

Dawn Marie Birnbaum (1976 - 1993)



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Profile:
Dawn Marie Birnbaum

Birth:
1976

Passing:
PA, United States of America
March 23, 1993

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Memorial

This is a memorial website for Dawn Marie Birnbaum, a 17-year old runaway from the Elan School in Poland Spring, Maine, who was murdered by James Robert Cruz, Jr., on or about March 23, 1993. The webmaster is of no relation to Dawn or any member of her family, but she wanted Dawn to be remembered. The webmaster was a doctoral student in Education at Penn State when Dawn's body was found. She will never forget reading the headlines of the local paper about what was found on that cold March morning back in 1993. What happened to Dawn should serve as a cautionary tale to other teenagers.

Dawn Marie Birnbaum, according to research done by the webmaster, had originally been from Gary, Indiana, and had led a troubled life, running away many times from home and from foster homes. She had been a ward of the state of Indiana, and had been sent to the Elan School, a home for runaway and troubled teenagers, in Poland Spring, Maine.

On or about March 22, 1993, Dawn and other teens from the Elan School were taken to a nearby mall to watch a movie and left there. It appears no counselor or other chaperone was there to watch this group, though they knew Dawn was a flight risk. When the time came to pick up the group of teens, Dawn wasn't there. She had run away again, this time to a nearby truck stop, the Dysart trucking stop, where she had hitched a ride with a truck driver. She had wanted to hitchhike to California (apparently) to see a friend of hers, and she made some calls from a pay phone inside the truck stop. Lacking paper, she wrote the numbers she was calling on her hand. This would prove instrumental in tracing who she was and where she came from, as she had no identification when she was found.

Dawn hitched a ride with a long-distance trucker, James Robert Cruz, Jr., who worked for the New Century Trucking Company out of Waterford, Ohio. A married 36 year old truck driver with three children and an expectant pregnant wife at home, Cruz had sex with Dawn in the truck and transported her across state lines. He evidently feared being caught, because he strangled her to death with a length of nylon rope. She was found half-clothed, wearing a heavy sweater and socks, with her hands tied behind her and a length of rope still around her neck, in a snowbank off Route 550 and Route 26, Centre County, Pennsylvania, near the Milesburg, PA exit of Interstate 80, the major road that runs across Pennsylvania and across the country.

Dawn was identified through painstaking detective work on the part of PA state trooper William F. Madden, who unfortunately died in 2000 at age 49 from cancer. FBI Special Agent Randy Cohick also assisted in the investigation. The key factor in the investigation was matching fuel receipts from the Bestway Travel Plaza in Milesburg with fuel receipts from the Dysart plaza in Maine. There was one match: James Robert Cruz, Jr., who had bought fuel at both places.

Tire tracks found near Dawn's body indicated that she'd been dropped

Memorial created on: 01/01/2009
By: Janice Harrison
[Contact Janice](#)
Visits: 825

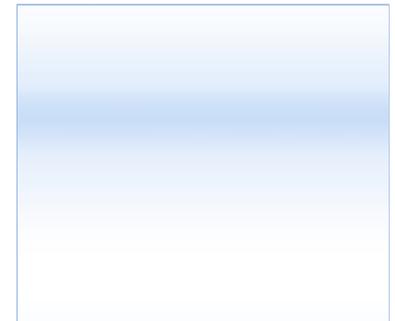
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off there by someone in a tractor-trailer, and plaster casts were made of the tire tracks. The casts eventually matched those on a rig driven by Cruz, and a single hair found in the carpeting on the passenger side door matched that of the unidentified victim, who by then had been identified as Dawn Marie Birnbaum. Dawn's mother, Nancy Lindemann, was sent for, and visited the Mondock Funeral Home in Bellefonte, PA, where her daughter's body was being kept. When Steve Mondock, the funeral director, pulled the pink sheet back from Dawn's face, Mrs. Lindemann identified her and began to cry. When she learned that the people of Bellefonte, PA, who were outraged that a young woman had been brutally murdered and dumped on a snowbank in their midst, they "adopted" Dawn as one of their own, and arranged for a plot in their cemetery. Eerily enough, before they found out who she was, they decided to call her "Spring Dawn" because she was found in Spring Township at dawn.

James Robert Cruz, Jr. was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole. He is presently incarcerated at Graterford State Prison north of Philadelphia.

Before Cruz was incarcerated, young women were constantly being found dead along area highways that Cruz traveled across Ohio and other states, in the same manner as Dawn Birnbaum. After his arrest, these deaths stopped. In the TV series "THE FBI FILES", the episode "A STRANGER IN TOWN" profiles the Dawn Marie Birnbaum case, and investigators still strongly feel that Cruz may be responsible for the deaths of at least 40 other women, though this has never been proven. However, it is definitely notable that after Dawn's disappearance and murder were solved, these other young women, of about Dawn's age, were no longer being killed.

On Dec. 4, 2008, Dawn's mother, Nancy Lindemann, died at age 52 at the Altoona Hospital. She is buried in Union Cemetery, Bellefonte, PA, beside her beloved daughter Dawn Marie, whom she loved so much and tried to help.

Rest in peace, Dawn!

THIS SITE IS IN REMEMBRANCE OF A YOUNG WOMAN (only 17) WHO DIED BRUTALLY. ANY COMMENTS POSTED HERE MUST BE RESPECTFUL. THERE IS A FILTER SET UP SO THAT COMMENTS POSTED HERE MUST BE FIRST APPROVED BY THE WEBMASTER. ANYONE WHO REPEATEDLY POSTS INAPPROPRIATE COMMENTS WILL HAVE THEIR COMPUTER IP ADDRESS NOTED AND THE ILASTING.COM AUTHORITIES WILL BE CONTACTED

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Stories

Dawn's disappearance

This is from an article the webmaster purchased from Google news archives, from the Philadelphia Inquirer (5/16/93). See below:

Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)
May 16, 1993
Section: LOCAL
Edi...

Janice Harrison (None--webmaster) wrote

January 2nd, 2009

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Guest Book Wall (What is this?)





Hover your mouse over the wall images to see each guest book entry.

Guest Book (6 entries)

just watched ur story on FBI Files, Ur safe now in heaven Sweet Dreamz Angel, up there in God's Paradise 

Craig Hollywood

April 22nd, 2010

After watching this episode of FBI Files I felt compelled to look for references on the web. I'm sorry for Dawn's demise. The work of Law Enforcement on this case was exemplary! Let everyone know that hitchhiking is just another "hunting ground" for the Evil among us. Rest in peace, Dawn. 

~ SL ~ (none)

April 18th, 2010

17 years on March 23rd. I held on to that poem forever..I was sad when it was lost :(I had it for over 10 years! I still buy Eternity. I am saddened today remembering the past.. We wrapped our hair in paper towels like curlers to curl it..lol.. U taught me how to make instant coffee w/milk instead of hot water..i still make it that way.. Cori misses ya too hun.. We all do.. 

fran coleman (friend)

April 6th, 2010

So sad for Dawn and all who loved her, It's a blessing to see after all this time Dawn is still loved and missed....Be the best angel ever Dawn... 

Penny Amaya

August 25th, 2009

I was friends with Dawn in Jr High, she always seemed so happy to be at school, she talked about problems at home and how she wanted to get away, but mostly was into her boyfriend and all the school had for her. Then they sent her away and none of us knew what had happened to her...it is a horrible tragedy, I was so sorry to hear that her life ended the way it did. What a sad life and horrible way to cut it so short. I have thought of her off and on through the years, only now can I grieve for her. She is, I am certain, in a much better place. 

Kimberly Thompson (friend)

July 24th, 2009

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