

# ‘Oh my God, they found her’: Fairfax Co. police ID remains found 20 years ago as teen who disappeared in ’75

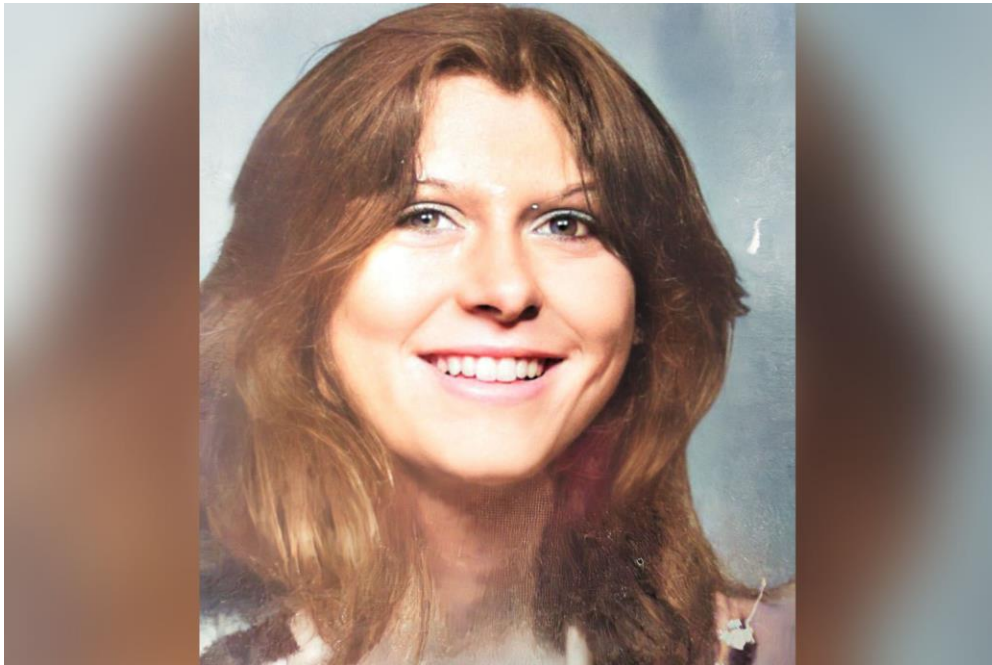
[Jack Moore](mailto:jmoore@wtop.com) | [jmoore@wtop.com](mailto:jmoore@wtop.com)

[Neal Augenstein](mailto:naugenstein@wtop.com) | [naugenstein@wtop.com](mailto:naugenstein@wtop.com)

September 26, 2022, 5:00 AM

For Fairfax County police, it was a mystery that had baffled investigators for more than two decades: the identity of the young woman whose remains were discovered in 2001 in the wooded area that is now Tysons, Virginia.

For Veronique Duperly, it was a far longer and more painful mystery: what happened to her younger sister — known affectionately as “Choubi” — who vanished without a trace in the 1970s.



A color-enhanced photo of Patricia Agnes “Choubi” Gildawie, who went missing in 1975. Gildawie’s remains were discovered in a wooded area near Tysons, Virginia, in September 2001. (Courtesy Othram)

Now, thanks to new technology, Fairfax County police say they know both answers. Police announced Monday the remains found in September 2001 have been identified as Duperly's sister, Patricia Agnes Gildawie, who was last seen in 1975 when she was 17.

"It took 47 years, but what was a mystery now has some answers," said Maj. Ed O'Carroll, bureau chief of major crimes, cyber and forensics, with the Fairfax County Police Department, in an interview with WTOP.

But there's one piece of the puzzle police are still hoping to solve.

"We're excited about this breakthrough," O'Carroll said. "We're halfway there — we're on to finding out who Patricia's killer was."

## **'The not-knowing was the worst'**

Gildawie's remains were uncovered Sept. 27, 2001, by a construction crew working behind an apartment complex off International Drive just north of where Tysons Galleria is now located. The victim was believed to be in her late teens or early 20s and 5 feet 5 inches tall, with partially dyed red hair. She had been shot in the back of the head.

