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After 47 years, Jane Doe murder victim in Eastern Kentucky identified

Sonja Kaye Blair-Adams was murdered in 1969, but her body was not identified until this year.

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In the summer of 1969, a man picking flowers along the secluded Little Shepherd Trail in Harlan County saw a body on the side of a hill, so decomposed it was hard to tell if it was a man or woman.

Now, 47 years later, the body has been identified using technology that didn't become available until long after the body was found, state police announced Wednesday.

The woman was Sonja Kaye Blair-Adams, and she was murdered. Someone stabbed her multiple times in the chest, said state police Detective Josh Howard, who has been working the case since 2013.

The identification comes in one of the state's oldest listed cold cases. The job now is to find who murdered Blair-Adams, if that person is still alive, Howard said.

"That's the hope," Howard said.

It's possible that being able to identify the long-missing woman could prompt someone to provide additional information.

Blair-Adams was 21 when she was killed. She and her husband had divorced in 1967 or 1968; police haven't been able to find a report of anyone reporting her missing in 1969, Howard said.

Her naked body had been in the woods three weeks to a month before it was found.

Police did not release the name of the man who found her. He told police he went to the area at times to dig up trees to replant at his house.

He was picking flowers when he found Blair-Adams' body on June 2, 1969, according to a news release.

Howard believes someone took her to the spot near the trail to kill her, but does not know a motive for the murder.

Blair-Adams had a daughter who was less than a year old when she died. The girl was raised by her grandparents in Letcher County.

"Growing up, she always wondered where her mother was, why her mother didn't come back for her," Howard said of Karen Stipes.

Ultimately, Stipes made the connection that led to her mother's identification.

Howard said Stipes had long heard the story that the body found on the mountain could be that of her mother, but it wasn't until 2009 that one of her children found a listing for an unidentified woman on the website of the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs, with details that fit.

Information on the "Jane Doe" found in 1969 had not been entered into the NamUs system until 2009, state police said.

Stipes contacted state police and Harlan County Coroner Philip Bianchi, according to a news release.

Blair-Adams had been buried in Harlan County with a headstone that said unidentified female, Howard said.

Authorities exhumed the body last year, and Stipes and her children provided DNA samples to compare to DNA from the body.

There was some concern about getting adequate DNA from the remains, but there was enough for technicians comparing the samples to confirm the body was that of Blair-Adams, Howard said.

Police asked that anyone with information on the case call (606) 573-3131.

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