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AMBER ADVOCATE 55-56/DOUBLE ISSUE



The AMBER Advocate, Issues 3 & 4, 2023

Double issue!

‘We speak the language of missing’

Eight parents who have endured the trauma of searching for a missing child help update the new multimedia *Family Survival Guide*— not only to offer guidance to other families, but also law enforcement

[Photo]

The *Family Survival Guide* parent-authors and production team in a studio in Salt Lake City.

COVER STORY: MAIN FEATURE

The (New!) Family Survival Guide

Eight parent-authors want families of missing children to know ‘you are not alone.’ They also ask law enforcement to ‘hear our truth.’

By Denise Gee Peacock

“I remember standing in the middle of chaos, wishing I had a book to tell me what to do.”
[Quote from parent-author Colleen Nick, Mother of Morgan Nick, abducted at age 6 while catching fireflies with friends during a Little League baseball game in 1995]

Thankfully, there *is* such a resource: [When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide](#). And its new multimedia format—with updated, actionable information—is more relevant and accessible than ever.

The *Guide*’s advice reflects the hard-won lessons of eight parents, including Colleen Nick, who have faced “the worst thing any of us could ever imagine—and no parent ever wants to think about: having their child go missing,” says parent-author Patty Wetterling.

Organized with numerous checklists and resources, the fifth edition of the *Guide* is a compass for parents in the midst of chaos. Its new iteration is fully digital, with a website offering a downloadable, printable guide, plus searchable online content and more than 100 videos covering the myriad of issues a parent may face during the search for their child.

Officially released on National Missing Children’s Day in May 2023, the *Family Survival Guide* was a labor of love for its parent-authors, who worked with the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) publications team and others for nearly two years to bring it to fruition. Reliving their experiences “is never easy; in fact, it’s agonizing—but it’s important for us,” Patty says.

When first published in 1998, *When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide* was the first comprehensive resource of its kind, offering parents of missing children guidance on effectively working with law enforcement, the media, and volunteers; managing rewards and donations; and “simply surviving to fight another day in the search for their child,” Colleen says.

She and Patty were among a small group of families that Ron Laney of the U.S. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) invited to work on the project with help from Helen Connelly, then a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)—and later a Program Administrator for Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC), home to AATTAP and the National Criminal Justice Program (NCJTC).

The *Guide* quickly became the go-to source for people who “speak the language of missing”—not only in this country, but also abroad, where agencies from the United Kingdom to Australia include it on their websites. “But a lot has changed in 25 years,” Patty says. “It was time for a new look, both in its content and design.”

Patty and Colleen rejoined Helen to work with six other parents to produce the *Guide*’s update with the AATTAP publications team—an initiative funded and guided by the DOJ’s OJJDP and Office of Justice Publications (OJP).

“Though there’ve been several prior updates to the *Guide*, this one is especially important,” Helen says. “It incorporates the most current information on a wider range of missing child situations. It also gives families immediate access to information via its online format. And there they can hear the parents’ advice and encouragement from the parents themselves, who speak directly to them through powerful videos.”

For 18 months beginning in fall 2021, the parents worked with the AATTAP project team to begin analyzing every aspect of the *Guide*: deciding what needed revision, what information needed emphasis, and what new resources and guidance should be added. Getting the *Guide* to completion took numerous virtual meetings, independent work spanning weeks, and multiple rounds of peer review that included input from top law enforcement professionals with expertise in finding missing children. The parents aimed to highlight more advanced technology, new and helpful laws, better ways of investigating, and expanded resources. Another goal was to speak more directly and clearly to parents.

Beyond being able to download a PDF of the document, they wanted to ensure parents could access its content from any place with WiFi. They worked diligently to develop information on topics relevant to today: broader classifications of missing children; the impact of social media and communication apps; ever-growing concerns about trafficking; increased public alerting options; and “how to work with law enforcement who may not be trained on new laws, or know how to access specialized resources,” says parent-author Jeffery Morehouse.

In January 2023, a week of filming took place in Salt Lake City. The parents flew in from New York, Washington, Minnesota, Tennessee, Arizona, Colorado, and Alabama to help contribute to what would become a vast library of video segments for the *Guide*’s website. (Colleen was unable to attend the session due to her work on the documentary “Still Missing Morgan.”)

The film crew and AATTAP team worked carefully and compassionately with families to capture the parents’ heart-wrenching stories and invaluable guidance available only from those who have survived what they have and been left resilient. Tears flowed. Hugs were plentiful. Connections were electric.

On the final day, parents were asked to speak directly to law enforcement to share advice that could be used for both the *Guide* and AATTAP training events. And at the end of the session, not a dry eye was visible.

AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen was in attendance—and in awe. “The strength in this room is so powerful,” she said. “The wisdom you’ve shared inspires me to share a quote that I think is appropriate for this moment.”

“Saint Augustine said, ‘Hope has two daughters: Anger and Courage. Anger for the way things are. And Courage to see that things don’t have to remain that way,’” Rasmussen said.

Parent-author Dr. Noelle Hunter replied, “As Ahmad says, ‘This is the club that none of us ever wanted to be in.’ But we’re in it. And, oh, my goodness—the power of solidarity you feel with people who get you *exactly* is transformative. It’s one of the reasons I never gave up working to see my child returned, and why I stay in this cause to help parents reunite with their children. There is no substitute for the new family that we have built through this work.”

For parent-author Yvonne Ambrose, “this process has been like going to counseling,” she said. “We all had a support system in place until our child went missing. Then we lost people who didn’t understand what we were going through. But even though we’ve lost them, we’ve found each other. That gives us the strength to keep fighting—and be there for others.”

