

Remains found 37 years ago in New Mexico identified as missing Wichita teen



A sheriff's office in New Mexico on Tuesday, Aug. 9, identified remains found 37 years ago as those of a 16-year-old reported missing from Wichita.

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WICHITA, Kan. (KWCH) - A sheriff's office in New Mexico on Tuesday, Aug. 9, identified remains found 37 years ago as those of a 16-year-old reported missing from Wichita. A news release from the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Office identified the teen as Dorothy Harrison, last heard from in late August or early September 1984.

The Doña Ana County Sheriff's Office said Harrison was last seen about 5 p.m. July 25, 1984 when she left her home in Wichita. She got into a car with two unknown girls and her family reported her missing at that time, the sheriff's office said.

“Dorothy would frequently leave and be gone weeks on end during the summer. Law enforcement would always locate her and bring her home, but she would inevitably leave again, always staying in Kansas,” the news release from the sheriff's office said. “Approximately a week and a half after Dorothy ran away her family received a phone call from her saying she was in Los Angeles. During this time, we know that the 1984 Summer Olympic Games (XXIII) were happening between July 6 – August 12, 1984. A few weeks later her family received another phone call from Dorothy saying that she was in El Paso, Texas and that she was on her way home. That was the last time the family heard from her.”

Fast forward nearly four decades. A breakthrough in the case came in March 2021 when the case of “Jane Doe” was assigned to a detective “with the hope that new technology and investigative tools could lead to the answers that had long eluded this case.”

In collaboration with the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Office and the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator, DNA was extracted from the left femur bone of “Jane Doe.”

“The process was successful and DNA results were then submitted to Innovative Forensics Investigations to build out a genealogical family tree. The collaborative work led to answers and after more than three decades Jane Doe was identified as 16-year-old, Dorothy Harrison,” the sheriff’s office said.

A timeline laid out in the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Office news release said Harrison left home about 5 p.m. on July 25, 1984. About a week later, “sometime in the beginning of August 1984, she called her family to say she was in Los Angeles. Weeks later, in late August or early September, Harrison called home to say she was in El Paso, Texas and was on her way home to Wichita.

“No one hears form Dorothy after this last phone call,” the sheriff’s office reported “Dorothy was likely killed between September 10, 1984, and January 10, 1985.”

On March 10, 1985, hunters in Doña Ana County, about 50 miles north of El Paso, reported finding possible human remains, ultimately confirmed to be Harrison, decades later.

“Dorothy was approximately 5’1 in height and weighed 95 pounds. She had light brown hair, green eyes and a medium complexion. Her nostrils aren’t even and were considered lopsided. She had a small scar on the bow of her mouth. She often wore heavy eye makeup,” the sheriff’s office said. “When she was last seen she was getting into a vehicle that was described as a big, tan, long car. Dorothy was picked up by two unknown females, described as white female and a black female, both older.”

Anyone with information about Harrison or anyone who believes they encountered her between July 25, 1984, and the time of her death, ruled a homicide, should call the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Office at 575-525-1911.

The sheriff’s office also released the following statement on behalf of Harrison’s family:

“Dorothy was a typical teenager; she was only 16 years old when this horrific crime happened to her. Like most teens she was sometimes unhappy at home and easily influenced. She left home with some people she thought were her friends and we never saw her again. The news of her death is devastating and even though this crime happened over 30 years ago, to our family, it is new and incredibly difficult information to process. We have so many unanswered questions and are hopeful that the continued investigation will be able to provide some of those answers. We ask that you give us this time to grieve and request any questions or information about Dorothy’s murder be sent to Doña Ana County Sheriff Kim Stewart.”