

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NICOLE RIFKIN

[Science](#) > [Pop Mech Pro](#)

A Security Guard Vanished in a Brazen Platinum Heist. Was It an Inside Job or Something More Sinister?

When \$220,000 worth of platinum went missing from a Pennsylvania glass factory, authorities were stumped. Then, they reviewed the security footage.

KATYA CENGEL PUBLISHED: MAY 23, 2025 9:44 AM EDT

 [SAVE ARTICLE](#)

 [LISTEN \(34 MIN\)](#)

PENNY CHLEBOWY WAS living in the Washington, D.C., area in 1987 when she received the first phone call. A traveling saleswoman for AT&T, Penny loved her work. “It was blast,” she recalls. “I mean, I was young and thin and beautiful. [I] had a really good job, drove a really nice car... Life was good.” She had made it out of Bradford, Pennsylvania, a once-booming oil town that had become a blue-collar **factory town** where everyone knew everyone else’s business. Her older sister, Cindy, had stayed in Bradford, though. So had their younger teenage brother, Al, along with their father, Dale.

But now, it seemed, Dale had vanished.

Dale Kerstetter, 50, had reported for his shift as a security guard at Corning Glass Works on Saturday, September 12, at 10:30 p.m. After he got off at 7 a.m. the next day, he was supposed to visit his girlfriend, Pamela Mays. When he didn’t show up at her house, Mays called Al, who called Cindy, who called Penny. The second oldest of Kerstetter’s six children, Penny was the one most like him: slight of stature but strong in personality.

“What do you mean they can’t find him?” Penny asked her sister.

Then she got in her car and drove to Bradford.

The day before, when Kerstetter had arrived for work at Corning, he had talked with the guard he was replacing, Art Peterson. Peterson left a few minutes later without punching his time card. The next shift worker often punched the previous worker’s time card, but Kerstetter did not do so that night. After midnight, he also did not check in every hour as was customary. (The record is unclear about how the check-in process worked at Corning, but Penny maintains someone should have known something was wrong if a guard didn’t check in during his shift.)

When John Lindquist arrived Sunday morning to replace Kerstetter, he found Kerstetter’s uneaten lunch, plant keys, and a newspaper in the cafeteria. Kerstetter’s Jeep pickup was in the parking lot with the keys in the ignition. A carton of cigarettes and the holster of his .22 caliber gun, but not

the gun, were inside, along with a daypack.

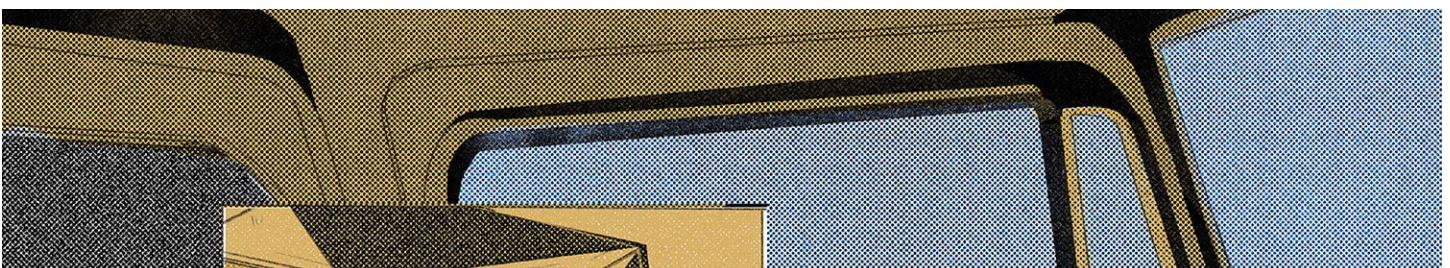
Lindquist searched the 112,000-square-foot facility, first on his own and then with his supervisor, looking for Kerstetter. It was not until Sunday evening that the township police were called. By then the theories were as unlikely as they were varied. Kerstetter had a heart attack. Kerstetter killed himself. Kerstetter went on a bender.

A search dog was brought in, alerting at the expected places: in the cafeteria, the storage areas, the bathroom, the mechanical-equipment room, the electric-switchgear room—all locations Kerstetter would have normally visited on his shift.

But the dog also alerted in a place Kerstetter would not have usually been, the kiln area where sand and other raw materials were melted at over 1,400°C to make glass rods. From the kiln the glass passed into platinum pipes. As the investigation continued, Corning staff discovered that some of the platinum, one of the most expensive commodities in the world, was also missing. The company initially estimated 23,000 grams worth about \$460,000 was gone, then later revised those figures to 11,000 grams and \$220,000.

