

## Unidentified Baby Still Remembered After 25 Years

Posted: Dec 7, 2007 05:58 PM CST

Updated: Dec 7, 2007 07:16 PM CST

The initial call came from a trucker, who reported seeing an adult's body in the river that early December morning, 25 years ago.

Responding deputies found something far more disturbing in the murky waters of the Escatawpa.

"And there they came across the baby's body. Like I say, they really weren't looking for a baby, they were looking for an adult and found a baby," recalled deputy Virgil Moore.

The pretty little girl, between 18 months and two years old, was never identified. Investigators determined she died a brutal death and was tossed off the interstate bridge, into the river.

"From what I recall of the autopsy, I saw on there the baby had been smothered and thrown overboard. But the baby still had a breath of life because she had sucked in some of the murky water into her lungs," said Moore.

The unidentified toddler is buried in Jackson County Memorial Park. Deputy Moore and his wife stepped forward and made sure the little girl was given a proper funeral and burial in 1982.

"She just became so close to us during the funeral and the time we were investigating this and all. And I have a picture of her that will hang in my living room as long as I'm alive. It's just like my own daughter, a beautiful baby."

Paul Murphy was a reserve deputy who was on duty at the time the child's body was recovered from the river. He clings to the hope that questions may one day be answered.

"She belongs to somebody. And if she's not remembered, it's not going to be put out anymore. It's just, time is going to pass on by. And this way here, if we keep her in the light, somebody may just come forward," says Murphy.

The memorial service for the still unidentified child will be held tomorrow at Bethel Assembly Church on Martin Street in Pascagoula. Some 200 people attended the young girl's funeral in that same church, 25 years ago.

"There had to be relatives of this baby. And this baby came up missing. You know, grand parents, uncles, aunts, cousins. Somebody." said Moore.

The memorial service for the child will be held at three o'clock Saturday afternoon at Bethel Assembly Church on Martin Street in Pascagoula.

By Steve Phillips

---

25 years later, 'Baby Jane' still a mystery

Associated Press

PASCAGOULA — On Dec. 5, 1982, an infant girl was found dead in the Escatawpa River.

Twenty-five years later, her identity and the circumstances surrounding her death remain unknown. No arrests have been made.

That's not stopping two Alabama women from seeking justice for her, or at least closure.

A memorial service for "Baby Jane" will be held Saturday at 3 p.m. at Bethel Assembly of God Church in Pascagoula. The church was the site of her funeral attended by about 200 people more than two decades ago.

The baby was buried in Jackson County Memorial Park.

Lynn Reuss and Marjorie Brinker, the Alabama women who are organizing the memorial service, met after researching another missing person's case. Reuss said she named the baby Delta Dawn because of the time of morning she was found.

"I have always been interested in the fate of this little girl ever since I located her case," Reuss said. "I just couldn't understand why someone would throw a baby into a river like that."

Deputy Virgil Moore, who now works in the community relations division of the Jackson County Sheriff's Department, was with other deputies at a Christmas party in 1982 when a truck driver reported seeing what looked like an adult body in the river.

Reserve deputies found the infant girl after arriving in the Franklin Creek area north of Interstate 10 and meeting with the truck driver.

The girl, who authorities believe was 18 months to 2 years old, had red hair and was wearing a red and white checkered dress and a diaper. She was about 31-inches tall and weighed about 25 pounds, and she was believed to have been dead between 36 to 48 hours, Moore said.

Moore said initial autopsy results indicated that she drowned, but he said that suffocation was never ruled out.

The sheriff's flotilla recovered her body partially floating and face up.

"There was murky water all in her lungs," Moore said.

Moore and his wife, Mary Ann, claimed the baby's body after authorities "exhausted every effort" in trying to locate a relative or someone else who would claim the girl.

"Actually, she belongs to Jackson County," Virgil Moore said. "She was a beautiful baby girl."

Instead of an unmarked grave, Moore said that his wife, now deceased, insisted on a Christian burial with a headstone that reads, "Baby Jane — Known Only To God."

Reuss said she and Brinker chose the church and pastors Joe and Donna Spence for the memorial because they conducted the 1982 ceremony there.

No leads have surfaced in 25 years, Moore said, stressing that "we didn't have the DNA and other technology that we do today." With no new leads, the case remains inactive.

He commended Reuss, who lives near Auburn, Ala., Brinker of Grand Bay and others for wanting to keep the case in the public arena.

"I keep hoping that somewhere down the line somebody will say something," Moore said. "There has to be an aunt, uncle, somebody that wants to come forward."

Reuss said she and Brinker were overwhelmed when local churches, florists, businesses, citizens and other strangers joined in to help with the memorial.

"We both felt like it needed to be done so that people would not forget and maybe stir up some publicity to help get justice for her case," Reuss said. "Somewhere out there, somebody knows something."

