

Case of missing woman a mystery

Dad, investigators: Unusual for 53-year-old, last seen in April, to not keep in touch

DETAILS

Anyone with information about Lori Lee Layman's disappearance is asked to contact Detective James Vidmar by calling the El Paso County Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center at 390-5555.

BY CHHUN SUN
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Lori Lee Layman always called. She called while traveling from state to state and living out of her car. She called while trying to keep her life a secret. And she called even while be-

ing caught up in a lifestyle of drugs and sex escorting. She never has gone this long without calling. A month after she disappeared in April, Layman's gold 2002 Kia Spectra was found abandoned at Pebble

Creek Apartments in south Colorado Springs. Investigators from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office said she did not know anyone who lived there. And the vehicle was empty, a shocking discovery since Layman was known to use it as a home.

Blood was in the car, and DNA testing later proved that it was Layman's. "We're definitely concerned that somebody could have killed her," said Sgt. Cliff Porter, who's in charge of the

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major crimes unit.

In 2015, the Sheriff's Office worked on 68 missing person cases, and Layman's is the only one unsolved.

Layman had "a very high-risk lifestyle." Investigators said she worked as an escort, based on ads they found online and information they received from people who know Layman. She often was "traveling unannounced" between Washington, Idaho and Colorado, the Sheriff's Office said. She last was seen April 22 at America's Best Value Inn & Suites on Garden of the Gods Road. On April 30, two days after her 53rd birthday, Layman talked with her father for the final time before disappearing. Her cellphone last was pinged May 11 near North Nevada Avenue.

The case remains active, without a body or suspect.

Chuck McMullen is losing hope about finding his daughter alive. Sometimes he talks about her in the past tense. At 77, he can't take more deaths in the family. To an extent, he's the only one left. All five of his brothers are gone. His first two wives, including Lori's birth mother, Karen, have died. And McMullen's first son, Charles II, died from cystic fibrosis 35 days after his birth in 1960.

Three years later, Lori was born. Peggy came a year after that but, at age 26, suffered the same fate as Charles II.

On a recent afternoon, Chuck McMullen handed a guest a cup of hot chocolate and talked about his missing daughter. He took several drags from a cigarette and admitted that he doesn't know what went wrong. After Layman decided to move from her home in Washing-



COURTESY PHOTO

Lori Lee Layman, 53, was last seen April 22 at America's Best Value Inn & Suites on Garden of the Gods Road. The following month her gold 2002 Kia Spectra was found abandoned at Pebble Creek Apartments.

ton state, McMullen offered her a place to stay. She declined.

"She didn't like my rules," the longtime Peyton resident said. "My only rules were keep herself and her room clean. And no drugs."

McMullen, a native of Salida, offered little information about his daughter's life after she graduated from Mitchell High School in Colorado Springs. His daughter attended cosmetology school. She got married in the mid-1990s and gave birth to two boys, who are now in their late teens. The marriage didn't last long, McMullen said. She moved to Washington with the intent to study psychology. To this day, McMullen doesn't know how she made a living there.

Every couple of weeks, he said his daughter would call him about a problem or to say hello.

And then, in early 2015, Layman decided to move back to Colorado. She didn't have a plan, but her father said she wanted to stay in the area to celebrate her birthday in April and then his birthday in June. Those plans never materialized.

McMullen said his daughter was hanging around "some shady friends." He didn't know who they were, but he knew she was the type of person "who never met a stranger." Layman always wanted to help people, he said.

While McMullen said he doesn't know what type of lifestyle his daughter led

while living out of her car, investigators have pieced some things together.

"She bounced from regular employment to doing some escorting, depending on her life circumstances at the time," said Sheriff Detective James Vidmar, who is investigating Layman's case.

Vidmar doesn't know what led Layman to become an escort or how long she was in that profession. He simply wants to find out what happened to her. That's the approach the Sheriff's Office takes in missing person cases.

"It's not our responsibility to judge," Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Jacqueline Kirby said. "It's our responsibility to find. We'll do that because it's somebody's family members, somebody's child, somebody's parent; it's somebody's relative. And we take that very, very seriously."

Investigators said it's uncharacteristic of Layman to go anywhere without telling someone. She was popular and kept in touch with family and friends.

"She was very active socially," Sgt. Porter said. "This is not a person who regularly took a hiatus of five to six days from talking to somebody."

That's one reason why McMullen is holding out hope that his daughter will show up or, better yet, call. At this point, that's all he can do.

"That's the hardest thing about it," he said. "I don't suppose you'll ever quit hoping."