

## **Mother of “Baby Theresa” identified, charged in newborn’s death**

Juliana Tornabene – Friday – 2022

Madison, Wisconsin (WMTV) - Nearly thirteen years after the death of a newborn girl whose body was found alongside a road in the Town of Theresa, Dodge Co. officials gathered Friday to announce the investigation into the death of “Baby Theresa” had been resolved and her mother identified and taken into custody.

The mother, identified as Karin Luttinen, made her first court appearance on the same day as the news conference to announce her arrest. Sheriff Dale Schmidt explained that after consulting with the local District Attorney’s Office, they determined the proper charge in this case is Concealing the Death of a Child, relating to the issue of a woman. The charge carries a possible sentence of up to three and a half years in prison and up to a \$10,000 fine.

Court records indicate that Luttinen’s cash bond was set \$2,500 and that she had posted it following the hearing.

The newborn’s body was discovered inside a garbage bag on April 29, 2009, along Lone Road, near the Village of Theresa. The investigators working on the case started calling her “Baby Theresa” to offer her an identity, naming her after the village near where she was found.

Schmidt recounted everyone working to identify the girl’s family members so they could give her a respectful and dignified burial. “Baby Theresa” was laid to rest on May 11, 2009, Schmidt continued, noting that no family members may have been found to attend, the Dodge Co. community were there to pay their respects.

The criminal complaint offered clues into how investigators tracked down Luttinen after years of searching, starting with the DNA recovered at the scene. At the time “Baby Theresa” was found, officers were able to gather genetic evidence from the newborn as well as the bag and its other contents. Some of the DNA discovered was determined to belong to a close female relative that investigators assumed was from the child’s mother.

According to the complaint, results from a Family Tree DNA sample identified someone with the last name of Luttinen as a potential match. Family Tree is a DNA testing agency that offers genetic testing to determine relationships between individuals or to learn more about a person's ancestry. The company's [privacy statement](#) indicates DNA submitted may be used "to comply with the law and requests from government bodies" including law enforcement agencies. The complaint does not indicate when officers learned of the possible connection.

Investigators first made contact with Luttinen, along with her longtime boyfriend whose name was not included, in January of last year. At the time, they both agreed to submit DNA swabs. Analysis showed that DNA collected at the scene was found on the scene and the pair were almost certainly the parents. In a phone call, authorities informed Luttinen's boyfriend that he was the likely father, to which he expressed repeated surprise. After that, the complaint continues, the call was placed on speakerphone and Luttinen was told she was the mother, eliciting just the word "OK."

Five years after "Baby Theresa" died, the district attorney's office filed a charge against the DNA profile believed to belong to the mother. While the Sheriff's Office and prosecutors did not know the mother's name, by moving forward with the charge in 2014 they were able to beat the six-year statute of limitations. That is why they are able to prosecute Luttinen now, Schmidt indicated.

In further interviews, Luttinen and her boyfriend both claimed not to know she was pregnant. Luttinen told investigators she thought she may be pregnant but was in denial. Toward the end of the pregnancy, the complaint states she thought she knew for sure she was pregnant, but her mind could not grasp the concept. The complaint details the events that culminated in "Baby Theresa" being born.

During Friday's news conference, Dodge Co. Medical Examiner P.J. Schoebel stated that an autopsy performed the next day did not find evidence that the child had been murdered. Instead, investigators determined her death was the result of 'fetal demise,' which Shoebel said indicated that she died prior to or during

birth. After speaking with Luttinen and weighing her description, the medical examiner determined the cause of death would remain. As a result, a reckless homicide would not apply.

At the conclusion of the news conference, Schmidt complimented Det. Vickie Brugger and Schoebel as the lead investigators on the case, saying "(t)hey never gave up and pursued absolutely every lead imaginable since Baby Theresa was discovered in 2009." He also acknowledged the entire Dodge Co. Sheriff Office's criminal investigative division for assisting Brugger and Schoebel. Schmidt also individually thanked:

- Sheriff's Office Chaplain Timothy Bauer - conducted the funeral service.
- Todd Michael and the staff at Cornerstone Funeral Home – donation of services.
- Matt Lober - vocalist at the gravesite during the funeral.
- Retired Sheriff Todd Nehls - providing resources in the initial investigation.
- Retired Correctional Officer Hanna Mueller - conducted a forensic drawing of Baby Theresa.
- Dodge County District Attorney Kurt Klomberg - provided legal guidance and prosecution of this case.