

Billy Smolinski Jr. went missing 20 years ago: where does the case stand now?

Hannah Ferrara | Contributing Writer | April 17th, 2024



Billy Smolinski Jr. was just 31 years old when he disappeared from his residence on the 100th block of Holly St. in Waterbury, Connecticut on August 24th, 2004. He has never been seen again.

As a New Haven resident, this case baffled me and I needed to find out what was being done by the Waterbury Police Department over the last ten years, as the

case became cold. What this meant to me, was getting raw information straight from the people affected the most: the victim's family.

Before we get into the updates on the case over the last ten years, let's talk about some of the details. The day of August 24th is a hard one to follow, but I will break it down as simple as I can according to police reports.

Billy Smolinski Jr.'s, just recent ex-girlfriend, Madeline Gleason reports that the last time she saw Smolinski Jr. was early August 24th, 2004, in Ansonia, when he was on a ladder outside her bedroom window. Gleason reports that she let him into her home, and Smolinski Jr. then asked to get back together and move in with him. Gleason proceeds to respond with "no," to which Smolinski Jr. asks if she would see him again, to which she responds and said she needs time to think. He then left her home, and that was the last interaction they ever had.

After Smolinski Jr. was reported missing on August 27th, 2004, Detectives Steve Pedbereznak and Cizauskas did a search warrant for his home phone. There they found a phone number that was listed 3 consecutive times on August 24th, 2004. The calls were made at 11:44 am, 11:44 am again, and 11:58 am. These three calls are the last made from Smolinski Jr.'s phone before he disappeared. The Detectives did a search on this phone number, and it came back as Chris Sorenson. After contact was made with Sorenson, detectives questioned him about the calls. Sorenson claimed that he did not receive any calls that he knew were specifically from Smolinski Jr., but he did receive a few anonymous and threatening messages that stated, "Chris you better watch your back at all times." Sorenson was unsure of who these messages were from, so detectives asked him to bring in his answering machine to find out. Detectives then got a hold of the messages, and brought in the sister of Smolinski Jr., Paula Bell, to identify the caller. She did end up identifying the caller as her brother, Smolinski Jr.

The last known interaction with Smolinski Jr. before he disappeared was with a neighbor of his, Laroi Henley. Henley gave a statement to the Waterbury Police Department of his own free will pertaining to Smolinski Jr.'s last known actions. Henley reports that he and Smolinski Jr. had a conversation about Madeline Gleason and the status of their relationship. Smolinski Jr. explains that he had just

gone on a trip with Gleason to Florida and found out she was cheating on him, because of the strange calls she was receiving on her phone. Smolinski Jr. explains that he was really upset with Madeline, and how he spoke to her earlier that morning after using a ladder to gain access to her window.

After their conversation ended, Smolinski Jr. then asked Henley to watch his dog because he was going up north for a few days. Smolinski Jr. then gave him the phone number of a friend named Mary Ellen Noble in case there were any problems with the dog. The very last time Smolinski Jr. was seen was later that evening, around 5 pm when he approached Henley once again and repeated to call Mary if there were any problems with the dog. Wednesday that same week, Henley went to Smolinski Jr.'s residence and checked under the porch mat for the key that they would usually exchange, but it wasn't there. Henley reported that he had watched Smolinski Jr.'s dog before, and that was the routine. He then called Mary and told her to check on the dog.

August 27th, 2004, is when the Smolinski family decided to report Billy missing. He had never been out of contact with them for more than 2 days, and he was always transparent about his travels; so this long of an absence was concerning.

The next day, August 28th, police investigated Smolinski Jr.'s home. They found no signs of foul play, but Billy's dog being left behind was extremely out of character. His truck was found parked at the end of the driveway, almost as if it was blocking it. His keys and wallet were both recovered from underneath the driver's seat. Several days later, in the middle of the night, Billy's truck was broken into and sifted through. Waterbury Police failed to fingerprint his truck in time, something that should have been a priority.

Frustrated with how police were slowly handling the disappearance of their loving brother and son, Billy's family took matters into their own hands.

"We hired multiple private investigators, set up our own tip line, and put up billboards over I-84," says Jan Smolinski when I had the chance to speak to her

recently. “Tips going to the Waterbury Police Department just weren’t going anywhere.”

The first search began when volunteers searched every inch of the Naugatuck River from Watertown to Naugatuck. Billy’s sister, Paula contacted Disaster and Wilderness Ground Searcher Inc., an all-volunteer search and rescue team, for help.

According to the June 2012 arrest warrant affidavit, the “real” searches began when a man named Chad Hanson reached out to investigators and told them that Smolinski Jr. had been murdered, and he knew where the body was. He then claimed that a man named Shaun Karpiuk had beaten Billy to death and Hanson helped him bury the remains, which were inside of a carpet and covered with lime.

Shuan Karpiuk is the late son of Madeleine Gleason, who we know as Billy's former girlfriend. Shuan Karpiuk died of an overdose in January of 2005.

“With pressure, you get results. With pressure, we got the police to finally act on searches and digs that they weren’t before.” Mrs. Smolinski stressed.

The first of three searches that Chad Hanson led detectives and the victim's family on, was in a residential driveway in Shelton, Connecticut in May of 2007. Shaun allegedly did construction at this residence at the same time that Smolinski Jr. went missing. Federal and state police conducted an excavation under the driveway of a private home. This search resulted in no further evidence or any remains.

On August 11th, 2008, due to information given by Hanson, the second search and big dig took place on a private property located at 160 Bungay Road. This search sadly also yielded no useful evidence of Billy’s whereabouts.

