



Seattle Police Department Case Investigation Report

Case Investigation Report: 94-156500

Type of Crime Suicide
Date of Incident 4/8/1994
Submitted by: Detective Michael Ciesynski

CMS- Administrative Clearance (A)

Entities:

COBAIN, KURT DONALD
W/M/02-20-1967

Investigation:

As the 20th anniversary of Kurt Cobain's death was approaching, the SPD Public Information Unit asked if I would review the case file and answer some questions from the media. During the initial investigation, I had a small role that included taking a taped statement 2 years after the incident. Therefore, my knowledge of the investigation was limited.

At the time of Kurt Cobain's death I knew very little about him or his band Nirvana. I ordered the case file from SPD records vault and checked out all of the remaining evidence from SPD Evidence. I contacted the King County Medical Examiner's office and ordered the Autopsy report. I reviewed all material contained in the case file binders, the Autopsy and Toxicology report and viewed all evidence. I interviewed King County, Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Richard Harruff in regards to the autopsy and toxicology report. I contacted and spoke with retired Detective Jim Yoshida, who was one of the original case detectives. The other original case detective, Detective Steve Kirkland, is unfortunately deceased. In addition to reading official reports, I read numerous articles and watched several documentaries on the death of Kurt Cobain.

Photographs: 35 mm film and Polaroid's were used to record the scene. 4 rolls of 35 mm film were not developed and were held in the records vault before being turned over to the evidence room. It has been my experience from working Cold Case Homicides for 10 years that certain evidence deteriorates over time, especially after 20 years. As a homicide detective I have an obligation to preserve evidence that I believe may lose its value due to decay. I recovered this film and requested it be developed by the SPD Photo Laboratory. SPD Photo Lab Supervisor Sean Jordan had to use the King County Sheriff's Photo lab as SPD no longer processes 35 mm film. When I received the developed photos, I observed a green tint on all of them. Jordan stated that the green tint was due to



Seattle Police Department Case Investigation Report

Case Investigation Report: 94-156500

the film deterioration. I requested the Photo Lab to clean up the 35 mm film (green tint) and place on a cd along with the Polaroid's. The photos depicted the victim (Cobain) and the scene. Most of photographs are from same angle as the Polaroid's.

Autopsy Report: The Autopsy report was prepared by Assistant Medical Examiner, Nikolas Hartshorne, M.D. (deceased) and approved by Chief Medical Examiner, Donald Reay, M.D. This reports states that the cause of death is attributed to a contact penetrating shotgun wound to the head (mouth). It further states that, "in view of the scene and circumstances surrounding his (Cobain) death, the manner of death is classified as suicide". The Pathological Diagnoses also states "Evidence of parenteral drug use, including needle tracks and fresh needle puncture wounds". The Blood test results indicate Morphine level, 1.52 mg/L (milligrams per Liter). Blood Ethanol was negative. Dr. Harruff advised that this was a large amount of Morphine (heroin), and that tolerance is extremely important when evaluating opiate levels. With tolerant individuals, very high levels can be achieved far more than a non-tolerant person.

Note: The note recovered from scene was examined by a Washington State Patrol Forensic Document Examiner. The examiner concluded that the note was written by Kurt Cobain. On 4-14-94, Wendy O'Connor, the victim's mother, met with Detectives Yoshida and Kirkland. Ms. O'Connor stated that she had read the note, and it was her opinion that the victim wrote it.

Weapon: When I first looked at the 35 mm crime scene photos, I noticed that the Remington 20 gauge shotgun was lying on victim's chest with the receiver facing up. I also observed a spent yellow shell casing lying on a coat at the right side of the photo. In the magazine I could observe a yellow round not fully chambered, that appeared to have malfunctioned. I was aware that for the spent casing to have landed to the victims left, the weapon would have had to been turned 180 degrees from what it was found. It appeared evident to what had happened when the weapon was fired, but I requested assistance from SPD Range Armorer Curt Wilson. I showed Officer Wilson a photo of victim holding the weapon, but I did not identify the victim. Officer Wilson stated that the fired round would have ejected in the direction where it was found and the second round probably malfunctioned due to victim holding the barrel, which prevented free movement of the barrel. The weapon probably pivoted when fired, and fell to the present position. Held in this manner, the fired round would have ejected to where it was depicted in the photo. The ammunition was Winchester 20 gauge, target load. The wounds victim sustained were consistent with the effects that would have come from a 20 gauge shotgun with target load ammunition.

Inside of the bag containing the shotgun shells, I recovered a sales receipt for \$6.95, which was dated 4-2-94. On the box of 20 gauge ammunition is a price sticker for \$6.95 from "Seattle Guns". The front



Seattle Police Department Case Investigation Report

Case Investigation Report: 94-156500

of the box describes that each box contains 25 shotgun shells. I counted 22 yellow, 20 gauge shotgun shells in the box. 2 live shells were recovered from the shotgun, and one spent shell from atop victim's jacket. "Seattle Guns" was located just south of 145th and Aurora. In the original detectives follow-up it was noted that a Gray Top Taxi picked up a male from the Cobain residence on the morning of 4-2-94. This male advised the cab driver that he wanted to find a place to buy some bullets since he had recently been burglarized. The cab driver dropped this person off in the area of 145th and Aurora.

Some theorists have suggested that a 20 gauge shotgun would have caused more than the penetrating wounds sustained by victim. This is a completely false assumption. Studies conducted have shown that the wounds sustained by victim were consistent with the load and gauge of the recovered weapon.

Conclusion: Based on my experience from reviewing the evidence, reports and interview transcriptions, the investigation on the death of Kurt Cobain, which was conducted 20 years ago, reached the correct conclusion that the manner of death was (Suicide).