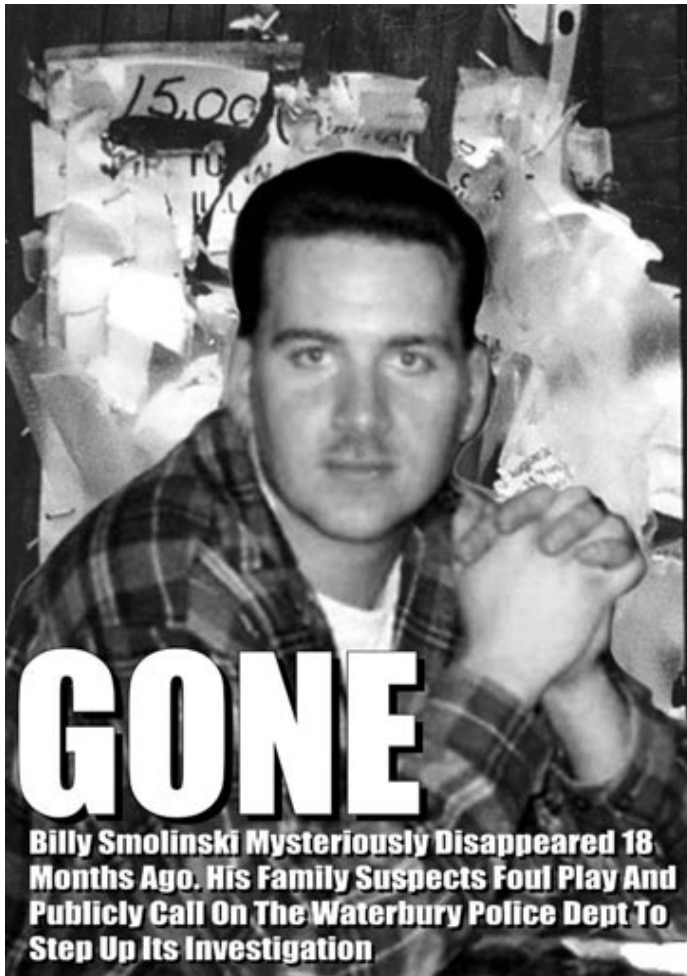




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**What Happened?**  
**03/08/2006**



**Billy Smolinski Mysteriously Disappeared 18 Months Ago. His Family Suspects Foul Play And Publicly Call On The Waterbury Police Dept To Step Up Its Investigation**

**Story By John Murray**

Billy is dead.

That's what his parents think.

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After 18 months of tirelessly searching for their missing 32 year old son, Janice and William Smolinski now believe Billy is dead.

"There is no body and no hard evidence," Janice Smolinski said. "But we believe a crime was committed against Billy. There are clues about what might have happened and who might be involved, but from the beginning the Waterbury Police Department has not aggressively investigated Billy's case."

Initial attempts to reach Waterbury Police spokesperson Sgt. Chris Corbett for comment came up empty. A visit to Police Chief Neil O'Leary's office brought a swift response.

O'Leary said "I would never rule out foul play. I don't think he disappeared on his own and is hiding from his family. My gut feeling is something is wrong."

Officially, the Waterbury Police Department hasn't ruled out any scenario regarding Billy's disappearance. They have cited the fact that Billy had personal problems in the days before he disappeared. He was going through a romantic break-up and had recently been laid off from one of his jobs.

O'Leary said several possibilities were explored; did Billy disappear on his own? Was there an accident and his body is still laying in the woods somewhere? Did he commit suicide? Did someone kill him?

"I wouldn't rule out any option," O'Leary said. "Something happened to that kid." O'Leary, who is not directly involved with the investigation, called Deputy Chief Jimmy Egan into his office. He asked Egan, who supervised the Detective Bureau during a portion of the investigation, to share information about the Smolinski case with the Observer. "Give him everything we've got," O'Leary ordered. "Set up a meeting with the detectives on the case and show him everything."

And then O'Leary excused himself. He had a luncheon date with Waterbury mayor, Michael Jarjura, and was running a few minutes late.

Egan picked up where O'Leary left off.

"We have checked out every lead we've had," Egan said. "We've done as much as we can. I don't know what else we can possibly do. We have explored all the angles, we checked out everything the Smolinskis have asked us to. We have nothing."

But to Janice and William Smolinski, that claim rings hollow. They view the investigation in its entirety, not just when Jimmy Egan and new detectives were assigned to the case.

"From the first day Billy went missing we had trouble getting the Waterbury Police Department to take this case seriously," Janice said. "We begged them to finger print Billy's truck and it was never done. There was a lot of sloppy police work during this investigation, especially in the beginning."



