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Video made the difference in Tori's case: ex-cop

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CTV Newsnet: David Perry, former homicide detective, on the charges



The reality seems to be that even if an Amber Alert had been issued when Victoria Stafford went missing, it would not have helped.

Enhanced OPP video of the security camera footage



This Oxford Community Police Service video of Victoria Stafford was enhanced and released by the Ontario Provincial Police Forensic Video Analysis Unit.

CTV Newsnet: Police hold press conference on arrests in Stafford case



Oxford Community Police Service Chief Ron Fraser says the next step is to identify the suspect.

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The short, grainy surveillance video that showed Victoria Stafford walking away from school with a woman is unquestionably the key to cracking the case, says a former Toronto homicide detective.

"Without that piece of evidence, this would have been a very difficult case to solve -- and it might not have been solved," Dave Perry told ctvtoronto.ca on Wednesday.

Victoria, an eight-year-old Woodstock, Ont. girl also known as Tori, went missing on April 8.

The next day, police released a short, grainy video of Tori walking away from her school with a woman in a puffy white coat.

They followed up with an enhanced version of the same video on April 13, followed by a composite sketch of the woman in the video on April 21.

Craig Racini, whose girlfriend lives next door to the female suspect in Woodstock, said his suspicions were raised after he saw the surveillance video.

He said two women moved next door about two months ago. One of the women recently cut her hair short. Racini said that when he asked her why, she said it was because she got bubblegum stuck in her hair.

Racini said "no comment" when he was asked if he called in the tip to police.

Police have arrested and charged two people in connection with Tori's abduction and death:

PHOTOS



Dave Perry thinks this crime has the earmarks of someone close to Tori Stafford's family.

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EDITOR'S PICKS

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- Michael Thomas C.S. Rafferty, 28, has been charged with kidnapping and first-degree murder
- Terri-Lynne McClintic, 18, is charged with kidnapping and being an accessory after the fact

At Wednesday's news conference to formally announce the arrests of the two suspects, OPP Insp. Bill Renton would only say the surveillance video is "one piece of evidence that has brought us to where we are."

Investigating missing children

With Tori, Oxford Community Police received a call at 6 p.m. saying Tori never returned home from school. By midnight, they had informed other nearby police agencies. The first news release went out at 3 a.m. on April 9.

The police have come under periodic criticism during this case for not declaring an Amber Alert, a system for urgently informing the media and public about missing children.

The topic came up again at Wednesday's news conference.

Oxford Police Chief Ron Fraser said Tori's case didn't meet the criteria. "Having said that, we utilized the local media as fast as we could to get the information out. The Amber Alert would not have made any difference because it did not meet the criteria," he said.

Perry, who has worked similar cases to that of Tori, said it's not up to individual police services to issue Amber Alerts. They must request one.

"I've done it before and been turned down in similar cases where children are missing and presumed abducted but there's no proof," he said.

In Tori's case, there was no evidence in the early hours to suggest she'd been abducted, he said.

Amber Alerts work best when someone sees a child being grabbed, put in a vehicle and where they then record the suspect's licence number, Perry said.

"When you have all this information, you have a decent shot at capturing these people before they do harm to the child," he said, adding children go missing all the time for all sorts of reasons.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that in rare circumstances, children can die in these cases.

Perry, who left the police five years ago, was lead investigator in the October 2003 disappearance of Cecilia Zhang, whose body was found five months later. A Chinese foreign exchange student was later convicted of murder in connection with her death.

In that case, Min Chen had intended to kidnap the girl for ransom of \$25,000. He planned to use the money for a marriage of convenience to allow him to stay in Canada.

Chen ended up strangling Cecilia moments after removing her from the family home -- inadvertently, he claimed.

"We had evidence the house was broken into," Perry said, but the fingerprints didn't match anyone who had been recently in the home.

As a result, solving that case took months. They eventually learned Chen had known someone who once boarded with the Zhangs, he said.

Another famous Toronto child murder is that of Holly Jones in May 2003. In that case, her killer Michael Briere snatched the young girl off a street in broad daylight at rush hour, sexually assaulted her and killed her within an hour.

"You've got minutes or hours in these cases," Perry said, as the offender carries out the sex act and then kills his victim because he panics and doesn't wish to get caught.

Perry said it didn't surprise him that Tori could disappear so easily, primarily because a female had been involved.

"It would appear that Tori was walking along willingly ... at the end of the day, we'll have to wait until the end of the court process to figure out what truly happened and how Tori was convinced to go with this woman," he said.



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