The value of the **theft** (more than \$600,000 in today's money), the unusual nature of the crime, and the lack of clues sparked a nearly four-decade search into what happened that September night.

While new methods of examining forensic evidence—DNA testing, for example—can be useful for solving cold cases today, Kerstetter's case is different. There is no forensic evidence to reexamine. Instead, there are people. And the time to get answers from them is running out.





ILLUSTRATIONS BY NICOLE RIFKIN

When Kerstetter went missing, his Jeep pickup was left behind in the parking lot with the keys in the ignition. Inside were a carton of cigarettes and the holster of his .22 caliber gun—but not the gun—along with a daypack.

AT CORNING, KERSTETTER worked as a journeyman, which means he did

whatever was needed: painting offices, operating the machines, performing maintenance jobs. Penny remembers him helping install a new tile floor and washing the windows. “He came in and did his job and he left, just like everybody else,” says Penny. “It was a factory job.”

And Bradford was a factory town. Corning Glass Works opened in Bradford in 1958. They made glass resistors and insulators that control the flow of current between wires in television and radio sets. Kerstetter began working at the company the following year.

That was also the year he married his first wife, Nancy. They knew each other from the school bus. Kerstetter left high school early to join the Air Force. Nancy, who was three years younger, had gotten a job at the phone company after she graduated. Not long after she started work, she ran into Dale at a carnival. He was fun to be around, a joker, a local she could trust. They dated for six months and then married. Cindy was born and then Penny, whom Kerstetter named after a beloved childhood dog. Kerstetter had been so close to the animal that he refused to leave his room for two days after it died. Penny was followed by two more girls, Bonnie and Wendy, and then the twins, Susan and Al.

RELATED STORY



There Is an Army of Thieves Coming For Your Catalytic Converter

Nancy stayed home with the children while Kerstetter worked at Corning. At work Kerstetter was known as something of a survivalist, having once sewn up a cut on his own finger. Kerstetter's grit came in handy when a forklift that held a propane tank rolled underneath a stream of molten glass. Kerstetter jumped onto the forklift and drove it out of the way before the hot glass could cause the propane tank to explode. His actions saved lives as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of equipment.

He also had a reputation as a bit of a mischief-maker. Roland “Skeet” Stoughton used to work nights with Kerstetter. “If he could make you laugh or he could scare somebody, that’s what he did,” Stoughton says.

In 1987, when Corning was downsizing and Kerstetter’s pay was cut, he added overnight and weekend security shifts. Art Peterson Jr., the son of the guard Kerstetter replaced the night he went missing, does not believe his late father or any of the other guards had special security training. They usually didn’t carry weapons. Kerstetter brought his own gun, which fits with the “tough, scrappy little guy” image Peterson Jr. has of Kerstetter from when their families used to go camping together. Nevertheless, Kerstetter, who was 5’4” and 130 pounds, “wasn’t a very big guy,” he adds. “He wouldn’t have been difficult to have been overpowered.” The plant did not have much of a security system. Penny remembers the door being unlocked when she visited her father during his shift.





ILLUSTRATIONS BY NICOLE RIFKIN

Upon reviewing the security footage from the night of the heist, a personnel manager saw a masked man enter the factory. Kerstetter goes to meet him. He looks right at the camera. Then, he's never seen again.

After her father's disappearance, Cindy thinks people got the idea that Bradford "was a perfect town to commit a crime in because nobody was going to do anything."

At one time Bradford was the perfect place for nefarious activities. Located about 90 miles south of Buffalo, New York, and the Canadian border, Bradford was well-positioned during Prohibition. Local bootleggers sold moonshine, beer, and wine to the city's wealthier residents who were happy to turn a blind eye, explains Sally Ryan Costik, curator of the Bradford Landmark Society and author of the 2011 book on Bradford during that era, *Bootleggers, Bullets and Blood*. Fights with neighboring bootleggers resulted in around 50 murders in Bradford and two neighboring communities during the Prohibition years from 1920 to 1933. Before moonshine there was oil. Before oil there was lumber.

Surrounded by the Allegheny National Forest, Bradford began as a lumber town. After oil was discovered in the late 1800s, Bradford got big, producing more than 630 million barrels of oil from 1871 to 1967. After the oil boom petered out, there were the big factories: Zippo lighters, Case Knives, Dresser Industries, Corning Glass Works.

