

NANCY GRACE

Missing in America

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NANCY GRACE, HOST: Tonight, as many of us celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah, we highlight the stories of two young girls, one young man, all three their worlds ahead of them, all three vanished, all three whose families want them home.

Good evening, everybody. I'm Nancy Grace. I want to thank you for being us tonight. Tonight, University of Houston downtown student 24-year-old Nate Hendrickson, last seen in his own family's home on the computer November 30, his cell phone, his wallet left behind in his room. No sign of Nate. Also tonight, 62 days since beauty queen-turned-school teacher Tara Grinstead went missing. Tonight, Tara's family announces the reward to bring her home now up to \$200,000.

But first tonight, breaking news. This Texas high school girl, Joanna Rogers, just sweet 16 when she went missing nearly two years ago. Tonight, police finally name a suspect.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KATHY ROGERS : People are remembering. What I want is for whoever has taken her or whoever knows something to come forward. A lot of times, we hear that people are saying things, but they're not saying them to us, they're not saying them to the sheriff's office.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

GRACE: I want to go straight out to Lance Lunsford. He's a courts reporter with "The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal." Welcome, Lance. Bring us up to date.

LANCE LUNSFORD, "LUBBOCK AVALANCHE-JOURNAL": Howdy. Well, in a bond reduction hearing Wednesday for accused murderer Rosendo Rodriguez III, testimony was elicited by prosecutors about his possible involvement in the Joanna Rogers case. Of course, she's been missing since May 2004. Later, sheriff's officials did tell us that Rogers's e-mail address was listed in Rodriguez's e-mail and his in hers.

GRACE: OK. Explain to me why they suspect him in this case. I mean, this case is two years old. Why finally?

LUNSFORD: Ultimately, I think that's the question that needs to be posed right now. I think a lot of people question its presence in a bond reduction hearing and it finally coming out there. It was elicited during testimony, I believe, with a detective from the Lubbock Police Department. But there wasn't a lot of information that we have on it right now. We're looking into it still, and apparently, it is based on that information about the e-mail links.

GRACE: Now, explain a little bit more about the e-mail links.

LUNSFORD: What we have right now is just that his name was in her e-mail address book and -- or in the e-mail -- they had either transferred e-mail or they were listed in each other contact lists, and again, his and hers. Right now, it's pretty thin information, but it's enough that sheriff's officials to consider him a suspect.

GRACE: Well, let me you ask this, Lance Lunsford. Everyone, Lance is with "The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal." This is a two-year-old missing persons case, a lovely young girl. What I don't get is why was he on a bond reduction hearing? I mean, why is he already behind bars?

LUNSFORD: He's behind bars right now for -- accused of capital murder. He's been indicted of a girl named Summer Baldwin. He's accused of stuffing her into a suitcase and dumping it at a landfill, city-owned landfill, northwest of town here in Lubbock.

GRACE: My God! I almost wish I hadn't asked you!

LUNSFORD: Right. It's -- I think it's a case that people are going to be paying lots of attention to. There's some outstanding police work that went into this, some great investigations based on information that we have -- or I shouldn't say great, but some -- a lot of work went into it, apparently, and police were able to locate some information about the suitcase, link it back to the store where it was purchased, and then link it to a purchase he made.

GRACE: Man! OK, Lance, don't move a hair. Take a listen to what Lubbock police have to say.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The name of Joanna Rogers came up on the forensics examination of Rodriguez's computer. There was also a file on Joanna's computer that had that name.

We are still considering this, at this point, a missing persons because there is no evidence to indicate otherwise at this point.

PAT LALAMA, INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER: Well, very interesting. This is a young woman, a teenager, 16 years old. She works at a sandwich shop. She comes home shortly after midnight, has a little chat with Mom, goes upstairs, presumably to go to bed. At 7:00 in the morning, the parents decide she is not at home. She leaves her cell phone.

There is just no indication -- you know what it reminds me of, Nancy? Reminds me a lot of the whole Chandra Levy thing. Why did she leave the house in the middle of the night? Why doesn't she take the cell phone with her? Why doesn't she tell someone? She is just simply gone, vanished, as if aliens had abducted her.

