


*****For Immediate Release*****

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**Contact:** **Chris Loftis – Director of Public Affairs**
**Phone:** **360-485-3983**
**Email:** Chris.Loftis@wsp.wa.gov

# ‘Helen Doe’ Has Been Identified and Mollie McCullough Has Been Found

## WSP Solves a 35 Year Old Mystery

Mary Ellen “Mollie” McCullough was born on March 26, 1957. Mollie’s father had been a truck driver and she loved to ride in the big rigs. She was the oldest daughter in a large and loving family, a free spirit who loved horses, her nieces and nephews, and travel. In 1991, she left home to catch a ride and her family never heard from her again. At 34, she was a very capable young woman living her own life. Though troubled by her disappearance, her family was unable to get her name added to missing persons lists. But when she did not show up for her grandmother’s or mother’s funerals in 1993 and 1994, family members had the strong suspicion that Mollie was gone forever.

That suspicion was sadly accurate. On May 14, 1991, a two semi-truck collision occurred on southbound I-5 in Kalama, WA. The collision resulted in a severe fire and the death of one of the drivers, Lester Harvel from Missouri, and a female passenger in one of the big rigs. Investigators were unable to identify the passenger. As Mount St. Helens was visible from the crash site, collision investigators chose ‘Helen Doe’ as the name of the unidentified victim and ‘Helen’ was buried in tragic anonymity in an unmarked grave in Longview.

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) investigated the fatal crash and though there were few leads to ‘Helen’s’ true identity in 1991, 23 years later, DNA forensics had vastly improved. In 2014, two WSP detectives, retired detective Greg Wilcoxson and Detective Sergeant Stacy Moate, re-opened the case. Wanting her story and her name to be known, they began a process that now in 2026 has eventually led to a positive identification of the deceased passenger.

‘Helen Doe’ was Mollie McCullough.

Working with the Cowlitz County Coroner, the King County Medical Examiner’s forensic anthropologist Kathy Taylor (now deceased), David Rose at Fox13, Crime Stoppers, and the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the two detectives had ‘Helen’s’ remains exhumed. Based on witness statements and later information from the forensic anthropologist, ‘Helen Doe’ had been originally thought to be Native American and the

Tribe offered their blessing and support for the exhumation. Forensic sketch artist, Natalie Murray, completed a forensic sketch using remains and witness descriptions. A follow-up sketch was crafted a few years later. A DNA profile was created and while there was no match in the FBI's national DNA data base, federal, state, county, and tribal law enforcement distributed the sketches and kept the search alive for another 12 years.

As our understanding of the large number of Native American women who have gone missing in our country became more widely known, greater numbers of missing indigenous persons were entered into missing persons data bases across the US. During this time, DNA forensic technologies continued to advance as well as DNA repositories where families and law enforcement could enter DNA samples and missing person information to aid in investigation and recovery efforts. Still, there were no leads.

Mollie's family kept looking as well. One of Mollie's nieces actually lived in Washington State for a time and saw releases about the search for 'Helen's' true identity. However, she did not make the connection as the family was of European decent and not Indigenous. Additionally, they never had any indication that Mollie had made it as far as Washington.

Years went by. In May of 2022, Othram Labs created a more advanced DNA profile for 'Helen' and loaded it into FamilyTreeDNA.com. DNA analysis actually showed that she was not Native American but rather Scottish/Irish/English. With the work of the experts from Othram coupled with local genealogist and volunteer Renee Kerr, Detective Sergeant Moate soon had lists of people who fell somewhere in 'Helen's' family tree. In the subsequent years, Moate, who handles a large and ever-growing active case load, made call after call, email after e-mail, text after text on 'Helen's' cold case as the schedule would allow.

Four more years passed. 'Helen' was still unidentified and Mollie was still the missing family member that seemed destined to forever be a mystery and a memory.

Then, on August 6, 2026, after already making a couple 'Helen calls' that day with no luck, the dedicated investigator decided to make one more call. She called ''Reference Tester #11" from the Othram Labs list - a Mr. Michael McCullough. McCullough answered his phone, and the detective gave him her normal spiel – "Hello. My name is Detective Sergeant Stacy Moate from the Criminal Investigation Division of the Washington State Patrol. I am working to identify a woman who was killed in a car crash in our state in the early 90's. We collected DNA and have been doing genealogy studies in attempts to identify her. The science tells us that she likely fits into your family tree somewhere but I am just not sure where. Do you know of any female family members that went missing in the early 90's and haven't been heard from since?"

"Yes. That would be my sister – Mollie," the voice on the other end of the call said.

The Detective Sergeant was stunned. In a job where sorrow and tragedy are as common as unanswered questions, and after a long career that despite those obstacles included solving hundreds of cases with occasional luck but always with determined police work, she had just ended a 12-year personal and professional search for 'Helen's' actual identity and answered a 35-year question for Mollie's family. After several more weeks and more DNA confirmations, the Cowlitz County Coroner was able to say definitively that Michael McCullough was 'Helen Doe's' brother.

'Helen Doe' was Mollie McCullough.

While certainly a positive development in a decades-old cold case, being the person that confirms the worst fears of a loved one brings no joy to either party. Still, being able to answer questions that had demanded answers for so long brought relief as well as the beginning of healing to all left behind after the tragic events of May 14, 1991.

According to Moate, "I had two big fears over the last 12 years of working on this. First, I was afraid I wouldn't find her name before I retired. Second, I was so scared that when I did find her family, they wouldn't care. I was worried that she was estranged from her family or that she lived a lifestyle they didn't approve of… Thankfully it was the complete opposite." The veteran investigator added, "Her family had wanted to find her, and they loved her and they were so thankful to finally have answers. They all knew that she had to have died but they were thankful to know that it was not by homicidal means and that she did not suffer."

The family has indicated they will now have her cremated remains brought back to her birthplace in Cambridge, Ohio. Mollie is going home…

WSP Chief John Batiste reflected on the case, "I am so proud of the work WSP personnel have done on this case and especially the dogged determination of Stacy Moate. Our detectives and forensic scientists work hand-in-hand with our Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit. They go as far as the evidence will take them and when science allows for rediscovery, they just keep going and never give up. Stacy's work on this case, always following every possible lead, also led to additional DNA evidence entries into other cases. The total value of her persistence is incalculable."

Speaking for the McCullough family, Mollie's brother Mike said, "Our family is deeply grateful for the outpouring of love, care, and support shown to our sister and aunt Mollie over the past 35 years. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Washington State Patrol, especially Detective Sergeant Moate and Detective Greg Wilcoxson, Othram Labs for genealogy research, the Puyallup Tribe for their care and kindness, and the Cowlitz County community for keeping her story alive and helping bring our family answers."

He added, "From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for never giving up on our Mollie."

Chief Batiste extended WSP's hopes for the family, "To the McCullough family, I just want to say, our entire agency understands your pain and the struggle of the last 35 years. Sadly, in our work, not every case has a joyful resolution. But it is important for us to bring you the knowledge of how your loved one died and reassurance that she was a focus of our industries these many years. We wish you all the comfort of knowing how your beloved Mollie lived, and the peace in finally knowing how she died. May this mystery now be over. And may her memory forever be a blessing to you all."

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