



City of Arts & Innovation

NEWS RELEASE

Police Department
LARRY V. GONZALEZ
Chief of Police

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUSPECT MOTHER IDENTIFIED AND ARRESTED IN 37-YEAR-OLD COLD CASE HOMICIDE

RIVERSIDE, CA – Thirty-seven years ago on October 13, 1987, a newborn baby was found discarded and dead inside a dumpster behind a business in the 5400 block of La Sierra Avenue. A man rummaging for recyclables found the baby. The newborn girl's death was ruled a homicide by the Riverside County Coroner's Office. Riverside Police Homicide Detectives worked diligently on this case, but all leads were exhausted and a suspect was not identified.



In 2020 and upon the formation of the Riverside Police Department's Homicide Cold Case Unit, this investigation was reopened. Homicide Cold Case Detectives worked closely with their partners on the Riverside County Regional Cold Case Team and were able to identify the baby's mother through DNA as 55-year-old Melissa Jean Allen Avila. Ms. Avila was 19 at the time of the baby's death and detectives have no reason to believe the baby's father had any criminal culpability in the murder.

Detectives utilized our METRO Team and their participation on the U.S. Marshals Pacific Southwest Regional Fugitive Task for to begin searching for Ms. Avila. With assistance from the U.S. Marshals Carolinas Regional Fugitive Task Force, Ms. Avila was eventually located in Shelby, North Carolina. She was arrested for murder and extradited back to Riverside County to face prosecution. On August 5th, Ms. Avila was booked into the Larry D. Smith Correctional Facility where she remains on \$1,100,000 bail.



The Homicide Cold Case Unit was assisted by our Forensics Unit, the Riverside County Sheriff-Coroner's Office, California Department of Justice Missing Persons DNA Program, and the Cleveland County Sheriff's Office in North Carolina.

An essential partner in this investigation was Season of Justice, a nonprofit dedicated to providing financial assistance for investigative agencies and families to help solve cold cases through grant funding for advanced DNA analysis solutions and forensic genealogy. This funding allowed for DNA analysis to be conducted by Othram, Inc., a private lab that specializes in DNA technology.

"Thanks to the persistent efforts of our investigators and partners, this victim now has an identity, bringing resolution to the case," stated Riverside Police Chief Larry Gonzalez. "We will remain dedicated to seeking justice for homicide victims and ensuring their families find closure."

If you have additional information regarding this homicide and arrest, please contact the Homicide Cold Case Unit at (951) 320-8000 or HomicideColdCase@RiversideCA.gov. For more information about the Cold Case Homicide Unit and other cases still unsolved, click [HERE](#).

California's "Safe Arms for Newborns" law was established in 2001 to ensure relinquished infants could be left with professionals who can provide care and resources. The law allows a parent or legal guardian to confidentially surrender a newborn, three-days-old or younger, to any hospital emergency room or fire station. If the baby has not been abused or neglected, the person may surrender it without fear of arrest or prosecution for child abandonment. For more information about Safely Surrender Baby Sites and resources, visit California's Department of Social Services website by clicking [HERE](#).