*Photo: The Smolinski family has weathered psychics, police apathy and harassment. From left to right is Billy's sister, Paula Bell, and his parents, Janice and William Smolinski. Photograph by John Murray*

Deputy Chief Egan confirmed that Billy's truck was never fingerprinted and said he wasn't inclined to speculate why. "I wasn't involved in the case in the beginning so I can't tell you why the truck wasn't fingerprinted," he said. "But from the time I got involved we have done everything the Smolinskis have asked us to do. We have investigated every lead that has been brought to our attention."

Egan, however, didn't get involved in the case until a year after Billy Smolinski disappeared. To date there have been six detectives who have worked the case, which is now assigned to detectives Tim Jackson and Gary Angon.

Jackson and Angon got involved after the Smolinski family met with Chief O'Leary in the summer of 2005 to discuss their frustration. He said he would assign two of his top men to the case and they would begin the investigation anew.

"We picked up the case a year after he disappeared," detective Angon said. "We look into anything we find. We have talked to everybody. We went to New York twice to look at bodies. We check the internet to see if his social security number has been used and we keep in touch with the family. We have not been able to find any physical evidence, but we are still looking."

When Billy disappeared from his home on August 24th, 2004, he left behind his truck, his keys, his wallet, and most significantly he left his beloved German Shepard, Harley, unattended and locked inside the house.

"Billy would have never left Harley like that," Janice Smolinski said. "He loved that dog." The Smolinski family feel like they've been slamming their heads against a brick wall these past 18 months trying to convince local, state or federal investigators that Billy was the victim of a crime.

"No body, no case," said Janice Smolinski. "That's what we've heard for the past 18 months."

That is not a phrase, however, that Egan, Jackson and Angon said would have come from anyone

inside the police department. "We aren't ruling out foul play," Egan said. "We just don't know what happened to Mr. Smolinski at this time. We are looking at every option."

But when all the known facts are placed on the table there are enough red flags fluttering around the case to start a flag store.

Consider this; at the time of his disappearance Billy was involved in a love triangle and had left a threatening voice message on the answering machine of his male rival telling him "to watch his back".

The male rival lives on the outskirts of greater Waterbury and is a prominent married businessman. The individual is also an elected public official with power and influence.

Consider that Billy's threatening phone call to his rival was placed the day he disappeared. The Smolinskis believe it was the last phone call Billy ever made. The Waterbury Police Department has a recording of that phone call.

As the family sees it, Billy was caught in an explosive love triangle with his girlfriend and an influential married man - a recipe for disaster. Yet the Smolinskis aren't clairvoyant and readily admit they don't know exactly what happened to Billy. They know in their hearts, though, that Billy didn't disappear on his own. The Smolinskis want Waterbury investigators to be more aggressive in probing into the two remaining pieces of the love triangle.

"We have questioned both individuals several times and do not believe either one of them was involved in Billy's disappearance," Deputy Chief Egan said.

But Janice and William Smolinski, and their daughter, Paula, don't believe the Waterbury Police Department has pursued these leads aggressively enough.

"Yes, they have been questioned," Janice Smolinski said. "But neither one of them was given a lie detector test. Why?"

Deputy Egan said the police can't force individuals to take a polygraph test, and even if they could, that the results would not be admissible in court.

When one stops to ponder several bizarre circumstances surrounding the love triangle, it is easy to see why the Smolinski family has requested further probing.



*Photo: Billy Smolinski and his German Shepard, Harley*

The woman Billy was dating, Madeleine Gleason, had five children and has been married and divorced three times. Four months before Billy disappeared, Madeleine's 18 year old daughter, Krystal Rapuano, hung herself in the family home in Seymour. Several months after Billy disappeared, another of Madeleine's children, Shaun M. Karpiuk, 27, died of a drug overdose in Waterbury.

At the time of his death Shaun was a construction worker with Top Gun Landscaping and had previously worked as a grave digger in Seymour.

Another of Madeleine's children, Daniel Rapuano, was in prison at the time of Billy's disappearance.

Further consider that for a year after Billy's disappearance Madeleine traveled around Woodbridge, Ansonia, Seymour and Bethany tearing down and vandalizing hundreds of Billy's missing person posters. When you add all that up, at the very least, Madeleine's family is involved with drugs, violence and death.

That Billy's male rival owns and operates a long distance trucking company only adds to the mystery and intrigue. It is not difficult to see why the Smolinskis have lingering questions.

When asked why the long distance trucking business didn't raise any red flags down at police headquarters, detective Angon told the Observer that the business only distributed vegetables to New York.

A five minute internet search, however, revealed that the business specializes in long distance freight trucking and in 2004 had \$3.5 million in sales. A telephone call by the Observer to the company's sales department revealed that the company hauls freight throughout New England, over to the Hudson Valley and down to Philadelphia.

"That is a perfect example of what we have encountered throughout the investigation," Janice Smolinski said. "(The Observer) found that out in a few minutes, and the Waterbury Police Department, who have been on the case for 18 months, don't have their facts straight."

