

Who Killed JonBenét: An Analysis of a Flawed Investigation and Main Suspects

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Sarah Behm

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Kerri Pickel

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

April 2015

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2015

Abstract

JonBenét Patricia Ramsey was a six year old rising star in the beauty pageant world when she was found brutally murdered in the basement of her home in Boulder, Colorado on December 26, 1996. Nineteen years later, the crime remains unsolved and no convictions have ever been made in the case. This could mainly be attributed to the fact that the Boulder Police Department was extremely inexperienced when it came to homicides, so they did not follow through with typical crime scene procedure when they responded to the 911 call. Also, they did not accept help from more experienced agencies, such as the Denver Police Department, available nearby. This paper reviews and analyzes the procedural mistakes made by the Boulder Police Department in Boulder, Colorado throughout the course of the kidnapping and subsequent murder investigation. These mistakes are specified and interpreted as to how the department should have handled the investigation in order to protect and preserve the crime scene evidence that was eventually damaged due to carelessness. Next, the theory of the main suspects, John and Patsy Ramsey, as well as a possible intruder are discussed while addressing the physical and circumstantial evidence gathered during the case and how the mistakes of the police investigation might have hindered a conviction. Finally, the paper indicates what former criminal profiler, John Douglas, ultimately believed happened to the miniature beauty queen.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Ronald Truelove for being the main inspiration for writing this thesis, being there for me for absolutely everything over the last two years, and believing in my potential. I will always value the lessons he has taught me. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Kerri Pickel for agreeing to assist me at a time when I needed her most. She has been such a valuable asset to me and I could not have completed this thesis without her.

Who Killed JonBenét: An Analysis of a Flawed Investigation and Main Suspects

“Human beings are capable of great good and of deplorable evil. To refuse to believe that is to live in the deepest form of denial. We want only to consider that we are “good” people”

(Hodges, 2000, p. 8).

In the early morning hours of December 26, 1996, Boulder, Colorado was rocked by a tragedy that would soon take the media by storm and change the world forever. A frantic 911 emergency call at 5:52 a.m. from a panicked mother would be the first words that started it all. This call to the Boulder Police Dispatcher would reveal that six year old beauty queen JonBenét Ramsey had apparently been kidnapped during the middle of the night and a ransom note had been left (Hodges, 2000). The 911 call originated from 755 Fifteenth Street at the multimillion dollar home of



Above: JonBenét Ramsey

John and Patsy Ramsey where they lived with their daughter and one young son, Burke. In the two and a half page ransom note, the kidnappers (who identify themselves as representatives of a “small foreign faction” known only as S.B.T.C) request a ransom of \$118,000, threaten the death of JonBenét if anyone at all is contacted, and inform that they will call the Ramseys between eight and ten in the morning with more information (Hodges, 1998). Mere hours into the kidnapping investigation, a gruesome discovery would change the direction of the case. Shortly after 1:00 p.m. on the afternoon of December 26th, six year old JonBenét was found murdered in the basement of her Boulder home.

JonBenét Patricia Ramsey was born on August 6, 1990 in Atlanta, Georgia. Her unique name came from a combination of her parents' names, John Bennett and Patricia "Patsy" Ramsey, both of whom were wealthy socialites. Early in 1991, when JonBenét was only nine months old, John Ramsey moved the family to Boulder, Colorado so he could continue to grow the computer company he founded ("JonBenét Ramsey," 2015). John described JonBenét as being the "spark plug" of the family, implying that she was the family member who always managed to brighten everyone's day and provide both himself and Patsy with energy (Hodges, 2000). In general, JonBenét was an outgoing child who did not like seeing others being unhappy.

When JonBenét was five years old, she made the decision that she wanted to follow in her mother's footsteps and participate in beauty pageants. Her mother, Patsy, was crowned Miss West Virginia in 1977 and, according to John Ramsey, inspired her daughter to pursue pageant titles after JonBenét saw her mother on stage at a pageant reunion (Chang, 2012). Being able to share her passion for beauty pageants with her daughter brought Patsy great joy and she adored getting the chance to experience that mother/daughter bonding time. Because of JonBenét's bright and outgoing personality, she soon became very successful in the pageant world, sweeping titles such as America's Royale Little Miss, Little Miss Christmas, Little Miss Colorado, Colorado All-Star Kids Cover Girl, Miss Colorado Sunburst, and more, despite her lack of experience (Singular, 1999). JonBenét's immediate success and general participation in the pageant field would be one of the biggest reasons her murder investigation would receive such worldwide attention.

Nearly nineteen years after the horrific death of young JonBenét, the case remains unsolved and the person who committed this crime has never been charged. While theories of how the crime played out and who may have done it have been presented over the years, no one

individual has been identified as the true perpetrator and no convictions have ever been made. One of the key aspects behind the reasoning that this investigation remains unsolved could be attributed to the overall lack of control that the Boulder Police Department had over the crime scene of the Boulder home from the very beginning. Throughout the hours and stages of the investigation on December 26th, numerous mistakes in following specific established procedures were made by the police officers who responded during the day to the 911 call that greatly affected the outcome of the kidnapping, and subsequent murder investigation of JonBenét Ramsey. Had procedure been precisely followed from the very beginning, the culprit behind the murder may have already been apprehended.

