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IN THE DISTRICT COURT FOR THE STATE OF ALASKA
FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT AT FAIRBANKS

STATE OF ALASKA,

Plaintiff,

vs.

STEVEN HARRIS DOWNS

DOB: 08/31/1974

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Defendant.

Case No. 4FA-19-_____ CR

INFORMATION

I certify this document and its attachments do not contain the (1) name of a victim of a sexual offense listed in AS 12.61.140 or (2) residence or business address or telephone number of a victim of or witness to any offense unless it is an address identifying the place of a crime or an address or telephone number in a transcript of a court proceeding and disclosure of the information was ordered by the court. The following counts charge a crime involving DOMESTIC VIOLENCE as defined in AS 18.66.990: None

Count I - AS 11.41.100(a)(1)(A)

Murder In The First Degree

Steven Harris Downs - 001

Count II - AS 11.41.410(a)(1)

Sexual Assault In The First Degree

Steven Harris Downs - 002

THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROSECUTIONS CHARGES:

Count I

That in the Fourth Judicial District, State of Alaska, on or about April 26, 1993, at or near Fairbanks, STEVEN HARRIS DOWNS intentionally caused the death of another person, Sophie Sergie.

1 All of which is an unclassified felony offense being contrary to and in violation
2 of AS11.41.100(a)(1)(A) and against the peace and dignity of the State of Alaska.

3
4 **Count II**

5 That in the Fourth Judicial District, State of Alaska, on or about April 26, 1993,
6 at or near Fairbanks, STEVEN HARRIS DOWNS engaged in sexual penetration, with
7 Sophie Sergie without the consent of Sophie Sergie and recklessly disregarded Sophie
8 Sergie lack of consent.

9 All of which is an unclassified felony offense being contrary to and in violation
10 of 11.41.410(a)(1) and against the peace and dignity of the State of Alaska.

11 The undersigned swears under oath this Information is based upon a review of
12 Alaska State Trooper reports, forensic testing, reports from the Alaska State Crime
13 Detection Laboratory and other investigative materials submitted to date.

14 Sophie Sergie was a twenty-year-old Native Alaskan woman from Pitkas Point
15 who flew to Fairbanks on April 24, 1993 and stayed with a friend in the University of
16 Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF) dorms. Sergie's body was found in a shower room in Bartlett
17 Hall shortly before 3 p.m. on April 26th. Evidence developed through the investigation
18 showed that Sergie had been sexually assaulted, stabbed multiple times and shot in the
19 back of the head before her body was placed in a bathtub in a second floor bathroom in
20 Bartlett Hall. A DNA profile was developed from samples collected from Sergie's body.
21 Alaska State Troopers (AST) investigated the case thoroughly but were unable to identify
22 the individual who murdered Sergie, until recently.

23 On Friday, April 23, 1993, twenty-year-old Sophie Sergie flew from her home
24 village of Pitkas Point to Bethel and then to Anchorage, where she spent the night with a
25 family friend. The next day, Saturday, April 24th, Sergie flew to Fairbanks. Sergie had
26 previously been a student at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF), but she left
27 college in 1992 to move home to earn money for orthodontic work she needed done.
While visiting Fairbanks in April 1993, she stayed with her friend, Shirley Wasuli, a

1 UAF student who lived in room #227 in Bartlett Hall on the UAF campus. The second
2 floor of Bartlett Hall, where Shirley lived, was for female students only. Sergie intended
3 to spend the weekend with Wasuli and then go to her orthodontist appointment that was
4 scheduled for the morning of Monday, April 26th. After the dental appointment on
5 Monday, Sergie was scheduled to fly home.

6 Sergie spent Saturday running errands in Fairbanks and then hung out on campus
7 that night with friends. Sergie spent Sunday, April 25th, in and around Bartlett Hall.
8 Sunday evening, she went to a movie with three friends, and after the movie, the group
9 went for a drive to the Murphy Dome Recreation Area. Sometime around midnight,
10 Sergie was dropped back off at Bartlett Hall where she met up with Wasuli and Wasuli's
11 boyfriend, Noah Naylor. The three of them ordered a pizza and went to Wasuli's room to
12 eat. Sergie left Wasuli's room to go to the dormitory commons area to get something to
13 drink. She returned to Wasuli's room for a few minutes but then said she wanted to leave
14 again to smoke a cigarette. As Sergie was leaving the room, Wasuli told Sergie that she
15 should go smoke near the exhaust vents in the tub room of the women's bathroom
16 because it was too cold outside.