The last search that Hanson led detectives on was located at the intersection of Woodruff Hill Road and Prokop Road in Oxford, Connecticut, from October 7th, 2011 to October 17th, 2011. Department of Environmental Protection Officials, Western District Major Crime Squad Detectives, and State Police K-9s acted on the information provided by Hanson. As a result, they cleared all of the lot

of brush and trees, and the tree line itself was pushed back and excavated. The excavation sadly resulted in no items of evidentiary value once again.

According to Chad Hanson's arrest affidavit, Hanson admitted to lying on several occasions to various agencies over the years causing unrepairable emotional and physical damage to the case and victim's family. Hanson was arrested for providing multiple false tips to police about the location of Billy's body. Hanson's tips spanned over multiple years of work, led police to three separate locations all over Connecticut, and cost over \$100,000 in resources to investigate. When brought to court, Hanson pleads guilty and is sentenced to four and a half years in prison, as well as being forced to reimburse the state for the money they spent on his false tips.

"He is now a free man who walks the streets to this day." Mrs. Smolinski states. "He refused to see me in jail, and we have never heard from him personally."

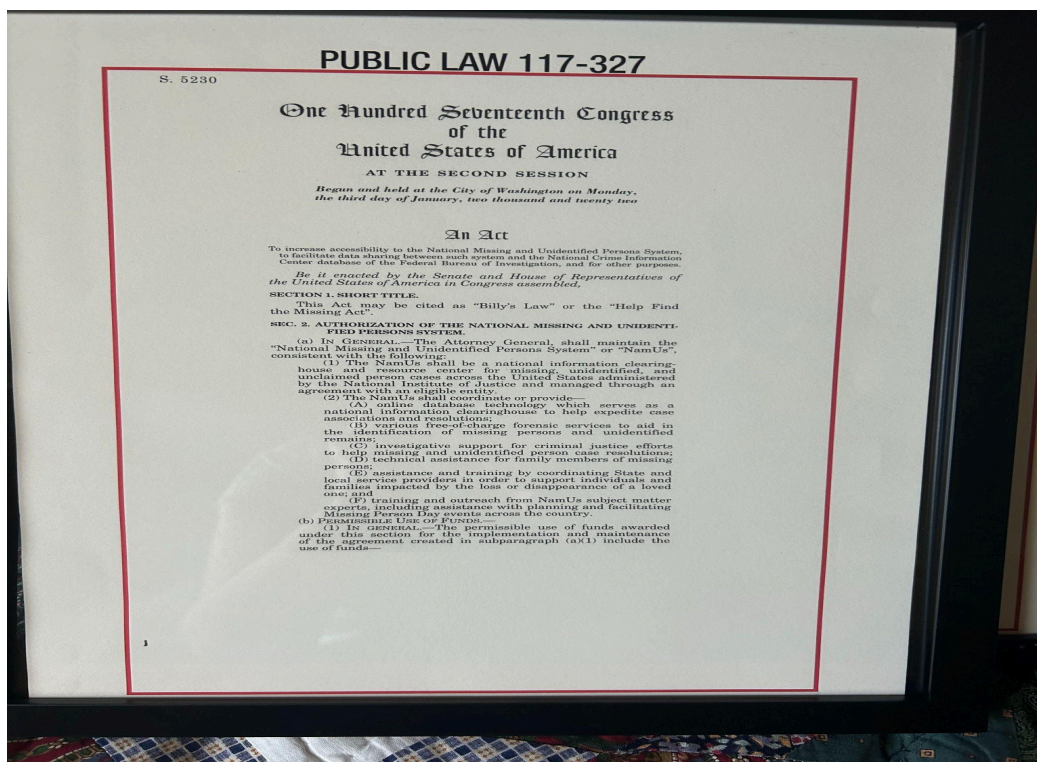
All of this searching, digging, and hoping for some sort of sign just to bring closure to this family; and nothing comes from it. Knowing all of this information left me needing to speak to Jan Smolinski, and see how she has been doing over the last ten or so years following the latest big dig.

When asked what updates she has received or if she has spoken to any police recently, Mrs. Smolinski stated, "On April 12th we actually spoke to the Waterbury Police Department and found out that the lead detective on the case had retired. Of course, we then asked who was now looking after the case; and they couldn't give us a solid answer. They just loosely explained that they are looking into crime specialists to join the case. Oftentimes, you get off the phone with the police feeling a little bit of encouragement, but as time goes by, nothing ever happens."

Not receiving a solid answer, or receiving empty promises seems to be a pattern in this case amongst the Waterbury Police Department from the very beginning. Mrs. Smolinski even told me, "The FBI told us that if the case was handled correctly 20 years ago, we would have gotten solid answers to what happened to Billy within two weeks."

Losing a child is an unfathomable experience that only a group of people understand and cope with. While speaking to Mrs. Smolinski and hearing the frustration and desperation in her voice, she said to me, “We always wondered why, but everything happens for a reason. After going through everything and learning about all the disconnects in the system, we ended up developing and pushing for Billy’s Law.” As I expressed my admiration for the work the Smolinski’s have done throughout the last two decades, I was reminded what good can come from such a hard situation.

“Billy’s Law” aims to make a difference for families of the missing all across America. It continues to do this by closing gaps in America’s missing person systems. It now requires the DOJ to set best practice guidelines, provide training for law enforcement, and connect databases for the missing. Joined by the infamous Petito family, the Smolinkis were able to guide this bill to be passed through the Senate and The House to create a database that would be available for all families of missing persons: NamUs.gov.



Billy’s Law hung up in Mrs. Smolinski’s household. Received from Mrs. Smolinski.

“We still have faith that one day, we will get our answer.” Mrs. Smolinski says to me as I am saying my thanks, and we are ending our conversation. After speaking with such a determined woman, and learning about the efforts she has made to conduct updates in this case; I have no doubt that one day, Billy Smolinski Jr. will be found and closure will come for this family.