

Bear Brook Jane Doe 2000

Success Stories

Final victim of the Bear Brook murders identified after 25 years
DNA Doe Project volunteers identify 'The Middle Child' as Rea
Rasmussen



Allenstown, NH – It's one of the most well-known Doe cases in the United States, and one that has haunted amateur sleuths, podcasters, and the public for more than two decades. Now, the DNA Doe Project has determined the identity of the little girl found in a barrel in Bear Brook State Park in 2000. Her name was Rea Rasmussen, daughter of Terry

Rasmussen and Pepper Reed. Terry Rasmussen, a serial killer believed to be responsible for the Bear Brook murders, may have also murdered Pepper Reed, who went missing in the late 1970s.

In the year 2000, the bodies of two young girls were found in a barrel in Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown, New Hampshire. Fifteen years prior to this, the bodies of a woman and a girl had been discovered in a separate barrel nearby. It was later determined that all four of them had been murdered and their bodies left in the park sometime around 1980. None of these individuals could be identified and the case became known as the Bear Brook murders.

Beginning in 2017, the mystery began to unravel. DNA testing proved that one of the girls was the daughter of Terry Rasmussen, a convicted murderer who had died in prison in 2011. Having established this link, investigators determined that Rasmussen was responsible for the Bear Brook murders. Two years later, three of the victims were identified – the woman was Marlyse Honeychurch and the oldest and youngest girls were her daughters Marie Vaughn and Sarah McWaters. But the identity of Rasmussen's daughter, 'The Middle Child', remained unknown.

Firebird Forensics worked tirelessly on this case for years before the New Hampshire State Police brought it to the DNA Doe Project in January 2024. Updated bioinformatics produced a new DNA profile for the unidentified girl, which showed that she was solely of European descent and provided an updated list of DNA matches that researchers used to build her family tree.

A team of expert investigative genetic genealogists was assigned to the case but their research was complicated by a lack of DNA matches and a number of misattributed parentage events. As a result, they had to build family trees many generations back in time to make connections, ultimately amassing a tree containing 25,000 people. Eventually, they were able to identify a couple born in the 1780s as likely ancestors of the Jane Doe, and building out their descendants led to a family of interest.



Pepper Reed, mother of Rea Rasmussen

A 2005 obituary for one of the great great great granddaughters of the couple stated that she was survived by a daughter called Pepper Reed, but further research indicated that Pepper had disappeared from the records in the 1970s. Pepper was born in 1952 and was from Houston, where Terry Rasmussen was known to be living in the 1970s. The team then found additional connections between Pepper's ancestors and the unidentified girl's DNA matches, which confirmed that Pepper Reed had to be the mother of Jane Doe.

"To figure out the identity of our Jane Doe, we first had to find her mother", said team leader Matthew Waterfield. "It took us almost 18 months to identify Pepper Reed, but once we knew her name, it led us right to her daughter."

Within half an hour of identifying Pepper Reed as the child's mother, the team made a shocking discovery. They found a birth record for a girl named Rea Rasmussen in Orange County, California in 1976 – to a mother with the maiden name of Reed. There were hundreds of girls with the surname Rasmussen born in the late 1970s in California alone, but with the Reed connection now known, a member of the team drove to Orange County to retrieve a copy of the birth certificate. This certificate listed Rea's parents as Terry Rasmussen and Pepper Reed, proving that the girl known for 25 years as 'The Middle Child' was in fact **Rea Rasmussen**.

“Due to her young age and life circumstances, we were prepared for the possibility of only being able to identify her mother,” said investigative genetic genealogist Jeana Feehery. “Returning both Pepper and Rea's names to them, their families, and the greater community is the best possible outcome we could have hoped for.”

The DNA Doe Project is grateful to the groups and individuals who helped solve this case: the New Hampshire State Police, who entrusted the case to the DNA Doe Project; the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for providing publicity and investigative support from the very beginning; Firebird Forensics, who previously worked on this case; Astrea Forensics for DNA extraction and sequencing; Kevin Lord for updated bioinformatics; GEDmatch Pro and FamilyTreeDNA.com for providing their databases; and the DNA Doe Project's dedicated teams of volunteer investigative genetic genealogists who work tirelessly to bring all our Jane and John Does home.

Description:

Believed to be a victim of the serial killer Terry Rasmussen and known to be his biological daughter, this little girl was between 2 and 4 years old at the time of her death. Her remains were found in a barrel on May 9, 2000 on private property near Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown, NH. Updated bioinformatics analysis has revealed that her mother is solely of European descent, and research has shown that she has colonial American ancestry.

NamUs ID:

UP2175

Date Body Found:

May 9, 2000

Race:

White/Caucasian

Sex:

Female

Estimated Age:

2-4 years

Estimated PMI:

Years

Agency of Jurisdiction:

New Hampshire State Police

Christopher Elphick

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More Information:

<https://www.namus.gov/UnidentifiedPersons/Case#/2175>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear_Brook_murders

<https://www.missingkids.org/poster/NCMU/1100662/1>

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/terry-rasmussens-victims-unknown/story?id=69585534>

Status:

Identified

Image Credit:

NCMEC

Acknowledgment:

Firebird Forensics worked on this case prior to it coming to the DNA Doe Project in 2024.

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