

Murder of Polly Klaas

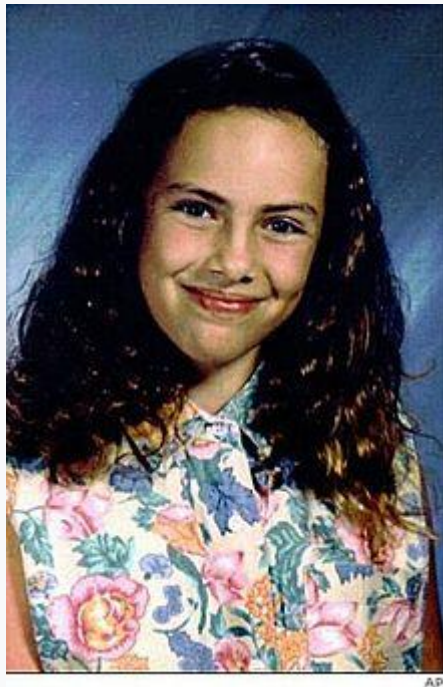
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Polly Klaas



Polly Hannah Klaas

Born

January 3, 1981

[Fairfax, California, United States](#)

Died

October 1, 1993 (aged 12)

[Petaluma, California, United States](#)

Cause of death

Strangulation

Body discovered	December 4, 1993
Nationality	American
Citizenship	United States
Occupation	Student
Known for	Murder victim
Website	pollyklaas.org

Polly Hannah Klaas (January 3, 1981 – October 1, 1993) was an [American](#) murder victim whose case gained national attention. On October 1, 1993, at the age of twelve, she was [kidnapped](#) at knife point during a [slumber party](#) from her mother's home in [Petaluma, California](#). She was later strangled to death. [Richard Allen Davis](#) was convicted of her murder in 1996 and [sentenced to death](#).^[1]

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Background^{[\[edit\]](#)}

On October 1, 1993, Polly Klaas and two friends were having a slumber party. Late in the evening, Richard Allen Davis entered their bedroom, carrying a knife. He tied both friends up, pulled pillowcases over their heads and told them to count to 1,000. He then kidnapped the weeping Klaas.^[2]

Over the next two months, about 4,000 people helped search for Klaas.^[3] TV shows such as *20/20* and *America's Most Wanted* covered the kidnapping. An APB ([all-points bulletin](#)) with the

suspect information was broadcast within 30 minutes of it, on October 1, 1993. However, the broadcast only went out over Sonoma County Sheriff's Channel 1.

In a rural area of Santa Rosa, about 20 miles north of Petaluma, a babysitter returning home noted a suspicious vehicle stuck in a ditch on her employer's private driveway. She phoned the property owner, who decided to leave with her daughter. As she drove down the long driveway to Pythian Road, the owner passed the suspect. She called 911 when she got to a service station and two deputies were dispatched on the call. The deputies did not know of the kidnapping or the suspect's description, due to Sonoma Valley units being on Channel 3. The deputies ran the suspect's driver's license number and car plate number, but they came back with no wants or warrants. The deputies tried to convince the property owner to perform a [citizen's arrest](#) for trespassing. Under California law, a citizen must make an arrest for this type of misdemeanor. The property owner would have had to go to the car with the deputies and say "I arrest you." The deputies then would have taken him into custody. The property owner refused.

The deputies called for a tow truck to get the suspect's car out of the ditch. They searched it thoroughly before the arrival of the tow truck and did not find evidence of anyone else in the car. The only possible violation was an open container of beer, but the suspect was not driving at the time of the deputies' contact and mere possession of an open container was not illegal. Before the suspect was allowed to leave, he was instructed to pour out the beer and the deputies filled out an FI (Field Interrogation) card with his information and the FI card was filed. It showed that Davis was the person with the [Ford Pinto](#) that night.

Since the events of October 1, the sheriff's radio system has been upgraded and APBs are now broadcast on all channels through a centralized 911 dispatch system.

On November 28, 1993, the property owner was inspecting her property after loggers had partially cleared the property of trees. She discovered items that made her think they might have matched those used in the kidnapping. She called the sheriff's department to report her discovery and deputies and crime scene investigators were dispatched. One of the items found, a torn pair of ballet leggings, was matched by the FBI Crime Laboratory to the other part of the leggings that were taken as evidence on the night of the kidnapping. A review of calls in the area the day of the kidnapping turned up the contact with Davis. The suspect was only identified because both deputies had filled out and filed the FI card. Once the identity of Davis was revealed, his palm print at the scene of the kidnapping was also traced to him. Authorities were unable to match the partial print earlier due to the poor quality of the print.

The Sonoma County Sheriff's Department, in cooperation with Petaluma Police and the FBI, launched a search of the property and the Pythian Road area during a heavy rainstorm. The first two days of the search were kept as low key as possible, since the suspect was under surveillance at an Indian rancheria near Ukiah, California. When nothing was found during the initial search and the surveillance of Davis also produced no results, the decision was made to arrest him for the kidnapping of Klaas.

While Davis was being interrogated by Petaluma PD and the FBI, a massive search was launched on Friday, December 3. The Sonoma County Sheriff's Department was assisted by over 500

search team members from 24 agencies, coming from as far away as Kern County, California and Washoe County, Nevada. The mutual aid effort was coordinated by the California State Office of Emergency Services (now known as the [California Governor's Office of Emergency Services](#)), FBI Crime Scene teams and numerous other state and federal agencies. The search remains today as one of the largest ever conducted in California. The search continued through Saturday, December 4. The search effort produced other items of evidence, but did not produce any evidence of human remains. The search was planned to continue on Sunday, December 5, but on the evening of December 4, Davis confessed to kidnapping and murdering Klaas and led investigators to her body.^[4] He had buried her in a shallow grave just off Highway 101, about a mile south of the city limits of [Cloverdale, California](#). The grave site is about 20 air miles and about 30 road miles from the search site.

Although Davis admitted to strangling Klaas to death, he refused to give investigators a timeline of the events from October 1. Investigators thought he was fearful that both people who passed him would call the sheriff's department. It is debated that he killed her before the arrival of deputies and hid her body in the thick brush on the hillside above where his car was stuck. He then waited for an undetermined period of time after being escorted back to Highway 12, about 1.5 miles from where his car was stuck and drove back up to retrieve her body. He was reportedly out of breath, sweating profusely (despite being a cool night) and had twigs and leaves in his hair when contacted by deputies. It is also debated that he had chosen the grave site in advance, since it would not have been discovered by a casual observer. The grave site area would be directly visible from Highway 101, but not the grave itself. He had to drive from the Indian Rancheria in Ukiah once a week to meet with his parole officer and he would have seen any police activity in the area.

Conviction^[edit]

After a long, tumultuous trial, Davis was convicted on June 18, 1996 of first-degree murder and four special circumstances (robbery, burglary, kidnapping and a lewd act on a child) in Klaas' death.^[5] A [San Jose](#) Superior Court jury returned a verdict of death. At his formal sentencing by a judge, Davis provoked national outrage by taunting his victim's family, extending both middle fingers at a courtroom camera^[6] and later saying that Klaas' last words just before he killed her were that her father molested her.^[5] Judge Thomas Hastings sentenced Davis to death by lethal injection^[7] and remarked, "It is very easy for me to pronounce this sentence, given your revolting behavior in this courtroom". He is currently on death row at San Quentin State Prison, in Marin County, California. Having survived an apparent drug overdose while in prison and attacks on him by several other prisoners, Davis is now in solitary confinement and continues to assist his attorneys in various appeals, and has more appeals ahead of him before the sentence passed can be carried out.

Winona Ryder^[edit]

Actress [Winona Ryder](#), who had been raised in Petaluma, offered a \$200,000 reward for Klaas' safe return during the search. After her death, Ryder starred in a [film version](#) of [Little Women](#) and dedicated it to her memory, because that had been her favorite book.^[8]

Aftermath and legacy[[edit](#)]

Klaas' body was cremated and her ashes spread over the [Pacific Ocean](#) by her friends and family.

In the wake of the murder, Klaas' father, Marc Klaas, became a child advocate and established the [KlaasKids Foundation](#).^[9] He has made himself available to parents of kidnapped children and has appeared frequently on [Larry King Live](#), [CNN Headline News](#) and [Nancy Grace](#). He is also portrayed in [The Elizabeth Smart Story](#) by Barry Flatman, as meeting the Smarts and informing them he was working with [Fox News](#).

The all points bulletin was broadcast on the CHP channel, which only CHP radios could receive. CHP practice changed after the case. Such bulletins are now broadcast on all police channels.

Five years after Klaas' murder, a performing arts center was named in her honor in Petaluma.^[10]

In the wake of the murder, politicians in California and other U.S. states supported [three strikes laws](#) and California's Three Strikes act was signed into law on March 8, 1994.^{[11][12]}

Media[[edit](#)]

[Investigation Discovery](#) re-enacted the kidnapping and murder in *Motives & Murder: Cracking the Case: Who Took Polly Klaas?* (Season 4 Episode 4, 2014).^{[13][14]}

The [A&E](#) television series [American Justice](#) released the episode "Free to Kill -- The Polly Klaas Murder". The episode exposes the challenges of the penal system to rehabilitate inmates. Davis had been in and out of jail, convictions ranged from kidnapping to burglary. The episode originally aired October 23, 1996.^{[15][16]}

The [Discovery Channel](#) crime series [The FBI Files'](#) [first episode's](#) topic was the Polly Klaas case. The episode reveals the details of the FBI agents' collection of evidence and their hunt for the criminal, and originally aired 20 October 1998.^{[17][18][19][20]}

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- ^{[Jump up to: ^[a] ^[b]]} ^["Richard Allen Davis: Safe on Death Row"]. *townhall.com*.
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


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Further reading[[edit](#)]

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External links[[edit](#)]

- [Polly Klaas Foundation](#)
- [KlaasKids Foundation](#) The Foundation's mission is to stop crimes against children.

-  [San Francisco Bay Area portal](#)
-  [Biography portal](#)
-  [1990s portal](#)
-  [Criminal justice portal](#)
-  [Death portal](#)

- [Crime Library Article on Polly Klaas](#)
- [Polly Klaas](#) at [Find a Grave](#)

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