

DNA confirms identity of 'Jane Doe' homicide victims buried in Berks County

By [Steven Henshaw](#)

<http://readingeagle.com/news/article/dna-from-exhumed-bones-confirms-two-jane-doe-homicide-victims-buried-in-late-1960s-in-berks-county-were-philadelphia-runaways&template=mobileart>One of the girls was shot to death, investigators say.

After 46 years, an Ohio family with eastern Pennsylvania roots can finally give a proper burial to a daughter who ran away from her Philadelphia home at age 14 and was buried in a Berks County potters field as an “unidentified.” DNA extracted from bones that were exhumed from an unmarked grave in Cumru Township in October has confirmed the remains are those of Sandy Stiver, authorities announced Friday.

The remains of an adjacent grave were identified as Stiver's sister-in-law, Martha Stiver, 17, who ran away with Sandy in the spring of 1968, officials aid.

The Berks County Coroner Dennis J. Hess brought in a renowned expert in forensic exhumations at the request of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and state police, who are investigating both deaths as homicides. The bones were sent to a Texas laboratory where DNA samples were extracted for analysis.

The missing children network made the request after persistent efforts by Hazel Stiver, one of Sandy's sisters, for more than a decade. About 2000, she came across the profiles of two unidentified murder victims in Berks County on the [Doe Network website](#). She thought it was very likely the unidentified girls were her older sister and her sister-in-law.

“I think I've been calling (the network) once a week for 10 years,” Hazel said in a phone interview from her home in Richfield, Ohio.

Barely able to control her emotions, she said: “My dad (Russell Stiver) died in 1974 and his wish was for me to continue on looking for my sister ... and I told him I would and I never stopped.

“I've been looking and looking and got the missing children's (network) to take it.”

Throughout the 1960s, her father worked as a commercial painter and the family spent summers in Philadelphia and winters in Kansas. The family eventually settled in the Cleveland area of Ohio, but Russell Stiver never gave up hope about finding what happened to his missing daughter.

“Since I was 9 years old my dad kept going to the Philadelphia police station once a year from Cleveland to try to find out what we could find,” Hazel Stiver said. “I remember sitting on the detective's desk and him giving me candy and cookies to wait while he was talking to them.”

In the mid-1980s, Hazel and another of her sisters, Linda Dresko, went to Philadelphia police to try to get them to reopen the case but were told a case file could not be found, she said.

After the missing child network agreed to take up the case and contacted Philadelphia detectives, Hazel Stiver and Dresko traveled to the city to file a new report with detectives, she said. **The initial case**

Sandy Stiver's body was found Aug. 22, 1968, in a patch of poison ivy about 20 feet off Route 82 near Joanna in Caernarvon Township by a 14-year-old boy, investigators said. She had been shot once in the head and at least five times in the body with a .22-caliber gun.

The skeletal remains of Martha Stiver were found about eight months later, on April 18, 1969, on a large rock in French Creek State Park by a man looking for mushrooms. The cause of her death could not be determined, but investigators said a forensic anthropologist who examined the remains determined Martha likely died about the same time as her sister-in-law.

Hazel Stiver and Dresko were informed of the DNA match Thursday in a phone call to Dresko by Trooper Robert Hess, who oversees cold case investigations with Reading-based Troop L.

In a press conference at the Reading station, Trooper Hess, who is not related to the coroner, said that with the identification of the victims “this investigation is like brand new now. We've got a lot of work to do, a lot of people to talk to.”

He invited anyone who knew or came into contact with the Stiver girls in the 1960s to call state police at the

Reading station at 610-378-4011.

"I believe there is certainly someone out there who knows what happened to these two girls," the trooper said.

"There's absolutely no doubt in my mind." **Little hope, at first**

Locating the graves that long ago lost their wooden markers, exhuming the remains and sending bone samples to the DNA was a yearlong process, and it looked for a time that the bones would not yield the results hope for because after four decades of being underground, little useful DNA could be extracted, Dennis Hess said.

Hess and two deputies assigned to the case were disappointed when the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification asked for bones in March because the initial samples did not yield as high of a probability of a match to the DNA profiles of family members who provided DNA samples.

But there were "a lot of cheers" in the coroner's office when the report arrived recently showing an extremely high probability that the remains were those of the missing Philadelphia girls.

The coroner's office is in discussions with the families of both victims about how to transfer the remains.

"We've accomplished the first part of this," the coroner said. "The most important part was to reunite them with their families, and that we're really excited about.

"I hope in the future we can do several more of these unknown and get them united with their families. We're working real hard on it." **Hazel Stiver, who has seven siblings, said it will mean the world to her mother, Elizabeth, resides in Richfield, to have a proper funeral for her long-lost daughter.**

Hazel Stiver, who has seven siblings, said it will mean the world to her mother, Elizabeth, resides in Richfield, to have a proper funeral for her long-lost daughter.

"I want to give her my sister back," Hazel said.

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Found Deceased

Sandy and Martha have been identified as two unidentified females found in Berks County in 1968 and 1969.

[Details of the Berks County Jane Does can be found here.](#)

Sandy Stiver (left photo) Martha Stiver (right photo)

Stiver Girls

Sandy Stiver, 14, and her sister-in-law Martha Stiver were last seen at Frankford & Kensington Avenues in Philadelphia, sometime in 1968. According to family members, the weather was just starting to get hot - hot enough to be opening the windows in the house, so it is likely that Sandy

& Martha were last seen in late spring or early summer of 1968.

The Stiver family had lived in Kansas City, MO prior to moving to Philadelphia and it was thought that Sandy and Martha may have headed back there, but the two girls were never seen or heard from again.

Forty years later, while looking through the Doe Network website, Sandy's sister came across the profiles of the Berks Girls, two Jane Does who had been murdered in Berks County in 1968. The sister thinks it is very possible that the unidentified girls may be Sandy and Martha. Sandy bears a striking resemblance to one of the girls in a photo that may be of the two murdered girls. The possibility is currently being pursued by PA Law Enforcement.



Above left, additional photo of Sandy. Above right, same photo of Martha but full view.



The above photographs were found in August 1969, in an abandoned hangar, which police believe was used as a hangout for area motorcycle gangs. The girls in the photos were believed to be the now identified Berks Girls.