The Investigation

The first and principal hindrance to the investigation was the time at which it initially took place. For one, the 911 call about the kidnapping and the discovery of a ransom note came in to the department just as a shift change of officers between the third and first shifts was about to occur. Second, the Boulder Police Department was at a dire disadvantage with the case happening right at Christmas-time. Christmas is considered to be one of the weakest staffing periods of the year for the department and all of the officers who were able to arrange it, mainly the more experienced senior officers, were off work and at home for the holidays (Singular, 1999). This left the department with only a minimal number of officers on duty, many of whom were inexperienced and this situation contributed to the inefficiency of the original kidnapping investigation.

The arrival of the initial responder when the kidnapping call came in was the first mistake the department would make throughout the course of the investigation. With a call of a missing six year old girl and a found ransom note, patrol unit 273 of the Boulder Police Department

headed towards the scene at 755 Fifteenth Street (Thomas & Davis, 2000). When this initial responder, Officer Rick French, arrived on scene, he pulled up in the customary black and white police cruiser. Right away, this was an obvious mistake because an unmarked car or undercover officer should have been the one to respond to a kidnapping call (Thomas & Davis, 2000). If the kidnappers were watching the house and keeping an eye on the scene at the time, they would have known immediately from the patrol car that the authorities had been contacted, which could end up having dire results for the abducted child depending on what was written within the ransom note. Another mistake that would end up hindering the investigation most later that day was that when the patrol supervisor, Sergeant Paul Reichenbach, arrived on scene, he ordered radio traffic to cease to prevent the supposed kidnappers from being able to pick up police broadcasts. All communication was strictly to be by phone, which made it much less effective for those involved (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001).

After the initial responder arrives at the scene, the first and foremost priority an officer needs to address when responding to the call is to immediately secure the crime scene and prevent anyone from entering or leaving the area. When the responding or backup team arrives, they must be sure to determine the boundaries of the scene and then section off and isolate the scene with ropes or barricades (“Crime Scene Procedures,” 2006). This first priority is essential to an investigation to ensure that the scene remains preserved with minimal contamination and that no valuable evidence within the scene is destroyed before it can be collected and recorded. This is crucial to be sure that the integrity of the crime scene stays intact. “Physical evidence can be rendered useless by people wandering through the area. Every single person has the potential to destroy valuable evidence. It’s the responsibility of the officer to prohibit access to anyone not directly involved with processing the site (including fellow officers)” (“Crime Scene

Procedures,” 2006). If evidence is tampered with, it cannot be used in the criminal investigation, so steps have to be taken in order to preserve and protect the area. When securing the crime scene in the early stages, it is also vital to designate a lead investigator to control the situation and make the decisions about what needs to be done. Having one person in charge ensures that everyone stays on the page with the investigation and that there are no discrepancies between officers involved (“Crime Scene Procedures,” 2006). However, this designation was never made in the Ramsey case.

During the course of the Ramsey investigation, the Boulder Police failed to treat the home as a crime scene (Singular, 1999). First and foremost, they did not secure the scene and the individuals involved in the initial report of the kidnapping. The responding officers, if they had followed procedure, should have established control over all of the individuals at the scene by restricting their movement and activity in order to prevent individuals from potentially altering or destroying evidence (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Ignoring the warnings in the ransom note of basically certain death for their daughter if anyone was contacted, Patsy Ramsey phoned four close family friends to convey to them what had occurred immediately after calling the police. The friends, Fleet and Priscilla White and John and Barbara Fernie, were asked to rush over to the Ramsey house, which they did (Thomas & Davis, 2000). Deviating from procedure, the police officers allowed these individuals admittance into the house, which was a dire mistake. According to Steve Thomas, a former lead Boulder Police detective, and Don Davis, *New York Times* bestselling author,

Good police procedure would have been to empty the house immediately and take the inhabitants to the police station, post a patrol officer inside the front door, and allow entry only to authorized personnel. Another perimeter should have been established some

distance away to preserve the grounds. No one knew at this point what evidence, such as footprints or fibers, might yet be found, and the crime scene was put at risk by allowing the friends to come inside. (2000, p. 20)

Proving the risk that these friends posed to the crime scene, upon his arrival, the Ramsey friend Fleet White took it upon himself to take a walk within the home to look for JonBenét, who he believed could potentially just be hiding somewhere. His presence throughout the home should not have been left unsupervised by the police officers. While he originally should not have been allowed to wander, an officer should have accompanied him in the house to ensure that he did not tamper with any potential evidence. Upon searching the basement, White noticed the presence of a broken window. He discovered a piece of broken glass, placed it on the window ledge, and then got down on his hands and knees to search for additional fragments of the broken window. Since the initial responders did not restrict White's movements throughout the house, during this individual search he unknowingly altered a valuable and vital piece of the crime scene by moving a suitcase that was situated beneath the window (Thomas & Davis, 2000). This altering of evidence could have been prevented if an officer had joined him in the walk through of the house, or if the officers involved had not let this search happen in the first place.

The next police error would come from one of the two victim advocates who arrived at the Ramsey house around 6:45 a.m. The mere presence of these two advocates added to the unnecessary population of nonessential personnel within the house and crime scene. The principal problem with the advocates being there is that after a crime scene technician went around the scene and dusted for fingerprints that could aid in the investigation, one of the advocates followed behind with a spray cleaner and cloth to tidy up the mess. Thomas and Davis

