Victim of 1969 Oakland homicide is finally identified

The 16-year-old girl was found strangled and beaten in a downtown hotel room; a suspect, who is being sought, was later charged



Photos of Joanne Yvonne Burdick at age 11, left, and 13, right, are seen during a cold case press conference at police headquarters in downtown Oakland, Calif., on Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026. Police Chief James Beere and the FBI identified the girl, who was 16 when her body was found at the St. Louis Hotel in Oakland 57 years ago. (Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group)

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OAKLAND — Decades after a 16-year-old girl was found strangled and beaten to death in October 1969 in a downtown hotel, authorities using DNA have identified her as Joanne Yvonne Burdick.

Authorities also once again named her suspected killer, Taylor Morris Teaford, who at the time of the Oakland killing was already wanted for fatally shooting his grandmother and wounding his sister in July 1967, in his hometown of North Fork, in Madera County.

Oakland police Chief James Beere said Thursday at a joint news conference with the FBI that Teaford has never been found and it is not known if he is still alive.

Burdick, known as “Joanie” to friends, was found strangled and beaten to death Oct. 2, 1969, in a room at the since-demolished St. Louis Hotel, 539 Seventh St., about a block from current Oakland police headquarters. The property where the hotel used to be is now the site of the North County Jail.

According to Oakland Tribune reports at the time, police responding to a report of someone screaming at the hotel found her body lying across a bed in a first-floor room. She was wearing a white knit minidress, and a strip of cloth was knotted around her neck. A man had rented the room, the reports say, but no description of him was released by police at the time.

Beere said the girl had no identification and that despite ongoing efforts police were not able to identify her for decades.

But in 2020, the FBI began assisting Oakland police with cold case investigations. DNA recovered from the victim was submitted by the FBI for a genealogy analysis, which enabled them to identify Burdick’s brother and subsequently confirm her as the victim earlier this year.

“This case represents the importance of partnerships among law enforcement agencies,” Beere said.

“For decades her family lacked answers they deserved about what happened. We hope today’s announcement will provide answers for her family and we continue to pursue justice. This is still an ongoing investigation.”

Scott Schelble, special agent in charge of the San Francisco office of the FBI, said: “This case reflects decades of tenacious work by investigators and what happens

when those investigators refuse to give up. Modern forensic tools made it possible to revisit evidence that could not be fully analyzed decades ago. No matter how much time has passed, victims are not forgotten and families receive the answers that they deserve."

Police were able to identify Teaford as the suspected killer through witnesses. In February 1972, even though Burdick had not yet been identified, he was formally charged with murder in her killing and was added to the FBI's most wanted list. He also has a prior rape conviction.

Police did not specify how he may have met Burdick. Beere did say Teaford "was a predator and took full advantage of that and she was a young person that needed help."

In a statement, the Burdick family said: "In 1967 Joanne ran away, leaving a void for our family. Her mother tried to find her, but at that time technology and resources were limited; there was no internet, social media, or cell phones to help in their search. ... Through diligent work, long hours, and dedication to their Jane Doe case, (authorities) were able to track down her only living relative, ... making it possible to identify her through DNA.

"Because of their desire and dedication to bring Joanne home to her family, everyone who worked on this case never gave up. They are heroes. They gave the unidentified girl who had been murdered in 1969 a name. They solved the mystery of who she was, making it possible for her family to have closure. Thank you to every single individual who worked on this case, past and present, for caring enough to give Joanne her name and to give her family closure."

Beere assured the community that police do not stop investigating cold cases, whether they be homicides or missing persons. "Whether it happened 57 years ago or happened two months ago our investigations won't stop."

The Hayward Area Historical Society contributed to this report.