

# Howard County Police Department Teams with Othram to Identify a 1971 Homicide Victim

After 54 years, an unidentified woman who was found in a field in Howard County, Maryland has been identified as 47-year-old **Sarah Sharkey**.

Solved



## Summary

In July 1971, an unresponsive woman who could not be identified was found lying in a field in Woodstock, Maryland in Howard County. There was evidence that the woman, who was alive, had been assaulted. The woman was hospitalized and underwent brain surgery in an attempt to save her life. The woman never regained consciousness and two months later, and she died two months later. With no information about her identity, the woman became known as Howard County Jane Doe.

Investigators estimated that the woman was between 35 and 60 years old at her time of death. She stood about 5 foot tall and weighed 86 pounds. In January 2014, case details were entered into NamUs as UP11923. An artist rendering of the woman's likeness was developed and released to the public. Despite a years-long investigation, the Howard County Police Department could not identify the woman and the case sat cold for more than five decades.



In October 2024, Howard County Police Department submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas to determine if advanced DNA testing could help identify the unknown woman. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the provided evidence and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for her. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team then used the profile in a genetic genealogy search to develop new investigative leads that were returned to law enforcement.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the woman. Reference DNA samples were collected from potential relatives and compared to the DNA profile of the unknown woman using KinSNP® Rapid Relationship Testing. This investigation led to the positive identification of the woman, who is now known to be Sarah Sharkey. Born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania in September of 1924, Sharkey was named Sadie Belle Murray. After she married in 1943, she assumed the name Sarah Sharkey. She died in the hospital at the age of 47.

As a result of Sarah Sharkey's identification, two of her biological children were connected. Sarah Sharkey's son, who is now 79 years old and lives in Ohio, was connected to his sister, who is now 81 years old. Both children lived in an orphanage from a young age. The investigators and staff at the Howard County Police Department are working to arrange for Sharkey's children to meet in person in the coming months.

The investigation into this homicide is still pending and anyone with information on the case is asked to contact the Howard County Police Department in Maryland.

This case illustrates the power of mending families and providing answers to victims, their families, and law enforcement when it may have seemed impossible.

Individuals who have taken a consumer DNA test can aid ongoing forensic investigations by joining the [DNASolves database](#). Expanding the number of available DNA profiles increases the likelihood of successful identifications, helping to reunite families with their missing loved ones and resolve cases that have remained unanswered for years.

The identification of Sadie Murray represents the 6th case in the State of Maryland where officials have publicly identified an individual using technology developed by Othram. Visit [DNASolves](#) to learn about other Maryland cases, where your support can help bring long-awaited answers to families.