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NEWS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
NOV. 20, 2024

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**COLD CASE SOLVED: DNA EVIDENCE CONFIRMS THE IDENTITY
OF A RAPIST AND KILLER IN A CASE DATING BACK TO 1979**

RIVERSIDE – In 1979, the body of a 17-year-old girl was found dumped in a snowpack off Highway 243 near Banning. Authorities determined she had been raped and bludgeoned to death.

Now, more than 45 years later, using forensic genealogy, the Riverside County Regional Cold Case Homicide Team announced today, Nov. 20, 2024, that they have confirmed the identity of the rapist and killer.

On Feb. 9, 1979, Esther Gonzalez was attacked and murdered while walking from her parents' house in Beaumont to her sister's house in Banning. Her body was found the next day off Highway 243, south of Poppet Flats Road.

Esther's body was found after an unidentified man, described by deputies as argumentative, called the Riverside County Sheriff's Station in Banning to report finding a body, saying he didn't know if it was a male or female. Five days later, sheriff's investigators were able to identify the caller as Lewis Randolph "Randy" Williamson and asked him to take a polygraph. He agreed and passed which, at the time, cleared him of any wrongdoing.

Investigators continued to work on this case for years and eventually uploaded a semen sample from the crime scene into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS). In 2023, members of the cold case homicide team sent various items of evidence to Othram, Inc. in Texas, initiating a Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy investigation, in hopes of developing additional leads. Earlier this year, a crime analyst assigned to the cold case team determined that, although Williamson was seemingly cleared by the polygraph in 1979, he was never cleared through DNA because the technology had not yet been developed.

Williamson died in Florida in 2014. A blood sample was collected during his autopsy and with the assistance of the Broward County Sheriff's Office, the sample was sent to the California Department of Justice. DOJ recently confirmed that Williamson's DNA matches the DNA recovered from Esther's body.

The Riverside County Regional Cold Case Homicide Team is asking anyone who knew Williamson or may have information about Esther's case or other potential victims, call them at (951) 955-2777 or email: ColdCaseUnit@RivcoDA.org.

The Regional Cold Case Homicide Team is comprised of members of the DA's Office Bureau of Investigation, the Riverside County Sheriff-Coroner Department, the FBI, and the Riverside Police Department. The team is available to assist in the investigation of cold case homicides for all Riverside County law enforcement agencies.

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