



Three years after Billy Smolinski Jr. disappeared from his life, his friends and family gathered together on the Green in downtown Naugatuck to draw attention to the bizarre circumstances surrounding the case.



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### [Vigil For Billy](#) **09/01/2007**

Hundreds of people throughout the Northeast gathered on the Naugatuck Green Sunday night, August 26th, to conduct a candlelight vigil for Billy Smolinski, who disappeared three years ago from his home in Waterbury. Friends and family remembered Billy, clergy offered prayer, private investigator Mike Ward spoke about the need for better police training, and Observer publisher, John Murray, gave the following remarks.....

Three years ago Billy Smolinski vanished from his life. For the first 18 months, like many people in greater Waterbury, I followed the story by reading accounts of his disappearance in the local daily newspaper. The articles informed us that Billy had gone north to look for a car and had asked his neighbor to watch his dog for a few days.

But there were strange circumstances. Billy had left his wallet and keys tucked beneath the driver's seat of his truck, and his family said Billy didn't need another car.

The explanation for his alleged trip up north didn't make sense. Who goes car shopping without their wallet? And how did Billy get up north, because his truck was left behind at the bottom of his driveway, parked mysteriously in a spot Billy never parked in.

There were lots of questions, and no answers.

Months passed and I saw missing person posters of Billy all over Waterbury, and like many other people, wondered what had happened to him. Why hadn't he come back home?

Eight months after Billy vanished I read reports in the local media that Billy's mom, Janice Smolinski, had been arrested in Woodbridge and charged with harassing Billy's ex-girlfriend, Madeleine Gleason.

Odd, I thought, Janice Smolinski must have snapped while searching for her missing son.

On the first anniversary of his disappearance the Republican-American newspaper published the first in-depth article about the case and it covered lots of familiar territory the trip up north and

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Janice's arrest. The story still seemed odd. How could his family know that Billy wasn't off on an extended walkabout?

Six months later I received an e-mail from a friend of Billy's, Dawn Breen, asking if I would consider writing a story on Billy's disappearance. I met with Dawn and she provided the kick in the behind I needed to get involved.

I called Janice and Bill Smolinski and requested an interview. The story they told was shocking.

They didn't think Billy was missing, they believed Billy had been murdered. There were stunning revelations about a love triangle involving Billy, Madeleine Gleason, and Chris Sorenson, an elected official in Woodbridge. On the day he disappeared Billy called his male rival and threatened him, it is believed to be the last phone call Billy Smolinski ever made.

After conducting several days of interviews with the Smolinski family, and the Waterbury Police Department, the Observer published a 7000 word story called Gone in March 2006. We named Madeleine Gleason, ran a photograph of her in the Observer and aired out explosive details in the case.

The Smolinskis implored the Waterbury Police Department to probe deeper into the love triangle, but neither Madeleine Gleason nor Chris Sorenson was ever given a lie detector test.

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

At the time of Billy's disappearance, Madeleine Gleason's son Shaun Karpiuk, was a construction worker with Top Gun Landscaping and had previously worked as a grave digger in Seymour. Shaun died of a drug overdose in Waterbury three months after Billy disappeared.

And Chris Sorenson, the other part of the love triangle, worked for a long distance trucking company in Woodbridge.

I wrote at the time- there are enough red flags fluttering around the case to start a flag store.

Three months after the Observer story was published Madeleine Gleason sued the Observer, Janice Smolinski, and Paula Bell for harassment and invasion of privacy. The suit was brought by high powered New Haven attorney John Williams.

The lawsuit was a feeble attempt to stop the Observer from printing the truth, and to strap both the Smolinskis and the Waterbury Observer with financial hardship.

Neither the Smolinski family or the Waterbury Observer will back down from their effort to find out

what happened to Billy Smolinski. Unanswered questions hang in the air.

When you place the facts out in the open we have an explosive love triangle, a threatening phone call, a mysterious disappearance, a politician, a grave digger and a long distance trucking company.

When I confronted the chief detective from the Waterbury Police Department with these facts he told me that Billy was probably having a beer somewhere in Europe, and that he suspected no foul play.