GRACE: Take a listen to this, Pat.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: The most damaging to our hopes is nothing, you know, the lack of information, just, you know, the whole stalemate. And so when we do hear rumors, even sometimes when they're as horrendous as they can be, you know, we think, Well, people are still out there looking, they're still out there searching, they're still out there listening.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

GRACE: Can you help us? We are searching for 18-year-old Joanna Rogers. She was last seen in her own home. She went to bed upstairs, never seen again.

To Lance Lunsford with "Lubbock Avalanche-Journal." Lance, I know she left behind her cell phone, but was there any forced entry? Did her bed look as if it had been slept in?

LUNSFORD: I think that's one of the things that sheriff's officials told us pretty quickly, was that there was no sign of forced entry. But that seemed strange. She had, again, as you mentioned, left some items behind, so they were -- it struck officials as strange that there was no sign of any kind of struggle. And at first, they considered the case unique because of no signs of forced entry.

GRACE: Sounds like Elizabeth Smart and Jessie Lunsford, remember?

LUNSFORD: Yes. Yes. And that her wallet and cell phone and vehicle keys were left behind, they found that strange, and personal bank account untouched.

GRACE: Now, this young guy, Rosendo Rodriguez, he is 25 years old. He's been named a suspect today. Now, let's see, this is two years ago, so he would have been 23 and she would have been 16 at that time, right, Lance?

LUNSFORD: Yes.

GRACE: OK. And they had been exchanging e-mails on the Internet?

LUNSFORD: Well, we can't say -- I can't speak to that for sure. We're still checking into that. One thing that we can say is that both of them, in their contact information, or their names, is what we're being told, was held between each other.

GRACE: Are you telling me they're on each other's buddy list?

LUNSFORD: That's what we're trying to find out right now.

GRACE: OK. OK. OK. I'm starting to get it. I'm starting to get it.

Back to Pat Lalama. Pat, the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Joanna Rogers almost sounds as if she went willingly with somebody she knew or somebody came into the house that she knew, after the parents went to bed.

LALAMA: Well, it sure does, Nancy. I mean, obviously, this is all speculation, but just common sense tells you that if she is communicating with this man -- she, as a teenager -- there's a lot about her life that parents and family, friends may not have known. If she's going to hook up with this guy, she's going to sneak out of the house to do it.

GRACE: Yes.

LALAMA: I mean, she's not going to go out to walk the dog at 1:00 in the morning. She had a place to go, if there's no one that forced himself or herself in the house. And I got to tell you, I mean, it just makes me want to pull the computers out of my two sons' rooms and put them right in the living room, where I can watch everything that they're doing.

GRACE: Back to Lance Lunsford with "The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal." Lance, I want to go back to this new murder case you're telling us about today, Summer Baldwin. Was that her name, Summer Baldwin?

LUNSFORD: That's correct.

GRACE: How did she go missing, anything similar to this?

LUNSFORD: It's not similar, and I think there'll be some developments as soon as we go to trial to find out what the relationship was between Rodriguez and Summer. We know that Rodriguez had been a Texas Tech University student here in Lubbock and had also been a Marine. And other than that, there's not a lot of information talking about...

GRACE: Was Summer a student?

LUNSFORD: I'm still looking into that. I'm not conversant on it.

GRACE: Very quickly, take a listen to this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: People aren't forgetting, people are remembering. What I want is for whoever has taken her or whoever knows something to come forward. A lot of times, we hear that people are saying things, but they're not saying them to us, they're not saying them to the sheriff's office.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

GRACE: Here is what the defense attorney for Rosendo Rodriguez, age 25, had to say. "I can't comment. We are under gag order. My client professes his innocence. We have repeatedly requested the evidence. If they have it, we have not seen it."

OK, we'll see what happens with that. With me right now by phone, Captain Kevin Overstreet. He is with the Lubbock Sheriff's Department. Welcome, Captain. Thank you for being with us. Tell us what you have done to help find this girl and what we can do to help you.

