

1. [Back to Home Page](#)
2. [Overview](#)
3. [Which Came First: the Head Blow or Strangulation?](#)
4. [What Object Was Used for the Head Blow?](#)
5. [Evidence About the Garrote](#)
6. [Evidence of a Stun Gun](#)
7. [Evidence of Sexual Assault](#)
8. [Evidence of Prior Sexual Abuse](#)
9. [Is This a DNA Case?](#)
10. [Evidence About The Pineapple](#)
11. [Evidence About Where JBR Was Killed](#)
12. [Was This a Kidnapping for Ransom?](#)
13. [Evidence of an Intruder](#)
14. [Evidence of Staging](#)
15. [Evidence of a Cover-up](#)
16. [Can Psychics Solve the JBR Case?](#)

[Back to Home Page](#)

Overview

As with any homicide, we start with the body, including what we can deduce about how JBR was killed. We know from the autopsy that both a severe head blow from an unknown object and strangulation from a ligature found on her neck contributed to her death.

- So the first puzzle is which came first: the head blow or strangulation? This is a question that hypothetically can be answered even if we never determine for certain what specific object was used to deliver the head blow. Moreover, the answer to this question may be important in determining what kind of perpetrator killed her.
- The second puzzle is what object was used for the head blow?
- A relates the evidence related to the garrote as this may reveal something about the killer's motivation in using such a device rather than manual strangulation or any alternative form of lethal violence.

There are two remaining questions that relate to forensic evidence obtained from the body. These too may be critical in narrowing down the range of plausible suspects:

- Evidence of a stun gun
- Evidence of sexual assault
- Evidence of prior sexual assault

The remaining forensic evidence comes both from her body, her clothing, or other locations in the house as the answers to these two would greatly constrain who might be regarded as a plausible suspect:

- Is this a DNA case?
- Evidence about the pineapple
- Evidence about where JBR was killed

The remaining evidence entails how to interpret forensic evidence unrelated to her body--including the ransom note and house itself--which speaks to the issue of motivation or nature of the suspected killer.

- Was this a kidnapping for ransom?
- Evidence of an intruder
- Evidence of staging
- Evidence of a cover-up

This page closes with a section on whether psychics can solve the JBR case.

Which Came First: the Head Blow or Strangulation?

Many theories of the case rest decisively on whether the head blow preceded the strangulation. If Steve Thomas's "bedwetting rage" theory is to be accepted for example, it is critical that the head-blow **precede** the "strangulation" used to cover this up. Conversely, if Cyril Wecht's "sex-game-gone-awry" theory is correct, the accidental strangulation would have to precede the head-blow used as part of staging. The experts are divided on this issue. An extensive discussion of the head blow is [here](#). See [The Head Injury](#) at Webbsleuths forum chat.

Evidence the Head Blow Came First

- **Expert Opinion.** Internet poster [SuperDave](#) has reported that Drs. Werner Spitz, Tom Henry, Henry Lee, and Ron Wright all concluded the head blow came first.
 - **Ronald Wright, MD** "director of the forensic pathology department at the University of Miami School of Medicine, reviewed [JonBenet's](#) autopsy report Tuesday at the request of the *Rocky Mountain News*." [RMN](#) stated: "The blow to her head -- which Wright is convinced was not from a golf club but more likely a blunt object such as a baseball bat or heavy flashlight -- came first, Wright said. "She was whopped on the head a long time before she was strangled," said Wright. "That might or might not have rendered her unconscious. But this is not anything that kills her right away." He said **20 to 60 minutes elapsed** between the skull fracture and the strangulation." [Emphasis added]
- **Head Blow with Little Bleeding Possible.** Kerry Brega, chief neurologist at Denver Health Medical Center, [said](#) it is not uncommon for people with skull fractures to not have any bleeding. "We see a lot of people with skull fractures without bleeds in the brain, and they didn't all get strangled on the way in," she said. "So it is actually possible to get a skull fracture without getting an underlying bleed in the brain."
- **Petechiae Evidence.** The presence of petechiae have been used by some as proof that JBR was still alive while strangled, but if death occurred during strangulation, this would imply the head blow came first. However, Internet poster [BluesStrat](#) has [found](#) the following [quote](#) on-line: "Petechiae (puh-TEE-key-eye) are tiny little broken capillary blood vessels. Everyone has had them. A hard bout of coughing or vomiting can cause facial petechiae, especially around the eyes. These mean nothing. Newborns often have facial petechiae from the tight squeeze through the cervix. Thus petechiae are fairly common and in general of no concern."
- **Personal Experience.** Internet poster [Ames](#) was temporarily strangled as a 9-year-old schoolgirl. Based on this experience, she is certain that if JBR had been still conscious while strangled, she would have clawed extensively at her neck to avoid the terrifying experience of being strangled. The absence of deep neck scratches implies to this poster that JBR must have already been unconscious from the head blow.