From the very beginning Bill and Janice Smolinski had difficulty getting the Waterbury Police Department to take Billy's disappearance seriously. Problem #1 was that Billy was a physically fit 31 year old male who appeared capable of fending for himself. Problem #2 was that Billy's neighbor had told police that Billy had headed north for a few days to check out a car. That comment threw everybody off the trail.

The Smolinskis are a close family and Billy lived with his parents into his late 20s. Bill and Janice Smolinski immediately recognized something was wrong, but were unable to get the Waterbury Police Department to share their concern. Law enforcement officers across the country go into a heightened state of alert if a child goes missing. The media snaps to attention when children, or attractive young women disappear, but when a vigorous 31 year old man goes missing, nobody cares.

Except his family.

The Smolinskis organized city-wide searches, brought in dogs, hired private investigators and hung thousands of missing person posters around Connecticut. But they couldn't capture the attention of the Waterbury Police Department, who told the family that Billy would come home when he was ready. The police noted that Billy had been wrestling with issues in his personal life at the time of his disappearance romance problems and the loss of a job and speculated he had either fled town, or committed suicide.

The Smolinskis didn't buy it.

With no assistance coming from the Waterbury police, the Smolinskis began investigating clues themselves. Their search led them into Woodbridge, where they found someone had been defacing and removing Billy's missing person flyers. With the help of other family members the Smolinskis set up surveillance shifts to see if they could catch the culprit. The answer stunned them it was Madeleine Gleason, Billy's ex-girlfriend. The Smolinskis videotaped Gleason ripping down posters and brought the film to the Waterbury police, who, according to the Smolinskis, were disinterested.

Meanwhile the Smolinski family had been badgering the FBI to get involved in the case because they had lost confidence in the Waterbury PD. The Waterbury investigators had lost or misplaced three DNA samples from the Smolinskis and had been unable to properly file a missing person report with the National Crime Information Center.

In July 2006 the FBI collected DNA samples from Janice Smolinski and began the process of uploading the information into CODIS, the national DNA data bank run by the FBI. In August 2006 the FBI stepped in and took over the investigation into Billy's disappearance.

In early May it seemed that the FBI's investigation was about to pay dividends. Acting on a tip called into Crime Stoppers that stated who killed Billy and where he was buried, the FBI, in conjunction with the Connecticut State Police and the Waterbury Police Department, dug several holes around Shelton in an effort to uncover Billy's body.

After an unsuccessful day of excavation a police spokesperson said the search would renew in the morning, but what ensued is four months of silence. Law enforcement officers believe they know what might have happened to Billy Smolinski three years ago, but they have no proof. The case is still defined by unanswered questions.

But for the past three years while the Waterbury police and the FBI slogged away at their own investigations, Janice utilized the internet to try and find her son. She couldn't get anyone to listen to her in Connecticut, but she began to find information on the internet from Las Vegas, from Florida, and from other families who were looking for their loved ones.

What Janice found shocked her. She hadn't realized the scope of the problem. She spent months learning about DNA and the local, state and national DNA data banks. The more she learned the more problems she encountered. Janice was peeking into Pandora's Box, and inside the box was a tangled mess of training, funding and computer nightmares.

Here is what she found...

There are 110,000 active missing person cases in the United States, and there are currently 700 Connecticut residents on that list.

There is no one data base that lists all the missing in Connecticut or the United States. There are several different systems and the computers can't communicate with each other. Billy Smolinski is listed in the FBI's missing person files, but the Connecticut State Police have no mention of him in theirs.

Police response to a missing person report varies wildly from town to town, and from state to state. There is no uniform response for police officers to handle missing person cases in the United States, and as a result precious time and evidence is often squandered. Most communities have an immediate response to the report of a missing child - the Amber Alert - but missing adult cases are not handled with the same intensity and purpose.

\ Medical examiners and coroners have 40,000 unidentified human remains in their possession. Bill Hagmaier, a national expert on the issue of unidentified and the missing has publicly stated many of the missing are victims of homicide and are being stored as unidentified dead by coroners across the country.

