

## **The Murder of Jon Benet Ramsey**

**by**

**Anne Haight**

**(Author comment: I originally wrote this in response to an assignment in a college level course on Rules of Evidence. The questions were those posed by the instructor. My answers follow, along with references at the end. I cleaned this document up a little to make for easier reading in the event that others are interested in a relatively short analysis of this infamous crime.)**

**What are the full names of Jon Benet's parents?** JonBenet's mother was born Patricia Ann Paugh in 1956 (Lee), and was commonly known as "Patsy". After marrying in 1980, she changed her name to Patricia Paugh Ramsey ("Patsy Ramsey") and retained that name until her death from ovarian cancer in 2006 (Miller).

The girl's father was born John Bennett Ramsey in 1943 (Martindale) and keeps that name to the time of this writing.

**Prior to the murder: Summarize what life was like for the Ramsey's. And, explain: What did John do for a living to support the family. What was Patsy's background? Where did Jon Benet and the Ramsey family reside at the time of the murder of Jon Benet? What address/city?**

JonBenet Ramsey was murdered in the early morning of Dec. 26, 1996. At that time, the family consisted of the parents, John and Patsy Ramsey, and the two children they had had together, JonBenet and her older brother, Burke. A merger of John Ramsey's company had required the family to move to Boulder, Colorado in 1991 (Lee p. 131).

John Ramsey founded Access Graphics in 1980 (p. 125), the same year he and Patsy Ramsey married, and later sold control of the company to Lockheed Aeronautics (p. 130). He remained employed there as President of Access Graphics and was in that position at the company at the time of JonBenet's murder. The acquisition by Lockheed made the family multimillionaires, and opened them to a lavish lifestyle that neither had been accustomed to previously (p. 129).

Patsy Ramsey was the oldest of three daughters. As a child, she was attracted to performing and won contests in both debate and beauty (p. 128). After her freshman year in college, she decided to train for the Miss America pageant, and became eligible by winning the Miss West Virginia title in 1977. She did not win the Miss America pageant, but finished in the top five. She graduated magna cum laude from the University of West Virginia in 1979 with a degree in Journalism. She married John Ramsey the following year, and subsequently spent her time involved their local church, and assumed the role of a "corporate wife" as John's newly-founded company became increasingly prosperous (p. 129).

Their first child, Burke, was born in 1987, followed by JonBenet in 1990. Patsy devoted herself to caring for her children as her primary concern, while retaining her social connections. After moving to Boulder in 1991, she was almost continuously engaged in remodeling their 6,800 sq. ft. new home (p. 129). In 1992, the family suffered an emotional blow when John Ramsey's eldest child from his previous marriage, Elizabeth, was killed in a car accident, along with her boyfriend. Then, in 1993, Patsy was diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer that had become

lymphoma (p. 129). She struggled with illness until being given a clean bill of health in 1995.

After recovering from her fight with cancer, Patsy got involved in a Boulder effort to open an elementary charter school in their area, and the school opened in the fall of 1995, by which time JonBenet was 5 years old. Both children, JonBenet and Burke, were enrolled there. Patsy was a volunteer at the school, and the parents were both active at St. John's Episcopal Church in Boulder. Their support for such activities was financial as well as physical (Lee p. 131, 132). Patsy introduced JonBenet to the world of child beauty pageants. JonBenet showed natural aptitude as well as enthusiasm, and won the title of Little Miss Colorado in July of 1995 (p. 132).

The family had just begun recovering from the deaths of Elizabeth, as well as Patsy Ramsey's illness, when JonBenet was found dead in their home on Dec. 26, 1996, barely 6 months after winning her pageant title.

At the time John and Patsy Ramsey purchased the house where JonBenet's body was discovered (1991), the address was listed as 755 15th Street in Boulder, Colorado. The address was changed to 749 15th Street in 2001 to discourage "tourism" by the curious (Reid, 2007). The home retains the new address at the time of this writing, and has new owners.