Evidence Against the Head Blow Coming First

- **Expert Opinion.** Internet poster [SuperDave](#) has reported that Drs. Michael Doberson and Cyril Wecht both concluded the head blow came after the strangulation.
- **Wecht View.** Wecht's [explanation](#) is as follows: "If you inflict a blow like that on someone whose heart is beating," he asserts, "the heart doesn't stop, because the cardiac and respiratory centers are at the base of the brain. You're not damaging that with a blow to the top of the head. It'll become compromised as the brain swells, but initially there's no compromise. They control your heart and lungs. The heart continues to beat. The blood continues to flow. But in the Ramsey case, they got less than a teaspoon and a half of blood. If you have a beating heart and the carotid arteries are carrying blood, this person doesn't die right away. That means that blow was inflicted when she was already dead or dying."
- **Doberson View.** "Adams County Coroner Mike Dobersen [said](#) he reviewed the autopsy photographs and thinks there would have been much more internal bleeding inside the brain if JonBenét had been struck first and strangled later."
- **Yeager View.** The Seraph report dated July 29, 1997 and written by Dale Yeager at the request of BPD [concluded](#) from the available forensic evidence:
 - "the strangulation and blunt trauma to the skull meant that the offender tried one method of killing the girl and then changed to a different method out of frustration. One of these methods failed and the person resorted to a second method to kill the victim."
 - If the forensic information that I have is correct, the offender attempted strangulation first.

What Object Was Used for the Head Blow?

Police collected several pieces of evidence that could have served as head blow weapons, including a large flashlight found in the kitchen, a baseball bat, golf clubs, a red clay brick and a hammer [Daily Camera 1/12/98](#).

Was Flashlight Used for Head Blow?

Yes

- "Cops had long suspected that a weighty black flashlight was used to inflict the fatal 8-inch head wound on the six-year-old beauty queen after she was garroted," reported Dick Woodbury, Time's Denver bureau chief. Boulder Police Chief Tom Koby declined to comment on the report. "We have never commented on rumors and speculations, and we are going to stay consistent with that," City of Boulder spokeswoman Leslie Aaholm said. "Police believe the flashlight's heavy rubber coating seems consistent with an instrument that could deliver a crushing blow yet not cause bleeding," the magazine reports, without identifying a source." [Daily Camera, 1/12/98](#).
- Internet poster [Dave](#) has done extensive experiments in smashing coconuts using the handle end of a similar Mag-lite and concludes that even accounting for the force required for the head-blow, this would not necessarily have damaged the flashlight or left forensic evidence on the light.
- Werner Spitz Account.** "Dr. Werner Spitz, Macomb County, MI Medical Examiner, who worked on the [JonBenet](#) Ramsey case has [demonstrated](#) that "you can place the end of the flashlight perfectly into her wound." However, he [believes](#) the large end of the flashlight was used rather than the handle. That said, no one has demonstrated that such a flashlight could deliver a blow of sufficient force to create the observed injuries without damaging the light end of it.

No

Internet poster [Spade](#) [claims](#) that Jeff Shapiro was the source for the story that police thought a flashlight had been used and that Shapiro was being fed bogus information by Alex Hunter. Spade claims to have interviewed a detective involved in testing possible objects used to deliver the blow and in this detective's opinion, a flashlight was not that object.

