

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, Monday, August 7, 1978

Body found in Willowbrook believed to be missing nurse

By MARC DAVIS

The decomposed body of a woman, believed to be a nurse at the Staten Island Developmental Center missing for more than two weeks, was found yesterday buried in a wooded area a few hundred yards behind the state Institute for Basic Research on Forest Hill Rd., Willowbrook.

Police last night refused to give the condition of the body, except to say it had been buried "some time" and showed "no apparent cause of death."

A Brooklyn medical examiner will perform an autopsy today to determine how the woman died. Police said they hope to identify the body this afternoon.

Shin Lee, a 44-year-old nurse, was reported missing July 20 and last seen that day walking home from Building 11 of the center toward her Sea View home. Police said Mrs. Lee always walked home through that wooded area after completing her 3-to-11:45 p.m. shift.

About 30 friends of the Korean immigrant yesterday searched the woods around the center's main building for about an hour before one of them found the body in a shallow, recently dug grave at 4 p.m.

Nicholas Lee, head of the Staten Island Korean Catholic Apostolate and not related to the nurse, said Mrs. Lee's friends were frustrated by the police's lack of success in finding the body after 17 days and decided to conduct their own search of the area.

"We felt the police were negligent," Lee said. "I've been contacting the missing persons squad every day and they never had anything. I thought that was ridiculous, so we searched ourselves."

Police said they conducted a number of searches around the area in the last two weeks, but did not know why they had not discovered the body. The searches were conducted by foot and by

helicopter, police said.

"Some of the searches had gone right by that area several times," said Lt. William Juliano, head of the detective squad. "The excess rain of this week may have loosened the dirt and helped uncover the body."

Besides police searches, Mrs. Lee's husband, Jun-ho, and a few friends had searched the area several times earlier with no success. Nicholas Lee said he personally contacted many members of the Korean community, as well as several local ministers, for a massive search yesterday.

Many members of yesterday's search party were members of the Korean Church of Staten Island, including South Shore resident Jaido Kim who eventually found the body.

"We gathered in front of the building at 3 p.m. and then spread out," Lee said. "Someone came late and was looking for us in the woods when he found the mound of dirt. It was the body."

The police apparently were alerted to the discovered body by a phone call from the Advance after Nicholas Lee phoned the paper. Police arrived on the scene about 6 p.m. and removed the body two hours later.

Although police would not positively identify the body, they noted it was approximately the same size and age as the missing nurse.

Mrs. Lee, described by friends as "very diligent" and "very family-oriented, reportedly had received a death threat several months ago from a co-worker in her building who had been fired after Mrs. Lee gave her a negative work evaluation.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee and their three children, Mi-jong, 16; Su-jong, 18, and Won-ki, 13, came to Staten Island from Korea in May 1971. On the night she disappeared, Mr. Lee and his children were in Brooklyn near his grocery store.

They returned home two days later, on July 22, when they noticed and reported the disappearance. News of Mrs. Lee's disappearance "shocked the whole Korean community on Staten Island," Nicholas Lee said.

Staten Island District Attorney Thomas R. Sullivan spoke with the nurse's husband and a few of her friends at the scene last night, but refused to say if there were any suspects in the case.

Police ask that anyone with information about the body or Mrs. Lee contact them at 987-7935. All conversations will be kept confidential, police said.

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By THOMAS CHECCHI

A 44-year-old nurse whose body was discovered Sunday in a wooded area in Willowbrook was strangled to death, an autopsy performed yesterday revealed.

The partially decomposed body buried in a shallow grave behind the main building of the state Institute for Basic Research was identified yesterday as Shun-ae (Emma) Lee of 7 Jasper St., Sea View, a registered nurse at the Staten Island Developmental Center. She was last seen alive July 20.

The naked body was discovered Sun-

day by a group of Mrs. Lee's friends who had been searching the area for about an hour.

Further tests must be performed to determine whether the woman had been sexually abused, Dr. Michael M. Baden, the city's chief medical examiner, said yesterday.

Police said yesterday they have no suspects in the case.

Mrs. Lee was last seen July 20 walking from Building 11 of the developmental center toward her home. Police said she always walked home through the

wooded area in which her body was found after completing her 3-to-11:45 p.m. shift.

The nurse had reportedly received a death threat several months ago from a co-worker in her building who had been fired after Mrs. Lee gave her a negative work evaluation.

Police said yesterday there is no indication the fired co-worker had anything to do with Mrs. Lee's death.

During the day, police searched the area for the woman's clothes and other clues. They refused to say, however, if

her clothes or any belongings were found.

Mrs. Lee's husband, Jun-ho, and about 30 friends searched the area around the center Sunday because they were frustrated by the police's inability to find the woman in two weeks, friends said.

Police said they had searched the area extensively several times previously but did not find the body. They said heavy rain in the past few days may have loosened the dirt and helped uncover the body, which was buried on a slope.

But the police report conflicts with

that of Nicholas Lee, head of the Staten Island Korean Catholic Apostolate and not related to the nurse, who was present when the body was found. He said the body was buried under a mound of dirt in a relatively flat area.

Mrs. Lee, described by friends as "very diligent" and "very family-oriented," came to Staten Island from Seoul, Korea, in May 1971. Besides her husband, she is survived by a son, Won-ki, 13, and two daughters, Su-jong, 18, and Mi-jong, 16.

Mr. Lee and the children were in Brooklyn near his grocery store on the

night Mrs. Lee disappeared. They returned home two days later, on July 22, when they discovered and reported her disappearance.

The funeral was today with a service in the Matthew Funeral Home, Willowbrook. Burial was in Moravian Cemetery.

John Degnan and Robert Dianora, the two detectives assigned to the case, ask that anyone with information about the case contact them at 987-7935. All conversations will be kept confidential, they said.

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