

LOCAL 12 - Search Results

The following is an archived video story. The text content of that video story is available below for reference. The original video has been deleted and is no longer available.

A mystery mother's identity revealed

CINCINNATI (Deb Dixon) -- She has been one of Cincinnati's enduring mysteries has more information in November of 2014.

A woman was found drowned in the Ohio River in 2006. The public called her "Pearl Lady" because the woman washed up on shore near Northbend had no identification. However, she looked as if she were going somewhere in her black skirt, pantyhose, and a Monet necklace of black and gold colored pearl-like beads. She even wore lipstick.

But nobody in the whole country reported anyone missing who matched "Pearl Lady's" description. That was in 2006. She was cremated in 2010. Now, fingerprints submitted to the FBI give her a name.

She was Barbara Hess, from a prominent Cincinnati family. Her father was president of the Bar Association, and Otis Hess was a respected Hamilton County Judge and Ohio Appeals Court Judge.

Barbara and husband James Precht had two girls and lived Indian Hill when they suddenly left town in 1983.

Hamilton County Detective, Brian Williams, said, "One of the girls awoke in the middle of the night, from an argument, and vaguely remembers two individuals in the house possibly with guns. A couple of nights later the family packed up a few things and left."

They ended up leading a vagabond life in California until Barbara Hess was arrested for shoplifting food; including chocolate chip cookies, Pringles, pasta and Colby cheese. This was why the FBI database had Barbara's fingerprints. Not long after that, Barbara and her husband dropped the girls off at an orphanage.

Hamilton County Coroner, Dr. Lakshmi Sammarco, said, "This wasn't a mom abandoning children. This was the hardest decision she had to make to give them up for their own safety. That's what it seems to me."

Dr. Sammarco was also wondering about the possibility one of them was in the witness protection program. No one claims to have seen Barbara Hess until she turned up dead in Cincinnati more than 20 years after her arrest. Why did she come to Cincinnati?

Dr. Sammarco said she may call for a coroner's inquest into her death.

"We owe it to her children to find answers," Sammarco said.

Det. Williams is trying to find James Precht. There is not enough evidence to determine if Barbara's death is accident, suicide or murder.

Follow Deborah Dixon on Twitter [@crimestopperdeb](#) and [LIKE](#) her on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter [@Local12](#) and [LIKE](#) us on [Facebook](#) for more updates.

<http://www.local12.com/template/cgi-bin/archived.pl?type=basic&file=/news/features/top-stories/stories/archive/2014/10/wR7IVeo5.xml#.VKSGtE10zmQ>