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MANOTICK, ONTARIO

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FRIDAY MAY 3, 2024



What happened to Shafiq Visram?

Human bones were found in 2016 at a home in Maple Creek Estates near Prince of Wales and Bankfield Roads. Forensic testing determined that the remains belonged to Shafiq Visram, a South Carleton High School student from Sri Lanka who went missing in 1994. Now, 30 years after he went missing, no one knows who is responsible for his death, or how his remains ended up buried in the field that became a neighbourhood. For the full story, see page 4.

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30 years later, Shafiq Visram remains the community's biggest mystery

BY JEFF MORRIS

The community is still recovering from the shock of the Barrhaven murders of the Wickramasinghe family.

A mother, her four children, and a family friend were brutally killed in March. They were Sri Lankan nationals who had not been in Canada for very long.

The community wondered how something like this could happen. What many did not know, however, is that it was not the first time a Sri Lankan national had been killed in the area.

While the Wickramasinghe family will forever be remembered in our local history, Shafiq Visram has all but slipped through the cracks.

Thirty years ago this month, the 19-year-old South Carleton High School student was sitting on the banks of Mud Creek near Prince of Wales and Bankfield Roads. No one knows why he came home from school, grabbed something to eat

– his brother told the Messenger 30 years ago that he left his dishes in the sink – and went to mud creek. He didn't take his wallet or any ID, but he did take his backpack. Visram's bank accounts had never been accessed since his disappearance.

He left the house, and then he was gone. The last time he was seen, he was sitting on the banks of Mud Creek.

What happened? Did he just get on a bus and go to Toronto? Was he abducted?

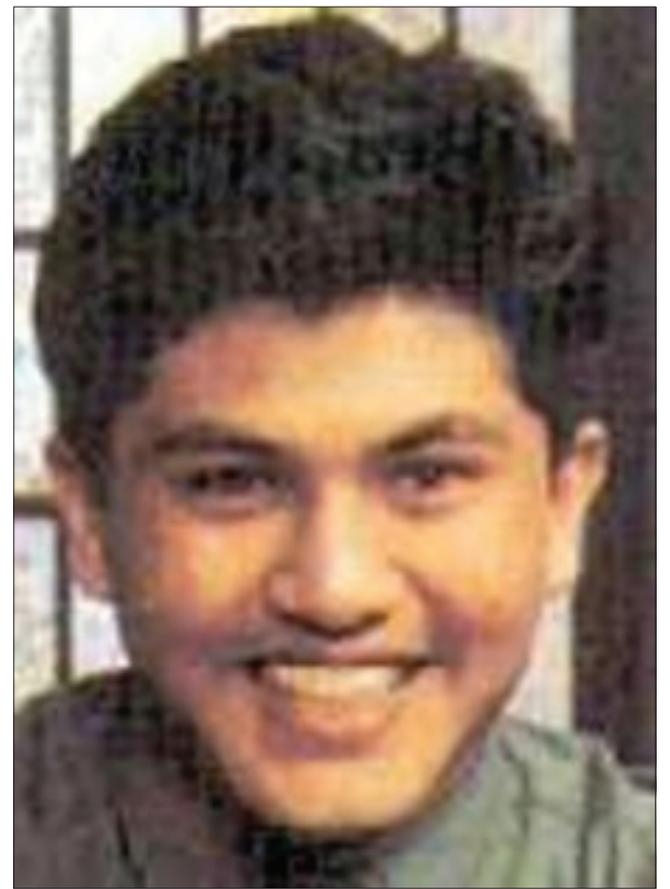
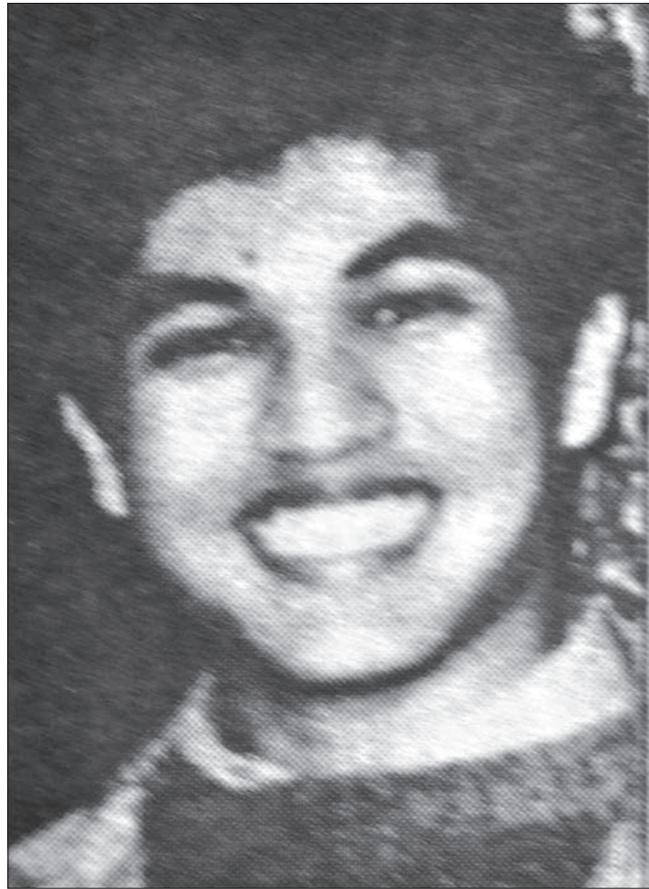
Nobody had a clue.

