

# San Diego District Attorney's Office Teams with Othram to Identify 1981 Homicide Victim

After 42 years, a San Diego, California homicide victim known as "The Bag Lady" is now identified as **Elaine Armstrong**, born in 1930.



Solved

## Summary

In October 1981, the remains of an unidentified individual were discovered by an employee of Vic's Office Supply who was arriving to work on Garnet Avenue in San Diego, California. It was determined that the remains were that of a white female who was between the ages of thirty and fifty years. The woman was approximately 5'5" tall and weighed 104 pounds. At the time of her death, she was wearing a purple/gray/off-white head scarf with yellow print, a light blue print shirt, several layers of jackets, and dark blue socks. The woman had been beaten, stabbed, and burned. Investigators presume that the woman was also sexually assaulted based on evidence available at the scene. It was estimated that the woman died only hours before her remains were discovered.



The woman's purse was located near her body and had an ID inside, but because of the fire, it was burned and unreadable. A forensic sketch depicting how the woman may have looked during her life was created and released to the public in hopes that someone could identify the decedent. Inquiries in the community revealed that the woman frequented Pacific Beach and was known as "The Bag Lady" because she was always seen carrying her clothes in a paper bag. Despite their best efforts, investigators were never able to identify the woman and details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP11737. For forty-two years, her identity was unknown.

In 2023, the San Diego District Attorney's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the homicide victim. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team used the profile in a genetic genealogy search to develop new investigative leads that were returned to investigators.



Using these new leads, San Diego District Attorney's Office investigators conducted a follow-up investigation and met with potential genetic relatives of the woman. In December 2023, using a manual fingerprint analysis, Medical Examiner Jennifer Wright confirmed the identification of "The Bag Lady" as Elaine Rose Armstrong. Elaine was born in 1930 and was originally from Manistee, Michigan and later lived in Midland, Michigan. Elaine's family has been notified of her identification and the remaining physical evidence from the crime scene will be re-examined in an attempt to identify the offender.

The casework costs associated with Othram's testing and investigative research were contributed by Project Justice, a philanthropic effort to reduce the backlog of unsolved cases. We are grateful for this funding which allowed us to assist law enforcement in working this case, leading to Elaine's identification.