

# Josephine County, State Medical Examiner and DNA identify remains from 1986

By: Jerry Howard

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JOSEPHINE COUNTY, Ore. -- The Josephine County Sheriff's Office says positively today that human skeletal remains found in 1986 belong to Elsie Baker.

The Josephine County Sheriff's Office (JCSO) says the positive identification comes from DNA science and research from its staff, the Oregon State Medical Examiner and Parabon NanoLabs with help from Baker's grandson. JCSO says he supplied a DNA sample that confirmed the skeleton was Baker's remains.

JCSO says initial DNA screening by Parabon NanoLabs suggested Baker was the person whose remains were in question. It says its investigation suggested she, and approximately \$10,000, had disappeared from her Josephine County home under suspicious circumstances.

JCSO says Baker had cancer, needing a wheelchair, and at the time of her disappearance, though she and her money were gone, her wheelchair was left at her home.

JCSO says the case surfaced in June 1986 when its staff responded to the Quartz Creek area regarding human skeletal remains located when a homeowner was installing a septic system and discovered the remains. It says they were found in the ground approximately four feet deep with other items such as fabric believed to be from a dress, a worn set of dentures and two rubber implements, believed to be from a walker or crutches.

JSCO says at that time law enforcement forwarded the remains to the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office for examination and DNA processing, thinking based on the condition of the remains that the decedent might have been in the ground approximately 15 to 25 years.

The Sheriff's Office says from 1986 to 2016 the remains identification investigation was revisited by detectives and forensic examiners, though "No leads were ever discovered to help with the identification."

It says due to poor condition of the remains the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office was awarded a grant in 2018 allowing the office to send the remains to Parabon NanoLabs for further DNA and genetic genealogy processing and, "With Parabon NanoLabs assistance, it was discovered that the remains may be of a missing person from 1959 out of the Rogue River area named, Elsie Baker, who went missing under suspicious circumstances."

JCSO says, "The circumstances were deemed suspicious after law enforcement learned that family and friends of Elsie Baker had not heard from her for a period of time. Law enforcement responded to Elsie Baker's home and found her wheelchair but no sign of her. An investigation between 1959 and 1960 was started and numerous individuals were interviewed. It was discovered that Elsie Baker was being treated for cancer and would have needed assistance to leave her home as she was mainly wheelchair bound. It was also discovered that approximately \$10,000 was missing from the home. Unfortunately, law enforcement was unable to come up with any leads regarding the missing person case."

JSCO says today Parabon NanoLabs suggested that through combining genetic genealogy, DNA Phenotyping and kinship analysis, if the remains were Elsie Baker, she might have a living grandson in the Utah area who would be the closest genetic match and would possibly solve the missing person case, identifying the remains.

The Josephine County Sheriff's Office says its detectives contacted the grandson and explained the case and circumstances leading law enforcement to contact him and, "With consent from the grandson and assistance from Emery County Sheriff's Office, Utah, the grandson provided an oral DNA swab sample for comparison which was submitted for review. In early January, 2023, Parabon NanoLabs and the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office were able to positively identify the decedent as Elsie Baker based on the matching DNA from the grandson."