Bradford's population peaked in the 1930s at around 33,000. The 1930s are also when Bradford became known for another disappearance. It happened on Mother's Day. While on a family picnic, two young girls left their parents briefly to pick flowers. Only one girl returned. A massive manhunt was launched for 4-year-old Marjorie West. Bloodhounds and soldiers searched a three-mile radius. Native American trackers were called in. "They never found anything," says Costik. "Nothing... She just literally vanished."

Half a century later, Kerstetter vanished. Bradford had a new mystery.

Cindy was in her mid-20s at the time and working at Zippo. Aside from her grandmother, Cindy was the only family member who remained in town following Kerstetter's disappearance. (Al had gone to see his mother in Texas after the incident, and Penny had returned to the D.C. area.) In the days and weeks after Kerstetter went missing, everyone's questions were directed at Cindy. "I felt like all eyes were on me," she says.

"Imagine someone you know that doesn't come home," she says. "What are you supposed to think? And how am I supposed to feel? I didn't know."

At 63, she still doesn't. Cindy believes it is easier to get away with things in a place where everyone knows you. In Bradford, she says, "there's all kinds of things people hide."

Their mother Nancy is living in Pennsylvania again, but not in Bradford—none of the family lives there anymore. Nancy has returned to her maiden name, which she does not want used. She is gentle, caring—and slightly wary.

Aside from Penny, and sometimes Cindy, her children “really don’t want to talk about it—especially Al.” In an early media interview, Al suggests, in the wishful way a young man might, that his father could be in Canada or Australia. It was enough to make people suspect Al knew where his father was. Al has kept silent ever since. Private and protective, Cindy doesn’t want to discuss her personal life or her life growing up, but she’s willing to discuss the incident. She asked that we not use her last name.

Yet as much as the family wants to put it behind them, they can’t fully. There are too many unanswered questions. Nancy entertains the possibility that Dale was killed and buried in the woods. “Every winter during hunting season, I always hoped that somebody would find something, and they could go back and identify him,” she says.

THE MONDAY AFTER Kerstetter disappeared, Patrick Foley sat down at his desk to watch the grainy security footage, a compilation of still images taken every few seconds by three cameras placed at three different angles. A personnel manager at Corning, Foley was a middle-aged man with thinning hair and had only been with the company a few years. He was shocked by what he saw when he turned on the small television screen. In the footage, a masked man comes into view. “Then Dale Kerstetter came back and met this masked person,” he said in an interview with *Unsolved Mysteries*, which recreated the footage for a 1989 episode. It is 10:45 on Saturday night. The camera captures Kerstetter looking directly at the camera. It is the last time Kerstetter is seen.

At 11:19 p.m., the masked man enters the kiln area where the platinum is located.

Platinum is a critical material used in glassmaking equipment because of its resistance to high temperatures and corrosion. Typically, raw materials like sand, limestone, and soda ash are melted in a large tank called a kiln. The molten mixture is then poured into a cooling tank that feeds into a platinum cylinder that branches in two, forming a Y shape. The two cylinders are

connected to “down draws,” which make canes, or long, thin rods, which are then cut to make resistors.

For 35 minutes, the masked man toils away, removing the precious metal from the kiln’s complicated machinery.

This was no snatch and grab. The part of the kiln that held the platinum cylinders was covered by mesh wire and gated. The cylinders themselves were covered with insulating fire brick. The thief would have had to use a tool of some kind to carve out the U-shaped fire bricks, then a saw to cut away the platinum.

The footage shows the masked man returning to the kiln multiple times, spending roughly two hours at the facility. He removes 11,000 grams’ worth of platinum but leaves behind much more, three times more according to a former employee, hundreds of thousands of dollars more.

When Corning employees were interviewed for Unsolved Mysteries, they suggested the company thought it possible Kerstetter was an accomplice. C. Dale Parry, another personnel manager at the company, told the show that Kerstetter was a “marginal employee” and a “slow worker.” His colleague Foley said, “I think the fact that he did everything in front of the camera was once again just Dale Kerstetter just saying to us ‘Hey, here I am. I’m taking your platinum and there isn’t a thing you can do about it.’”

