

Where is Naomi Wilson?

By Kurt Rogahn
Gazette staff writer

Why would a 32-year-old Cedar Rapids woman walk away and leave her house, her car, a good job and friends and family who love her?

That's the puzzle behind the disappearance of Naomi Wilson, 1618 13th Ave. SE. Last seen on Sunday afternoon, April 12, her car was found two afternoons later in the K-mart parking lot at 2727 16th Ave. SE.

Police have not ruled out foul play in connection with Wilson's disappearance. But neither is there enough evidence at this point to suggest someone may have killed her, according to police sources.

Wilson is one of three adults reported missing to Cedar Rapids Police since Jan. 1. Three detectives have been assigned to investigate her disappearance, and the investigation has generated a thick file of reports.

Wilson's is one of 23 unsolved missing-person cases on file with Cedar Rapids Police since 1978. Fourteen of those reports involve juveniles.

BUT NAOMI WILSON was more than just another name on a list to people who knew her — people such as her brothers John and Lorenzo Pollard, who hurried here from Atlanta last week to join in the search for their sister; and Colbert "Billy" Beets, her boyfriend for three years.

Naomi Wilson would not go away without letting someone know where she was, agreed both John Pollard, interviewed this week by phone, and Beets, who was interviewed at The Gazette.

"She's very level-headed," Pollard continued. "She thinks about building up her life in many ways."

"She's real friendly," Beets said. "She's pleasant to talk to," not necessarily outgoing, he said. Her temper occasionally flared, "but she was plain-spoken. She didn't beat around the bush. If she didn't like something, she'd say so."

Both men said they knew her to be a reliable worker at Harnischfeger, where she worked in materials-handling and later at a factory "checkpoint."

"It's most unusual for someone to up and leave a job where you're making \$1,000 a month," Pollard continued. "She has acquired furniture, a car, and bought a house last July. She had been buying things to fix up the house," he said.

Naomi and her brothers were

Naomi Wilson



raised in Birmingham, Ala. After high school she moved to Chicago, where she married Bennie Wilson. The couple divorced three years ago, some time after moving to Cedar Rapids. Since remarrying, Bennie Wilson now lives in Denver.

SUNDAY, APRIL 12 started normally, Beets said, when he went to church. Although she didn't go that day, Naomi also usually attended church.

Beets said he returned from a noon church service during mid-afternoon. The two left Naomi's house within minutes of each other about 4 p.m., Beets said.

Beets went to his mother's house with some ice. Wilson went to get gasoline for her car and to visit a woman she worked with at Harnischfeger.

But the friend told Beets later Naomi never showed up.

Beets and Wilson passed each other on the street an hour later, he said. That was the last time he saw her.

When she didn't return home, Beets said he searched for her until 3 a.m. Monday. He and others searched again for her Monday.

"I still didn't report it to the police, and I still didn't put it out on the street, because I didn't want to get everyone all stirred up and have her drive up all of a sudden."

When another Harnischfeger employee phoned Beets to let him know Naomi never showed up for work Monday, Beets called police.

Friends searched the city by car Tuesday and Beets' brother found Naomi Wilson's car at the K-mart at 2:55 p.m., according to police reports.

More friends, aided by the Linn County Civil Defense office, searched a wooded area near K-mart Wednesday, April 15.

BEETS FEELS police could have done more the day after they were told Naomi Wilson was missing.

For example, at one point he flagged down a uniformed police officer while he was trying to find Naomi's car. He asked the officer if he'd seen the car, and the officer didn't know that the police had put out an "attempt to locate" report on Wilson's car.

"I don't believe they even looked for the car," Beets said.

And when the car was found at K-mart, police didn't take fingerprints off the car at the scene, Beets added. Instead, officers checked the car and its trunk at the scene and allowed him to drive it home.

"I think they've done a poor job," said Pollard. "I don't think they took the missing person report seriously when it was first reported. Being from the South, and being black, I grew up knowing that if you're white, the police jump on the case. If you're black, they wait around a little before acting."

Beets and Pollard seem to have opposite "gut feelings" about the case, when each was asked to speculate her fate.

"I guess I have a positive attitude," Pollard said. "I don't have that gut feeling that something is wrong with her right now." He just hopes that "if some person or persons are holding her," that she can break free and call her family.

"My parents in Birmingham are upset now," Pollard added. "They've lost two of my brothers, one in '58 and one in '72."

Beets seemed to suspect foul play. "Something would just have to have happened to her," he said. "I can never believe that she would just leave town," he said.



Gazette photo by Tom Merryman

Chinese visitors

Educators from the Republic of China (Taiwan) visited the Kirkwood Community College campus and the Amanas this week. Above, they look over bedding plants in the Kirkwood greenhouse. From the left are, Leo C.H. Lee, who is studying in Cedar Rapids; I-Fan Chang, director of the department of technology and vocational education; Clifford Sung-Nien Yoh, president of Taichung Junior College of Commerce; Mel Essex of the Kirkwood staff; Tong Tien Chih Chen, president of Tahwa Junior College of Technology, and Wai Chan Ong, an attorney and counselor for the ministry of education. The four visitors arrived at Kirkwood Thursday and will leave today.

Browning given 25-year sentence

King Junior Browning has received a sentence of up to 25 years in prison on his guilty plea to a second-degree murder charge in Linn District Court.

Browning, 46, of 1052 Fifth Ave. SE originally was charged with first-degree murder in the Jan. 13 shotgun slaying of T.J. Mayfield, but he pleaded guilty to the reduced charge as part of a plea bargain.

Judge Larry Conney imposed the only sentence allowed by law. A statute dealing with forcible felonies involving a firearm requires that at least five years of the sentence be served.

Mayfield's body was found inside a garage at 815 Fifth Ave. SE. Browning reportedly told acquaintances he had shot Mayfield, and they reported it to police.

Linn-Mar FFA is top winner

SIoux CITY — The Linn-Mar Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter of Marion has won four gold awards, the highest given, in speaking contests at the state FFA convention in Sioux City.

Those winning the top awards included:

- Extemporaneous speaking, Doug Dostal.
 - Public speaking, Chris Novak.
 - Parliamentary procedure, including team members Mark Arkema, Jeff Biedenbach, Joe Heyer and Nate Morrison.
 - Greenhand conduct of meetings, including team members Dave Beckner, Doug Biedenbach, Connor Callahan, Amy Geers, Mary Moes, Carla Ruley and Deb Wirather.
- In addition, the Linn-Mar FFA chapter received a gold award in judging of reporter's scrapbooks.

Linn-Mar FFA won more gold awards than any other FFA chapter in The Gazette circulation area.

Other award winners at the state convention in The Gazette circulation area included:

- Freshman creed speaking contest. Silver or second place, Andrew Craft of Decorah. Bronze or third place, Liza Schaul of North Linn at Troy Mills; Tom Poduska, Stanwood, and Mark Hanson, Williamsburg.
- Extemporaneous speaking contest. Silver, Eric Craft, Burr Oak near Decorah.
- Public speaking, Silver, Kerry Fladung, Washington; Janet Gibbs, West Union.
- Chapter program, Gold, Manchester, including team members Marty Pins and Greg Klein. Gold, Vinton, Denise Inman and Roger Oliphant.
- Parliamentary procedure, Silver, Manchester, including team members Rob Gudenauf, Kenny Klein, Dave McDonald, Dan Reiss, Mitch Wueste.
- Secretary's record book, Gold, Dysart-Geneseo.
- Treasurer's book, Gold, North Linn of Troy Mills, Monticello, Mid-Prairie of Wellman, Silver, Keota.
- Reporter's scrapbook, Gold, Manchester.

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