Was Baseball Bat Used for Head Blow?

Yes

Except for fiber(s) from the carpet on which JBR was killed, the only thing that links the bat to the crime is its unusual location and the possibility that a bat could have created the metal scraping sound heard by a neighbor. If police found any other forensic evidence on the bat, this has never been reported.

No

Tricia Griffith View. Internet poster [Tricia](#) argues that there's no proof the bat had anything to do with the crime. She states: "The baseball bat is not linked to the murder. It was not shown to be used in any way during the commission of the murder. The only thing that can be proven is that a fiber from the room in which JBR was found was also on the bat. The Ramseys make no attempt to connect the bat in any way to the murder. There is no way to know how long the bat had lain in the location it was found. There are no fingerprints on the bat that are connected to the murder. There is no DNA. Even Patsy Ramsey wasn't sure if the bat was Burke's or not [see]. There is no evidence to show when or how the baseball bat got in the location it was found, and there is no useful evidence other than small fibers on the bat to suggest it was used in the crime; yet, the leap is somehow made that the bat is connected to the murder of [JonBenet](#) Ramsey as cited by Judge Carnes."

Evidence About the Garrote

The autopsy alludes to "ligature cord" but most people refer to the strangulation device as a garrote since it included a stick that hypothetically could be used to tighten the noose. Some argue that this garrote (found around JBR's neck) was used as a sexual device; "sex-game-gone-awry" theories such as Cyril Wecht's entail the garrote's being used as an erotic asphyxiation (EA) device which is somewhat more consistent with her being killed by a family member or close family friend. Conversely some intruder theories posit a pedophile or other type of sex offender who used the garrote as part of a sexual fantasy. A related question is whether JBR struggled while being strangled; evidence that she did would argue against a voluntary "sex game."

- On-line Discussion.** See [The Garrote](#) at Webbsleuths forum chat.

Was the Garrote a Sexual Device?

Evidence For the Garrote as a Sexual Device

Internet poster [Tril](#) has [posted](#) a November 1995 story about the "choking game" that apparently was familiar to Boulder area schoolchildren aged 10-16. Thus, even if the device was not used for a sexual purpose, its intention may well have been for choking, as opposed to staging.

Evidence Against the Garrote as a Sexual Device

Internet poster [Delmar England](#), a self-reported expert in knots, has done extensive experimentation with the knots used in the ligature device and argues that it could serve only as a noose. That is, it could only be used to tighten, but not easily released. If so, this rules it out as an erotic asphyxiation device. His original analysis is [here](#) but he has updated his analysis [here](#) and [here](#).

Internet poster [FuryoftheDragon](#) [argues](#) "The neck ligature. Horrible to see. But, think about how this would have to work. Whoever did it had to pull it tight from behind. That suggests strongly to me that whoever did it couldn't bear to look her in the face. Why would a stranger intruder be bothered. Not only that, but its construction was so inefficient it couldn't have been used very effectively on a conscious person. Also, it allowed an obvious means of death. Cui bono from that? Not only an obvious means of death, it allowed the person to kill without having to touch the body, as if they were repulsed. Not what you'd expect from a hardened killer.

Did JBR Struggle While Being Strangled?

Evidence JBR Struggled While Being Strangled

- Lou Smit, under questioning by Lin Wood in a sworn deposition in the Wolf v. Ramsey case, [stated](#) "The most significant part of this photograph and what it tells me is the marks above the garrote. Petechiae that was found in the eyes are very tiny, tiny little pinpoint hemorrhages. These are larger abrasions. Dr. Doberson and I both agree that these marks that are above the garrote are fingernail marks made by JonBenet as she was struggling to get that garrote off of her neck. They are half moon in shape. JonBenet also, under her fingernails, the primary source of DNA, is JonBenet's." Q. On both hands? A. On both hands."
- Immediately after this excerpt, Internet poster Jameson (the source of this leaked deposition) states: "Note - not all of these photos are available to the public, nor will they be made public by my hand. But Lou is accurately describing them here." Thus, it appears that the particular photo Smit is alluding to (containing half-moon shaped marks) may not be in the public record.