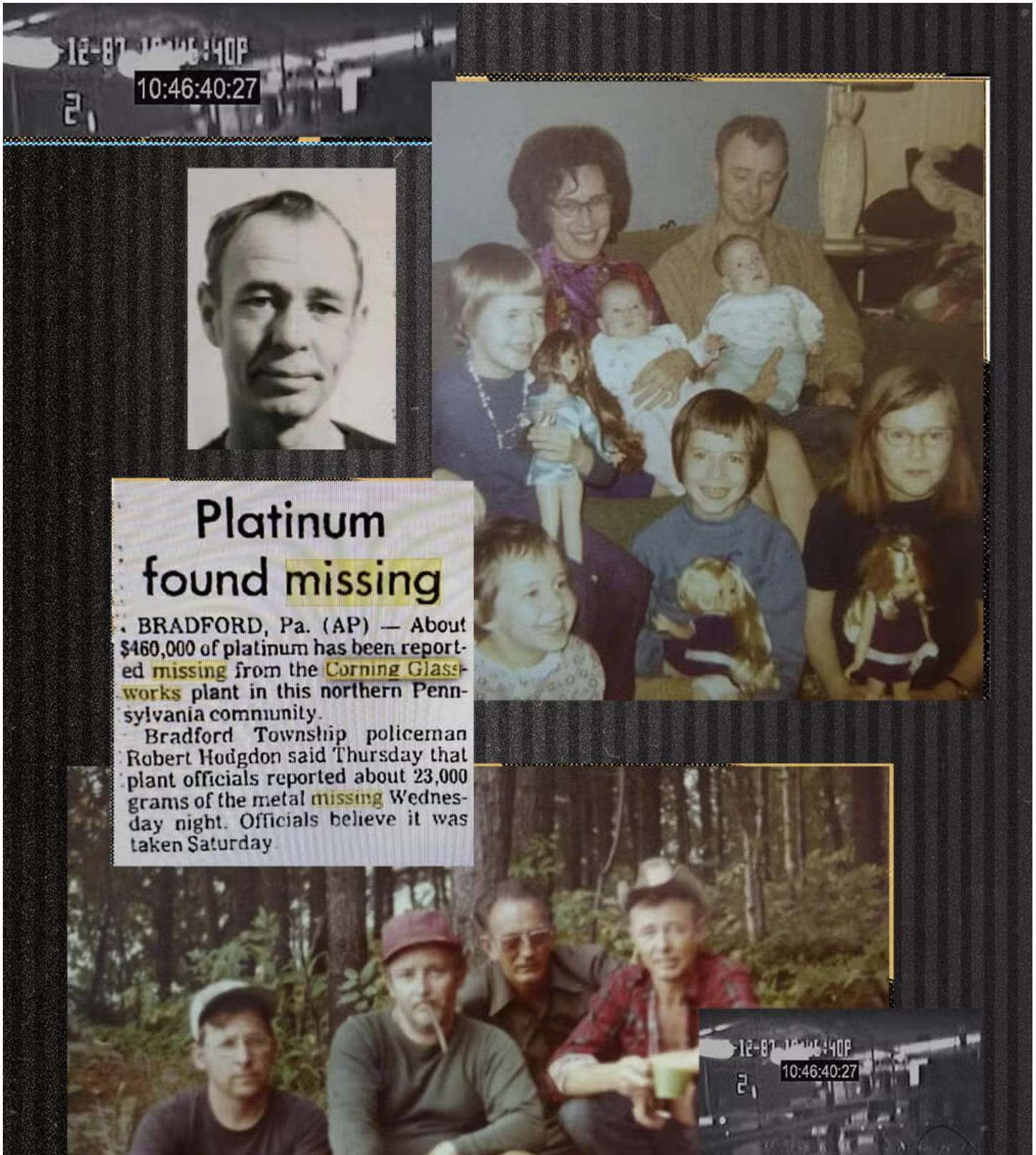
Penny, who says she first saw the video during the initial investigation in 1987, sees something else. “I think he’s looking at the camera saying, ‘Do you guys see this? Is somebody going to come and help me?’”

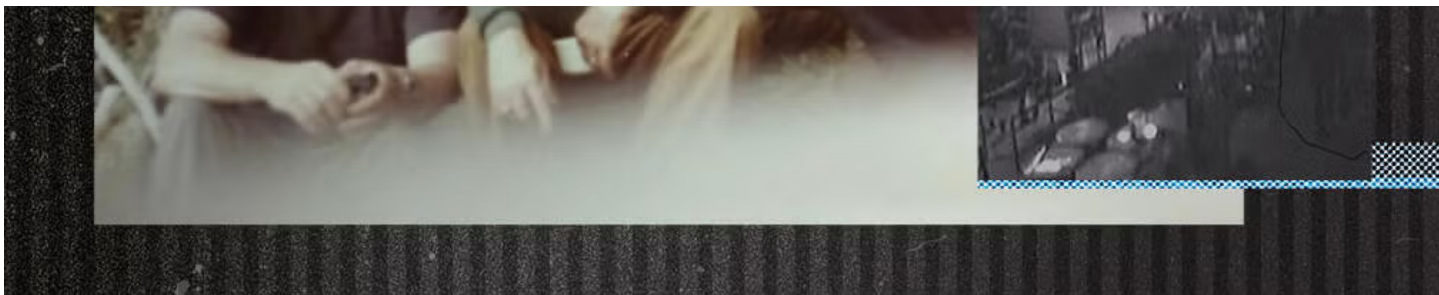
Prior to the platinum theft, there had only been minor thefts at Corning, explains Bradford Township Police Lieutenant Tim Gigliotti. Employees would take pieces of flooring or a shelf they could use in their homes. This was a much more brazen crime.

