

Remains found near Houston those of Kelli Cox, UNT student missing 19 years



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University of North Texas student Kelli Cox went missing near the Denton police station in 1997.

By Claire Ballor and Tom Steele

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Staff Writers

For almost 20 years, family and friends of missing University of North Texas student Kelli Cox could only speculate about what happened to the 20-year-old after she disappeared at midday in Denton.

But long-awaited answers finally arrived Monday when remains found at a Brazoria County dig site were identified as hers.

UNT's Center for Human Identification and Laboratory of Forensic Anthropology and the Galveston County medical examiner's office used dental records to confirm Cox's identity, Denton police said in a prepared statement.



William Reece

Detectives focused on the site almost 300 miles from the woman's Farmers Branch home after primary suspect William Reece told authorities in March he had buried Cox and another missing woman, 17-year-old Jessica Cain of Galveston, about 30 miles south of Houston.

Remains found in March at a dig site in West Orem, 10 miles southwest of Houston, are still being tested to see whether they are Cain's.

Reece, 56, who was a truck driver when Cox disappeared, is serving a 60-year sentence for kidnapping a young woman in Harris County two months before the UNT student vanished. Last year, he was charged with first-degree murder and kidnapping in the 1997 death of 19-year-old Tiffany Johnston, near Oklahoma City.

Cox, who was a psychology major at the University of North Texas, had toured the Denton jail on July 15, 1997. She called her boyfriend from a nearby pay phone afterward to say that she was locked out of her car, which was parked near the jail.

When he arrived about an hour later, there was no sign of Cox.

Her parents were left to raise her 19-month-old daughter, Alexis.

Kelli's mother, Jan Bynum, said she and her husband have been sustained through the years by their granddaughter, who is now 20.

“If Kelli were to walk through that door,” she said, “I want her to walk in, look at Alexis and say, ‘Oh gosh, Mom, you did a great job.’ ”

For years, Bynum experienced a mix of hope and fear from not knowing her daughter’s fate, but now she has answers.

“If she is gone, then I want to know. It brings the answers and it brings the comfort that at least she’s not out there hurting.”

Source: <http://crimeblog.dallasnews.com/2016/04/remains-found-in-houston-area-are-those-of-kelli-cox-unt-student-missing-since-1997.html/>

BRAZORIA COUNTY, TEXAS - Human remains have been found at a Brazoria County dig site near Rosharon, according to the Texas Rangers. Searchers had been looking for Kelli Cox, a young mother from Denton who vanished back in 1997.

Cox's family got a call late Monday afternoon about the remains, which were found on Friday.

"I feel like maybe we are a step closer to getting answers, and I've said all along if she's gone I want to know," said Jan Bynum, Kelli Cox's mom. "If this is Kelli and she's gone, I want this whole journey to bring some sort of good to someone."

Authorities say they are excavating a strip of land off Highway 288 South, approximately 700 yards long. They began using their hands and smaller tools after the remains were found.

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A suspected serial killer named William Reece apparently told authorities where to dig and he has been spotted at the site.

The medical examiner was at the scene Tuesday, but it will likely take time for the identity of the remains to be confirmed.

"If it's her, I want to bring her home and put her to rest the right way," Bynum said.

It's been nearly three weeks since the remains of another person, possibly Jessica Cain, were found at a separate dig site on West Orem. The forensics information is still unavailable in that case.

Reece told investigators they would find Cain's body at the West Orem site. The La Marque teen disappeared in 1997 after having dinner with friends. Her car was found abandoned on I-45 in Galveston County.

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Reece is also the prime suspect in the 1997 disappearance of 12-year-old Laura Smither of Friendswood. She was jogging in her neighborhood when she was abducted. Smither's body was later found in Pasadena.

Reece was recently charged with the 1997 murder of Tiffany Johnson of Bethany, Oklahoma after DNA linked him to the case. She was murdered after being abducted from a car wash.

Reece is currently serving a life sentence for aggravated kidnapping. The Oklahoma native moved to Houston in 1996 after being released from prison for rape.

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Source: <http://www.khou.com/news/local/neighborhood/remains-found-at-dig-site-in-search-for-kelli-cox/121174858>

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