write that “it was a terrible breach of procedure – possible trace evidence was being erased in the name of neatness” (2000, p. 20). The advocate roaming around and cleaning up could have theoretically cost the police the investigation by wiping away the possibility of valuable evidence that could have led to the identification of a useful suspect. If the initial responders had not failed to name a lead investigator, someone in charge of the scene could have prevented this incident involving a major procedural breach from occurring.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), when a crime occurs, an important thing for police personnel to do is to collect and document statements and comments from all of the witnesses who may have perhaps seen or heard anything that could aid in the investigation (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). In this case, the main witnesses in the Ramsey investigation were Patsy and John Ramsey and their nine year old son, Burke. When JonBenét was initially reported missing, the police should have immediately woken up the boy and questioned him to see if he had potentially heard or seen something during the night. Unfortunately, neither the police nor the parents thought it necessary to wake up Burke to find out what he knew. One of the strangest moments of that morning occurred when John Ramsey finally roused Burke, swiftly got him dressed, and sent him to be taken to the house of a family friend (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). Seeing as he was considered a key witness, the police should not have let Burke Ramsey be escorted from the Ramsey house, no matter how much John insisted that his son was sleeping and therefore did not know anything about what had transpired throughout the night. Because JonBenét had potentially been kidnapped by a supposed terrorist organization as depicted in the ransom note, the officers found it odd that John and Patsy would want Burke to be out of their sight whatsoever, let alone in an unprotected location away from

the police custody. Any knowledge that Burke may have had about the night walked right out the door with him and potentially hindered the investigation of any leads.

Hours after the investigation had originally commenced, the official scene walk-through of the house that was typical in police procedure had still not been conducted. Scene walk-throughs are valuable to police because they provide overviews of the scene and help to ensure the protection of any physical evidence that may be involved. Because this walk through did not occur immediately upon the start of the investigation, there were numerous chances for anyone involved to participate in the contamination of evidence that was potentially valuable to the overall case. If following correct procedure at the commencement of the process, the walk-through should be conducted only by the main investigators in charge accompanied by individuals responsible for processing the entirety of the scene. During this initial walk-through, personnel should avoid contaminating the scene at all costs and should collect written and photographic documentation records of the conditions of the scene (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

In the Ramsey case, the unofficial walk-through team was composed solely of John Ramsey and family friend Fleet White, who had joined the parents to comfort them. One of the detectives in the case, Detective Linda Arndt, suggested that White and Ramsey conduct their own search of the house to see if they would be able to locate anything belonging to JonBenét (Augé & Robinson, 2000). This was a grave blunder because the individuals left to walk through the house were not professionally trained to understand how procedure should be carried out and how evidence should be protected and preserved. Also, no officer was available at the time to escort the two around the house, meaning that they were wandering around unsupervised (Thomas & Davis, 2000). This circumstance would prove to be the severest mistake made

throughout the course of the investigation in terms of greatly affecting the future collection of valuable evidence.

Originally, Detective Arndt had suggested that the pair search the house from top to bottom, but John immediately headed towards the basement instead of following the suggested directions. He was later described as “making a beeline” for a tiny dark wine cellar with a white door at the far end of the basement (Augé & Robinson, 2000). Upon opening the door into the shadowy room, John Ramsey would make a horrific discovery. Lying on her back on the floor of the small windowless room was the body of little JonBenét, carefully wrapped in a white blanket. In an interview afterwards, John Ramsey was quoted as saying, “As I was walking through the basement, I opened the door to a room and knew immediately that I’d found her...Her eyes were closed; I feared the worst, but yet—I’d found her” (Acker et al., 2015, p. 118). In apparent distress and grief, John ripped off the piece of tape that was covering her mouth, desperately attempted to loosen the ligatures on her wrists, and then scooped up the blanketed body of his precious daughter, carried it up the stairs of the basement, and brought it out to the numerous other individuals within the house (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). The moving of the victim’s body was a severe procedural mistake in terms of preserving the crime scene. Disturbing the direct evidence on and around the body greatly reduces the accuracy of the investigation and the chances of discovering the truth about what happened to the victim. During this first primary movement of the body, the fibers of John Ramsey’s clothing were transferred to the victim, thus compromising the crime scene from the start and tampering with the most important piece of evidence.

In the short time following this discovery, the evidence of the victim’s body would quickly become a forensics nightmare. Detective Arndt ordered John to put the body down on

the floor, then proceeded herself to again move the body onto a rug in the living room. This was a disaster to the evidence because with each move of the body, the scene was changed. Just a few minutes after the detective placed the body in the living room, John Ramsey tossed a nearby blanket over it, which was then adjusted by Arndt, and then a sweatshirt was placed over JonBenét's feet (Thomas & Davis, 2000). Any chance that a forensics team would have had at effectively examining the body was officially compromised after only a couple of minutes. The constant movement of the most crucial piece of evidence in the investigation severely damaged and despoiled the crime scene and made it virtually impossible to designate the origin of the fibers that could be found on the body. Additionally, the body should have been immediately secured and nobody further should have been allowed to come in contact with it. With the lack of officer control at the time, Patsy Ramsey was not stopped from throwing her body down onto her daughter's while weeping openly, and John was hugging the body and stroking the victim's hair, further damaging the future evidence collection process. If John Ramsey and Fleet White had been accompanied by a police officer during their roaming of the house, this crucial mistake in procedure could have been prevented in the first place, or at least would not have been allowed to happen to such a degree. Moreover, if Detective Arndt had not been left alone to watch over the family and friends in the house, the evidence on the body would not have been as compromised as it was because other officers would have been able to secure the individuals and keep them away from the victim.