At 12:51 a.m., the masked man uses a hand truck to drag what looks like a

plastic-covered load out of the plant. The footage finally ends at 12:53 a.m., when camera three shows the man reentering the plant. He is not seen on film again. Some speculate the load is the platinum.

Others believe it is Kerstetter's body.





COURTESY LOSTNFOUNDBLOGS.COM

Fellow employees at Corning Glass thought Kerstetter could have been an accomplice. From the start, the company was suspicious of him.

DALE KERSTETTER WAS known to enjoy fine food, to read Forbes magazine, and to study and invest in the stock market. Although he left high school early, Kerstetter was a lifelong learner, obtaining his GED and taking several college courses. “He wasn’t the country bumpkin,” says Penny. Both Penny and her mother mention Kerstetter being ahead of his time. Even though men were not expected to play a large role in child rearing in the 1960s, Nancy remembers her husband questioning why he couldn’t get paternity leave when she was pregnant.

They also remember family excursions: picking berries, fishing, cooking out. In winter they would drive to a country road where they would cook hamburgers over a fire, drink hot chocolate, and go sledding. Kerstetter loved the outdoors—and adventure. He hunted, fished, trapped, and went skydiving (once shattering his ankle so badly, his surgeon used pins to repair it). Penny joined him in many of these pursuits, going trapping with him as a child and skydiving with him as an adult.

Nancy says out of all her children, Penny most reminds her of Dale. There are the obvious similarities: They both smoked and liked a bit of excitement. And then there is the part she can’t explain. “Just sometimes she might do something that would remind me of something he might do,” Nancy says.

After 22 years of marriage, Nancy and Dale divorced and Dale remarried. Despite the divorce, Nancy and Dale remained close. In the 1980s, Nancy moved to Texas, and was there when she found out Dale had disappeared.

“I could see it both ways,” she says. “But the more I think about it, I really think somebody did go in there and do something to him.”

IF HE HAD HELPED WITH THE HEIST, HE WOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT FOR THE MONEY, SAYS PENNY. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR THE THRILL.

From the start, Corning management viewed Kerstetter with suspicion. Patrick Foley, following a tip, told the police to check Kerstetter's discharge papers from the Air Force, implying Kerstetter had been accused of stealing platinum while in the service. (United States Air Force records show Kerstetter was honorably discharged.) Corning did not respond to multiple phone and email requests for comment.

Cindy remembers going to Corning with her boyfriend and listening to a company supervisor who seemed to assume her father was guilty. Law enforcement agents repeatedly asked her if her father had contacted her. She kept telling them no. “I think they sat outside my apartment a couple times,” she says.

When the family first tried to have Kerstetter declared legally dead so they could collect life insurance, Corning objected. A 1990 appeal from an order dismissing the family's petition explains that the company was permitted to intervene to “assert its contention that Kerstetter had been a participant in the theft of the platinum.” According to Corning, there was evidence Kerstetter was experiencing financial difficulties.

Kerstetter was in debt. A September 9, 1987, letter from Mastercard declared his balance of \$3,882.88 to be in default. According to his family, he had more than enough in his bank account to pay this off, as well as investments and people he could count on to help him out financially if he needed. Kerstetter was also very close to retirement and collecting his pension. If he helped with the heist, he wouldn't have done it for the money, says Penny.

It would have been for the thrill.

FENCING THE PLATINUM would have been more than just exciting—it would have required prior planning and connections to a facility that could melt the metal down, making it easier to sell. The platinum was of such high grade that melting it down would have entailed a special machine, says retired Pennsylvania state trooper Max Bizzak. “All the places I contacted had no means or facility to melt that down.”

Bizzak, a tall, slim father of three, was called to assist the township police three days after Kerstetter went missing. He remembers being shown the video footage. “It was really, really hazy,” he says. “You can hardly see anything.”

