

Crime revisited

Personal items belonging to 1974 murder victim found in Manhattan

By **TED SULLIVAN**,
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A 31-year-old murder case has been reopened following the discovery of personal items belonging to the victim Wednesday.

A driver's license, wallet and notebook belonging to Sandra Dykman Smallegan, who was murdered in 1974, were recovered Monday when construction workers renovating a garage on East Main Street in Manhattan found the items hidden in a wall.

The case has been reopened to process the evidence.

Betty Dykman, Smallegan's mother, said Wednesday it was surprising to learn of her daughter's missing belongings.

"It brings the memories and the whole thing back," she said.

But it doesn't bring her closure.

"I don't know that there's any real closure ever," Dykman said. "She's gone. She was a wonderful, wonderful daughter and I still miss her."

Manhattan native David Meirhofer confessed in September 1974 to having killed Smallegan, 19,

and three other people in Manhattan and Three Forks.

Meirhofer might have owned the building where the items were found, Sheriff Jim Cashell said.

"Who would have thought there was more stuff in a wall?" Dykman said. "It's kind of amazing. What were the chances of that wall coming out?"

Meirhofer told police after his arrest that he kidnapped Smallegan while she slept in February

(More on **Murder**, page A10)

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Murder/

from page A1

1974. He dated her once, but she later refused his advances.

He told police he tied her up and sealed her mouth with tape, then began putting her clothes in the car. He said Smallegan must have died because she couldn't breathe through the tape.

Meirhofer took her body to the Lockhart ranch, hid her car in a barn and sliced her body into separate parts. He then burned her remains in a fire.

Four hours after confessing, Meirhofer tied a bath towel to his cell bars in Gallatin County's jail and hanged himself.

"It happened a long time ago, and I went through a lot of hard times," Dykman said.

"I've just been with this for

such a long time."

Detectives will process the evidence, document and photograph all of Smallegan's belongings, Cashell said. They don't expect to find anything suspicious that will change the belief that Meirhofer killed her.

"This was totally unexpected," Cashell said. "It's somewhat sad that it's got to get reopened."

The Manhattan Police Department worked with the sheriff's office to gather the evidence from the garage.

Smallegan's items will be returned to her mother soon.

"I'll keep them. I want them," Dykman said.

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