

# Where to find the missing

Creating a single database could help keep searches alive

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS  
BDN STAFF

**T**wenty-seven years ago, Virginia Douglas and her husband, Frank Douglas, pulled into the Renys parking lot in Belfast so she could use the store's restroom. Virginia Douglas reportedly walked into the store and was never seen again.

The couple had come to Maine on a spur-of-the-moment trip from their home in Lexington, Massachusetts. No one the local police interviewed at the store recalled seeing her. They even doubted she had ever set foot in Belfast, according to news reports at the time.

Police suspected Douglas may have been the victim of foul play but they could never confirm those suspicions.

Belfast police Chief Michael J. McFadden was living in the city when she disappeared, although he wasn't working for the police department at the time. He said he can't recall any other Belfast cases, either before or after Douglas' appearance, in which someone completely vanished.

"People just don't go missing in Belfast," he said.

Although Douglas went missing all those years ago, her name isn't found on any official database for missing persons in Maine. And she isn't the only person to be absent from them, either. The databases that are available often contain inconsistent information about who is missing in Maine. Without accurate information about these people, there's a greater risk they may be forgotten and their cases stay unsolved.

**'Sometimes you don't find someone'**

For Lt. Brian McDonough of the Maine State Police's Major Crimes Unit, time is the critical factor in any missing person case because witnesses' memory, evidence and crime scenes deteriorate as the clock ticks away. The state police are particularly concerned about this, as their work on missing persons focuses on those who may have fallen victim to foul play.

A majority of cases are resolved quickly, according to Bangor police Sgt. Dave Bush-ey.

Bushey, who leads the department's Criminal Investigation Division, said that missing persons are a high priority for investigators. He reviews each case when it comes in and as-



GEORGE DANBY | BDN

signs one of his detectives right away. As a result, they "clear them on a regular basis."

Those cases don't always end happily. Cecil Worster of Bangor went missing from his home near the Hampden town line sometime on Nov. 21, 2013, and police searches were unsuccessful. Five months later, he was recovered from the Penobscot River in Stockton Springs.

But then, "sometimes you don't find someone," McDonough said.

**The numbers**

What's difficult is getting a handle on how many of these cases have gone cold in Maine. The Maine State Police list 16 names of missing persons on its website, with another two people who are believed to be

missing listed as unsolved homicides. Not included are any missing person cases from local and county police departments.

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) has 27 names on its list of missing persons in Maine. Unofficial lists on the Doe Network and The Charley Project websites, which are maintained by volunteers, have 18 and 25 names, respectively.

But the actual number could be higher because of inconsistent reporting over the years. Each list goes back only as far as 1971, and some names will appear on one list but not another.

Douglas, who went missing back in 1988, isn't listed with the state police or NamUs. But her name appears on both the

Doe Network's and The Charley Project's databases.

According to Bushey, four people went missing in Bangor from 1991 to 2010 who still have not been found. Those names — Roderick Hotham, Sharon Beaudoin, Richard Morse and William Hilderbrand — don't appear on any of the above lists.

Aside from the state police, no Maine police department posts information about unsolved missing person cases.

Bushey said he wasn't sure why the Bangor Police Department didn't have that information on its website.

"It's not a bad idea," he said. "We're not opposed to it."

While Maine may not have a publicly accessible database in which local police departments

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# Maine is loose with its debt

**O**ne hundred million dollars. Catchphrase of an Austin Powers villain or spending on the Nov. 3 ballot?

If you guessed the latter, you are correct. Dr. Evil was all over the place when quoting numbers. Unfortunately, so is Maine when it comes to debt. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a bonding problem.

Not with the actual sale, because Bruce Poliquin brought competition to the process and left out the steak dinners — Terry Hayes has continued that reform. And I am not referencing the ongoing Land for Maine's Future saga. That is a dispute about policies on acquiring and utilizing state-owned property. I am talking about our love affair with a whack-a-mole borrowing strategy. This year, we have \$100 million in debt on the ballot. Last year? \$42 million. 2013? \$150 million. 2011? Zero dollars.



