

# St. Lucie County 1986 cold case homicide victim identified



**Will Greenlee**

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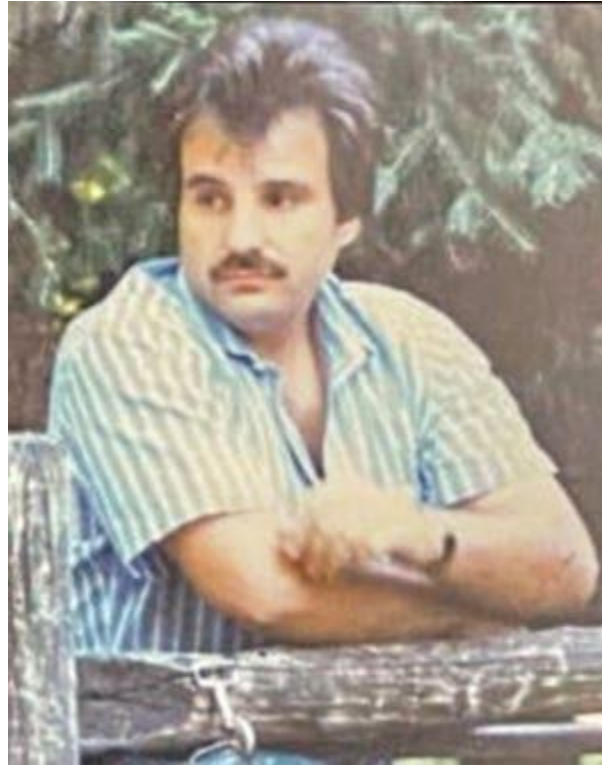
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- Remains found Oct. 7, 1986, in St. Lucie County have been identified as 39-year-old Blaine Louis Brown, Jr.
- The identity was learned this year after extensive work involving DNA.
- Brown, who sheriff's officials say may have been involved in narcotics smuggling, owned a horse ranch and another business in Ocala.

ST. LUCIE COUNTY – Nearly 40 years after an unidentified man was found bound and executed in St. Lucie County, sheriff's investigators with the help of DNA technology learned the remains are those of 39-year-old **Blaine Louis Brown, Jr.**, the Sheriff's Office announced April 28.

The remains determined to be those of Brown, who owned a horse ranch and another business in Ocala and was known by the nickname "Bunny," were [found Oct. 7, 1986, by a laborer](#) in a grove near Ralls and Selvitz roads.

"Interviews with family members indicated that Brown may have been involved in narcotics smuggling, and he had ties to Ocala, Miami, Fort Pierce, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the 1980s," the Sheriff's Office stated.



Blaine Louis Brown, Jr. Provided from St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office.

Detective Paul Taylor, who's been dedicated to investigating cold case homicide and missing person cases, has said officials determined the man was "absolutely executed," shot in the head a number of times.

Sheriff Richard Del Toro said much work involving DNA was done on the case, saying the agency was happy to identify Brown and bring some closure to the family.

"I know they've been searching for answers for the past 40 years. You can imagine what that must be like," he said. "There were young kids involved, a wife, and so a lot of time's passed and we're able to now give the family some answers."

## **What happened?**

In a 2020 interview about the case, Taylor said the worker noticed what he thought was a football, but it was a head, which had separated from the body because of decomposition and perhaps a scavenging animal pulled it into the road. The body was nearby, and likely had been there for at least a couple of weeks.

Taylor mentioned suspected links to drug trafficking — the “cocaine cowboys” era.

The man wore nice clothes for the period — Jordache jeans (34-inch waist), Hennessy button-down shirt, Nocona cowboy boots (size 10D) and Nike socks. He also had a Seiko watch with leather band. More than \$350 in cash was in his pockets. Investigators ruled out robbery.

“Despite exhaustive efforts by original detectives, no suspects were identified, and the victim remained a John Doe, eventually buried without a name in the Fort Pierce public cemetery,” the Sheriff’s Office stated.

## **New efforts**

Taylor in 2019 reopened the case. He found just the skull remained in evidence at the Sheriff’s Office. A section was cut out and delivered to DNA Labs International in Deerfield Beach for DNA testing in November 2019, though Taylor got a report indicating no DNA turned up.

Incredulous, he talked to scientists and learned the skull had been put in formalin, which he described as a preservative that stops decomposition.

“The formalin had actually erased the DNA,” Taylor said. “It had slowly worked its way through the bone.”

The remains in March 2020 were exhumed after Taylor learned the body was released to Yates Funeral Home & Cremation Services. He tracked it to a cemetery in the area of Avenue H and U.S. 1.

“When we exhumed him we actually found that he remained still tied up, which was just completely shocking to everybody,” Taylor said. “All of his bindings were still there. They were still on the body.”

Taylor has said both femur, or thigh, bones were sent to DNA Labs International for testing.

The DNA results, however, weren't sufficient for forensic genetic genealogy until March 2024, when the Florida Department of Law Enforcement approved grant funding for advanced testing by Othram, a lab in Texas that specializes in DNA identification from degraded remains.

Ultimately, on Jan. 8, 2025, a genealogy report identified possible first cousins of the deceased.

“Subsequent contact with several family members, including a half-brother in Ohio, led to the submission of a confirmatory DNA sample,” the Sheriff's Office stated. “Testing confirmed the victim's identity as Blaine Louis Brown Jr.”

## Missing person

Sheriff's officials stated the same day the remains were found — Oct. 7, 1986 — Brown was reported missing to the Marion County Sheriff's Office.

“According to his family, he was last seen on Sept. 26, 1986, telling relatives he was driving to Miami in connection with horse-related business,” the Sheriff's Office stated. “His leased 1986 gray Ford pickup truck was later found abandoned in a Miami parking lot.”

Sheriff's officials report they continue to try to identify the person or persons responsible for Brown's death.

Taylor said Brown had a wife, and sons, ages 4 and 7 at the time.

“I know that on the day that he disappeared, he told his wife and his two sons that he was headed to Miami to deal with horses, and he disappeared,” Taylor said. “Whenever I did make contact with the son to do a death notification, he actually told me that throughout his entire life he never knew what happened to his dad,” Taylor said.

“He said that he thought that maybe his dad just decided not to come home anymore and so that gave them a little bit of closure.”

Del Toro said those with information should not concern themselves about possible issues with drugs.

“We're not worried about the narcotics aspect of this case. Some people might be thinking if they bring information forward now they're going to get jammed up because maybe narcotics charges,” Del

Toro said. "The statute of limitations is over regarding those cases. We are focusing now 100% on the homicide angle."

Those with information are asked to contact Taylor at 772-359-4407 or [taylorp@stluciesheriff.com](mailto:taylorp@stluciesheriff.com). Tips also can be submitted via Treasure Coast Crime Stoppers through [www.tcwatch.org](http://www.tcwatch.org)

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