

Who was Donald Webb and where did he go?

By: [R. Marc Kantrowitz](#) May 20, 2022

There was blood, a lot of it — evidence of a violent struggle — on the typically quiet parking lot of the Agway store, as well as in and on the police cruiser with its door open.

Type A as it would turn out, the same blood type of the now-dead police chief. Type O of the person who killed him, and who himself was also likely shot, given the trail of blood back to the car in which the killer came and left.

Two bullets hit the chief, both fired from his own now-missing gun. On the seat of the cruiser lay a clipboard that indicated a piece of paper had been ripped from it. Far more importantly, on the ground was a driver's license: Stanley Portas, age 50, 41 S. Main St., Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

The police had far more than a clue; they had, in all likelihood, the identity and location of the killer. Also a description — a white male with longish hair, wearing aviator glasses and driving a white car.

He was found 37 years later.

On Dec. 4, 1980, several of the residents of Saxonburg, a small town in rural western Pennsylvania with two full-time police officers and a volunteer fire department, started thinking about the upcoming Christmas holiday. Certainly its young police chief, 31-year-old Greg Adams, had it on his mind if for no other reason than his son Ben would be turning 3 on the 24th. With another child, a 7-month-old, he and his wife, Mary Ann, had much on their proverbial plate.

Adams in many ways typified small-town America. Taciturn, professional and pleasant, he left his job as a police officer in Washington, D.C., due to the guns, violence and danger. He preferred the safety and friendliness of Saxonburg, where, as the cliché goes, no one locked their doors and greetings were plentiful. Crimes were rare; murders unheard of. One occurred in 1942. The second on Dec. 4, 1980.

Nine days after Adams' slaying, the police arrived in Phillipsburg, where they were chagrined to find that no one had ever heard of Stanley Portas, nor could they locate anyone matching his description. Stanley Portas had never voted, paid taxes or utility or phone bills, and wasn't listed in any town records.

The dig had to go deeper. They soon discovered that Portas had a second driver's license, in Richmond, Virginia, with an address of 2325 West Broad St. A team went there to check out the lead.

Meanwhile, in Jersey, evidence of Portas taking a driver's exam, listing an address of a local hotel, surfaced. When told a permanent address was needed, he gave the South Main Street one.

Leaving no stone unturned, investigators learned at the local post office that a forwarding address for South Main Street directed mail to be delivered to RD#2, still in Phillipsburg. When the woman living there was shown a picture of Portas, she neither could identify him nor explain why his mail was forwarded to her.

But at 2 in the morning she changed her story. She phoned the police and told them she had lied. She had met Portas the spring of that year, 1980, and in the months following met him and his friend at a local popular restaurant/bar.

Portas had told her they were from Georgia and sold junk jewelry, and that they were staying at a local hotel. He seemed nice, if not charming, and dressed well. At one point he told her he needed to have some mail forwarded and offered to pay her if he could use her address. She agreed to his \$50 offer.

The police went to the hotel where he had stayed, never expecting to find him still there but hoping his stay revealed something of value. It did.

Upon check-in, he gave a work address of 2325 West Broad St. in Richmond, along with the license plate number of the rental car he was driving. The car was traced to an agency in Allentown whose owner remembered Portas as a frequent and good customer, well-mannered and well-dressed, who rented five different vehicles over 30 weeks starting earlier that year.

Although a credit card was required to be on file, Portas always paid in cash. Once when Portas was due a refund, the agency provided one via a check. The police anxiously asked if the check had been cashed and, as was the bank practice then, returned to the agency.

It had: a \$333.90 refund, cashed at a bank in New Bedford, Massachusetts, on July 29, 1980, into the account of Lillian Webb.

When a local New Bedford police lieutenant was shown a picture of Portas, he immediately exclaimed, "That's Donald Webb!"

On Feb. 28, 1956, 25-year-old Stanley Portas died, leaving behind his pregnant wife, Lillian. She eventually remarried, five years to the day of Stanley's death. Her new husband, Donald Webb, used among his various aliases that of her late husband. False names came in handy for one in Webb's profession, a member of the Fall River Gang, which specialized in various heists up and down the East Coast.

The investigation of Webb and his crew revealed men polite to the staffs at the establishments and hotels in which they stayed, inordinately neat and well-groomed, complete with shoes highly shined. They also tipped generously.

In later 1980, Webb was again on the lam, having skipped out on a western New York court date for attempted burglary.

With the true name of the killer in hand, the police were closing in, or so they thought. A complicating factor might have been the very close relationship that the lieutenant, who identified Webb, had with Lillian, whose son happened to be a member of the New Bedford Police Department. Regardless, as would soon be discovered, Donald Webb up and vanished.

