

# The Progress-Index

NEWS

## Norfolk handwriting experts point finger at Jon-Benet's mother

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NORFOLK – Handwriting expert Cina Wong brimmed with excitement the day big-shot lawyer Darnay Hoffman called her up.

And why not? Hoffman wanted Wong for what's been called the highest-profile child murder case since 1932. He wanted her to compare the ransom note from the Jon-Benet Ramsey case to handwriting samples reportedly from the 6-year-old beauty queen's mother.

“At the time, I hadn't seen a copy of the ransom note yet,” says Wong, a board-certified document examiner with Norfolk's David Liebman & Associates. “So I wanted to see it for myself, as anyone in my line of work would. ... I was really excited.”

Of course, that's nothing compared to how she felt after examining the writing samples.

“I was really shocked,” Wong says. “I mean, I was floored.”

“There were over 51 similarities and that's a heck of a lot of similarities. You can't ignore it.”

Just like that, two of Norfolk's top handwriting experts were involved in the most infamous child murder case since Charles Lindbergh's 2-year-old son was kidnapped and killed.

JonBenet Ramsey's body was found Dec. 26, 1996, in the basement of the family's home in Boulder, Colo. The reigning Little Miss Colorado had been strangled with a nylon cord and sexually assaulted, according to newspaper accounts. Her skull was fractured.

Her mother, Patsy Ramsey, had telephoned police hours earlier to report that JonBenet was missing and there was a ransom note.

The parents have repeatedly denied any part in their daughter's murder. And although investigators aren't ruling out Patsy Ramsey, they haven't named any suspects yet.

This didn't sit well with Hoffman, a New York City attorney most famous for defending subway gunman Bernard Goetz in 1996.

In a surprise move this November, Hoffman filed a lawsuit to make the Boulder district attorney file charges against Patsy Ramsey or appoint a special investigator. The lawsuit was based largely on evidence from Wong and David Liebman's handwriting analysis.

"You have a really powerful case of circumstantial evidence here," Hoffman says. "I took this information (on the writing analysis) to the Boulder District Attorney's office, but they weren't interested in talking about it or about doing anything about it."

In response to Hoffman's subsequent lawsuit, DA Alexander Hunter counter-filed to dismiss the suit. He called Hoffman's claims "premature and not ripe" since the case is still under investigation, according to newspaper accounts.

Although a judge eventually ruled against Hoffman Jan. 20, the lawyer plans to continue being a thorn in the DA's side. If the case goes before a grand jury,

he hopes to testify about the handwriting analysis – along with Liebman and Wong.

Hoffman learned of the hand-writing experts' reputation through word-of-mouth, and he contacted Wong in late October.

Wong, 35, is listed as the youngest person ever certified by the National Association of Document Examiners, which certifies handwriting experts to testify in court.

Liebman's credentials include years of ongoing NADE training and a master's of science degree in biology education (with a minor in psychology) from Old Dominion University. He's also the president of the NADE.

“David's a recognized leader in his field,” Hoffman says, “and Cina is the closest thing to a rising star that this business has.”

David Liebman & Associates handles a variety of cases, mostly from people and companies seeking answers. Are these insurance documents forged? Is Dad's will the real thing? Who wrote those insults on the bathroom wall? Did this doctor sign his name to a fatal dosage of prescribed drugs?

To discover the truth, Wong and Liebman use dozens of tricks from the high-tech to the common sense. They compare the writing styles in the documents, the way the letters are shaped and other details. They look at how paper is folded and stapled, and at the paper's age.

Ultraviolet and infrared light can reveal other details, such as words that have been erased or covered over.

Those techniques showed 30 “points of similarity” between the JonBenet Ramsey ransom note and her mother's handwriting samples (which includes a letter and several greeting cards), Wong says.

A second examination by Liebman revealed more than 51 similarities.

The similarities are most obvious on the third page of the ransom note where the jerky handwriting loosens up and becomes less forced.

In both the note and the Ramsey writing samples, many of the letter shapes are formed the same way, with the same spacing between words. The writer has a tendency to pull toward the left margin.

Also he or she likes to use exclamation marks, slang words like “outsmarted” and “fat cat,” and pretentious phrases like “and hence.”

“The more I looked, the more I saw connecting Patsy Ramsey to the ransom note,” Liebman says. “It proved without a doubt that she actually wrote it. It doesn’t mean that she committed the crime, but she wrote the note, so she did know something.”

Liebman and Wong aren’t sure what’s next for them. They’re disappointed that Hoffman’s lawsuit was dismissed, but they hope to tell their findings to a grand jury later this year.

“I kind of expected it to be dismissed,” Wong admits. “People say ‘How long can they drag this out for?’, and I guess the answer is as long as they can.

“What Mr. Hoffman is doing is prodding and pushing the case along a bit. That’s kind of a good thing.”

A grand jury hearing could be months away, but Wong and Liebman are staying plenty busy in the meantime. In addition to their other cases, they’ve been fielding interviews with national and local television, radio and newspaper reporters.

“We just want justice,” Wong says, “and we want something solved in this case. ... The public opinion is that this thing’s been going on for too long. People want this case to be resolved.”