



Physical Anthropology Section – 2005

H31 The Lady in the Box

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After attending this presentation, attendees will realize the importance of perseverance and interagency cooperation in the resolution of cold cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating how cooperation of law enforcement agencies and forensic specialists is especially important in cold cases.

In 1974, five days after her divorce from John David Smith, Janice Hartman “disappeared” from Doylestown, OH. Police investigated, but the investigation went cold until 1992. In 1991 Smith's second wife, Betty Fran Gladden, also went missing in West Windsor, NJ. Her “departure” was especially suspicious because she had a broken hip. Her sister, Sherrie Gladden-Davis, learned of the 1974 disappearance of Smith's first wife. Attempts to locate the missing women in 1992 were unsuccessful.

Robert Hilland, a former West Windsor policeman now with the FBI in 1998, working with Detective Sergeant Brian Potts, Wayne County Ohio Sheriff's Department (who had pursued Hartman's case) was able to establish rapport with Smith's younger brother, who revealed John had constructed a plywood box (58” x 18”) for “storing his estranged wife's clothing.” In 1979 he looked inside and saw his sister-in-law wearing a strange multi-colored rainbow wig. He telephoned John, in Indiana, to ask him about the box. His brother quickly returned, put the box into his Corvette, and drove off.

In 1999, following a lead from the brother, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office and Cleveland FBI ERT brought in GPR specialists and the Sauls (ERT consultants) to search under the floors of garages in Seville, OH, that were under construction by Smith's stepfather's company when the box disappeared. Nothing of consequence was found. Later, Potts helped by Sherrie Gladden-Davis, contacted coroners and law enforcement agencies along the route (80) that Smith would have taken back to Indiana, asking about human remains discovered subsequent to Smith's departure with the box. Amazingly, these inquiries produced a response in March 2000 from Morroco, Indiana, where a box with decomposed remains and clothing was found in 1980 near Route 80.

A 1980 “autopsy” and skeletal analysis indicated the remains were a “Hispanic” female, 20-35. The skull and mandible were retained in the coroner's office, while both proximal tibiae and left fibula (the remainder had been cut off below the knee), the intact right femur and both patellae were stored in the Indiana State Police evidence locker. The rest of the skeleton and clothing were interred in the local cemetery.

In March 2000 a court order was obtained based on the probability that the remains found in 1980 were those of Janice Hartman. Following exhumation the Sauls received three separate sets of skeletonized remains at the Lucas County Coroner's Office. Although the three sets of remains were presumed to belong to the individual found in a box in 1980, their original continuity had been disrupted. All sets were considered to be from the same individual based on direct articulation. The Biographic Profile of each set matched, and there was no duplication of elements. The skeletal remains were those of a 20-30-year-old white female who was about 5'3”–5'6” tall. In the absence of antemortem radiographs, the FBI DNA laboratory used bone samples for positive identification. No cause of death could be determined.

Both tibiae and the left fibula in Set 2 and the right fibula in Set 3 were severed below the knees. The Sauls forwarded the cut bone to Dr. Steven Symes, Memphis Regional Forensic Center to obtain information on the tool(s) used for dismemberment as well as the dismemberment process itself. Symes determined the cutting instrument was a serrated knife, not a saw as previously believed. He also determined that the right tibia was cut from front to back while the left tibia was cut from back to front. Since the striated side of the blade was applied to the proximal surface of each bone, it was likely that one leg was removed and the body rolled over before the second leg was removed. The instrument used was never located.

Why were the lower legs removed? Was the box too short? Why were the missing portions not in the box into which he put her clothing? FP Saul and SA Symes testified at the trial. Prosecutor Jocelyn Stefancin's final remarks revealed the meaningful secret of the “rainbow hair” seen by Smith's brother in 1979 – “The Shroud of Janice.” Smith was sentenced to 15 years to life.

Cold Cases, Forensic Anthropology, Tool Mark Analysis