As soon as the investigation began, and unquestionably as soon as body was discovered, the police should have immediately separated John and Patsy Ramsey and questioned them individually to obtain and record their statements. In any crime, it is important to separate and secure suspects, witnesses, bystanders, and any other person involved in a case to be able to

prevent potential tampering with statements (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Separating the two prevents the opportunity for them to discuss details and theoretically collaborate a story for both of them to convey to police. Furthermore, if witnesses are allowed to communicate with one another, they have the potential to influence each other's reports of what they believe to have occurred. In other words, "one person's errors can become part of another person's account, and this proliferation of error can lead to miscarriages of justice" (Wright, Memon, Skagerberg, & Gabbert, 2009, p. 174). In this phenomenon, known as memory conformity, an eyewitness can incorporate details from another's report to construct a new memory. Over time, while the witness may begin to forget who exactly shared that piece of information, he or she will not forget the information itself (Wright et al., 2009). This could have been problematic for the police involved in the JonBenét investigation because if the Ramseys had discussed details of the case together, the reports they would subsequently give to police could be misconstrued.

Unfortunately, the police involved in this investigation did not comply with this procedure. They allowed the Ramsey parents to remain together and made no attempt to separate them, nor did they make an attempt to take them into custody to be questioned thoroughly. Additionally, shortly after 2:00 p.m., the Ramseys finally emerged from the crime scene. Patsy, still clinging to family friends and sobbing hysterically, climbed into a car and was shuttled away, while John got into a separate van and also left the scene. Thomas and Davis write that "It was perhaps the most critical moment of the investigation. The crime had abruptly changed from kidnapping to murder, the place was surrounded by police, a detective sergeant and an FBI agent were there, yet the parents simply walked away" (2000, p. 33). The various police officers who were on the scene made no attempt whatsoever to stop the Ramseys from leaving the premises. Statistically speaking, seeing as an overwhelming 54 percent of child murders are committed by

family members, compared to only about 6 percent being committed by strangers (Thomas & Davis, 2000), the Ramseys should not have been allowed to leave the scene unescorted and unsupervised by police. They would most easily be labeled as the prime suspects in the investigation, yet the police officers just let the pair go off wherever they chose.

As the day carried on, the police, much too late in the investigation, finally made the effort to secure the scene. Unfortunately, one last major and careless mistake would be made by the police on scene within the following few days. On the afternoon of December 28, 1996, police granted entry to the scene to one of Patsy Ramsey's sisters from Atlanta, Pam Paugh, so that she could collect pieces of clothing for Patsy, John, and Burke to wear to JonBenét's upcoming funeral. Accompanied by Detective Mike Everett, Paugh spent several hours making at least half a dozen trips throughout the house to take a vast collection of the Ramsey's possessions out to the police car (Thomas & Davis, 2000). This was a mistake in police procedure because absolutely nothing should be removed from an active crime scene, especially still so early in the investigation, and she should not have been given authorization to enter such a fragile scene. Since the amount of items she removed from the Ramsey house was of astonishing size, Detective Everett could not keep an account of everything. The articles Paugh removed included: stuffed animals from JonBenét's bedroom, dresses for JonBenét, tiaras, passports, bank records, toys for Burke, clothing, jewelry, credit cards, etc. Allowing the removal of these items was detrimental because none of those possessions would be coming back to the scene and the investigation had only just begun two days prior. Thomas and Davis write that "Pam Paugh should never have been allowed in there at all. The removal of so much potential evidence, with police assistance, was more like an earthquake than a mere procedural error" (2000, p. 52).

As previously mentioned, the Boulder Police Department had initially failed to treat the Ramsey house as a crime scene, and therefore, had severely damaged their investigation from the very beginning. The main explanation behind their actions can be based on the fact that their department was extremely inexperienced when it came to that type of investigation and were just not prepared to handle something like this. John Douglas, former FBI profiler, and Mark Olshaker, suspense novelist and filmmaker, mention how even though the Boulder PD was full of dedicated and hardworking officers, they handled an average of a single homicide a year (2001). The nearby Denver Police Department, on the other hand, was vastly more experienced in homicide cases, yet Boulder refused to accept their assistance in the investigation. Before the discovery of JonBenét's body, the case was classified as a kidnapping investigation. Following the passage of the Lindbergh law, or the Federal Kidnapping Act, in 1932, the FBI was given primary jurisdiction in all kidnapping cases due to the fact that kidnapers will often cross state lines with their victims and Congress believed the FBI could be more effective in handling these jobs (Theoharis, 1999). Once a kidnapping case becomes a homicide instigation, the jurisdiction will shift back to local agencies. Furthermore, while homicide is labelled as a state crime and the FBI does not have jurisdiction in these instances, the FBI can provide a local department with certain services, such as an evidence response team, profiling and criminal investigative analysis, legal advice, lab facilities, or whatever they may wish to use (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). However, these FBI services have to be requested by the local department before they can be implemented. Douglas and Olshaker write that "Unfortunately, none of these services was used early on to an extent that could have made a difference in the investigation" (2001, p. 385). Had the Boulder Police Department utilized all of the more experienced agencies and resources that were available to them at the time from the very beginning of the investigation, the extensive list

of mistakes that occurred primarily on their part could have been easily prevented and the JonBenét Ramsey murder case might not remain unsolved to this day.

The Main Suspects

“Nobody knows for certain what happened on the night of December 25, 1996, that caused the unnatural and violent death of JonBenét Patricia Ramsey, except for the person or persons who perpetrated it” (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001, p. 364).

