

# Boulder Jane Doe Identified

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On the afternoon of October 23rd, 2009, I had just returned home from picking up the mail and receiving my Fall 2009 copy of the *Chesapeake Examiner*. There it was- the cover story about the efforts of historian Silvia Pettem and the Boulder County, Colorado, Sheriff's Office to identify a young woman found murdered in a remote river canyon almost 55 years before. As I pondered what I knew about the depths of the investigation and efforts of so many these past 5 years to identify this victim and return her to her family, I reflected on the silent figure sculpted by Vidocq Society founder and renowned forensic artist Frank Bender (figure 1).

## WHO IS SHE?

In bold print, the story was summarized in just a few words. "*Modern Forensics and the Search for Boulder Jane Doe.*" Ironically, this caption captured the essence of an investigation that had haunted investigators for more than half a century. I thought about how Ms. Pettem and the sheriff's office had configured a perhaps unique investigative relationship. Ms. Pettem had integrated her small cadre of superior internet researchers with dedicated, professional law enforcement personnel of the 21st century, and their combined mission sought to identify this unknown homicide victim. Perhaps, even, to identify and prosecute her killer.

By any account, this was an almost herculean task given the passage of time, personnel, destruction of records, evidence, and other attendant circumstances so prevalent in these types of investigations. I was keenly aware that modern efforts to solve previously investigated but unsolved "cold case homicides" hinge on two primary solvability factors- changes in relationships and changes in technology. The first centered around the passage of time and erosion of relationships between those who committed violent acts and others who knew, while the latter centered around the development of automated fingerprint systems and, of course, DNA and CODIS. I wondered, "*When will one, or both, of these ultimately arise to write the final pages in this mystery?*" It was then the telephone rang.

