

April 2020

DOWN THE HILL

The Del Phi Murders

ELUSIV

THE WOODS CAN BE A DANGEROUS PLACE

Monday, February 13, 2017 was a school day for Liberty “Libby” German and Abigail “Abby” Williams, ages 14 and 13, respectively. It was one of those awesome make-up days built into the school calendar in case too much snow and ice resulted in multiple days off. And since the weather was unusually warm for that time of year, Libby and Abby decided they didn’t want to be cooped up in the house all day.

The eighth-graders convinced a family member to drop them off at a trail near the Moon High Bridge, one of the tallest bridges in Indiana that crosses Deer Creek, around 1 pm. The girls were to be picked up around 3 pm.

A little after 2 pm., Libby posted a photo to Snapchat of Abby walking across the deserted bridge. This is why the case is sometimes referred to as the Snapchat Murders.

When pickup time arrived, the girls failed to show up. This didn’t immediately send up red flags. Initially, the relative who came to fetch Libby and Abby thought maybe they had simply lost track of time, as teenagers tend to do, especially when they’re out taking photos on a beautiful day. But as the minutes then hours ticked by, it became undeniable to the girls’ family and friends that something was wrong.

Law enforcement wasn’t ready to panic just yet, even as the sun slowly sunk into the night sky. A few hours after Libby and Abby disappeared, Carroll County Sheriff Tobe Leazenby issued a press release stating that there was no reason to suspect foul play or to believe the girls were in immediate danger. Despite the statement, a massive search was launched, only to be called off when it became too dark and dangerous to continue.

The following day, Valentine’s Day, a volunteer searcher stumbled across the bodies of two young girls. Initially, their identities were not released, though

nearly everybody in town knew who they were. Then, on the afternoon of February 15, following autopsies on both girls, the State Police and the Carroll County Sheriff's Department held a news conference announcing that the girls were Liberty German and Abigail Williams. And, they said, the cause of death in both cases was ruled a homicide.

The Photo

Information quickly emerged suggesting that the girls' murders weren't sneak attacks. It was likely the girls realized they were in danger.

During the press conference announcing the identities of the bodies, the Indiana State Police released a photo of a man seen walking along the trail at the same time as Libby and Abby. The image appears to show a white male with his hands in his pockets. He's wearing a blue jacket, jeans, and a hat. He is either wearing a long brown shirt or some sort of fanny pack. A composite photo was created using the photo.



Photos posted on Libby's Snapchat Story of the bridge and of Abby on the bridge a few hours before they go missing.

Police would later reveal that they believed the man approached the girls on the trail.

The girls seemed to know that they were being followed and suspected that they were in danger, and they had a clear enough presence of mind to capture evidence in case something happened to them.

Stop and imagine that for just a second. You're all alone in the woods and you're being followed by a creep. You're 13 or 14 years old. You only hope that you'll be alive to help describe what happened to you, but you're old enough to realize you might be about to meet your end. What a horrifying situation to be in.

Police said they wanted to speak to the man in the photo, but stopped short of calling him a suspect.

Investigation Begins

On February 16, police executed a search warrant of a home on Bicycle Bridge Road in connection with the deaths. The warrant was based on a tip that came in, but no arrests were made. The police said that nobody at the home was being considered as a suspect in the crimes.

By the 19th, police had changed their tune on the man in the photo, and were calling him "the main suspect" in the murders.

The police provided no details about what the preliminary evidence contained, nor how it directly related to the man in the photo.

In mid-March, police executed a second search warrant, this time at the home and property of Ron Logan, 77. This is vital information, as the girls' bodies were found on the property.

Logan had been arrested earlier that week on unrelated charges. As it turned out, he was on probation for a 2014 conviction for operating while intoxicated and was found to be a habitual traffic offender, Fox 59 reported. His arrest was for violating his probation by driving to a county dump site on the same day Abby and Libby were murdered. Logan was also spotted at a local restaurant drinking alcohol, another violation of his probation.

However, as fishy as all that sounds, police said he was not a suspect in the murders. In January 2018, Logan was released on home detention.

As you can imagine, in a town as small as Delphi, everyone became suspicious of each other. The idea that a cold-blooded child killer might be walking down their street, pumping gas at the local gas station, or living next-door became a terrifying and all-encompassing thought – so much so that Carroll County Prosecutor Robert T. Ives specifically warned Delphi residents not to "harass, bother, or accuse anyone," particularly those living at the Logan home.

Delphi became a fearful, suspicious little town, and understandably so. But this fantastic community also came together to do what they could to help the search and the girls' families. On February 22, authorities announced a \$41,000 reward for information leading to an arrest in the killings. That same day, police also released a short audio clip believed to have been recorded by Libby of a man saying "down the hill."