### **What was Jon Benet's age at the time of her death?**

JonBenet was born August 6, 1990. She died on December 26, 1996, and so was approximately 6 years, 4 months old at the time of her death.

### **What was the date/time Jon Benet's body was discovered?**

JonBenet's body was discovered at approximately 12:55pm, December 26, 1996 (Lee, 2004, p. 144).

### **Who was the first person to discover Jon Benet's Body? Was anyone with this person?**

The body was discovered by John Ramsey. He was with Fleet White (Wecht, 2003, p. 46), a close friend of John's who was visiting with his wife for the holidays, in the basement of the home. White, however, was not actually in the utility room with Ramsey when Ramsey made the discovery. Boulder police detective Linda Arndt had suggested the home tour to distract a visibly agitated and despondent John Ramsey (Lee p. 138, 144).

### **Describe where Jon Benet's body was located, when found?**

JonBenet's body was discovered in the Ramsey house's basement. It was found in a closed room, a wine cellar, with a concrete floor, brick walls, and no windows (Lee p. 145)

**THE CRIME SCENE: Thoroughly describe Jon Benet's body and any evidence found at the crime scene. For example: Was she clothed, nude, or partially nude? If clothed, describe what she was wearing: Clothing/jewelry? Describe any/all Physical or Trace evidence found at the crime scene. Provide a thorough description of the details in the Ransom note. For example: What amount of ransom was being demanded? Was there evidence of a possible intruder? Explain, if so.**

JonBenet's body was discovered by John Ramsey and Fleet White in the house's basement wine cellar. Ramsey and White reported that the girl was supine and partially covered by a white blanket. Her hands were extended up above her head and appeared to be bound together with cord. There was duct tape over her mouth (Lee, 2004, p 145).

She was wearing a white nightshirt with a silver star embroidered on the front (Wecht, 2003, p. 46), flowered panties with "Wednesday" marked on the waistband, and white long johns (Lee p. 154). A gold cross charm on a gold chain was around her neck (p. 155)

There was a ligature tied around JonBenet's neck, comprised of a single length of white, flattened cord about 1/4" wide, that was pulled through a knot (p. 145). Tied into the neck ligature was a wooden stick that was broken off on both ends. It bore several colors of paint, a varnish coat, and the word "Korea" in gold lettering (p. 154). The other parts of this stick were found in the basement nearby, and turned out to be a paintbrush from a set of art supplies stored there and used by Patsy Ramsey (p. 179). The other end of this cord was tied around her right wrist, on top of the sleeve of her nightshirt (Wecht, 2003, p. 43). Blonde hairs were tied into the cord's knots on both the neck and wrist (Lee, 2004, p. 179).

### **Physical marks on JonBenet's body consisted of the following:**

- Horizontal groove about 1/2" wide across the throat where the ligature was tied. The groove curved up at both ends as it moved toward the back of the neck (p. 155). Interestingly, the hyoid bone in the throat and the thyroid cartilage were not damaged (Wecht, 2003, p. 57).
- Linear skull fracture approximately 8-1/2" long, on the right side of the skull, running from front to back.
- Toward the back end of the skull fracture, a piece of skull bone measuring ~1/2" long was displaced. The coroner found it consistent with a heavy blow from a blunt object (Lee, 2004, p. 156)
- Subdural hemorrhaging of the brain over the right cerebral hemisphere, and a film of subarachnoid hemorrhaging over the whole right cerebral lobe of the brain (p. 187). These injuries were bruises consistent with the child being vigorously shaken before death (Wecht, 2003, p. 57).
- Chronic inflammation of the vaginal mucosa, between 48 and 72 hours old (thus not inflicted at the time of her death) (p. 54). The walls of the vagina were reddened, with the heaviest abrasion on the victim's left side and toward the rear of the vaginal canal (Lee, 2004, p. 156).
- Most of the hymen was missing, and although it did not show signs of having been recently damaged, there was some recent abrasion to the hymen's edge (p. 156).
- Scratches and abrasions on the victim's chin and the back of the right shoulder, consistent with movement against concrete or stone (p. 188).
- Red heart drawn in ink on the left palm (p. 145)
- Two sets of aligned marks, one on her lower back and one on her neck, consistent with the placement of stun-gun prongs. That the marks had been made by a stun-gun was not conclusively proven nor disproven, and no stun-gun was found (p. 199).
- Scattered petechial (smallest blood vessels) hemorrhaging on both lungs and the heart, consistent with death by strangulation (p. 187).

