

'Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee' identified; person of interest identified, officials say

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SUMTER COUNTY, Fla. - A young woman killed more than 50 years ago and left in a lake beneath an overpass - known as "Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee" - has been identified, officials with the Sumter County Sheriff's Office said.

Officials also released the name of a person of interest in her death.

On Feb. 19, 1971, a young woman was found dead under the Lake Panasoffkee Bridge near Interstate 75 in Sumter County. Up until today, she had never been identified.

She was found on the east side near mile marker 322, the Sumter County Sheriff's Office said at the time. Authorities estimated she was in her 20s. She reportedly had a belt wrapped around her neck. She was wearing a thin yellow necklace, had a yellow metal ring on her right hand, and a 17 jewel Baylor watch on her left wrist.

On Wednesday, Sumter County officials said "Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee" had been identified as 21-year-old **Maureen L. Minor Rowan, known as "Cookie to her friends and family.**

She was never reported as a missing person at time of her disappearance or death, officials said.

Officials said Rowan was a mother.

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Officials said that the last known address for Maureen Rowan was on Windermere Way in Tampa. They also listed connections to Jacksonville, Gainesville, and Inigma, Georgia.



Little Miss Panasoffkee cold case update: News conference

The Sumter County Sheriff's Office shared new details about the 'Little Miss Panasoffkee' case. Investigators have identified the woman who was found dead under a bridge near I-75 in 1971.

Family statement

What they're saying:

"For nearly 55 years, our family lived without answers about what happened to my mother. We now know that she was "Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee". But she was more. She was a mother, a daughter, a sister, and a woman who deserved a full life. We are deeply grateful to the Sumter County detectives and the local community who never gave up on her. Now that she has been identified, our family can begin to heal. We ask anyone who has any information on who killed our mother to please come forward."

Sumter County Sheriff Patrick "Pat" Breeden

"This breakthrough exemplifies the dedication of every investigator who has worked on this case over the past five decades and reflects the unwavering commitment of the Sumter County Sheriff's Office to seek the truth and deliver closure to families.

Although we still have a lot of work to do to bring justice to Cookie and her family, I am incredibly proud of the men and women of my office who continue to diligently work our cold cases and persevere despite the challenges that some of them present.

To Cookie's family, our thoughts and prayers are with you. We know your hearts are heavy with grief. Cookie was your mother, she was your sister, and your friend. She has never been forgotten and has had a profound impact on our community."

Person of interest identified

Detectives identified the woman's estranged husband – Charles Emery Rowan Sr. – as a person of interest in Maureen Rowan's murder. He died in 2015, the sheriff's office said.

What you can do:

Though detectives are looking to the public for help with any additional information about what may have happened to Cookie – and why.

Maureen Rowan would have been 76 in 2025. Charles Rowan Sr. would have been 85 in 2025.

Anyone with information on the woman's identity or what happened to her is asked to contact the Sumter County Sheriff's Office at (352)793-2621 or to Crimeline at 1-800-423-TIPS (8477).

Timeline: From Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee to Maureen L. Minor Rowan

Feb. 19, 1971

A woman's body was found beneath the I-75 overpass, near Lake Panasoffkee, in Sumter County.

1986

The woman's body was exhumed as DNA and facial recognition improved to help develop composite sketches and a better potential profile. Detectives conducted forensic anthropology, dental comparison, facial reconstruction, and early DNA testing.

October 1992

***Unsolved Mysteries* profiles the "Little Miss Lake Panasoffkee" cold case – 21 years after the woman's death.**

2006

The woman's fingerprints were sent to the FBI to compare with national databases. No matches found.

2013

Unknown at the time, but the woman's fingerprints were in the FBI's database from a 1970 arrest in Hillsborough County.

2018 - 2025

As DNA, forensics, and genealogy tools and technologies improved, efforts were made to continue to identify the woman. Several labs were used, but no matches were found. Details on the victim's medical history and physical characteristics improved.

2021 - 50th Anniversary

The Sumter County Sheriff's Office marked the 50th anniversary of "Little Miss Panasoffkee" with a video recap of the case, new composite images, and plea to the public for help.

February 2025

The Sumter County Sheriff's Office acquires Storm ABIS (Automatic Biometric Identified System), which is owned by IDEMIA, and provides fingerprint IDs and analysis to law enforcement, the sheriff's office said.

October 2025

The Sumter County Sheriff's Office submitted new latent prints to the IDEMIA Storm System, which resulted in a match. Officials then positively confirmed the remains to be of Maureen Minor Rowan, also known as "Cookie."

In March 2012, the Anthropology Department at the University of South Florida re-examined the woman's remains to hopefully develop a better composite image, hoping to identify the woman.

Officials said that analysis determined the woman may have been of Greek descent and likely came to the U.S. 10-12 months before her death.

Authorities said she may have been from Lavrion, Greece, which is about 60 miles from Athens, due to the high level of lead found in her teeth. Lavrion is known for high levels of lead due to mining operations in the area, officials said.

The woman was estimated to be between 17-24 years old at the time of her death. She was between 5' 2" and 5' 5" tall and weighed 110-120 pounds. She was wearing plaid green pants, a matching solid green shirt, and a shawl with green and yellow print.

The Source: The information is from the Sumter County Sheriff's Office, including a video update marking the 50th anniversary of the woman's death and the ongoing investigation.