Reuss and a friend also set up an online petition to lobby America's Most Wanted and other national TV programs and media outlets to help provide information about the case.

Another child, referred to as "Baby Jane 2," is buried next to the infant girl, Moore said. That baby, believed to be about 4-weeks old, was found drowned in Wade in 1987.

<http://www.picayuneitem.com>

---

JACKSON COUNTY, Miss.) Feb. 19 -- The case of "Baby Jane Doe" has been kept alive by detectives and deputies who simply won't let it go. The child's body was found floating in a river off Interstate 10, in Jackson County Mississippi on a cold December morning in 1982. It's a case that still baffles investigators 25 years later.

Jackson County Mississippi detectives believe Baby Jane Doe was thrown off the Interstate 10 bridge into the Escawtawpa River. "The child most likely was alive when it was thrown over because there's no blunt force trauma," Detective Mick Sears tells NBC15's Jame Gordon.

The child drowned, starting a 25 year mystery. Virgil Moore, the original investigator, has taken on the task of not only finding out who killed the baby girl, but has become the girl's surrogate father, first arranging for her burial and since then, tending to her grave. He says: "As the marker says, 'Known only to God.' What I'd like is for us, myself and all the people here, is to know who this baby is."

The night before Baby Doe's body was found reports came in that a woman holding a baby was seen walking along I-10 near the Alabama-Mississippi state line. A truck driver who was interviewed at a nearby truck stop told investigators he offered to help the woman, but she refused.

The next day, there was another call. A truck driver heading east on I -10 said he saw a body floating near the west bound lane off a bridge on the Escawtawpa River. Paul Murphy, the deputy on call, says: "And I stopped in the middle of the first bridge there to get out and looked over and there was the baby."

Searchers looked for another body, possibly that of the baby's mother, but nothing was ever found.

Now, 25 years later, the focus is on the truck driver who called saying he saw the baby's body. Among the many questions is, why did the truck driver wait until he was miles away to make the call.

Detectives say they are getting closer to tracking down that truck driver, but they realize it could be just another dead end. According to Captain Sears, "We just want to try and go over his statement that he made back then, that was, which of course back then was not a very good statement."

This past December, folks in Jackson County marked the 25th anniversary of the little girl's death and they continue with their vow to give the baby a name and to find justice for her.

If you have any information which could help officials find the answers they seek regarding the Baby Jane Doe case, contact the Jackson County, Mississippi, Sheriff's Department.

<http://www.nbc15online>

---

Can DNA advances solve cold case?

Monday, September 07, 2009

By CHERIE WARD

Staff Reporter

Advances in DNA technology could prove the strongest chance for investigators to determine the identity of Baby Jane, an unknown infant girl found dead in Dog River 27 years ago.

The case of the 18-month-old child, also referred to as Delta Dawn, who was found floating in the river Dec. 5, 1982, has been a troubling mystery for years until a recent break in the cold case.

Jackson County Sheriff's investigator Hope Thornton said the body of the child was exhumed in November 2008 to obtain DNA samples, hoping to link her to another cold case out of state.

"In March 2008, I was contacted by a California coroner," Thornton said. "The family of a young girl who disappeared about the same time saw the digital composite of Delta and wants to know if she could actually be theirs."

Allegedly, the boyfriend of the girl's mother stated he kidnapped the child and killed her but has never told authorities where the child's remains were hidden, Thornton said.

"He's in jail," she said. "Whether or not this is the child or not, we just don't know, yet. Right now, we're having a hard time getting viable DNA."

But investigators have also not ruled out a truck driver as a prime suspect in the child's demise.

Ted Hammond of Florida reported seeing a dead body in the Escatawpa River as he drove over an Interstate 10 bridge.

Thornton said she interviewed Hammond when she took the case over eight months ago.

"He's still a suspect in my book," Thornton said.

According to a Dec. 7, 1982, report in the Mississippi Press, Hammond said he saw an adult body floating 1,000 feet west of the I-10 bridge that runs over the Escatawpa River.

Sheriff's investigators later found the baby 10 miles north of that bridge but never found an adult.

A Dec. 8, 1982, report describes a woman with a baby walking west on I-10 near the truck scales at the Alabama-Mississippi state line.

"Even with age and time, there's no way things can change as dramatically as his story has," Thornton said, declining to give details because of the ongoing investigation.

The Jackson County Sheriff's Department adopted the baby shortly after she was discovered, and deputies paid her funeral expenses.

Call the Jackson County criminal investigation department at 228-769-3065 with any information about Baby Jane.

<http://www.gulflive.com>

---

An end-of-life story

The authors of the groundbreaking 1999 book, *Beyond the Body*, contend that when bodies are divorced from their personal identities, the living are the ones left in the lurch. Unidentified human remains rob us of the soothing rituals—eulogies, reminiscences, memorials—through which we cope with death.

