

A beetle story by Lois Ann Dort

The Poughkeepsie Telegraph

Lost diamond found in abandoned car; nostalgia snares wanted man

DOVER PLAINS, NEW YORK—One man's trash is another man's treasure. That saying was never so true as this week when an auto salvage crew recovered the long-lost Euphrates Diamond from a Volkswagen Beetle mouldering just off the Appalachian Trail.

Adam Anderson, proprietor of AA Salvage, told ABC news that he'd been hired by a local car enthusiast to rescue the Beetle last month but due to the terrain and the wet weather the crew couldn't get in to do the job until this week.

The salvage crew had questions about the job. Anderson said, "It seemed very odd to dig that old bug out of the dirt. But Holmes (the client) said it was a sentimental undertaking. He'd had a car like that back in the day, and when he saw it in the woods, he had to have it."

"We had no idea what was in that car," said Anderson.

They had no idea about their client either.

"As soon as we found something sparkling in the wheel well of the trunk, we called the police," recalled Anderson, "then things got interesting."

Dutchess County Deputy Sheriff Will Wright told The Telegraph that it only took a few well-placed calls to put an end to the mystery of the diamond and unveil a murderer who'd evaded capture for three decades—Delroy Holmes.

Holmes-- aka Paul Holmes, Bob Holmes, Donald King, Simon King—has been on the FBI's most wanted list for over 30 years. After a string of armed robberies in the late 1980s, which included the theft of the Euphrates Diamond from a bank vault, Holmes disappeared in a haze of smoke hanging over a shootout with police that left two officers dead.

He would have continued to live in obscurity if he hadn't fallen victim to nostalgia.

For two decades Holmes has lived in Dover Plains, at an old farmhouse he bought for \$50,000 cash. He led a quiet existence, and few people knew him outside of a passing acquaintance. Other than meeting people at work, first employed as a mechanic and most recently as cashier at the local hardware store, Holmes kept a low profile in the community.

Neighbours say when he wasn't working, he could be found tinkering in his barn.

Scott Boyd, who hired Holmes as a mechanic when he first moved to the area, said, “You wouldn’t believe the cars he’s got in there. He told me he was into restoration but as I look back on it—I don’t remember anything coming in there not already in mint condition. I just figured he did that work somewhere else. I never guessed he had millions to spend on classic cars. He didn’t look like a millionaire, no suits, no haircuts, no flash. I thought he was just another grease monkey who spent his weekends in junk yards.”

Those millions, Holmes told The Telegraph in a jailhouse interview Monday, had been stashed in the back seat of the VW Beetle.

“I used to make monthly withdrawals from that little bug once I found out how to get over the hurdle of spending stolen money. If you’re not stupid, and I’m not, you gotta know you can’t just unload a lot of cash at one time or at one place. It’s a slow process. But I’m a patient man,” Holmes said.

Asked how he laundered the money he’d stolen, Holmes replied, “I can’t tell you that; trade secret.”

As for what Holmes did with his clean money, the answer to that is found in the barn; a 1939 Alfa Romeo Lungo Spider, a 1963 Aston Martin, a 1955 Jaguar, a 1956 Ferrari, and a 1935 Duesenberg-- five classic cars bought at auction worth an astounding \$100 million.

Basic arithmetic and common sense indicate there are some holes in this story, notably a 10-year gap in the whereabouts of Holmes and why he decided to salvage an old car from the woods—a rusting 1957 Volkswagen Beetle hardly fits in Holmes’ amazing collection.

But it does. Holmes told The Telegraph the Beetle was his first classic car purchase. He bought it as an homage to his late wife.

“We had our first kiss in a ’57 Beetle. It was my dad’s car. As kids we used to sit in that car and dream of the places we might see if we ever got out of Saltville. One day she just looked at me, put her hand on my leg and leaned in.”

“She was the girl next door, so to speak, and after that kiss we were inseparable. Our parents used to laugh about it and say we’d marry when we grew up, and we did. We were never apart, not one day, not until the day she died. After that whenever I saw one of those cars, it brought her closer to me. I had to have one,” he said. It was that need that led him to his first bank robbery.

“You could say, I did it for love,” he chuckled.

After committing one robbery, committing another seemed like life’s natural progression, Holmes said while rolling up his sleeve to reveal an image of his late wife standing next to a Volkswagen Beetle, “It’s like tattoos, you get addicted to them.”

But he added, “I never meant to kill anyone. After that job, I quit the stick-up work. The wife wouldn’t have liked people dying. I didn’t care much for it either.”

Holmes went on to say that once the heat died down and his face wasn’t plastered in every post office across the country, he felt safe enough to settle and Dover Plains seemed as good a place as any. He knew he needed a place to store his ill-gotten gains and decided the safety of the car in an out of the way location would be best. And while he regretted leaving the vehicle to the whims of the elements, he kept it in good condition, aside from the rust which he permitted as camouflage.

“Over the years I replaced headlights, upholstery, door handles—if anyone looked closely at that bug, they might have twigged to that. But no one did,” the 68-year-old said with a grin.

As for the reason Holmes decided to bring the car back into the world, he replied, “The money was gone. I didn’t need to hide anything anymore.”

And after a thoughtful pause he added, “I’m old. I can’t manage the trail like I used to. I couldn’t abandon her.”

Asked about the Euphrates Diamond that was his undoing, Holmes sighed and tapped his head, “This isn’t what it used to be. I forgot about that. I only had use for the money...perhaps the cops should start digging in between the seats and see if they find anything else.”

Few tears will be shed for Holmes. The families who lost loved ones by his hand will however profit from his long-overdue capture. The salvage crew who received a \$250,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of Holmes has agreed to donate their windfall to the children of the slain officers.

A statement released by the families of the officers thanked the crew for the donation and for the part they played in the capture of Holmes. It eased their minds knowing justice would finally be served, though long overdue.

Police continue to investigate Holmes’ property, the area where the diamond was found, and the years not accounted for in his timeline. They believe several unsolved cases can be linked to Holmes despite his claim that he stopped his crime spree after the two officers were killed.

Deputy Sheriff Will Wright said, “He’s been lying for half his life, why would he start telling the truth now.”