Aside from the footage, he didn’t have a lot to work with. By the time he arrived on the scene, any evidence had been compromised. He doesn’t remember seeing the daypack or gun holster; the family says they never got an accounting of what happened to those. They also found it strange that there was a daypack at all because Kerstetter never used one. The family wonders if the pack might have belonged to the masked man or someone else and are concerned by its disappearance. There had been no leads on the masked man.

At first Bizzak and the township police, under the leadership of Chief Dave Doyle, worked together chasing down leads. Because the state police had more resources, they eventually took it over. It was Bizzak who contacted Unsolved Mysteries, hoping they might discover something the police had missed.

While Bizzak worked the case, his wife, Barb, handled the home front. She also became his de facto coordinator during long assignments. In the 1980s, Max and his partner had a three-year assignment with the U.S. Marshals to help investigate the Pagan’s Motorcycle Club. At a time before pagers and cell phones, Barb was the one they primarily checked in with. The undercover operation may have been Bizzak’s most exciting assignment, but

it doesn't haunt him the way Kerstetter's case does.

RELATED STORY



Massive Treasure Trove or Elaborate Hoax?

Bizzak was five years away from retirement when he began work on the Kerstetter case. By mid-September, the FBI had been called in to assist. Local law enforcement offices often called the bureau if they needed help with laboratory services or forensic metallurgy services, or in the apprehension of a fugitive. Chief Doyle hoped the bureau's labs would be able to improve the poor quality of the tapes. Instead they made them worse. "I had watched it on their machine at Corning, and when I got it back from the FBI, I didn't even recognize it," he adds. "That was a big blunder."

At the time, the FBI was not involved directly in investigating platinum thefts, says FBI Supervisory Special Agent Michael Howard. But among the FBI files on the Kerstetter case is information about a 1960 theft of \$152,000 worth of platinum from a Corning plant in Rhode Island. There were at least three more platinum thefts at Corning in the 1970s, two in New York and one in Virginia, and quite a few others at plants owned by different companies.

Kerstetter was not the first guard to go missing.

A month before the Bradford heist, in Solon, Ohio, a night watchman vanished along with \$85,000 worth of platinum. In a newspaper account at the time, private investigator Lee Feathers said he suspected the theft involved insider knowledge. The night watchman had been employed by Brinks Security System. Feathers contacted the Pennsylvania State Police to see if Kerstetter was also employed by Brinks. He was not. Whether that is the reason the Pennsylvania police did not investigate further is not in their report, only that despite the similarities in the cases, the trooper who responded did not feel the cases were related.

When Feathers was asked by a reporter where the platinum would be sold, he said it depended on the thieves' contacts, but that it was obvious they would have already had a contact or buyer for it. The FBI attempted to figure out who that buyer might be in the Bradford case, interviewing several scrap-metal dealers, all of whom reported that the only platinum they dealt with was through collecting catalytic converters.

Platinum group metals—which include iridium, osmium, palladium, platinum, rhodium, and ruthenium—occur together in nature. However, substantial deposits that can be mined in large quantities are rare, which is one of the reasons platinum is so valuable, explains Ruth Schulte, a mineral commodity specialist for the National Minerals Information Center. This rarity, combined with resistance to wear and tarnish, make platinum well suited for making jewelry as well as investments in the form of coin and bullion.

But its ability to withstand chemical and temperature assault, to deform without breaking under different types of stress, and to enable catalytic reactions make it useful in industrial applications, like at Corning. Platinum group metals are also used in the chemical industry to produce fertilizer, explosives, and silicone. In addition, platinum-supported catalysts are used in gas production and crude oil refinery. In the last 40 years, platinum has primarily been used by the automotive industry in catalytic converters to capture harmful exhaust emissions.

Platinum's value also makes it desirable for thieves. Special Agent Howard, who manages the FBI's major theft program, says the trend today is to steal platinum group metals that are already in finished products and not in their raw form. Because thieves now tend to target distributors—which involve interstate shipments—and not refineries, the FBI has taken a more active role in these investigations. Howard believes the pivot from targeting raw materials to finished products—for platinum, mainly catalytic converters—is likely because there is less raw material in circulation. Laundering the stolen items is not difficult. "There are very active laundering markets for precious metals virtually everywhere in the world," says Howard.

Chief Doyle has his own theory. He thinks Kerstetter could have participated as part of a theft ring with ties to Mexico, and that perhaps he was killed by accomplices in a hotel in Florida. Doyle has nothing to base this on. At the same time, he is puzzled by the fact that some valuable platinum in the Bradford plant, something Kerstetter would have known about, was left untouched.

