

## **The Caledonian-Record, February 20, 2004, Area Man Laments The Events Of Feb. 9 - Missing Woman Didn't Accept His Help, Gary E. Lindsley**

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Butch Atwood wishes the events of the night of Feb. 9 had gone much differently for a missing 21-year-old Massachusetts woman. Atwood was on his way home, about a mile from Swiftwater on Route 112 in Haverhill, when rounding the sharp left-hand curve by The Weathered Barn, he saw a black Saturn partially in the roadway and partially mired in the snow. It was about 7:30 p.m., he said.

The driver had failed to negotiate the sharp curve after passing the barn, gone off the road and struck a stand of trees on the right side of the highway. The car sustained extensive front-end damage. Atwood, a school bus driver for First Student, was returning from dropping off students after a day of skiing at Wildcat Mountain.

He stopped the school bus by the Saturn to see if he could help. "She was still in the car," Atwood said, referring to Maura Murray. Murray, who is from Hanson, Mass., and is a nursing student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, has been missing since the night of the accident.

Atwood said the Saturn's lights weren't on. "I shined the light in (her car)," he said. "I said, Are you OK?' She said she was." Atwood said he got a good look at her. She looked to be about 20 and had dark hair. As a matter of safety, he told her to turn her car's lights on so no one would strike her vehicle coming around the curve.

"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.

"I said, OK. I will make a call to the police department and the fire department to check you out," he said. "I said, Why don't you come to my house? You can get warm and wait for the police and EMS." Atwood said she just told him to go. He drove to his house, about 75 yards from the scene of the accident, and backed it his driveway before running into the house to call police.

However, he couldn't get through to the Haverhill Police Department and the Grafton County Sheriff's Department. He called 911 and the operator couldn't either. Atwood said another 911 operator was able to get through.

While he was talking on his phone on his front porch, Atwood could see the road, but not Murray's disabled car. He saw several vehicles drive by, but couldn't tell any makes or models because it was so dark. After about seven to nine minutes, he looked out and saw the Haverhill Police. Atwood believed the situation was under control and went to the school bus to tend to his paperwork.

The next thing he knew, Haverhill Police Department Sgt. Cecil Smith was banging on his bus window. Smith asked him if he had called in the accident and seen anyone at the scene. Atwood told Smith he had seen a girl about 20 with dark hair. Smith said when he arrived, Murray was no longer with her car. In the seven to nine minutes between the time Atwood had left Murray to call for help and the time Smith arrived, Murray had vanished.

"I took a ride around the back roads," Atwood said. "I was gone about 15 minutes. Then I took a ride to French Pond." He even drove about a mile down the road to the store in Swiftwater to check and see if she was there. She wasn't. When he returned to the accident scene, a New Hampshire State Police trooper was there.

Atwood said they checked the woods in the immediate area to see if Murray had gone into the forest. There weren't any tracks. He said there wasn't any way Murray could have driven the car after the accident. He said the radiator had been pushed back into the fan. The air bag also had been deployed.

However, he said it didn't appear Murray had been injured, just shaken up. "I just wish I could have gotten her to come with me," he lamented. "But I am a big man, over 350 pounds. She may have gotten into a car with someone who was clean cut."

Atwood believes one of the vehicles which had passed his house could have stopped and picked her up. "She could be anywhere, absolutely," Atwood said. He said whoever may have picked her up could have driven toward the area of Lincoln, or back to Route 302 and over to Vermont.

Anyone who has seen Murray is asked to contact the New Hampshire State Police at 603-846-3333 or 603-271-1170. People also can call the Haverhill Police Department at 603-787-2222.