

"THIS WAS HUGE"

Sacramento County Sheriff Scott Jones calls the arrest of Joseph James DeAngelo, 72 (in an April 25 mugshot, left, and a 1973 photo, right, near police sketch of suspect), "like catching Jack the Ripper."



AN ARREST AFTER 40 YEARS

THE GOLDEN STATE SERIAL KILLER CAUGHT?

Police say Joseph James DeAngelo—an ex-cop and a father of three—is one of the nation's most prolific serial killers and rapists *By* **JOHNNY DODD** *and* **CHRISTINE PELISEK**

FROM LEFT, SACRAMENTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT/
GETTY IMAGES; FBI; THE SUN-GAZETTE NEWSPAPER

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ore than four decades have passed since the Golden State Killer began his bloody 10-year rampage of murder and rape across California, leaving 12 people dead and more than 50 women sexually assaulted. Also known as the Original Night Stalker and the East Area Rapist, he struck terror around the San Francisco Bay area, Santa Barbara and Orange County from 1976 through 1986—before he seemingly vanished into thin air. But even as the case grew colder, police

vowed never to stop the hunt. "This guy," says Sacramento County Sheriff Scott Jones, "was one of the most prolific sexual offenders and serial killers in modern history."

Now, after 40 years, police say the notorious case is finally solved. Late in the afternoon on April 24 a SWAT team of federal and local officers arrested Joseph James DeAngelo, a 72-year-old retired mechanic and former police officer, at his suburban Citrus Heights, Calif., home. The following day he was charged with four savage murders—with more charges expected. "There was a needle in the haystack," Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert tells *People*.

“And we found that damn needle.”

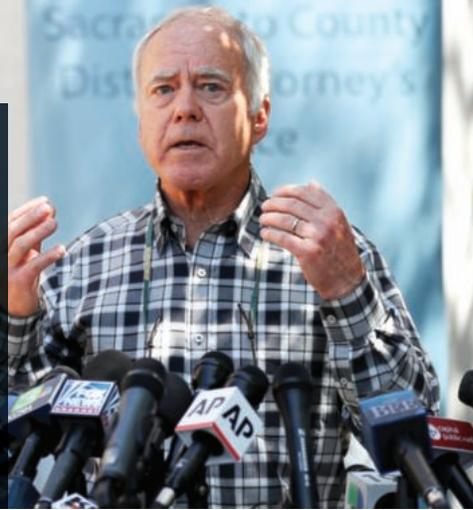
The arrest stunned even those closest to the case. Actor Patton Oswalt, whose late wife, crime writer Michelle McNamara, had spent years of her life investigating the Golden State Killer, got news of the arrest the day after filming began on an HBO documentary of her book about the case, *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*. Though police say no new leads came from the book, “I just feel very, very happy that her work wasn’t in vain,” Oswalt told *Entertainment Weekly*.

DeAngelo, who had been fired from the Auburn police department in 1979 after allegedly shoplifting a hammer and a can of dog repellent from a grocery, is believed to have committed over two dozen sexual assaults throughout Northern California between June 1976 and July 1978 before launching a murder spree that spread to Southern California. Eight of the victims were married couples, and the killer was known to stack teacups on his male victims’ backs, then threaten to kill everyone if he heard a clatter while he sexually assaulted their wives. He often wore a ski mask, enjoyed taunting law enforcement and had a penchant for taking souvenirs from his crime scenes. DNA evidence linked the same suspect with all the crimes, but police couldn’t zero in on him. “Our task force had a list of 8,000 suspects,” says retired Orange County Sheriff’s Department investigator Larry Poole. “But no one was ever identified.”

By 2018 the case had long gone cold, but Schubert put together a task force that began studying the last-remaining samples of DNA evidence taken from a 1980 double murder in Ventura County. Using a novel and controversial technique, investigators then compared the DNA markers available on the public genealogy Web site GEDMatch with their known crime-scene sample. “We wanted to use every option

A BROTHER'S PAIN

“He’s in jail now; he’s history,” Bruce Harrington, whose sister Patrice was murdered by the Golden State Killer in 1980, told reporters on April 25.



available to get to the answer,” Schubert says.

With a DNA link matched to DeAngelo’s relatives, police zeroed in on DeAngelo, a father of three grown children who, after his police days were over, worked 27 years as a mechanic for a grocery chain before retiring last year. Police spent six days watching DeAngelo as he pattered around the meticulously tended yard at the home he shared with a daughter and granddaughter. After retrieving and analyzing two DNA samples from his trash, officers arrested DeAngelo as he opened his garage door around 5 p.m. on April 24. “I have a roast in the oven,” he reportedly told officers before being taken to the Sacramento County Jail’s psychiatric ward, where he’s been placed on suicide watch.

‘WITHOUT DNA, HIS NAME NEVER WOULD HAVE SURFACED. PERIOD’

—SACRAMENTO D.A. ANNE MARIE SCHUBERT

While many in DeAngelo’s quiet neighborhood were stunned by the arrest—“Nobody thinks that their next-door neighbor is a serial killer,” says Kevin Tapia, who lived next door to DeAngelo for more than 20 years—investigators weren’t surprised to learn that DeAngelo was a former police officer. “Much of his behavior seemed to indicate he could have been in law enforcement,” says Poole, “given the control he exercised over the victims. It makes sense he would have been able to dodge us for so long.”

Still, DeAngelo’s first appearance in court on April 27, handcuffed to a wheelchair, marked a strangely mundane final twist to a case that has haunted California law enforcement and the public for decades. “I’m speechless, almost sick to my stomach because I’m so excited,” says Jane Carson-Sandler, now 72, who was tied up and raped by the killer in bed beside her 3-year-old son in 1976. “His arrest is a dream come true.” ●

A KILLER'S VICTIMS

Police say the Golden State Killer murdered 12 in California between 1978 and 1986



CHERI DOMINGO, 35
GREGORY SANCHEZ, 27



DR. ROBERT OFFERMAN, 44



LYMAN SMITH, 43
CHARLENE SMITH, 33



JANELLE CRUZ, 18



KATIE MAGGIORE, 20
BRIAN MAGGIORE, 21



DR. DEBRA MANNING, 35



KEITH HARRINGTON, 24
PATRICE HARRINGTON, 27



MANUELA WITTHUHN, 28

FROM TOP: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES; RICH PEDRONCELLI/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK; VICTIMS: (DOMINGO & SANCHEZ) COURTESY DEBBI DOMINGO; (SMITH) COURTESY SMITH FAMILY; (MAGGIORE) COURTESY KENNETH SMITH



Investigators remove evidence from DeAngelo’s home on April 26.