

# Woman found alive, reunited with family more than 40 years after custodial kidnapping

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO) helped reunite a family and closed a more than 40-year-old missing-person and custodial-kidnapping investigation Monday.

Authorities said Debra Leigh Curry Newton took her then 3-year-old daughter, Michelle Marie Newton, to Georgia in 1983 to begin a new job, but after a final phone call, they both vanished.

An FBI Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution warrant and a custodial-interference indictment followed, JCSO said. Years later in 2000, the Commonwealth couldn't reach Michelle's father, Joseph Newton, and the case was dismissed; Michelle was later removed from the national missing-child databases in 2005.

A family member reached out to the sheriff's office in 2015 for help which encouraged them to re-examine the case, according to the department. The commonwealth's attorney at the time, with the help of detectives, re-indicted the case in 2016.



*Credit: Missing People in America*

**Michelle Newton, 3 (pictured above), had been missing for more than 40 years. She was found and reunited with her family in Louisville, Kentucky.**

In 2025, a Crime Stoppers tip in Florida found a possible match for Debra, and JCSO Detective Constance Jones confirmed the resemblance. DNA from Debra's sister showed a 99.99% match to the person in Florida.

Authorities said a family member came to Kentucky and posted the bond, and Debra voluntarily appeared in Louisville court.

Michelle, who was living in another state under a different identity, contacted the Sheriff's Office after finding out about her family history, and the department was able to reunite her with her family, according to the sheriff's office.

She told JCSO she had not realized she was a victim until she saw everything she missed.

"This is the kind of case you see once in a law-enforcement career," Col. Steve Healey said. "Detectives refused to let the trail go cold. Their work—and the courage of a Crime Stoppers tipster—brought a daughter home to her family after four decades."

Debra faces a custodial interference charge.

<https://www.whas11.com/article/news/local/michelle-marie-newton-debra-leigh-curry-newton-missing-person-custodial-kidnapping-jefferson-county-sheriffs-office-louisville-kentucky/417-17031697-a929-4650-85ff-88cf16f35eba>