Who killed Jane Doe 1971?
Genealogist, Bedford officer won't give up on cold case

Melinde Lutz Byrne is a person who connects the dots. She found that out after first meeting her a couple of years ago when the 10th annual New England Regional Genealogical Conference came to Manchester.

The Bedford resident is highly respected in her field. She is one of the 50 living fellows of the American Society of Genealogists, an author and the director of the Genealogical Research Program at Boston University.

She can trace your family tree, starting from the roots at the top branch, by digging through records from libraries and courthouses, municipal documents, church registers, census records and published letters.

This work has helped prove with and aid doctors trying to understand the origins of hereditary issues in families.

Lutz, in many ways, is a storyteller. But these stories always start with a name. That’s why she is so intrigued by the Jane Doe case of 1971.

There was no name attached to the woman a hunter found in wooded area along Kilton Road in Bedford on Oct. 6, 1971. Just her remains.

The area borders with traffic near Kilton Road was a dead end back then and still a good place for hunters to track game during the fall season. One of them came across a pile of brush, the smell overpowering.

He stuck his gun into the pile and uncovered a skull. He ran off and called police. It was the lead story in the next day’s edition of the Manchester Union Leader.

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One of the headlines read: “Hunter Makes Grave Find, Probe Began.” But the investigation went nowhere. There was no name attached to the woman a hunter found in wooded area along Kilton Road in Bedford on Oct. 6, 1971. Just her remains.

That’s where Melinde Byrne comes in. A woman died less than five miles from her own home and no one knows who she is. Lutz doesn’t think that is right.

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It is almost 40 years since Jane Doe was found and the various officers who have taken their crack at solving the case have not been able to identify the body.

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lenged by the fact that the skills I have as a genealogist can and have been used to solve cases like this,” Lutz said.

She gave the students in her forensic research class at BU three similar cases to study. She said they were able to identify two fairly quickly, but not Jane Doe.

She has worked with the Bedford Police Department and detectives for the Cold Case Unit of the New Hampshire Department of Justice. Her credentials have given her a confidence that has allowed her to form a relationship with the police.

“She’s hasn’t been pushy, she’s not running around like she’s a police officer,” Bedford Police

Genealogist Melinde Lutz Byrne of Bedford meets with Bedford Police Chief David Bailey at the spot “Jane Doe 1971” was found off Kilton Road in Bedford in October 1971. Lutz, who teaches a genealogical research certificate program at Boston University, holds photos made by an artist of what the woman may have looked like.

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Rabbi seeks to ‘rebrand’ movement

By ANTHONY LANSING

LAS VEGAS — Three hundred rabbis walked into a Las Vegas convention center to try to transform the Conservative Jewish movement into a modern church.

Over three days, roughly one of every three American Jews identified as Conservative. Since then, Conservative synagogue membership has declined by 14 percent and by 30 percent in the Northeast, the traditional stronghold of Conservative Judaism.

By 2010, only one in five Jews in the U.S. identified as Conservative, according to the American Jewish Committee. The Reform and Orthodox movements also saw declines, although not nearly as steep. Reform Judaism for a time claimed the most adherents but today that distinction goes to people who identify themselves “just Jewish,” meaning they don’t answer with any of the traditional denominational labels. Many are ecumenically social.

But that is about to change, said Rabbi Schuhl Finken, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly and one of those trying to save the Conservative movement. Con- ventionally, he said, “We’re not in crisis, but we’re in urgent need of rebranding the institutions of Jewish life.”

Conservative Judaism has many strengths. It includes some of the most vibrant congregations in American Jewish life and some of the most prominent rabbis, among them Daniel Wolf of Temple Sinai, Temple Beth Shalom and Beth Jacob of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, also in L.A., and Harold Abrahamson of N.Y., author of “When Ends Happen in Good People.”

But as the rabbi gathered at a Las Vegas resort much of the talk was about the urgent need for change.

The movement’s problems, many agree, begin with its name, which has nothing to do with political conservatism and doesn’t describes a community that accepts openly gay and lesbian rabbis and forbids the Bible is open to interpretation. That’s just for starters.

Deep dissatisfaction with the organization of Conservative Judaism prompted a movement of rabbis to say that denomination’s continu- ing identity needed a slogan, one that’s short and memorable. Some said dues give congregants a sense of ownership.

Rabbis know the woman was implanted both split, resulting in two sets of identical twins. Privately, Katz said, “My heart sank.”

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