For thirty years, the Jackson County, Mississippi, sheriff's department has been hunting for clues that might identify an eighteen- to twenty-four-month-old girl. In 1982, the child's body was found in the Dog River beneath the westbound lane of Interstate 10 in Pascagoula.

She's known as Baby Jane, but Lynn Reuss, a resident of nearby Auburn, Alabama, calls the toddler with the strawberry blond hair and pink-and-white dress Delta Dawn because she was found just as the sun was rising on a cold December day. Reuss, a missing persons advocate, helped organize a public memorial service that marked the 25th anniversary of the little girl's death.

The authors of *Beyond the Body* would say Reuss is fulfilling the basic human need to explain a death—to make sense of what appears senseless. At the end of life, the living are compelled to form a narrative or biography of the deceased through a memorial or even just a conversation. Reuss and others are keeping the conversation going, hoping Delta Dawn will one day be reunited with her name.

<http://us6.campaign-archive2.com>

---



JACKSON COUNTY, MS (WLOX) -

A picture could finally give detectives answers 31 years after a man was found murdered.

Pascagoula Detective Darren Versiga found out about the man just two years ago when he was re-opening another cold case. The man's remains were being stored in Oklahoma where the autopsy was done in 1982.

Versiga sent the man's remains off to a volunteer artist with University of Tennessee Project Everyone Deserves A Name. The artist has just created a computer generated sketch of what the murdered man may have looked like.

"I sent off for DNA testing. Once that was complete, they sent those remains to UNT under the direction of Todd Matthews, and basically they did a reconstruction of it and it looks like a real photo," Versiga said.

Versiga said there was no DNA match, but now that he has a picture he hopes someone will be able to recognize the man.

He was found on December 8, 1982, in the Dog River underneath the eastbound lane of Interstate 10 in Jackson County. Divers were searching the water after a young girl was found floating four days earlier. She has never been identified either.

The two were found only 60 yards from one another.

"The black male was found thrown off the bridge it seemed like. He was shot is what the pathologist had confirmed," Versiga said. "We don't know if he is from the area or was driven here and thrown off the bridge."

Investigators believe the man was between 18 and 22-years-old, weighed about 120 pounds and was about 5'6".

"We have the clothing that was found then, and now we have a face to put to that man that has been unidentified since 1982," Versiga said.

The man was found wearing brown pants and a Hawaiian printed shirt. Investigators believe he had been dead six months to three years before he was found.

"Hopefully we will bring closure to a family somewhere," Versiga said.

If you have any information about who the man is, you are asked to call the Pascagoula Police Department at 228-762-2211.



If detectives are able to identify him, they can begin asking questions to try and find his killer.

WLOX

---

The Bodies in Singing River ON THE TRAIL OF A COLD, COLD CASE BY DEBORAH HALBER, G96 PHOTOGRAPH BY BETH YOUNG The grave digger drove west on interstate 10 through a chilly December drizzle. He slowed, peering at a figure laboring along the roadside. He wasn't the only one to spot her. CB radio channels were abuzz that night—Friday the third—with truckers' reports of a woman carrying what looked like a barefoot, coatless toddler in her arms, walking near the truck scales at the Alabama-Mississippi line. The grave digger felt sorry for her. But in Pascagoula, Mississippi, in 1982, a black man simply didn't invite a white woman into his vehicle, no matter how miserable the weather. Within days, a small body in a tiny casket would be buried under a donated, nameless stone, and the memory of that night would haunt him. Shortly after sunrise on Sunday, December 5, a trucker crossing over one of the area's many waterways on the Interstate stopped and called the police. He'd seen what he thought was a body floating in the murky water under a bridge. The road from Biloxi to Mobile spans labyrinthine waterways that cut winding channels through ancient, moldering bottomland swamps en route to the river delta. All that stagnant water infuses the air with cloying odors of decay and rot that some find unnerving in a "what lies beneath" kind of way. Then there's the Singing River. Legend has it that the last Native Americans from a tribe decimated by white settlers, war, and disease grasped hands and disappeared, their voices joined in a communal death choir, into the Pascagoula River. Some claim you can still hear the music, whispery at first but growing more distinct over time. To a northerner used to water with finite boundaries, this landscape is unfamiliar, surreal, run through with tea-colored liquid that melts through solid earth. If you can't trust land to be solid, what can you trust? In 2011, working on a book about amateur sleuths, I traveled to Mississippi to meet Ellen Leach, a chain store cashier who, in her spare time, had become a one-woman volunteer detective agency, chasing down the identities of human remains that cropped up, nameless, within state lines. It struck me as an unusual hobby, but Ellen was far from alone in pursuing it. In chat rooms and on blogs and websites such as Websleuths.com, the Doe Network, and Canyouidentifyme.org, I found a far-flung community immersed in the deaths of strangers. They mined esoteric details from the Internet, bandied about theories and possible names for death-ravaged faces, speculated whether this victim could be tied to that serial killer. I wanted to understand why, in the absence of financial reward or recognition, they did it. Ellen had populated her own website, Mississippi Missing and Unidentified Persons (mmup.info), with dozens of local cases. One of the oldest and most mystifying was that of Delta Dawn, or, as some know her, Baby Jane. I had studied the

