

## EXPANDED INVESTIGATION

### Mysterious letters have led Markovich investigators from N.H. to Florida

**Bruce Siwy and Eric Kieta**

The Daily American USA TODAY NETWORK

**Editor's note:** *This is the second part of a series on the 1987 disappearance of 15-year-old Alicia Markovich of Windber.*

The writer said he or she was prompted to pen the confession after seeing a missing person flier on the side of a Philadelphia mailbox.

In a letter mailed more than 20 years ago, the person claimed to have details about how Windber resident Alicia Markovich — who vanished in 1987 at the age of 15 — had been killed and buried. A portion of the text released by state police reads almost like poetry.

“The second time I saw (the missing persons flier),” the person wrote, “it was like everything faded to gray, nothing seemed real for a long time, I had thought it all had been forever buried.”

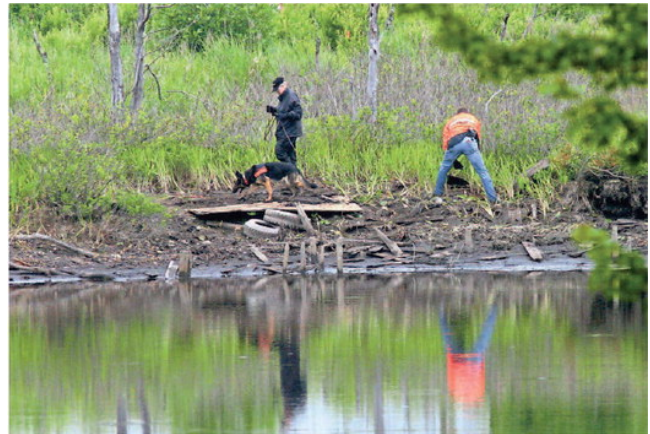
Tips from this writer have not led investigators to answers in Alicia's mystery. They have, however, expanded the investigation — and raised the possibility that her case is connected to the disappearance of at least two other teenage girls from Florida and Massachusetts.

#### Letter to John Markovich

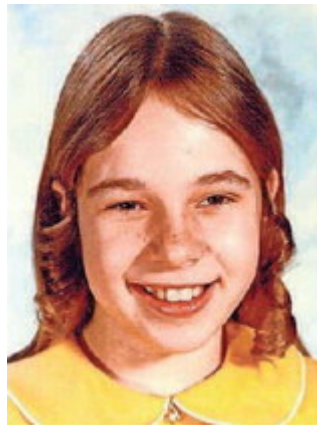
John Markovich, Alicia's father, told Pennsylvania State Police about the letter in October of 2000.

Postmarked in Bedford, New Hampshire, the writing was sent directly to Markovich. Its contents prompted a police search on the banks of the Conemaugh River, not far from Markovich's home outside of Blairsville.

At the time, the claims seemed credible because Alicia's father had reportedly been the last person to see her leaving his house on foot in the early



**Searchers check the banks of Walker Pond for the remains of Deborah Ann Quimby, who disappeared in 1977 at the age of 13, in Townsend, Mass., on June 22, 2004. JULIA CHENG/AP**



**A photo of Deborah Ann Quimby, who disappeared in 1977 at the age of 13. PHOTO PROVIDED BY NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN**

evening hours of April 26, 1987.

#### Coming Friday

Stolen, burned out car adds questions to Alicia Markovich case.

---

Just a few months after the writing to Markovich, however, the family of a missing Florida girl received a similar letter.

[MARKOVICH from page A1 to A6](#)

This letter was from Manchester, New Hampshire. The City of Manchester is just 5 miles from the town of Bedford — the origin of Alicia’s letter.

### Colleen Orsborn disappearance

On March 15, 1984, 15-year-old Daytona Beach resident Colleen Orsborn apparently missed her bus and decided to ditch school.

She grabbed a pink bikini and left her beachside home. Three days later her family reported her missing. They told police she’d done this before and had assumed she’d be back in a day or two.

According to the Daytona Beach News-Journal, her body was found in a shallow grave a few weeks later.

At the time, however, forensic science did not conclude that the remains were of Orsborn. Her case languished in mystery for decades.

In the meantime, a writer confessed to her killing and begged for forgiveness.

The letter — postmarked in Manchester, New Hampshire — was received by Orsborn’s brother March 19, 2001. It gave directions to where her body was allegedly left.

“I killed your beloved Colleen nearly 15 years ago,” the letter said. “For that I can only beg your forgiveness, I can only attempt to make amends buy (sic) disclosing to you were her innocent little body is.”

In place of a signature, the writer drew a fish-like mark similar to the Christian symbol for Christ.

