

## Turnout Tumult

How LI is preparing for historic vote **A4-5**

## Scary Neighbors

How to spot them — and cope with them **YOUR LI HOME**

# Newsday

LONG ISLAND

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FRIDAY, OCT. 31, 2008

LONG ISLAND EDITION

## INVESTIGATORS:

# How He Faked It All



Cops detail husband's failed plot to get away with murder **A2-3**

  
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Booking photo of William Walsh Jr., accused of murdering his wife, Leah, inset.

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# Cops tell how



## A family mourns

Statement by Josh Hirschel, Leah Walsh's brother (pictured above) outside their parent's Rockville Centre home.

"First off we would like to thank the Nassau County Police Department. Their professionalism and dedication and their kindness have really been nothing short of exemplary throughout this time of crisis. To our friends and family, your outpouring of support has been tremendous to us in this time of need. Without you I think this nightmare would have been completely unbearable for all of us. Leah always strove to brighten the world around her. She always lent a hand to those who most needed it. She was a wonderful person. We ask that in lieu of flowers or gifts that those whose lives were most touched make a contribution to the special needs school in which she worked, which she loved... That's all that our family will have to say. We kindly ask to be left to grieve by ourselves and without interruption."

## A school's void

The Glen Cove facility where Leah Walsh taught struggles to cope with her loss.

A33

## HOW THEY BROKE THE CASE

A timeline of events law enforcement sources provided leading up to the arrest of William Walsh Jr. in the slaying of his wife, Leah.

### SUNDAY

**BETWEEN 2 AND 3 A.M.** William Walsh Jr. returns to the Bethpage home he shared with Leah Walsh, his wife of three years, after spending Saturday in Atlantic City with a male friend.

### SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN

The couple begins arguing over Leah's suspicions that he has cheated on her. The fight escalates into a physical confrontation. He strangles her.

### DURING DAYTIME

With his wife dead in the house, Walsh runs errands, including doing laundry and eating at McDonald's, intended to establish an alibi.

### AFTER DARKNESS

He takes his wife's body from the home, placing it on the floor of the front passenger seat of her own black Ford Focus. He drives around Long Island to find a discreet site to dispose of her body. Near the Long Island Expressway north service road, he drags her about 50 feet away into a wooded area and drives off.

### MONDAY

**BETWEEN 5 AND 6 A.M.** Walsh drives Leah's Ford Focus and drops it off at Exit 9 of the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway, where it would be later discovered. He then walks home.

### ABOUT 6:30 A.M.

He returns to plant a bag lunch in her car in an effort to make it appear she had been on her way to work. A state Department of Transportation HELP truck comes upon the disabled Focus, and the worker also sees a yellow car — and a person ducking near a tire of his wife's car. The person crouches and runs to the yellow car and drives off. The worker places a sticker on the Ford Focus and notes the incident to his office. Walsh drives a yellow Mustang.

### BEFORE NOON

Leah doesn't show up to her job at a special-education school in Glen Cove. Officials there contact her mother, who calls Leah's father, who happens to drive by her daughter's disabled car in his school bus — and calls his son-in-law, who goes to the scene and dials 911.

### 12:57 P.M.

An Eighth Precinct officer is dispatched to the scene, and the police investigation begins.



Leah Walsh was 29.

### TUESDAY

**2:03 A.M.** Police announce that Leah cannot be found, classifying her disappearance as a missing person case.

### AFTERNOON INTO NIGHT

Walsh spends more than seven hours being interviewed by police. They praise his cooperation.

### WEDNESDAY

**7:58 A.M.** A country-club worker comes upon Leah Walsh's body in the wooded area and calls police.

### ABOUT 9:30 A.M.

After driving away from making yet another emotional plea to reporters to help find his wife, Walsh is arrested by homicide detectives on Wellwood Avenue in East Farmingdale.

### BETWEEN 10 AND 10:30 A.M.

Walsh arrives at homicide squad and his interrogation begins shortly afterward.

### ABOUT 4 P.M.

Walsh makes an oral, then written, confession.

### ABOUT 8:30 P.M.

Nassau police announce that Walsh has been arrested and charged in his wife's murder.

## WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY How Newsday covered the story



NEWSDAY PHOTO, 1987

Matthew Solomon after his arraignment for his wife's Christmas Eve murder.

## Painful similarities

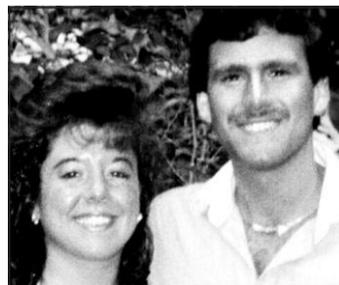
BY JENNIFER SMITH

jennifer.smith@newsday.com

Relatives of Matthew and Lisa Solomon said yesterday it's all painfully familiar: The disappearance of a beloved young woman. The desperate search. The shattering news that an apparently grieving husband is the police's prime suspect.

Lisa Solomon disappeared from the couple's Huntington home on Christmas Eve 1987. Six days later, her husband, Matthew Solomon, confessed to her murder.