Within days of Billy's disappearance the Smolinski family was frustrated with the Waterbury Police Department and decided to take matters into their own hands. They brought in search dogs, organized their own search party and hired private investigators. They have churned the waters looking for Billy and found little more than frustration.

"There have been so many weird and unexplainable things that have happened," Janice Smolinski said. "It's bizarre, and we want the Waterbury Police Department to follow up more aggressively."

Right now the Smolinski family has only questions, no answers.

"We are frustrated with the police," Janice Smolinski said. "We don't know why they aren't following up on the bizarre events that occurred after Billy went missing. We no longer believe Billy is alive, but we want to know what happened to him, and we aren't backing down until we have an answer."

#### **BILLY SMOLINSKI**

At the time of his disappearance Billy was 31 years old. He was six feet tall and weighed 200 pounds. His friends and family describe him as physically fit, and photographs back up that assertion. He looks like a man in the prime of his life that would have no trouble taking care of business.

In August 2004 Billy was working three jobs. He was an apprentice heating and air conditioning technician at Midland Company in Newtown, he was a part-time tow truck driver for Durable Towing on Thomaston Avenue in Waterbury, and he mowed lawns and plowed driveways to scratch out extra money needed to pay his mortgage.

Leo Bianchi was Billy's boss at Durable Towing for five years. "Billy was a reliable, fast worker," Bianchi said. "If Billy told me he was going to be there, he was there. He did his job and never called in sick."

After Billy had his hours cut back at Midland, Bianchi offered Billy more hours at Durable Towing. Cash flow, it appeared, was not an issue when Billy vanished.

"I talked to Billy a few days before he disappeared," Bianchi said. "He told me he had some trouble with a girlfriend. I told him 'there are a lot of fish in the sea and don't worry about it.' Billy was a good looking kid and I told him to let it go."

Bianchi also doesn't buy into the theory that Billy voluntarily disappeared. "Billy was a tough kid and didn't take any shit," Bianchi said. "He wouldn't back down if he was up against a giant, and I think he came across the wrong person. I think someone bumped him off."



*Photo: Billy Smolinski and his sister Paula Bell, when they were kids.*

Billy was raised in Naugatuck and attended Kaynor Tech for three years where he studied to be an electrician. After his junior year Billy decided it wasn't for him, and he transferred back to Naugatuck High School for his senior year.

"After high school Billy spent a few years trying to figure himself out," Janice Smolinski said. " He drove a truck for Wesson Oil, delivered for Gary's Auto Parts and had a few other jobs."

Billy lived at home with his parents until he was 26 years old. When he moved out Billy bought his own home in the south end of Waterbury, at 130 Holly Street. Billy told his parents he didn't want to pay rent when he could start investing in his own home.

Before Billy dated Madeleine Gleason, he was involved in an eight year relationship with Mary Ellen Noble. They had known each other since high school. She said their break-up was a mutual decision and they remained close friends right up until the time Billy disappeared.

"Billy was a great guy," Noble said. "He was spontaneous, crazy and fun loving. Billy was one of those guys who didn't want to grow up."

While they were dating, Billy and Mary Ellen bought a German Shepard puppy at a breeder in Bethany and named him Harley. Mary Ellen lived with her mother in the Town Plot section of

Waterbury and Billy lived in the south end of the city.

"We talked about moving in together," Noble said, "but we never figured it out. Harley would go back and forth between our homes. It was like we had joint custody of Harley, he was like our baby."

The week before Billy disappeared he went to Florida with Madeleine Gleason, and Mary Ellen came over to his house every day to take care of Harley.

"I talked with Billy when he was in Florida and he let me know he was not having a good time," Noble said. "He suspected his girlfriend was seeing another man."

Noble said she talked with Billy again when he returned home from Florida and he was upset.

"If you cheated on Billy he would take it really hard," Noble said, "A former girlfriend cheated on him and it was something he wouldn't let go of. Billy told me he had a plan to try and get Madeleine to admit the affair."

At 4:45 AM on the day Billy disappeared he placed a ladder up against Madeleine Gleason's house and knocked on her second floor bedroom window. Gleason told the Waterbury police department that she let him in and they talked.

The Waterbury police cite Billy's unusual early morning behavior as a sign he might have been losing his emotional balance. But to Mary Ellen Noble, who dated Billy for eight years, it was "just Billy being Billy. He knocked on my window many times in the middle of the night," she said. "He wouldn't think anything of it."

The Smolinski family agrees.

"Billy was always doing something like that," his sister, Paula Bell said. "The police don't know Billy the way we do. That was just Billy."

Noble believes Billy set out to have a confrontation with the man he suspected was messing around with his girlfriend. "That would be so Billy," Noble said.