The victim remained a Jane Doe for years — Duperly told WTOP she never even heard police had discovered remains in 2001.

[Earlier this year](#), O'Carroll told WTOP that police were turning to [Othram](#), a Texas-based DNA lab, in an effort to identify the remains. The lab, which uses advanced testing and forensic genealogy, helped in leading to Duperly, who had uploaded a DNA sample to an online database after getting an Ancestry.com subscription as a Christmas present a few years ago. That brought detectives to Duperly's door in Calvert County, Maryland, earlier this year.

Duperly felt relief when the detectives finally told her what had happened to her sister, "because I knew that I didn't have to worry about her anymore," she said. "Oh my God, they found her. In a sense, she's safe."

"The not-knowing was the worst, because I couldn't even imagine what could have happened to her," Duperly said. "I was wondering, you know, maybe did

she have a family? Did she get married? Was she sick? Was she hurt? Was she in the hospital some place? You know, you don't know, and you don't know where to look. Nobody could help me."

Othram's high-tech work also helped police clear up some misconceptions about their Jane Doe.

At the time the remains were discovered, a review by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and an anthropologist posited that the victim was an African American female and that the remains had likely been in the woods for roughly two years at the time they were discovered in 2001.

In fact, Gildawie was white, and police now believe the remains had been in the woods since the mid-70s — shortly after the teen went missing.



Gildawie's remains were discovered near a drainage ditch on Sept. 27, 2001.

## **Free spirit**

Duperly, who's 18 months older than her younger sister, was recently married and starting a life of her own when "Choubi" went missing in February 1975.

The family nickname means “little cabbage.”

“My mother used to call her ‘my little cabbage’ when she was just a baby because her head was so round,” Duperly said.

Born in France in 1958, Gildawie had moved with her family to Fairfax City when she was 8 months old and grew up in Northern Virginia.

“She was a free spirit,” her sister recalled. “She didn’t want to live under anybody’s rules. She was a sweet girl. She never hurt anybody, as far as I know. But she just got involved with the wrong type of people.”

## **An older man**

At the time she went missing, Gildawie was dating an older man — he was in his 30s, Duperly recalled — who worked in an upholstery store.

Choubi had a habit of coming home to her mother’s house at least once every few weeks. “Get some food, have a place to lay her head,” Duperly said. And then, suddenly, she stopped coming home.

“I’m quite certain in my heart — now, no evidence — that he probably had something to do with her disappearance,” Duperly said of the man her sister was dating.

O’Carroll, with Fairfax County police, said detectives are interested in speaking with the man. The upholstery store was located near the intersection of Church Street and Lawyers Road in Vienna, but is no longer there.

“We’ve been working hard on tracking him down,” O’Carroll said. “We know where he used to work — that business is no longer in operation. So we have a lot of work do to find out where he is and what he knows.”

## **‘Re-creating the ’70s’**

In nearly 50 years, the entire landscape of Fairfax County has changed — gleaming glass towers in Tysons have replaced what was once farmland; people have moved away; memories may have faded.

After the high-tech break in the case, investigators are now focused on old-fashioned detective work.

“We’re re-creating the ’70s,” O’Carroll said, “finding out who she was with,

At the time she went missing, police said Gildawie was driving a Cadillac Eldorado with a red interior.

“Maybe someone can provide some information that gives us some more insight to where she was on the night that she was murdered,” O’Carroll said.

Duperly said knowing what happened to her sister is what matters most to her. As far as whether police will ever find her sister’s killer, she said she remains doubtful given the time that has passed.

She said she remembered watching Tysons Corner being built over the years — highways being widened, offices and malls being constructed — never knowing that her sister’s body lay buried in the woods off International Drive.

“Somebody walked her out in the woods and shot her in the back of the head and left her there, and didn’t give a second thought ... If they find who did this, I will be so amazed and thankful. But I have my doubts,” Duperly said.

Police are asking anyone with information about Gildawie’s disappearance or death to submit tips through Fairfax County Crime Solvers. Tips can be submitted anonymously by phone by calling 1-866-411-TIPS (8477) and online [on the Crime Solvers website](#).