

Father waits to hear from daughter in 1993 parental abduction case

LOUISE DICKSON, Victoria Times Colonist, December 4, 2011

VICTORIA — Joe Chisholm has been told that the daughter he has not seen since May 13, 1993, wants to contact him.

Counsellors with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection told Chisholm that his daughter, [name withheld], who grew up in Victoria under the assumed identity of [name withheld], is doing okay, but is still in shock.

On Thursday, her mother, Patricia Joan O'Byrne, 54, was arrested at home by Victoria police, who were working with the Toronto Police Service to solve an 18-year-old parental abduction case. O'Byrne was known to neighbours and colleagues as Pamela Whelan, a public information officer for the provincial government at several ministries.

On Thursday, Toronto police and counsellors sat down with [name withheld], who was valedictorian of her 2009 graduating class from Victoria High School. She was told her father had been looking for her for 18 years. Her mother and father had married and lived in Toronto. They separated and had joint custody of her when the mother is accused of disappearing with her, violating a custody order. [name withheld was 20 months old. At the time, Chisholm had a four-year-old son, Jesse, from a previous relationship.

A September tip to Calgary-based Missing Children Society of Canada eventually led to O'Byrne's arrest. She is to appear Monday in Toronto's College Park courthouse for a bail hearing.

Reached at home Saturday, Chisholm said the child protection counsellors have been doing a great job keeping him in touch with his daughter.

"We've been sending little notes and messages to her along the way," Chisholm said. "They said she was in shock. I mean, we're still in shock, even though we were prepared for this. Jesse and I are walking on eggshells. She didn't know everything about her past and more is being revealed, and that's shocking."

Chisholm sent [name withheld a note telling her he was looking forward to meeting her. He also told her he cannot imagine what she's going through. Chisholm's parents, Don and Joan, have sent her family photographs and a note.

"She hasn't responded yet. I've heard she wants to. It's just a matter of time," Chisholm said. "Everything is indicating she's just getting ready for that day, whether it's the weekend or a couple of weeks from now."

Chisholm said his whole family is beside themselves.

"Every family gathering in the last 18 years has been like a funeral. It's hard to get all excited and huggy and happy when someone's missing."

He hopes his daughter has good friends to help her through her extraordinary situation. Counsellors are continuing to support her, he said.

"They made sure she was talked down and not left to her own devices. She hasn't done anything wrong. She hasn't committed a crime. She's the victim," said Chisholm. "My biggest concern is that she has all the time she needs."

Chisholm expressed empathy for his ex-wife and hopes the circumstances will not ruin his daughter's relationship with her mother. "I mean, she's a good kid — you've got to give her mom credit."

Chisholm does not plan to attend O'Byrne's court appearance Monday. He has sent her a message.

"If she wants to talk to me, I'll talk to her, face-to-face without cameras. We've got a lot to talk through. But if she's livid and self-justified, it won't help. It would just exacerbate the situation. I'm not going to go and jeer at her in the courtroom. I'll talk to her, when she wants to talk to me — just like my daughter."

Chisholm created a blog on a social media site dedicated to finding [name withheld]. There are videos containing photos of Jesse and baby [name withheld] playing together and photographs of O'Byrne.

Chisholm said the tip that led police to Victoria probably came from someone who was on O'Byrne's side, but became ticked off at her.

ldickson@timescolonist.com

© Copyright (c) The Victoria Times Colonist