

Mom from Texas vanished during 1977 Florida trip, cops say. Now, fate revealed

By Mark Price June 27, 2025 1:18 PM

Carol Sue Skidmore left Sealy, Texas, for a trip in 1977, and was never seen again, the Bay County Sheriff's Office in Florida says. Her remains have just been identified. Bay County Sheriff's Office photo DNA testing has confirmed that remains found by hunters in 1980 are those of a Texas mom who vanished during a trip that ended with her entire family dead, according to investigators in the Florida Panhandle. Carol Sue Skidmore's whereabouts had been a mystery since 1977, when she left Texas for an extended trip with her husband and son, the Bay County Sheriff's Office said in a June 27 news release. TOP VIDEOS The video player is currently playing an ad. It's now suspected she and her son were killed by her husband, James Ronald Skidmore, who later killed himself in an Arkansas hotel room, officials said. "In 1980, the skeletal remains of a woman were located in a shallow grave by three hunters about a half mile west of (Highway) 231, north of Fountain," the sheriff's office said. "Because of damage done to the clothing found with the skeletal remains, foul play was suspected." It was initially believed to be the body of 21-year-old JoAnn Benner, a mother of two who disappeared in 1976, officials said. However, a tooth submitted for a DNA testing linked the remains to two of Carol Skidmore's siblings in Texas who have been searching since 1977 for their sister, the sheriff's office said. "In March of 1977 ... Carol Skidmore, her husband James Ronald Skidmore, and her 5-year-old son Lynn Dale Mahaffy left their home in Sealy, Texas, to visit James' parents in Rossville, Georgia," the sheriff's office said. "They wanted to 'put their marriage back together.' They left on March 29, 1977, and were last heard (from) on April 9, 1977, when Carol contacted her parents and told them she wasn't sure when they would be back." In May, her son's body was found in Parksville Lake at Tennessee's Cherokee National Forest, officials said. "The body, wrapped in plastic and weighed down, appeared to have been in place for a few weeks," the sheriff's office said. On June 1, 1977, James Skidmore was found dead of "a drug overdose/suicide" in a hotel room in Harrison, Arkansas, the sheriff's office said. Harrison is about a 730-mile drive northwest from Fountain, where Carol Skidmore's body was discovered. "A suicide note was found with his body stating, 'things weren't working out for him.' Authorities searched for his wife Carol Skidmore with no success," the sheriff's office said. "Investigators believe that James Ronald Skidmore killed Carol Skidmore, burying her body in a shallow grave in Bay County, and her son, Lynn, leaving his body in a lake in Tennessee, and then himself." Investigators contacted Carol Skidmore's family to reveal the outcome of the case. "One of her siblings had passed away, but her brother was grateful to get word about his sister, to finally know what happened to her and experience closure," the sheriff's office said. As for JoAnn Benner's case, evidence "has been turned over to the State Attorney's Office by the Cold Case Unit for review and potential prosecution," the sheriff's office said. "The BCSO Cold Case Unit and Crime Scene Unit are currently using ancestral DNA to identify several sets of human remains found in Bay County," the sheriff's office said. Fountain is an unincorporated community about a 145-mile drive east from Pensacola.

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