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SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 2007

Sex, Violence & Politics, aka The Smolinski Case

Cool Justice Report Exclusive:

Government Inaction And Unaccountability Why Does This Case Stink Like A Cover-Up?

FOI Officer Orders Disclosure Of Police Reports In Smolinski Missing Person Love Triangle Case

Family Clings To Shred Of Hope That Investigation Will Generate Results

By JIM BREWER
The Cool Justice Report
www.cooljustice.blogspot.com
March 25, 2007

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is available for reprint courtesy of The Cool Justice Report,
<http://cooljustice.blogspot.com>*

Police reports about the Smolinski Missing Person Love Triangle Case are scheduled to be released to the public next month, giving Billy Smolinski's family a shred of hope that the investigation will finally generate some results.



“The worst part is not knowing,” Billy Smolinski’s mother, Jan Smolinski, told The Cool Justice Report during a two-hour interview last month. “When Billy first disappeared, we knew something was wrong, but we couldn’t get the police to do much.

“There are good days and bad days,” she said. “The good thing is that we have met so many others that have experienced the same problems.”

Billy Smolinski, a rugged six-footer at 200 pounds, disappeared from his house on Holly Street in Waterbury on Aug. 24, 2004. He was 31 years old. The tow truck driver was not known as someone who would go away quietly. He was also devoted to his German Shepherd, Harley. “Billy would never have left without taking care of his dog,” Jan Smolinski said.

Andy Thibault, editor & publisher of The Cool Justice Report, requested copies of the Waterbury police file on the Smolinski case on July 28, 2006. Days later, when Thibault followed up with a formal complaint, Waterbury police wrote to the FBI asking for help to solve the case.

Some observers wondered if this was just a ploy to keep the file secret. “They obviously don’t want you to know what they know or how little they actually worked on the case,” a reader commented to The Cool Justice Report.

With the request to the FBI, Waterbury police acknowledged for the first time that they suspected foul play.

Still, not knowing what actually happened wears on the Smolinski’s and isolates them. “This is what I see and feel and what others who have missing loved ones see and feel on a daily basis,” Jan Smolinski said, explaining the family’s thoughts and feelings about Billy. “It seems as though the broken hearts are never mended, the thoughts of what happened to you: Are you safe or did you suffer are constant reminders that the missing have been swallowed up in a society of people who have pushed us to the corner of the room.”

Most Documents To Be Released

Now, the state Freedom of Information Commission is ordering the Waterbury Police Department to release most of the documents in the Smolinski file.

Atty. Mary Schwind, hearing officer for the FOI Commission, had reviewed 17 documents “in camera” or privately following a complaint by The Cool Justice Report and a hearing last September.

In a decision dated March 9, 2007, Schwind ruled: “Other than a broad assertion of prejudice, the respondent has failed to prove how any of the requested records, specifically IC-2006-389-1, IC-2006-389-

3 through IC-2006-389-9, and IC-2006-389-11 through IC-2006-389-17, would prejudice a law enforcement action if released.

“Accordingly, it is concluded that [these] records ... are not exempt from mandatory disclosure ... and that the respondent violated the FOI Act by denying the complainant copies thereof ...

“Forthwith, the respondent shall provide the complainant with a copy of the requested records ... at no cost.”

The FOI decision notes the documents requested were “any and all reports ... mentioning Madeleine Gleason and / or Christian Sorensen.” Several high-ranking members of the Waterbury Police Department - including Chief Neil O’Leary - had confirmed to Waterbury Observer Publisher John Murray the identities of Gleason and Sorensen as part of a love triangle with Billy Smolinski.

Gleason, a bus driver in Woodbridge, went public with a bizarre legal action. After tearing down handbills about a reward for finding Billy Smolinski, Gleason sued Jan Smolinski and Murray, accusing them of violating her privacy. Murray had published photos of Gleason in public.

Compounding the absurdity and outrageousness of this case, Woodbridge arrested Jan Smolinski and accused her of disorderly conduct for posting reward flyers about her missing son. The case was dismissed.

Sorensen had served on the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen and was considered a frontrunner for first selectman. He resigned last year, saying he needed to spend more time with his family.

Waterbury police have a tape of a threatening call Billy Smolinski made to Sorensen after he learned Gleason and Sorensen were an item.

The FOI Commission is scheduled to vote on Schwind’s finding during its meeting scheduled April 11 at 2 p.m. at 18-20 Trinity St., Hartford.

Schwind also found that the Waterbury Police Department properly withheld two documents which are signed statements of witnesses. She ruled those documents are exempt from mandatory disclosure.

A Life of Constant Anxiety

For Billy’s parents, Jan and Bill, and their daughter, Paula Bell, life has been marked by a sense of constant anxiety. They jump at every phone call. They live a life of suffering and diminished hope.

Our interview was interrupted by a call from another new friend in a missing person’s network. The caller reported progress in another state on legislation to help find missing adults.

