

**Husband of 1981 Victim Feels Vindicated, But Not Lucky**  
**CRIME: David Witthuhn is No Longer a Suspect, but Old Memories Still Cause Him Pain.**

*Orange County Register*, 1 October 2000, pg. A8  
By Bill Rams

IRVINE, CA. The rape and bludgeoning killing of his wife forever changed David Witthuhn.

Some of his friends and members of his wife's family thought he murdered her.

He switched jobs several times and ended up homeless for a short time. He had nightmares every night for years.

Now, almost 20 years after her death, Witthuhn can sleep through the night. Detectives using DNA technology have proven that a random serial killer nicknamed the "Original Nightstalker" raped and beat Manuela Witthuhn to death in their Irvine home in February 1981.

"I feel vindicated," he said, noting that detectives took a sample of his DNA to compare it to the killer's to clear him.

Now, David Witthuhn is hoping that detectives find the murderer. "If he's actually caught," David Witthuhn said in an interview this week, "I'd be the first to pull the switch."

David Witthuhn would likely have been killed, too, had he not been hospitalized with a viral infection at the time of his wife's death.

The serial killer targeted couples.

Witthuhn doesn't feel lucky.

"It changed my whole life," he said. "From my health to everything. I'm still single. I rarely date."

Now the manager of a Laguna Beach motel, Witthuhn remarried, but divorced after nine years. He lives at the motel.

Underneath a coffee table rests a tan photo album with the only pictures he has left of his wife, from a trip to Hawaii more than 20 years ago.

"I've had a hard time stopping being mad at everyone," he said. "Plus, I would accuse everyone. And, I was a suspect."

They had been married five years. A friend set them up -- she was a loan officer, he was an assistant parts manager for Mercedes-Benz.

Though she sometimes had a temper, they rarely fought. They were happy. He wasn't too worried about his wife when he went to the hospital. She was independent. But her father worried. He offered to have his German shepherd stay with her, but she declined.

After her death, Witthuhn continued to live in their Irvine home for six years before finally deciding it was time to move on.

"There was just so much to deal with, with being considered a suspect and trying to stay mentally stable," he said. "Back then, there were no victim support groups. A lot of times, I could have used something like that."

Not a day goes by, he says, when he doesn't think about Manuela and what their lives might be like if she were alive.

They would still be living in the Irvine home together. She would be the bank branch manager. He'd be the parts department manager for Mercedes-Benz.

They'd have a teen-age child. They'd still be happy.

Now, he says, all he can hope for is that the detectives will find the killer so he can stop wondering.