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Serial killer gets three life sentences after pleading guilty to murder

A 43-year-old serial killer who fled to Mexico in 2003 was sentenced to life in prison after he pleaded guilty to murder charges for the strangulations of three women, Dallas County Criminal District Attorney John Creuzot announced Thursday.

Jose Sifuentes would go to bars and clubs, where he met his victims. DNA evidence links him to the rapes and killings of Erica Olivia Hernandez, 23, Maria de Lourdes Perales, 20, and Veronica Hernandez, 27.

“This guy was born to kill. He treated women as soulless objects,” said prosecutor Leighton D’Antoni.

Sifuentes received a life sentence on each of the cases, as part of a plea agreement. The sentences will be served concurrently.

He was extradited from Mexico in January 2020 after nearly 17 years on the run. He was first arrested in 2003 in Dallas County on a murder charge but fled Dallas after posting bond.

The arrest and prosecution were the result of the work of the cold case units in the Dallas Police Department and Dallas County District Attorney’s Office.

“This is another example of diligence and persistence to bring a violent criminal to justice,” said District Attorney Creuzot. “We continue to pray for the healing of the families of the victims.”

Sifuentes’ DNA was collected at the time of the 2003 arrest, which later linked him to the rapes and strangulations of two women in 1998. He was charged with capital murder in the 1998 cases.

On Feb. 15, 1998, Perales’ body was found by a passerby around 6 a.m. in the 6100 block of Santa Fe Avenue. She was nude and had been raped, strangled, and then run over.

About four months later, on June 27, 1998, Erica Olivia Hernandez’s body was found around 1:30 p.m. at a construction site in the 11200 block of Harry Hines Boulevard. Like Perales, Hernandez was also found nude and had been sexually assaulted and strangled.

On May 16, 2003, the body of Veronica Hernandez was found at the mechanic shop where Sifuentes worked. She was found mostly nude, with her shirt and brassiere pulled up. She had been sexually assaulted and strangled. Like the other women, Hernandez was last seen leaving a bar with a Hispanic man.

An anonymous caller told investigators that the suspect wore a mechanic's shirt with the name "Jose" on it.

Sifuentes posted bond after spending two months in jail in 2003. He was indicted after he fled.

Dallas police Det. Noe Camacho, who was investigating cold cases, found that Sifuentes was never charged in the 1998 slayings. The Dallas County District Attorney's Office cold case team worked with the detective to indict Sifuentes on two capital murder charges in 2017.

After he was indicted, the DA's office applied for an international provisional arrest warrant, which authorizes the arrest of a non-U.S. citizen from the person's home country. In January 2019, a Mexican judge issued an arrest warrant. Sifuentes was arrested in April 2019 in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, and extradited to Dallas County in January 2020.

D'Antoni said the investigation was one of the biggest collaborative efforts of his career. He thanked the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of State, and Interpol.

He said the work of Camacho and the original Dallas police detective, John Palmer, were critical to catching Sifuentes and linking him to the murders.

"They always, always stayed on top of it," D'Antoni said of the detectives.

The DA's investigation was the result of the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative federal grant, which funds two investigator positions [Investigators Tammy Goodman and Jon Wakefield], two victim advocate positions and two dedicated prosecutor positions for cold case homicides and sexual assault cases.