



"We're not giving up hope," says one volunteer searcher, who has helped comb the land around Grand Junction.

of the National Association of Securities Dealers, who traveled from Denver with his wife, Suzanne, 61, to join the search and look after their grandchildren. "I mean, I don't think anyone assaulted her because of the Pampered Chef products she was selling."

Cops say that on Thursday, June 28, the twice-divorced Birgfeld met her first husband, Howard Beigler, 37, for a date in Eagle, Colo. At 9 p.m., as she made the 120-mile drive back to Grand Junction, Beigler called her cell phone and she told him she was nearly home. By Saturday, though, she still hadn't arrived. Her nanny, accustomed to her employer's irregular hours, called police at the insistence of Birgfeld's daughter Jess, 8. The following night, her 2005 Ford Focus was found burning in a parking lot about three miles from her home, and on July 15 searchers found her checks and business cards scattered over an 11-mile stretch along a highway south-east of Grand Junction. "Everything so far indicates foul play," says Heather Gierhart, spokeswoman for the sheriff's department. "We don't have anything to indicate that she walked away on her own."

The younger of Frank and Suzanne's two children, Birgfeld loved her own kids too much to leave them, say friends. One longtime pal,

Andrea Lake, once asked her if she ever wanted to get away from it all. "She said, 'Sure,'" says Lake. "But I'd want to take my kids with me." Birgfeld's other passion was dancing. While she taught dance to kids, she'd also worked as an exotic dancer in her 20s. In fact, she met her second husband, Robert Dixon, while dancing at a strip bar in Denver. "I knew she did exotic dancing and maybe she had some dancers she booked jobs for, but that didn't matter to me," says Lake. "Her actions as a mother spoke much louder than anything else."

Cops have interviewed several of her escort service clients and searched the home of mechanic Lester Ralph Jones, 56, who works across the street from

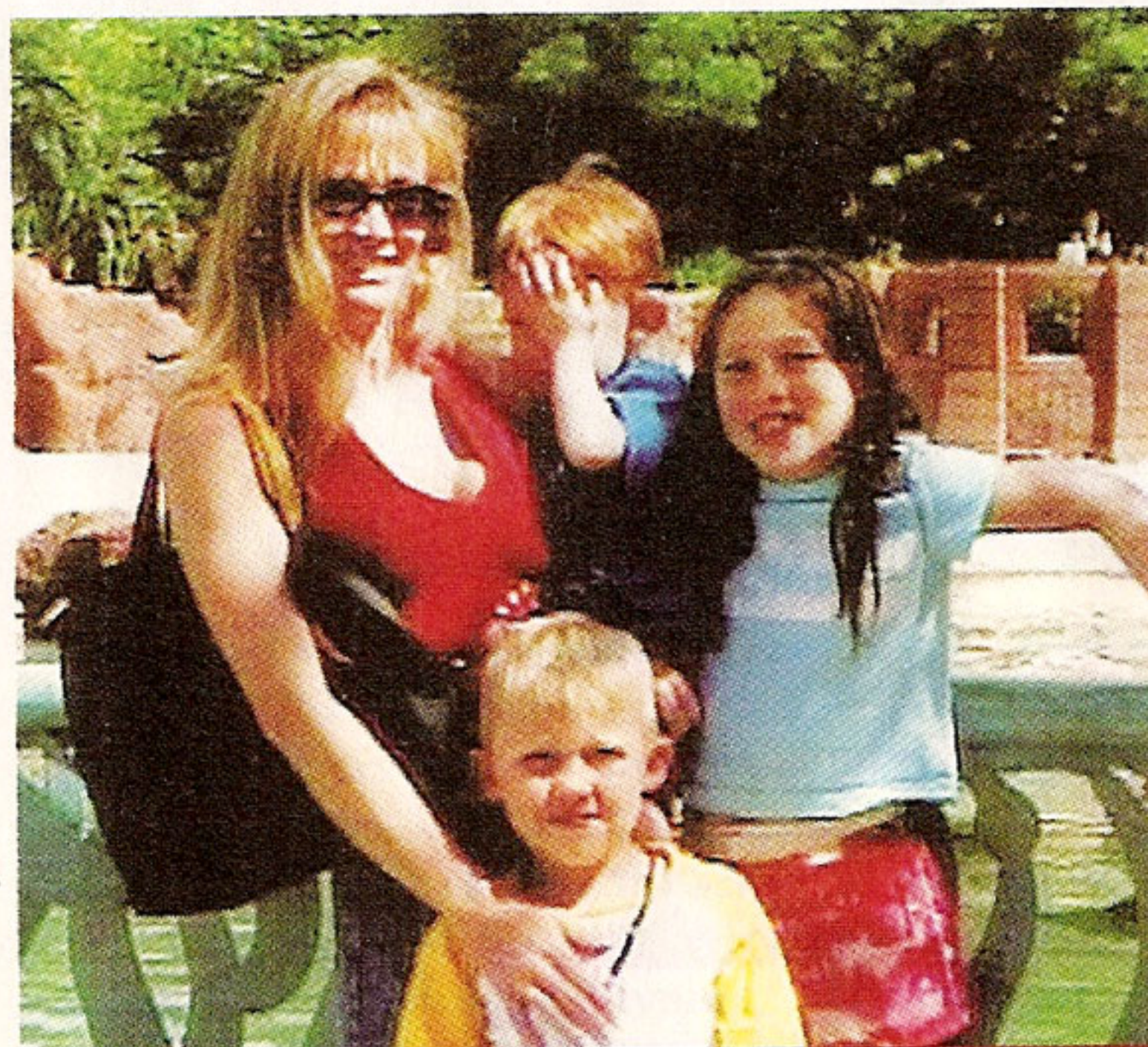
where Birgfeld's car was found. (Police call him "a person of interest.") They say both of her ex-husbands, including Dixon, the father of her children Jess, Taft, 6, and Kohl, 3, are cooperating fully. Frank Birgfeld says his daughter's divorce last year from Dixon put her under heavy financial stress. She struggled to keep up payments on the six-acre home where they had lived, and "started setting up things she could do from home," Birgfeld says. Among other schemes, she tried flipping houses, selling baby slings and considered breeding dogs. "If there was a buck to be found somewhere, she could find it," Birgfeld says.

With a sigh, he acknowledges his daughter's entrepreneurial spirit does appear to have extended into the escort business. One of Paige's online ads offered an "escort, erotic massage, private dancer" who would even travel out of state to meet clients—but only by chartered jet. She went on to describe herself as having a "beautiful body and face, nice hair and teeth. Sensual mannerisms with a fun attitude." Friends say she rarely sent other women on 'dates,' but mostly went herself—and they insist she would have never prostituted herself. "There is a very clear line between legal and illegal and she made sure that line was never crossed," says another longtime friend, Jamie

Silvernail. "She knew if she crossed that line, she could jeopardize her kids." Regardless, her clients seemed satisfied. In a June 25 post online, one of them raved she was "a little bit pricey [but] worth every dime."

For now, the search continues. Frank Birgfeld holds out hope. "We know the odds aren't good in our favor," he says. "But at the same time, the Elizabeth Smart case comes to mind where there was some bizarre ending and that's what we're hoping for. In the meantime, we're searching hard to find her."

By Johnny Dodd



Birgfeld with her children Kohl (in her arms), Jess and Taft. She ran the escort service, say friends, to help support her children.