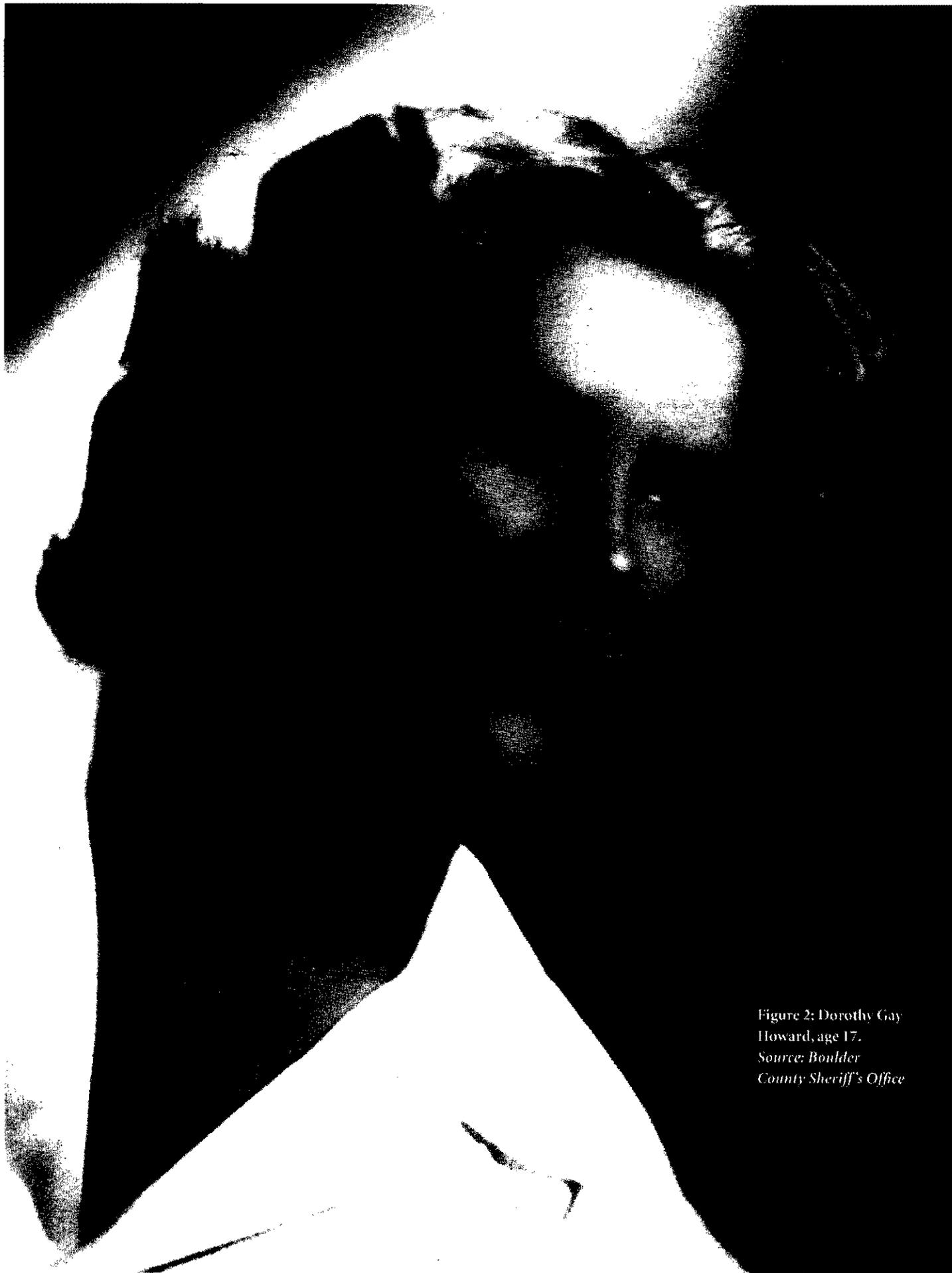


Figure 2: Dorothy Gay  
Howard, age 17.  
Source: Boulder  
County Sheriff's Office

"Rich. Jane Doe has been identified!" With these electrifying words, Detective Steve Ainsworth uttered the words so many had sought for so long to hear. Over the years Pettem and Ainsworth had identified, then eliminated, a number of persons as possible victims in this case. At the outset, regional missing persons accounts were gleaned from newspapers for the period surrounding April, 1954. These were the only sources of potential leads as agency records were long missing or destroyed. The plight of America's missing and unidentified persons has been called "the nation's silent mass disaster," and it is true. Despite increased efforts within the past two decades to document and record the missing and unidentified, there are still so many thousands unaccounted for.

After years of elimination by investigation, investigators thought they had developed strong circumstantial evidence to identify a woman thought to be Katharine Dyer, as Boulder Jane Doe. Despite intensive investigative and research efforts, her background and whereabouts had remained a mystery. Unable to locate any relatives, they were precluded from attempting to obtain identification through DNA. Even photo superimposition techniques had failed to exclude this mystery woman, and the investigation appeared to be almost at a dead end. On August 20, 2009, the Boulder County Sheriff announced:

*"In a 'good news, bad news' development, Boulder County sheriff's investigators learned last week that the most likely candidate for identifying 'Jane Doe' has been found alive and well and living in Australia... Katharine Farrand Dyer, 84... was reported as missing to Denver police in March, 1954, shortly before the discovery of 'Jane Doe's' body in Boulder Canyon on April 8th, 1954. Police records were unable to determine if Ms. Dyer was ever found. Circumstantial evidence led to a strong supposition that "Jane Doe" and Katharine Farrand Dyer were one and the same, and detectives and Ms. Pettem spent a significant amount of time attempting to locate relatives of Ms. Dyer in the hope of establishing a connection. That connection was established last week when Ms Dyer's caretaker found an address book among her belongings and queried the owner's name through the Internet."*

As investigators learn early, months and years of effort and the resultant hope and expectations can be dashed in an instant. An



Figure 1: Bust of "Boulder Jan Doe"

elderly woman, half way around the world, was the long sought woman, who thankfully, was alive and well. One once a prime candidate for identification was now excluded.

