

# Cold Case: Who killed the ‘Girl in the field’?

## The key to the identity was a titanium rod in her leg

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WOODBURN, Ore. (KOIN) — She was known as the girl in the field until Dr. Nici Vance with the Oregon State Police Medical Examiner’s Office gave her a name.

On January 12, 2004 a farmer found the body of a young woman in his field near Woodburn. The medical examiner determined she was murdered and had been dead for several months.

“As we performed the autopsy... our state medical examiner Dr. Gunson and I were looking at this young girl from head to toe and we quickly realized that she had a very distinct feature on one of her upper leg bones,” Vance said. “That was a 14-inch titanium rod that was inserted within the shaft of that leg bone.”



The body of Miriam Orta Gomez was found in this Marion County field in 2004 (KOIN, file)

The rods are used to repair bone fractures, and each rod has a lot number stamped on it. Sometimes, the numbers can be traced back to a particular hospital or patient.

“In this case we did find the lot and realized there were thousands of these titanium rods that were produced,” Vance said. “We could not narrow it down to one person.”

The lot number revealed the rod had been shipped to Mexico, but it didn't indicate which hospital. Vance's best clue to the woman's identity had hit a dead end.

Using the skull, the FBI was able to create a facial reconstruction. Detectives in Marion County helped distribute the information to authorities in Mexico, hoping someone would recognize her. But that, too, hit a dead end.



A forensic composite of Miriam Orta Gomez that helped identify her after her 2004 murder. (KOIN, May 2017)

That's when Vance listed the woman on the [National Missing and Unidentified Persons Website](#). It's her job to make sure Oregon cases on the website are constantly updated with the latest information, in the hopes that someone, somewhere will reach out. And one day a few months ago, someone contacted her.

"I received a message from a woman in Mexico that said she believed the unidentified remains from Marion County... were potentially her sister," Vance said.

The woman said her sister was missing, and that her family had last heard from her in 2003. They believed she had been living in Seattle and confirmed she had fractured her leg in a motorcycle accident.

Detectives then traveled to Mexico to take DNA samples from the family.

"It ended up being a match," Vance said.

Twelve years after the remains were found, they were identified as Miriam Orta Gomez. She had been living in Lynwood, Washington. Her family in Mexico said they last heard from her in June 2003 when she called to say she had given birth to a baby. It's believed she was murdered a few months later.

No one knows what happened to the baby.

Now that the victim has been identified, detectives are looking for whoever killed her.



Miriam Orta Gomez in an undated photo provided in May 2017

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