CPT. KEVIN OVERSTREET, LUBBOCK SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT: Well, there have been some

developing information just within -- just recently, just soon after the -- Rosendo Rodriguez's arrest of -- concerning the Summer Baldwin case. There is some computer information linking Joanna and Rosendo together. And in addition to that information, we've uncovered additional information linking the two together.

GRACE: Joining me now also by phone, Dana Ames (ph). She is the director of United Response. She has been working with Joanna's family ever since she went missing. Dana, tell us, how is the family coping with the disappearance of their daughter?

DANA AMES, DIR., UNITED RESPONSE: Oh, Nancy, this has just been awful on the family. For 19 months, they've held out hope against hope that they were going to find Joanna. And of course, as Kathy (ph) said earlier, you know, they're hearing rumors, but no one's gone directly to the family, no one's gone directly to law enforcement. And that's been the case.

We have followed much of those leads and have not been able to locate Joanna. This is very, very disturbing information, of course. We were with the mother yesterday when this information came out about the computer connection, and we had had a meeting earlier that day with law enforcement. And of course, at that time, we had no knowledge of that. It was kind of surprising the way that that information did come about.

GRACE: Right. Right.

AMES: And from that moment on, the media has been just, you know, of course...

(CROSSTALK)

GRACE: ... trying to find out how the family is doing. With us is Dana Ames. She is the director of United Response. And when we come back, everyone, we're going to be joined by a very special guest. Joanna's father, is with us, speaking out about the disappearance of his girl. Won't you help us tonight?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: During the forensics that was done on Mr. Rodriguez's computer, the LPD uncovered a link that would connect him in some way to Joanna Rogers. And based on that information and some additional information that our investigators have uncovered, we have determined that he is a suspect in the Joanna Rogers case.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

GRACE: What a smile. Joanna Rogers would be 18 years old today, 5-5, hazel eyes, beautiful red hair, 125 pounds. Missing since May 4, '04.

And with me right now her father, Joe Bill Rogers. Mr. Rogers, thank you for being with us.

JOE BILL ROGERS, JOANNA'S FATHER: Thank you for having me on.

GRACE: So what can we do to help you?

ROGERS: Well, get my daughter back. The first I heard of any of this information was when Rosendo Rodriguez's attorney called me Saturday morning. We hadn't had anything relayed. And he called and wanted to know why they would be looking into the relationship between my daughter and Rosendo Rodriguez, the defendant in this case.

GRACE: Hold on one second, Mr. Rogers. Straight to Captain Overstreet. Captain Overstreet, why is it the suspect's lawyer is the one to tell the parents, instead of the police?

OVERSTREET: Well, that's my understanding. I did talk with Joe Bill yesterday, and it is my understanding that Rosendo's attorney...

GRACE: Yes, well, I understand that, too. My question is why.

OVERSTREET: Well, I couldn't tell you why he contacted him.

GRACE: Well, shouldn't the police call him?

OVERSTREET: Certainly.

GRACE: Well, you`re the captain, right?

OVERSTREET: We have talked to the family, Nancy. We talked to them yesterday morning.

GRACE: OK. Back to the father. Mr. Rogers, I`ve had so many family members tell me they learn things from the media or they learn things from opening up the morning paper, about their loved ones. I understand the lawyer called you. Can you take me back to the day that you learned that your daughter was missing? What happened?

ROGERS: I`m a licensed investigator. I belonged to the Texas Association of Licensed Investigators. Whenever my daughter -- she came in about 12:35 from work, told her mother and me that she was going to bed and talked with her mother a little bit. She went to bed. I heard a noise about 3:30. I got up because we`d had our cars broke into. I looked, didn`t think anything about it, but I looked out the front window and the side door, went back to bed.

And Joanna had a doctor`s appointment that morning. Kathy went in to get her up. She wasn`t there. We called all around, trying to find her. And then I was wondering about some phone information, so I got on a thing we call Tally (ph) help line and put out a call for my PI friends to give me a hand trying to figure out, you know, where to go with the phone numbers that we were trying to get.

And then we flew in a guy who`s one of the best in the world, by the name of Philip Klein (ph). He flew in. It was at 3:00 o`clock. He specializes in missing and runaway kids. He does it all over the world. Philip came in, started talking to everybody because, you know, when you`re close to it, you leave it alone. I gave him what I had. He did a real good search, background on friends and things, talked to people...

