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# 'Most Wanted' targets Merhige

Police hope an upcoming segment about the manhunt for Paul Merhige on 'America's Most Wanted' will help them catch the man accused of killing four of his family members on Thanksgiving.

**BY ROBERT SAMUELS**

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The broad manhunt for Paul Merhige, the Kendall resident who is believed to have killed four of his family members on Thanksgiving, is set to widen even more. John Walsh, host of America's Most Wanted, returned to South Florida this week to shoot an extended segment for his television program with Jim and Muriel Sitton. It was at the Sutton home in Jupiter where Merhige, 35, is accused of killing four relatives, including the Sittons' 6-year-old daughter, Makayla.

"He tried to destroy this family on Thanksgiving and did not finish the job," Walsh said at a press conference Monday afternoon in Miami Beach. Walsh warned that Merhige might try to strike again. "This family needs closure, they need justice."

Police have received more than 200 tips about the case, said Jupiter Police Chief Frank Kitzerow. Neither Merhige nor the blue Toyota Camry he speed away in has been found. Police think he is still alive.

Kitzerow said he might have left for another country, so the search now involves immigration and customs agents. The FBI is also participating in the manhunt.

"This case is our No. 1 priority at this time," said Manny Puri, supervisory inspector for the regional branch of U.S. Marshals Service.

Walsh himself has a strong connection to the case. His son, Adam, was the same age as Makayla when he was abducted in 1981 from the Sears store at the Hollywood Mall. Authorities found the boy's severed head in a canal near Vero Beach.

Adam's case, which took 27 years to solve, inspired Walsh to be proactive and help police catch criminals. His efforts include hosting America's Most Wanted.

Merhige's case and face have already been featured twice on the show. But Saturday's edition will be the first extended segment about the slayings, including a lengthy interview with the Sitton family.

Jim and Muriel Sitton didn't know Paul Merhige well, but he was one of several members of their extended family at the home for Thanksgiving. Days before, Walsh said, Merhige had drawn \$12,000 from his bank account and took some cash from the ATM. He bought several rifles.

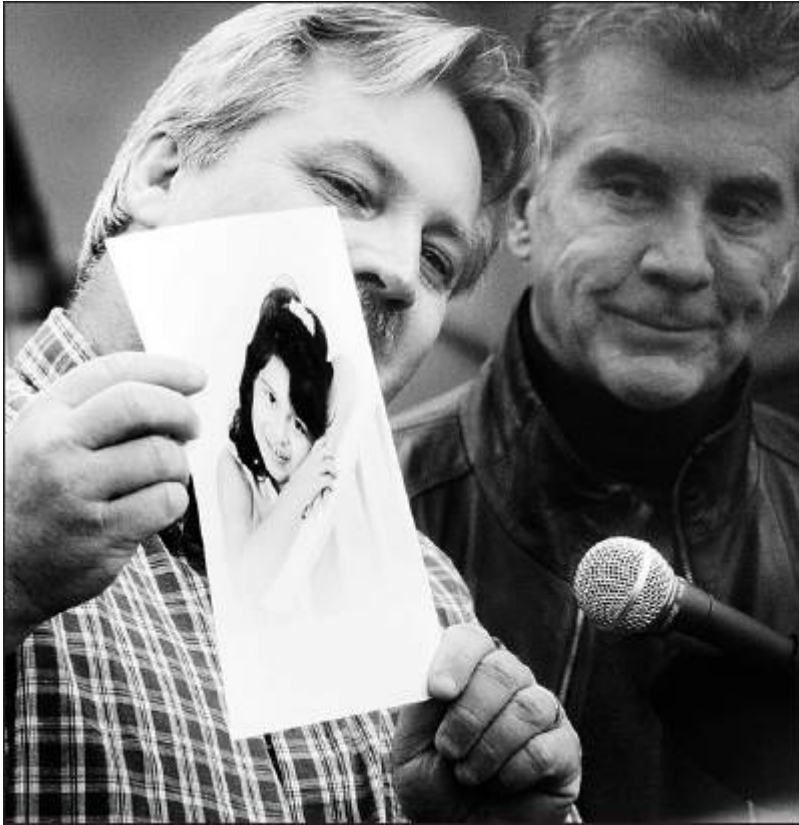
Police said Merhige sat with the family for hours before he fired the first shot. Ultimately, he killed Makayla, his 79-year-old aunt, and his sisters, Carla Merhige and Lisa Knight, reports say. Knight was pregnant.

Police received a call Dec. 2 that Paul Merhige had been spotted in the DoubleTree Grand Hotel and condominium along Biscayne Bay in Miami, where several of the witnesses live. Authorities swarmed the building but did not find him. Kitzerow, Jupiter's police chief, would not divulge details of the investigation but told The Miami Herald that the search was not fruitless.

It is the department's hope that the segment on America's Most Wanted will give the tragedy national attention and help them locate the killer. It is also the hope of Jim Sitton, who said he appreciate Walsh's efforts. The TV host greeted Sitton with a big hug.

"[Walsh] is the first person I've spoken to who's lost a child," Sitton said. "So his hug means a little more."

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PHOTOS BY MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

PUBLIC PLEA: Above, Jim Sitton shows a picture of of his 6-year-old daughter, Makayla, believed to be one of Paul Merhige's victims. America's Most Wanted host John Walsh is at right. Below,



law-enforcement officials, and Jim and Muriel Sitton, listen as Walsh speaks in Miami Beach.