“I don’t know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of platinum was inside the furnace, but they didn’t go do that,” he says.

THE SECOND PHONE call Penny Chlebowy received after her father went missing came in March 1992.

Penny was pregnant and living in Buffalo, New York. She was at work and took the call in her boss’s office. A Pennsylvania state trooper was on the line. A headless, handless body had been found in Florida. One of the feet was damaged. The trooper wanted Penny’s permission to review Kerstetter’s medical records and see if the damage matched her father’s ankle injury.

When her boss heard the conversation, he was shocked. Penny remained composed. She was tough because she had to be, but that didn’t mean it didn’t bother her. “There’s not too much more that I could find unsettling than to get a phone call like that,” says Penny.

Penny gave the trooper permission to access her father’s records. The x-rays were gone, but the medical files were still there. And when the surgeon who had repaired her father’s ankle saw imaging of the John Doe, Penny recalls the doctor saying it wasn’t his work. And that was the end of that.

There were other leads over the years. On September 23, just 10 days after Kerstetter was declared missing, a man reported seeing him on West Washington Street in Bradford. He was sure it was Kerstetter because he had met Kerstetter before. A day later, a woman reported seeing a man she believed to be Kerstetter near the railroad tracks. As recently as 2020, a woman in Albuquerque, New Mexico, contacted authorities after viewing the

Unsolved Mysteries episode because she was convinced Kerstetter was her neighbor.

RELATED STORY



Two Centuries. Three Puzzling Cryptograms. One Ungodly Fortune.

A month after the heist, the Bradford Township police department received a note naming the president of a smelting company in New York. In police interviews, the executive theorized his name was on the note because a Bradford company with which he formerly did business had a grudge against him. He did deal in platinum, but only catalytic converters. He didn't know Kerstetter.

Tim Gigliotti, with the township police, describes Kerstetter as having hung around with “less than savory” people. The stories are colorful: a doctor who was suspected of trying to kill his wife; an accused killer who was one of three men tried for shooting a man and pushing his truck, with his body inside it, into a large body of water. The accused killer was found innocent and is now deceased, but he used to meet with Kerstetter on Saturday mornings at a local restaurant, according to Doyle. These and other acquaintances of Kerstetter's were interviewed by police and the FBI, then dropped for one reason or another.

“It was all speculation,” says Bizzak.

A few years ago, Penny met with one of her father's friends who was living in Florida at the time Kerstetter went missing. He had come under suspicion when Kerstetter's young son Al told police that his father had seen the man with a suitcase containing a large amount of cash after he had declared bankruptcy. The man was interviewed. Penny knew about his background and knew her father was a loyal friend; yet after talking to him she decided the police were right to not pursue him.

“That’s a dead end,” she says.

TODAY BRADFORD HAS plenty of churches and brick buildings. Hometown Hero signs hang from lamp posts, American-made Ram trucks cruise the streets, and the occasional Amish or Mennonite woman can be found among the pedestrians. The vanishing now is done by the younger generation leaving for bigger cities and better jobs.

The Corning grounds are still there, nearly 10 acres surrounded by forest on the outskirts of town just around the corner from the township police. The facilities have been split up and are occupied by different enterprises, explains Bob Cummins, the local construction company owner who bought the property. The section where the platinum theft occurred was torn down during remodeling.

Grass grows through cracks in the visitors’ parking lot. The office space remains intact, but in serious need of upkeep. The long, carpeted main hallway is dark. Floors inside offices are pocked with puddles below where the ceiling has collapsed and leaked. A sign on the wall thanks people for not smoking. At the far end of the hallway is a makeshift storage area. An old life-size cutout Santa grins eerily from one corner, a snowman from another.

Penny toured the facility a few years ago. She has never really stopped searching. She posts on an Unsolved Mysteries message board dedicated to her father’s case. That is how she met Heather Graupmann, an Illinois woman who’s also behind [Lostnfoundblogs.com](https://www.lostnfoundblogs.com). Together the two began digging. Penny returned to the state police to examine their files.

Graupmann found files of her own, accounts of other platinum thefts. Graupmann felt more could be learned from these thefts and listed some of them in the two blogs she wrote about Kerstetter in 2018 and 2019.

It was the video footage she mentioned, though, that caught readers’ attention. After the publication of her first story, an amateur investigator requested and received the Corning security footage from the police

through the nonprofit news site MuckRock. The video was so corrupted it was almost impossible to decipher. Graupmann asked a film hobbyist named Mike West to clean it up. During the process West discovered what he believes could be a third person, bringing up the possibility there were two intruders.

