

'No Clues' to Suicide Given by Paisley

Psychiatrist Says Ex-CIA Official May Have Had Emotional Crisis

By Blaine Harden
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Two days after he disappeared while sailing on Chesapeake Bay, John A. Paisley had been scheduled to bring his estranged wife to a group psychotherapy session in Chevy Chase to discuss why his marriage failed, according to Dr. Jack Baruch, Paisley's psychiatrist.

In an interview yesterday Baruch, who had been treating Paisley in individual and group therapy sessions since April, said the former CIA official had given "absolutely no clues" that he was contemplating suicide.

Baruch speculated, however, that Paisley might have had "feelings of loss and abandonment" because of recent developments in his personal life.

Paisley's body was found on Oct. 1

floating in Chesapeake Bay with a bullet wound in the head.

Maryland state police said yesterday they still lack the evidence needed to determine whether Paisley, 55, committed suicide or was murdered. The death remains classified as an "unusual occurrence."

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which began an inquiry into the death after a published report that Paisley was killed because of his CIA connections, also is continuing to look into the case, a spokesman said yesterday.

In a wide-ranging discussion yesterday of Paisley's mental state before his death, Baruch said that despite Paisley's outward happiness there is a possibility that he was undergoing an emotional crisis on the weekend he disappeared.

Although they had spent weekends

together for the last six months, on the weekend of Sept. 23-24 Paisley did not see his friend, Betty R. Myers, 51, Myers has said. Myers, a psychiatric social worker, moved from Washington during the previous week to take a job in Cumberland, Md.

Baruch said Paisley, a man he described as preoccupied with his freedom from personal entanglements, probably was relieved by Myers' move because of his "unwillingness or inability to make a commitment."

The psychiatrist said, however, that one can "speculate that this separation unconsciously may have produced feeling of loss and abandonment (in Paisley) based on early childhood loss."

See PAISLEY, C6, Col. 1

PAISLEY, From C1

Baruch is a former assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Georgetown University and a former member of the staff of the National Institute of Mental Health. He has been in private practice in Chevy Chase since 1972.

Baruch said that "maybe the pain (of separation from Myers) was something that at the last minute hit him that Sunday (he disappeared)."

As a psychiatrist in almost weekly contact with Paisley, Baruch said that he normally would be able to detect whether Paisley was contemplating suicide. But Baruch said that Paisley, who dealt with highly sensitive government secrets before he retired in 1974 from his position as deputy director of the CIA's Office of Strategic Research, could have been one of those "certain individuals that give absolutely no clues" of suicidal intentions.

Baruch said Paisley seemed happy during the week before his death and that the happiness was not a marked change in his personality—a change often noted among suicide victims. "Paisley showed nothing but progressive improvement over the last three months," Baruch said.

Based on what Paisley told him, Baruch said his patient "two or three years ago very well could have been a candidate for suicide." Myers has said Paisley was burdened two years ago with adjustment problems relating to his marriage, change of careers and grown-up children.

Paisley had overcome the adjustment problems, Baruch said, and it was Paisley's idea to invite his estranged wife Maryann, from whom he had been separated about two years, to group therapy "to give a brief overview of what it was like living with John

for 28 years."

Baruch said Paisley showed no signs of being troubled over introducing his former wife to the seven people in his group, or airing their marital problems.

Baruch, who spent five one-hour individual sessions and six 1½-hour group sessions with Paisley, said he had learned that the former CIA official felt considerable loneliness as a child.

"His father left (the family) when Paisley was 2½ years old. His mother went to work as a practical nurse and he was taken care of by his grandparents," Baruch said.

"At an unconscious level, that his dear friend Betty Myers left to go to Cumberland may have recapitulated his feelings of loss. (This) could have triggered futility, hopelessness and perhaps despair," Baruch said.

Paisley, who spent a great deal of his time in the past three years alone on board his 31-foot sailboat, the Brillig, "very deeply enjoyed his freedom and wasn't willing to give it up," Baruch said.

"Some people want freedom so much they pay a huge price for it. Freedom can envelope you. It becomes devastatingly lonely," Baruch said.

Paisley became interested in psychotherapy after his experience with an encounter group called Lifespring, a Washington-based organization conducting five-day seminars that encourage personal awareness. Paisley attended two of the seminars, one last December, the second in March.

Maryland State Police spokesman Cpl. Jerry Eiseman said yesterday the seven-man team investigating Paisley's death lacks solid evidence in the case and is "hoping someone will call in and say they saw the boat."

Eiseman said police are tracing the ownership of one of the two diving weight belts found strapped around Paisley's bloated body when it was pulled out of the bay near the mouth of the Patuxent River.

"One of those belts is Paisley's. The other is unfamiliar to people who sailed on the boat with him," Eiseman said.