The last time Mary Ellen saw Billy she said he was sad about how things were going with Madeleine, but he seemed fine, and they made plans to go to Six Flags Amusement Park the next weekend. "Billy and I had plans for that Saturday. The last words he said to me were 'Don't forget Saturday, don't forget, don't forget....'" Noble said. "Billy would not have committed suicide. I just know he wouldn't have done that. Something bad happened to him."

Billy's neighbor told the Waterbury police that the day Billy disappeared Billy had asked him to watch Harley for three days because Billy was going up north to look at a car. The following morning when the neighbor went to Billy's house to let Harley out, he couldn't find the house key. The neighbor had Mary Ellen Noble's telephone number and called her immediately.

"Right then I knew there was a big problem," Noble said. "Billy would never have left Harley locked up like that. Never."

Noble called Billy's sister, Paula, and the word spread through the Smolinski family within minutes -

something strange is going on with Billy.

"When Mary Ellen called to say Billy had left Harley unattended we knew there was a problem right away," Janice Smolinski said. "We called the police, but since Billy had told the neighbor he would be gone for three days, the police insisted we wait three days before they got involved."

When Billy's sister, Paula, arrived at his house she thought it was odd where his truck was parked. "He never parked his truck at the bottom of the driveway like that," she said. "It was kind of weird, but we still didn't know what we were dealing with yet."

As family and friends convened at Billy's house, his truck was blocking the driveway, so Paula said she got in and moved it up against the house where Billy usually parked it. "I didn't think much about it at the time," she said. "But now I do."

It's possible Billy Smolinski wasn't the last driver of his truck. Several days later, in the middle of the night, Billy's truck was broken into and papers were strewn about the cab.

"We repeatedly asked the Waterbury police to fingerprint Billy's truck," Janice Smolinski said. "And by the time we finally got someone's attention (almost ten days later) they told us it was too late."

After the third day the Smolinskis followed up with the police and two detectives came down and looked around Billy's house. When they heard about Billy's problem with his girlfriend, and his job situation at Midland, they inferred to the family that it might be a suicide.

The family didn't buy it.

The Smolinskis were then told by the Waterbury police that Billy was, as Janice recalls, "out and about."

The police did eventually perform infra-red tests on his house, garage and truck, but found no signs of blood.

The week after Billy disappeared the Smolinskis used the Republican-American newspaper to recruit volunteers to help scour greater Waterbury for Billy, and 200 volunteers showed up on Saturday, Sunday and Monday of Labor Day weekend. The search began at Billy's house and fanned out from there. A psychic called the family to say that Billy had been hit on the head and was bleeding along a river bank. Although the family was skeptical about psychics, volunteers scoured every inch of the Naugatuck River from Watertown to Naugatuck. They found hobo encampments and a dead deer, but no Billy.

Billy's sister, Paula, contacted D.A.W.G.S. (Disaster and Wilderness Ground Searcher Inc), an all-volunteer search and rescue team from Canton for help. The group uses scent dogs to search for lost and missing persons, and they immediately agreed to help. D.A.W.G.S. contacted the Waterbury police to inform the department they would be forming a search in the south end, and the department sent two men to accompany the dogs and their handlers as they made their way through backyards and businesses.

"The police worked with DAWGS," William Smolinski Sr. said, "but they didn't help with the search for Billy all over Waterbury. We had more than a hundred volunteers helping out every day, but not one cop. They didn't seem to care."

Ten days after Billy disappeared his sister went down to police headquarters and said she "went a little snappy" about the lack of attention the police were giving Billy's investigation. A new

detective was placed on the case, Sgt. Steve Pedbereznek, and he came down to Billy's house to have a look around.

"Within 15 minutes Steve came back in the house with Billy's keys and wallet," Paula said. "He found them tucked underneath the driver's seat in Billy's truck. Now we knew Billy was in big trouble."



*Photo: Billy Smolinski had been dating Madeleine Gleason for a year before he suspected she was having an affair with a prominent married man in Woodbridge. Days before Billy disappeared he and Gleason broke up. The day Billy vanished he left a threatening message on the home phone of his male rival.*

#### **THE GIRLFRIEND**

Billy Smolinski met Madeline Gleason several years ago when they both drove school buses in Woodbridge. According to Billy's family, the two began dating in the summer of 2003, more than a year before Billy disappeared. Billy first brought Madeline around the family at a birthday party for his nephew.

"Billy hadn't told us how old Madeleine was," Paula Bell said. "We were all surprised when we met her because she was my mother's age."

The age difference between Billy and Madeleine was 16 years. As the Smolinskis heard more and more about Madeleine they were concerned for Billy's future. She had been married and divorced three times, had five children and was a school bus driver.

"Nobody saw what Billy saw in her," Paula said. "But I'll give her this, Billy was falling in love with her."

Ten months after Billy and Madeleine started dating, Madeleine's only daughter, Krystal, committed suicide at her home in Seymour.

"Billy felt really bad about that," Janice Smolinski said. "And he started spending even more time with Madeleine trying to comfort her."