MICHAEL CIANCETTE

In 2015, Mainers paid nearly \$100 million in debt service. Nearly \$15 million of that was interest. What did all that interest buy us? The right to use money sooner. Over the past five years, we have averaged \$107 million annually in payments, \$17 million in interest. Because we are continually spending and re-borrowing that amount, the interest cost is wasteful. And waste is anathema to frugal yankees.

There must be a better way to use this \$100 million annual cost. Unfortunately, incentives around debt are misaligned, and Augusta — both parties — has failed. Voters generally do not dive into the minutiae of government finances, nor should they need to. We hire legislators and officials to manage the public treasury; we expect them to do it well. When their arguments make intuitive sense, we take them at their word.

In support of new public debt, analogies to families are often drawn. After all, most families have to borrow to make big purchases such as cars or homes. And bridges count as a big purchase, right? The reality is, although we may fight like one, Maine is not a family when it comes to finances. The \$100 million on the ballot represents about 2.5 percent of the state's 2014 tax revenue.

With that perspective, let's re-frame the analogy. If I told you a family making \$50,000 wanted to borrow \$1,250 for 10 years, you would tell me they are nuts. Especially if they are already spending \$1,250 per year to pay for earlier borrowing.

So why does Augusta continually place these bond questions on the ballot? Because it is a way for

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# Hope remains, even with addiction, after husband's death

BY AMY PRICE  
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

**W**e will all experience bitterness. I'm learning, though, that it's a waste of life. Even with an addiction and with the death of my husband, let me tell you why I have hope.

I grew up in a small town in Massachusetts. I got married, had a child, earned my licensed practical nurse degree, divorced and remarried. I had done the usual experimentation with drugs in high school, but I had never developed a habit.

I drank during times of stress, which turned into maintenance drinking, which is when the body needs a certain level of alcohol just to function.

That went on for about 10 years. Circumstances put me in an area where heroin was abundant. After trying it, it wasn't long before I got hooked.

I used daily for about four years, during which time I did things I was not proud of.

I fell in love with my dealer, knowing full well that two addicted people usually cannot manage a viable relationship. We were lucky.

We both got on methadone in 1994 and spent the next couple of decades living happy, productive lives. Our individual strengths complemented one another, and we even started a store in Eastport together. (I do wood-burning and painting.)

Sadly, after a brief battle with cancer, I lost my husband last year.

He was the bravest man I knew, and he stayed clean right to the end. I have had my share of challenges over the years, but this was different. I had lost my soulmate, my constant companion, the person who in a



large way was how I defined myself. I couldn't picture a future without him.

I'm sure I was mentally relapsing for about six months before I actually used.

When I did, it was to dull the pain. Even after 21 years of staying clean, the insidious nature of addiction doesn't change. But those 21 years helped me to think it through and stop using before it was too late.

I am grateful to have the insight now to realize that using again was really just a form of slow suicide. I was reminded of a line from the film "Shawshank Redemption," which said, "Get busy living or get busy dying." I can't put it any better than that.

After we first began methadone treatment, we began feeding a large flock of wild ducks that gathered at a local park. We spent the next several years feeding them daily. It helped us to heal in so many ways. We learned again how to be committed and responsible, and we felt needed. The grace and dignity we observed in those ducks taught us empathy and so much more.

I have come away from it all a stronger person, and though I took a step back, I am again moving forward. With the right help — in my case, methadone and my husband — it's possible. It's even possible after great loss.

I have hope because I have learned that life is good, even when I am unable to see it. Addiction has taught me that emotions are neutral, and it's how we act upon them that defines us. Happiness is not a constant state of being but an ebb and flow.

We are all put to the test in one form or another. I don't look in the mirror to determine how I feel about myself; I look at my behavior. What I don't do is many times more important than what I do.

*Amy Price lives in Bangor. She shared her story as part of The Recovery Project, a BDN initiative encouraging people to submit messages of support for those in recovery. Find out more at <http://bit.ly/recoveryproject>.*