When the victim of a violent crime is a child, the public and media will typically turn suspicion of the perpetrator towards the guardians because statistics tell society that parents and



Above: Patsy and John Ramsey

close family members are the likely killers (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). From the precise moment that the investigation commenced, the first initial suspects of the case were John and Patsy Ramsey, the parents of the young JonBenét. Since the two were in the same residence as the victim on the night of the murder and were considered to be the

last ones to see the victim alive, the public immediately focused on them as the main suspects and culprits in the investigation. Denver-based crime journalist and *New York Times* bestselling author, Stephen Singular, writes that “From the very beginning, the case had been framed by the media and perhaps by the legal system itself, as an either-or murder” (1999, p. 87). Singular continues on to explain that he had never heard anybody publicly discuss any other options for a perpetrator other than the Ramseys or an unknown intruder (1999). Even though the public strongly considered them as suspects, the Ramseys were never actually formally named as such and there were no criminal charges ever brought up against them (Acker et al., 2015).

In any investigation, discovering the motive behind the crime is one of the first and most significant aspects in figuring out who was the perpetrator. In this case, multiple theories of the Ramseys' motive were brought to light. It was written that, "Lack of motive has always been the Ramseys' theme song. Since the very beginning, Patsy and John Ramsey have vehemently proclaimed their innocence and have continually offered the persuasive defense, 'We loved our daughter and had no reason to kill her'" (Hodges, 2000, p. 14).

However, one theory in particular that has been considered over the years focuses on Patsy as the perpetrator. It was rumored that in the months leading up to her death, JonBenét had started to fight for her independence and would frequently test the patience of her parents (Hodges, 1998). Since JonBenét suffered from enuresis, most commonly known as bed-wetting, the theory suggests that perhaps JonBenét had wet herself the night she was killed, which was a "last straw" for her overbearing mother. Patsy, being severely stressed and tired from the events of that Christmas day and annoyed at having to take the time to clean up JonBenét's mess, then lashed out at the daughter from which she demanded nothing but perfection. An experienced chief coroner and medical examiner, Dr. Robert Brissie, concluded that the cause of JonBenét's death was strangulation along with a head injury that occurred shortly before (Hodges, 1998). "Most likely Patsy impulsively struck JonBenét in the head with a heavy object, immediately rendering her unconscious" (Hodges, 1998, p. 159). Perhaps the injury may have proven fatal to the child, and Patsy, too frightened to take JonBenét to the hospital, chose to end her daughter's suffering. According to this theory, Patsy took the time to fabricate the supposed kidnapping in order to cover up the heinous, yet unplanned crime against her daughter.

This theory could be supported in terms of the ransom note, with which several irregularities were brought up throughout the investigation. First of all, after the discovery of the note, the police department asked the Ramseys for handwriting samples for comparisons. John gave over Patsy's notepad from the kitchen counter and some of his own work papers. As the forgery and fraud expert, Detective Jeff Kithcart, was going through Patsy's notepad, he discovered "Mr. and Mrs." with the beginning of what looked like a capital R written on a page in the middle of the pad. The paper and felt-tip pen used appeared to match the ransom note and Kithcart quickly realized that he had discovered the apparent first draft of the kidnapping note (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001).

Above: First page of the ransom

Secondly, Douglas and Olshaker describe the handwriting in the note as appearing to "belong to someone who was either extremely nervous or consciously attempting to disguise his or her normal style, possibly by writing with the nondominant hand" (2001, p. 371). When the handwriting of the note was analyzed and processed, John Ramsey was cleared of the possibility of having written the note, but Patsy could not be completely eliminated as the author. Handwriting expert, Chet Ubowski, from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation concluded that the handwriting samples showed indications that the writer of the ransom note was Patsy Ramsey (Obmascik, 1999). Andrew Hodges writes how Detective Steve Thomas had "consulted six

independent sources, all of whom thought Patsy wrote the note” (2000, p. 44). Third, the sum of money that the supposed kidnappers demanded as ransom, \$118,000, was the exact amount that John Ramsey had received recently as a Christmas bonus from his company (Acker et al., 2015). This piece of information signifies that the person who had penned the note would have had inside knowledge in regards to the bonus. The specifics of the requested sum were interesting. Typically, kidnappers prove to be overly greedy and will demand a much grander sum of ransom. Seeing as the Ramsey family was worth millions, it appeared rather peculiar to the police officers that whoever had written the note would demand such a miniscule amount of ransom money compared to the overall wealth that John had access to through his company.

As for the events of the morning of December 26th, 1996, there were several incidents that occurred during the beginning of the investigation that made the public question the innocence of John and Patsy Ramsey. As previously discussed, the various phone calls that the Ramseys made towards the beginning of the investigation, first to police, then to friends, family, clergymen, etc. were questionable. The parents were given clear and strict instructions within the ransom note about not contacting or alerting a single soul. The note specifically stated that if the Ramseys so much as looked at a stray dog, JonBenét would be killed, yet the Ramseys ignored the warning and risked their daughter’s life when they made all of those phone calls (Hodges, 1998). Second, while one of their two children was supposedly kidnapped, the Ramseys made no attempt to awaken and monitor their sleeping son in order to ensure his safety. When one child is missing, typical parents would not want to let their other children out of their sights, yet John and Patsy swiftly organized a strategy to get Burke out of the house, away from the crime scene, and away from the two of them. These two specific actions taken by the Ramsey parents were not considered to be usual reactions that parents would have in that situation with a missing child.