According to the Smolinski family things between Billy and Madeleine were going pretty good through the summer of 2004. The couple was making plans for Madeleine to move into Billy's home in Waterbury.

"Madeleine didn't like the color of Billy's house and Billy asked his father to help him paint it," Janice Smolinski said. "Billy had stripped the outside of the house before he went to Florida and his father was going to help him when he got back."

The night before he left for Florida Billy brought his dirt bike over to his parent's house because he didn't want anyone to steal it while he was gone. Billy was not a traveler and liked to stay close to home. The last time he was on an airplane was when he was 15 years old and the family flew down to Disney World.

"Billy was apprehensive about flying," Janice Smolinski said. "He borrowed our luggage and we talked about the sites to see around Jupiter Beach. He seemed very happy."

From police accounts, and talking to several of Billy's family and friends, it is clear that the relationship took a hard turn for the worse while Billy and Madeleine were in Florida.

Billy was upset at Madeleine's secretive behavior with her cell phone in Florida - he caught her talking in shower stalls - and he suspected she was in an affair.

The Waterbury police department confirmed that Billy and Madeleine had been arguing in Florida, and on the plane ride home. When they returned home from Florida, Billy talked to his sister and with Mary Ellen Noble. He told them both that he was having problems with Madeleine.

"He told me he had broken up with her," Paula said. "Billy said he was through with her." Billy told his boss down at Durable Towing that he was devastated.

What really goes on in the mind and heart of a young man coping with loss and disappointment is unclear, but one thing that is certain is that Billy Smolinski was angry with the individual he thought Madeleine was having an affair with. Billy knew the man, and telephone records show that he called him three times the day he disappeared.

The man is a prominent business owner and politician in Woodbridge. According to Deputy Chief Egan the individual was contacted weeks after Billy disappeared and voluntarily brought in his answering machine to police headquarters and shared the threatening message with investigators.

Billy's sister went down to headquarters and listened to the recording and confirmed that it was her brother's voice on the machine.

"He said 'Watch your back, I'm going to get you,'" Paula said. "It was very short, but it was definitely Billy's voice."

Paula said after listening to the tape she knew Billy had gone to confront the individual and something bad had happened. "Billy was not afraid of confrontation," Paula said. "If you listen to that message you know something happened after that."

The Smolinskis know that Billy was caught in a love triangle, and they also know that Billy would have sought a confrontation.

His father, William, said "Billy wasn't one to start anything, but if someone started something with him, he would finish it. This time it looks like someone got the better of him."

Despite all the indications leading towards a confrontation, for the past 18 months the Waterbury police department had publicly stated that they suspected no foul play in Billy's disappearance.

In a Republican-American article written by Brynn Mandel one year after Billy disappeared, she wrote that "police believe that neither foul play nor medical issues are factors in Billy's disappearance. They noted his job loss and relationship difficulty."

When Janice Smolinski contacted the television show "America's Most Wanted" about broadcasting news about Billy's disappearance, the show's producers contacted the Waterbury police department about the case and were told that investigators didn't suspect any foul play. Unable to run a segment without cooperation from local police, and with no suspected foul play, Billy's story never made the national broadcast.

"At first the police thought it might be a suicide," Janice Smolinski said. "Then they said he was out and about and would probably come home eventually."

That was 18 months ago. Now, in March 2006, the Smolinskis don't think Billy is ever coming back.

The first person inside police headquarters to publicly state that foul play was a possibility is Police Chief Neil O'Leary, who did so during an interview with the Observer on March 2nd.

"We can't rule it out," O'Leary said. "My gut feeling is something is wrong here."

#### **UNEXPECTED ARREST**

Weeks after Billy disappeared the Smolinski family paid the New Haven Register \$1200 to print 20,000 flyers that were to be distributed in the newspaper. The family printed a few thousand more flyers which they planned to distribute in restaurants, businesses and in public areas around the state of Connecticut. Several odd occurrences with the flyers began to raise some eyebrows within the Smolinski family.

