

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Twenty years after Josh Guimond's disappearance, podcast turns up new leads 01G8EBFFK27ZB56Z6V4M9FPDVW

CATHY WURZER: You know, it's been 20 years since 20-year-old Josh Guimond disappeared from the campus of Saint John's University near Collegeville, Minnesota. On November the 9th, 2002 Josh had been playing cards and drinking with friends at an on-campus apartment. He started walking home around midnight and he was never seen again.

Now, a new podcast from Josh Neville, a local civil rights lawyer, claims to be turning up new leads in the long unsolved case. The podcast is called *Simply Vanished*.

INTERVIEWER A student at a Minnesota Catholic college vanished in the middle of the night.

1:

INTERVIEWER A popular college student who simply vanished.

2:

INTERVIEWER Standout student, the 20-year-old had a bright future ahead.

3:

INTERVIEWER Class president of his Maple Lake High School, voted most likely to succeed by his peers, and planning for a future in politics and law.

4:

JOSH From Trembling Leaf Media in Minneapolis, this is *Simply Vanished*.

NEWVILLE:

CATHY Joining us right now is Josh Neville Josh welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

WURZER:

JOSH Hi, Cathy. Thank you so much for having me.

NEWVILLE:

CATHY Thanks for being here. I am really curious about what got you interested in this case.

WURZER:

JOSH I really identify with Josh Guimond. We were about the same age. We had similar interests. I was my class president and voted most likely to succeed. And so was Josh. And we both went into politics and poli-sci and then wanted to go on to law school.

NEWVILLE:

And he just really, I felt, very similar. And I couldn't fathom how he had been gone for so long. And there just hadn't been any explanation-- really any real leads at all in so many years. So I just started digging.

CATHY I'm assuming you've been in touch with the Guimond family. What did you have to do to gain their trust to tell their story?

WURZER:

JOSH Yeah. Well, for me, I'm going to be doing multiple seasons of this podcast. And the first season's focused on Josh's case. But one driving principle here is that I don't want to investigate a case without the family's consent.

NEWVILLE:

And so I did take some time on the front end to introduce myself, and to get to know them, and work with them in terms of getting investigative material and kind of get pointed in the right direction. And it's been really nice getting to not just his mom and dad, but his extended family-- driving all over Minnesota and understanding who Josh was, largely by getting to know them and hearing their stories. It's been great.

CATHY It's been about 20 years since I've talked to Josh's family after he disappeared. How are they doing?

WURZER:

JOSH Well, I think each of them sort of have handled the last 20 years and handle each ongoing day slightly differently. It's tough. You lose your only child. I can't even imagine what it's like, and I'm just so impressed with how they've persevered.

NEWVILLE: It's tough for them, though. They've really been desperate for answers for a long time.

CATHY Like Jacob Wetterling before him, there have been many individuals, both amateur and professional, who have tried to solve this case, right, over the past 20 years. What's a bit different from your investigation?

WURZER: I think the biggest difference in this case is just the lack of leads and the lack of, really, any real information. The public has known so little about Josh's case and what may have happened to him in 20 years. And so we've only released now three, four, depending on how you count them, episodes. And we've already, just in the first episode alone, released way more information than the public has ever known about Josh's case. And so that's the big piece, I think, is just the lack of publicly known information previously.

CATHY For folks who may remember this story, the theory was that Josh drown-- that there is a pond, a lake, on-campus. And you found that not to be true.

WURZER: Well, not only have I found that to be extremely unlikely, but even investigators at this point are acknowledging that is unlikely and haven't been pursuing that direction in a long time. Frankly, there wasn't really a lot of good evidence for it, other than the fact that there had been some other drownings in both Minnesota and other parts of the country. And that's not really great evidence.

JOSH So there are other leads that do have really solid evidence. And that's what we're really focused on right now.

NEWVILLE: Are you focused on a specific theory?

CATHY

WURZER: Well, two theories that we are heavily pursuing at the moment-- the first that we've already discussed on the podcast is there were a series of attacks, and stalkings, attempted abductions of college men in the area, not just in November of 2002, the same month that Josh went missing, but, really, in the years surrounding that as well. And so we are continuing to receive leads related to this theory.

