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"Seeking Outside Help - Family, Friends of Maura Murray Upset With Investigation"

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HAVERHILL, NEW HAMPSHIRE - Family and friends of 21-year-old Maura Murray believe someone picked up the University of Massachusetts at Amherst nursing student after she was involved in a one-car accident in Haverhill, N.H., Feb. 9. They have hired an outside investigator to find out what happened to her.

It has been more than 2-1/2 weeks since Murray's car failed to negotiate a sharp curve near The Weathered Barn on Route 112 and crashed into a stand of trees about one mile east of Swiftwater. "With all the attention from the media, if a good person had picked her up, he would have come forward," said Sharon Rausch, mother of Bill Rausch, Murray's boyfriend. "It leads us to believe a bad guy picked her up."

"I just wish they would treat this as a criminal investigation. If they treated it as such, the FBI could become more involved." The "they" she is referring to is New Hampshire State Police Troop F and the Haverhill Police Department.

Rausch said her son Bill, Murray's father, Fred, and Murray's siblings, Freddy, Kathleen and Julie, are all frustrated with the lack of leads and the apparent belief by law officials that Murray's disappearance is nothing more than a person not wanting anyone to know where she is.

They believe Murray would have fought anyone trying to abduct her. Family members and friends are also frustrated with conflicting information in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Murray, who is 5 feet 7 inches tall, weighs about 120 pounds and has brown hair and blue eyes, was last seen on the UMass campus between 4 and 4:30 p.m. Feb. 9.

Packed Up Her Dorm Room

UMass Police Department Detective Brian Davies said Murray had packed up all her belongings in her dorm room and appeared to be moving out and not returning.

Murray also had notified her professors she was going to be gone for a week because of a family emergency. A search of Murray's computer by UMass detectives turned up evidence she had conducted a Mapquest search on the Internet for directions to Burlington, Vt.

Murray may have been having trouble with her black 1996 Saturn. Rausch said she understood the vehicle was not running on all of its cylinders. Believing that, Murray may have left Interstate 91 and exited onto Route 302. She then picked up Route 112 and was headed east when her accident occurred.

She reportedly is familiar with the White Mountains region because of family camping trips. After Murray's accident, Butch Atwood said he was returning from taking students skiing when he spotted Murray's car half in the road and half off the road without its flashers on at about 7:30 p.m.

Others near the scene said the car's emergency flashers were on. Atwood, who drives a First Student school bus, stopped his school bus by the Saturn to see if he could help. Murray was still in her car.

Atwood said she looked to be about 20 and had dark hair. "I saw no blood," he said. "She was cold and she was shivering. I told her I was going to call the police."

Murray, according to Atwood, told him not to because she had already called AAA. Atwood said he invited the woman to wait at his house, nearby, but she declined. He said he then went home to call 911.

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After about seven to nine minutes, he looked out and saw a Haverhill police cruiser by the Saturn. A short time later, Haverhill Police Department officer, Sgt. Cecil Smith, notified Atwood that when he arrived at the crash scene, Murray was no longer with her car. Between the time Atwood had left Murray and her vehicle to call for help and the time Smith arrived, Murray had vanished.

State police arrived and checked the woods in the immediate area to see if Murray had gone into the forest. There weren't any tracks. Atwood said Murray didn't appear to be intoxicated, despite police having said a witness indicated she had appeared to be impaired due to alcohol. He lamented the fact Murray had not accepted his offer for help. He noted school bus drivers have to go through extensive background checks.

Police Delay Search And Press Release

Family members and friends are upset because police did not issue a press release seeking people's help in locating Murray until two days after the accident. They also are upset because a thorough search of the area wasn't conducted until two days after the accident.

On Feb. 11, a canine team tracked Murray from the crash site east for about 100 yards.

Troop F Commander Lt. John Scarinza this week said investigators are still treating Murray's disappearance as a missing person investigation. Scarinza says there is absolutely no evidence foul play has been involved, and that people living in the area of the accident scene have been interviewed several times. A search of nearby homes by a canine team as well as forensics experts would require a search warrant. And a search warrant would require probable cause.

Rausch said family members were told by at least one person living near the accident site a man was seen in Maura's car after the accident. Scarinza said investigators are using all the tools they have available to them to locate Murray. Rausch said despite the appearance of Murray's dorm room, she and family members don't believe that's the case.

She said Murray, on the day of the accident, had picked up insurance forms related to an accident she'd had on Feb. 7. Murray was going to call her father the night of Feb. 9 to have him help her fill out the insurance forms.

Those forms, according to Rausch, were found in Murray's car along with school books, clothing and expensive jewelry. The insurance forms and school books indicated to Rausch that Murray was going to return to Massachusetts and the university and was planning to study while she was away.

Family members and friends also are upset with no information coming from someone who placed a calling card call to Bill Rausch's cell phone as he was waiting to fly out of Oklahoma Feb. 11 to come search for his girlfriend.

Calling Card Call

Bill Rausch said he heard what he believed to be whimpering and crying. However, Scarinza said that angle has been eliminated because investigators traced the calling card to the American Red Cross officials who had been attempting to contact Bill Rausch.

There also is the mysterious phone call Murray received while working as a security person at a residence hall at the UMass Amherst campus Feb. 5. The call reportedly reduced Murray to tears and her supervisor had to take her home because she was so distraught.