Neither vandalism to the flyers about Bill Smolinski gone missing nor harassment by Woodbridge police can deter Jan Smolinski.

“I work on this every day now,” Jan Smolinski said. “I put up signs anywhere I can. When they get torn down, I go back and put it up again. We try to get them up higher on the poles so they won’t be as easy to tear down.

“I can’t give a good reason why anyone would tear them down.”

Despite their troubles, they still hold on to some faith in law enforcement.

“Now that the FBI is investigating,” Jan Smolinski said, “I have to hope they will find out something. They tell me they are actively investigating the case.”

BACKGROUND:

Associated Press Story 10-1-06

FBI steps in to help in case of missing man

Posted @ www.newsday.com and www.courant.com
October 1, 2006, 2:58 PM EDT

WATERBURY, Conn. (AP) _ The FBI has agreed to help Waterbury police in the case of a man who vanished more than two years ago.

Billy Smolinski was 31 years old when he disappeared in August 2004 after asking a neighbor to look after his dog while he took a three-day trip to look at a car. City police say their investigation has hit a dead end and hope federal authorities can help solve the mystery.

"We feel we did all we can do from the local perspective," Police Superintendent Neil O'Leary said. "The case was investigated as thoroughly as it could be."

Waterbury police asked for the FBI's help in August, requesting a joint local-federal investigation.

"It is our belief there is a likelihood of foul play involved in the disappearance of Mr. Smolinski," Deputy Police Chief James Nardozzi wrote in a letter to a Connecticut FBI official. "However in our quest to locate Mr. Smolinski we also believe we have exhausted all avenues of investigation available to us."

O'Leary said Saturday that police have never ruled out foul play in Smolinski's disappearance, but local authorities have never said definitively that it was a factor.

"One of the three things happened," O'Leary said. "He may have disappeared on his own accord and, hopefully, he is alive and well. There may have been foul play; someone may have harmed him and that's why he is missing. Or he may have disappeared and took his own life."

Members of Smolinski's family have been frustrated with the investigation, saying city police have ignored their concerns. They have also accused police of being negligent and careless in attempts to solve the case.

His family has repeatedly spoken to the FBI, put up posters of him and contacted a private investigator. The private investigator, Andy Thibault, asked for Waterbury police's file on the case under Freedom of Information laws.

The state's Freedom of Information Commission ruled last week that police must turn over the documents within a week. The commission will decide which papers can be released.

Smolinski's mother, Janice Smolinski, said she hopes the FBI can help locate her son. "Whether the FBI's participation will help remains to be seen," she said. "We've heard many promises that never came through."

Upside Down Investigation In Billy Smolinski Case

By JOHN MURRAY
Editor & Publisher
The Waterbury Observer
September 2006

In 13 years of publishing the Waterbury Observer we have written several in-depth pieces about the influence of politics and corruption inside the Waterbury Police Department, and in the process we gained insight into the inner workings down at police headquarters.

Those insights helped the Observer peek inside a virtual Pandora's Box of lunacy in the bizarre disappearance of Billy Smolinski, a 31-year-old Waterbury man who vanished August 24th, 2004. The Waterbury PD continues to publicly state that there is no foul play in the case, and deputy chief, Jimmy Egan, told the Observer back in March, that Billy was probably having a beer in Europe someplace, starting his life anew.

I began my attempts to reach the Waterbury police for comment on the Smolinski case by calling

department spokesperson, Chris Corbett. When he failed to return several phone calls, I contacted Police Chief Neil O'Leary, who I have known for the past 13 years.

O'Leary and I had a wide ranging discussion on the John Regan case, local politics and Billy Smolinski. O'Leary hooked me up with his second in command and asked Egan to share information about Billy Smolinski with the Observer.

During a one on one interview in his office Jimmy Egan was hesitant to share details about the case. He spent the first few minutes of the interview challenging the credibility of Billy's mother, Janice Smolinski, stating the family had gone to psychics and had come to him with a kooky story about a balloon that the family had released, and who had recovered it. Egan portrayed Billy as a mixed up kid who had climbed a ladder up to his ex-girlfriend's bedroom window at 4AM on the day he disappeared.

I just sat and listened.

But when I began asking Jimmy Egan detailed questions about the case his behavior changed dramatically. He was agitated and paced back and forth around his office. He confirmed several details that the Smolinski family had provided to the Observer, including the explosive fact that at the time of his disappearance Billy was involved in a love triangle, and had threatened his male rival hours before he vanished off the face of the earth.

Egan confirmed that the male rival was an elected official in Woodbridge and is involved in a long distance trucking company. Egan said the man had been brought in for questioning and had agreed to take a lie detector test, but later declined to do so. Apparently the man's sudden reversal about taking a lie detector test was of little interest to Waterbury detectives, because Egan said the man is not a suspect in the case.

