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ADVANCED DNA TESTING REVEALS IDENTITY OF VICTIM KILLED 33 YEARS AGO

Body of 30-year-old Woman Discovered in August 1991

Four Men Arrested and Prosecuted but Victim's Identity Remained Unknown Until This Year

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that a female homicide victim, whose identity remained unknown for more than three decades, has now been identified as Judy Rodriguez by using advanced DNA testing. Rodriguez's unidentified body, bound at the ankles with a cord and covered with a large wooden board, was discovered on August 25, 1991, in a grassy area at the intersection of Cross Island and Southern State parkways in southeast Queens.

Four men were prosecuted and convicted in 1992 and 1993 for their roles in the killing, but the identity of the victim remained unknown. Rodriguez was reported missing by her family shortly after being last seen on January 23, 1991, at her daughter's first birthday party.

District Attorney Katz said: "Three decades ago, four men were convicted for a gruesome killing of an unidentified woman. Though justice was served, the family went 33 long years without any answers about their loved one. Thanks to our partners at the NYPD and the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, we have now provided those crucial details, which I hope brings a measure of solace. This case is a prime example of the determination of my Cold Case Unit in identifying victims and solving the borough's oldest, most challenging homicides. And I extend special gratitude to U.S. Rep. Grace Meng for securing a \$500,000 grant for the Cold Case Unit in my office, which will be used to obtain such answers for other families."

U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queen) said: "As I have said, it is never too late for justice, and the \$500,000 I secured for the D.A.'s Cold Case Unit will go a long way towards investigating and prosecuting local cold cases, and providing answers and closure for families. This latest case from 1991 underscores why this money is so important, and it's an example of the types of cases it will be used to solve. I'm proud to work with District Attorney Katz in pursuing justice for the victims of cold cases in Queens, and I continue to stand with her in never forgetting about them and their loved ones."

Four men, age 18, 19, 20 and 20 at the time of the killing, were arrested and charged in August and September of 1991.

One of the defendants pleaded guilty in September 1992 to manslaughter in the first degree and received a sentence of 8 1/3 to 25 years in jail. He was released in 2009 and discharged from parole in August 2016.

Two others pleaded guilty in October 1992 to reckless endangerment in the first degree and received a sentence of 2 1/3 to seven years in prison. They were released in 1996 and discharged from parole in April 1998. A fourth defendant pleaded guilty in February 1993 to hindering prosecution and received a sentence of 1 1/2 to 4 1/2 years in prison. He was released in 1996 and discharged from parole in July 1997.

DA Katz said that according to the original charges and the investigation, the four men approached the victim sometime between July 15 and August 15, 1991. The men proceeded to drive Rodriguez to the intersection of the Cross Island and Southern State parkways. During the drive, two of the men tied the victim up. Once they arrived at the location, the men pushed the victim out of the car and one of them exited the car and struck Rodriguez on the head with a large metal flashlight, causing her death. The foursome then drove away.

Approximately two weeks later, the four men returned to the scene and attempted to conceal the body by placing a large wooden board over the victim.

On August 25, 1991, police received a call reporting a dead body underneath a wooden board at the parkway intersection. The responding officers discovered the victim but were unable to establish her identity because the body was severely decomposed. However, an investigation was launched, and the four men were arrested and charged approximately one week later.

In November 2023, the Queens DA's Cold Case Unit and the NYPD sought the assistance of a private laboratory to help generate leads to the unknown victim's identity.

In April 2024, DNA Labs International used advanced DNA testing to produce a comprehensive genealogical profile from the skeletal remains. The genealogical profile was uploaded to public databases. The results were given to Detective Joseph Rodriguez of the NYPD's Investigative Genealogy Squad, who built a family tree and turned over an investigative lead to the Queens District Attorney's Office and the NYPD's Cold Case Squad. Investigators then began to contact potential family members of the victim and obtained DNA samples for comparison to the discovered remains.

Through these combined efforts, investigators confirmed that the remains found were those of 30-year-old Judy Rodriguez. Further investigation revealed that Rodriguez was last seen by her family on January 23, 1991, and was reported missing shortly thereafter. Tragically, her disappearance coincided with the first birthday of her daughter, Stephanie Rodriguez. The child was later raised by Rodriguez's parents, who have since died. In addition to her daughter, Judy Rodriguez had two other children and three siblings.

The District Attorney's Cold Case Unit is currently investigating approximately 47 homicide victims who have yet to be identified. Earlier this year, the office received a \$500,000 grant, secured by U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, for advanced DNA testing and genealogical investigations on these types of cases. Since that time, the District Attorney's Cold Case unit has initiated genealogy investigations for 14 cases involving unidentified human remains.

The Forensic Biology Unit in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner has provided crucial assistance and is currently working in close collaboration with the District Attorney's office to develop the DNA profiles on the remainder of unidentified cases. The District Attorney thanks them for their continued support.

This investigation was conducted by Assistant District Attorney Karen L. Ross, Chief of the Cold Case Unit and Deputy Bureau Chief of the Homicide Bureau, under the supervision of John Kosinski, Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney Shawn Clark alongside Detective Charlie Venticinque from the NYPD's Cold Case Unit under the supervision of Sgt. James Wheeler and overall supervision of Lt. Michael Saccone.

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Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