### **Trace evidence found on JonBenet's body:**

- Black fibers on her clothes, as well as over her genital area beneath her clothes, and inside her panties (p. 154, 156). These fibers, along with blood traces, caused the coroner to conclude that the body had been wiped clean with a clothlike material (p. 185).
- Urine stains in the crotch and on the front of the white long johns she was wearing, as well as urine stains on the panties she wore beneath (p. 154).
- 3 red spots in the crotch of the panties about 1/2" in diameter (p. 154), later determined to be blood from someone other than JonBenet (p. 195).
- Green strands of material in her hair, consistent with a green Christmas garland observed in the home on the stairs leading from JonBenet's room down to the kitchen (p. 156).
- Residue on the upper thighs, later determined to be blood (p. 156, 188).
  
- At the vaginal entrance, traces of dried and semidried blood (p. 156).
- Inside the vagina, a birefringent foreign material containing silica. This was consistent with talc, perhaps from a glove, or merely talcum powder (Wecht, 2003, p. 54). Analysis later determined it to also contain a cellulose material consistent with the wooden stick used in the ligature garrote (Lee, 2004, p. 223).
- Chunks of undigested pineapple in the upper colon (p. 195).

At the primary crime scene in the basement was found the white blanket John Ramsey had removed before bringing JonBenet's body upstairs (Wecht, 2003, p. 79). Also found there was the duct tape he had removed from her mouth at that same time. A pink child's nightgown with "Barbie" written on it was also found at the crime scene, but the child had not been reported found wearing it (Lee, 2004, p. 146).

A palm print was found on the door leading into the cellar room where the body was found. That palm print was never identified (p. 195).

A window in the basement was broken, and the glass fragments were on the floor beneath, inside the house. John Ramsey told investigators he had broken it several months prior after locking himself out of the house (p. 156-157). An intact spider web was found over the well outside the window on the day after the murder (p. 160), making it unlikely that someone had entered the home that way to kill JonBenet.

A suitcase was found under the broken window, later determined to belong to John Andrew Ramsey, one of John Ramsey's sons (p. 157). It was not dusty, but did not offer any evidence consistent with an intruder, and did not appear to be connected to the crime.

### **The text of the ransom note reads:**

**Mr. Ramsey,**

**Listen Carefully! We are a group of individuals that represent a small foreign faction. We respect your bussines (sic), but not the country that it serves. At this time, we have your daughter in our posession (sic). She is safe and unharmed and if you want her to see 1997, you must follow our instructions to the letter.**

**You will withdraw \$118,000.00 from your account. \$100,000 will be in \$100 bills and the remaining \$18,000 in \$20 bills. Make sure that you bring an adequate size attaché to the bank. When you get home you will put the money in a brown paper bag. I will call you between 8 and 10 am tomorrow to instruct you on delivery. The delivery will be exhausting so I advise you to be rested. If we monitor you getting the money early we might call you early to arrange an earlier delivery of the money and hence a earlier pickup of your daughter.**

**Any deviation of my instructions will result in the immediate execution of your daughter. You will also be denied her remains for a proper burial. The two gentlemen watching over your daughter do not particularly like you so I advise you not to provoke them.**

**Speaking to anyone about your situation, such as Police, F.B.I., etc., will result in your daughter being beheaded. If we catch you talking to a stray dog, she dies. If you alert bank authorities, she dies. If the money is in way marked or tampered with, she dies. You will be scanned for electronic devices and if any are found, she dies. You can try to deceive us, but be warned we are familiar with law enforcement countermeasures and tactics. You stand a 99% chance of killing your daughter if you try to outsmart us. Follow our instructions and you stand a 100% chance of getting her back. You and your family are under constant scrutiny, as well as the authorities. Don't try to grow a brain John. You are not the only fat cat around so don't think that killing will be difficult. Don't underestimate us, John. Use that good, Southern common sense of yours. It's up to you now John!**

