

Investigators inch closer to identifying Princess Doe 30 years after her death

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By **Kathryn Brenzel** | **The Express-Times**



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Times File Photo | Courtesy ImagePrincess Doe is buried in Blaiirstown Township, her grave is seen here in a 2007 file photo. Investigators released a new, 3D composite image of what Doe looks like on the 30th anniversary of when her body was discovered.

Murder made her royalty.

But Princess Doe's story is more Grimm than fairy tale, shrouded in 30 years of mystery: A young girl, found bludgeoned to death in a **Blaiirstown Township** cemetery, unclaimed and never named.

With decades of unanswered questions, Doe still reigns the psyche of those who seek to unveil her identity.

"I ask the same questions everyone else does," said Eric Kranz, a retired Blirstown detective who originally headed the murder investigation. "How can this be? How does this happen?"

Investigators believe they are closer than ever to unraveling Princess Doe's identity and what led up to her murder. A memorial today at Cedar Ridge Cemetery, where her body was found July 15, 1982, recognizes a 30-year-old enigma.

It represents possible changes: A name for Doe, and a new final resting place. As authorities inch toward what they hope is a breakthrough, efforts are under way to move Doe to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

Time turns case warm

Though cases usually go cold within 48 hours, the passage of time has proved invaluable in breathing life into the Princess Doe case, said Lt. Stephen Speirs of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office, who has been the lead detective on the case since 1999.

Advances in forensic science have provided investigators with new methods of identification. A high resolution scan of Doe's skull allowed authorities to create a new, computerized composite of her, Speirs said. The composite is more life-like than previous renderings created after her body was exhumed in 1999, he said.

Authorities sent samples of her hair to a lab in Salt Lake City, Utah, to analyze its mineral content. Since mineral levels in food and water vary by region, the analysis may help pinpoint how long she was in Blirstown before her death, as well as where she was prior to arriving in the township, Speirs said.

The results are expected in a few weeks, and Speirs plans to use them to determine what locations he will inundate with the new composite sketch in hopes that someone remembers her.

"She was out there," he said. "Somebody knows her."

Other evidence may reveal who had contact with Doe before her death, including her killer, Speirs said.

Past people of interest -- perhaps most notably Henry Lee Lucas, a Texas man who claimed he killed 100 women -- proved inconclusive. Though lacking evidence, Speirs said he hasn't closed the door on some theories, including that Arthur Kinlaw, a New York man jailed for beating a woman to death, killed Doe.

Kranz, 65, continues to work on the case long after retirement. He is now involved in efforts to have Doe moved to Arlington National Cemetery.

Relocating Doe would provide parents of lost children with something they desperately lack: a special place to grieve and pray, Kranz said. If Doe isn't admitted into Arlington, he and others will work to make the Blairstown cemetery a national memorial.

"She will represent the idea of lost potential as a result of a fiendish, selfish act," he said.

Naming the nameless

Doe was one of the first widely publicized lost children. She was the first unidentified person to be added to the FBI's National Crime Information Center and is one of the first cases to work closely with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Her case has garnered national attention and inspired a novel, a **website** and even headgear. Missy Des Londe, an administrator for the **Doe Network**, a nonprofit organization that assists law enforcement with identifying unidentified missing persons, has a hat bearing a composite sketch of Princess Doe.

She said she wears the hat when she goes to new places, in hopes that the picture may trigger someone's memory.

"I can't stand to think there is a person that just has no name," she said. "I think it's very sad that someone can go so long without being claimed by someone."

After Doe was found on an embankment on the southeast of the graveyard, her head beaten, Kranz thought of his own daughter, who was three years old at the time. He dubbed her "Princess."

"I used to call my daughter that," he said. "I just thought, at the time, somebody may have called her that."

He also wanted to protect Doe from becoming another anonymous face.

"I want to take this person, not knowing who she was, and give her some personality," he said. "To set her apart from all the John and Jane Does."

'Case consumes me'

Princess Doe is one of three unidentified bodies found in Warren County.

Cases remain open for a woman known as the "Tiger Lady," who was found off Route 94 in Knowlton Township in 1991 and named for a tiger tattoo on her left leg. The other is a man found in Knowlton in 1976, near the Delaware Water Gap.

As the lone officer in the prosecutor's office cold case unit, Speirs said he's worked on the Tiger Lady case, but that Princess Doe has occupied most of the time he can dedicate to cold cases.

"Quite honestly," he said, "the Princess Doe case consumes me."

There is no statute of limitations for homicides in New Jersey, so the cold cases will remain active investigations until they are solved.

The time lapse can make investigators' jobs difficult, said New Jersey State Police Detective Sgt. Michael Tansey, who is the assisting head of the state police Missing Persons Unit. Even with the advancement of technology, some people don't leave a trail to identity.

"People don't realize that there is a segment of society that doesn't leave a footprint," he said. "Not reported missing, no government documents, and unless the person has been arrested, no DNA sample or finger prints."

Princess Doe continues to fascinate strangers, which is vital to a resolution, Kranz said. Sustained interest in the Princess Doe case is imperative for other missing and unidentified people, Kranz said.

"If this person doesn't have a value put on her, there's no hope for anybody out there," he said. "For 30 years, I broke my back trying to find out who this girl is. I haven't given up. The Warren County Prosecutor's Office hasn't given up."

IF YOU WANT TO GO

Ceremony: Noon today at Cedar Ridge Cemetery, Route 94, Blirstown Township.

Anyone with information can call a toll-free hotline at 866-9426467. For information on the memorial and the case, visit **princessdoe.org** or call the prosecutor's office at 908-475-6287.

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