

The statistic stopped me in my tracks: an estimated 40,000 unidentified bodies and human remains found over the years throughout the United States. I heard the startling numbers from Debra Culberson, a woman who approached me last fall after I gave a speech in Kentucky.

Debra Culberson is not a coroner or a police officer; her reason for knowing such a shocking statistic is that she is a mother on a heartbreaking mission: to find her own daughter among those tens of thousands of unidentified bodies. Until now, there has been no system to connect the remains to the thousands of people searching for missing family members.

Debra told me her story: She has been searching for her daughter, Carrie, since Aug. 28, 1996, the day the bright and bubbly 22-year old suddenly disappeared from her Blanchester, Ohio home. Debra knows Carrie is dead. Vincent Doan, an ex-boyfriend, was convicted of killing Carrie, but still refuses to say what he did with the body.

Debra has spent the past twelve and a half years scouring newspapers of neighboring counties and states and calling local police whenever she read a body was found. As she explained to me, "I think any mother, or any parent in the world would understand this -- it's that physical body that I held in my arms all those years and just the need to know where her remains are. It's not any different than someone losing a soldier, you know, they still need to find their son's remains."

The search put Debra Culberson in contact with Dr. Emily Craig, the Kentucky state forensic anthropologist, who helped design a national database, appropriately called NamUs. The idea is to put names and faces to the thousands of unidentified bodies and to give some peace to mothers like Debra Culberson.

NamUs has actually been online since the first week of January and so far, five cases have been solved, one with shocking results. I will report on that case, as well as Debra's search for Carrie, tomorrow morning on *The Early Show*.