official case history: A sheriff's deputy went to the area the truck driver mentioned, a bridge spanning the Escatawpa River, a tributary of the Pascagoula, but found no body. He decided to continue the search and, under another bridge several miles away, spotted a small blond child, clad in a checkered dress and a diaper, lying partially submerged and face up in the weeds. The autopsy determined she was between eighteen and twenty-four months old, perhaps still alive when she hit the water, apparently thrown from the westbound side of the twin Interstate 10 causeways, which exceed forty feet at their highest point. When the trucker tipped off police that night in 1982, Virgil L. Moore was a deputy in the Jackson County Sheriff's department. "I think talking to Virgil would be good," Ellen told me. In her fifties, Ellen was a one-time tomboy, a tall woman with a strong jaw and cleft chin, a wide, mobile mouth, and gray hair to her shoulders. That day she cut a mannish figure in jeans, zip-front fleece jacket, and black leather sneakers. "You could hear how they found her and everything they went through to try to identify her," she said in an ex-smoker's rasp as we drove over viaducts and past old-growth forests that were filled, I imagined, with writhing copperheads and leering, talon-branched trees out of Snow White. She paused. "Next year will be thirty years," she said. "And she's still unidentified." Moore, in his seventies and semi-retired, agreed to escort Ellen and me to the gravesite. "He is real country," she warned as we neared the meeting spot. Moore, square-jawed and balding like a grayer Jack Nicholson, in a navy blue sheriff's uniform with Cool Hand Luke shades and a .40-caliber handgun strapped to his hip, met us at a service station just off the Interstate. With a nod to me and a wave to Ellen, he floored the accelerator and his silver Ford pickup shot off in a spray of gravel. He barely paused at a stop sign and then raced through a yellow light. "OK, Virgil," Ellen muttered as we weaved after him, cutting off other drivers, finally swerving into a driveway marked Jackson County Memorial Park. "Oh," she sighed as Moore's tires dug furrows into the grass near someone's grave. Two cars waited for us at the burial site. "I wonder if it's the investigators," Ellen said. She had brought a camera—every time she visited the grave, she photographed the trinkets unknown people placed there that she believed might contain a clue to Delta Dawn's identity. She kicked herself for forgetting her Mississippi Missing business cards. Like many web sleuths, Ellen cultivated relationships with law enforcement in the hope that they would drop her tidbits of information. Two women with badges and holsters on their belts—detectives Linda Johnson and Hope Thornton—shook our hands. Ellen had alerted them that she'd be there with a writer. "Hey, darlin'," Moore greeted his colleagues, his Mississippi drawl rough and throaty. "If you crack this case, Hope," he said, "you'll make national notoriety." He turned to me. "You come all the way from Boston for this?" Moore related that after the child's body was found, his wife asked him, "What are you all going to do with that little girl?" "Well, if we don't find someone to claim the body, we'll put her in an unmarked grave. The county will bury her," he said. That did not sit well with Mary Ann Moore, mother of six. "Oh, no," she told her husband. "I want her to have a Christian burial." The next day, Moore went to the sheriff and the lead detective. "Can me and my wife have that baby?" The Moores signed some papers, and the body was theirs. "Don't you call her Jane Doe," his wife scolded. Moore helped pay for a flat granite marker with a

