

# Mystery solved

Denton County Jane Doe identified

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By Donna Fielder / Staff Writer

Her name is Patsy Lee Ross.

She was 54 years old the night a pickup truck struck and killed her on the Interstate 35 service road at Ganzer Road. She had two daughters.

At last, we know.

The woman known as Jane Doe since July 28, 1996, has been identified. Her daughters finally know what happened after she walked away from the home of one of them in 1995.

Denton County medical examiner investigators finally can close the case that has been open for 11 years.

The Denton County woman who has kept her cremains and a video of her memorial service on a shelf in her computer room for more than 11 years finally can accomplish the task she set for herself.

Fran Brown was foreman of the grand jury that convicted the hit-and-run driver. She took the cremains and put them in an urn. She kept photographs and notebooks crammed full of facts about the case. She organized a memorial service to draw attention to the unidentified woman and videotaped it so that loved ones would eventually know that people cared about their mother, even if they didn't know who she was.

"It's a Christmas miracle!" Brown said Thursday from her Carrollton home. "I'm so happy. I was so taken by surprise today when they called and told me. I'd been told all along that we wouldn't find out who she was unless someone was looking for her. But it didn't happen that way."

Denton police found the woman's body tossed against the embankment of the Ganzer Bridge over I-35. She had been struck by a vehicle that had left some debris when it sped away. An investigation led to the arrest of Cory Lee Prince, a 20-year-old Oklahoma man who admitted striking something but said he thought it had been a bush.

Brown and the other grand jury members were anxious to get the case before their three-month term ran out, she said. They indicted him and he entered a guilty plea and was sentenced to four years probation.

But the victim carried no identification, had no scars or tattoos and was too badly injured by the accident to be photographed for public access. Drawings were circulated at the time, and numerous newspaper stories ran in Texas and other areas.

A small funeral took place for her, and she was cremated.

Two years later, Brown organized another service to draw attention to the unidentified woman. The service generated a great deal of publicity, some of it national, but no one came forward with identification.

So Brown put the urn on a shelf, surrounded by stuffed animals, and waited.

She made arrangements for the ashes to be buried with her, Brown said.

“I couldn’t just leave her here alone. I couldn’t just leave her hanging around on a shelf in the basement of the courthouse when I found out that’s where she was,” she said. “And I couldn’t leave her behind when I went either.”

Last week Troy Taylor, chief investigator for the Denton County Medical Examiner’s Office, decided to try one more time to make identification.

Her fingerprints didn’t match anything in the federal fingerprint identification system at the time, and the agency has run the prints back through three or four times a year ever since.

This time, the prints got a hit. Ross had been arrested in 1995 for felony larceny in a small county in Virginia. But, as is the case in many smaller agencies, that agency didn’t turn its prints to the federal clearinghouse agency. Only within the past few months has it begun sharing its fingerprints.

“We’ve probably run them 15 to 20 times, maybe more, but they never popped up because they weren’t in the system yet,” Taylor said. “They’d been on a fingerprint card in the back of a drawer in some deputy’s office. Had we known that she had been arrested, we could have identified her the day she died. But that’s the reason we keep trying,” he said.

The arrest report included the address of one of the daughters.

Ross’s daughters did not want to talk to reporters. But Taylor said they were relieved to finally know what happened to their mother.

“Her daughter said she was mentally unstable. She was living with her mother and just kind of left one day. She thought she’d be back but she never came. She had prepared herself for the worst,” Taylor said.

One daughter lives in Minneapolis and the other lives in Virginia, Taylor said.

“She has no idea what her mother was doing in Texas. They don’t have relatives here. She said her mother couldn’t handle life. After her divorce, she was in a mental institution for a while.

“She’s so relieved,” Taylor said. “She’s almost as happy as she is sad.”

Janan Kline works in the medical investigator’s office. She spent hours running down clues and making calls. Last week, she visited a metal cross set up on the embankment where Ross died. Someone had placed a new bouquet of silk flowers there.

This week, Kline cried along with Fran Brown when she called to tell her the news.

“This really is a Christmas miracle,” Kline said. “Case closed.”

*DONNA FIELDER can be reached at 940-566-6885. Her e-mail address is [dfielder@dentonrc.com](mailto:dfielder@dentonrc.com) .*