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After 19 years, woman's death remains unsolved

AP

MAQUOKETA (AP) - When she died in 1975, 84-year-old Hulda Fischer's obituary read like that of any other woman who died in the winter of her life. It provided no clues to her brutal death.

She was stabbed to death with a butcher knife on Feb. 25, 1975, at her home in peaceful Maquoketa. Theft wasn't a motive. Nothing was missing from her home.

The slaying has remained unsolved. No one has been arrested.

Ronald Keller, 59, says he thinks about the slaying "absolutely every day." And he still hopes a break in the case might lead to justice.

"I have hopes," said Keller, owner of Modern Upholstery & Antiques in Maquoketa. "Every year, the chances are less, but I've never given up hope that somebody would come forth."

Keller and his business partner lived across the back yard from Fischer's house. After no one saw Fischer for a day, Keller, who had keys to her house, and his aunt and neighbor, Hattie Petersen, searched her home.

They found her in the basement, lying face down. She was a large woman, so they figured she had fallen down the stairs. They called Thomas Goodwin, a business partner who has since died.

Goodwin turned the body over and found the butcher knife sticking in the woman's chest.

Mark Brooks was one of the first officials on the scene. At 21, he had been on the police force for less than a year.

"I was intrigued by it," said Brooks, the city's police chief. "You hear about that happening in bigger towns. You expect to handle civil disturbances and barking dogs" in smaller towns.

Brooks said there was at least one suspect but not enough evidence for a conviction.

The case is reviewed occasionally, but Brooks said it would take some new evidence to lead to an arrest. Unsolved homicide cases are never closed.