ceramic vase, inscribed “Baby Jane” in block letters and, below, “Known only to God.” A pastor offered to lead the services. Four deputies served as pallbearers. A local paper reported more than two hundred attendees. “A lot of females, mothers boo-hooing,” Moore recalled. “It was a beautiful funeral.” Based on autopsy photos that still make Moore cringe, a forensic artist created a digital facial reconstruction. In it, the toddler is round-faced and pink-cheeked in a patterned blouse with a wide, lace-edged white collar tied in the center with a blue satin bow. Her blue eyes are wide and hopeful, her lips parted in a cherubic smile over a row of even, pearly baby teeth. Digitally manufactured light glints off her strawberry blond hair, which falls in charming curls around her small ears. “She was purty,” Moore said. “She was a beautiful baby girl.” He hung an eight-by-ten framed copy of the reconstruction in his living room and waited for someone to find her name. Because the child was discovered at daybreak in the river delta, Lynn Reuss called her Delta Dawn. A substitute school bus driver from Auburn, Alabama, Reuss was researching another perplexing local case—that of an Alabama boy who vanished in 1959—when she came across Baby Jane. In 2005, she convinced a local paper to revive the story. Marjorie Brinker, a retired office manager who lived in nearby Great Bay, saw it and got in touch. The two became friends, their relationship forged around the toddler. In 2007, Lynn and Marjorie organized a graveside prayer vigil followed by a memorial service to mark a quarter century since the girl’s death. Ellen Leach drove to Pascagoula from her home in Gulfport. She, Lynn, and Marjorie gathered with the others around Baby Jane’s granite stone. Ellen looked carefully at all the attendees, including a woman alone in a car. She guessed the woman was in her seventies, or perhaps younger but worn down by a hard life. “She sat right over there in her car during the whole thing, sat in her car and chain-smoked,” Ellen said. “An old lady who drives a Cadillac.” At the church, the woman, dressed in a tasteful pantsuit, sat in a middle pew, hands fidgeting, and spoke to no one. Ellen watched her from the back. Lynn snapped a photo. They peered at the registry after she signed it. The name looked like Donna Hall, or perhaps Donna Hill. “Curiosity got me on that. I think she knows something,” Ellen said. She passed along the information to law enforcement but if anyone followed up, they didn’t report back to her. She wishes now she had jotted down the woman’s license plate, maybe even tailed her. Another time, a woman from Kentucky called Detective Thornton, saying she was sure Delta Dawn was her long-lost sister. “She said she remembers her daddy put her sister in the trunk of a car and she’d never seen her again,” Moore said. “She said her uncle was a truck driver from Florida,” perhaps one of the anonymous tipsters about the woman on foot, although the Kentucky woman had no idea who that woman might be. The Kentucky woman drove to Pascagoula, and Moore raced to meet her at the cemetery. “I was so happy. I hugged that woman; she hugged me. She was crying.” The woman and a companion spent the night at Moore’s home. The next day Virgil and Marjorie took them to a Golden Corral restaurant. Marjorie handed over all the notes, photos, and articles on Baby Jane she had collected over the years. After tearful goodbyes, the woman headed back to Kentucky. But Thornton found that the woman’s DNA didn’t match Baby Jane’s. “She up and swore it was her sister,” Marjorie said. “Virgil, bless his heart, believed it was, too.” Just about everyone

involved with the case is stymied. The truck driver who reported seeing a body under the bridge described an adult wearing blue jeans and a checkered shirt. That would match the description others gave of the woman walking on the Interstate, but her body was never found. “He never seen a baby body,” Moore pointed out. “And where that baby was couldn’t be seen anyway”—not from the road. Bizarrely, divers dragging the river for the jeans-clad woman came upon the clothed skeleton of a young man with a gunshot wound to the head. Mississippi backwaters harbor surprising things: drums of toxic chemicals, water moccasin nests, skeletons. “Just luck,” was how the county coroner explained finding two unrelated bodies less than fifty feet apart in a spot being searched for a third. Lynn Reuss is taunted by vivid dreams: in them, the woman is a runaway who, without her family’s knowledge, gives birth. She is fleeing something or someone, maybe an abusive partner. “Virgil said that the baby was partially smothered, possibly from being held too tightly. Maybe the mother thought her baby was dead” and, panicked, threw her over the bridge. “Did you know that the child had no food in her stomach, but appeared to be cared for? Another reason why I think the mom fled—no money, no blanket, no shoes or socks on the child, no coat or hat. If she had these things, they were lost somewhere along the way.” For years, Lynn tried unsuccessfully to get Delta Dawn featured in the national media—she believes the digital reconstruction may jog someone’s long-dormant memory. “So many questions and no answers,” she wrote to me. In 2008, a coroner in California contacted Hope Thornton. A family thought the digital composite of Delta Dawn looked like their missing daughter. The child’s mother’s boyfriend allegedly kidnapped and killed the child but never told authorities where he hid the remains, Thornton said. Marjorie told me about an Alabama man who went by variations of the name Louis Lovie Riddle, incarcerated in Maine for another crime, who claimed he’d killed the baby and buried the mother in Alabama—and then recanted. “I don’t know if he was wacko or what,” she said. Thornton hasn’t ruled out the truck driver. She drove to Florida to interview him when she inherited the case in 2008. “Even with age and time, there’s no way things can change as dramatically as his story has. He’s still a suspect in my book,” she told a reporter from the Mississippi Press, although she declined to say more because of the ongoing investigation. “It gets in you and you can’t walk away from it,” Thornton told me that day at the gravesite. An investigator of crimes against children, she’s no stranger to the dark side of human nature. But clearly she finds this case particularly vexing, as do Lynn, Marjorie, Virgil, and others who thumb through the yellowing archives in the Pascagoula library, click on online details, or frequent Baby Jane’s grave. Her story and so many others remain maddeningly unknowable. The National Institute of Justice estimates that some 40,000 bodies or cremated remains from the past few decades languish in coroners’ back rooms, morgues, and potters fields around the country. It’s as though the population of Wilkes-Barre or North Miami Beach were lost and mysteriously unaccounted for. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, coroners and medical examiners handle the bodies of about 4,000 unidentified dead, of whom more than 1,000 will remain nameless in a given year, their chances of being identified shrinking by the day. Crowdsourcing the online resources adds human problem-solving to an intractable problem. As of 2014, Doe Network volunteers had

