

TEETH GIVE CLUES IN DEATH DENTIST HOPES TO IDENTIFY BODY HE'S BETTING SOMEONE REMEMBERS HER SMILE

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She lies, cold and unclaimed, refrigerated at 38 degrees **in** the Wayne County morgue.

Police say she is likely the ninth victim strangled by a serial killer stalking women **in** Highland Park and Detroit. No one seems to know her name.

For now, they call her Unknown Female No. 51.

When no friends or family come to identify the dead, when fingerprint checks are no good, when publicity generates no tips, stumped morgue officials **in** several Michigan counties turn to Dr. Allan Warnick.

Warnick, 52, is a forensic dentist with a general practice **in** Livonia. But for at least one day each week for the last 10 years, he has taken his tools to morgues **in** Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe and other counties, where he studies the **teeth** of the victims of accident and homicide.

Warnick gets to know his subjects.

Today, he may hold the keys to identifying the woman found Monday **in** an abandoned building **in** Highland Park. Warnick worked on the decomposed body Tuesday night.

He's betting that someone will remember her smile. Unknown Female No. 51 has a gap between her two front **teeth** . But what really distinguishes her is a rare congenital defect **in** her mouth.

The woman never developed two **teeth in** her upper jaw: the ones that normally fit between the pointed canine or eyeteeth and the front **teeth** . The canines took the place of the missing **teeth** , so there are no gaps.

The defect is present **in** only about five to eight percent of the population, Warnick said. The inherited trait is the kind that mother or father or grampa or granny would remark upon with something like, "She's got my **teeth** ."

Warnick hopes that the woman's unique smile will help tell him her name. All he needs are dental records to confirm her identity. Those records typically come when morgue investigators discover a missing report on someone who fits the description. Or when a concerned relative calls. Or when an investigator just plain gets a good hunch.

When records of visual inspections, X-rays and models of the **teeth** match, Warnick knows he's got the right name. "It's 100 percent," he said. A 1964 graduate of the University of Detroit dental school, Warnick identified his first bodies a few years later **in** the Air Force dental corps. Four people died **in** a plane crash and young Capt. Warnick got the call.

In 1967, he set up a general practice and grew increasingly interested **in** forensic dentistry. **In** 1982, he was certified **in** forensics and has since become the only dentist **in** Michigan to be certified by the American Board of Forensic Odontology. He is one of about 100 dentists nationwide recognized by the board.

Recently, he has confirmed the identities of all four of confessed serial killer Leslie Williams' victims.

He has also worked on the other bodies linked to a reputed serial killer stalking the Woodward Corridor.

He also has testified as an expert witness **in** child abuse cases **in** which he matches suspects' **teeth** to bite marks.

When Flight 255 crashed **in** 1987, he led a team of 23 dentists through the gruesome sight at Middle Belt and I-94. The team identified 130 of the 156 victims through dental records.

In a case **in** Dearborn, a bomb exploded and killed a man. Warnick identified him through five **teeth** imbedded **in** the man's chest.

Forensic dentists don't need a perfect set of **teeth** to make an ID. While fire or decomposition or prolonged exposure to water can erase such **clues** as fingerprints, Warnick said, " **Teeth** are forever."

And fake **teeth** aren't bad either. Dentures and partial plates also are used to identify bodies, and the man-made **teeth** are very durable, he said. He's worked on bodies charred by fire "and removed dentures that are **in** perfectly good shape."

A state law that requires dentists to ask their patients whether they want their name or other identification put **in** new dentures helps make Warnick's job easier, he said.

Of the bodies brought to the Wayne County morgue, roughly two percent are identified through dental records, Warnick said. Most are identified visually and through fingerprints.

In 1991, Warnick worked on about 50 bodies for Wayne County; five were never identified.

Before Warnick examines a body, an autopsy is done. Then he takes X-rays of the **teeth** and does an oral exam, noting fillings, missing **teeth** , caps and the shape of the **teeth** .

The next step is to painstakingly chart the status of each **tooth** . A form with 256 blanks is filled out and usually entered into a national law enforcement computer. The data allows Warnick and others to search for matches of bodies and missing people.

Sometimes, even with all the work that is done, no match is ever made.

The Wayne County morgue keeps unidentified bodies on average for six months. Then they are buried **in** unmarked graves.

That is what awaits Unknown Female No. 51, the woman with the unique smile, if no one calls for her.

Unknown Female No. 51 is black, about 5 feet 4, 105 pounds, 30 to 40 years old. Anyone with information on her may call 224-5643 anytime.

Caption: Photo WILLIAM ARCHIE

Dr. Allan Warnick, a forensic dentist, says **teeth** help identify bodies because they can't be erased like fingerprints. " **Teeth** are forever."

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