

Family marks year of agony

'Where's Junior?' Still no answer

By Kristan Metzler
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A year after George "Junior" Burdynski rode away on his red bicycle, weathered yellow ribbons still hang on the metal fence of his Brentwood home.

And although George and Barbara Burdynski have discussed moving, believing it might alleviate some of their pain, they still cling to the hope their son might return someday.

"Until an answer comes to what happened to Junior, this is the only home he knows and the one he'll come back to," says Mr. Burdynski, 32, standing on the front porch of his white clapboard house in the 4300 block of 40th Place yesterday.

"I'm just hoping he is well, being taken care of, and he will return home soon," says Mr. Burdynski. "I still feel someone knows something and that information will lead to Junior."

In the last year his parents have scanned the faces of thousands of children in the hope one of them might be that of their son.

Prince George's County police investigators, meanwhile, still search for the one clue that might help them find the boy, whose 12th birthday is July 29.

"Hopefully someone will call us with a piece of the puzzle that will lead us to Junior," says Prince George's County police Lt. Michael McQuillan, commander of the county's homicide and sexual assault section.

The county Police Department organized one of the largest searches in its history in the days after Junior's parents reported him missing. But officers have yet to uncover any evidence that might lead them to the boy — even a piece of his clothing or the red bicycle.

Hundreds of police officers and FBI agents have performed interviews that fill bound volumes of files. County police still have two lead investigators on the case, which Lt. McQuillan says is as much a priority today as it was a year ago.

"We have run down hundreds and thousands of interviews, and we still are actively investigating the case. If [the investigators]



George and Barbara Burdynski, shown in November with youngest children Gary and Virginia, still hold out hope Junior will be found. Photo by Kenneth Lambert/The Washington Times

needed the help of 100 officers, they would get 100 officers," he says.

Calls still come in from those who believe they spotted a shallow grave or saw the boy, Lt. McQuillan says.

"We are still today interviewing people in the neighborhood and area to find someone who saw Junior, but we haven't been able to get that yet," he says.

And investigators say they haven't given up the possibility Junior is still alive somewhere.

"I hope and pray he is," says Lt. McQuillan.

News of the disappearances spread quickly from the Brentwood community of 3,000, just northeast of the District, across the region to parents who shuddered at the thought that the missing child could have been one of their own.

A parade to celebrate the community's birthday held just a week after Junior's disappearance was rerouted to pass in front of his home. The Burdyskis stayed inside for weeks after reporting Junior missing in hopes the phone would ring and they would hear their son's voice.

Mrs. Burdynski, 31, left her job after Junior disappeared, in order to take his brother Gary, 8, and sister, Virginia, 6, to school and watch them when they returned. The children rode their bikes on the street in front of the Burdynski home yesterday, ven-



George "Junior" Burdynski

turing only as far as two driveways away before circling back to the house.

Those are the rules now. "There is no reason they need to go farther than that," says their father.

The Burdyskis, who also have a 15-year-old son, Fred, still have trouble sleeping at night. Mrs. Burdynski has recently chosen not to talk to the press.

"It just makes her too sad," says her husband.

Mr. Burdynski says he has been fired from two jobs because of taking time off for the case.

He now works at a muffler

shop in Capitol Heights. But even there he has been unable to avoid the aftermath of his son's disappearance.

"Just a few weeks ago, I looked up and saw a bicycle laying on the ground with no child around. I went and picked it up and just a few seconds later a boy came by and asked if I had seen it," Mr. Burdynski says.

"I asked him, 'Why are you out here by yourself?'" Mr. Burdynski says. "It was sort of shocking to me."

He opened a briefcase filled with fliers, which he carries everywhere, handed the boy one, told him who he was and warned the youngster against being out alone.

Several weeks ago, Mr. Burdynski hired a private investigator, hoping he can make a break in the case.

"Police aren't too happy about it, but I have to do what I can," he says.

Police say they haven't eliminated anyone as a suspect in the case, including James A. Kowalski, 54, who is awaiting four trials on charges he sexually assaulted several Brentwood boys in Junior's neighborhood. Kowalski has already been convicted of sexually assaulting two boys at his home in Winchester, Va., after he moved from Hyattsville.

He pleaded guilty in the Winchester cases but has pleaded not criminally responsible by

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reason of insanity in the Prince George's County cases.

Kowalski and 36-year-old Stephen Bruce Leak — who were arrested when police began investigating Junior's disappearance — were named in an 84-count indictment handed up by a Prince George's County grand jury in September.

Leak was convicted Feb. 15 of third-degree sex abuse and battery for fondling a 10-year-old boy in 1992.

Prosecutors say the two men operated a sex ring, but neither has been charged in Junior's disappearance.

Mr. Burdynski, who also considers Kowalski a suspect in his son's disappearance, hopes news reports will generate new information for the investigation.

"We've heard enough about Kowalski and his molestation charges," Mr. Burdynski says. "Now, where's Junior?"