solved or helped solve sixty-seven cases of lost identity; Ellen Leach alone solved several. A publicly accessible database, Namus.gov, launched in 2009 by the Department of Justice, is credited with aiding in more than two hundred fifty identifications. Among the many unidentified dead, the lost children are the most gut-wrenching. Not only did adults in these children's lives fail them; the system failed them. Often, no one seems more chagrined than the detectives who inherit sometimes decades-old cases. But the odds are stacked against them. "She deserves a name and a birthday," Thornton said of Baby Jane. "Every day is her birthday." In 2009, Virgil Moore watched the little girl's remains exhumed for a DNA sample that investigators hoped—in vain, as it turned out—might tie her to a missing person. As the grave digger worked, he told Moore he'd never forgotten spotting the woman and child on I-10 that night. He'd always wondered if things might have turned out differently if he'd stopped. Moore, whose wife died in 2000, hopes to have Baby Jane's portrait recreated on weather-proof ceramic that he can affix to her headstone. If she had lived, she would be in her thirties, but to Virgil she will always be an angel child, trapped in time. "Nothing adds up right now," he said. But then, little about the case ever added up. No matter how many ways I pieced together the sketchy facts, I couldn't come up with a scenario that fit. But I had a newfound respect for those who refused to stop trying. After getting back in our cars and trailing Virgil a mile or so from the cemetery to the church—deserted that day—where the funeral and memorial had been held, Ellen and I headed back toward Gulfport. We retraced our route over the bridge where the truck driver saw a body that no one ever found, along the stretch of highway where the grave digger almost stopped, and past the murky water where the singing Native Americans disappeared, leaving only their voices behind. DEBORAH HALBER, G96, is the author of *The Skeleton Crew: How Amateur Sleuths Are Solving America's Coldest Cases* (Simon & Schuster), due out in July. Formerly a writer and editor at Tufts and MIT, she has also written for many magazines and newspapers - See more at: <http://www.tufts.edu/alumni/magazine/summe...h.WL12t2Fg.dpuf>

It's been over 34 years, but the Jackson County Sheriff's Department refuses to give up on Baby Jane, an unidentified toddler found lifeless in Dog River in Pascagoula.

"I hit a certain point of that bridge and I could hear a child or baby crying at the top of his lungs and it's got to be down in the water there or in a boat or something there, I didn't know." It was this lone truck driver's call to 9-1-1 that led Jackson County investigators underneath I-10, deep into Dog River one cold December morning. Jackson County Sheriff's Flotilla Captain Louis Seaman said, "We got a call early one morning to Escatawpa River which was called Dog River at the time for a victim in the water." It was 1982, Louis Seaman was 16-years-old and had just joined the Jackson County Flotilla, never expecting that his first official call would be to search the waters for a dead toddler. "Overwhelming I guess you could say and very heart wrenching, I guess you could call it, just to know it was a kid," said Seaman.

Seaman, along with Jackson County investigators, pulled the body of a two-year-old blonde girl from the marshes. Initial reports in '82 showed Baby Jane had been dead for 36 to 48 hours and drowning was the cause of death.

There is a composite drawing of what the toddler could have looked like, but any and all details surrounding Baby Jane's death remain foggy. Captain Chris Stratton with the Jackson County Sheriff's Department said, "The previous night she was reported by some truck drivers that her mother was carrying her and they were walking on the side of the road and several people offered her a ride she refused and we're assuming that's the mother of the baby that was found because no one has ever found out who that was and nobody has reported a child missing or the woman."

Baby Jane's body was exhumed in 2008 to extract DNA, but no matches have been made and still no one has come forward to claim the toddler. "Somebody's missing this child. This is somebody's kid. The mother was somebody's kid. There's a grandparent somewhere. There's a father somewhere and somebody has to be missing this child. It wouldn't be a child anymore," said Stratton.

As the years pass, the initial investigators who worked the case have also passed away or retired and all possible suspects have led authorities to countless dead ends, but Captain Stratton, along with Louis Seaman, say they won't stop fighting for justice for Baby Jane. "Somebody somewhere knows something and we need to put this baby to rest," said Seaman.

If you have any clues as to what happened to Baby Jane call the Jackson County Sheriff's Department or Crime Stoppers.

