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Police don't know how Woodlawn student died investigating as homicide

February 12, 1999 | By Peter Hermann and Young Chang | Peter Hermann and Young Chang, SUN STAFF

The body of a young woman found Tuesday buried in a shallow grave in Baltimore's Leakin Park was identified yesterday as an 18-year-old Woodlawn Senior High School student who disappeared nearly four weeks ago.

Hae Min Lee was last seen Jan. 13 driving away from the Baltimore County school in a gray 1998 Nissan Sentra, on her way to get her 6-year-old niece and go to work at a LensCrafters store.

"We thought she would come back," said her uncle Tae Soo Kim.

Baltimore police said a man out walking found the grave, which was about 100 feet off Franklinton Road in the secluded West Baltimore park -- about a mile from Woodlawn High.

Police said they did not know how or where Lee died. She had no obvious signs of trauma, and the medical examiner's office said yesterday that a determination on the cause of death was pending further tests.

Police said they are investigating the case as a homicide because of how and where her body was found.

Detectives spent yesterday trying to track Lee's movements from the time she left school about 3 p.m. Her car, with Maryland license plate FSV 645, is missing.

Authorities would not say whether they are investigating a link between Lee's death and last year's strangulation of Jada Denita Lambert, an 18-year-old Woodlawn woman whose body was found in May in a stream in Northeast Baltimore.

Lambert disappeared while driving to work at Mondawmin Mall. No arrest has been made in the case.

Lee's family, gathered yesterday at their home in the 7300 block of Rockridge Road, remembered a scholar and an athlete who emigrated from Korea with her mother and brother seven years ago. Kim said Lee's father remained in Korea when his family left and never maintained contact with the family.

Lee was a member of her school's lacrosse and field hockey teams and manager of the wrestling team. She had aspired to be an optician. She had plane tickets to France and had been scheduled to leave today.

James Wilson, Woodlawn High's principal, described Lee as "quiet and popular. She was a very warm type of person, well-liked by all the students."

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