

NEWSRELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Murderer found after 38 years on the run

Frank Dryman, who killed a Shelby man nearly 60 years ago, was back behind bars Wednesday after nearly four decades on the run. He was found through efforts of a descendent of the victim.

April 4, 1951 was a cold blizzard of a day on the Hi-Line when Frank Dryman was hitchhiking near Shelby. Clarence Pellett stopped to pick up the drifter from California, but didn't know his passenger carried a gun he had bought in Reno before heading north.

Dryman, who said later admitted to fatally shooting Pellett, took his victim's car and drove into Canada where the 19-year-old was arrested by police.

Convicted of murder, Dryman was sentenced in 1955 to life in Montana State Prison. He was paroled in 1969. In March 1972, Dryman disappeared. The Montana Department of Corrections has listed him as an absconder ever since. No Montana offender had been missing longer.

On Tuesday, 38 years later, Dryman – now 78 – was arrested by a Pinal County sheriff's detective.

Dryman, who operated a wedding chapel and notary business in Arizona City, Az., under the alias Victor Houston, was found after Dryman was tracked down by a private investigator hired by Pellett's grandson, Clem, an oral surgeon who lives in Bellevue, Wash.

Dr. Pellett said his father had always warned him against picking up hitchhikers, telling him that one had killed his grandfather many years before. But he knew nothing else about the crime until he was rummaging through a box of his mother's belongings in February 2009. There he found old newspaper clippings about the crime and the trial.

He began a yearlong quest to learn more about incident and to find the man who killed his grandfather, who he remembers as someone who lived in Shelby and worked on oil rigs before opening a café shortly before his death. Montana corrections officials supplied Dr. Pellett with copies of Dryman's files to aid him in his search and maintained frequent contact with him during the past year.

"I was just trying to fill a hole in my family's memory," he said of his quest.

(more)

Dr. Pellett managed to track Dryman to Glendale, Az., but there the trail went cold. He hired a private investigator to take over the search that eventually led to Arizona City and the Cactus Rose Wedding Chapel.

Patrick Cote, the investigator, went to the chapel on March 20 and said he was looking for Frank Valentine, an alias once used by Dryman. Cote noted Houston's birthdate and Dryman's were two days apart and that Houston sported faded tattoos on his hands that appeared to coincide with those Dryman once had.

"It appears that Victor H. Houston and Frank Dryman are one and the same," Cote reported to Pellett.

Pellett informed Montana corrections officials of the discovery and they contacted local law enforcement in Arizona to authorize the arrest Tuesday. Dryman later admitted his identity to officers.

Extradition proceedings to return Dryman to Montana are under way.

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