

# 1980 cold case: search for biological mother leads to bodies buried in San Bernardino County desert and link to Mississippi killer

Two unidentified bodies discovered in 1980 in a remote part of the Mojave Desert have been identified and linked to an incarcerated Mississippi man after a more than 40-year investigation, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department announced Wednesday, April 21. (Courtesy of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department)

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A woman's search for her biological mother involving a DNA match has led to the identification of two bodies discovered buried in 1980 in a remote part of the Mojave Desert in San Bernardino County, the Sheriff's Department announced.

The victims were linked to an incarcerated Mississippi man, authorities said.

The body of a woman who was only previously known as "Jane Doe 10" was identified this month as Pamela Dianne Duffey, who was born on April 6, 1959. The body of a man only previously known as "John Doe 29" was also identified this month as being William Everette Lane, who was born on May 23, 1960, the Sheriff's Department said.

Duffey was estimated to be 20 years old at the time of her death while Lane was estimated to be 19 years old, according to Jodi Miller, spokeswoman for the Sheriff's Department. Both were estimated to have been dead for six to eight months when they were discovered, according to the San Bernardino County Coroner's Office.



Two unidentified bodies discovered in 1980 in a remote part of the Mojave Desert have been identified and linked to an incarcerated Mississippi man after a more than 40-year investigation, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department announced Wednesday, April 21. Pictured is victim Pamela Dianne Duffey. (Courtesy of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department)

Both are believed to be among the various victims of convicted murderer Howard Neal, 68, of Mississippi. He is currently incarcerated in Mississippi for the 1981 rape and murder of his 13-year-old niece and her 12-year-old friend as well as the murder of his brother, the Sheriff's Department said.

The bodies in San Bernardino County were initially discovered in November 1980 about five miles east of the town of Ludlow and a little more than a quarter-mile south of U.S. Highway 66. Ludlow is off Interstate 40 in a remote area between Barstow and Needles.

Neither victim was wearing any clothing nor had any identifying information on themselves, according to the Sheriff's Department.

An autopsy was performed and it was determined that both died of a combination of a gunshot wound and blunt force trauma. Attempts to identify the two with available resources after the autopsy were unsuccessful, the Sheriff's Department said.

### **Child/parent match**

In 2018, a Virginia woman, Christine Marie Salley, hired a private investigator to aid her in a search to find her biological parents, as she was adopted as a child. In

December 2018, the investigator submitted Salley's DNA to GEDmatch DNA and a child/parent match was indicated between Salley and Duffey's body.

Christine Marie Salley spoke with sheriff's investigators and provided adoption paperwork and additional DNA samples. A positive match was confirmed between Duffey and Salley by the California Department of Justice this month, the Sheriff's Department said.

While Salley and investigators were able to get a quick positive match through a genealogy database, that match was not considered positive in the eyes of the law, said San Bernardino sheriff's investigator Gerrit Tesselaar. The official results from the state DOJ were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Two unidentified bodies discovered in 1980 in a remote part of the Mojave Desert have been identified and linked to an incarcerated Mississippi man after a more than 40-year investigation, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department announced Wednesday, April 21. Pictured is victim William Everette Lane. (Courtesy of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department)

Salley had also learned that before her mother was considered missing, she reportedly knew and traveled with a man known as "Digger Lane," who was a former inmate at a Virginia prison who was released in either late 1979 or early 1980. Virginia State Police were able to identify William Everette Lane as the person incarcerated around that time and a DNA sample from Lane's mother in Jacksonville, Florida, was able to positively identify the male victim as Lane.

Prior to the positive identification of the bodies, sheriff's investigators were aware that Neal and his family previously lived in Ludlow and moved to Mississippi shortly after the killings. Investigators made several attempts to interview him, however,

they were not successful in securing a meeting with him until August 2017, the Sheriff's Department said.

In an interview, Neal provided "very little" information and gave accounts of picking up a woman who was a hitchhiker who left her daughter behind and a man he described as being a "hippie," the Sheriff's Department said. He then said that an argument ensued with the man after Neal tried to make advances on the woman, and that resulted in him fatally shooting the man.

Investigators believe Neal then sexually assaulted the woman and then killed her, the Sheriff's Department said. Neal then said he took the bodies to an isolated part of the desert, dug a shallow grave and then buried the two.

Neal was initially sentenced to death in 1982; however, his lawyer filed an appeal based on Neal's mental status in 1990 and his death sentence was commuted after he was found to be "borderline mentally challenged" after an IQ test, the Sheriff's Department said. Neal is serving three life sentences currently.

### **Among oldest cold cases**

The case is among the oldest cold cases the Sheriff's Department has dealt with, Tesselaar said. He and San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office Investigator Steve Shumway were assigned to the case in August 2017.

Tesselaar said that identifying the victims in the case and connecting them to Neal was among one of the "top moments" in his 41-year career with the Sheriff's Department, 33 of which were spent in various ranks and roles and the last eight as a contractor and volunteer since his 2012 retirement.

"This is probably the most fulfilling aspect of my career," he said.

Tesselaar credited investigators as well as the labs that were able to get viable DNA out of what was left of the remains.

The process of returning the San Bernardino County victims' remains to their families for proper burials has begun, the Sheriff's Department said. Both victims' families want the remains to be cremated, according to Tesselaar.

As to whether new charges will be filed against Neal, that's pending as prosecutors need to review the case, said Michael Bires, spokesman for the District Attorney's office.