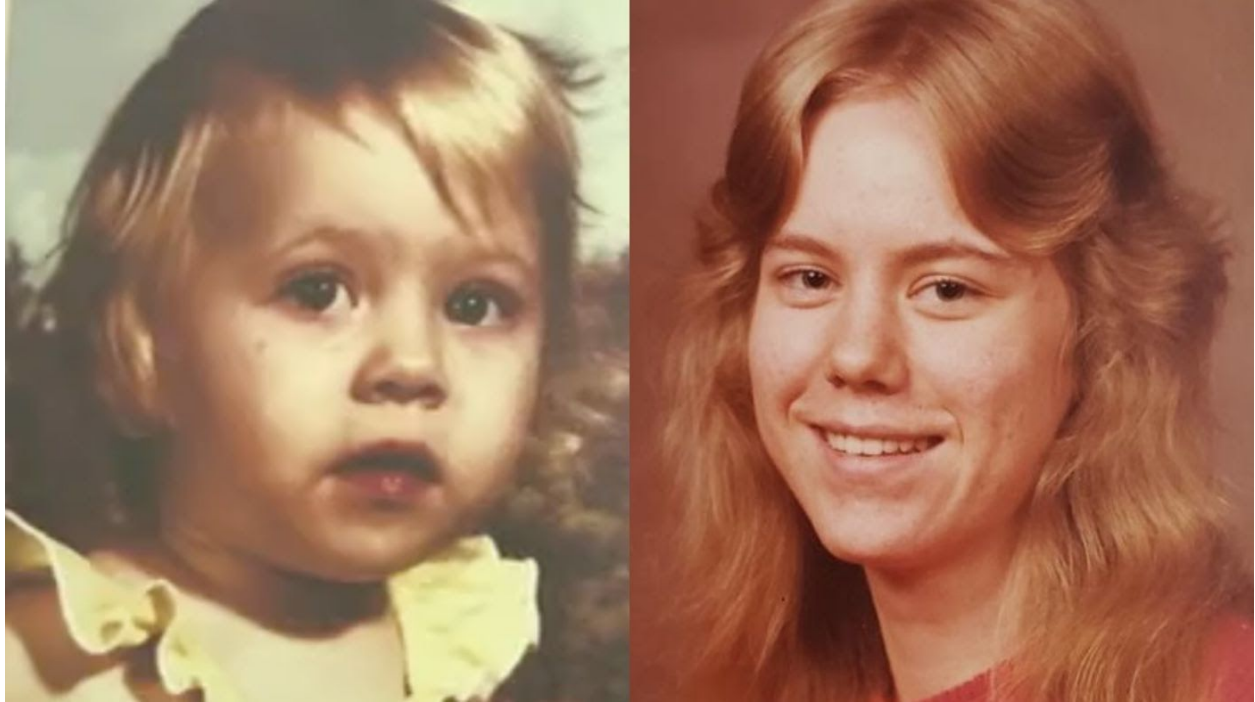
---

By [Lindsay Knowles](#) | December 3, 2020 at 2:26 PM GST - Updated December 4 at 1:29 PM

PASCAGOULA, Miss. (WLOX) - Nearly four decades after a child's body was found in the Escatawpa River, she has been identified thanks to persistent investigators and DNA technology. It was 38 years ago this week when the body of a small child was found in the Escatawpa River under the I-10 bridge. That child has remained unidentified since she was found in 1982, despite numerous efforts over the years to figure out who she is and how she got into the river.

The toddler - believed to be between 18-24 months old - was dubbed "Delta Dawn" and "Baby Jane."

On Friday, Jackson County Sheriff's Department announced that they have identified Baby Jane as 18-month-old Alisha Ann Heinrich and her mother as 23-year-old Gwendolyn Clemons.



After 38 years, Baby Jane - also called Delta Dawn - has been identified as 18-month old Alisha Ann Heinrich. Her mother, who is still missing, has also been identified as 23-year-old Gwendolyn Clemons. They were last seen Thanksgiving 1982 in Joplin, Missouri. (Source: Jackson. Co. Sheriff's Dept.)

Sheriff Mike Ezell said Gwendolyn was last seen by her family on Thanksgiving 1982 in Joplin, Missouri. The young mother, baby Alisha, and an unidentified man left the state together, reportedly traveling to Florida to start a new life, according to the family.

They were never seen again. Less than two weeks later, the toddler's body was found in the Escatawpa River.

### **The Update**

On Dec. 4, 2020, the Jackson County Sheriff's Department gathered together the many investigators and volunteers who have spent years working on this case to update the public about Baby Jane's identity.

The break in the case came after the DNA was received by Othram, a state-of-the-art DNA laboratory in Houston. They were able to match Alisha's DNA with family members in Missouri, leading investigators to travel there and confirm with the family that the missing child and her mother were Alisha and Gwendolyn.