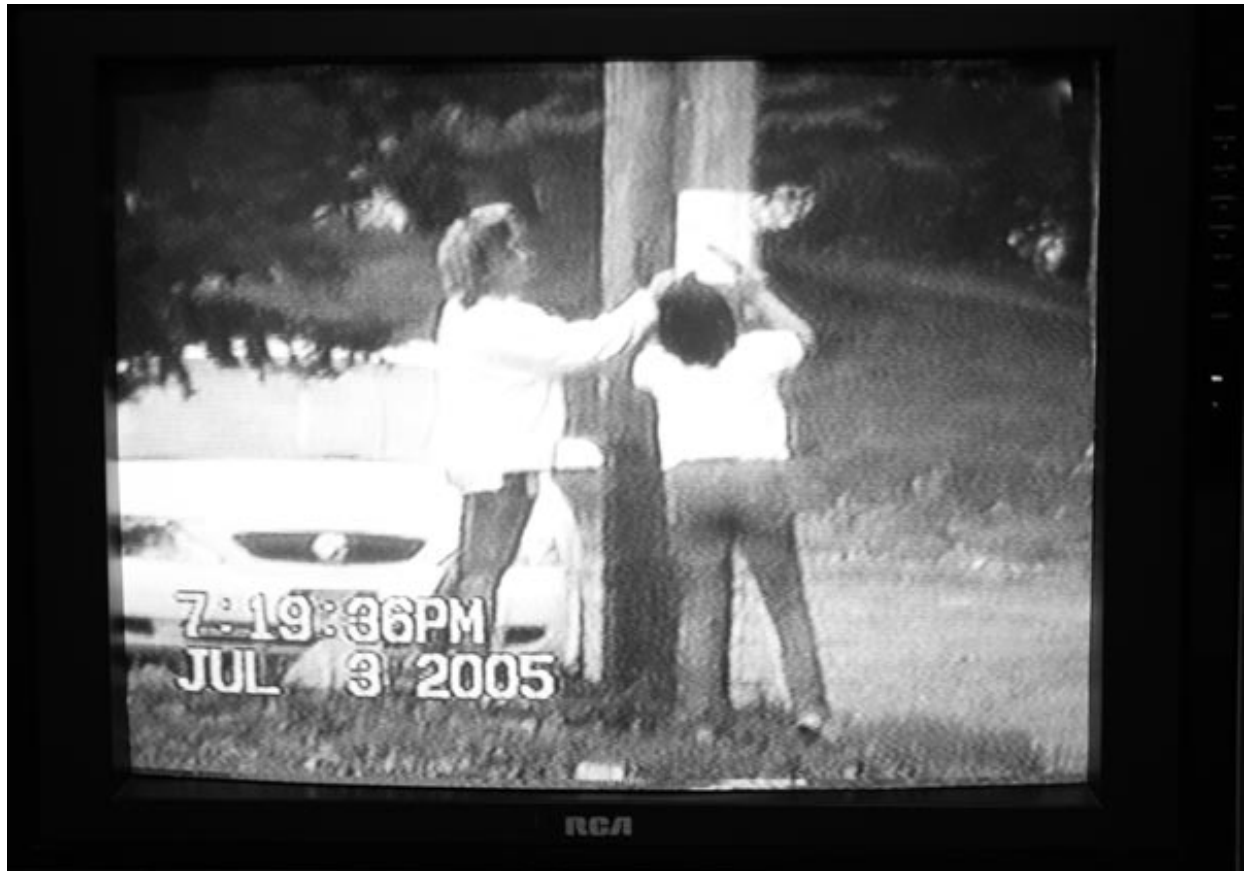
First, not every town that was supposed to get the flyer, received them. During the first distribution run, strangely, the family said, the town of Woodbridge didn't get the insert in their editions of the Register. The Smolinskis have many friends in Woodbridge who reported that they didn't get the flyer. The Smolinskis complained and the Register promised to re-run the flyer in a few communities, including Woodbridge. This time, once again, the flyers didn't make it into most of Woodbridge.

Why would these raise concerns with the Smolinskis? Because the other two angles of the love triangle work or live in the town of Woodbridge.

At the same time the Smolinskis were having trouble getting the flyers distributed in Woodbridge,

a good friend of the family telephoned Janice and said she had witnessed a woman ripping down posters of Billy off utility poles in Amity. The family friend wrote down the woman's license plate number and gave it to Janice. Using an inside connection in law enforcement the Smolinskis had the plate number checked and were stunned when it turned out to be Madeleine Gleason's car. This was a month after Billy vanished.

"We were shocked," Janice Smolinski said. "We couldn't understand why anyone would want to rip down Billy's posters, but his girlfriend? It was bizarre. Why would she do that?"



*Photo: One month after Billy disappeared hundreds of flyers with his photograph on them were being systematically destroyed in Woodbridge, Seymour, Ansonia and Bethany. The Smolinski family investigated and discovered that Billy's old girlfriend, Madeleine Gleason, and her friend, Frances Vrabel, were the culprits. The women grew so bold as to tear the posters down seconds after Janice Smolinski tacked them up. Pictured above, Vrabel, left, begins to tear down one of Billy's posters even before Janice has finished hanging it. The image was recorded by the Smolinski family.*

The Smolinskis investigated and found dozens of posters in Woodbridge, Bethany, Ansonia and Seymour disfigured, shredded or missing. The family placed thousands of posters around Connecticut and the only place they were being vandalized was in the area Madeline Gleason lived and worked in. The Smolinskis decided to replace the posters and asked the private investigators to watch and see what happened.

"They said they couldn't just sit and stare at a pole for days waiting to see if someone came," Janice Smolinski said. "So we decided to do it ourselves."