17 At approximately 1:30 a.m. on the morning of April 26th, Wasuli and Naylor
18 went to Naylor's room in another dormitory, where they spent the night together. Sergie
19 had not returned from smoking when they left, and before leaving, Wasuli left a note on
20 her dorm room door telling Sergie where she and Naylor had gone. At approximately
21 8:50 a.m., Wasuli returned to her dorm room and discovered that Sergie was not there.
22 The note Wasuli left was still on the dorm room door. Wasuli's room appeared to be the
23 same as she had left it, indicating that Sergie never returned. Wasuli looked around the
24 dormitory and commons area but found no sign of Sergie. Later that day, Wasuli called
25 the orthodontist and learned that Sergie had missed her appointment.

26 Monday afternoon at approximately 2:42 p.m., UAF janitors were cleaning the
27 women's bathroom on the east side of the second floor of Bartlett Hall when they
discovered the dead body of a young woman lying in the bathtub in the tub room next to
the shower stalls. UAF Police were called and they secured the scene. AST investigators

1 were summoned, and they took over the investigation. AST investigators immediately
2 began a canvass of Bartlett Hall. They contacted Wasuli and Naylor in Wasuli's dorm
3 room and interviewed them. Wasuli reported that Sergie was missing and told the
4 investigators about Sergie's activities over the past few days. One of the investigators
5 found Sergie's identification card among her belongings still in Wasuli's room. With the
6 ID card, investigators identified the victim in the bathtub as Sergie.

7 The tub room was a small, separate, room next to the shower stalls in the east
8 bathroom. The tub room had a shower stall-type swinging door at the entrance of the
9 room. Sergie's body was found lying on her back in the bathtub with her legs together
10 and bent over to her left. Her feet were in contact with the bottom of the tub. She was
11 wearing shoes and socks. Her pants and underpants had been pulled down past her
12 knees. Her sweater had been pushed up around her neck and armpits. The right cup of
13 her bra had been pushed up, exposing her right breast. The left side of her face was lying
14 against the bottom of the tub, over the drain. Her arms were above her head, below the
15 water spigot. She had multiple stab wounds on the right side of her face, and her face
16 was covered in dried blood. Sophie's clothing and hair were damp, indicating that the
17 water had been run after she was placed in the tub. When her body was removed from
18 the tub, investigators discovered that she had also been shot in the back of the head.
19 Under her body, in the tub drain, investigators recovered Sophie's cigarette lighter.

20 Sergie's body was transported to Anchorage. On April 28th, an autopsy was
21 performed. The autopsy revealed that Sergie had been killed by a single gunshot to the
22 back of her head. The bullet entrance wound appeared to be a close contact wound. The
23 bullet was recovered and later placed into evidence. Sergie had also been stabbed twice
24 in the right corner of her right eye, and the medical examiner concluded that Sergie had
25 been alive when she suffered these stab wounds. Another stab wound was found on her
26 right cheek, but it was determined that this wound likely occurred after Sophie died. All
27 the stab wounds appeared to have been made by a knife with a thin blade. Several
abrasions and marks were observed on Sergie's abdomen and right hip, and a bruise was
noted on her right knee.

1 A female resident of Bartlett Hall indicated she was in the shower on the second
2 floor at approximately 1:30 a.m. on April 26th. The shower stall shared a wall with the
3 tub room where Sergie's body was later discovered. The female resident reported
4 hearing noises coming from the tub room, including thumping and muffled voices.

5 During the autopsy, swabs and gauze were used to collect biological evidence
6 from Sergie's vagina as well other parts of her body. The swabs were subsequently sent
7 the Alaska State Crime Detection Laboratory (SCDL) for analysis. In 1993, DNA
8 technology was not yet being used in Alaska. In the late 90's, using early DNA
9 technology, the crime lab developed what is commonly referred to as a DQA1 DNA
10 profile from evidence collected. The investigators used that profile to compare the DNA
11 of numerous possible suspects in the years following the sexual assault and murder, but
12 none of the comparisons yielded positive results. The bullet recovered from Sergie's
13 head was also sent to the SCDL for analysis. The bullet was determined to be a .22
14 caliber, displaying six lands and grooves with a right-hand twist, but a possible murder
15 weapon was never recovered for comparison purposes.