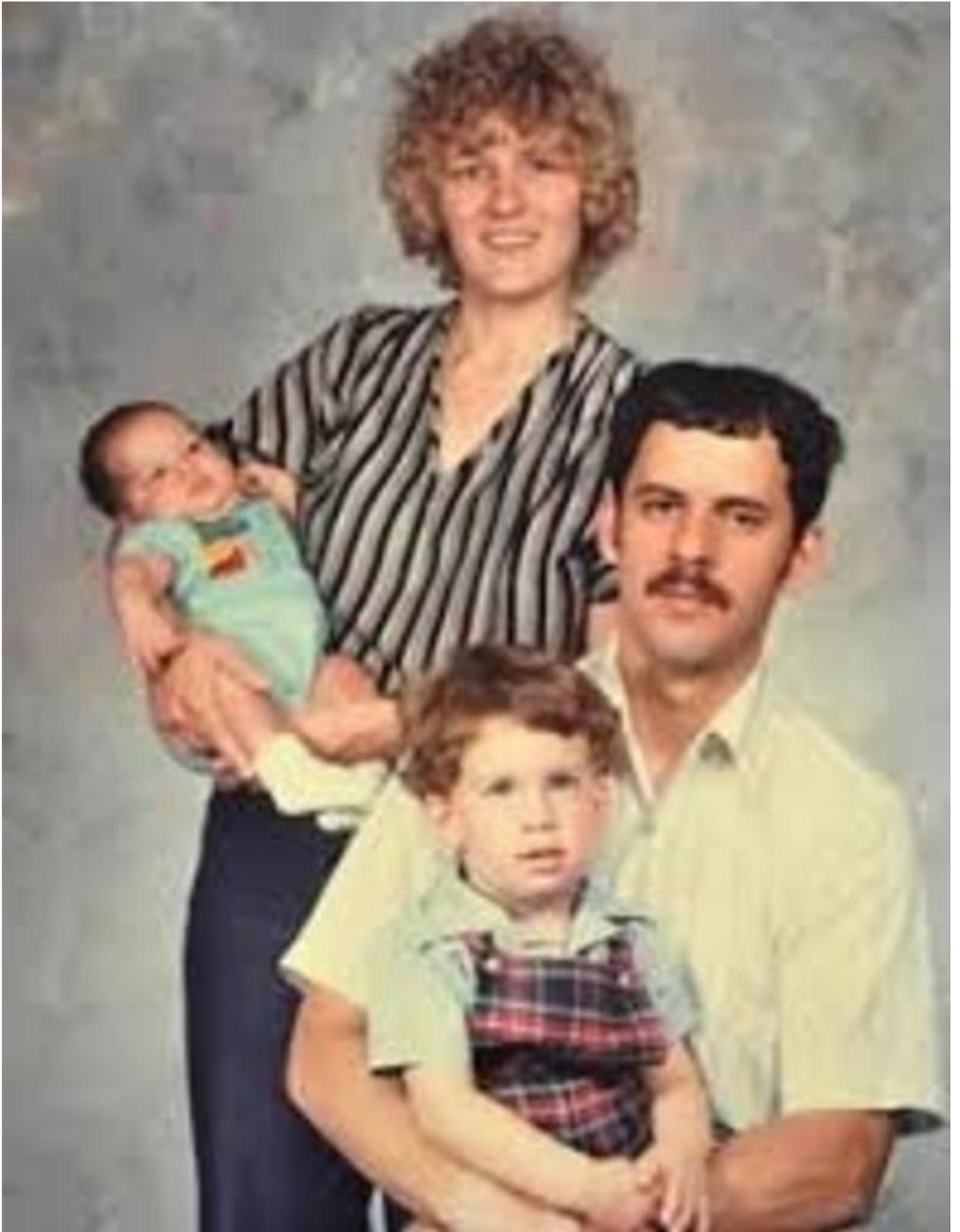
When Lillian, who turned out to be smart, shrewd and tough, was questioned, she insisted she did not know where her husband was and had not seen him for a while, a story she would tell for decades.

In 1981, Webb was placed on the FBI 10 Most Wanted Fugitives list. Leads came in from across the nation of Webb sightings, but all proved fruitless. Two national television shows featured the story, all to no avail.

Determining that Lillian held the key, she was followed. Often realizing she was being tailed, she took evasive actions while driving and succeeded in losing the police. She was also frequently questioned and always stuck to her "I know nothing" story. As the years passed, detectives were reassigned or retired. Their replacements took up the challenge, which always started with Lillian.

And then a new team and tactic. Relentless surveillance of Lillian, now 82, and, even more productive perhaps, convincing Mary Ann, who remarried in 1989, to sue Lillian civilly.

With the pressure now at maximum impact, an either fed-up or worn-down Lillian finally cracked. The year was 2017.



Greg and Mary Adams with their children

Epilogue

Donald Webb had not been shot in his nuclear battle with Chief Adams as earlier thought. However, he had been grievously and permanently wounded, spending days in a hospital under another false name. When he was released, he lived in Lillian's house for most of the time, much like an invalid.

He died in 1999 and was buried in a grave that Lillian, at his request, dug in her backyard.

The above column is based on "The Ghost" (2021) by Maureen Boyle. R. Marc Kantrowitz is a retired Appeals Court judge. He can be contacted at Rmarckantrowitz@comcast.net.



Lillian and Donald Webb



Greg Adams



Webb's hiding place