Evidence JBR Did Not Struggle While Being Strangled

Internet poster [Nuisanceposter](#) has summarized the evidence against JBR's struggling:

- "I don't think she clawed at her neck while being strangled, because Meyer did not find her skin under her nails. If she scratched at her throat during strangulation enough to leave fingernail marks, then her skin should have been under her nails. It wasn't."
- "Not only that, there is very little damage to the interior of her neck, as if she didn't struggle at all. The hyoid bone is still intact as were the thyroid and cricoid cartilages, and her trachea. The strap muscles of her neck were not hemorrhaged."
- "Her tongue and the insides of her cheeks were unblemished as well, and usually stragulation victims will bite their tongue and cheeks during the strangling."
- "JonBenet's neck gives no indication that she was struggling or even conscious while she was being strangled, and when you consider the killer tied the knot and the back of neck and that her long joints were urine-stained in the crotch and in the front, it sounds to me like she was strangled face-down from behind, and she did not struggle against her killer at all."

Evidence of a Stun Gun

Evidence of Sexual Assault

There is little question JBR endured some sort of vaginal penetration on the night she was killed, as there was both vaginal bleeding and fragments of wood shards from the paintbrush used in the garrote as well as birefringent material consistent with said paintbrush also found in her vagina. The only question is whether this was the result of a deliberate sexual assault by a killer motivated in that direction or instead was part of staging after the fact to hide past sexual abuse or perhaps mislead authorities about how or why she actually was killed.

Evidence For a Sexual Assault

- In the Burke Ramsey v. CBS defamation case, Lin Wood [argued](#) "the evidence clearly demonstrated that JonBenet's murderer also sexually assaulted her: (1) there was blood on JonBenet's underwear and the entrance of her vagina; (2) JonBenet's hymen had been freshly broken, likely close in time to her death; (3) forensic pathologists that examined her found that she had been penetrated; and (4) fragments of wood that matched the garrote handle were found in her vagina" (paragraph #528).
- Lin Wood also [asserted](#): "In the 1990s, before he sold his services to participate in the Documentary, Pseudo-Expert Spitz examined evidence regarding JonBenet's vaginal injury. He found that the injuries to JonBenet's vagina showed she was sexually assaulted at or near the time of death" (paragraph #529).
- Rebuttal of CBS Documentary Claims.** Lin Wood has [asserted](#): "The secondary transfer theory regarding the piece of wood is so inherently improbable and absurd as to be obviously false. As Defendants knew, the piece of wood was traced to the very same paintbrush that was used to make the garrote handle. Further, the secondary transfer theory assumes that wood from the paintbrush somehow crawled through JonBenet's pajamas, then through her underwear, and then up into her vagina, all because her body was moved or a blanket was placed on top of her. That is nothing short of nonsensical and demonstrates the lengths these "experts" were willing to go to in order to support their false accusation against Burke" (paragraph #536).

Evidence Against a Sexual Assault

- **Werner Spitz.** In the CBS documentary *Who Killed JonBenét?*, Dr. Werner Spitz argued against the evidence of a sexual assault ([paragraph #530](#)).
- **Henry Lee.** The Documentary dismissed the piece of wood by strongly suggesting that it found its way into her vagina due to a secondary transfer. Henry Lee stated that the secondary transfer could have occurred when JonBenét's body was moved repeatedly or when a blanket was put on her ([paragraph #535](#)).
- **Internet Poster FuryoftheDragon.** "Then there's the sexual "assault." I use the dreaded quotation marks because the word assault implies certain things to me, which don't seem to apply here. The damage was very light, almost as if the person doing it didn't want to do it and wanted to get it done with quickly. That ties in with using the handle of the paintbrush: again, it allowed the work to be done without touching the body. Add to that pulling her pants back up and wiping away the blood from the penetration: as if someone couldn't stand to look at it. Those are some behavioral tells. Here's a physical one I'd like everyone to cogitate on: In order for the standard IDI theory (I guess you'd call it the Smit theory) to be correct, the killer would have to be strangling her while assaulting her genitals at the same time. Do I have that right? If so, let's go over the problems:
 - "JonBenét's hair was tied into the knot of the neck ligature. That means it was made on her body, not ahead of time. So the killer would have to hold her down with at least one hand while making the ligature with two hands. HUH?"
 - "According to Dr. McCann, JonBenét's labia would have to be manually separated, as with someone's fingers, in order to place something inside. Also, the place where the vaginal injury happened is consistent with a right-handed person inserting the object or a finger into her while she was lying on her back. Ergo, the killer would have to have her on her back, holding her labia open with one hand while inserting the paintbrush handle (IF that's what did it) with the other hand. So if I'm reading this right, the killer would need one hand to hold her down, two to make and tighten the ligature, and another two to penetrate her. That's five arms! PLUS, they'd have to be able to have her upper half facing down while her lower half was facing up! Just what the hell was this guy? A Greek mythological monster?" ([post](#)).