The Ramseys were also inconsistent with their original statements to the police. Patsy, in particular, had changed a very particular and important part of her story regarding her initial movements in the morning before making the call to police. Thomas and Davis state that “She originally told Officer French that she checked the bedroom *before* finding the note on the stairs, but she later told Detective Arndt that she went downstairs and found the note first and only then hurried to the bedroom and found JonBenét gone” (2000, p. 23). John Ramsey, months after telling three different officers that he had personally checked the doors around the house and confirmed their security, denied ever saying it to any of the officers. John would also later deny his statement about reading a story to JonBenét on Christmas night after tucking her in to bed (Thomas & Davis, 2000). When individuals change important parts of their story in an investigation, it can signal a red flag to investigators that they might not actually be telling the truth. Douglas and Olshaker (2001), however, argued that these inconsistencies with the Ramseys memory are typical of people under extreme stress and fear, saying that parents of child victims will often forget the details of their own actions. Douglas writes, “I have seen parents block out the entire experience the way you hear of car-crash victims being unable to recall anything about the accident” (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001, p. 377). Empirical evidence also indicates that under extreme stress, individuals can often misremember the details of their experiences.

During the course of the initial kidnapping investigation, the mannerisms portrayed and the reactions given by the two parents were rather intriguing and, in a way, confusing. John Ramsey, in particular, acted rather peculiar in the eyes of the police. It was reported that John did not seem distressed, was speaking clearly and articulately, and was even joking around and smiling while his distraught wife sobbed in the arms of family friends. John made very little

attempt to comfort his grieving wife and stayed in the dining room while she sat in the sunroom. Thomas and Davis write that typically in a situation involving a child, the parents will cling to each other for comfort, “so police considered the physical distance between John and Patsy Ramsey to be remarkable under the stressful conditions” (2000, p. 24). Furthermore, though Patsy wept incessantly over her missing daughter, one officer questioned her grief, saying that he noticed that Patsy had been watching him through splayed fingers while she was crying (Acker et al., 2015). Furthermore, neither John nor Patsy had seemed concerned about the time of day in the early morning. In the ransom note, it was written that the kidnappers were going to contact the parents between the hours of eight and ten in the morning with instructions for the delivery of the ransom money. As that specific time frame came and went, the Ramseys did not seem worried or distraught that no word had come. This would later be used against the parents in the defense that they knew JonBenét had not been kidnapped, and therefore, that no call would ever come.

Another suspicion brought on by John Ramsey occurred shortly before the afternoon discovery of young JonBenét’s body in the basement of the house. After no call from the kidnappers had come, police officers began to move back to the station, leaving Detective Linda Arndt alone to keep watch over the Ramseys and the family friends in the house. At one point, Arndt discovered that John Ramsey was nowhere to be found and would end up being completely out of contact for more than an hour. After John returned, Arndt noted a definite change in his overall attitude from before. “Whereas he had been calm and collected earlier, he now sat alone in the dining room, preoccupied in thought, his legs bouncing nervously” (Thomas & Davis, 2000, p. 26). People would continue to wonder what John had experienced during that hour that he was unaccounted for by police, with some speculating that he had roamed around

the house and discovered his daughter's body before officially finding it later that afternoon. John's son from another marriage reportedly told investigators that John said he had found JonBenét's body at 11:00 a.m., though it was not until 1:00 p.m. when John had carried the body up from the basement room (Augé & Robinson, 2000).

After the discovery of little JonBenét's body, the Ramseys were quickly criticized for their decision to leave the crime scene only an hour after their daughter was discovered murdered. "In most child murders, parents resist leaving the body" (Thomas & Davis, 2000, p. 33). Typically, parents cannot force themselves away from their child and want to remain with him or her as long as they are allowed. There were also reports from one detective of John contacting his pilot around 1:45 p.m., less than an hour after the discovery of JonBenét's body, to get his plane ready for a flight to Atlanta, Georgia, to get out of Boulder, Colorado as soon as possible (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). The police and the public were curious about the reason the Ramseys had for wanting so desperately to get away from Boulder as swiftly as the pilot could. To them, the Ramseys' reaction to the situation did not make sense.

Even though the decisions and actions of the Ramsey parents were very inconsistent with those of typical parents in that situation, no tangible evidence could be recovered that could link the Ramseys to the murder. In the summer of 2008, nearly twelve years after the death of JonBenét, a new DNA technology was developed that officially cleared John, Patsy, and JonBenét's brother Burke of the crime. This "touch DNA" technology was performed on skin cells, left merely from a touch, scraped from the waistband of long johns that JonBenét had been wearing when her body was discovered ("DNA Clears JonBenét's Family," 2008). The theory was that the only people who would have come in contact with the inner waistband of this piece of clothing would be the parents or another unknown perpetrator. In the previous decades,

forensic investigators needed roughly quarter-sized samples of DNA in order to effectively perform an analysis. The new touch DNA technology requires the collection of only a few cells from the outermost layer of human skin that cannot be seen by the naked eye. With these cells, investigators and scientists are able to make copies of the genes using a process called polymerase chain reaction to give “a highly specific genetic portrait of that person” (“What is touch DNA,” 2008). In the JonBenét case, the DNA recovered using this technology pointed to an unidentified male suspect who did not match any DNA found in the police system, including the DNA of the Ramsey family and the officers on the scene. With this unknown DNA discovery, the police formally cleared the Ramsey family members as suspects. This left the police with still no indication of who committed this heinous murder of the young beauty queen (Woodward & Johnson, 2008).

The Other Suspect: Intruder?