The way to solve a substantial amount of these cases is to cross reference the unidentified dead with DNA samples from the missing. For this to happen police have to collect and process DNA samples from the family of the missing, and medical examiners must collect and upload DNA samples from the unidentified dead. This is not happening.

Despite major scientific breakthroughs in the use of DNA as an investigative tool, the information and training has not trickled down to local law enforcement agencies. As a result local police are often unaware of the proper way to collect DNA samples, and even if they do collect it, they don't know how to process it. Despite all the television dramas, we don't live in a CSI society. Training has not caught up to science.

While the FBI launched its own investigation into Billy's disappearance, Janice Smolinski went to work to try and change the laws in Connecticut concerning how local and state police respond to the report of a missing person. She testified before two legislative committees in Hartford and is the driving force behind Bill #5273 that was signed into law this June.

Her initial bill was based off model legislation created by the Department of Justice and mandated a uniform response from law enforcement officers in Connecticut when responding to a report of a missing person. The 14 page document detailed information an officer must collect and process, and gave an exact time line for filing reports with the Connecticut State Police and FBI.

But somehow just before the bill left the House of Representatives the 14 page document was condensed to one page and all the details were replaced with vague generalities. The bill had suddenly taken a hard detour into the hands of the Connecticut Police Officers Standards and Training Council, who were given until January 1st, 2008 to come back to the table with their own proposal, or the model legislation introduced by Janice would go into effect.

On August 9th Janice had a productive meeting with the executive director of the council, Thomas Flaherty, who agreed changes are needed, but is reluctant to mandate the changes.

That's insane.

New procedures in how Connecticut police handle missing person cases has to be mandated. The Governor has signed this into law. The police in Connecticut have to enforce the law, especially when the laws apply directly to them. Laws are not voluntary. Police should follow the law or be punished.

Pressure may have to be applied to the state legislature to ensure that our politicians and police to the right thing for the safety of all Connecticut residents.

This story started with the disappearance of Billy Smolinski, but it has expanded into a crusade by his mother to change the laws about the missing.

Janice is in the final stretch of inacting change in Connecticut, but she isn't stopping there. She has lobbied Connecticut's congressional delegation to introduce a bill into Congress that would create a law across America mandating how all law enforcement officers in the United States

respond to a report of a missing person.

Janice has talked with Congressman Chris Murphy's office and has been corresponding with Senator Joe Lieberman's staff on how to move this initiative forward. Waterbury police chief Neil O'Leary has also been very helpful with writing letters of support to the state legislature and to Senator Lieberman's office. Chief O'Leary has said his department botched the case and its time that police officers receive mandated training on DNA and how to respond to the missing. That's progress.

The number one priority for Janice and Bill Smolinski is to find out what happened to Billy and bring him home. But this isn't just about Billy anymore, it's about a grieving family who encountered a broken system and is trying to fix it. Their efforts give new meaning to the words Homeland Security. My first impression of Janice Smolinski was from a news report after she was arrested. I thought she might be a bit touched. Now, two years later, I can emphatically tell you that she is one of the most amazing people I have ever encountered in my life. If she's touched, she's touched by an angel. She is driven by a belief that all things happen for reason, and she is intent on finding a meaning in the madness that surrounds her.

Although Bill Smolinski isn't as outspoken as his wife, it is his quiet strength, and total support of her work that sustains her in these troubling times. They make an amazing team, but in order to tackle state and national issues they need you to join their team.

In the weeks ahead it is important to contact your state representatives and implore them to mandate the new policies about the missing. It is also important to contact your congressman and senators to urge them to seek a federal solution to this disgraceful national crisis.

While much of Washington D.C. remains focused on fighting terrorism abroad, we face terror from within. There are 110,000 brothers and sisters missing, and 40,000 unidentified dead Americans stored in morgues.

Its time we gave a voice to this silent crisis.

Its time for all of us to join with Janice and Bill Smolinski and demand a change.

It's the least we can do for Billy.

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