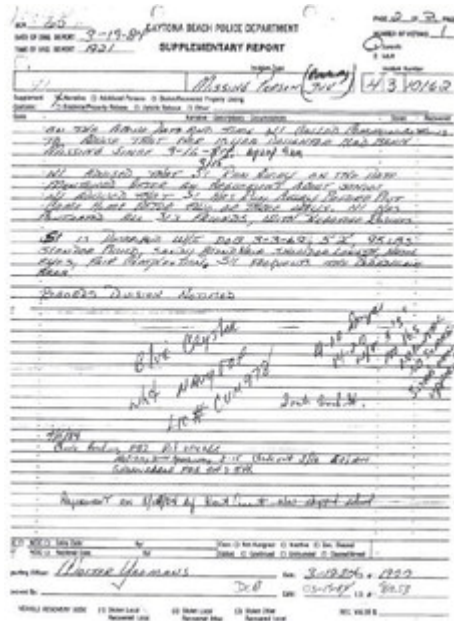
“This person know too much,” Colleen’s brother, Bruce, said in a 2001 Associated Press report. “He knew stuff some things about her — stuff that wasn’t in the fliers. That she was petite and everything.”

A year later, another New England letter was penned about a third missing teen girl.

### Deborah Quimby disappearance

On May 3 of 1977, Deborah Ann Quimby left home for her grandfather’s campsite on a boy’s brown model 10-speed Takara or Schwinn. She was accompanied by a friend for a brief period of the trip.

Quimby, who had told her parents she had “some issues” to deal with, was never seen again.



**A page from the Daytona Beach Police Department report on Colleen Orsborn. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE DAYTONA BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT**

In the Orsborn case, police searched an area near the Tomoka River identified by the writer in 2001. They found no trace of the Florida girl.

Using scientific advances, investigators determined that Orsborn was a Jane Doe discovered just months after her disappearance — and approximately 80 miles from the spot identified by the mystery writer.

Police have stated that Orsborn was likely the victim of Australian-born serial killer Christopher Wilder, who checked into a Daytona Beach hotel around the time that Orsborn vanished. Wilder was killed in a confrontation with state troopers in upstate New Hampshire in 1984, decades before the mystery letters were mailed.

Searches derived from the Quimby letters were also fruitless.

Authorities scoured Walker Pond as directed by the writer in both 2003 and 2004. They used sonar in the first attempt and drained it on the second occasion.

Old tires, clothing and bike parts were found — but no trace of the missing girl.

David Solet, the chief assistant district attorney of the Middlesex County cold case homicide unit in Massachusetts, declined to confirm or deny any aspect of the Quimby investigation and its related letters during a recent phone call.

Her father, Richard “Jake” Quimby, long dismissed theories that his daughter was “snatched” by a stranger. He said during a 2004 press conference that he thought she might have been on her way to meet someone she knew.

“When she left, it seemed like she had a destination in mind,” he said. “To me, that’s not being snatched.”

This investigation went cold for decades until police began receiving anonymous tips directing them to search nearby Walker Pond.

According to the Associated Press, the first letter was sent in November of 2002 and the second exactly a year later in 2003. Police had declined to say whether they indicated that the writer was a suspect or simply someone with knowledge about the disappearance.

“I feel very strongly about the letters,” Sgt. Travis Rixford said during a 2004 press conference. “They’re somewhat specific.”

The letters were typewritten but sent in handwritten envelopes. They were postmarked from Worcester, Massachusetts, and — just like the Orsborn letter — Manchester, New Hampshire.

### **Confession letter hoaxes?**

Though the timing of these letters — all sent within a two-year period from the same rural quadrant of the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border — has led to speculation that they’re the work of a single writer, authorities believe at this point that they may have been part of a hoax.

Nor have state police in Pennsylvania had any luck with the tips about Alicia’s case.

Shortly after her father gave investigators the letter he received in the fall of 2000, investigators used a cadaver dog to scour the portion of the Conemaugh River identified by the writer. They found nothing.

Trooper Cliff Greenfield, a public information officer with state police, said a second letter was also received.

“The Pennsylvania State Police (are) aware of two letters, both of which were followed up on by investigators. In an effort to further investigate those letters, investigators traveled out-of-state,” he said. “Ultimately, their efforts did not result in any credible evidence that would further the investigation.

“Both letters were analyzed (for DNA) and failed to produce any evidence that would further the investigation.”

At least one of the letters included a name, so police went to New Hampshire to question the person whose name appeared on it. They determined that this person did not write the letters or have any knowledge of Alicia.

“Through the course of this investigation, our investigators have followed leads that have taken us from Florida to New Hampshire,” state police Trooper John Matchik said during a 2011 press conference in Indiana, Pennsylvania. “We have expended a significant amount of manpower and resources that have led us all over the East Coast.

“We received tips of possible sightings of Alicia at various times throughout the investigation. Our investigators aggressively follow up on these tips, which were never able to be substantiated.”

Ironically, one of the most compelling pieces of Alicia’s state police case file may be related to an incident that occurred less than a year after her disappearance and just miles from her father’s home.