Seeing as the investigation originally began as a kidnapping investigation involving a ransom note, a mysterious and unknown intruder was another suspected perpetrator in the case. The note was a valuable piece of evidence in favor of a separate kidnapper, but the details of the note did not quite add up for investigators. For one, the FBI had stated that the leaving of a nearly three page ransom note was something that had never been seen before in any other kidnapping investigation (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). Archetypally, ransom notes are short and concise, with enough quick details to get their point and the demand across effectively. Secondly, the discovery of the rough drafts of the ransom note hidden within the middle of Patsy’s notepad in the kitchen signaled to investigators that, while inside the house, the intruder had to have taken the time before the abduction or after the murder to sit down and draft out the two and a half page note. That in and of itself would prove to be a very risky move on the

perpetrator's behalf to take the gamble that no other individual in the house would awaken and discover them in the time that it would take them to be satisfied with what they had written. Third, the language used within the note was very peculiar. The author misspelled common words like "business" and "possession," yet correctly used and spelled the words "attaché," "deviation" and "hence" (McClish, 2001). To experts, these instances gave the impression that whoever had written the note was trying to hide their educational background to make themselves appear as the supposed "foreign faction," but kept making mistakes in their cover up (McClish, 2001).

As for how the intruder could have gotten into the house, the police confirmed that there were no signs of forced entry on any of the doorways or windows within the household (Thomas & Davis, 2000). This points to the possibility that whoever had come in with the intent to kidnap JonBenét potentially had access to a key, such as someone who was close to the family. John and Patsy informed police that they did have a burglary alarm system installed in the residence, but they very rarely used it because Boulder was known for being a low crime area and JonBenét and Burke would frequently set the alarm off accidentally (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). At one point early in the investigation, Patsy suggested the possibility of the housekeeper, Linda Hoffmann-Pugh being the kidnapper because she had easy access to the house. Patsy recalled that in the months leading up to Christmas, their housekeeper had asked for \$2,000 in assistance from the Ramseys so that she would be able to pay her rent. In another instance, she made an off-hand comment wondering if the Ramseys were ever worried about someone kidnapping JonBenét because she was so beautiful (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). While this theory could account for the lack of forced entry, no evidence was ever found to link Hoffmann-Pugh to the crime, and she was never formally designated as an initial suspect.

While there were theories regarding the suitcase under one of the windows in the basement and whether or not the intruder could have used it as a step, the fact that family friend Fleet White shifted the suitcase's position during his unofficial search critically interfered with the investigators' ability to determine the viability of the theory. Also, on the outside sill and surrounding area of that particular basement window, the dirt and dead leaf accumulation, as well as the spider webs around the frame, showed no signs of any disturbance, which would have been present if an intruder had used that specific location to gain entrance into the house (Thomas & Davis, 2000). The police had also checked other various windows around the house and noted that the dust, debris, and foliage along them were also not disturbed, giving no indication of forced entry (Thomas & Davis, 2000).

John Ramsey's proposed theory of who may have committed the crime was a disgruntled employee who wanted to get revenge on him for some reason by kidnapping his precious daughter. Specifically, John thought of a long time employee, Jeff Merrick, who was bitter about being recently let go by John's company Access Graphics and had threatened to bring down both the company and John (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). Investigators thought that if the perpetrator had worked with John, it could potentially provide an explanation for the requested ransom of \$118,000 since that individual might have had knowledge of the Christmas bonus he received that year. On the other hand, the investigators involved in the case noted just how awkward the floorplan of the Ramsey house was. Douglas and Olshaker write that "the flow from one part of the home to another was choppy. You couldn't walk from one room to another without coming to a dead end" (2001, p. 407). Police speculated at how difficult it would have been to effectively navigate the rooms and floors while carrying a six year old in the dark without having prior knowledge of the layout.

Another piece of evidence that initially helped to give leverage to the theory of an intruder was the discovery of what the investigators believed might be a semen stain on the underwear that JonBenét was wearing and on her leg. As expected, the police were thrilled with this piece of evidence. If this stain discovery yielded DNA that matched a certain individual in the police system, the investigators would gain an incredible lead towards locating and convicting JonBenét's killer. Unfortunately for those involved in the investigation, this report was later found to be erroneous and did not produce any significant findings in terms of who the perpetrator could be (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001). The technicians at the Colorado Bureau of Investigation determined through the use of ultraviolet light that the substance found on JonBenét's leg during the autopsy was nothing more than a smear of blood, and not semen (Thomas & Davis, 2000)

Overall, the current standing of the murder investigation sits on the fact that there is not enough evidence pointing to an intruder or specific individual as the perpetrator, and not enough evidence to charge the Ramseys for the murder of their daughter. Therefore, no conviction has been made throughout the nineteen years since the case first began. Had the Boulder Police Department treated the Ramsey house as a crime scene from the second they arrived and utilized the nearby and experienced agencies available to them, the amount of evidence that ended up being compromised and/or destroyed during the first day of the investigation could have easily been preserved. If John Ramsey had been escorted through the house, therefore not having the opportunity to disturb the wine cellar scene where JonBenét's body was found, forensic evidence could have been protected to the point where the murder investigation of JonBenét Patricia Ramsey might have been solved years ago.

What Really Happened?

After doing his own research, John Douglas, an expert in the realm of criminal personality profiling, initially believed that the murder was committed by an unknown male in his thirties or forties with some business background, based on the business-like fashion of the ransom note. Douglas believed that the reactions of the Ramsey parents during the course of the investigation were justified because every parent reacts differently to a traumatic situation. After conducting his own interview with John Ramsey, Douglas concluded that in his opinion, John was telling the truth about not having murdered his six year old daughter. During this interview, he told Ramsey that he had sat across from hundreds of criminals and that “you are either one hell of a liar or you’re innocent. I believe what you’re telling me” (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001, p. 411). He believed that JonBenét had meant everything to John and Patsy and that they could not have possibly been the ones to kill her.