The first shift was manned by Billy's aunt and uncle, Grace and Bruce Smolinski. During their first shift they were stunned to witness Madeline Gleason and her son pull up to a pole and rip down a poster. They attempted to videotape the moment and experienced difficulty with the zoom, focus

and exposure. But the tape clearly shows the pair tearing down Billy's poster.

The Smolinski family replaced the posters and the next night they were torn down again. This time Paula was in the car with her aunt and uncle and they videotaped the incident for a second night.

"We brought the tape down to the Waterbury Police Department and they didn't have much to say about it," Janice Smolinski said. "We didn't understand their reaction, but we continued to keep them informed."

Frustrated they couldn't snag the attention of the Waterbury Police Department, the Smolinskis were determined to engage Madeleine's increasingly bizarre behavior. They believed she knew something about Billy's disappearance and they intended to find out what. Thus began a daily cat and mouse game. The Smolinski family would go around Woodbridge, Seymour, Ansonia and Bethany every day and re hang Billy's posters on telephone poles. Every night they were torn down This went on for several months until Janice noticed one day that the posters were disappearing within minutes, in broad daylight.

"Madeleine and her friend, (Frances Vrabel), started following me and eventually started ripping the posters down right in front of my face," Janice Smolinski said. "It was a huge insult and I wasn't going to coil back and go home and forget about."

Madeleine's in-your face tactic riled up a soft-spoken woman. "She had the nerve to do that right in my face and I was determined that I wasn't going to back down. I just kept hanging Billy's posters and went about my business. When she tore them down I put up another."

Eventually Paula and Janice witnessed Madeleine and Frances, who are both school bus drivers in Woodbridge, stopping their buses to get out and destroy Billy's posters. Paula shot videotape of the women, and while she was filming Madeleine began to follow them in an empty school bus.

"We couldn't believe what we were watching," Paula said. "Madeleine never helped search for Billy when he went missing. Why was she doing this?"

The bizarre behavior continued almost daily until April 2005 when Madeleine pulled the bus into the Woodbridge Police parking lot. Paula and Janice saw an opportunity to confront Madeleine's behavior with the police, and they followed her inside.

Once inside the police station both Paula and Janice state that Madeleine taunted them, saying that if she had married Billy she would have referred to Janice as "Mommy." After a few "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy" taunts, Paula blew a fuse and lunged at Madeleine and said she was going to kill her. By the time the Woodbridge police sorted through the tangled raw emotion, according to the Smolinskis, they were under threat of arrest on five different charges.



*Photo: The confrontation between the Smolinskis and Madeleine Gleason escalated into daily skirmishes. During one encounter, while driving a Woodbridge school bus, Gleason followed Janice Smolinski around town. Ten months ago the Woodbridge police arrested Janice Smolinski for harassment. At the time of his disappearance Billy Smolinski was involved in a love triangle with Gleason and a prominent elected official in Woodbridge. The video images were shot by the Smolinski family.*

The police report states that Gleason complained that the Smolinskis "have been smothering the areas along her bus route, in front of her residence, the bank she frequents and now at a gym she just joined. Gleason stated that she has been tearing down a portion of these posters because she feels it is too much."

The report also stated that Janice had told Madeleine that she wasn't going to stop hanging Billy's posters until Madeleine broke and told the truth.

"I did say that," Janice said. "I believed she knew something about my son's disappearance and the police weren't doing anything about it. I wasn't going to stop."

According to the report the police had some sympathy with the Smolinskis and asked them to stop distributing flyers around Beecher School, but they could continue hanging flyers on poles around town.

Although the police report doesn't reflect this, both Janice and Paula state the Woodbridge Police agreed to let them go if they didn't take the videotape of Madeleine ripping down the posters to the media.

"We didn't know our rights then," Janice said. "So we agreed and we left." But the following day Janice Smolinski was back in Woodbridge hanging up Billy's posters. That night they were torn

down again. Day after day Janice and her family faithfully re hung Billy's posters, and night after night they were destroyed.

The Smolinskis consulted with a lawyer who advised them they had every right to hang posters near school property, and the following day, April 10th, Janice once again started hanging posters near the Beecher School entrance.

"The superintendent of schools drove by and asked me what I was doing," Janice said. "I explained my son was missing. She was very nice and said she'd appreciate it if I didn't hang it on that pole anymore, and I never put it there again."

Two weeks later the Woodbridge Police called and asked Janice to come down to Woodbridge. Madeleine's friend, Frances Vrabel, had filed a complaint against Janice for hanging posters by the school. Janice was arrested for first degree harassment.

"It was so backwards," Paula said. "The police tried to make us seem crazy, but we were just trying to find Billy. The only arrest so far in this case has been my mom. She just wants to know what happened to her son and she ends up sitting next to criminals in the New Haven courthouse."

The charges were eventually dismissed, but the event left William Smolinski rattled. "This shakes my belief in the system," he said. "We just want the truth and we're not getting the truth."

