

1996 WA cold case solved: Remains of missing Pierce Co. boy identified

By [AJ Janavel](#)

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Pierce Co. investigators close missing boy cold case 29 years later

The Pierce County Sheriff's Office has closed a nearly three-decade-old cold case after identifying the remains of 13-year-old Jeffrey Klungness, who disappeared in 1996.

The Brief

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- Remains of 14-year-old Jeffrey Klungness have been identified after 29 years.
- Martin Malcolm, long suspected in the case, died in 2022 before charges could be filed.
- Investigators confirm Jeffrey's murder, but with Malcolm dead, the case is officially closed.

PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. - The Pierce County Sheriff's Department has closed a nearly three-decade-old cold case after [identifying the remains](#) of 14-year-old Jeffrey Klungness, who disappeared in 1996.

The primary suspect, Martin Malcolm, died of natural causes in 2022 before charges could be filed.

Keep reading to learn more about the case and how the [Pierce County Sheriff's Department](#) was able to finally crack it.

A family's tragedy and a long search for answers

The backstory:

On March 21, 1996, Susan Klungness was found murdered in her home, suffering multiple blunt force injuries. At the time, her son, Jeffrey, was last seen with Malcolm, a handyman who had become close with the family through their church.

Malcolm was spotted driving Susan's vehicle with Jeffrey in the passenger seat, withdrawing money from a bank and taking Jeffrey for a haircut. Jeffrey was never seen again.

Malcolm had a violent past — convicted in 1980 for stabbing his wife (the mother of his child) to death and attacking two of her friends. He served 12 years in prison before his release in 1992.

Though he was a strong person of interest in the Klungness case, authorities lacked sufficient evidence to charge him at the time.

"Mr. Klungness knew this person likely had done this, and he still lived in the same area as him," said retired Detective Sgt. Lynelle Anderson, who worked the case. "He could be going to the store and run into the person who, likely, killed his wife and child," she added.



Jeffrey Klungness, 13, disappeared in Pierce County in 1996. (Pierce County Sheriff)

Breakthrough discovery in the Greenwater area

Dig deeper:

In 2017, mushroom pickers in the Greenwater area of unincorporated Pierce County discovered a skull fragment.

Forensic analysis confirmed it belonged to a juvenile male with signs of blunt force trauma. The FBI extracted DNA, and in 2020, a match was made to Jeffrey Klungness using his half-sister's mitochondrial DNA. A further search in 2020 uncovered additional remains and clothing in the same area.

DNA testing by Bode Technology and the University of North Texas confirmed in 2021 that the remains belonged to Jeffrey. The Pierce County Medical Examiner's Office later ruled his death a homicide, with the cause listed as multiple blunt force injuries to the head.

"There wasn't a doubt for any of us who had ever worked on the case, or were familiar with the case, that it was Jeffrey," said Anderson.

Unfortunately, by the time the DNA was confirmed to be Jeffrey's, it was too late for closure for the family.

"It was COVID, and Mr. Klungness had been admitted to the hospital, and he died the same night we learned that it was Jeffrey. We were unable to tell him. The hospital wouldn't let us go in," said Anderson.

Case closed, but justice delayed

As investigators prepared to present charges against Malcolm, they learned he had died in August 2022 at the age of 67.

The Pierce County Prosecutor's Office confirmed in March 2025 that charges would have been filed if he were still alive.

While some aspects of the investigation are still being finalized, officials have deemed the case resolved. After 29 years, the Klungness family now has answers — but the justice they sought will remain out of reach.

However, Anderson said bringing closure to this case is still vital for her, the PCSO, and the community.