16 In May of 2000, the unidentified DNA sample collected from Sergie's vagina
17 was processed a second time using a more advanced type of DNA analysis. The source
18 of the DNA was determined to be from a male. The lab tested swabs taken from Sergie's
19 vagina, as well as other samples collected from her body and clothing and found
20 spermatozoa. A Short Tandem Repeat (STR) profile—commonly referred to as a “DNA
21 profile”—was developed from the unidentified DNA sample. The STR profile was
22 uploaded into the Combined DNA Identification System (CODIS) and compared to other
23 STR profiles in this national database, but no identification was made. This indicated
24 that no known male criminal offenders with DNA profiles uploaded into the database
25 matched the DNA profile developed from the swabs collected from Sergie's vaginal area.
26 As the years went by, additional suspects were explored and DNA samples were
27 collected, but all potential suspects were eliminated as the source of the unidentified
DNA. By the end of 2003, the investigation had gone dormant.

1 From 2003 until 2009, various AST investigators continued to work on Sergie's
2 case, but no concrete leads were developed. During the investigation, the police
3 attempted to identify all the people living in Bartlett Hall at the time of the homicide, and
4 investigators attempted to interview all the possible witnesses. Many of the potential
5 witnesses had left Alaska, which made the task more difficult. In 2009, Investigator
6 James Stogsdill, a cold case investigator for the Alaska State Troopers, was assigned to
7 the case, and he conducted an interview with Nicholas Dazer in 2010. At the time of the
8 murder, Dazer was a resident of Bartlett Hall, living in room #305 with Steven Downs.
9 Both Dazer and Downs were briefly interviewed during the initial investigation, and they
10 both denied having any relevant knowledge concerning Sergie's sexual assault and
11 murder.

12 At the time of the murder, Dazer was a student at UAF and was working as a
13 security guard for the university. He was on duty the night of Sergie's disappearance and
14 he subsequently assisted police on the 26th in making sure the crime scene was not
15 disturbed. In addition to that involvement, Inv. Stogsdill chose to re-interview Dazer
16 because he was fired from his job as a security officer for possessing a firearm, which
17 was not permitted in the dorms. When interviewed by Inv. Stogsdill in 2010, Dazer
18 stated he remembered the incident well, but affirmed that he did not know anything of
19 use. Dazer confirmed for Inv. Stogsdill that it was true that he had been fired for
20 possessing a firearm, but he denied owning a .22 caliber gun. However, Dazer did
21 inform Inv. Stogsdill that his roommate, Steven Downs, had a .22 handgun in the dorm
22 room in 1993. Dazer stated that Downs owned an H&R model .22 caliber revolver, as
23 well as some other guns. Later in the investigation, forensic scientist Deborah Gillis,
24 who is the firearms expert at the SCDL, advised AST investigators that six lands and
25 grooves with a right hand twist on a bullet, as was observed on the bullet recovered from
26 Sergie's body, would be consistent with having been fired out of an H&R .22 caliber
27 revolver. However, she also noted that the observed lands and grooves would also be
consistent with a large number of other .22 caliber firearms. Inv. Stogsdill continued to

1 work on the case until he retired, but was unable to identify a concrete suspect and the
2 case went cold again.

3 In 2018, Inv. Randy McPherron was assigned to the case and he decided to
4 consider another investigative approach that had not yet been attempted. Inv. McPherron
5 contacted a lab that uses genealogical databases to identify possible suspects in unsolved
6 criminal cases. The lab agreed to analyze the forensic sample collected in Sergie's case
7 and compare it to the genealogical databases and look for potential suspects. The lab
8 explained that the tool they use, genetic genealogy, employs a type of DNA profile called
9 a Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP). Whereas a STR profile is like a genetic
10 fingerprint of a specific individual, a SNP profile is a genetic blueprint of an individual.
11 The blueprint contains the genetic data that a person shares with their blood relatives.
12 After a SNP profile is generated from an unidentified suspect DNA sample, it is
13 compared to other SNP profiles in a public DNA database, like "GEDmatch." The
14 comparison identifies relatives of the suspect and those names are given to a forensic
15 genealogist, who then employs standard genealogy research methods to potentially
16 further narrow the scope and identify the suspect.

