between 5:15 pm and 6:45 pm, on Friday, May 27, 1994.

The murderer is still at large.

If you saw anyone or anything suspicious, around Pineville Circle, Greenville Drive or Villareal Drive in Castro Valley on or before May 27, 1994, or have any information that may help solve this case, please call:

Alameda County Sheriff: (510) 667-3636 Or
Toll Free Hotline: (855) 4-JENNY-LIN

Reward offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the murderer of Jennifer Lin. Caller may remain anonymous if so desired.
E-mail: jhlin@sbcglobal.net <http://www.JennyLinFoundation.org>

Jenny Lin Foundation is a non-profit organization exempt from federal and state tax under IRS Tax Code Section (501)(c)(3) and State Revenue and Tax Code 23701d. Employer ID:94-3208797. Case Number: 954327099.

An advert posted by the Lin family

Smyth said he was hopeful that DNA technology developed in the coming years could be used to process the limited physical evidence. At present the DNA available to detectives is not enough to use investigative genetic genealogy, which has helped police across the country solve more than 600 cold cases.

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“We do have something, as far as DNA is concerned. But, unfortunately, that won’t allow us to use genetic genealogy,”

Smyth said. “I’m always hopeful that someone will come forward and say something that will allow us to solve this case.”

In the meantime, the cold case unit and the Lins, who keep weekly contact with Smyth, are relying on the public’s assistance to make a connection that leads to a breakthrough. “We’re not going to stop until we find the killer,” Ms Lin said. “We’re very hopeful that they will find the person who is responsible for Jenny’s death.”

Repurposing grief

Among the ocean of memories about Jenny that the Lins hold dear is her smile and wisdom beyond her years. “She always was laughing her big laugh,” her mother said. “Her thinking was that the world needs a common language that would promote world peace. In her mind, that common language was music.”

The Lins have worked to repurpose their pain into action. In 1995, just a year after her death, they established the [Jenny Lin Foundation](#). Through the charity, more than 250 young people are able to attend the Jenny Lin music camp, free of charge, every year.

The foundation also sponsors a leadership programme, safety training and two music scholarships. An annual concert and celebration of life, which are held on separate dates, are a fixture for the local community.

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“The Lins are just fantastic,” Smyth said. “And what they’ve done since then is just incredible ... what they’ve done to keep her spirit alive.”

Her parents have integrated their daughter’s memory in every space they can. Outside the once muddy area where Jenny used to wait for them after music class, her school has created the “Jenny friendship court”, a lit space where students wait to be collected.

At the local library, the “Jenny Lin teen room” is always packed with young people who share her love of reading and spending time with friends. “We wanted to do things that Jenny would have wanted to do herself if she would have the opportunity ... We just miss her, we miss her a lot,” Ms Lin said.

The parents believe that someone out there will help them find closure. “It’s just hard,” Mr Lin said. “We really need to catch this killer. Sooner or later, this crime is going to be solved.”

Anyone with information about Jenny’s murder is asked to contact the Alameda County Sheriff’s Office at 510-667-3636 or the Jenny Lin hotline at 855-4-JENNY-LIN.

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Andrea Blanco



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