Her mother, Diane Weaver, said her heart goes out to the parents of slain Bethpage schoolteacher Leah Walsh, whose husband, William Walsh Jr., is charged with her murder. "I know exactly what they



Matthew and Lisa Solomon on honeymoon in Hawaii.

are feeling," said Weaver, 75, of East Northport.

"I remember when my daughter was missing," she said. "Matthew was by our side, comforting people, leading all the people on the searches. When he was arrested, it was such a betrayal." That murder devastated both

families, inflicting wounds that persist decades later. The Weavers lost a daughter at the hands of the man they had entrusted with her happiness. The Solomons saw their son convicted of murder and sent to prison.

Solomon, who is serving 18 years to life, was denied parole in November 2007 for the second time after Lisa Solomon's family lobbied parole officials.

There are no grandchildren, no milestones for the two families to celebrate together.

"I lost a sister," said Judith Edlin, Matthew Solomon's sister, who became close with Lisa Solomon during the couple's courtship. "I lost the potential that our families would have been together for 20 years. And it destroyed my family." Both Weaver and Edlin live

# hoax unraveled

William Walsh Jr. leaves Nassau County police headquarters yesterday to be arraigned in his wife's murder.

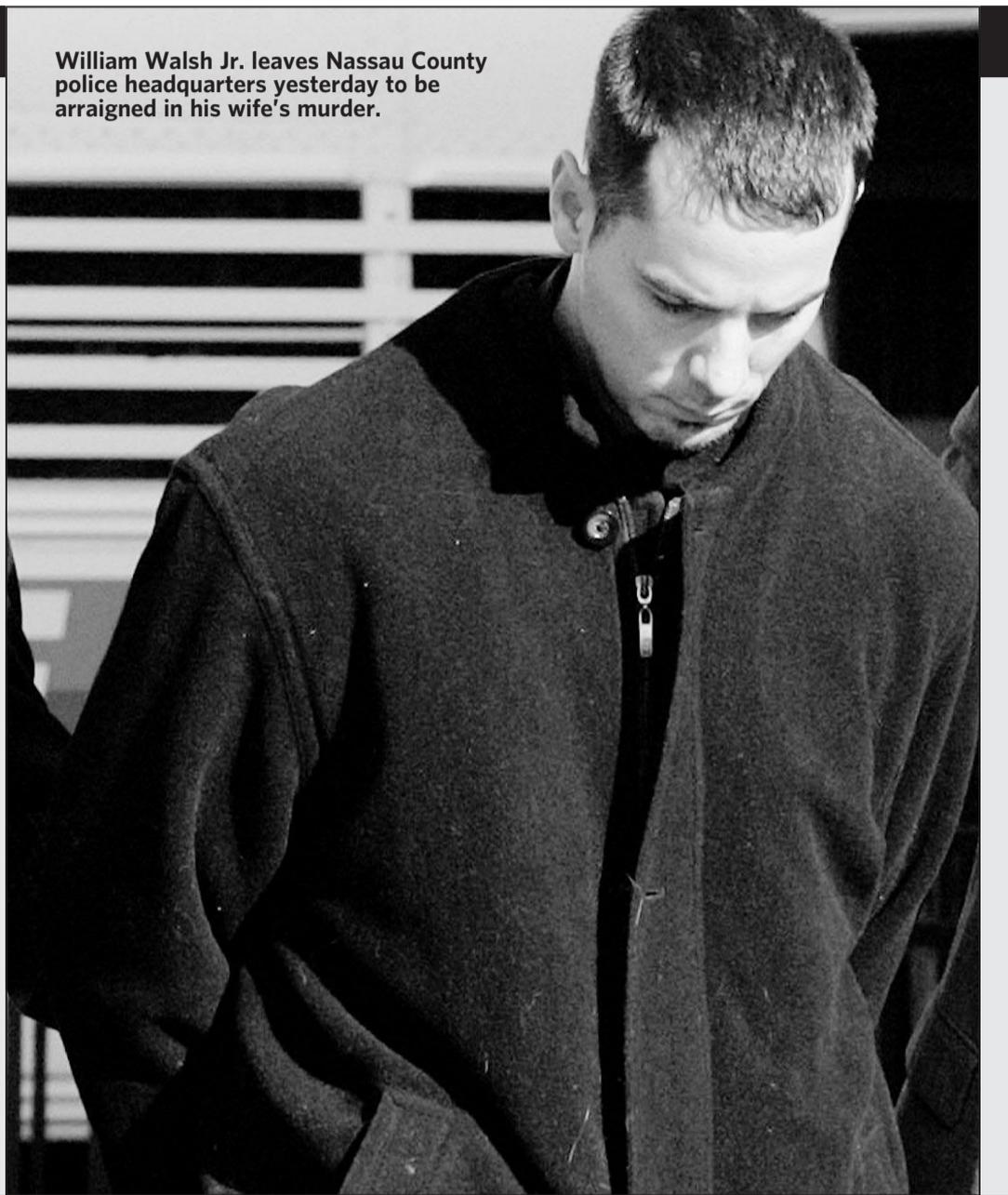


PHOTO BY HOWARD SCHNAPP

## to 1987 murder case

in East Northport. When they meet, as they do from time to time, they are civil. Each still grapples with the legacy of Lisa Solomon's killing.

