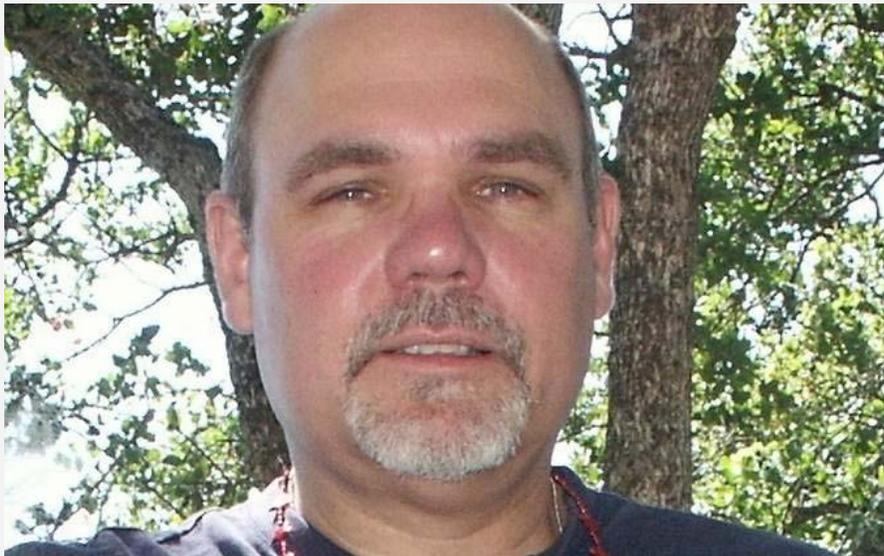


Mike Meese



Mike Meese(Family photo)

By GUY KOVNER
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Mike Meese, the former Petaluma police sergeant who led the investigation of Polly Klaas kidnap-murder in 1993, died of complications from pancreatic cancer on Monday at his home in Kelseyville. He was 55.

Meese, who served more than 30 years in law enforcement and also taught at Santa Rosa Junior College, was diagnosed with the cancer last month and had undergone three weeks of chemotherapy treatment. Doctors suspect the cancer created a blood clot that blocked an artery, his family said.

He was very much at peace, said his wife, Michelle Meese of Kelseyville. He got to tell his loved ones goodbye.

As cards and phone calls poured in from friends and colleagues, Meese learned how widely admired he was, his wife said. Many people are not able to find that out before they pass on, she said.

Pat Parks, a former Petaluma police chief who worked with Meese on the Klaas case, said he talked to Meese last week. He was in very good spirits, Parks said. He was looking forward to the holidays.

Parks, who had Meese as a student in a Sonoma County police academy class on patrol procedures, was a colleague throughout Meese's 15-year career with the Petaluma department.

He was an exceptionally tenacious investigator, Parks said, recalling that Meese pulled up a rug in 12-year-old Polly Klaas' Petaluma home and found one of Richard Allen Davis' beard hairs.

The hair and a palm print found by the FBI confirmed that Davis, a sexual predator who was out on parole at the time, had been in the house.

Meese and FBI Agent Larry Taylor gained Davis' confession in videotaped jailhouse interviews that were played, in part, during Davis' trial.

Davis led Meese and other officers to a field outside Cloverdale, where the ex-con pointed to a spot of brambles and bushes where he had left Polly's body.

I can still smell the night air as it existed that night. His smell. I can see what he pointed out. I can hear his breathing, Meese said upon revisiting the site in 2003.

In June, the state Supreme Court upheld Davis' conviction, concluding that Meese had acted properly in obtaining the suspects' acknowledgment of his crime.

I had tears of relief, Meese said at the time.

Davis remains on Death Row at San Quentin State Prison, but his appeals could take another 15 years.

Born in Detroit and raised in Libertyville, Ill., Meese obtained a GED after dropping out of high school. He joined the Army at 17 and fulfilled his ambition to serve as a military policeman, said his sister, Mindy Beers of Fayetteville, Ark.

Meese was also proud of his studies, earning associate, bachelor's and masters degrees, and he was working on a doctorate when he died.

He was truly blessed by God in that he accomplished everything he wanted to in his life, Beers said.

Meese joined the Petaluma department in 1981 after eight years in the Army. He was promoted to sergeant in 1987 and served as watch commander and SWAT supervisor.

After the Klaas case was concluded, he joined the Sonoma County District Attorneys' staff as an investigator in 1996, then took a job as assistant chief of the University of Nevada at Reno police force. His last law enforcement job was as chief of the Hopland Rancheria Department of Public Safety in Lake County.

Meese joined the SRJC faculty in 1987 and became a fulltime administration of justice instructor in 2006. He received tenure earlier this month.

Michelle and Mike Meese married in 2005. Every single day of my marriage to Mike was the most wonderful day of my life, she said. This month.

A patient, caring man, he was not troubled by trivial matters, she said. He saw things as they were, Michelle Meese said.

In addition to his wife and sister, Meese is survived by another sister, Marilyn Rasco of Palatine, Ill.; sons, Todd Meese of Hidden Valley Lake and Frank Meese of Reno, Nev. and five grandchildren.

He cared for his oldest granddaughter, Victoria, 13, most of her life.

Burial will be private. A public memorial will be held at 1 p.m. Dec. 12 in Burbank Auditorium at Santa Rosa Junior College.