

Elkridge man charged with killing wife, who disappeared in 1991

The backyard of the house at 6050 Claire Drive, in Elkrdige, has two sheds. (Photo by David Greisman)

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County police have charged an Elkridge man in the killing of his wife, who disappeared 21 years ago, after finding a woman's remains Wednesday buried underneath a backyard shed.

Robert Arnold Jarrett, 57, of the 6000 block of Claire Drive, is facing one count of first-degree murder and one count of second-degree murder, according to Sherry Llewellyn, spokeswoman for the Howard County Police Department.

Jarrett was arrested when police stopped his vehicle Wednesday night in Prince Frederick in Calvert County, where, according to court records, he currently lives. He is being held without bail at the Howard County Detention Center in Jessup.

Christine Jarrett was reported missing on Jan. 5, 1991. Robert Jarrett told police that she had walked away after an argument. She was 34 years old at the time.

"She was never seen or heard from again," Llewellyn said. "Police suspected foul play but did not have evidence at the time to prove it."

However, detectives recently received information "that reinforced the possibility that the case may have involved foul play," she said.

On Wednesday, detectives returned to the home on Claire Drive, where Robert Jarrett's current wife lives. The couple is separated. Property records show Robert Jarrett as its owner.

The woman gave police permission to search the property. Investigators found the remains of a woman, whom they believe is Christine Jarrett, underneath the floorboards of a shed and buried in concrete.

Personal effects located with the body suggest that it is likely her, police said. On Friday, police announced that the medical examiner had confirmed Christine Jarrett's identity through dental records. The cause of death is pending.

According to court records, Robert Jarrett filed a petition in Howard County Circuit Court in 1996 for Christine Jarrett to be declared dead.

On Jan. 28, 1998, the court did declare Christine Jarrett dead, declared the date of her death to be June 10, 1993, and ordered the chief medical examiner to issue a death certificate with that

information and "additional information" about Christine Jarrett provided by Robert Jarrett, according to court records.

Robert Jarrett's current wife had little to say about the case Thursday afternoon.

"I understand it's an ongoing investigation. It wouldn't be proper for me to make a comment at this time," she said as she got out of her car in front of her home.

"It's not easy," she said.

A mailbox with "The Jarretts" and several hand-drawn hearts on it stood in front of her home. Two sheds were visible in the far corners of the back yard, one clearly newer and the other older. Police found the remains under the older shed, Llewellyn said.

Several neighbors, some of whom have lived on Claire Drive since before Christine Jarrett disappeared, said they were shocked at Robert Jarrett's arrest.

"Who thinks about anything like what we're now finding out happened?" said Joyce Welsh, who has lived several houses up the street since 1972. "You shake a little bit to think something like that has gone on in your neighborhood, someone that you knew."

Barbara Keir was visiting her father, who has lived on Claire Drive since 1984. She recalled a psychic who visited the street after Christine Jarrett disappeared and said the woman was close by.

"The rumor at the time was that he killed her," Keir, now of Bel Air, said Thursday. "Everyone was convinced. It was the way that he acted — just out there. It didn't ever matter that she was gone."

Police initially believed Christine Jarrett had walked away with nearly \$4,000 that had been withdrawn two weeks prior, according to a *Baltimore Sun* report from March 1991.

Robert and Christine had been married for 16 years. Their two sons were 5 and nearly 11 when the boys last saw their mother.

"It's sickening just thinking the sons would go out to the shed to get something and be walking over that," said Marty Giuliano, who has lived three doors away for 20 years. "It's hard to think about."

Staff writer Kevin Rector contributed to this article.

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