

Action News 5 Investigates: Buried Secrets

Posted: Sep 14, 2009 3:25 PM CDT

Updated: Sep 15, 2009 8:49 AM CDT

By Janice Broach - bio | email | Twitter | Facebook

MEMPHIS, TN (WMC-TV) - Rodney Mills is a man who behind bars in Tennessee, convicted in the murder of a Memphis man nearly 15 years ago. Last month, he told Action News 5 he set up the man's wife to make it look like she was part of a murder for hire plot.

During that interview, Mills also confessed to another crime - one that took Janice Broach deep into rural Mississippi.

Jeff Harmon disappeared more than 20 years ago in Monroe County, Mississippi. His father, Noel, is haunted by his son's disappearance.

"Never heard from him again after that Saturday afternoon," Noel Harmon said. "It's always on my mind."

Now, Rodney Mills is confessing to Jeff Harmon's murder.

"I'm telling you I done it," he said. "I put the man in the grave yard where he's at."

Sheriff Andy Hood confirmed to Action News 5 that Harmon disappeared and was apparently murdered in 1985. His body has never been found.

"Harmon was killed," Hood said. "Apparently, for a day or two he was hauled around in the back of a car. They went to Mills' residence. He agreed to dispose of the body."

Hood said one of Mills' own family members tied him to Harmon's murder.

"It was one of his family that said Rodney had disposed of the body," he said.

The body was allegedly disposed of in a cemetery just 300 yards behind where Mills used to live. Mills thought it would be the perfect place to bury the body, because there was already a freshly dug grave there. Mills said he dug the grave back up, put Harmon's body in it, and covered it over.

"There was this guy they had buried a couple of days before, so I went down there - they wanted me to get rid of this body," he said. "I go down there and dig the grave up, and then when they kill him, they bring me the body. I bring him down there and put him on top of the coffin, and cover him back up. He's been down there since 1985."

Investigators wanted Mills to tell them where he buried Harmon. Several years ago, they sent him cemetery pictures in jail. Mills pointed out a spot on the pictures where the body allegedly was.

"We went to our circuit court clerk, got a search warrant, and found just one body," Hood said.

Hood said that left the case stalled, as prosecutors no longer believed Mills. However, they never actually brought him to the cemetery to show them where he allegedly buried Harmon's body. But, that might happen soon.

"Our hope is we get Rodney here," Hood said. "We find the body, and Rodney talks."

If Mills can find the right burial site, it would bring closure for Jeff Harmon's family.

"I would love to give him a proper burial," said his father, Noel Harmon. "Don't just leave him out in the cold dark swamp."

Investigators said Mills might be able to give them enough to charge the suspects in Harmon's murder and at least 5 other murders that happened around the same time.

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Harmon family hoping for closure in missing person case

by Ray Van Dusen/Monroe Journal 3 months ago | 429 views | 0 | 5 | | HATLEY – Quiet. Shy. Generous. Would give you the last dollar he had. Not one mean bone in his body. Kept to himself and minded his own business. Loved people and loved to be around them. These words and phrases come to paint the personality of Jeff Harmon from close relatives' recollections.

"Jeff was an only child and he and his mother and father would come over to our house for Sunday dinner every week. Since Jeff lived in Amory at the time, my brothers would tease him because they were country boys. Jeff didn't know what an electric fence was so they'd throw the football that direction and laugh when he ran into it. No matter what they did to him, he would always come back the following Sunday. He was like our brother," said a close relative who chose to remain nameless.

Harmon disappeared on June 29, 1985 from the home he and his mother, Peggy, lived in on Aberdeen's Thayer Avenue. He was 23 at the time.

"The last time Jeff talked to his father was on a Thursday. They talked about buying Jeff a used car. He went missing on Saturday, which caused suspicion with his father. Peggy was in the hospital for food poisoning and was released that Tuesday. If I remember correctly, his

paycheck was still on the vanity and from there, his parents knew something was wrong,” the relative said.

Initially, confusion set in for the first couple of weeks following Harmon’s disappearance. The family was unclear if he had picked up and left town or if something far worse had happened, as he had recently been rewarded a settlement out of court involving a previous lawsuit and had received threats in relation to the outcome.

“Our confusion was followed by anger why there were no answers to our questions followed by years and years of grief,” the relative said.

Harmon’s case was written off as being one of several unsolved murders in Monroe County in the 80s and early 90s.

“I don’t know how many times I went to the law enforcement agencies asking them to investigate it more and they kept telling me the same thing, ‘Without a body, he’s not necessarily dead and there’s not much that can be done,’” said Noel Harmon, Jeff’s father.

At the time of Harmon’s disappearance, Noel and Peggy were divorced, but the two would follow up on the hundreds of tips they received involving the case – individually and collectively. From rumors of Harmon’s body being buried in an oil well to any name that came up in connection with the case, the two took it upon themselves to follow up on the leads.

“When you love somebody, you will go anywhere and do anything for them. When you think someone has killed your child, they’ve killed a part of you,” the relative said.

They hired a psychic who said he was buried very close to water. They drafted reward posters and scattered them throughout Amory and Aberdeen.

“After he disappeared, I was always glad to see Christmas come and go,” Harmon said.

Holidays and birthdays were difficult for the family as was any other developing lead.

“I don’t know how many times Noel got calls about missing bodies found here and there and he would have to go through the same hell over and over again,” the relative said.

After years of following up on information, the incident just dissolved, but always remained in Harmon’s family’s minds.

“It was always on my mind. I’ve had so many sleepless nights and several times Jeff was the first and last thing on my mind each day. Things don’t get to me like they used to,” Harmon said.

For the past two years, the Monroe County Sheriff's Department has been in communication with Rodney Mills in connection with the Harmon case. Mills is a Hamilton native serving time for murder in Nashville's Riverbend Maximum Security Institution.

In a recent interview with Memphis' WMC-TV reporter, Janice Broach, Mills said, "They brought the body to me and told me to get rid of it."

Mills' house was within 300 yards of Willis Cemetery, off of Hamilton's Old Nursery Road. The house was burned to the ground shortly after the timeline of the disposal of the body.

"The way I took it, there was a fresh grave that had been filled in and he came back at a more convenient time and put Jeff's body in there," Noell said.

"The whole family whole-heartedly prays this is the closure we've been waiting for. If it's true, we can bury his remains beside his mother. As far as a conviction for those responsible goes, it would be great. If not, it's something they're going to have to carry it to their graves. God have mercy on them," the relative said.

Harmon's 90-year-old grandmother had bought a cemetery plot years ago for her, Peggy and Jeff at New Prospect Cemetery in Lackey so the whole family could be together. Peggy died in 2001 from injuries incurred from an automobile accident.

After receiving the information, the sheriff's department gained permission from one family with a loved one buried in the cemetery to dig up the grave for Harmon's remains, but it turned up unsuccessful.

"We're just waiting for permission to have more graves dug up and for all the paperwork to go through to get Rodney Mills down here to identify which spot he buried the body. After the years, I've become leery of everything so I'm not at 100 percent fulfillment. I wouldn't be surprised either way it goes – if he's telling the truth or lying," Noell said.

"Our family really wants to be there when the investigation goes further and be there if his remains are in that cemetery. Whoever killed Jeff, they know who they are, but I've wondered throughout the years do they know or even care they also killed family. The only difference is we've had to die a slow death day after day and night after night year after year. How very sad it is that someone could do this," the relative said.

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