

Wisconsin man, 21, arrested in Jayme Closs abduction

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
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Reporting from Madison, Wis. —

A 21-year-old man is jailed in the deaths of a Wisconsin couple he allegedly killed because he wanted to kidnap their teenage daughter, investigators said Friday, a day after the girl approached a stranger along a rural road saying she'd been abducted in October and held against her will.

Jake Thomas Patterson was taken into custody shortly after 13-year-old Jayme Closs sought help from a woman walking her dog in a rural, heavily wooded neighborhood near the small town of Gordon, about 60 miles north of Barron. Jayme disappeared from her family's home outside Barron when her parents were killed Oct. 15.

During a news conference Friday, Barron County Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald said Jayme was taken against her will. The sheriff also said investigators don't believe Patterson had any contact with the family.

Fitzgerald said that investigators believe Patterson killed Jayme's parents because he wanted to abduct her and that Patterson "planned his actions and took many steps to hide his identity."

Fitzgerald said investigators believe the girl was "the only target."

A woman said she was walking her dog along a rural road Thursday afternoon when a disheveled teenage girl called out to her for help, quickly grabbed her and told her she was lost. Only then did the girl reveal her name.

Jeanne Nutter said Friday that Jayme told her she had walked away from a cabin where she'd been held captive not far from Nutter's home.

“I was terrified, but I didn’t want to show her that,” Nutter, a social worker who spent years working in child protection, told the Associated Press. “She just yelled, ‘Please help me, I don’t know where I am. I’m lost.’”

Nutter said she didn’t want to bring Jayme to her own home because it was too close to where she’d been found, and she didn’t want them to be alone. “My only thought was to get her to a safe place,” she said.

The two went to the home of Peter and Kristin Kasinskas.

Jayme was skinny and dirty, wearing shoes too big for her feet, but appeared outwardly OK, the neighbors said.

“I honestly still think I’m dreaming right now. It was like I was seeing a ghost,” Peter Kasinskas told the Minneapolis Star Tribune. “My jaw just went to the floor.”

Jayme went missing Oct. 15, when police discovered someone had broken into the family’s home outside Barron and fatally shot her parents, James and Denise Closs. Jayme was nowhere to be found, and the Sheriff’s Department said she had probably been abducted.

Detectives pursued thousands of tips, watched dozens of surveillance videos and conducted numerous searches in the effort to find Jayme. An army of 2,000 volunteers mounted a massive ground search Oct. 23, but it yielded no clues.

Fitzgerald said in November that he kept similar cases in the back of his mind as he worked to find Jayme, including the abduction of Elizabeth Smart, who was 14 when she was taken from her Salt Lake City home in 2002. She was rescued nine months later with the help of two witnesses who recognized her abductors from an “America’s Most Wanted” episode.

“I have a gut feeling she’s still alive,” Fitzgerald said at the time.

He was right.

During the 20 minutes Jayme was in their home, Peter and Kristin Kasinskas said they tried to make her feel more comfortable. They offered her water and food, but she declined both. Jayme was quiet, her emotions “pretty flat,” Peter Kasinskas said.

Jayme told the couple she didn't know where she was or anything about Gordon. From what she told them, they believe she had been there since soon after she disappeared.

Gordon is about 40 miles south of Lake Superior and about 60 miles north of Barron, Jayme's hometown. Gordon is home to about 645 people in a heavily forested region where logging is the top industry.

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office confirmed on its website that Jayme was found in the town at 4:43 p.m. Thursday and that a suspect was taken into custody 11 minutes later.

Sue Allard, Jayme's aunt, told the Star Tribune that she could barely express her joy after learning the news Thursday night.

“Praise the Lord,” Allard said between sobs. “It's the news we've been waiting on for three months. I can't wait to get my arms around her. I just can't wait.”