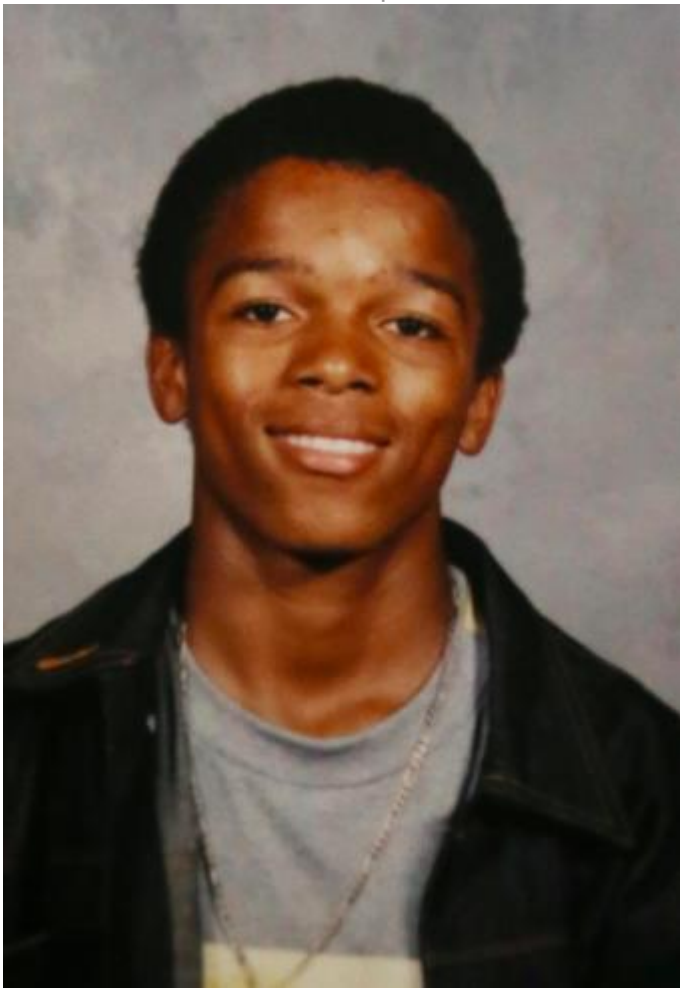


Tattooed remains found in 2015 in Chicago ID'd as missing Akron man

By Stephanie Warsmith / Beacon Journal/Ohio.com

Posted Jan 8, 2019 at 5:13 PM Updated Jan 11, 2019 at 3:29 PM



Although Arlene Candace Rogers hadn't heard from her brother Michael for several years, she still hoped that he might call one day or knock on the door of her Akron home.

Rogers, however, recently learned this won't happen. She found out her brother, a Navy veteran, drowned in 2015 in Chicago. His remains weren't identified until last month.

The news was devastating for Rogers, her mother and seven siblings.

"A lot of us are still trying to wrap our heads around it," Arlene, 30, said. "It's horrible."

The family also is trying to raise money to pay the \$6,500 needed to exhume Michael's remains and bring him home to Akron. They have a [GoFundMe page](#) that has raised \$1,225 toward this goal.

"It doesn't matter how long it takes," said Naiomi Rogers, Michael's sister, who set up the page with her husband, Jeff Waite. "As long as the funds are collected to bring him back."

Besides providing closure for his family, the identification of Michael Rogers, 28, also solved a mystery that had captivated many people across Ohio. They speculated that the unidentified man could be from Akron or elsewhere in Northeast Ohio based on his numerous tattoos, including one that said "Rubber City Boy 330" with the image of a skyline that included a blimp.

The Beacon Journal/Ohio.com wrote about the case in [October 2017](#) and the Ohio Center for Missing Persons posted about it on Facebook in November, including sharing images of the deceased man's tattoos. The Facebook post was shared by people from as far north as Sandusky and as far south as Portsmouth.

About Michael

Michael Rogers was born in Cleveland but moved to Akron when he was very young.

He was one of nine children and one of only two boys in the family.

Michael, who would have been 31 now, attended Mason Elementary School, Goodrich Middle School and Garfield High School, where he played football.

Arlene Rogers remembers many good times with Michael and her other siblings, attending festivals, taking trips and going to the movies.

“He was a great brother,” she said.

Shortly after his graduation in 2006, Michael joined the Navy.

Arlene said Michael left the Navy in 2014 and returned to Akron where he visited with his mother and several siblings. She said he then moved to Chicago for a job he got through a Navy buddy.

Arlene last talked to her brother when he arrived in Chicago.

“He seemed like he was doing OK,” she said. “He was trying to get on his feet, spending time with old friends. He seemed all right.”

Michael didn’t have a phone number, email address or social media account, so family members didn’t have a way to reach him.

Arlene said they frequently asked each other, “Have you heard from him?” No one had.

Remains found

A passer-by noticed a body floating in Lake Michigan off East Ohio Street in Chicago on June 10, 2015.

The Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office performed an autopsy and found the man had drowned, but could not determine whether he was the victim of homicide, suicide, an accident or natural death.

Investigators later told family members the body had been in the water for several weeks, which made the man’s facial features impossible to distinguish.

This contributed to an error that may have delayed the identification of the remains. An anthropologist who examined the body thought the deceased man was either white or Asian, which turned out to be wrong. (Michael Rogers was African-American.) The incorrect racial information was included in the remains' description and used for a drawing of the man.

“It was an anthropological exam,” said Natalia Derevyanny, a spokeswoman for Cook County. “The features of one race or ethnicity can be similar to the features of another race or ethnicity.”

The coroner entered the information on the remains and submitted the man's DNA to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), but got no matches with known missing persons.

The case, though, wasn't forgotten.

The Beacon Journal included the case in a story in October 2017, speculating that the man found in Chicago may have been from Akron.

The Ohio Center for Missing Persons featured the case on its Facebook page in November 2018. The post drew a great deal of interest.

“So sad!!!” one woman wrote. “Someone has to know this man . . . Prayers his identity is found.”

Identification made

Naiomi Rogers credits her brothers' tattoos and the tenacity of a Cook County investigator with him finally being identified on Dec. 14.

She said the investigator studied Michael's tattoos to try to figure out who he was, eventually leading to the dental records from the remains being compared to Michael's records in the Navy. The records matched.

DNA samples were also taken from several members of Michael's family to compare with the DNA extracted from the remains. The

samples weren't submitted, however, because the dental records matched, Derevyanny said.

The investigator reached out to Naiomi and Stacy Holmes, two of Michael's sisters who live in the Cleveland area.

The family members have many questions, including exactly what happened to Michael. "My brother wasn't suicidal," Arlene said. "My intuition says there is foul play involved."

Naiomi, 36, has accepted that the family might not get all of the answers.

"I'm someone who has come to peace with that," she said.

Rogers, though, is upset about the improper racial identification and with how the family is being required to pay the estimated \$6,500 to have Michael's body exhumed from a mass grave, cremated and returned to Ohio. She said they can't afford this expense and hopes future unidentified persons cases are handled differently so other families don't have to go through what hers has endured.

"Something has to change," she said. "This is very unnecessary."

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