JOSH I received, frankly, a pretty bombshell lead last night that I am currently working on running down and figuring out how to pursue that. But it does seem much more likely than we, I think, previously thought that this may have been an abduction. And that's quite frightening. It's kind of the stuff of your nightmares, frankly.

NEWVILLE: Have you been in touch with the Sterns County Sheriff's Office?

CATHY

WURZER: Oh gosh, yes. Prior to launching the podcast, that was another thing that was important to me. I want to collaborate as much as possible. And I want to make sure I'm not interfering in the official investigation. In fact, our primary goal is to help advance the official investigation, right, and to also, sort of corollary to that, bring attention to Josh's case.

And so I am certainly in touch with them. I've sat down and provided them a ton of information in terms of both my findings. And then I've been working with another guy named Justin Thole, who's an independent filmmaker. And he's been investigating the case too. And so we really teamed up.

And both of us have presented our findings to investigators. And, honestly, they've been pretty great to deal with.

CATHY WURZER: What's your opinion of the work done so far by the Stearns County Sheriff's Office? Was something amiss at the beginning? Did they not take it seriously? Why are we to this point?

JOSH NEWVILLE: I have made a very conscious effort to keep this podcast focused on finding Josh. And so I think there's some good, very legitimate, criticism of the early work of Stearns County Sheriff's Office. I don't think it's really relevant to our current goal of finding Josh. And so I'm trying to stay focused on finding him and working with the new investigators now in a collaborative way.

CATHY WURZER: So I understand there was a letter to the editor in the St. Joseph, Minnesota newspaper, hometown of Jacob Wetterling, where Jacob's mom Patty wrote about a renewed call for finding Josh and mentioned your podcast by name. Have you been in touch with the Wetterlings?

JOSH NEWVILLE: I've talked with Patty, yes. She is phenomenal. I am blown away at how much empathy and continued involvement she has despite everything she and her family have been through over the years.

CATHY WURZER: With your efforts, I'm thinking about Jodi Huisentrui, in Minnesota native who was an Iowa TV anchor who disappeared while on her way to work. She's never been found. There are independent efforts to sift through leads, and billboards are up, and those working on the case have been quite vocal. What are you hoping your podcast does for the Guimond case?

JOSH NEWVILLE: I've certainly been inspired by the work of the Find Jodi team-- Caroline Lowe is another person I've taken advice from. She's amazing as well. And I'd like to do something similar in the sense that I'd like to present the evidence, present the information in a way that isn't really putting a thumb on it.

I'm not trying to advocate or trying to convince anyone that a particular thing happened. I'm really just trying to get all the information out there so that the public can really help detectives move this case forward. We are digging in, doing a lot of investigative work ourselves, but then figuring out strategically what information to push out and how to get feedback from the public on various leads that we're working on.

I mentioned the abduction theory. There are others. And the second really big one is that Josh may have met up with someone that night. We have decent evidence to suggest that is a strong possibility.

And so as we continue to explore these various leads, we're going to continue to ask the public for help. But first, we're going to give them information to help them help us.

CATHY WURZER: If there's a perpetrator in this case, do you think that person is still around?

JOSH NEWVILLE: I do. Yes.

CATHY Do you have a good idea of who that might be?

WURZER:

JOSH If it's OK with you, I'd rather not comment on that at the moment.

NEWVILLE:

CATHY Sure.

WURZER:

JOSH This is an active and ongoing investigation. And I want to respect the investigators as well.

NEWVILLE:

CATHY You mentioned that you're working on Josh's case. Will there be other cases, do you think?

WURZER:

JOSH Oh, definitely. So this is our first season. I very much would like to see this case closed. However, we will move on to a second season at some point. I will never close out a season, though, until the person has been found.

NEWVILLE:

And so I want to do it right. So we're not going to be producing episodes all the time and seasons constantly. But we will try to help out in other cases after this one.

CATHY I wish you well, Josh. Thank you for your work. We'll see what happens. Obviously, we'll keep listening.

WURZER:

JOSH Wonderful. Thank you very much. And I just want to thank the public for all the tips we've already received. We're just making tremendous progress. And we've barely begun.

NEWVILLE:

CATHY Josh Neville is a Twin Cities civil rights lawyer and the creator of the podcast *Simply Vanished*.

WURZER: