

# New book details investigation of U student's death

The student died on Halloween in 2002, but many questions remain unanswered.

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After a Halloween night spent in Downtown Minneapolis, Chris Jenkins was ejected from the bar where he and his friends had been drinking. It was the last time those friends would see Jenkins, a 21-year-old Carlson School of Management student.

Jenkins' body was found four months later in the Mississippi River. Police eventually ruled the case a murder but never solved it. The Jenkins family didn't stop searching for answers.

That was seven years ago .

Now Jan Jenkins, Chris' mother, recounts the family's own investigation into the mysterious disappearance and murder in her book "Footprints of Courage ," which was released this week.

Jenkins said the book is a tribute to her son and the countless volunteers who joined in the search for Chris Jenkins.

"Even out of a horrific tragedy, those acts of courage are a testament to the indomitable human spirit," Jenkins said.

The book points to many factors that hamstrung the investigation and contributed to Jenkins' death, including issues of resources available to police in missing person investigations, personal safety measures and the accountability of investigators, bars and the community in missing person cases.

Jenkins said community members who witnessed clues that might have aided the investigation were dissuaded because the case was labeled a suicide before authorities found any compelling evidence to suggest that Jenkins was not murdered.

Jenkins said the book had a message for families of students, as well as those who had suffered loss or facing adversity.

"The book is all about trust[ing] your gut and step[ing] with the courage to do it, because it will be the right thing," Jenkins said.

The case has garnered national attention as some have speculated that Jenkins' death is connected by circumstance to similar murders by culprits, known commonly as the "Smiley Face Killers ," a theory that the FBI and Minneapolis Police Department both denied.

"There is no shortage of theories about what happened to Chris Jenkins on Halloween night in 2002 ... it is our goal not only to uncover the facts surrounding Chris Jenkins' death, but to identify evidence which objectively proves those facts beyond a reasonable doubt," police said in a 2008 statement.

Still, NBC and Gentleman's Quarterly are both producing upcoming works that highlight the investigation and the Jenkins family struggle, Jan Jenkins said.

When Jenkins disappeared, Minneapolis police did not initiate a search for three days because there was no immediate sign that he had been taken captive, so his family and friends began searching for him, Jenkins said.

The searchers even turned to private investigators, blood hounds and psychics to find answers, according to Minneapolis police records.

“If you think something is unfair, and it’s really important, stand up for it. I can’t imagine what would have been more important to [us],” Jan Jenkins said.

Some answers came in February 2003, when a General Mills employee spotted Jenkins’ body floating on the Mississippi River.

Unable to find definite signs of a struggle or determine where Jenkins entered the water or why, Minneapolis police closed the case in September 2004, and Minneapolis Police Chief William McManus wrote to the family, ruling out foul play.

Still unsatisfied with the original investigation, the Jenkins family enlisted scientific experts and pored over satellite photos in hopes of finding clues about how Jenkins’ body came to rest with his hands folded over his chest and with his clothing still tidy, characteristics that were inconsistent with the suicide by jumping off a bridge, as police had ruled.

Lifeguard Systems , a New York organization that investigates and analyzes drowning deaths, examined the case and reported several possibilities, but could not pinpoint the location or exact circumstances by which Jenkins entered the water.

Jenkins’ family refused to believe that Chris, who had been a captain on the University lacrosse team and was close to graduating, had killed himself or had merely fallen off a bridge. They appealed to the Minneapolis police for evidence to support the theory.

“We never got anything,” Jenkins said.

Police reopened the case and reclassified it as a homicide in 2006, admitting to mistakes in the original investigation.

The FBI later investigated the case, but ceded authority to Minneapolis police when they found no connection to the “Smiley Face Killers,” an FBI spokesman said.

Now, the investigation has stalled, and Jan Jenkins fears that some clues that may have clung to her son’s body were swept down the river when the investigation was being handled as a suicide and not a murder.

“We can’t change it, we can’t make it better. What we can do is present facts that make sense and hopefully effect positive change for the future,” Jenkins said.

The book can be ordered at [www.footprintsofcourage.com](http://www.footprintsofcourage.com)