

## Craig Stebic Now Focus In Wife's Disappearance

(CBS) PLAINFIELD, Ill. In the days after his wife was reported missing, Craig Stebic spoke to a reporter in tears, clutching a crumpled tissue and saying his wife Lisa would never voluntarily leave their two children.

More than two months after an emotional Craig Stebic told reporters about the last time he saw his wife, Plainfield police on Thursday announced he's become a prime focus of their investigation.

"Plainfield police have narrowed the focus of their investigation into the disappearance of Lisa Stebic and now consider Craig Stebic a person of interest," Plainfield Police Chief Donald Bennett said. But Bennett said the announcement does not really change anything as far as the police investigation goes.

"Right now, we feel we've narrowed it in, and where we need to go is to focus currently our investigation on Mr. Stebic," Bennett said.

Plainfield police say they were led to that conclusion following numerous interviews and countless hours of investigation.

Police had previously been reluctant to name Craig Stebic as the subject of their investigation.

They said Thursday he was the last person who saw Lisa Stebic on the evening of April 30. They also said they believe Lisa Stebic was the victim of foul play.

The couple were going through a divorce, but they still lived together with their two children in the family's home in Plainfield, about 35 miles southwest of Chicago.

Bennett said that Stebic has twice refused requests by police and the Will County state's attorney's office to let investigators talk to his children about their mother's disappearance.

"Police have logged thousands of hours in this investigation and have pursued every viable lead," Bennett said. "Unfortunately, Mr. Stebic had denied investigators the crucial opportunity to conduct a thorough, in-person interview with his children."

Police say re-interviewing the children could be key in finding out exactly what happened to the mother of two. But Craig Stebic's attorney says he doesn't believe that would be in the best interest of the children.

"Based upon their tactics in the past and to keep the children emotionally stable I have refused to let the Will County advocates interview the children," said attorney Dion Davi.

But investigators say if Craig Stebic truly wants the police to find his wife he'll allow the kids to tell police what they know.

"Mr. Stebic's refusal to allow access to his children has hampered our investigation," Bennett said.

The spokeswoman for Lisa Stebic's family hopes he'll reconsider.

"We would encourage Craig to let Lisa's children talk to police," said Lisa's cousin Melanie Greenberg.

Bennett said the children were among the last people to see their mother before she disappeared April 30, and said authorities believe they may have "valuable information that will assist in the investigation."

"Ten weeks have passed. We've talked to a lot of people, and we just need to clear up some answers and some questions, and that's what's vital," said Bennett.

Will County Prosecutors say Davi asked for the questions in writing and suggested he'd have the children answer them. They call that suggestion ludicrous.

If Stebic refuses to allow the children to be interviewed, prosecutors can use a subpoena to question them in front of a grand jury. It's not something

that prosecutors like to do, but CBS 2 Legal Analyst Irv Miller says if Stebic is stonewalling, they may have little choice. CBS 2 asked Miller what it means to be named a "person of interest" in such a high profile case.

"This puts him on notice that the police are focusing in on him -- and he is now more likely to back away even more from this investigation," Miller said. "Even though he hasn't been cooperating up to this point, refusing to talk -- he's probably going to totally do what he can to shut out any police cooperation whatsoever and to say to these guys, 'Well, you're calling me a person of interest? I'm not helping you at all.'"

Miller adds that there's nothing in the criminal code that defines a "person of interest," so this does not change Craig Stebic's legal standing.

But he also said it could cause others who haven't told police what they know so far to begin cooperating.

"Some relatives of his that's been on his side now and believing in him, maybe now they'll think twice and go to police with something they know," Miller said. "Most people I've talked to have labeled him a person of interest from day one in this case. And if you're going to be a victim of a homicide, over 90 percent of the time, it's going to be someone close to you. "From day one when you have a homicide, or a person who's missing like this, you are the likely suspect."

Lisa Stebic, who was 37 when she disappeared, was likely last seen by Craig Stebic about 6 p.m. April 30 at their Plainfield home. She seemingly vanished without a trace, as did her cell phone and purse. Her cell phone and her credit cards have not been used since.