16 On October 10, 2018, the genetic lab contacted AST and informed them that
17 they had completed the genetic analysis of the suspect's SNP profile. The lab had
18 submitted the suspect's SNP profile into a public database and it was compared to the
19 profiles of individuals who had voluntarily submitted their DNA into that database. Two
20 promising matches (second cousins or closer) and three potentially promising matches
21 (third cousin or closer) were identified. The lab forwarded this information on to their
22 forensic genealogist to complete the last step in the process.

23 On December 18, 2018, the lab completed their analysis and sent Inv.
24 McPherron a copy of their genetic genealogy report. Based on its review, the lab
25 identified a likely relative of the suspect. The amount of genetic information shared
26 between the relative and the suspect was consistent with a second-degree relationship,
27 which includes half-siblings, an aunt/nephew or a grandmother/grandson relationship.
Because the relative also shared the same X-DNA (female DNA) as the suspect's DNA

1 profile, the lab reasoned that the connection between the two came from the suspect's
2 mother's side, since males only inherit X-DNA from their mothers. The genealogy
3 research revealed that the identified relative has no known maternal half-brothers and no
4 known biological children of her own—and therefore, had no biological grandchildren
5 either. Through a thorough process of elimination, the lab determined that the known
6 relative to the DNA profile only had one possible second-degree relationship with a male
7 relative, her nephew, Steven H. Downs (DOB: 08/31/1974).

8 The genealogical study further revealed that Steven H. Downs was born in
9 Maine and he graduated from high school there in June 1992. Downs left Maine and
10 attended college in Fairbanks, Alaska at UAF in the Fall of 1992. As noted above, at the
11 time of the sexual assault and murder, Downs was living in the same building where
12 Sergie was killed. Various witnesses during the investigation placed him in the building
13 on the night the incident occurred. After attending college at UAF from 1992 to 1996,
14 Downs lived for a time in Arizona; he ultimately returned to Maine. Downs was most
15 recently employed as a nurse living in the Auburn, Maine area. Downs has no previous
16 arrests, and his DNA has never been uploaded to the national database. Thus, the sample
17 in the database from Sergie's vaginal swab has never previously been compared to
18 Downs' DNA profile.

19 On February 13, 2019, Maine State Police, working with AST, contacted Downs
20 at his home in Maine. Downs recalled that a female had been murdered at his dorm at
21 UAF. He told Maine officers that he did not know the female and that he had never been
22 in contact with her. When the Maine police officers showed him a picture of Sergie,
23 Downs stated that he recognized Sergie from posters that had been put up around the time
24 of the murder, but confirmed that he did not know her and didn't believe he had ever
25 been in contact with her. Downs said that he lived on the third floor of the dorm but
26 predominantly stayed with his girlfriend, who lived on the fourth floor of the dorm.
27 Downs indicated that he didn't believe he ever even been on the second floor of the
building. Downs said he believed he had been in his girlfriend's room most of the
evening that Sergie was killed. Downs repeatedly told the detectives that he suspected

1 soldiers from Ft. Wainwright were responsible for Sergie's murder because they were
2 often in the building. He assured the detectives that if he knew anything about the
3 incident at all, he "would have been forthright from the jump." He stated, "I never knew
4 or saw anything to begin with." Before concluding the interview, the detectives showed
5 him the pictures of Sergie again and he again said "I remember the pictures, it's terrible,
6 poor girl," but he again denied knowing Sergie.

7 On February 14, 2019, a search warrant was executed to search Downs' house
8 and to obtain a buccal swab to develop a known DNA sample of Downs' DNA. In
9 anticipation of Downs' known DNA sample being collected, the Alaska SCDL had
10 coordinated with the Maine State Crime Lab to provide them with the information
11 necessary to do an immediate comparison of Downs' DNA profile to the profiles
12 developed from Sergie's vaginal swabs. The Maine State Crime Lab analyzed Downs'
13 buccal swab and confirmed that his DNA profile matched the profile of the DNA sample
14 developed from Sergie's vaginal swabs.

15 BAIL INFORMATION

16 Per the Alaska Public Safety Information Network, the defendant has the
17 following convictions in Alaska:

18 None.

19 Dated at Anchorage, Alaska, this 15 day of February, 2019.

20
21 KEVIN G. CLARKSON
22 ATTORNEY GENERAL

23 By: 

24 Paul J. Miovas, Jr.
25 Assistant Attorney General
26 Alaska Bar No. 0808051
27