

FBI scours salvaged boat for evidence in Joan Webster case

By Gary McMillan
Globe Staff

FBI agents yesterday began scouring a boat for fingerprints, blood traces, pieces of clothing or a canvas bag that belonged to Joan Webster, the Harvard graduate student who disappeared two years ago. Suffolk County Assistant Dist. Atty. Timothy Burke said.

An informant has reportedly told the district attorney that Joan Webster's body was dumped at sea from the boat - named the "Malafemmina" or Evil Woman - and then the boat was sunk in Boston Harbor. The boat, a 1974 Chris Craft Catalina, was recovered Tuesday from 37-foot waters off Pier Seven in South Boston and taken to the Massport warehouse on Pier One in East Boston. Burke, at the FBI's request, banned reporters from the warehouse when the search began about 2 p.m. yesterday.

Malafemmina is owned by Ed Paradiso, a 40-year-old Manog clam raker from Revere who is in MCI Walpole awaiting trial in the Aug. 12, 1979, killing of Marie Iannuzzi.

Yesterday Paradiso's attorney, James J. Cipolletta, said in a tele-

phone interview: "We are confident there is nothing on that boat to indicate that Paradiso at any time had communication with Joan Webster. Mr. Paradiso absolutely and positively denies any and all allegations of involvement with Miss Webster's disappearance."

The FBI search will take about two days, Burke said during interviews at the warehouse, but he conceded that "the possibility is remote that we will find any traces of Joan." In addition to her pocketbook and suitcase - which were

found in separate spots soon after she vanished - Burke said Webster was carrying a large canvas bag with shoes, books and records. Blood traces and fingerprints both have a tendency to dissolve in salt water, Burke said.

Joan Webster was last seen at Logan Airport on the night of Nov. 28, 1981, as she was returning from a Thanksgiving visit to her parents' home in Glen Ridge, N.J. George Webster, an executive with International Telephone & Telegraph, and his wife, Terry, have of-

fered a \$25,000 reward for information leading to their daughter's whereabouts.

Paradiso, in letters to the Boston Herald and WHDH radio, has said he reported the Malafemmina missing in July 1981, four months before Webster disappeared. Yesterday, Burke confirmed that the boat was reported stolen on July 26, 1981, and that Liberty Mutual Insurance Co. had paid the claim.

Paradiso was being held at Charles Street Jail on the Iannuzzi murder charge last January when

the informant reportedly told the district attorney's office that Paradiso had said he disposed of Webster's body at sea. Last May - while still awaiting trial - Paradiso was transferred to Walpole state prison, a move correction officials say is unusual but not unprecedented. Cipolletta said yesterday he expects a ruling in October on a motion to have Paradiso returned to Charles Street.

Burke said yesterday that finding the boat was a "key clue" because it buttresses the credibility

of our informant. He had no connection with Paradiso, so how was he to know six months or so before the boat was found where it would be unless he was told?

Nonetheless, Burke acknowledged, any murder case will be difficult to prove without Webster's body. "The last time in this state a murder case was successfully proved without a body was 1850." That case, involving a Harvard professor who burned his victims in a basement incinerator, was Commonwealth vs. Webster.

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