

Her Name is Alexa: Sisters' Search for Truth



By Emma Henderson Vaughan
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For the first time since her recovery 24 years ago, Jane Manhattan Doe 2000 has been identified as **Alexandria "Alexa" Isadora Skolnitsky**.

In May 2000, unrecognizable, unidentified female remains were pulled from the East River in Midtown Manhattan. Medical examiners estimated the young woman had been deceased for several months. Despite an extensive investigation, the cause and manner of her death were both ruled as undetermined. The girl was fully clothed, wearing a distinctive, local band t-shirt with a skunk emblem on the front and the words "Perfect Thyroid" on the back.

With her name unknown, the girl became Jane Doe, and for more than two decades, dedicated scientists at the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner (NYC OCME) tirelessly sought to uncover her identity. But they weren't the only ones searching. At the same time, two sisters embarked on their own quest to find their youngest sister – Alexa.

No one expected that the two searches would collide.

As the youngest of four, Alexa Skolnitsky was only six years old when her sisters last saw her. Separated in their youth by foster care, the four sisters ended up in vastly different places around the country – ultimately losing contact with one another.

However, as the sisters grew up into adulthood, they slowly began to reconnect. As the years passed and the other siblings found one another, Alexa's older sisters were left with uncertainty of her fate. No one seemed to know where she was or what had happened to her.



Alexa Skolnitsky as a child. (Credit: Linda Caver, Alexa's sister)

When it seemed like no one could find her, two of Alexa's sisters, Linda and Veronica, took it upon themselves to begin searching for Alexa. They started to contact family members, previous foster parents, and even went to social media, posting on Facebook, hoping someone would recognize her. And eventually someone would.

While Alexa's sisters were focusing on finding and reuniting with their little sister, multiple agencies behind the scenes were working to obtain the identity of the 2000 Jane Doe. When her case was received at the National Center for

Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), forensic artists completed a facial reconstruction image of what she may have looked like in life. In 2023, NCMEC's Forensic Services Unit and the NYC OCME Forensic Anthropology Unit reviewed the case. At that time, it was decided that there was enough available evidence to pursue forensic genetic genealogy.



NCMEC facial reconstruction. (Credit: NCMEC)

“At NCMEC, we are utilizing the latest advances in technology, including forensic genetic genealogy to help investigators solve old cases,” said Carol Schweitzer, program manager of NCMEC’s Forensic Services Unit.

“Currently, we have more than 640 unidentified cases that we are working to resolve so that we can continue to provide answers to searching families.” In August 2023, NCMEC facilitated the submission of the case to Intermountain Forensics (IMF) for DNA testing. By November, IMF successfully developed sufficient DNA for genetic genealogy research. NCMEC’s partners at Innovative Forensic Investigations (IFI) conducted the genealogy research and within just a few days, IFI developed a lead that Jane Doe could be Alexandria “Alexa” Isadora Skolnitsky.

While the genealogists at IFI were searching for Alexa’s family, they came across a post on Facebook where details resembled the information about Jane Doe. The post was from Alexa’s sisters, Linda and Veronica, seeking answers to find their long-lost sister.

That’s when the final pieces began to fall into place. Given the knowledge from genealogy and the Facebook post, Jane Doe 2000 and Alexa were most

likely the same person. NYC OCME forensic anthropologists sought out direct communication with Alexa's mother to confirm the identification.

A direct DNA comparison completed by the NYC OCME Forensic Biology laboratory confirmed the unidentified girl was indeed Alexa Skolnitsky. She was only 19 years old at the time of her death.

When her family received the call from NYC OCME with the news, they were devastated. After years of searching for an answer, they finally had one – but not the resolution they hoped for. What happened to her is still a mystery. “If I could tell Alexa one thing today, it would be how sorry I am that I could not keep all of us together,” said Veronica, Alexa's oldest sister.

She remembers Alexa as a bright, energetic and fun-loving child, who loved dance parties and riding her bike.

“She was just the sweetest little girl with an infectious, beautiful smile,” Veronica said. “Just being around her was such a joy. Alexa's vibrant spirit may only be a keepsake shared by her sisters now, but I want the world to know how special she is to us.”



Alexa with her sister, Linda Caver. (Credit: Linda Caver)

And today, more than 24 years after her discovery, the world now knows Alexa's name. The two sisters' search serves as a powerful reminder that behind every cold case and unsolved mystery, there are families waiting for answers.

“I just want her story to matter,” Linda said. “Even if it’s to help someone else out there identify their loved one. It’s incredible all the people that came together to find out who my sister was.”

Alexa’s family, including her mother, Mary Lyon, are thankful to all the agencies that came together to solve Alexa’s case.

“I was surprised that they were able to piece together all this information and solve such an old case,” Mary said. “I am happy that Alexa finally has her name back and that she is at peace.”



Alexa as a child. (Credit: Linda Caver)

Unfortunately, Alexa’s sisters do not have any photos of her as an adult, but for Linda and Veronica, they want the world to remember Alexa like they do: smiling, bright-eyed and happy.

They find peace in knowing that despite the circumstances, Alexa finally has her name back.

UPDATE: Following the release of her identity, Alexa’s sisters were given a new photo of Alexa, at age 16 or 17.



Alexa as a teenager. (Credit: Linda Caver)

If you have any information regarding Alexa's case or other unidentified persons cases in New York City, please call the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

For more information on unidentified cases at NCMEC, please visit: <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/helpidme>.