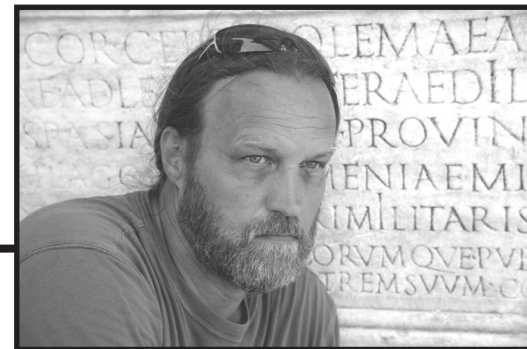


# OBSERVATIONS

## Upside Down Investigation In Billy Smolinski Case

Column By John Murray



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 24<sup>th</sup>, 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 politicians 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 stepfather. 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 at The Hartford Courant, former managing 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.