**Victory!**

**S.B.T.C.**

A number of things about this note are odd. The ransom amount specified is \$118,000, which is a peculiar number to choose for a ransom. Why not a round amount such as \$100,000 or \$1 million? As it happens, \$118,000 was almost exactly the amount of John Ramsey's year-end bonus from Access Graphics that year (Lee, 2004, p. 140). Knowledge of this number suggests a knowledge of Access Graphics' business practices.

The ransom note is quite long, and goes into a lot of personal detail. It implies an emotional vendetta against John Ramsey, although why he would be singled out is unclear. He was not well-known outside of Colorado, or even particularly distinctive within his professional field. It is difficult to believe that he would come to the attention a foreign terrorist organization, especially for such a relatively small amount of money.

The ransom note itself, that is, the paper, was determined to have come from a pad of paper found inside the Ramsey home. Further, a practice note consisting of "Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey" was found on the page before the 3 pages that had been torn out (Wecht, 2003, p. 52-53). The handwriting analysis eliminated John Ramsey as the author (Grand Jury In JonBenet, 1998), but for Patsy Ramsey the analysis was inconclusive. The note's writing bore a resemblance to Patsy Ramsey's handwriting, but experts could neither prove or disprove with any certainty that she had written it (Lee, 2004, p. 209).

Murdering JonBenet is inconsistent with kidnapping for ransom as a motive. It is also unlikely that the writers of the ransom note would do so after arriving at the house, rather than before, and take the time to write such a lengthy one. Patsy Ramsey told officers she discovered the note on the steps while coming down the stairs in the dark, yet the note showed no sign of having been stepped on (p. 211).

The first responding officer to the scene stated that there was no evidence of forced entry into the home (p. 138). A

damaged door frame was discovered on a back door, but the damage was obviously old and could not have been done in the past few days (p. 149).

There were no footprints in the snow outside the house except at the main entryways where people had been coming and going from the home the morning of the murder (p. 148-149). In the basement there was a broken basement window but it had reportedly been that way for some time, and the well outside the window still had an intact spider web the day after the murder occurred (p. 157, 160). It was extremely unlikely that there had been an intruder in the home. Whoever killed JonBenet had probably already been in the house from the day before.

**What mistakes, if any, did the police make on the search & family interview? Was potential forensic evidence protected by police?**

The initial responder to the Ramsey home, after Patsy Ramsey called 911 to report JonBenet missing, was Boulder police officer Rick French. French arrived at around 5:56am on December 26, 1996, and made a quick search of the house, but did not find JonBenet or any sign of forced entry into the house. He did not secure a crime scene or establish any kind of controlled perimeter, nor did he formally establish an investigation. The ransom note that Patsy Ramsey claimed to have found was handled by her, officer French, and possibly other unknown persons.

About 15 minutes after French's arrival, officer Karl Veitch arrived. During that time, the Ramseys had been calling friends and some of those people had begun arriving at the house. Two victim's advocates, automatically called to the scene by the Boulder police, also arrived. When Boulder police detectives Linda Arndt and Fred Patterson arrived at the home at around 8:10am, they observed these people at the crime scene, and that they were permitted free access to come and go from the house, potentially disturbing or removing evidence (Lee, 2004, p. 138-139).

The crime involving JonBenet was originally treated as a kidnapping, as the 911 call had originally reported it to be. The idea that some other sort of crime might have taken place was not entertained, and the house itself was not immediately thoroughly searched. In fact, JonBenet's body was not discovered until almost 1:00pm that day, more than 7 hours after the initial 911 call, and was discovered by John Ramsey rather than a law enforcement officer. He moved the body from its original location, disturbed evidence on her body, and brought it upstairs. The body was moved again by officer Arndt to another part of the house, further disturbing evidence (p. 144-146). It was not until 1:50pm that day that the house was officially secured (p. 148).

