

# Palo Alto Weekly

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Dear CNPA judges:

Reporting on the 1970s cold-case murder of Andy Kinyon led journalist Sue Dremann on an adventure that required patience, trust-building, extremely careful analysis and enterprising research. Uncovering the whole story was complicated significantly by the fact that the investigating law enforcement agencies – the San Francisco Police Department and San Francisco District Attorney’s Office – refused to respond to Dremann’s inquiries.

Nonetheless, she doggedly pursued leads and was able to carefully piece together what likely happened to Kinyon that night in San Francisco and also tell the compelling tale of a family’s stubborn resolve in “Searching for their father’s killer.”

Most of the case file documents that Dremann relied on had been provided to her by a “deep throat” source who insisted on remaining anonymous. The documents had been photographed and those images shared with her.

In addition to case files, she used archived news stories and court criminal-case databases to put together the criminal history of the alleged killer and timelines for his whereabouts. When the online data didn’t reach back far enough, she called the county courts in states where she knew he had resided to find out about cases and sentencing.

She found the contact information for the original, long-retired detective on the case. She wanted to both interview him and get him to confirm the authenticity of the case files she had received. Given the acrimony between the victim’s son and the detective, it took a little convincing to get him to trust that Dremann wasn’t out to do a hatchet job on him.

To verify the investigative documents’ authenticity, Dremann also compared the handwriting and signature of the lead detective, which was on the tattered case file cover, with the handwritten investigative notes and interviews that were part of the case file.

Among other hurdles to reporting: Since the DA’s Office didn’t charge the assailant, there were no court records for the case. Also, most of the witnesses and other players had died or disappeared years ago.

Building this story required Dremann to cultivate trust. All of the parties had been deeply wounded by years of failed communication, acrimony and trauma. Information was not handed over all at once. At each step of the reporting process, Dremann had to ask if there was a particular document to confirm statements or aspects of the crime or timeline. It took time to understand what had happened and to corroborate each part of the story.

In addition, the alleged killer had multiple aliases. Even the detectives' spelling of his name varied, as did the name of the victim, who also used an alias. So researching data and confirming identities proved challenging.

Some witness interviews also required careful study and comparison to corroborate the timeline and whereabouts of the killer in the hours before the homicide; some of the police interviews had discrepancies that she had to resolve.

She also plotted out the locations of each spot the victim and the assailant were said to have been at particular times, which were relevant prior to the crime and afterward, to see if the locations were plausible in the given timelines and locations mentioned in the witness statements.

After the article was published, Dremann did not receive any objections from anyone who had been interviewed or who had refused to be interviewed.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Dong

Editor, Palo Alto Weekly