GRACE: Did he look at her computer?

ROGERS: Yes. He took this kind of quick glance in her computer. I can tell you a lot about the computer.

GRACE: Well, actually, hold on. Mr. Rogers -- everybody, with me, is Joanna Rogers`s father. Tonight, we are asking for your help to bring his girl home, just sweet 16 when she went missing out of her own bedroom, the mom and dad right down the hall, asleep. We`re going to come back with Mr. Rogers to see if you can help us.

Very quickly, to break and to tonight`s "Case Alert." A controversial proposal to put a three-year stop, a moratorium, on the California death penalty. What the hey? Five California assembly members are proposing the bill, and a the state legislature is set to consider it. Victims` rights groups speaking out against this measure. Crime Victims United of California calls the bill unconstitutional and an insult to murder victims everywhere.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The name of Joanna Rogers came up on the forensics examination of Rodriguez`s computer. There was also a file on Joanna`s computer that had that name.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

GRACE: There`s a rash of missing girls out of Lubbock, Texas. You`ve got Joanna Rogers, a cute little redhead we`re talking about tonight. Her father is with us. Reward \$15,000. Also now missing, a girl named Jennifer Lynn Wilkerson (ph), last seen, Lubbock, Texas, about the same age, DOB 1977.

I want to go back to Joanna`s father, Joe Bill Rogers, joining us by phone. That must have been shocking. You wake up, your little girl gone, no forced entry, nothing stolen, correct?

ROGERS: Correct.

GRACE: What do you think about this Rodriguez fellow? Do you think they were talking to each other on line? I mean, they were apparently on each other`s buddy list.

ROGERS: There`s things that -- you know, I wouldn`t doubt that that`s a possibility. We had the hard drives pulled and copied five times. I sent it to two very good computer experts, one in Dallas and one in Houston.

GRACE: I wish you could see this guy. I wish you could see this guy. I`m looking at him right now. He looks so much younger than 25. I bet he could have told a girl that he was -- I mean, he looks like he`s in his teens, maybe 19, 20.

ROGERS: I have no earthly idea. I`ve never...

GRACE: I`m looking at him right now. Now, here in his mug shot, he looks a little bit older, but -- go ahead, sir. I`m sorry.

ROGERS: Just that, you know, that`s it. We had them pulled. They`ve been looked at. The way I understood it from the attorney for Rosendo was that they`d been looking into this and that Special Agent Fish (ph), who`s an FBI agent, and one of the sheriff`s deputies, Parrot (ph), Greg Parrot is his name, been looking at this about, oh, five or six weeks ago...

GRACE: Yeah.

ROGERS: ... and that, you know, they had something going. Didn`t know anything about it and...

GRACE: I can`t believe you...

ROGERS: ... then Jennifer Wilkerson...

GRACE: ... found...

ROGERS: ... also disappeared not too far from our house, too, in very unusual circumstances. And I know Jack (ph) and Dickey (ph), her parents, are beside themselves, too. You know, it`s just -- we don`t know.

GRACE: I`m just wondering if this guy isn`t connected to Jennifer Wilkerson, as well. Mr. Rogers, before we go to break, number one, I`m sorry that you learned this through a phone call from the defense attorney, about Rodriguez. But what can we do for you, other than publicizing your daughter`s name, her photo and the reward.

ROGERS: Well, mainly, you can tell people to love their kids. That`s the whole thing. Love them while you`ve got them. And just try to -- you know, you can only do so much, and just be happy every time they walk in the door and then know where they`re going when they`re going out. And even at the best, you can`t always do that.

GRACE: I know you are on the case, sir, and it`s Christmas and Hanukkah approaches us...

(CROSSTALK)

ROGERS: Well, I haven`t stopped looking, and I`m still going to keep looking, and I`m digging lots of places now.

GRACE: Sir, we`ll be happy to continue to help you.

Everybody, the phone number 806-775-1601 or go on line to The Lost, that number is 1-800-THELOST. The reward up to \$15,000.

We at NANCY GRACE want very much to help solve unsolved homicides, find missing people.