

# ‘Her family now has answers’: Beaufort County’s ‘Jane Doe’ from 1995 is identified



**SOFIA SANCHEZ**

December 1, 2022, 2:53 PM

A woman whose identity has been a mystery to police since her body was found in 1995 in Yemassee has finally been identified, the Beaufort County Sheriff’s Office announced Thursday.

Maria Telles-Gonzalez of Kissimmee, Florida, had been known as the Beaufort County “Jane Doe” for 27 years. Gonzalez, who was 36 at the time of her death, was a wife and mother of three children.

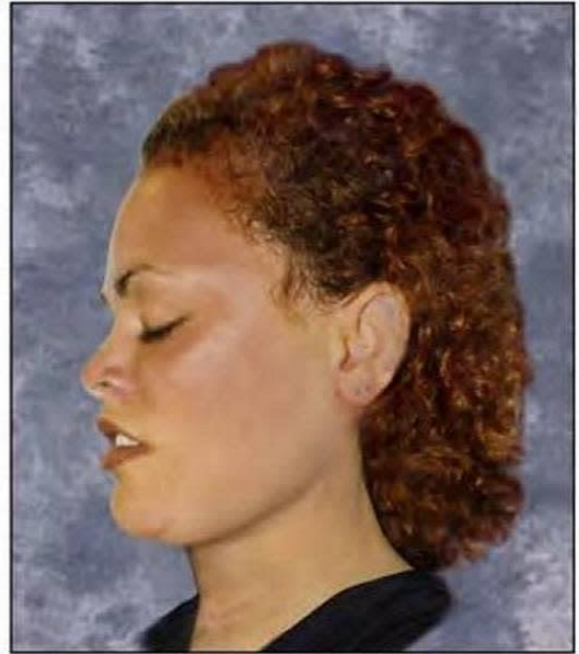
“This is far from over,” said Maj. Bob Bromage, head of Beaufort County Sheriff’s Office cold case investigations. “It’s not solved. We have a lot of work to do on this case.”

Bromage started his career as a deputy investigator at the Beaufort County Sheriff’s Office in November 1990 and has remained on as head of cold case investigations since leaving the agency in July to work as the [Director of Public Safety](#) for the Town of Hilton Head.

“It doesn’t get more rewarding than bringing some semblance of closure to victims’ families,” Bromage said in an interview with the Island Packet and Beaufort Gazette. “The other families have got to know, we are still investigating these cases.”



Likeness of victim



Likeness of victim- profile view

The body of this unidentified woman was discovered May 24, 1995 in Yemassee.

### **Finding Gonzalez**

Gonzalez was identified in October through DNA testing. Since 1995, police have publicized her case on the Latin American television network Univision, and interviewed those who came forward suspecting she might be their missing relative.

She was not.

Eventually, her case was turned over to the cold case investigations team, a task force comprised of retired law enforcement volunteers who routinely evaluate unsolved cases in Beaufort County.

“There were directions to go with these cases that were just not being explored under other leaderships,” Bromage said of the efforts that were at the forefront of Sheriff P.J. Tanner’s campaign when he was first elected in 1999.

Some of the cases evaluated by the team span back to the 1970s. Until this year, Gonzalez’s case was the only one out of about 35 Beaufort County cold cases in which the victim had not been identified.

In 2007, biogeographical DNA told investigators that Gonzalez was possibly from the Caribbean or South America. In actuality, she was Puerto Rican, Bromage said. Her cause of death was determined to be strangulation, he said. Bruises and other injuries on her body indicated to investigators that Gonzalez had been beaten before she was killed approximately 36 to 48 hours before her body was found.

In 2020, her DNA was submitted to Parabon NanoLabs, a DNA technology company, and then sent to ancestry databases where possible matches for distant relatives are found. A volunteer member of the cold case committee then reached out to possible family members and, in October, they found Gonzalez’s son.

“It’s sad, all these years,” Bromage said. “Her family now has answers about what happened to her. We have to be conservative because there’s only so much DNA in this case.”



Maria Telles-Gonzalez of Kissimmee, Florida, had been known as the Beaufort County “Jane Doe” for 27 years. Gonzalez, who was 36 at the time of her death, was a wife and mother of three children.

**What happened to her?**

On May 24, 1995, Gonzalez’s body was found face down in a drainage ditch on Cotton Hall Road off Interstate 95. State employees who were mowing the grass in the area found her. She had no wallet, purse or other identification. All she had on was a pair of Leonisa underwear, a brand made in Colombia and sold in South and Central America at that time.

Investigators traveled to Florida to interview the family and were told by Gonzalez's children that they last saw their mother in 1995 when they were leaving their home for school. Gonzalez had just returned home from a trip to Puerto Rico the day before. Their father, Gonzalez's husband, whose name has not been released by police, was alone with her at home at the time, police said.

"She left without her vehicle," Bromage said. "The suitcase she arrived from Puerto Rico with was also gone."



Police have used age progression technology to show what "Patricia" might look like today.

When asked whether there were any suspects, Bromage said that "no one is excluded as a person of interest." Gonzalez's children believed that their mother had "left the family" and she was never reported missing.

The investigation into Gonzalez's death is ongoing.

Police are looking to interview two people who they believe may be able to give them more information. One is a woman who they identified as “Patricia” who they were told was Gonzalez’s best friend. Patricia is a military wife who was stationed with her husband in Hawaii and lived “in or around” Kissimmee, Florida, at the time of Gonzalez’s death.



Police are looking for a woman who they identified as “Patricia” who they were told was Gonzalez’s best friend.

The other was identified as a Hispanic “male friend” from Colombia who lived in Kissimmee, Florida, back in 1995.

*Anyone with information on a Beaufort County cold case may call the Beaufort County Sheriff’s Office dispatch at 843-524-2777 or Crime Stoppers of the Lowcountry at 843-554-1111.*