Evidence of Prior Sexual Abuse

Is This a DNA Case?

Evidence About The Pineapple

Evidence About Where JBR Was Killed The Basement

The conventional wisdom is that JBR was killed somewhere in the basement. Internet poster [Jameson](#) has recently summarized the conventional wisdom:

- **Wine Cellar Room Ruled Out.** The mold and dirt on the floor of the wine cellar room shows too few footprints for there to have been a scuffle in there.
- **Hallway Outside Wine Cellar Room.** There was a urine stain on the floor immediately outside that room, and a few feet away was the paint tote containing the remaining piece of the paintbrush used for a garrote; small bits of paintbrush handle also were found at the same location, suggesting this is where the garrote was made. Jameson asserts "most investigators" believe this is the area in which she was killed.
- **Train Room. John Mark Karr** claimed to have used the train room, i.e., the basement room with window through which he allegedly entered, but there was no evidence of urine found on the floor in that room and DNA evidence ruled out Karr as a suspect.

Outside the Basement

However, Internet poster [Henrietta McPhee](#) has noted "There is no forensic evidence, like some tufts of hair, or pieces of skin, or blood stains and blood spots, to indicate that she was murdered in the basement, and wonders whether the killing occurred elsewhere." Moreover, some theories such as the bed-wetting rage theory involving Patsy Ramsey or Burke's striking JBR in anger over her having snatched pineapple, imply that the initial violence occurred in a completely different part of the house. Such theories therefore require further explanation as to why the suspects would have taken her body to the basement to finish her off and/or why her body was taken to the wine cellar room if she was killed elsewhere etc.

Was This a Kidnapping for Ransom?

Evidence of Kidnapping

- **Legal Definition.** Under Colorado law, kidnapping is defined as follows:
 - KIDNAPPING, FIRST-DEGREE - First-degree kidnapping is committed when a person who seeks concessions to release the person either a) forcibly seizes and carries any person from one place to another, b) entices or persuades any person to go from one place to another or c) imprisons or forcibly seizes any person. See Manual 6.6 and C.R.S. ♦ 18-3-301.
 - KIDNAPPING, SECOND-DEGREE - Second-degree kidnapping is committed in either of two ways: knowingly seizing and carrying any person from one place to another, or, taking or enticing a child with the intent to keep the child from the child's parents or the intent to sell or trade the child. See Manual ♦ 6.6 and C.R.S. ♦ 18-3-302.
- **JBR "Kidnapped" Legally Speaking.** Thus, *technically speaking*, JBR was the victim of a first-degree kidnapping even though she was merely carried or forced to go from one part of the house to another and no ransom was ever collected. Arguably, even if she willingly went to the basement with a "friendly" intruder, the RN presumably would have been used as evidence of an effort to seek a concession for release even if its actual purpose was merely to divert authorities and/or buy time to escape.
- **The Ransom Note**
 - **RN Not "Planted" Evidence.** The note itself exists, and in that sense is "genuine." No one has argued it was "planted" by law enforcement, for example. But a contentious issue is whether **when written** the note was intended to actually secure a ransom amount from the Ramseys, regardless of what might have happened in the aftermath.
 - **Would Timing of RN Matter?** This is connected to, but irrevocably bound to, the question of whether the note was written before or after JBR was killed. As the [Comparison to Other Famous RN's](#) shows, there are historical examples of notes used successfully to secure ransoms even in cases where the kidnap victims were killed both before *and* after the notes were written. Thus, *the fact that JBR was found dead cannot itself be taken as definitive proof that the RN was not genuine.*
 - **Does Failure to Try and Collect Ransom Matter?** Likewise, there have been apparently genuine ransom notes written in which the perp, due to possible incompetence or some unknown motive, failed to attempt to retrieve an offered ransom amount. Thus, the failure to call "tomorrow" with further instructions for ransom delivery cannot be taken as definitive proof that the RN was not genuine at the time it was written.
 - **Motivations for "Fake" RN.** Many potential motivations have been offered for crafting a "fake" note: a) as part of a "cover-up" to divert authorities from how/why JBR died; b) as a "hidden message" to law enforcement or criminal profilers such as Robert Ressler or John Douglas; c) as a "mind game" that gave the killer satisfaction over expressing his/her control over the Ramseys; or d) as a deliberate effort to frame the Ramseys.