He is the boy who simply slipped through the cracks.

The 1994 case of Shafiq Visram remains one of the biggest mysteries in Manotick's 166-year history.

Remains found

Human bones unearthed at a construction site caused many long time village residents to wonder and speculate if, perhaps, the body of the 19-year-old South Carleton High School student who went missing in May, 1994 may have finally been found.



Shafiq Visram was last seen along the banks of Mud Creek on May 30, 1994.

The bones were found in 2016 at a home in Phase 6 of Maple Creek Estates near First Line Road and

Prince of Wales Drive. Tim Carver and Jason Pink were digging in front of the house on Cabrelle Place to

install fence posts. When they went to take a break, Pink stepped on something hard. He looked, down, and

saw what appeared to be a human jaw bone.

VISRAM
continues on page 5

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VISRAM continues from page 4

When the police were called in they agreed with the two contractors that the bone was likely human. A forensics expert was called in, and for the next few days, the home's front yard turned into an archaeological dig site. Vertebrae were found, which would help experts determine the age and origin of the bones.

The police said that they could not begin to form a direction for the investigation into the bones until information was received. Const. Marc Soucy said that, first, "we have to know if these are 600-year-old bones or 20-year-old bones."

For longtime residents, their immediate thoughts went to the South Carleton High School student who went missing from the nearby Mid Creek area.

Months after the bones were found, forensics confirmed that it was, indeed, Shafiq Visram.

According to the June 8, 1994 Manotick Messenger, Visram had last been seen on Monday, May 30, 1994, returning home from school.

"We're not sure what happened," Manotick OPP Const. Ian McCurdie said at the time. He is a good student but his marks had slipped a bit. That's all we know.

"Ordinarily, we would not search for a 19-year-old, but from some of the information we had, we decided

to look into it."

The Visram family, originally from Sri Lanka, arrived in Manotick from Kenya two years earlier. Shafiq's father has passed away, and most of his family is now living in the Greater Toronto Area. He has a brother living in England.

"What I remember about that case was how the community got together," said Mike Williscraft, who publishes a newspaper in Grimsby but was the editor of the Messenger at that time. "It was an interesting time because community policing was just becoming popular, and people wanted to get involved and volunteer to help. There were people from Manotick, Kars, North Gower, Osgoode and Richmond all coming together to look for that boy."

Hundreds of volunteers linked arms and walked through farm fields and through the woods looking for Visram. Police dogs were brought in, and helicopters flew overhead during the search.

"Eventually, the search was called off," recalled Williscraft. "There were no clues. It was like he vanished."

Visram was described by everyone as a good kid. He lived a clean life. He was not a kid who was into drugs, or any kind of trouble for that matter. Yet his disappearance remains an ongoing

mystery in the community.

As the search was called off, South Carleton High School would endure another tragedy less than a week later. Scott Whittle, a student at South Carleton who played in the Osgoode Rideau Minor Hockey Association, was killed in a car accident. The Kars youth volunteered with the ORMHA initiation hockey program.

While Whittle's death turned some of the focus in the community away from Visram, there were other factors at play.

"Right around that time, there were changes in policing in the area," said Williscraft. "The local OPP detachments like Manotick's were being closed in favour of larger, regional police departments. While the Visram disappearance showed no clues or evidence, a lot of the police officers were pre-occupied with what was going to happen to their own careers. Since they turned up nothing, the Visram file eventually became a cold case."

Visram's death is considered suspicious. Though the optics appear that he was murdered and then buried in the area near the



Workers discovered a human jaw bone while installing a post in 2016.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MISTY DWYER

housing development was built, that cannot be proven.

When the remains were found, it did provide some closure for Visram's family.

But there was little comfort, as we are no closer to finding out what happened to him than we were 30 years ago.

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