Weaver, 75, has found some solace in a support group for parents of murdered children.

But the gap in her heart remains, and she still visits her daughter's grave each day. Her headstone reads "Lisa Weaver." Her mother requested that, saying her daughter spent 22 years as a Weaver, but only two weeks as a Solomon.

Having endured a nearly weeklong hunt for her own daughter, Weaver said she was thankful the search for Leah Walsh ended as quickly as it did. "Knowing is better than not knowing," she said.

For Edlin, the Walsh case

was a fresh reminder of the toll Lisa Solomon's death took on her own life.

"I am painfully aware of the profound effect that the situation has got to be having on everyone who is involved, on both sides," said Edlin, 52.

She said the Walsh family faces a difficult road, especially if William Walsh Jr. is found guilty.

Edlin is no longer in touch with her brother, something that pains her. She said it is important not to lose sight of family bonds, but also to "recognize that you are separate from that person and the act that they committed."

She added: "My heart aches and breaks for what they all are going through, and what they will go through in the future."



NEWSDAY PHOTO, 1989 / DICK YARWOOD

Ruth Solomon and daughter Judith Edlin after Matthew Solomon's sentencing.

Hours after a tearful William Walsh Jr. begged the public to help him find his missing wife, the Bethpage man snapped a smiling self-portrait with his cell phone during a break in a lengthy meeting with detectives at a Levittown police station, a law enforcement source said.

That private moment posed a contrast to the public image of a grief-stricken husband that Walsh displayed after reporting the disappearance of his wife, Leah Walsh, 29, on Monday.

Walsh was arrested and charged with her murder on Wednesday.

Walsh, 29, confessed to strangling his wife after returning home early Sunday morning from a trip to Atlantic City, Det. Lt. John Azzata of Nassau's homicide squad said at a news conference yesterday.

Walsh's lawyer disputed the confession, saying that it was obtained after hours of grilling his sleep-deprived client.

Police said the chain of events that led to Leah Walsh's death began with an argument over whether he was cheating on her. After strangling his wife at their Bethpage home, Walsh then hid the body in the woods, staged a disappearance and made phony emotional pleas for her safe return, Azzata said.

On Sunday, as Leah Walsh's body lay in their home, her husband ran errands to establish an alibi, police said. "Mr. Walsh went about his business, including doing his laundry at a local Laundromat, going to a local McDonald's," Azzata said.

Police said that night Walsh drove his wife's black Ford Focus to a wooded area of North Hills and dumped the body. Early Monday, he left the car by the side of the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway — letting air out of a tire to complete the ruse.

On Tuesday, Walsh made an emotional appeal for his wife's return before a lengthy interview with investigators in Levittown where a law enforcement source said Walsh snapped the cell phone photo.

Leah Walsh, who taught children with autism at a special-education school in Glen Cove, was identified by detectives using fingerprints on file from a criminal-background check done when she became a teacher, Azzata said.

The body was found Wednesday morning by a worker at the North Hills Country Club. Walsh was arrested soon after and charged with her murder that night.

Police said Walsh's story didn't square with the evidence.

A state Department of Transportation worker spotted a yellow car early Monday morning near Leah Walsh's abandoned car on the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway, said Nassau Det. Lt. Kevin Smith. The DOT worker said a person crouching by the Ford's tire ducked, then ran to the yellow car and drove away.

Walsh drives a yellow Mustang, a car a neighbor remembered the couple washing with painstaking care.

In his confession, Walsh said he dropped his wife's car off on the expressway and then walked home, according to a law enforcement source. After finding a bag lunch that Leah Walsh had forgotten to take on Friday, he drove back and placed it in her car to make it look as if she disappeared on her way to work, the source said. Her pocketbook was found just off the shoulder of the expressway near the car.

During the interview when he confessed, police asked Walsh what he had taken from his wife's wallet, the law enforcement source said. Walsh said he took her driver's license and her credit card. Asked what he did with them, Walsh leaned down and took them out of his shoe, the source said.

Karl C. Seman, the Garden City attorney representing Walsh, said at a bail hearing and arraignment at criminal court in Hempstead yesterday that police pressured the confession out of his client. Seman said investigators "rushed to judgment" by arresting Walsh before an autopsy of Leah Walsh's body was complete.

Walsh pleaded not guilty and was ordered held without bail. His next court date is Monday.

In Rockville Centre, Leah Walsh's brother, Josh Hirschel, emerged from the family home yesterday morning and thanked loved ones for their outpouring of support.

"Leah always strove to brighten the world around her," he said. "She always lent a hand to those who most needed it."

This story was reported by staff writers SOPHIA CHANG, MATTHEW CHAYES, CARL MACGOWAN, KEITH HERBERT and JENNIFER SMITH. It was written by SMITH.