

Missing / 'We're on a track that will be very profitable'

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imminent. The case is a long way from solved. The women have not been found, nor has a crime scene been discovered outside Levitt's home.

Still, Thomas is sure "we've got a motive." And though he will not discuss it, "We believe we're on a track that will be very profitable," he says.

The problem is that the case remains like a complex puzzle. There are so many pieces, and so many yet to be found.

"We need evidence, we need confessions," Whitson said. "Until we have solid information and evidence, all we're doing is speculating."

No obvious clues

When the abduction blind-sided the community two years ago, more than 30 Springfield officers were assigned to work the case around the clock. But in tracking virtually every tip, investigators were admittedly working a mystery with no recognizable clues.

Thomas insists: "I've known what precipitated this thing from almost day one." His initial notion, along with facts he's gathered along the way, have pulled him stronger over time.

Still, some investigators are not convinced he is on the right track.

"We don't have any one single clear direction here," Whitson says. "But it may be a matter of perspective. Doug may have a different feeling on it."

He does. "I am confident," he says of the course he's plotting.

With help from the FBI, Thomas is the lone Springfield cop working the case. Asher, once the lead detective, is Thomas' direct supervisor. But having been promoted last year to sergeant, Asher must deal daily with the oversight of other crimes and other detectives.

The families

So while somewhat out of the loop on this case, Asher still talks with Stacy's parents, Janis and Stu McCall, who continue to press police weekly for updates on the case.

"It's extremely frustrating to (both) families that we don't have any answers at this point," Janis says. Still, "the investigation is the

closest thing I have with my daughter right now. (The investigators) are absolutely the only link I have with Stacy, so without their help and their finding her one way or another, I have to keep going down there so I can stay in touch. That sounds strange, doesn't it?"

But who can understand the limbo in which the families and friends of the three women remain locked to this day?

"It doesn't get any easier," Janis says.

Two weeks ago she cleaned Stacy's room for the first time since the abductions. For nearly two years, nothing had been moved. The dust had settled thick.

"It was the worst hell I've ever been through," Janis recalls of the hours she spent packing away her youngest daughter's keepsakes and belongings.

"It just brought everything back into focus."

Stacy and Suzie had graduated from Kickapoo High School the day before they were taken.

Many of the graduation cards and gifts had remained where Stacy put them before she left home on the night of June 6 to party with Suzie and their other classmates.

Investigators believe that sometime in the early morning of June 7, the two teens returned to Levitt's home, where they were to spend the night. They had prepared for bed when their captors came.

Janis clings to her "50-50" reasoning that because no bodies have been found, her daughter may still be alive.

Though Thomas has no physical proof, he is not so optimistic.

"There is not a happy ending," he believes. And when — or if — this case breaks, he predicts a mixed reaction from the community.

If what he believes is true, and if Thomas can prove it to the point of bringing an arrest and charges, "the first response will be almost like a burden lifted," he says.

"But then, right on the heels of that, there will be sobriety and anguish."

Will it take another year to get there?

"I don't know," he says.

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