#### **IF NOT KATHARINE, WHO WAS JANE DOE?**

As the truth became known, the complexities and difficulties of the modern investigation became more apparent. Katharine's family, when located, had no idea that she had ever been reported missing although they had lost contact with her a number of years before. In 1954 there was no NCIC or other national database for missing persons and these cases were usually circulated locally and regionally. Her date of birth and place of birth were not what had been

believed, and she had assumed her name to reflect her similarity to Katharine Hepburn. After a failed marriage and death of her child in a vehicle accident, Katharine joined an all-woman crew on a yacht and sailed to Australia. Once there, she eventually remarried and settled down. With Katharine eliminated now, the investigators were left without any viable candidates but the resultant publicity affirmed the value of news media in cold case homicide investigations.

#### **CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY... THE INTERNET**

Even bad news, however, can be good news and late at night on September 27th, a message popped up on Ms. Pettem's computer: "I believe Jane Doe is my great-aunt." In a



Figure 3: Serial Killer Harvey Glatman after his arrest. Source: Unknown

series of quick exchanges, Pettem learned that the sender had been searching for her great aunt, Dorothy Gay Howard, for the past year or so and had recently read that the woman believed to be Jane Doe had been found alive in Australia. Her Internet research had previously indicated that investigators believed Katharine was Boulder Jane Doe, so she had dropped her efforts along this avenue. The revelation that Katharine was not Jane Doe had caused her to revisit her efforts, and quickly Pettem learned more.

Dorothy Gay Howard was last seen by her family in the fall of 1953. According to her great niece, Dorothy was survived now by only one sister who had been 13 years old at the time. Dorothy's date of birth coincided with the appropriate age of Boulder Jane Doe,

as she was about 18 years of age at the time of her murder. Furthermore, Dorothy was slender and petite, had no fillings in her teeth and had an appendectomy scar. All of this tallied with the remains found near Boulder Creek. Pettem immediately notified the sheriff's office of this latest development.

A few days later, the surviving sister went to her rural county courthouse for a buccal swab. The sample was forwarded to Detective Steve Ainsworth, and then to Dr. Terry Melton at Mitotyping Technologies, LLC in Pennsylvania. Dr. Melton had previously extracted a DNA profile from Jane Doe's tooth, and graciously offered to do any comparisons for Jane Doe pro bono. For Pettem and the investigator, it was now a matter of waiting, but the answer was not long in coming.

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#### ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY... FASTER DNA RESPONSE TIME

Examining the data, Dr. Melton realized there was a match. An experienced scientist, Dr. Melton would later say “It's always tempting to jump up, run around, and tell everyone you have a match in a specific case, but it's better to sit quietly, check everything three or four times, edit the profile of the positive controls, check and recheck again.” In this case, however, they had a good quality sample and profiles, and soon Dr. Melton was convinced that the profiles were the same. After all these years, Boulder Jane Doe was once again Dorothy Gay Howard (figure 2).

By law and protocols, the family learned first of the identification. In short order, they notified Pettem, and now began what some call closure for the victim's family. This is a misnomer, however. For most, there is no closure, but a sense of knowing that allows them to have some answers, and to move forward. For those who hoped, and believed, that Dorothy was still alive, however, there was now the realization that she was not. Questions remained, however.

## WHO DID IT? WHY? WHAT HAPPENED?

Most who read in the media about cold case homicides that are solved do not appreciate the toll that these take on the investigators and others involved in the investigation. While some cases are solved in a relatively short time period, others, such as Boulder Jane Doe, may take years to resolve. Over the course of time, those involved in these investigations often come to feel like extended family of the victim. To the surviving family members, they become members of the family. When the case is solved, these participants feel a sense of elation and ownership, a well earned sense of great satisfaction.

Identification of the victim and their movements is most often key to solving criminal homicides. From there investigators seek to identify who had the motive, means, and opportunity. By now, Dorothy's mother and father had passed on, albeit her aunt had passed away less than 2 years before at age 103 near Amarillo, Texas. From family members it was learned that Dorothy had been born in the Texas panhandle. Upon learning this, Pettem recalled a news report that the coroner's inquest had quoted a dentist as saying Jane Doe's teeth were in excellent condition and that she may have come from a community where the water supply contained naturally contained fluorides. According to Pettem, a high fluoride content marks the Ogallala aquifer that underlies much of the Panhandle and the little town of Hereford was once called "the town without a toothache" by a dentist commenting on the extremely low level of tooth decay in the area.

