

After Minnesota girl identified as 1980 Texas homicide victim, hunt goes on for killer

By [MARY DIVINE](#) | mdivine@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press

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For decades, people tried to determine the identity of a young girl whose naked and battered body was found on the side of the highway in Huntsville, Texas, in November 1980.

On Tuesday, authorities in Walker County, Texas, [announced that a forensic DNA analysis had solved the mystery.](#)



Sherri Ann Jarvis (Walker County Sheriff's Office)

Sherri Ann Jarvis, a Forest Lake girl who had run away from authorities in Stillwater just after her 14th birthday in March 1980, was "Walker County Jane Doe."

"We are all so glad she finally has her identity back," said Marina Willis-Bozeman Brinkley, a Gatesville, Texas, woman who started a website devoted to discovering the identity of the girl. "Honestly, I am still in shock. I prayed for so long for this day to come, and now it has."

Thomas Bean, a detective with the Walker County Sheriff's Office, said his agency partnered with Othram Inc., a Texas-based company that specializes in forensic genealogy, to determine the girl's identity. DNA taken from Sherri's remains was used to construct a family tree, which led to the genetic confirmation of her identity, he said.

Sherri's parents died without knowing what happened to their daughter. Don Jarvis Sr. died at 77 in January 2018; her mother, Kerry Zumbrunnen, died at 78 in June 2019, public records show.

One of Sherri's sisters traveled to Huntsville, Texas, for the announcement and news conference on Tuesday, but declined to talk to the media.

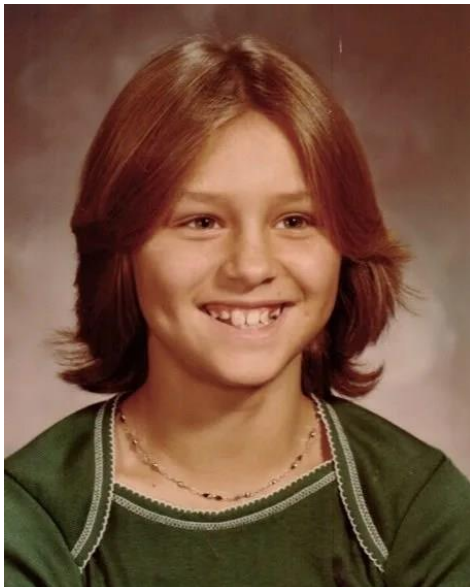
"We lost Sherri more than 41 years ago and we've lived in bewilderment every day since, until now as she has finally been found," her siblings said in a statement. "Sherri Ann Jarvis was a daughter, sister, cousin and granddaughter. She loved children, animals and horseback riding."

Their sister, they said, "was deprived of so many life experiences as a result of this tragedy. She was denied the opportunity to experience romance and love, marital bliss, the heartache and pain of loss, the pure joy of having children or growing old and being able to reflect on such milestones.

Her family told investigators Sherri had gotten in trouble for skipping school and was sent to a shelter in Stillwater before she disappeared, Bean said.

The shelter, operated by Stillwater residents Dick and Judith Anderson, was an emergency state-licensed crisis home where young people between the ages of 12 and 18 were placed temporarily while awaiting appearances in juvenile court.

"I recognized her right away," Dick Anderson said Thursday. "I remembered her face."



Sherri Ann Jarvis (Courtesy of Walker County, Texas, Sheriff's Office)

Now the Rivertown Inn Bed and Breakfast, the shelter at 306 Olive St. served teens from five counties, Anderson said. The couple, who had five children of their own, took

in up to 18 teens at a time, he said. A staff of six adult chaperones supervised the shelter 24 hours a day.

The Andersons, who own the Lowell Inn and the St. Croix Boat and Packet Co., sold the house in 1982. The shelter was moved to a location on Myrtle Street and closed a few years later, he said.

Sherri Ann Jarvis attended Central Junior High School in Forest Lake, said Connie LeTourneau, of Linwood Township. Sherri was in eighth grade at the time of her disappearance; LeTourneau was in seventh grade, she said.

“She was my bestie,” LeTourneau said. “We called her Totti. We liked to hang out together. We’d sit around listening to music. We liked being with friends. That was the most important thing: being with friends.”

