

**latimes.com**

## **Lakewood man, 66, arrested in 30-year-old murder case**

Officials say James Edward Sims had been on the run since 1981, assuming a dead man's identity in California after allegedly shooting a man in a dispute over an exotic dancer in Fort Myers, Fla.

By Abby Sewell, Los Angeles Times

July 8, 2010

Will Bronas lived a quiet life on a tree-lined street in Lakewood until the day sheriff's deputies from two states showed up at his door and took him away in handcuffs.

Authorities say his real name is James Edward Sims, and he had been on the run since Jan. 18, 1981, when he allegedly shot and killed a man in Fort Myers, Fla. He had assumed the identity of Willis Bronas — who died in 1973 — and lived in Lakewood for 19 years before being arrested Friday.

Sims, now 66, is accused of shooting 29-year-old Roy Radabaugh in the face in the parking lot of a bar after the men argued over an exotic dancer named Lafonda Dalton. According to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Sims believed Radabaugh was stalking Dalton, whom Sims was dating.

A Florida court issued an arrest warrant for Sims two days after the shooting, but he eluded capture for nearly 30 years, even after the case was featured on the TV show "America's Most Wanted" in 2005.

The Lee County, Fla., Sheriff's Office's cold case unit took up the case about six months ago and used "good old-fashioned police work" to pinpoint Bronas as Sims' likely alter ego, department spokesman Tony Schall said. Investigators found a thumbprint Bronas submitted to the California DMV with a 1997 driver's license application and matched it to a print on file for Sims.

Detectives from Lee County and deputies from the L.A. County Sheriff's Lakewood station staked out Sims' home on Conquista Avenue and arrested him when he walked outside a little after 8 a.m. Friday.

Sims left a wife and 8-year-old daughter in Florida when he fled, said Lee County Sheriff's Lt. Kevin D. Ferry. He had owned a business there called Sims Underwater Salvage and started another salvage business in California. Apart from that, officials gave limited details about Sims' past and his activities while on the run, citing an ongoing investigation.

Neighbors in Lakewood knew little about his past. They described "Will" as a mellow handyman who largely kept to himself but whose backyard trampoline was always open to the neighborhood

children.

"He was a nice neighbor," said James Boano, 35, who lived across the street from Sims for five years.

Sims lived with his longtime partner, Sharon Beard — who bought the house where they lived in 2003, according to property records — and did construction work on boat landings, neighbors said. At times he would help neighbors out with odd jobs around their homes or loan them tools from his vast collection.

Steed Coats, 41, who lived down the block from Sims, said his 7- and 9-year-old sons would frequently play with Beard's visiting grandchildren or jump on the trampoline. The neighbors who had spoken to Sims regularly said they had never heard him mention Florida.

"This is all news to everybody," Coats said.

Contacted at their home and at a court hearing for Sims, Beard declined to comment on the case or on Sims' life in Lakewood, other than to say that she loves him.

Sims appeared in a Los Angeles County court Wednesday and waived his right to fight extradition. He will be sent back to Florida to face trial on a first-degree murder charge.

As of Wednesday afternoon, he remained in Men's Central Jail in downtown L.A. without the possibility of bail.