When asked how he could eliminate the man as a suspect Egan told the Observer that the results of a lie detector test weren't admissible in court. Bizarrely, Egan seemed more concerned on keeping the politician's name out of the paper. He asked if I planned to publish the man's name, and when I said we might, Egan said, "We would ruin the guy's life."

As I walked out of police headquarters that day my head was spinning from the upside down interview with Deputy Chief Jimmy Egan. His priorities seemed backwards.

Why was he trying so hard to discredit the Smolinski family? Why was he so concerned about the well being of the Woodbridge politician? And why was the Waterbury Police Department so quick to eliminate this man as a suspect?

The Waterbury Police Department's stance on Billy's ex-girlfriend, Madeleine Gleason, the third part in the love triangle, is equally bizarre. One of her sons was a former grave digger who died of a drug overdose in Waterbury months after Billy disappeared. Another son was in prison for violently assaulting his step-father. And perhaps most shocking, Gleason tore down hundreds of Billy's missing person posters in the 18 months after he disappeared.

Gleason was brought into police headquarters for questioning, and like her Woodbridge lover, declined to take a lie detector test. If she has nothing to hide why has she refused to submit to a lie detector test? And if she has refused to take the lie detector test, why have the Waterbury Police Department eliminated her as a suspect?

In an odd twist to this upside down investigation, Janice Smolinski was arrested in Woodbridge by Woodbridge police officers on charges of harassing Madeleine Gleason. Every time Gleason ripped down one of Billy's posters, the Smolinski family would replace it. In the Woodbridge police arrest warrant it states clearly "That the Waterbury Police (ref cn# 04-26782) did look into Gleason as a suspect. That Gleason was advised by them that she could remove herself from being a suspect by taking a Polygraph Exam. That as of the writing of this affiants report on April 4, 2005 Gleason had not taken the exam."

What? The Waterbury police told the Woodbridge police that Madeleine would remain a suspect until she took a polygraph test, and yet she never took one, and now she is no longer a suspect.

How does that make sense?

And to further a world flipped upside, now Madeleine Gleason is suing Janice Smolinski, her daughter, Paula Bell, and The Waterbury Observer for invading her privacy, harassing her, publicly calling her a murderer and causing extreme emotional distress.

I have never heard the Smolinskis call Madeleine Gleason a murderer. They don't know exactly what happened to Billy, but they believe he is dead. They don't know if Madeleine Gleason or the Woodbridge politician had anything to do with Billy's disappearance, but they do know there are many unanswered questions lingering in and around Woodbridge.

Questions that should be asked by detectives in the Waterbury Police Department.

There are many strange twists and turns in this case, but at the minimum the story involves sex, violence and politics; and at the maximum it expands to murder, corruption and a massive cover-up scheme. Where the story goes from here I'm not sure, but the only chance at resolving this mystery lies in the hands of some investigative force outside the Waterbury police department, because they are not doing their job.

And because of the huge void in the investigation, the Smolinskis have turned to help wherever they can get it. There is a private investigator in Connecticut working on the case, and detectives in Canada and Florida have assisted the family. Two internet bloggers are on the case, Andy Thibault, from The Cool Justice Report, and Bill Dusty, from the New England Rogue Journal. Thibault, a former investigative reporter [and editor] at The Hartford Courant, former editor at The Register-Citizen in Torrington, and former columnist for the Connecticut Law Tribune, sent a freedom of information request to the Waterbury police department asking for materials related to the investigation.

His request was denied.

In addition to the bloggers the case has been reported in the Republican-American newspaper, Channel 3, Channel 8 and on Fox-61. The case also made a brief appearance on America's Most Wanted and the Smolinskis have fielded calls from producers at the Montel William's Show.

Janice Smolinski has made internet contact with coroners in Nevada and Florida who have helped educate her about DNA testing and the importance of getting DNA in CODIS, a local, state and national data base. When questioned about CODIS the detectives assigned to Billy's case had no idea what it was, and even more disturbing, the police department has mishandled, or lost, three DNA samples provided by the Smolinski family.

Two years after his disappearance Billy's DNA has still not made it into the CODIS network, although new DNA samples taken from the Smolinskis in the Spring are, according to the Waterbury PD, in the pipeline (there is a back log).

Outraged at the lack of DNA knowledge inside the Waterbury Police Department, Janice Smolinski is seeking legislative help in Hartford. Her state representative in Cheshire has agreed to sponsor a bill in the next legislative session that could help rectify the situation. The bill would address several issues including; educating local and state police on DNA, collecting DNA in missing person cases and entering the information into CODIS, require police to conduct a full search within 24-48 hours after a report of a missing person and involve state police search dogs and helicopters with heat seeking equipment, take DNA samples from every soldier before they head off into a war zone, establish a better communication system between medical examiners, coroners and law enforcement officers, and to seek state and federal funding to break the log jam that backs up DNA samples from getting quickly posted into CODIS.

Janice Smolinski may never see her son Billy again, but she is determined to find out what happened to him, and in the process try and change the system so no family has to endure the horror they have faced these past two years.

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