According to the family, Sherri ran away from the Washington County Courthouse in Stillwater, where she was supposed to appear for a detention hearing, Bean said.

LeTourneau said she believes Sherri ran off with two sisters from the area and ended up near Green Bay, Wis. The two sisters returned home in their car, but Sherri, who would have graduated from Forest Lake High School in 1984, refused to go with them, she said.

“She said, ‘I’m not going home,’ and she took off from them on foot,” she said. LeTourneau said she has spent the past 41 years searching for Sherri. “There was a time when I thought I saw her at the Maplewood Mall, and I ran up, and it wasn’t her,” she said. “I looked everywhere: newspapers, Facebook, websites, you name it. I looked and looked and asked and asked, but nobody knew anything. Her dad kept the same phone number for 38 years — hoping she would call someday.”

LeTourneau said she was shocked when she logged on to Facebook on Tuesday afternoon and saw a news article about Sherri. “I clicked on, and the first thing I saw was Totti,” she said. “I just went numb.”

Witnesses reported seeing Sherri in two separate locations on the night she died, Oct. 31, 1980: a Gulf gas station on the south side of Huntsville and the Hitchin’ Post Truck Stop. She reportedly spoke to the gas station manager and a waitress at the truck stop, asking for directions to the Ellis Prison Unit, a state penitentiary run by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice about 12 miles north of Huntsville, said Carl Koppelman, who started the [“Who Was Walker County Jane Doe?” Facebook page](#) in 2015. “I tend to believe that’s true,” Koppelman said. “There was this girl, who appeared to be too young to be on her own, asking for directions to a men’s prison.”



Sherri Ann Jarvis composite image (Courtesy of Walker County, Texas, Sheriff's Office)

The girl had told people at the truck stop that she was from Aransas Pass, Texas, a city about 260 miles south of Huntsville, he said.

Koppelman, a CPA who lives in Los Angeles, spent hours poring through yearbooks in the area, but never found a connection. An amateur forensic artist, he also made drawings of what he believed Jane Doe would have looked like when she was alive.

He said a family member told him Sherri wrote one letter to her mother — postmarked from Denver — in August 1980. “She said, ‘You won’t hear from me until I’m at least 18 or 21,’ ” he said. “She was upset she was being incarcerated.

Bean, the detective, said Thursday that officers plan to travel out of state to interview either a witness or a person of interest in Sherri’s rape and murder, but he would not specify which state.

Sherri was buried in the Adickes addition of the Oakwood Cemetery in Huntsville under a stone marker that reads simply: “UNKNOWN WHITE FEMALE / DIED / NOV. 1, 1980.”

Brinkley and her daughter, Kaleigh Glasco, also of Gatesville, often visited the gravesite. The two have worked for years to try to learn the girl’s identity, they said.



Sherri Ann Jarvis was buried in the Adickes addition of the Oakwood Cemetery in Huntsville, Texas, under a stone marker that reads simply: “UNKNOWN WHITE FEMALE / DIED / NOV 1, 1980.” (Courtesy of Laura Gann)

It was “astonishing,” Glasco said, to get the news on Tuesday. “The best part was finding out that she had a family who loved her. She wasn’t someone who had been forgotten. It’s good to know that her family, 1,277 miles away, cared. That gave me a little bit of peace.”

Now, she said, they need to find Sherri’s killer.

“I hope that we can find out who did this to her and, personally, I hope that the person is still alive, so that they can be punished for it,” Glasco said. “I think that would be the absolute best scenario possible.”

Josephine Purviance, who lives in Huntsville, regularly visits the gravesite. “She’s become a regular part of my life,” Purviance said. “My daughters love going with me and bringing her items or flowers. I’m glad she’s staying here in Huntsville where we can continue to show her our love.”

LeTourneau said she plans to travel to Huntsville next week to visit her best friend’s grave and thank the officers who worked on the case.

She said she watched the news conference on Tuesday and was impressed with Walker County Sheriff Clint McRae. “He said that she had always been a top priority, and that they loved her, too,” LeTourneau said. “When I saw that, I cried. I got goosebumps, and I said, ‘I want to hug him.’ I said, ‘I’m going.’ ”

“I hope they get the S.O.B. who did this to her,” she said. “That day can’t come soon enough.”