

Donna Willing: 40-year-old case of 9-year-old girl's rape and murder goes to trial

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Family of girl, 9, raped and murdered 40 years ago fight to keep man who confessed to her killing behind bars after all evidence in the case was lost

- Donna Willing was abducted, raped and strangled on her way to buy bread in February 1970
- Robert Hill, a sex offender, confessed twice but recanted his story both
- Prosecutors want to put Hill on trial -- despite the physical evidence being lost in the 1990s

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#) and [Associated Press Reporter](#)

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The family of a nine-year-old girl who was raped and murdered in 1970 is fighting to keep the man suspected of killing her in prison - despite all evidence in the case being destroyed decades ago.

The murder of Donna Willing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was never solved and no one has ever been charged.

However, Robert Hill, a convicted sex offender who lived down the street of Donna, has confessed to her murder twice. He later recanted both statements and now claims he never killed the girl.

He is currently serving the last few months of a ten-year prison sentence for sexually assaulting four children under the age of 10 between 1995 and 2002.

Cold case: Donna Willing was raped and murdered at age nine in 1970. Robert Hill, 73, has been in prison for the last decade and has confessed to the killing -- but later recanted

On Monday, prosecutors will argue that a childhood neighbor and convicted sex offender - who they say confessed to the killing but has since recanted - should go to trial in the death of Donna Willing.

With physical evidence in the case lost or destroyed, prosecutors say they will argue under the state's sex offender law that Hill, now 73, is sexually violent and must remain in custody indefinitely.

A trial could finally spell the end in a lifelong journey for Donna's sister, Virginia Davis, who has been wracked with guilt about the death of her sister more than four decades ago.

Only 4 years old at the time, Davis knew little about the crime. The subject remained off-limits for the next four decades for many in a family that hoped to forget the hurt.

But Davis couldn't forget, and after years seeking help to solve her sister's killing, she's preparing to face the man police believe is responsible.

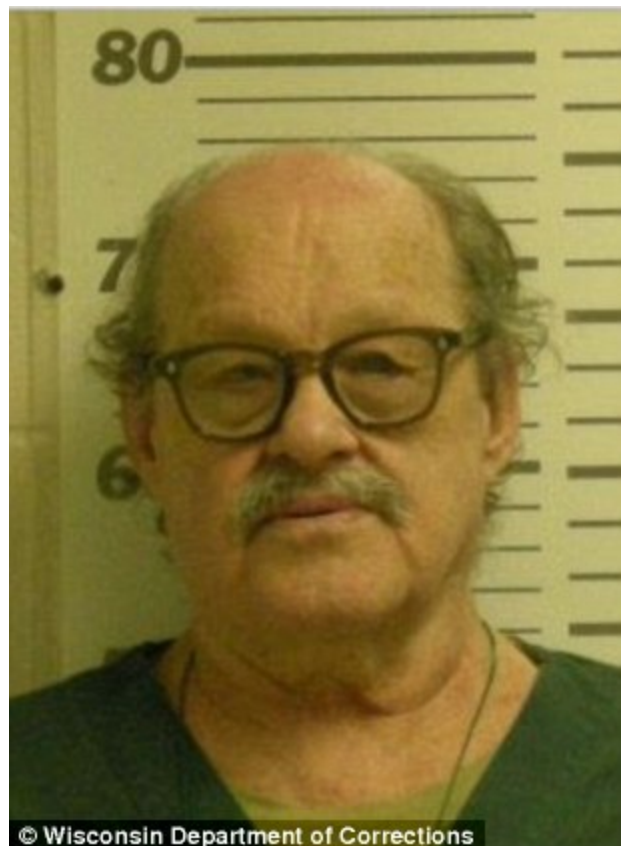
Davis says that when she was a child, her sisters would scold her for talking about Donna, warning, 'You don't want to make mom cry, do you?' Most of the siblings don't discuss it even now.

But Davis needed answers. At 15 she found the courage to go to the library and read news coverage about her sister's death. Every detail discovered since has helped.

'I didn't feel like so lonely, I didn't feel so empty, I didn't feel like I had a million holes anymore,' said Davis, now a mother of three who lives in suburban Milwaukee.

'I just started feeling like it's easier, it's easier, it's easier now. I can talk about her now. I can speak her name.'

Davis clearly remembers the afternoon of February 26, 1970. Her big sister Donna was reading to her from a favorite book about animals as they sat on the couch. Her mother wanted Donna to go to the bakery for bread, but Virginia purposely delayed the trip, begging for one more story.



'I remember seeing out the window, it was getting dark and thinking "Mom won't make her go if it gets dark. She'll send (my brother) or somebody else. She can't go," Davis recalls.

'We were afraid of the boogeyman and stuff back then. The boogeyman will get her if she goes out after dark.'

Donna walked out at 5.15pm. A witness later saw her get into a green car. Less than two hours later, a man discovered her bruised and bloodied body under a car in his garage about a mile away.

Newspaper reports at the time said police had people of interest, but no leads panned out.

So investigators in 2008 began interviewing Hill in prison - where he was serving a 10-year sentence for sexually assaulting four children under the age of 10 between 1995 and 2002.



Horror: Donna Willing was just blocks from home when she was raped and murdered in 1970

Hill first told police he sexually assaulted Donna after she got into his car that night, according to court documents. She began to squirm and slapped him. He became angry, afraid she would tell on him. He strangled her and dumped her in a garage. It all took about 10 minutes, he said.

In another account outlined in court documents, Hill said he molested Donna for years, picked her up and had sex with her. After she screamed, he put his hand over her mouth and strangled her.

Hill, who is now being held in a supervised facility, has since recanted both statements. Balash said Hill knew specifics of Donna's injuries that hadn't been released.

Hill's attorney, Robert Prifogle, didn't return a phone call seeking comment before Monday's hearing.

Before her mother died in 2009, Davis finally asked why she needed Donna to go to the bakery. Her mother said she wanted to make French toast for dinner. That filled a big hole.

This year, Davis met the man who discovered his sister's body - another big hole filled. She said she had blamed herself when she was younger for delaying her sister's trip until after dark, but no more.

Davis chokes up when talking about her gratitude for the cold case detectives who pursued the case.

'I want to invent or create a word and I can't come up with anything yet that is the equivalent to how I feel,' she said.