### **COLLECTING DNA**

Janice spends hours every day searching the internet looking for information that might help solve the mystery of Billy's disappearance. She has learned a lot about DNA. It was on the internet she learned about the FBI Laboratory's Combined DNA Index System (CODIS). She discovered how CODIS blends forensic science and computer technology into an effective tool for solving violent crimes. CODIS, according to its web site, enables federal, state, and local crime labs to exchange and compare DNA profiles electronically, thereby linking crimes to each other and to convicted offenders.

CODIS began as a pilot project in 1990 serving 14 state and local laboratories. The DNA Identification Act of 1994 (Public Law 103 322) formalized the FBI's authority to establish a national DNA index for law enforcement purposes. In October 1998, the FBI's National DNA Index System (NDIS) became operational. CODIS is implemented as a distributed database with three hierarchical levels (or tiers) - local, state, and national. NDIS is the highest level in the CODIS hierarchy, and enables the laboratories participating in the CODIS Program to exchange and compare DNA profiles on a national level. All DNA profiles originate at the local level (LDIS), then flow to the state (SDIS) and national levels. SDIS allows laboratories within states to exchange DNA profiles. The tiered approach allows state and local agencies to operate their databases according to their specific legislative or legal requirements.

After Billy disappeared the Waterbury police took his razor and hairbrush to collect DNA samples from Billy. They also took blood samples from Janice Smolinski and Paula Bell.

After learning more about DNA, Janice Smolinski called the Waterbury Police Department recently to find out if Billy's DNA was in CODIS. "I was transferred from one person to the next and nobody could answer my question," she said. "Finally I was told to contact Cindy Lopes (a former Waterbury police officer) who now works at the state police forensic lab. When I got hold of her she said that Billy's DNA was not in CODIS. I want to know why."

When the Observer met with Deputy Chief Egan and detectives Jackson and Angon on March 6th inside police headquarters, none of the officers could answer the question about Billy's DNA. Neither of the detectives knew what CODIS was.

Egan called back the following day to say that the police were now going to swab the inside of Janice and William Smolinski's cheeks and send their DNA off to the state lab. Egan readily admitted he was not an expert on DNA and placed Sgt. Joe Rainone on the telephone to help explain the technology.

"We are going to do a buccal swab on the parents and send it to the state lab for a reverse paternity test," Rainone explained. "The results can be used to compare with any unidentified male remains."

Sgt. Rainone said the results would first be plugged into the CODIS system, which would scour Connecticut for any unidentified male remains. Secondly, Sgt. Rainone said the DNA from the Smolinskis would be plugged into the NDIS system, to see if there were a match with any unidentified male remains around the country.

The previous blood samples taken from Janice and Paula sits in storage right now, and will be used for Mitochondrial DNA testing in the near future. According to Sgt. Rainone, who is not involved in Billy's investigation, the new DNA is cutting edge and can be used to seek a DNA match on a tiny piece of skeleton, which is impossible with conventional nuclear DNA testing.

"What about Billy's DNA?" Janice Smolinski wonders. "The police took his razor and hair brush 18 months ago. Where is that and why isn't Billy's DNA in CODIS right now? It is very confusing, but we don't need to be educated, the police do."  
Billy's file is quickly turning into a cold case.

"This whole case is bizarre," Police Chief Neil O'Leary said. "Maybe some media attention might help. Right now we don't have a lot to go on."

Janice Smolinski shrugged her shoulders. "The police don't know where to go from here because they blew it in the beginning," she said. "I hope this is an eye-opener for the police department and next time someone goes missing they take it seriously and do everything they can right away. For 18 months we've been trying to get somebody to pay attention and we've decided we're not going to make any headway without making noise."

On March 6th the Smolinskis went up to Hartford to testify at a public hearing regarding a proposed bill to establish a Missing Persons Day in Connecticut. One of Billy's co-workers at Durable Towing, Dawn Breen, had suggested the idea to state representative Selim Noujaim, and he had followed through. "It seems like it is going to pass," Janice Smolinski said. "It was a very emotional experience. When my husband broke down while reading his comments I looked up and two of the senators were crying."

But Janice Smolinski isn't stopping there. She wants the Connecticut State Legislature to pass a bill that establishes a statewide procedure for dealing with missing persons. "If a person goes missing the police should immediately collect DNA samples," Janice said.

"They should start a search within 24 to 48 hours with dogs and helicopters. Police have to take a missing person report seriously."

Before Billy vanished, Janice Smolinski said she was shy and would avoid confrontation. Now she is trying to confront a system plagued with inconsistency and wants to change the laws in Connecticut.

"I'm doing it for Billy," she said. "We hope no one else in the future has to go through what we are going through."

*(Editor's note - attempts to reach Madeleine Gleason for comment for this story were*

*unsuccessful)*

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