In 2022, the case was returned to the township police after decades spent with the state police. Chief Doyle had retired in 2012, and Gigliotti was then handling the case. Gigliotti is aware of West's work and said the video breakdown was slightly helpful but that West's work doesn't "really clarify anything."

Gigliotti, whose age and relaxed attire—a blue polo shirt—signal the tail end of a career, was not working for the township when the theft happened. But he worked for them before and after, and interacted with Corning through his father's trucking company, which picked things up at the facility. The renewed attention gave him hope. Gigliotti felt with Kerstetter's friends in "their golden years, somebody might come forward."

There was talk. An old friend of Kerstetter's told Penny he thought her father might be in one of the hundreds of old oil wells that dot the region. The wells, some as deep as 1,500 feet, are in various states of disrepair: fully filled in, partially filled in, and hollow. A local driller offered the police a map of the wells and help utilizing a camera system to search for a body in a well. The problem is that checking every well is not possible, says Gigliotti. "It would take years." Time is something they don't have.

As time passes, says Gigliotti, it becomes "progressively less and less probable we're going to find any body." A lot of the people who'd remember anything are gone now.

PENNY IS NOW a 61-year-old grandmother. Her mother, Nancy, 85, is a great-grandmother. Seated in Penny's backyard in a rural neighborhood in Pennsylvania, the women reminisce about the man at the center of the mystery. Penny tells me how Kerstetter would bring home fresh doughnuts

when he got off the night shift. Once, the neighbor's dog jumped on Penny's sister and knocked her over. Kerstetter opened the window and shot the dog off his daughter. Both Penny and Nancy remember Kerstetter being a crack shot. Nancy remembers that the owner of the dog was a cook at the school the children attended. Lunchtime was complicated after that.

Nancy has short gray hair and a gentle manner. Penny is wearing a T-shirt dress, dangling earrings, and a stone bracelet. On the table in front of Penny is a pack of American Spirit cigarettes and a can of diet tonic water. The women have long since given up hope Kerstetter is alive.

What is left is Kerstetter's reputation. Penny wants it cleared. "Anybody that really knew him would tell you that he would never [leave his family]," she says.

Kerstetter's former colleague, Skeet Stoughton, is now 87 and battling lymphoma. He has his reasons for thinking his friend is innocent. Kerstetter would have known about the additional platinum right next to where the platinum was stolen. He would have known about the security camera and would have covered it up instead of looking at it. And finally, Kerstetter wouldn't have left a carton of cigarettes in his truck. "In my opinion, and I'll go to my grave saying that, and I'm getting closer to that, Dale Kerstetter never had one thing to do with stealing that platinum," says Stoughton.

Patrick Foley, formerly of the Corning personnel office, is still suspicious of Kerstetter's involvement. When I reach him by phone, he refers me to his Unsolved Mysteries interview. "I fully believe what I said then, and there's been no reason for me to change my mind since then," says Foley.

That Kerstetter is most likely dead is the one thing most everyone can agree on.

Initially Max Bizzak had hoped Graupmann, the blogger, might find something the police had missed. A summer rainstorm beats down outside as Bizzak sips coffee on his covered porch, his long legs stretching out in

front of him. A week before his 84th birthday, he is neither hunched nor hesitant. Tall and lean, with a head full of white hair, Bizzak is dressed in shorts and a trim athletic shirt. He and Barb live about 30 miles southeast of Bradford in the town where he grew up. They have been married almost 60 years.

Barb, who is small and quick with a wink, sits against the wall. She says she is there to smoke, and she does, but really, she is there to make sure her husband remembers everything correctly. He does, mostly.

What has faded is his hope. He's still hung up on Penny.

"She wanted to find out what happened to her father, and I couldn't give her an answer," he says. "I couldn't even tell her if her father was involved in the theft, or he was a victim. And today, I still can't tell you."

When her husband steps out for a minute, Barb approaches, a large manila envelope in her hand. Inside are printouts of the two articles Graupmann wrote on the case as well as the letter Penny included when she mailed them to Bizzak. Barb offers them to me. I refuse them politely, telling her I already have a copy.

The envelope stays in the air between us.

The mysteries, the homicides, the late nights, the worry, all that was supposed to have ended when Max retired at age 52, after almost 30 years of service.

Now Max's memory is failing.

Barb extends the envelope toward me again, telling me to take it.

When I accept, she smiles.

"Now he can be done," she says.