

Body of baby in Delray storage unit a mystery right out of 1957

By Jerome Burdi
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Delray Beach · The news Jan. 9, 1957, didn't make history. Headlines were of a British prime minister resigning and a Dutch newspaper society expelling its communist daily newspaper. The Frisbee was a hot new toy and *I Love Lucy* ruled the airwaves.

It was a newspaper from that day that was used to wrap a dead baby boy, sealing him away from the world for 50 years, police said. His body was wrapped in pages of the *Daily-Times*, a now-defunct newspaper from New Jersey or New York, from that day, according to police.

A woman discovered the mummified body Monday evening.

She was emptying her dead parents' storage unit at Security Self Storage, 189 Linton Blvd., police said. In the garage-size room, she found the baby wrapped in the newspaper and nested inside two suitcases.

The woman had flown to Florida from New Jersey after learning the rent had not been paid and the contents would be auctioned off.

She was stunned looking at the body of what could have been her older brother, police said. The child had chubby cheeks and hair on his head, police spokesman Officer Jeff Messer said. Catholic religious items, including rosary beads, were beside the boy's body, Lt. Marc Woods said.

Police have not named the woman who found the body. Several people had access to the storage room, they said.

Woods said the family moved to Florida in the 1980s, apparently bringing the body with them. The couple, both of whom died within the past few years, had rented the storage unit since 1996, police said.

The storage room was filled with furniture and record albums from the 1960s, Woods said.

Medical Examiner Dr. Michael Bell said the body was unlike any other he has seen.

"We've seen some archaeological bones that have been older, but nothing above ground," Bell said.

Because the tissue has hardened, forensic anthropologists at the University of Florida's Human Identification Laboratory in Gainesville will examine the body.

Dr. Anthony Falsetti, director of the lab, said it could take weeks to glean DNA from the body, determine the boy's age and if the boy suffered any trauma. The medical examiner then will analyze the information and determine a cause of death.

Falsetti, who has helped identify mummies from Egypt and Peru, said DNA analysis likely would come from the femur, or thighbone.

Still, to determine with certainty the baby's identity, DNA would have to be obtained from the parents' bodies, experts said.

Scientists can make a less-certain identification using DNA from siblings and relatives, said Mehul Anjaria, laboratory director of California-based Human Identification Technologies.

"Nobody can say for sure they are siblings [with that DNA technology]," Anjaria said. "It's not 100 percent unless you can get to the parents."

Without the parents, analysis uses mitochondrial DNA. Though that DNA is inherited through the mother, it is carried in an unaltered state through all females in the family, making the determination of a mother less certain, said Dr. Bruce McCord, professor of chemistry at Florida International University in Miami.

Though unusual, finding a mummified baby is not unheard of.

In August 2001, in the 200-person town of Kickapoo, Ill., a mummified newborn girl was found in a cardboard box inside a suitcase inside a trunk bought at an auction for \$1. She might have been in the trunk for 30 years, detectives said, according to news reports.

Staff Researcher Barbara Hijek contributed to this report.

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