

Police question Boulder 'Santa,' wife

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Boulder police are re-checking information from a local man who played Santa Claus at the home of 6-year-old JonBenet Ramsey two nights before she was murdered, and his wife.

Boulder investigators had interviewed Bill McReynolds, 67, a former University of Colorado journalism professor, and his wife Janet, 64, on Feb. 7, after they returned from a trip to Spain.

The Rocky Mountain News reported Sunday that police re-interviewed the McReynoldses and collected hair and handwriting samples from each of them last week. The News said police are interested in the McReynoldses because of two parallels to the Ramsey slaying.

One is the fact that the McReynoldses' middle daughter, then 9, was abducted along with a friend in Longmont and witnessed the sexual molestation of her friend. The incident occurred on Dec. 26, 1974. No suspects were ever arrested.

JonBenet was found murdered in the basement of her parents' luxurious Boulder home 22 years later. An autopsy showed that JonBenet may have been sexually assaulted.

Another parallel is an award-winning play written by Janet McReynolds in 1976. The play, "Hey Rube," is about the sexual assault, torture and murder of a girl whose body was found in a basement.

Janet McReynolds went with her husband to the Ramsey house on the night of Dec. 23, when he portrayed Santa at a Christmas party for the third consecutive year. Bill McReynolds was given a tour of the Ramsey's 6,866-square-foot home in 1995.

The McReynoldses told police their alibi for the night of JonBenet's murder was that they went to bed at 8 p.m. JonBenet died sometime between her bedtime Christmas night and dawn the following day.

"They've always said they're doing this for the purpose of exclusion," Janet McReynolds said of the police request for hair and handwriting samples. "I'm sure we're very far down the list of potential suspects."

Bill McReynolds said he had nothing to do with the murder and said his wife "could never be a suspect" in the case.

"I always told my students to seek the truth," he said. "Now I'm on the other side of it.... I'm probably naive and stupid."

He said the abduction of his own daughter and the play are coincidences.

"In my heart, I know there's no connection," he said. "Anything I'd say would sound suspicious. That's the nuts and bolts of it. "

Boulder spokesman Kelvin McNeill on Sunday refused to confirm that police had talked with the McReynoldses and declined comment about the couple's status in the investigation.

Janet McReynolds put little significance on the similarities between her play and the Ramsey case.

"I was surprised that the police wanted to talk to me about 'Hey Rube' because it never occurred to me that there was a possible connection," she said.

Her play is a fictionalized account of the 1965 torture and murder of Sylvia Likens in Indiana. The 16-year-old girl was brutalized by a gang of teenagers and a woman who had agreed to board Likens in her home.

Janet McReynolds won a Western States Art Foundation regional prize and a \$7,500 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for the play in 1976, but it was never published. She refused to provide

a copy to reporters, and a worldwide search conducted by a reference librarian at the Denver Public Library failed to find a copy.

"It would sound very quaint now," Janet McReynolds said. "It was a '70s play. It was written for its time."

She said the play is irrelevant to the Ramsey case.

Bill and Janet McReynolds say the only significance of their daughter's abduction to the Ramsey case, regardless of the dates, is that it underscores the compassion they feel for John and Patsy Ramsey.

Their daughter's ordeal "makes you sensitive to the horror" of JonBenet's murder, Janet McReynolds said.