

November 25, 2008 Forth Worth, Texas

# Rifle stolen in 1977 is returned to owner

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Mike Cassidy never imagined he'd see his rifle again.

In July 1977, Cassidy, then a federal firearms dealer, bought a Marlin .35-caliber, lever-action rifle at a pawn shop while visiting relatives in Albuquerque.



Mike Cassidy's Marlin .35-caliber, lever-action rifle, recovered by Fort Worth police officer R.D. Gilfour. "He bent over backward to get the job done," Cassidy said of Gilfour.

"I used to buy old guns and fix them up. I went from one pawn shop to the next buying guns," Cassidy, who lives in Fort Dodge, Iowa, said Monday.

But at the second pawn shop he visited that day, his father-in-law

forgot to lock the car door, and someone stole the rifle.

"The day they took the police report, I figured that was a goner," Cassidy said. "The officer told me it's probably over the border already."

But on Friday, 31 years after the theft, Cassidy and the rifle were reunited after a Fort Worth police officer discovered that the stolen rifle had recently been sold to an east Fort Worth gun store.

Officer R.D. Gilfour said pawn shops and gun dealers must document all transactions of secondhand property they receive, including serial numbers. Gilfour said that when a clerk entered the rifle's serial number into [LeadsOnline], an online nationwide database, police learned that the gun that had recently been sold to the Winchester Gallery Gun Store, 6054 E. Lancaster Ave., had been stolen three decades ago in Albuquerque.

Gilfour obtained a copy of the police report from Albuquerque police and, upon confirming the rifle's make and

model, confiscated it from the dealer. He said it was the oldest stolen gun ever recovered through the database.

He then set out to track down the owner.

Cassidy, 66, said the officer first contacted his former wife, whose new husband e-mailed one of Cassidy's daughters about the officer's call.

"She called me and said, 'Hey, did you lose a gun?' " Cassidy said. "It was before she was born. I said, 'Yeah, that's been a hundred years ago.' She said they found it in Fort Worth, Texas."

Because a recent leg amputation prevented Cassidy from traveling to Fort Worth to attend a property hearing, Gilfour contacted the chief of police of Fort Dodge, an acquaintance of Cassidy.

"He agreed to accept the recovered firearm by mail so he could get it back to the rightful owner," Gilfour said.

Gilfour said charges in the case would have to be sought by Albuquerque authorities but are unlikely due to the length of time that has passed and the difficulty in proving who stole the gun, which could have changed hands numerous times since the theft.

Cassidy is content to have the rifle back and praised Gilfour's efforts.

"He didn't have to do what he did. He bent over backward to get the job done, and I appreciate it," Cassidy said.

He said he's trying to convince his wife to let him display the rifle on a wall.

"It's home under my bed with all the documentation that [Gilfour] sent me so I can show people," he said. "People don't believe I got the gun back."

He said he's curious where the gun has been all these years.

"I wish it could talk," he said.

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