

## Waters

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ters' half-brother, Scott Gielow, 51, of Indian River County.

So far, Waters' body has not been found. Gielow said he believes a heavy storm that blew from land onto water was responsible for Waters' disappearance.

He said he's pieced together a clearer picture of what he believes happened after Waters set out from Sexton Plaza beach around 2 a.m. Aug. 3.

At the time, Gielow was in California on vacation and scheduled to fly to Vero Beach when he learned his brother was missing.

When he arrived home, a full search involving state, local law enforcement and the Coast Guard was underway.

"That was the hardest thing not being able to contribute and being helpless," he said. "I went and walked the beach even though I knew..."

Boaters found Waters' new, inflatable kayak around 2½ miles southeast of the Sebastian Inlet at 4 p.m. that day. In days to follow, two of Waters' backpacks were found.

On Aug. 7, a bag containing Waters' phone and survival gear including food rations, insect repellent and wound care was found by boaters off Bethel Shoal, an area roughly 12 miles northeast of Vero Beach.

"If he was on a desert island he could've lived forever," said Gielow, referring to items found in days following his brother's disappearance. "He didn't have a life jacket, the one thing you should have."

Gielow said the discovery kept the search going into Aug. 8, when it was suspended.

Later, a backpack full of Waters' fishing gear washed up near Palm Bay in Brevard County, he said.

### Last communications

A series of phone calls, messages and a Facetime conversation with friends and acquaintances between 2 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Aug. 3 helped Gielow understand what happened, he said.

"He said he was having a great time," Gielow said. "Even at 10 a.m., he sounded excited. He slept under the stars."

Waters, he said, talked by Facetime with a friend until roughly 2:30 a.m., when Gielow said he believes Waters then fell asleep after paddling out beyond the waves into open ocean.

Gielow said the current likely carried him out.

He said Waters had taken the kayak out in an early morning trip at least once before and that he would check water conditions in advance.

He had bought the kayak roughly two or three weeks earlier and planned to explore barrier islands and shipwrecks offshore and document his trips in a journal.

"He woke up at 8 a.m. and was texting everybody and telling them how cool it was (that) he could see the sharks," Gielow said.

A ship captain moving a yacht from Fort Pierce to St. Augustine reported seeing Waters around 8:30 a.m. roughly a quarter to a mile off shore at a popular reef east of Sexton Plaza beach.

In a call to a woman between 10 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., Gielow said Waters' told her he was paddling to shore. Although, by this time, the woman reported the recep-



Donald Waters CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY SCOTT GIELOW

tion was bad and the call was breaking up, he said.

Gielow said that was one reason why he believed Waters wasn't reported missing until roughly 8:30 p.m. that night.

Vero Beach Police Department detectives who looked into Waters' disappearance spoke with those who last reported talking with him, according to police records.

A police case report shows Waters spoke with at least two people between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.

In one phone call, police said he told a man "he had paddled out too far into the ocean ... and could not figure out how to get back to where he parked," and also that he could see land, but it was, "far in the distance," according to the case report.

The case report shows that a boater spoke with earlier reported him missing from Sexton Plaza parking lot where he met and spoke with boaters just after 8:30 p.m.

He, and a woman Waters spoke with around 10 a.m., told detectives they believed alcohol might have been involved.

Gielow said even if his brother had anything to drink, he didn't believe it was the reason for his disappearance. Instead, he pointed to a storm with 40 mph wind gusts.

A strong band of storms moved through Indian River County Aug. 3 in the afternoon.

A meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Melbourne said a 40-mph wind gust was recorded 3 miles east-northeast of Gifford at 1:55 p.m.

Meteorologist Tim Sedlock said a special marine warning from the Sebastian to Jupiter inlets was issued twice that day.

He said those warnings are intended to caution



A U.S. Coast Guard plane flies along the shoreline near Sebastian Inlet State Park on Aug. 5, in the second full day of a search for missing kayaker Donald Waters, 42, of Indian River County.

COREY ARWOOD/TCPALM

boaters of dangerous conditions including potential wind gusts over 39 mph or waterspouts.

### He'd done it before

"He just wanted to be on the other side of the waves basically," Gielow said. "He had already done it once on the kayak."

Waters, his brother said, was a good swimmer and diver, who he jokingly called a "prepper" for reading survival books and that between them, as children, they "basically lived in the pool and ocean."

Waters and Gielow grew up in Vero Beach; Waters moved to California in the early 90s.

Waters moved back to Florida roughly four years ago and was living with their mother. He was set to start a job as a maintenance man at a shoreline hotel, Gielow said.

He said Waters has an 18-year-old daughter, Jenna Waters, who is a student at Oregon State University.

"He was just the type of person that could make anybody laugh ... he just brightened your day when he was there," Gielow said.

Corey Arwood is a breaking news reporter for TCPalm. Follow Corey on Twitter @coreyarwood, or reach him by phone at 772-978-2246.

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## Teacher

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Blair "was a bright, happy soul with a great love for her students," Freeland told the School Board Tuesday. "She was a friend, a teacher, a sister, a daughter and a mother."

"Though Blair is a memory now," Freeland said, "she will be deeply missed long after this meeting."

News of Blair's death comes as local school officials grapple with how to best control the spread of COVID-19 on campuses and as published reports document more public-school teachers and staff across the state dying from the virus.

Since July, 34 educators have died from COVID-19 or COVID-19-related complications, according to the Florida Education Association. Twenty-six have died in August.

In Indian River County, 273 students and 108 staff have tested positive for the virus since the first day of

school, records show. Hundreds more have been quarantined for on-campus exposures.

In Martin County, 174 students and 36 staff have tested positive since the start of the year, and in St. Lucie County, it's 348 students and 121 staff, records show.

On Monday, Indian River school employees were told they would be required to wear masks indoors when social distancing wasn't possible. The next day, the School Board imposed a two-week mask mandate for Pre-K through eighth grade unless students had medical exemptions.

On Aug. 11, one day after the St. Lucie County School Board implemented a mask requirement for students, the district imposed a mask mandate for all employees, including teachers.

Martin County schools have a mask-optional policy.

Sommer Brugal is TCPalm's education reporter for Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties. You can keep up with Sommer on Twitter @sbrugal and give her a call at 772-221-4231.

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