There was no apparent effort made by initial responding officers to secure or control the crime scene in any way, and it was not until 8:00pm, long after many people had been in and out of the house, that a thorough search was conducted (p. 152). A search warrant was required to do so, since the police left the house and could not reenter without a warrant (p. 150). Items and evidence observed by people present, or later discovered in the house, could have been left there by any of the people coming and going, including officers. Evidence original to the scene could have been destroyed or removed. There was no way to know without having first established a secure crime scene (p. 147).

**Explain what samples of physical evidence the Ramsey's were required to provide the police.**

John Ramsey and Patsy Ramsey, as well as John's children John Andrew, Melinda, and John's brother, Jeff, all provided samples of hair, saliva, fingerprints, blood, and handwriting (Lee, 2004, p. 162).

**Did the DNA sample found in Jon Benet's underpants belong to anyone in the Ramsey family?**

No. Neither analysis at the time of the original investigation (Lee, 2004, p. 195), or more recent analysis by the Boulder County District Attorney's Office (Letter to John Ramsey, 2008), showed any match to anyone in the Ramsey family.

**How did the press play a role in the implication that the parents were responsible?**

There were a number of rumors and false allegations circulating after this crime became public. The intense public

interest in the story led to the media covering anything and everything that was even slightly relevant, regardless of whether it turned out to be true. Rumors such as John Ramsey confessing to his daughter's murder (Lee 2004, p. 185), and the odd truth about the parents' evasive behavior with the authorities (p. 148, 189), their immediate retention of high-powered lawyers (p. 162), and reported plans to flee the area (p. 148) made them appear that they had something to hide.

### **How did the fact that Jon Benet had been entered by her parents into beauty contests factor into the negative publicity against the Ramsey's?**

The pageants that JonBenet had been involved in were of a type that presented very young girls dressed in grown-up, sometimes age-inappropriate clothing. This, combined with makeup to make them look much, much older, created a sexualized aura around the children that many people found highly repugnant and somewhat sinister (Wecht, 2003, p. 59, 60).

In addition, as media coverage delved deeper into the world of child pageantry (which was unfamiliar to most readers), it became apparent that some children involved found it exhausting, unpleasant, and tedious. The parents of such children were often cutthroat and hostile toward other parents, and treated their children like over-primped commodities -- like prostitutes -- rather than human beings (Lannin, 1997).

The sexual undertone the pageants and photography carried was overtly pedophilic to some, and it was uncertain whether a five or six-year-old child was capable of the true consent or comprehension for it. It appeared to many that JonBenet was exploited, perhaps abusively, by her parents. Public opinion turned against the parents as a result, as people wondered what could be wrong with a family that sexualized a little girl like that (Cohen, 1999). To some extent, this was unfortunate happenstance, since all the photographs available of JonBenet would have been of her "dolled-up" self from her portfolio and pageant appearances. Such photos comprised the bulk of public pictures that the media ran of the girl.

### **Recently a man named John Mark Karr "confessed" to accidentally killing Jon Benet". Summarize why/where the police arrested Mr. Karr and the disposition (outcome) of that arrest.**

Karr came to the attention of US authorities as a suspect in the JonBenet case in 2002, after a journalism professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Michael Tracey, revealed to them that Karr had initiated contact with him and provided information possibly linking him to JonBenet's murder. US authorities monitored further email exchanges between Tracey and Karr over the next four years. Karr openly confessed to murdering JonBenet. The content of the emails suggested an overseas location, but nothing specific enough to act upon (Burke, 2006).

In cooperation with US and Thai authorities, Tracey mailed a package to Karr in at a Thailand address. FBI agents followed Karr to his residence, where he was arrested and his identity finally learned (Burke, 2006). That same week, in August of 2006, Karr was returned to Colorado for investigation on suspicion of JonBenet's murder (The Karr Carnival, 2006).