Craig Stebic, who has declined interviews with police and the media on the advice of his lawyer for more than two months, has said he had nothing to do with his wife's disappearance.

On May 3 when CBS 2 sat down with Craig Stebic, he said he was the only one home when Lisa left around 6:00 p.m. April 30.

"She left to go, supposedly, to work out," Craig Stebic said. "Somebody picked her up. I was in the backyard, working in the backyard. When I came in she'd already left."

The kids were at Walgreens at the time Craig Stebic says they then came home around 6:30 or 6:45 p.m., and then promptly left with him to go to the store.

"We went out shopping over at the local Target store for a birthday present, and she just never came back the next morning," Craig Stebic said.

A neighbor reported Lisa missing May 1 when Craig Stebic called her that morning, asking if she knew where Lisa was. Stebic has said he last saw Lisa at home about 6 p.m. April 30. Stebic says he was in the backyard when Lisa left to go workout. He said he assumed she left to work out as she often did in the evenings.

A woman who lives just a couple of doors down from the Stebics hopes the new "person of interest" designation will allow police to interview the Stebic children, and that maybe they'll be able to confirm or deny whether she left of her own free will.

But some of Lisa Stebic's close friends say that announcement doesn't change anything.

"He's still not gonna talk to anyone and they're not gonna arrest him, so there's nothing really new," said neighbor Laurrie Bingenheimer.

A memorial for Lisa still stands at a park near the family's home.

"I don't feel she's alive, Bingenheimer added. "I haven't since day one."

Many who have followed the case like Greg Zanis, who felt compelled to put a cross on the Stebic lawn Friday morning, say they are confused by Stebic's apparent lack of cooperation.

"I've been crying about this for 10 weeks, 10-weeks," Zanis said. "If I was in his shoes, I would be begging for somebody to help me find my Sue. You know, I mean I would be out here every day searching. I wouldn't be able to sleep until I found her."

Some neighbors say they still hold on to hopes for a miracle that the bright-smiling woman they know might be found alive. But, it's a hope that fades somewhat with each day.

"We just want peace," said Lisa's friend Sonja Conway. "We want this issue to be resolved. We want to know where she is so we can put her to rest. I hope that she's still out there somewhere, but I don't have much left."

Conway worked out with Lisa when she was trying to lose weight. She describes Lisa as a humorous but private person who would hate all the media coverage, but she'd understand how badly people want to know what happened.

Craig Stebic said the couple was divorcing and had rarely spoken in the six months before she disappeared. Lisa often went out at night but always came home by 10 or 11 p.m., he said.

Two days after Lisa was reported missing, Craig told The Joliet Herald News it was not in Lisa's character to miss work, and that she would never leave their children.

On May 15, about two weeks after Lisa was reported missing, Plainfield police, an FBI evidence response team and a special operations unit from the Joliet Police Department conducted a midnight search of the Stebics' house and vehicles.

The search warrant has been under court seal and not available for public scrutiny.

Craig has dismissed reports that police found his wife's blood on a tarp in his truck and used the evidence to obtain the search warrant. Any blood in his truck had to have come from an animal he hunted, he said.

Police say Stebic stopped cooperating on day nine of their investigation. Davi has barred police from interviewing his client.

"The fact that police now are in the public eye, stating that Craig is a person of interest doesn't change anything," said Davi. "The reality is he was a person of interest from the beginning."

Just because he's been named a person of interest doesn't mean police can force him or the children to talk, but Will County prosecutors can use subpoenas to question them in front of a grand jury.

Lisa Stebic's divorce attorney Glenn Kahn said Lisa told him April 30 she mailed him a petition that day to temporarily evict Craig from the house while their divorce was pending. Her petition said Craig's verbal abuse was affecting her mental and physical well-being, and jeopardizing the mental well-being of their children. Lisa's demeanor during the conversation seemed normal, he said.

Eight days after Lisa was reported missing, Craig filed a petition for temporary custody. Lisa had not previously threatened to take the children away, Davi said. But he felt the petition was necessary, considering the unanswered questions surrounding her disappearance.

Kahn filed Lisa's petition in May with his response to Craig's custody request.

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