Beat: News

Missing and legally dead Pa. woman shows up in Florida

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USPA News - A central Pennsylvania woman who mysteriously disappeared without a trace after dropping off her children for school more than a decade ago has been found alive in Florida after she turned herself in to a sheriff`s deputy, officials said on Thursday. Brenda Heist, 53, had been reported missing in February 2002 after dropping her kids off for school in Lititz, a borough in Lancaster County in Pennsylvania.

Her car was found abandoned just days later with no signs of a struggle, although the woman`s husband was briefly investigated as a possible suspect in her disappearance. Becky Herrin, a spokeswoman for the Monroe County Sheriff`s Office in Florida, said Heist turned herself in to a sheriff`s deputy in Key Largo, some 1,100 miles (1,770 kilometers) from Lititz, at around 4:30 p.m. local time on April 26. She told the deputy that she thought she might be wanted in nearby Pinellas County, after which officers began to investigate. "A check on her name revealed her status as `missing and possibly deceased` from Lititz, Pennsylvania," Herrin said. Heist was going through an amicable divorce when she disappeared and had been declared legally dead in 2010, allowing her ex-husband to collect on a life insurance policy. "Authorities in Pennsylvania were notified of her recovery. She is currently in protective custody in the Keys, but not in the custody of the Monroe County Sheriff`s Office," Herrin added. Heist`s ex-husband, who has since remarried, told a news conference that he was angry at her because of the effect the woman`s disappearance had on their family. Investigators in Lititz said Heist is believed to have hitchhiked to Florida along with three other people. She shared a camper with a man for about seven years but also spent years out on the street, sleeping under bridges and surviving by searching for food and begging for money.

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