Later that month, on August 28, the Boulder County District Attorney's Office issued a press release stating that the case of People vs. Karr had been vacated and the hearing scheduled for that day would not take place. The arrest warrant for Karr was withdrawn. The press release stated that forensic testing of unmatched DNA associated with the crime did not match DNA taken from John Mark Karr, and that Karr's family had provided circumstantial evidence that Karr was with them at the time of the murder, and could not have been at the Ramsey home to commit the crime (Boulder DA, 2006).

### **The Ramsey's filed a \$12 million Defamation Lawsuit against a major news network. Which network?**

Fox News Network (JonBenet's Parents Sue Fox, 2003)

**In July, 2008 the District Attorney of Boulder, Colorado issued a formal apology clearing the Ramsey family in**

**Jon Benet's death: Explain why the DA issued this apology. In other words, based on what specific evidence was the Ramsey's finally cleared as suspects?**

Advances in DNA forensic technology have been made since the case was originally investigated, and revisiting the forensic evidence in that case with a technique called "touch DNA" permitted some new information to come to light (Letter to John Ramsey, (Boulder DA, 2008).

During the original investigation, DNA from a single male individual was found on a blood drop in the panties JonBenet had been wearing when she was killed. The new "scraping method" performed by Bode Technology laboratory in 2008 obtained another DNA sample from the long johns that JonBenet had also been wearing at the time. The new sample matches the DNA sample taken from her panties previously. This DNA's genetic profile does not match anyone in the Ramsey family, and it was also established by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation that the DNA did not come from anyone involved in JonBenet's autopsy. The unknown DNA remains unidentified, and points to a third-party suspect as her killer (DNA Evidence Clears JonBenet's Parents, 2008) .

Essentially, there is no forensic evidence directly connecting the Ramsey family to her murder. In particular, the unidentified DNA profile specifically excludes the genetic profile of the Ramsey family, thus eliminating them as suspects.

References:

Burke, M. K. (2006, August 18). Exclusive: How John Mark Karr Was Caught. *ABC News*.

Cohen, R. (1999, October 21). Presumed Guilty - And Tasteless. *The Washington Post*.

DNA Evidence Clears JonBenet's Parents. (2008, July 9). *Fox 12 Oregon*.

Grand jury in JonBenet case may be looking at ransom note. (1998, October 17). *The Colorado Springs Gazette*.

Hunter, A. (1997, September 8). JonBenet Ramsey Ransom Note. Released by the Office of the District Attorney, Boulder County, State of Colorado. <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/ransom1.html>

JonBenet's Parents Sue FOX, Alleging Defamation. (2003, December 25). *Orlando Sentinel*.

Lacy, M. T. (2008, July 9). Letter to John Ramsey. Office of the District Attorney, Boulder County, State of Colorado.

Lannin, J. (1997, February 9). Pageantry: It's Not A Pretty Business. *Portland Press Herald*.

Lee, H. C., (2004). *Cracking More Cases*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.

Martindale, R. (n.d.). *Ancestry of JonBenet Ramsey*. Retrieved March 18, 2009, from [www.wargs.com/other/ramsey.html](http://www.wargs.com/other/ramsey.html) (William Addams Reitwiesner Genealogical Services).

Meyer, J. B., MD. (1996, December 27). Autopsy Report for JonBenet Ramsey. Office of the Boulder County Coroner, State of Colorado. <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/jonbenet1.html>

Miller, V. (2006, June 24). Patsy Ramsey, 49, dies: Mother of slain 6-year-old beauty queen wanted to see case solved. *Daily Camera*.

Office of the District Attorney, Boulder County, State of Colorado. (2006, August 28). People vs. Karr Case Vacated. Press Release. <http://www.bouldercounty.org/newsroom/templates/?a=566&z=0>

Reid, C. (2007, June 8). Ramsey basement gets re-do. *Daily Camera*.

Wecht, C., & Saitz, G. (2003). *Mortal Evidence*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.

World's Editorial Writers. (2006, August 31). The Karr Carnival. *Tulsa World*.