



NEWS

# No Closure in Boulder

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One year ago, 6-year-old JonBenet Ramsey was found killed in her home. Today, the case remains as baffling and disturbing as it ever was.

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BOULDER, Colo. – One year later, gawkers still drive by the faux Tudor mansion where JonBenet Ramsey died.

Her family moved months ago, and the \$1.2 million home is for sale. But the tourists keep coming, mesmerized by the mystery of who killed the 6-year-old beauty queen.

“People will go up and pretend to knock on the door, and look over their shoulder at the camera,” says Patricia Nelson Limerick, a University of Colorado history professor who lives across the street. “It’s as if they’re having an outing to an amusement park.”

The case has taken everyone connected with it on a roller coaster ride.

“Either this was the most horrific crime, committed by parents on their own flesh and blood, or the Ramsey’s have been totally victimized by the events of last Christmas,” says Craig Silverman, a former Denver prosecutor.

Last week came the first new scrap of information in months: The Ramsey family confirmed that a “stun gun” was somehow involved in the murder of

the girl. Police have been asking neighbors whether they own one of the high-voltage devices, used to immobilize a person. The Ramsey's never had such a weapon, spokesmen have said.

Neighbor Margaret Dillon says she was "flabbergasted" to be asked a year later about a stun gun. "If it's critical to the case, why wasn't it mentioned before?"

Police wouldn't comment on that or whether JonBenet's autopsy showed evidence of a stun-gun attack.

The investigation has had its moments of drama. In February, Boulder District Attorney Alex Hunter glared into the TV camera. Addressing the unknown killer, he vowed: "We're going to solve this case. We will see that justice is served, and that you will pay for what you've done to this beautiful little girl."

Many doubt it. Others predict a grand jury will convene early next year. If only to put the matter to rest by either indicting someone or shelving the case for lack of evidence.

JonBenet Ramsey, named after her father John Bennett Ramsey, was the reigning Little Miss Colorado when she was found beaten and strangled the morning after Christmas 1996.

Her mother, Patsy Ramsey, had phoned 911 at 5:52a.m. to report that her daughter was gone and that she had found a 3-page ransom note.

Investigating the case as a kidnapping, police didn't search the home thoroughly, waiting instead for a kidnapper to call. At about 1 p.m. a detective suggested to John Ramsey that he look the house over once again. Minutes later, Ramsey and a friend turned on the light in a little-used basement room and found JonBenet's body on the concrete floor. She was gagged with duct tape, and crude nylon garrote circled her neck, tightened with a broken wooden paintbrush.

Ripping the tape from her mouth, Ramsey gather her up and took her upstairs, potentially contaminating evidence at the murder scene and perhaps on her body.

Since then, critics have attacked Boulder police for botching the earliest, most critical period of the investigation.

Within hours of discovering her body, the Ramsey's had hired lawyers. Within a week they hired a private investigator and a public relations expert. The family offered a \$100,000 reward and even ran Sunday advertisements in Colorado newspapers seeking tips.

Boulder Police Chief Tom Koby, who has acknowledged mistakes in the investigation, is stepping down next year.

“It is accurate to say that if we had it to do all over again, we would do it differently,” he says. “What was in front of us was a kidnapping. We pursued that until we understood that we had something different.”

The investigation has been exhaustive and exhausting. Police have compiled more than 18,000 pages of files. They traveled to Atlanta, where the family had lived until 1991, to interview relatives and friends the week after the murder.

And they took five samples of Patsy Ramsey's handwriting to compare with the ransom note, whose demands for \$118,000 was about the size of the bonus John Ramsey had received as president of Access Graphics, a \$1 billion Boulder computer company.

The Colorado Bureau of Investigation reported that the handwriting tests were “inconclusive.” But New York lawyer Darnay Hoffman, who sued to force a prosecution in the case, says an analysis by handwriting expert Cina Wong shows a high probability the handwriting was Patsy Ramsey's.

This month, lead investigator Cmdr. Mark Beckner, who took over the investigation this fall, said his team was working through a checklist of more than 70 items. The list includes re-interviewing significant witnesses to re-testing some items of evidence.

Throughout the investigation, police have said they have no official suspects. But Beckner said at the news conference Dec. 5 that the Ramsey's remain under “an umbrella of suspicion.”

He also said his team has asked to re-interview the Ramsey's and JonBenet's brother, Burke, 10, the only other person in the house the night of the murder. But one of the Ramsey's legal representatives said last week that the family won't take up the issue of more interviews until after the new year.

- Contributing: Steve Marshall in Washington