Evidence of a Ransom Attempt

- **Odd Ransom Amount Raises Questions.** Taken at face value, the RN seeks \$118,000; but because of the odd and paltry amount relative to what the Ramsey's could have paid, it is presumed by many that the note shouldn't be taken seriously, i.e., that it is "staging" and the perp never intended to collect a ransom. So the issue is what other aspects of the note suggest it was genuine?
- **Explicit Instructions.** The RN mirrors other "genuine" ransom notes in which ransoms were actually paid or attempted to be paid to perps who fully intended their notes to produce such a result.
 - The precise form of the ransom amount is specified in terms of number and denomination of bills desired;
 - The container in which the ransom amount is to be delivered is specified;
 - The method of contacting or being contacted by kidnapper is specified;
 - There are admonitions not to contact LE, with severe consequences articulated for non-compliance.
 - There are assurances that victim will be returned safely.
- Obviously the above characteristics of the RN are not dispositive since in any *fake* RN, the writer also would be seeking to replicate the form and style of RNs as they understand them (either as "students" of past crimes via movies or reading, OR by simply imagining what a kidnapper might "need" to say; we already know that this perp apparently was well-familiar with recent "ransom" movies, so there's no need to posit that the individual had ever read "classic" RNs such as in the Lindbergh or Loeb cases). But one could say that this note was far more detailed than it "needed" to be. Had it left out certain elements such as the denomination of bills requested, this fact would not have led LE to automatically conclude the note was "obviously" fake. So was the "excess" detail because the perp really hoped for a ransom delivery and was doing all possible ensure nothing inadvertently went wrong or does it reflect a fake RN writer bending over backward to appear genuine? Short of a confession, there's probably no way of determining the answer to the question with certainty given the evidence in hand.
- **BPD Took RN Seriously.** Even though "everybody knows" the RN was "fake" because we now have 20:20 hindsight of a body being found, in real time LE did take the note very seriously. If the note were "obviously" fake, the police presumably would have undertaken a much more thorough and diligent effort to search the house, thereby shortcutting the many hours of waiting that ensued. Likewise, the police presumably never would have wasted resources on setting up genuine phone taps and monitoring for hours. If their intent was merely to "entrap" the Ramseys by seeing how they would react, that could have been done much less expensively. But all this suggests that the RN was sufficiently credible that it could not be easily differentiated from a genuine RN.

Evidence Against a Ransom Attempt

- **FBI Did Not Take RN Seriously.** See [here](#) for details.
- **Forensic Linguistics Institute Analysis.** The *Forensic Linguistics Institute* has [posted](#) an analysis of the RN's contents, concluding that it is not a genuine ransom note.

Evidence of an Intruder

[Evidence of Staging](#)

[Evidence of a Cover-up](#)

[Can Psychics Solve the JBR Case?](#)