The following day, the office of U.S. Representative Todd Rokita donated \$9,000, bringing the reward total to \$50,000. A couple of days later, that amount swelled to \$100,000.

In early March, Retired Indianapolis Colts punter Pat McAfee and Jim Irsay donated an astounding \$97,000 to the reward fund, bringing the total to \$200,000.



Photo found on Libby's phone of a man walking on the bridge around the same time the girls may have gone missing.

"During the course of the investigation, preliminary evidence has led investigators to believe the person, in the distributed photo, is suspected of having participated in the murders of Abigail Williams and Liberty German."

Indiana State Police

The Lowe's in Lafayette donated 1,000 orange light bulbs so that locals could "Light Up Delphi" and install the bulbs in their porch lamps as a show of solidarity and as a tribute to Abby and Libby. In addition, a Papa John's franchisee held a pizza fundraiser at Delphi Community Middle School to raise even more money for the reward fund.

It was clear that Abby and Libby didn't just belong to their families, they belonged to the whole town, and that town wanted answers and punishment meted out as soon as possible.

Daniel Nations Suspected

On September 27, police in Colorado arrested a man named Daniel Nations for having expired Indiana license plates that they said could be linked to the murders. The following day, police called Nations a person of interest in the case.

Police also believed the man, who was allegedly threatening people with a hatchet on a hiking trail, may be linked to the murder of a cyclist.

Indiana State Police received a tip about Nations' arrest from a local news outlet in Colorado, but wouldn't say if they believed he was directly involved in Abby and Libby's murder.





Overhead view of the area on the bridge where the girls may have gone missing from.

The similarities between Daniel Nations and the composite sketch released by police immediately after the murders are impossible to ignore. Even Nations' wife, Katelyn Nations, couldn't help but notice the similarities. But did she believe her husband murdered two middle-school-age girls in cold blood? She couldn't say for sure.

She couldn't remember her husband's exact movements on February 13, the day of the murder, but she did remember that he did not have a set of wheels to get him around town.

"I had an ultrasound that day and I'm pretty sure he came with me...but I'm not 100 percent sure."

On February 14, Katelyn drove Daniel to the Morgan County Sheriff's Department so Daniel could register as a homeless sex offender.

According to Katelyn, the couple watched news coverage of Abby and Libby's mur-



der, and while Daniel looks a lot like the suspect's composite sketch, Katelyn said there are things that don't match.

"Not something my husband would wear. The dark blue jacket he did not have, he does not wear a hat like that. He only wears baseball caps."

Nations has a lengthy criminal history. He was required to register as a sex offender in 2007 after being convicted of indecent exposure for exposing himself while sitting in his car in a parking lot, and later flashing a woman and child who were riding bikes.

In previous years, while Nations was stationed at Camp Lejeune, he was charged for indecent exposure four times, and charged once while in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

In 2016, Nations was convicted of public indecency in Indiana for fondling someone's genitals in a public place. Furthermore, he was caught spying on women

and masturbating in a women's restroom at a gas station.

Nations was also convicted of domestic abuse in Indiana, and has a number of other minor convictions on the books.

Katelyn Nations filed for divorce from Daniel in April 2017. By May, however, the two had resettled in Colorado, where they were trying to rebuild their marriage.

But almost exactly a year after Abby and Libby were murdered, investigators in Indiana said Nations was no longer a concern to them. However, they cautiously stated that "Until somebody is arrested, we're interested in almost everybody."

With those words, Delphi residents' stomachs dropped to their knees, their hearts leapt into their throats, and an uncomfortable, eerie frustration fell over the small town that had hoped that justice was about to be served.



Charles Andrew Eldridge

"We know it's hard for the public and media to resist posting side-by-side comparisons on social media of people who are alleged to have committed heinous crimes and also resemble the sketch of the Delphi murder suspect."

*Captain Dave Bursten,
chief public information officer
for the Indiana State Police*

Charles Andrew Eldridge

When Charles Andrew Eldridge's photo first appeared on the news, a collective "GOT 'EM!" was gleefully shouted in many Delphi living rooms. He was a dead ringer for the man in the sketch.

The 46-year-old was arrested on January 8, 2019, during an undercover sting operation in Union City, Indiana. In true sex offender fashion, Eldridge went to meet what he thought was a 13-year-old girl for sex, but was greeted by an undercover cop, instead. Following his arrest, Eldridge was charged with two counts of child molestation, one count of attempted child molestation, and one count of child solicitation.

