

Introduction

Every day you encounter faces of missing people. They are on posters in federal buildings, gas stations, highway rest stops, grocery stores and sometimes in newspapers. Images of missing individuals are sometimes displayed on the rear doors of transport trucks, milk cartons and billboards, but the efforts to find these individuals are most often sporadic, uncoordinated and very hit and miss. Agencies such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children work diligently to publicize missing children cases and to protect vulnerable youngsters from harm, but the effort to locate missing adults doesn't have the same support.

The National Center for Missing Adults is one of a few organizations that have sprung up in recent years to work with police agencies and help relatives focus attention when someone who is old enough to vote vanishes. There are also numerous non-profit organizations with web sites that feature missing adults and appeal for help to find them.

The statistics on missing individuals are staggering and demonstrate the need for national and international coordination to ensure nothing is overlooked when anyone disappears. The majority of people reported missing are teenage runaways or adults who make a conscious decision to leave. In addition there are thousands of children who are abducted by family members or strangers, and countless adults who are victims of foul play or become mired in situations where they are trapped, including women forced into prostitution.

To give perspective to the scope of the concern, the names of some 800,000 people on average are entered as missing persons each year in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's national crime computer. The majority are removed from the computer, sometimes within hours, because the individual has returned home or been located. But despite the high clearance rate, there are still more than 100,000 individuals listed as being missing in the United States and half of those who have vanished are juveniles. In the early 1970s, it was common for law enforcement agencies to limit investigation of a missing teenager who was considered to be "just a runaway" or to require families to wait 48 hours or more before reporting the disappearance of an adult. Today, with greater societal risks, the first two hours after a person vanishes is being looked upon as a critical window and it's not uncommon to see police pulling out all stops when someone goes missing. This is most evident when a young child or elderly person disappears, but more and more law enforcement agencies are going into high gear much faster when anyone is reported missing.

Another critical component in the initiative to locate missing children is the Amber Alert system that was developed across North America

following the 1996 abduction and brutal killing of Amber Renee Hagerman in Arlington, Texas. Witnesses saw the girl being dragged into a white pick-up truck but there was no way authorities could immediately get public assistance to locate the vehicle. Since the Amber Alert program was adopted police agencies have documented a number of cases where children have been safely rescued after being snatched from the street by a stranger. In addition, lawmakers at the state and national level have enacted or are working on passing legislation named in honor of several missing persons that require authorities to act immediately when people go missing. Other laws obligate police to enter names in a national registry in a timely fashion and to obtain DNA samples and other physical evidence that can be used to properly identify a missing person if they fall victim to foul play and are later found dead.

In Canada, Judy Peterson, the mother of a 14-year-old girl who vanished in Victoria, British Columbia in 1993 has been fighting an uphill battle for the establishment of a national missing persons DNA data bank, similar to the federal government's registry of DNA profiles from unsolved homicides and sex crimes. Sadly the issue of missing people has been used as a headline grabber or photo opportunity by politicians, and governments as a whole have not tackled the concern with a view of looking for constructive solutions and strategies that will provide the tools to law enforcement when someone goes missing and to adequately assist families who find themselves living in a nightmare if a son, daughter, mother or father vanishes.

The purpose of this book is to focus attention on various people who have disappeared through the years across North America in the hope someone has information that can bring them home. Sadly, in many cases, relatives are resigned to the fact the missing individual is no longer alive, and they want their body found to provide a proper burial and to have a place where they can go and grieve. At the same time, there are other people who cling to the hope that a missing person will be found safe and actively maintain web sites with constant updates begging for information that will reunite them with their missing family member. Details in the book were obtained from police agencies, missing person organizations, media reports and in some cases family members.

The synopsis of the various cases provides specific detail that will hopefully trigger someone's memory if they have information that will help find a missing individual. Also included are photographs showing what the person looked like when they went missing, again with the hope it will jog the mind of anyone who can recall even the slightest detail at the time of the disappearance. Investigators who have responsibility for each of the missing person occurrences urge anyone who has information to call the police department directly or telephone the tip line

of the nearest Crime Stoppers program and tell them what you know, no matter how insignificant or trivial it may seem. Rewards are available in some of these cases but money shouldn't be the motivator that encourages individuals to do the right thing where missing people are concerned. If you are aware of any information regarding the people in this book or any missing person, please contact police or Crime Stoppers immediately.