In great detail, Pettem has time lined Dorothy's short life. In the early 1940's, her family had moved to Phoenix, and in a short time she had married, divorced and remarried. At some point this strong willed teenager, who had previously run away to Oregon and was returned by her father, left Phoenix without telling her immediate family that she was leaving or where she was going. Although voids appear in the time line, her movements suggest that she took a bus to visit her aunt who lived in the Capital Hill neighborhood in Denver, Colorado. The aunt, not knowing of her intended visit, apparently did not make a connection between her niece and the remains found



Figure 4: Glatman victim Shirley Ann Bridgeford, murdered near San Diego, California, in March, 1958. This photo along with many others was found in a toolbox recovered by detectives after Glatman's arrest for the attempted kidnapping of his 4th known Southern California victim in October, 1958.

along Boulder Creek.

During the investigation, Pettem and Detective Ainsworth became experts on notorious serial killer Harvey Glatman. Glatman had been imprisoned first in Colorado and then in New York for stalking and assaulting women, and had a fetish for bondage. According to Pettem, Glatman was raised in Denver and assaulted women whom he followed from buses in the Capital Hill neighborhood. In her book,

"Someone's Daughter: In Search of Justice for Jane Doe," Pettem details the similarities between Jane Doe and the fate of other women slain by Glatman in California in 1957 and 1958 (figure 3).

Glatman would pose as a photographer for detective magazines and solicit models for photo shoots. He would consensually tie them up to ostensibly take their photographs, and then he murdered them (figures 4 & 5). Glatman was caught in the act while



Figure 5: Glatman victim

attempting to abduct his fourth known (at the time) victim in October, 1958.

After his arrest, Glatman was interviewed by famed Los Angeles Police detective Pierce Brooks. When it became known that Glatman had hired other women in Denver, he was asked if he had murdered women in Denver. In a curious, chilling response, Glatman stated "not unless they've been run over." In a secondary autopsy in 2004, skeletal injuries consistent with the bumper height of Glatman's 1951 Dodge Coronet were noted. Other similarities included ligature marks on Dorothy's wrist similar to those of his California victims. As a result of this case, Brooks went on to become the moving force behind the founding of the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, commonly known as VICAP, at the FBI Academy at Quantico.

Held to answer at his preliminary hearing the following month, Harvey Glatman was

tried and convicted for the murders one month later and executed at San Quentin the following September. During the course of this investigation and at the request of the Boulder County Sheriff's office, I located and interviewed his defense attorney some fifty years later as well as recovering Glatman's interview and trial records. His earlier years in prison were the result of the eye witness testimony of his victims and this experience, by his own words, had taught him a lesson – dead victims tell no tales.

On Wednesday, October 28th, 2009, the Boulder County Sheriff's Office announced the identification of Boulder Jane Doe as Dorothy Gay Howard. In doing so, "Sheriff Joe Pelle commended Ms. Pettem's skills as a researcher and her persistence in pushing the investigation forward while complimenting Sheriff's Detective Steve Ainsworth, who has diligently pursued and documented every lead in the case. Together they built a compelling

*circumstantial case for naming serial-killer Harvey Glatman (executed in California in 1959 for murder of three other women) as Ms. Howard's murderer."*

The press release went on to note that surviving family members had expressed a preference that Dorothy remain, at least for the present, interred in the Boulder cemetery. This decision was due in large part to the love and kindness expressed by the local citizenry 55 years before as well as the present time. Currently a fund drive to purchase a new headstone is underway and contributions may be made to "Jane Doe Fund" in care of the Boulder History Museum, 1206 Euclid Avenue, Boulder, CO 80302.

The author wishes to express his deepest gratitude and appreciation to Silvia Pettem and the Boulder County Sheriff's Office for their outstanding resolution of this case, and for their cooperation in the preparation of these articles for the *Chesapeake Examiner*. ★