

Cold case homicide victim identified after 43 years

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The remains of a homicide victim discovered in Orange County 43 years ago have finally been identified and the victim's family notified, authorities announced Tuesday.

The skeletal remains of what investigators determined to be a Black male between the ages of 17 to 24 were discovered in May 1980 adjacent to an oil well in an unincorporated area of Tonner Canyon near the city of Brea, according to a [news release](#) from the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

Attempts to identify the young man over the years were unsuccessful and the case had remained cold.

In Dec. 2021, the sheriff's department was contacted by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to conduct a forensic investigative genetic genealogy analysis of the victim.

The young man was exhumed in May 2022 so investigators could collect DNA samples. In June, a private forensic biotechnology company developed a DNA profile from the skeletal remains and submitted it to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Genealogy Team.

After months of work, investigators contacted a woman in Compton believed to be the victim's mother.

"Using familial DNA samples, investigators in May 2023 identified the decedent as **Lonnie Raymond Thomas**, who was 20 years old at the time of his death," the release stated.



The remains of Lonnie Raymond Thomas, 20, were discovered in May 1980 in Orange County. He was not identified until May 2023. (OCSD)

Thomas' family was notified, and his remains will be reinterred this week, authorities said, adding that the O.C. Sheriff's Department ordered a gravestone to make the 20-year-old's final resting place.

"Sheriff's Department investigators now turn their focus to investigating the homicide case," the release noted.

Anyone with information related to this case is encouraged to contact Orange County Crime Stoppers at 855-TIP-OCCS or online at [O.C. Crime Stoppers](#).