Later on, Douglas tweaked his interpretation to state that he believed JonBenét Ramsey’s killer was a “white male, relatively young, who had a personal grudge against John Ramsey and intended to carry it out by defiling and robbing him of the most valuable thing in the world to him” (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001, p. 459). He proposes the scenario that the unknown intruder attempted to incapacitate JonBenét and abduct her, using a stun gun to subdue her and carried her body down to the basement with the intention of escaping through the window. After binding her hands together, he began strangling her with a garrote which nearly killed her, but decided to end her life with a blow to the head, and then fled the scene in panic (Douglas & Olshaker, 2001).

In my opinion, after reviewing the investigation and the evidence involved, I believe that the murder of JonBenét Ramsey was committed by someone within the family, most likely her

parents, John and Patsy. My interpretation that incriminates the Ramsey parents also coincides with that of Thomas and Davis (2000). The actions of the Ramsey parents are very suspicious and inconsistent with those of parents who had just lost their youngest child. They did not choose to comfort each other in a time of great loss, certain police officers did not believe their distress was genuine, and they immediately left the crime scene after the discovery of the body.

Furthermore, the majority of the evidence that the investigators collected did not point to an intruder actually being in the house to commit the crime. To me, the evidence did not quite add up, especially when it comes to the ransom note and lack of a discovered entry point. Whoever had originally taken JonBenét had to have been familiar with the layout of the home, which contributes to the theory of John and Patsy being the true perpetrators of the murder. When referring to an expert medical examiner, Hodges writes that “Given the ransom note with the child’s body found in the home, Dr. Brissie immediately stated that almost certainly the killer had to be a family member who knew the child” (1998, p. 168). Unfortunately, due to the lack of careful consideration by the Boulder Police Department and the damaging of valuable evidence, the world may never know who actually did murder the fledgling beauty queen, JonBenét Patricia Ramsey.

References

- Acker, K., Bonner, W., Burns, B., Foley, J., Gavin, T., Jones, C., . . . Sterngass, J. (2015)
Mysteries of the criminal mind: The secrets behind the world's most notorious crimes.
New York, NY: Time Home Entertainment Inc.
- Augé, K., & Robinson, M. (2000, April 10). JonBenét Ramsey murder news. Retrieved April 4, 2015, from <http://extras.denverpost.com/news/jon041000a.htm>
- Chang, J. (2012, March 13). JonBenét Ramsey's father regrets letting her in pageants, says 'Toddlers and Tiaras' is 'bizarre' Retrieved April 4, 2015, from <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/03/jonbenet-ramseys-father-regrets-letting-her-in-pageants-says-toddlers-and-tiaras-is-bizarre/>
- Crime scene procedures. (2006, October 1). Retrieved April 4, 2015, from http://harfordmedlegal.typepad.com/forensics_talk/2006/10/crime_scene_pro.html
- DNA clears JonBenét's family, points to mystery killer. (2008, July 10). Retrieved April 4, 2015, from <http://www.cnn.com/2008/CRIME/07/09/jonbenet.dna/#cnnSTCText>
- Douglas, J., & Olshaker, M. (2001). *The cases that haunt us: From Jack the Ripper to JonBenét Ramsay, the FBI's legendary mindhunter sheds light on the mysteries that won't go away.* New York, NY: Pocket Books.
- Hodges, A. (1998). *A mother gone bad: The hidden confession of JonBenét's killer.* Birmingham, AL: Village House.
- Hodges, A. (2000). *Who will speak for JonBenét?: A new investigator reads between the lines.* Birmingham, AL: Village House.
- JonBenét Ramsey. (2015). Retrieved April 04, 2015, from <http://www.biography.com/people/jonbenet-ramsey-12986606>.

- McClish, M. (2001, July 9). Analysis of the JonBenét Ramsey ransom note. Retrieved April 4, 2015, from <http://www.statementanalysis.com/ramseynote/>
- Obmascik, M. (1999, October 17). Experts: Conviction a long shot. Retrieved April 4, 2015, from <http://extras.denverpost.com/news/jon101799.htm>
- Singular, S. (1999). *Presumed guilty: An investigation into the JonBenét Ramsey case, the media, and the culture of pornography*. Beverly Hills, CA: New Millennium Press.
- Theoharis, A. (1999). *The FBI: A comprehensive reference guide*. Phoenix, AZ.: Oryx Press.
- Thomas, S., & Davis, D. (2000). *JonBenét: Inside the Ramsey murder investigation*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- U.S. Department of Justice. (2000, January). Crime scene investigation: A guide for law enforcement.
- What is touch DNA? (2008, August 8). Retrieved April 10, 2015, from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/experts-touch-dna-jonbenet-ramsey/>
- Woodward, P., & Johnson, A. (2008, July 9). Family cleared in JonBenét Ramsey's death. Retrieved April 4, 2015, from http://www.nbcnews.com/id/25608543/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/family-cleared-jonbenet-ramseys-death/#.VR9GP454row
- Wright, D. B., Memon, A., Skagerberg, E. M., & Gabbert, F. (2009). When eyewitnesses talk. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(3), 174-178.

Photos:

- (2013, July 19). *Ramsey ransom note* [digital image]. Retrieved from <http://www.expert-handwriting-analysis.com/2013/07/19/unmasking-the-ramsey-ransom-note/>

Feld, R. (Photographer). (2013, October 24). *John and Patsy Ramsey* [digital image]. Retrieved from <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/jonbenet-ramsey-case-judge-orders-release-john-patsy-ramsey-indictment-article-1.1495227>

Simons, R. (Photographer). (2013, January 28). *JonBenét Ramsey* [digital image]. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2269431/JonBenet-Ramseys-parents-beauty-queens-murder-13-years-ago.html>