

Three decades later: Jane Doe identified in Apache Junction cold case breakthrough, police say



AJPD

Melody Harrison



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More than 30 years of mystery have shrouded the identity of the Apache Junction Jane Doe case.

The unidentified female has been identified as 15-year-old Melody Harrison, who was reported missing from Phoenix in June 1992.

Her identification was possible through the persistent efforts of Apache Junction Police Investigator Stephanie Bourgeois and the innovative genetic genealogy techniques of the DNA Doe Project, according to a release.

Harrison's decomposed remains were found in a remote desert area of Apache Junction on the northwest corner of Idaho and Baseline roads on Aug. 6, 1992, sparking a forensic investigation to determine her identity and cause of death.

Although she has been identified, the investigation continues as to how she ended up in the far east portion of the Valley more than 40 miles away from her residence.

Using the DNA Doe Project's investigative genetic genealogy process, they analyzed DNA of possible relatives of Melody and built a family tree, allowing investigators to make branches through genealogical records and two databases – GEDmatch Pro and FamilyTreeDNA.com, the release states.

Besides genetic DNA, a second confirmation of DNA was done by comparing family members to confirm Harrison's identity.

Bourgeois picked up the case in 2008 and retested evidence through advanced technology. Over the years, other investigative tools were used, but the case went cold. In 2018, the department hired the DNA Doe Project to conduct forensic investigative genetic genealogy to further develop Apache Junction Jane Doe's DNA profile.

Harrison's family filed the initial missing person report through the Phoenix Police Department in June 1992. However, because of individuals coming forth to the family saying they had seen Harrison in multiple locations, the family believed she started a new life and did not want to go home.

She was removed from the missing person's database in August 1996. Her family thought she was still alive.

In 2019, The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children posted two billboards in the Phoenix area of Apache Junction Jane Doe's composite sketch to help assist with her identification and no leads were presented, according to the release.

Identifying Harrison was always the priority. Through research with dozens of volunteer investigative genetic genealogists and the work of Bourgeois, Harrison was given back her name.

"There is peace of mind having found Melody's identity and sharing with her family, but there isn't closure surrounding the circumstances of her death," Bourgeois said in the release. "We are still searching to find out how she might have passed away."

The Apache Junction Police Department seeks information from anyone who can shed light on Harrison's presence in Apache Junction during the time of her disappearance in 1992. Any details regarding her close friends or relationships could be instrumental in solving this case.

If anyone has information regarding this case, contact Silent Witness at 480-W-I-T-N-E-S-S, 480-948-6377, or 480-T-E-S-T-I-G-O for Spanish speaking. They can also leave an anonymous tip at silentwitness.org. Responses can be completely anonymous and could earn a cash reward for information leading to the arrest and/or indictment of the suspect(s) of this crime.