

Family of 'missing' man 'bewildered' as gardaí tell them his remains were discovered 25 years ago but only identified recently



Mary and Denis Snr Walsh from Caherdavin, Limerick, hold a photo of their son Denis who at the age of 23 went missing in 1996. Photo: Liam Burke
David Raleigh

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The family of a Limerick man, who was declared missing for the past 25 years, have been informed by gardaí that his human remains were actually discovered in 1996, a few weeks after he disappeared.

Denis Walsh was 23 years old when he went missing after walking out of his home, in Caherdavin for what was the final time on March 9, 1996.

Over the years since, Mr Walsh's parents, Denis Snr and Mary, have made appeals for information and even travelled abroad to follow up on a number of reported sightings of their missing son.

Mr and Mrs Walsh said they were visited by two members of An Garda Síochána over the weekend, who informed them that gardaí had received confirmation that human remains found in 1996 belong to their son.

When members of the family went to visit their local Garda station on Saturday, they were told there was no further information at that time.

A Garda spokesman said: "On March 9, 1996, Mr Denis Walsh, Caherdavin, Limerick, was reported missing to gardaí at Mayorstone Park Garda Station in Limerick. The missing person investigation file remained open until now.

"In April 1996, an unidentified body was recovered off Inis Mór, Aran Islands, Co Galway. This unidentified body was taken to the Mortuary in UCHG.

"Bodily samples were taken and forwarded to the forensic science laboratory in an effort to identify the deceased. These samples were examined in July 2008, March 2011 and June 2017, with negative results for a match.

“On February 5, 2021, gardaí in Mayorstone were notified of a positive match following advances in DNA. The remains were positively identified from reference samples from both parents as that of Mr Walsh. The family have been notified.”

Mr Walsh’s heartbroken parents said they have further questions, as they try to come to terms with the news. They said they are awaiting information on the whereabouts of their son’s remains, and whether their son’s remains are full or partial remains.

Mr Walsh was remembered at his local church over the weekend, and his parents are continuing to pray for his remains to be returned to them as soon as possible to allow them to organise a funeral service and finally lay him to rest.

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Speaking this morning, Denis Walsh Snr said he and his wife have been left “shocked” and “bewildered” by the news, but that they were “also happy” their son had been found.

“We’re bewildered by the whole thing, we have suffered enormously for the past 25 years, and I haven’t slept over the past three nights,” Mr Walsh said.

“We still don’t know where his remains are,” he added.

“If Denis was found in April 1996, that’s only a month after he went missing, so were the dental records checked?” he asked.

“We have been going around for 25 years looking for Denis. We went to Cork, Kerry, Dublin, Fermanagh, England,” he added his voice choking up.

“I’m happy Denis has been found.”

Mike Walsh, a brother of the deceased, said the family were “trying to process all of this information”. “I’m a bit numb,” he said.

“We are definitely pleased Denis’s body was found; now the constant thinking and wondering is over, and we have something (tangible) to work with,” Mike Walsh added.

Gardaí have been asked for further comment surrounding Mr Walsh’s remains.

The details around why and how Mr Walsh went missing remain unclear. Despite a number of reported sightings of him in the days after he was reported missing, his trail soon ran cold.

A security manager working at the Seacat Ferry in Belfast contacted gardaí in May 1996 after he watched an appeal for information about Mr Walsh’s whereabouts on the *Crimecall* television programme.

The man told gardaí he believed he had seen Mr Walsh waiting to catch a ferry to the Isle of Man. When the security manager checked, a ticket in the name of Walsh had been cashed in, unused.

The Walsh case is similar to that of the unrelated 2000 disappearance of Aengus Shanahan – also from Limerick – in that Mr Shanahan’s partial remains were discovered washed up near Bunratty, Co Clare in 2001, but were not identified until 2018, after advances in DNA technology.

Mr Shanahan’s family believe he was murdered, however, gardaí continue to keep an open mind about the circumstances around his disappearance.

Source: <https://www.independent.ie/news/family-of-missing-man-bewildered-as-gardai-tell-them-his-remains-were-discovered-25-years-ago-but-only-identified-recently-40065079.html>