

'I want to know what happened to my kid!'

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MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Each day, Darla and John Maurer struggle to unravel the mystery of a dreadful end to a promising young life. They're desperate for answers and determined to find them — it was their son who died.

They know any discovery will cause them pain. But it will also bring them the peace they've craved for nearly two years — since their only child, Chad, 21, was found in a garage 150 miles away, his body battered, his blood poisoned by carbon monoxide.

The Maurers don't know how and why their son ended up on the edge of a crime-infested Chicago neighborhood. They insist it's foul play, maybe even murder, but it's all a puzzle and the important pieces are missing.

"I want to know what happened to my kid," Mrs. Maurer said plaintively. "We keep hoping for answers. All we keep getting is more questions. ... It's a terrible mystery. Something is wrong in this whole case and I just don't know what it is."

The Maurers have pressured police and pushed to keep their case in the public, recently portraying themselves in an episode of TV's "Unsolved Mysteries." They've lobbied lawmakers, knocked on doors and written letters, diligently logged calls, filed responses and stored away each new nugget of information.

"We think about Chad and what happened to him every day," Mrs. Maurer said, clutching a tissue. "We've got to keep talking about it or John and I would lose our sanity. We've got to keep pushing law enforcement people."

"It would be a discredit to him and ourselves not to do it," Maurer said. "Even if we don't come to peace, maybe Chad can rest in peace. He's the one who lost his life. We're the



AP Photo

Darla and John Maurer sit at home in Madison, Wisc., with a picture of their son, Chad, on the table and other photos of Chad on the wall behind them. The Maurers struggle daily to unravel the mystery of Chad's death almost two years ago.

walking wounded."

There's little to go on about and much to speculate about in Chad's disappearance on May 19, 1990. He was found two days later in an unlocked garage, the car ignition on, the fuel gauge empty.

Authorities believe Chad was in a fight just before he died. His hands, face and groin were bruised. Though the Maurers insist their son didn't kill himself — he had plans to move to Colorado — Chicago police won't rule out suicide. They do say, however, he doesn't fit the profile and concede they were wrong when they first reported his death that way.

Police now list Chad's death as undetermined but also note it's possible it was accidental.

Chad Maurer was a young man on the go, an outgoing blond with surfer looks and an athlete's flair who enjoyed skateboarding and snowboarding and collected hundreds of trophies for racing dirt bikes.

Chad had a less innocent side, too: He smoked marijuana and took LSD a few times. Police speculate his

death may be tied to drugs.

The day of his disappearance, a Saturday, Chad came home for lunch from the Village Pedaler, where he had worked only two days. He made a few sandwiches and said he was going back to work because the shop was busy.

He never did.

That Monday, Chad was found on the outskirts of an area that was Chicago's busiest homicide beat that year, with 166 murders.

Police Sgt. John Ridges said it's possible Chad was a drug courier, looking for quick, easy money. Mrs. Maurer said one of her son's friends later told her Chad was paid twice in 1989 to transport a drug dealer to Milwaukee.

Police also are intrigued by another connection: Some youths with drug backgrounds from Chicago's South Side now live near the Maurers. After a TV "Crimestoppers" show in Madison featured Chad's story, a tip suggested a similar link, but nothing has been proven.

"Something happened up there to cause him to be down here," Ridges said. "Something happened right before his death. I still can't explain what happened in that garage."

"This family is so concerned and so much involved, we can't give anything back to them. It's frustrating for us," he added. "If you wanted to have some answers, this is the one we wanted to have them for. We're still at square one."

That infuriates the Maurers, who claim Chicago authorities bungled the case from the beginning, first notifying them Chad killed himself, then neglecting to mention all his bruises.

Ridges acknowledges mistakes were made.

"If you want to be a Monday morning quarterback, I think there were problems," Ridges said. "I don't think anybody screwed up intentionally."

The Maurers argue Chad wasn't suicidal: He was saving money to move to Boulder, Colo., and was considering college. He had brought in a bike wheel to be repaired days before he disappeared and planned to attend a concert the day he was found.

And his mother says: "Why drive to Chicago to commit suicide and how can you find an unlocked garage down in Timbuktu?"

Ridges concedes that doesn't make sense, Chad doesn't fit a suicide profile and he had told no one of such plans.

The Maurers became convinced foul play was involved after viewing their son. They were shocked at what they saw: a cut and bruised face, deep bruises in the groin area; a swollen lower lip cut by his teeth; skin scraped to the bone on both knuckles; blood on the back of his shirt and skid marks on the seat of his pants.

"I get flashbacks of him getting beat up," his soft-spoken father said. "What were his last thoughts, his last impulse? Was he alone?"