



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Eastern District of Arkansas*

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**CONTACT: Jane W. Duke
United States Attorney
501-340-2600**

MURDER SUSPECTS INDICTED FOR LYING TO FEDERAL INVESTIGATORS

Little Rock – Jane W. Duke, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas; William Temple, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Little Rock Division, and Colonel Winford Phillips, Director, Arkansas State Police (ASP), announced today the arrest of Wanda Faye Richart, age 50, and her husband, Charles Walter “Bubba” Richart, age 52 both of Kingsland, Arkansas. The Richarts were indicted by a federal grand jury on Wednesday, February, 6, 2008, for charges stemming from multiple false statements each made to FBI agents during the course of an investigation into the disappearance of their 14-year-old niece, Christina Richart. The Richarts made their initial appearance before United States Magistrate Judge John F. Forster, Jr. this afternoon to enter their plea of not guilty to the four counts in the indictment.

According to the indictment, in 1997, the Richarts became primary caregivers for Bubba Richart’s niece, Christina Richart, and two nephews, all minor children. In 1999, the family moved to Ozark, Arkansas. The indictment alleges that sometime that same year between July and September Wanda Richart killed Christina during an argument at the family’s home. The indictment goes on to specify the manner in which Christina was killed. Specifically, Wanda Richart physically took Christina into a bathroom, locked the door and began running water in the bathtub. As this was going on, Bubba and two other individuals present in the home heard Christina screaming for help. Minutes later, Wanda Richart opened the bathroom door and the witnesses observed Christina’s lifeless, wet body on the floor.

The indictment alleges that after the death of Christina, Wanda, Bubba and the two other individuals buried Christina’s body in a wooded area near Ozark and burned her clothes. Within a month of the murder, the Richarts relocated to Fordyce, Arkansas and began fabricating a story

as to why Christina no longer lived with them. In addition, Wanda Richart twice threatened the life of one of the witnesses if the witness told anyone about what happened to Christina.

When federal authorities ultimately became involved in the case in 2005, Wanda and Bubba Richart were interviewed numerous times by FBI agents. Both were questioned about Christina's disappearance and both repeatedly told authorities that Christina voluntarily left their house in Ozark one day with a great aunt and a male headed to California. According to the indictment, the Richarts' separate stories had significant variances in details. In addition, the indictment further describes repeated interviews of Wanda Richart over the course of 2005-2007, listing many discrepancies and inconsistencies between and among those interviews.

The indictment formally charges Wanda Richart and Bubba Richart with one count of conspiring to make false statements to federal authorities and one count each of making false statements to authorities. Both offenses carry a statutory penalty of not more than 5 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Bubba Richart is also charged with being an accessory after the fact to Wanda's making of false statements. The accessory after the fact charge carries a statutory penalty of not more than 2 ½ years in prison and a \$125,000 fine.

"This is a tragic case. I cannot imagine the terror that young Christina Richart must have experienced before her death," Duke stated. "We are working closely with David Gibbons, the Prosecuting Attorney for the 5th Judicial District, and are hopeful that the state authorities will be able to pursue murder charges against the Richarts." Duke added, "I want to recognize the efforts of the FBI agents and Arkansas State Police investigators who have spent countless hours on this matter. Their refusal to give up on this case is to be commended."

"I am extremely proud of the work done by the entire investigative and prosecutive team in this case. Their unwillingness to accept anything less than justice for Christina is laudable," said Temple.

Colonel Phillips stated, "This case is a testament to the tenacious determination you'll find in law enforcement officers at all levels when it comes to crimes against children." Phillips added, "There was a tremendous unbridled spirit of cooperation among the investigative team and U.S. Attorney which resulted in an indictment that should serve to send a crystal clear warning that such crimes will not be tolerated in our state."

The investigation was conducted by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Arkansas State Police. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Patrick Harris and Patricia Harris.

An indictment is only an allegation of wrongdoing based on probable cause. A defendant is presumed innocent until such time as he or she is adjudged guilty either by plea or jury verdict.

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