

# DNA and a Thumbprint Help Authorities Solve 2003 Long Island Murder

A former neighbor of Edna Schubert, 88, who was beaten to death in her Suffolk County home, was arrested after a retired detective urged the use of new technology in the case.



Listen to this article · 3:18 min [Learn more](#)



By Livia Albeck-Ripka

Feb. 10, 2025, 7:17 p.m. ET

On Dec. 12, 2003, Edna Schubert, 88, a retired Department of Motor Vehicles worker and widow, was found beaten to death at the home where she lived alone in Long Island hamlet of North Bay Shore, N.Y. Neighbors entered the home and found her body after seeing her front door ajar; a window shattered and papers billowing in the wind outside her house.

For more than two decades, the case went unsolved, until a retired detective still haunted by the murder urged in 2023 that new technology be used to re-examine evidence taken from the scene. Now, a man has been charged with Ms. Schubert's murder after high-definition photography was used to help match his left thumbprint to one found at the scene, the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office said at a news conference on Friday.

The man, Raul Ayala, 51, of Talmo, Ga., was Ms. Schubert's neighbor and was 29 at the time of the murder, the district attorney's office said. Mr. Ayala, who was arraigned Friday on charges of first- and second-degree murder, had been trying to rob Ms. Schubert at the time, according to an indictment in Suffolk County Court.

If convicted of the most serious charge, he could be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, according to the district attorney's office.

Mr. Ayala's lawyer, Christopher M. Gioe, said in an email that his client had pleaded not guilty and maintains his innocence.

Law enforcement officers arrested Mr. Ayala on Jan. 16 following a monthslong investigation in which detectives used high-definition photography to more clearly identify a fingerprint in a 2003 picture of the window where they say Mr. Ayala entered the home, the Suffolk County district attorney, Ray Tierney, said at the news conference.

The Suffolk County Police Department began surveilling Mr. Ayala in August 2024 and matched DNA samples taken from Ms. Schubert's clothing with samples taken from lottery scratch-off cards and plastic bottles that Mr. Ayala had discarded, he said.

"As investigators, some cases stick with you," Mr. Tierney said. Though Ms. Schubert had no children of her own, she "was the grandma to every kid in her neighborhood," Mr. Tierney added, noting that she would often feed them snacks and help them with math homework.

On the eve of her death, Ms. Schubert's neighbors had taken her dinner and a thermos of coffee for the following morning, Mr. Tierney said, adding: "Edna looked out for them. They looked out for Edna."

He said he did not believe there was any "specific relationship" between Ms. Schubert and Mr. Ayala, who he said did not appear to have a job at the time of the murder.

Pasquale Albergo, the retired detective who pushed for the case to be re-examined, could not provide further information or comment on the case because he may be called as a witness, the district attorney's office said. Others involved in the investigation, including the fingerprint expert who linked Mr. Ayala's thumbprint to the scene, may also be called as witnesses and could not comment, the office said.

## Relatives of Ms. Schubert could not immediately be reached on Monday evening for comment.

**Livia Albeck-Ripka** is a Times reporter based in Los Angeles, covering breaking news, California and other subjects. More about Livia Albeck-Ripka