

Investigators say they have identified 1992 murder victim's remains in N. Houston wooded area

By [Jessica Willey](#)

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HOUSTON, Texas (KTRK) -- For more than three decades, the identity of a woman found dead in a wooded area of north Houston remained a mystery. Known only as a Jane Doe, her story had no name, until now.

Thanks to the efforts of a Houston-based nonprofit specializing in forensic genetic genealogy, the woman has been identified as Joann Zamora, a mother of six who vanished in 1992.

Her daughter, Spencer Graham, was just two years old when her mother disappeared. For most of her life, she lived with the story that Joann had simply run away.

"The story we got growing up was that she just left. She couldn't be a mom anymore," Spencer said. "We weren't living with her at the time. Her boyfriend called us after she was supposed to see us for Easter, 1992 and said she just took off with his car, money, and camera. So that was the story we believed."

Recently, they learned everything they knew was wrong. **Joann Zamora** died sometime before her 29th birthday.

Her remains were discovered in September 1992 off West Rittenhouse Road in North Houston. Despite efforts by law enforcement, her identity could not be confirmed at the time. She was ultimately buried in the Harris County Cemetery, her grave marked only as "Unknown."

It wasn't until last year that **Moxxy Forensic Investigations**, a nonprofit organization, took on the cold case. Using DNA extracted from the remains by Intermountain Forensics, a lab in Utah, and advanced genealogical mapping, the team was able to construct family trees that eventually led them to the Zamora family.

"Families deserve answers," said **Katie Thomas**, co-founder of Moxxy Forensic Investigations. "Our eight genealogists went to work, building out family trees for DNA matches to find connections and common ancestors that we eventually continued to build down to find the Zamora family."

In July of this year, Spencer and her family received the news they never expected. Joann had not abandoned them.

"It makes me feel sad that I believed what I believed for the majority of my life," Spencer said. "I finally have answers I never thought I would have. But now it leads to more questions."

According to Moxxy, Joann was the victim of a homicide. The Houston Police Department would only tell ABC13 that the Cold Case Unit is investigating Joann Zamora's death.

As for Spencer, the news has brought grief, but also connection. She's now seeing photos of her and her mother for the first time.

"She loved Christmas, and Mr. Gatti's Pizza," Spencer shared. "She was just a fun person, who had her faults but she loved life."

Spencer credits Moxxy and the generosity of crowdfunding donors, like Criminal Coffee Co., for making the identification possible. Now, she hopes the renewed attention on her mother's case will lead to justice.

"We just want to know what happened, even if it's hard to hear," she said.

Anyone with information about Joann Zamora's death is urged to contact HPD's Cold Case Unit or Crime Stoppers at 713-222-TIPS.

Meantime, Moxxy is working on a second [Harris County Jane Doe case from 1994](#).