But Eldridge wasn't immediately linked to Delphi murders. He only became a person of interest in the public's mind after his mugshot was flashed across the local news, prompting viewers to call a tip line at the Carroll County Sheriff's Department.

FBI and local and state police said they were investigating a potential link between Eldridge and the girls' murders.

Eldridge wasn't shy about his past, openly admitting to police that he'd had multiple sexual encounters with minors under the age of 13.

Again, the police warned local residents not to accuse or harass each other, and not to assume that Eldridge was the killer.

Eldridge had a reputation among his neighbors as a pervy weirdo. According to his ex-wife's grandparents, Eldridge was obsessed with guns. A lot of people have a fascination with guns and that doesn't make them dangerous. But Eldridge added to his reputation as a weirdo by regularly posting stories to his Facebook pages (he had two) about missing children, sex crimes, murders, and wanted killers. He even posted a few stories about Abby and Libby days after their bodies were found.

Indeed, his Facebook pages were not for the faint of heart. They featured photos of vultures feeding on a blood human body, bloody knives and tools at a tool station, and a painting of a character from the Angry Birds game on a hand grenade.

But by the end of January, police once again put Eldridge on the back burner, saying they had uncovered no evidence suggesting that Eldridge had anything to do with the girls.

GUYS... DOWN THE HILL

A New Direction

Delphi residents and those closely following the case were stunned when, on April 22, 2019, the Indiana State Police announced the case was moving in a "new direction."

Law enforcement released a very brief video clip of the main suspect walking along the bridge, and a revamped version of the audio clip released in 2017 that said, "Guys...down the hill." Police no doubt hoped someone in this community of about 3,000 people would recognize the man's voice or his gait. The police had previously only released a still shot from the video. Though the clip is short and only four words are spoken, it is undoubtedly one of the most bone-chilling aspects of the case. While more than 1,000 tips came in, none of them led to an arrest or a definitive suspect.

Observers were further stunned when police released a new composite sketch of the suspect, one that looked nothing like the original.

Police Sgt. Kim Riley said the sketch was not another take on the heavy-set man in

the video but was another person entirely. The person depicted in the first sketch was "not presently a person of interest in this investigation."

The new sketch, showing a younger, clean-shaven man, "is representative of the face of the person captured in the video on Liberty German's cell phone as he was walking on the high bridge."

Police added to the confusion by also announcing that the second sketch was made on February 17, 2017, just a few days after the girls were murdered.

The suspect was initially believed to be in his 40's or 50's, but police said they were now looking for someone between the ages of 18 and 40.

Law enforcement would not explain the reason for the change of direction in the case, or why it took two years to release the second composite sketch, leaving many feeling that a lot of time had been wasted looking for the wrong person.



New composite sketch released showing the police looking for a suspect younger than they were originally suspecting.

Still Searching

There have still been no arrests in the case, but the families of Liberty German and Abigail Williams still have confidence in the police.

Becky Patty, Libby's grandmother, is fighting a separate battle of her own — a rare form of endometrial cancer that accounts for just 15 percent of all cases. Even as she endures surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, she keeps her spirits up knowing that even if she loses her battle with cancer, she will get to see her granddaughter.

She told RTV6 earlier this month:

"It's a win-win situation in my heart. It didn't hit me as hard as maybe it would have because I thought if I don't beat this, I'm going to be with Libby and wait for my family. And if I do beat this, I get to look for this killer."

The construction of a memorial park to honor the girls is currently in the works, which has given family and friends of the girls something to focus on while they wait for word that the killer has been captured.

Rumors have been swirling that the killer might be a friend or relative of Libby or Abby, but family members have put those theories to rest, stating that they are only rumors.

Yet, there are glaring questions in this case that many would like to have answered sooner rather than later. Why did the police wait two years to release the second composite sketch? If the case is only one tip away from being solved, as police assert, what is taking so long? How much physical evidence is there? If the police have DNA evidence, it should be easy to rule out the likes of Daniel Nations, Charles Eldridge, and Paul Etter, but they have not been cleared, only moved to the back of the pile of potential suspects.

And if the killer is local, as the police suspect, why hasn't anyone in the small town of Delphi recognized the man in the second sketch? What does "local" even mean? Is he believed to be from Delphi or the entire region, in general? Did he live there previously and move out of the area?

The truth is, very little is known about what happened to Libby and Abby that day. We don't know how they were killed or if they were sexually assaulted, though the focus on rapists and child molesters seems to suggest they were.

It is clear that the police are devastated by the loss of these two little girls, and are working desperately to bring closure to their families, as much as possible.





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