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# A Name and Face No One Knew, but Never Forgot



Ángel Franco/The New York Times

**UNIDENTIFIED MALE, CASE FA-99-09** A plastic tub, right, holding the remains of an unknown man found in a creek in 1999 sat in an evidence room in Frankfort, Ky., for years as little progress was made in the case. In 2002, three people were convicted of killing the man, but even they did not know who he was. [More Photos >](#)

By **DAN BARRY**

Published: April 21, 2008

FRANKFORT, Ky. — After the murder, the body was swaddled in bed

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sheets and a Mickey Mouse blanket. It was placed in a van, driven far from any road in rural Henry County and dumped in a narrow creek bed, just as another July day was dawning.

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Emily Craig Discusses the Case of Miguel Garcia (mp3)

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The summer of 1998 baked on. Autumn arrived to rain-swell the creek and send skull bits floating down the bed of silt and stone. Winter followed to skim the mesh of gray twigs and pale bones with a veil of ice. Then, one February morning, two hunters running their beagles were stopped cold in their tracks; the living, finally, took notice.

Soon came Dr. Emily Craig, [Kentucky's](#) well-respected forensic anthropologist, along with County Coroner Jimmy Pollard and a couple of state police detectives, all tutored in her lesson not to treat crime scenes as Easter egg hunts. She put on her latex gloves and thick boots, got down into the creek, and began handing up pieces of a broken human being, the evidence already shouting to her that this was a man shot dead in the head.

Investigators recovered most of a skeleton and some associated evidence, including a brown sandal, a gold bracelet and a mesh shirt bearing a Dallas Cowboys insignia. Now for the questions:

Who were you?

Who killed you?

Back in her autopsy room in Frankfort, Dr. Craig logged the case by pen in the official register: "John Doe," she wrote. Then she laid the bones in anatomical order on a

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Dr. Emily Craig at the site where the body was dumped nearly 10 years ago. [More Photos](#) »

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A forensic anthropologist used a skull to reconstruct the face of an unknown shooting victim, left, and Texas officials posted a photograph of a missing man on a Web site. [More Photos](#) >



The killers, from left, Patrick W. Meeks, Michael A. Peak and Leann E. Bearden. [More Photos](#) >

stainless-steel gurney and developed a rough description. Male; possibly Hispanic; at least 30 years old; about six feet tall; extensive dental work, including a gold crown. Dead about six months.

The state police publicized a description of what the dead man might have looked like. Dozens answered, hoping and not hoping that their father, husband, brother, son had been found. But nothing panned out. So Dr. Craig applied clay to skull to create a facial reconstruction for the public's consideration; again, nothing. She and the other investigators moved on to other cases just as sad.

They did not know that 1,250 miles away, in the South Texas town of Freer, a distraught mother had reported her 34-year-old son missing.

The bones were placed in a small plastic tub labeled "Henry Co. Doe" and tucked into an evidence room used to store books, [Christmas](#) decorations and the bones of Kentucky's unidentified dead going back 30 years. Here was a tub labeled "River Legs"; there, a bag labeled "Shelby County Babies."

More seasons passed. One day in October 2000, Detective Jim Griffin of the state police learned that a man just arrested for a minor crime wanted to talk about one of his old cases: the creek-bed body. The detective was skeptical, having wasted years of time listening to jailhouse lies. He arranged to meet the man; you never know.

The informant said he was awakened one night in July

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1998 by two agitated acquaintances saying they needed his help. He so feared one of the men that he saw no way out. So he helped them lug a wrapped body out of a remote farmhouse and into a van, took a long ride, and then joined in dumping that body in a creek.

The skeptical detective asked the man for just one detail, just one, that no one else could know. The man paused, then said: The body was wrapped in a Mickey Mouse blanket.

“Gave me goose bumps,” Detective Griffin recalls.

It eventually came out. Two men and a woman had met a man they knew as Jose, or Juan, or Miguel, or Mike, in the bars of Louisville. A plan was struck days in advance to lure him to a farmhouse and relieve him of this kilo of cocaine he kept talking about. His last words were for mercy. Please, please. Don’t shoot.

In December 2002, the three defendants were convicted and given lengthy prison terms, even though no one in Kentucky, including those who killed him, knew who the victim was. He was known casually as Juan Doe; more formally as Unidentified Male, Case FA-99-09.

Out of diligence and with faint hope, Dr. Craig sent bone samples to an [F.B.I.](#) laboratory in Quantico, Va., to be processed for a DNA profile that could be uploaded into an unidentified-remains database. After that, the bones sat in the evidence room, among the unidentified, undisturbed, for five years.

But some never forget the unknown dead.

Volunteers for the Doe Network, an organization dedicated to examining cases of the missing and unidentified, were developing their own database. The Justice Department was starting an online repository, available to the public, called the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs. And a Texas ranger, Sgt. Ray Ramon, was trying to find that mother’s missing son.

Four months ago he received information that a body found not far from Dallas might be

a match. It wasn't, but he decided to take a DNA swab from the mother, out of diligence and with faint hope.

Soon a description and photograph of the missing son was posted on the Texas Department of Public Safety's Missing Persons Clearinghouse Web page. About six feet tall; 34 years old; last seen in July 1998; and with these circumstances: "possibly en route to Kentucky."

In Mount Pleasant, S.C., a mother of two named Daphne Owings spends three hours a day searching Web sites to match the missing with the unidentified. "I really feel this is what I'm supposed to be doing," says Ms. Owings, a Doe Network volunteer.

She saw the Texas posting of the lost son "possibly en route to Kentucky" and compared it to a Kentucky posting of the unidentified dead man found in a creek. The man's photograph resembled Dr. Craig's facial reconstruction. This could be something.

Prompted by Ms. Owings's report and a similar one from another Doe Network volunteer, Dr. Craig and Sergeant Ramon worked to prove a match. They compared the missing son's dental records with the teeth recovered from the creek — including that gold crown — as well as the DNA culled from bone with the DNA taken from the mother.

Ten days ago, in the Texas town of Freer, a frail woman named Zeferina Garcia opened her door to an investigator from the local sheriff's department who represented, among others, Coroner Jimmy Pollard, Detective Jim Griffin, Doe Network volunteer Daphne Owings, Sgt. Ray Ramon and Dr. Emily Craig.

The investigator had bittersweet news: Ms. Garcia's playful, intelligent son, who had lived with her, served in the Army and kissed her goodbye 10 years ago, saying he had a job to do but would be back soon, was dead.

It was after hours last week when Dr. Craig closed out the case of Unidentified Male, Case FA-99-09. She removed a tub from the shelf, donned some latex gloves, and, with motherly care, collected the bones and placed them in a cardboard box bound for Texas. Then she opened the same register in which she had logged the case more than nine years

ago.

She drew a pen line across John Doe, and, very carefully, printed the name: Miguel Garcia.

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