According to family members, Gwendolyn and Alisha left the state headed to Florida with a man the young mother was dating. That man, who the family said is now deceased, is suspected of killing Alisha and possibly Gwendolyn.

Sheriff Ezell said the man - whose name has not yet been released - returned to Missouri without the mother and baby. For years, Gwendolyn and Alisha's family have hoped that they were alive. "The family were under the assumption that Alisha was alive and living somewhere," said Ezell. "I guess they were just hopeful. They were thankful that the case was still being worked and (finding out what happened) gave them some closure. The aunt and the grandmother were present along with one of the cousins and they were extremely thankful that we were able to identify (Alisha) and give her name back. And now they know where she was and they were very thankful."

To date, Gwendolyn has not been found and authorities can't be sure she whether she is dead or alive.

"We do not know if she is dead or alive at this point," said Ezell. "We're assuming the worst but we don't know that for sure."

The sheriff said they were reaching out to other law enforcement agencies, asking anyone who may have a body matching Gwendolyn's description to please contact them.

For the officers and volunteers who worked this decades-long case, it's an emotional end.

Several of them were moved to tears during the press conference, wiping tears from their eyes, unable to speak publicly about the case that has haunted them and taken up so many hours of their time.

"One of the hardest things that law enforcement officers deal with is the death of a child and it brings back a lot of memories, I know, but it shows you the devotion of these folks and their commitment to public safety and public trust, that they'll get out there and do the hard work," said Ezell.

## **Eyewitness Reports**

On Dec. 3, 1982, witnesses reported seeing a woman carrying a toddler. The woman was reportedly seen between midnight and 1 a.m. on Dec. 3, 1982, carrying the child on Highway 63. A woman matching the same description was also reportedly seen shortly after on I-10 close to the Alabama border, walking west near the exit for the truck scales.

One of the witnesses who came forward told investigators she was monitoring the CB radio on the night of Dec. 3, 1982, when there was a lot of chatter about a woman with a child walking down the interstate and being in distress but refusing to let anyone help her.



Two days later at 7 a.m. on Dec. 5, 1982, a truck driver called police to report seeing the body of an adult woman in the Escatawpa River. A deputy responded and, while searching for the woman, came upon the body of Baby Jane.



Forensic facial reconstruction renderings show what Baby Jane may have looked like before her death. (Source: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children)

### **The Discovery of Two Bodies**

The toddler was found partially submerged and face up in the weeds close to the bridge.

Authorities believe the child was thrown from the bridge into the general area where her body was subsequently found. Investigators said at the time that it was unlikely the child's body was the one seen by the truck driver because that section of the river was heavily infested with weeds, making it difficult to view from the road.

Over the next few days, a large search effort was launched to try and find the woman. Despite an exhaustive search with helicopters, boats, and divers, a woman's body was never found.

However, the body of an unidentified African-American man - who also still remains unidentified - was discovered on Dec. 8, 1982. To this day, the man remains unidentified, but authorities say they believe he had been in the water undiscovered for at least six months before being found and that his death is not believed to be connected to Baby Jane's.

An autopsy on Baby Jane - also called Delta Dawn - revealed that someone attempted to smother her before she was put in the river. However, she was still alive when she landed in the water and her official cause of death was determined to be caused by drowning.

The toddler was 2'6" tall and weighed around 25 pounds. Her hair was strawberry blonde and she was found wearing a pink and white checkered dress or shirt and a disposable diaper. She had 12 teeth and appeared to have been well-nourished and cared for.

Baby Jane's body now lies interred at Jackson County Memorial Park thanks to a Jackson County deputy and his wife who stepped forward to give her a proper funeral and burial. Her grave bears the inscriptions: "Baby Jane" and "Known Only To God."

### **An Investigation That's Lasted Decades**

For decades, investigators have exhausted all efforts to identify Baby Jane and to find the woman seen on the interstate that night. All efforts have proven fruitless.

As technology progresses, forensic facial reconstruction software was used to guess how the child may have looked before she died.

In 2009, the body of Baby Jane was exhumed so that DNA could be obtained from her body. That sample was then entered into the data registry for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

**WLOX FLASHBACK:** Steve Philips shares 'Delta Dawn' story

### **What's Next?**

Now, investigators will continue to conduct interviews and gather evidence to try and determine if the man last seen with Alisha and her mother is the person responsible for the child's death. They are also working leads to try and find Gwendolyn to learn more about what happened to her.

Anyone with information about this case is asked to contact Jackson County Sheriff's Department at 228-769-3036 or Mississippi Coast Crime Stoppers at 877-787-5898.

**FULL NEWS CONFERENCE:** Authorities update 1982 "Baby Jane" death in Jackson County

*Copyright 2020 WLOX. All rights reserved.*