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THE WOODBRIDGE CONNECTION: The trail of a missing Waterbury man

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The mystery surrounding the disappearance of Billy Smolinski, a Waterbury man missing since August 2004, has received intense scrutiny recently. Presently, the state legislature, prompted by the story of Smolinski's disappearance, is considering a bill to improve methods for handling missing adult cases. In addition, on April 11, the Waterbury Police Department, under orders of the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission, released its records concerning the investigation of Smolinski's disappearance to the public.

In those records, Madeline Gleason and Christian Sorensen, both Woodbridge residents, are mentioned in connection with the investigation.

According to the police records, as of August 2004, Smolinski had been involved in a yearlong relationship with Gleason, a Woodbridge school bus driver for B&B Transportation. During that same period of time, Gleason had also been involved with Sorensen, another Woodbridge school bus driver and a former member of the Board of Selectmen. According to the police reports, Gleason said that Smolinski broke off the relationship during the week preceding his disappearance when he learned about Gleason's relationship with Sorensen.

Gleason last saw Smolinski on Aug. 24 2004, the day he disappeared. On that same day, Sorensen's phone records revealed three calls from Smolinski. According to the police reports, Smolinski left a threatening message on the answering machine, saying, "Chris you better watch your back."

Sorensen, who was interviewed by the Waterbury police, admitted having a relationship with Gleason. Sorensen maintained, however, that he had no personal interaction with Smolinski. Initially, Sorensen denied any trouble with Smolinski, but he subsequently told police that Smolinski was responsible for breaking windows on Sorensen's bus several months earlier.

Almost immediately following Smolinski's disappearance, the Smolinski family began hanging missing person posters of Billy Smolinski in Woodbridge, as well as other surrounding towns. Those posters were torn down repeatedly. Although Gleason denied tearing down posters in a Waterbury police report dated Aug. 5, 2005, Gleason admitted to tearing down the posters in a Woodbridge police report dated Nov. 22 2004. That report states that Gleason said, "... she will continue to tear them down if she sees them posted."

After months of this poster battle, the Woodbridge police arrested Janice Smolinski, the mother of the missing man, for criminal trespass. According to the Woodbridge Police Department spokesman, Sgt. Frank Cappiello, the warrant was an attempt to quiet things down. "We were trying to defuse the situation," he said.

Those charges were subsequently dismissed at trial. However, Janice Smolinski and her daughter, Paula Bell, are facing litigation filed by Gleason and her employer, B&B Transportation. The suit claims that the Smolinskis harassed the plaintiffs. The suit was filed in August 2006, but the Smolinskis have continued to hang missing person posters. And those posters continue to be torn down.

During the investigation by the Waterbury police, Gleason also told the police that one of Sorensen's friends, whom she refused to identify, had received a call on or about Aug. 29, 2004, from a Hartford payphone. According to Gleason's report, the caller said, "Tell Chris to watch his back."

In that same report, Gleason said that she had received a number of hang-up calls from Rhode Island, but she had not saved the phone numbers on her caller ID. Gleason did tell the police that Smolinski "was an outdoorsman and loved to hike in the woods, and he knew how to survive in the woods."

The released police records all revealed that an Oxford man contacted "Crime Stoppers" in June 2006 in response to a segment aired about Billy Smolinski. The Waterbury police subsequently interviewed the individual, who preferred to remain unnamed. According to the police report, this individual said that in October 2004 he was told by a close friend of Shaun Karpiuk, Gleason's son who died in February 2005, that Karpiuk choked Smolinski to death at Gleason's apartment. The body was buried at a construction site in Shelton; the grave site was covered with concrete the following day. "I basically believe that that's what happened. That's why I went to the police," the man said, who had once been an employer of Karpiuk.

Although the Waterbury police drove by the area, no further action was taken, according to the police records.

The investigation was taken over by the FBI in August 2006. The FBI had no comment about the ongoing investigation when contacted on April 13. When asked about the above information concerning Karpiuk, however, a spokeswoman for the FBI, MaryBeth Miklof, said, "We're still receiving information from the Waterbury Police Department."

Despite efforts to contact Gleason and Sorensen, neither of those individuals chose to respond.

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