

# Faith and sonar help answers surface in 21-year-old White County cold case

Car found linked to missing Sparta teens

Authorities in White County now confirm to NewsChannel 5 that investigators are processing the vehicle owned by a cold case victim.

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SPARTA, Tenn. (WTVF) — White County Sheriff's deputies are processing a car linked to a 21-year-old cold case after it was found in a Sparta river.

Deputies say the 1998 Pontiac Grand Am was last seen driven by Erin Foster and Jeremy Bechtel the night they went missing on April 3, 2000.

It's a mystery that's been filled with speculation for years. Deputies chased down leads to Florida before the case eventually went cold.

Jeremy Sides discovered the case only weeks ago and decided to drive from Georgia to Sparta in hopes of offering help. He posts his travels on the YouTube page "Exploring with Nug" and dives into bodies of water searching for cold case clues.

"They disappeared in their car and that's an immediate red flag that chances are they went into a body of water somewhere," Sides said.

Sides shared a video on YouTube where he was diving in Sparta. Somehow the video made it to the Foster family who just happened to be at church with newly elected Sheriff Steve Page.

"They asked me if I saw the videos put up by the young man who was here looking," Page said.

Page reached out to Sides and explained how he discovered last year that investigators may have been searching in the wrong place.

"The whole investigation was led out of the west end of the county. That's where everybody assumed something bad happened. That just wasn't the case," Page said.

Page says a closer look at the records shows the pair picked up Foster's brother that night and took him home. They got permission to go back out and later vanished, which Page says means they were traveling from Foster's home near Highway 84.

Page directed Sides to search Calfkiller River, in an area he claims no one had bothered to search before. Using sonar to map out the riverbed, it took just a matter of hours to track the car 12 feet below the surface.

"Everybody was just speechless. Very overwhelming, but in a good way. It was a very great feeling to bring so much closure and answers to so many people. It meant a lot to me and I know it meant a lot to all of them too," Sides said.

Sides pulled the license plate and called Page to confirm this was indeed Foster's car. Page said he couldn't believe what he was hearing. He was the first to call both families.

"I prayed for this. I asked God to help me find these teens. To give closure to help this family finally be able to put this to rest and I think we're going to be able to do that," Page said.

The family of Jeremy Bechtel told us they have mixed emotions after learning about the car. They know it means closure, but also the end of hoping the two would be found alive. They say they're thankful for the efforts by new leadership at the sheriff's office because past administrations "lacked attention to detail."

Major John Meadows is now the lead investigator who says he still remembers the day his classmates went missing.

"It's very humbling to be a part of something that's going to bring so much closure to so many families," Meadows said.

Human remains were found in the car, but it's not clear if they belonged to two separate people. Investigators are waiting on DNA evidence to positively ID the victims. A process Page says could take months. Dive teams plan to return to the water in hopes of finding more remains and evidence to explain what happened.

Page says they haven't ruled out foul play, but they believe it's more likely the pair simply lost control of their vehicle.

source: <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/faith-and-sonar-help-answers-surface-in-21-year-old-white-county-cold-case>