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Four months after filming, the *Family Survival Guide* “family” (or “FSG power team,” Yvonne calls them) reunited in Washington, D.C., to attend this year’s National Missing Children’s Day—where the completed *Guide* was first announced May 23. They also were invited to participate in a roundtable discussion with OJJDP Administrator Elizabeth Ryan and her team.

Prior to the DOJ-hosted Missing Children’s Day event, the *FSG* family gathered at their Alexandria, Virginia, hotel for a reception hosted by AATTAP staff. They held the first bound copies of the 96-page *Family Survival Guide* and previewed the new companion website. They also watched “The Power of Support,” a [video](#) encapsulating some of their most powerful messages shared during the *Family Survival Guide* filming sessions.

“You all embody incredible courage,” Janell said, “and your wisdom and candor will be immensely valuable to both parents and law enforcement, who can learn from it and share it with others.” The parents said they plan to continue helping train law enforcement by working

with the AATTAP and NCJTC of Fox Valley Technical College. They also want to continue advocating for legislative changes that support parents facing situations similar to theirs. (See highlights of their advocacy work by clicking [here](#).)

They also emphasized the value of volunteering with [Team HOPE](#), a cornerstone program of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). The group is made up of trained parent and family volunteers who have experienced the trauma of having a missing or exploited child. Counseling is offered 24/7 to families coping with all the complex issues surrounding the search for their missing child.

The parents were front and center when the *Guide* was announced at the 40th annual National Missing Children's Day event at the U.S. Department of Justice Great Hall in Washington, D.C. "The terror felt by a parent when their child has disappeared is overwhelming," said U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "I have great respect for the brave and resourceful professionals who work every day to protect children from harm, reunite missing children with their families, and provide support in the aftermath of a traumatic event. There is no cause more worthy of honor."

Following the event, the FSG team gathered at the OJJDP office to talk with Administrator Elizabeth Ryan and OJJDP Program Managers Lou Ann Holland and Alex Sarrano. The parents thanked the OJJDP team for inviting them to participate in the project, and discussed ways to increase awareness of the *Guide* and further help searching parents.

One conversation addressed the need for parents and law enforcement to understand what types of financial support are available for crime victims. "The criteria around accessing these funds is not clearly defined or understood," Ahmad said. Patty then described hardships that her son, Trevor—who witnessed his brother's abduction—has experienced while trying to receive victim resource support as an adult.

Administrator Ryan assured the parents that her team would help address such obstacles, and assist families of missing children in every way possible. Yvonne expressed her gratitude. "The fact that you all are supporting this new *Guide*, and allowing us to help others—and having us here today to talk about what families need—means the world to us," she said. In response, Ryan told the group, "What you have built together is immensely powerful—and greatly needed."

At the meeting's close, Patty returned the focus on the parent-authors' children—some of them found, but some still lost—as well as all children who remain missing.

"Why not get ahead of the problem?" she said. "How do we raise our kids to be the way we want them to be, and not cause harm to another human being? I can talk forever about how we want the world to be—the world that Jacob knew, that innocent world in St. Joseph, Minnesota. We refuse to let the man who took Jacob take that too."

“One of my favorite quotes is by Pablo Casals, who said, ‘We must work to make the world worthy of its children.’ So why not do that?,” Patty proposed. “Let’s all work to build a world where kids can feel safe enough to follow their dreams.”

- The parents share these goals: To give voice to children who have been forever silenced. To give hope to parents of missing children when life is at its lowest point. And to help law enforcement best work with parents who desperately want to find their missing child.
- The eight parents graciously provided their time, ideas, emotions, and advice to help update the *Guide*. They relived the anguish and challenges of having their children abducted by a stranger, kidnapped overseas by a parent, lured by a sex trafficker, or killed by an adult they trusted. But as parent-author Nacole Svendgard explains, “We feel it’s our duty to make things better for the next person—the next parent who has to navigate the same minefields we did.”
- Watch “The Power of Support”—Hear the parents discuss how they find strength by helping other searching parents: bit.ly/FSG-Support
- Watch OJJDP Administrator Elizabeth Ryan announce the new *Family Survival Guide* and commend its authors for their “tremendous efforts and unwavering commitment” to the project for National Missing Children’s Day 2023: bit.ly/FSG-DOJ
- “This *Guide* is one of the most important resources ever developed by the Department of Justice.” — Ron Laney, OJJDP/AMBER Alert veteran

[Photos/captions]

1—Photo collage of the eight parents and their children, and a lit candle from a vigil.

2—Photo of the parent-authors as a group sharing their advice for searching parents during a filming session in Salt Lake City.

3—Photo of parent-author Patty Wetterling, seated, talking with Bonnie Ferenbach, AATTAP Program Manager and *Family Survival Guide* production director, in a Salt Lake City studio.

4—Photo of parent-author Yvonne Ambrose as seen on a video camera’s monitors.

5—Photo of parent-author Ahmad Rivazfar visiting the *Family Survival Guide* information table outside the U.S. Department of Justice Great Hall during the 2023 Missing Children’s Day commemoration.

6—U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland at a podium addressing attendees at the 2023 Missing Children’s Day commemoration at the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.

7—The *Guide*’s parent-authors and AATTAP staff are shown with OJJDP leadership after their meeting following the Missing Children’s Day event.

8—OJJDP Administrator Elizabeth Ryan is shown promoting the *Family Survival Guide* during the 2023 Missing Children’s Day event at the Department of Justice.

COVER STORY: SIDEBAR 1

What’s in the Guide?

When Your Child Is Missing: A Family Survival Guide (Fifth Edition) is a multimedia compendium of peer-reviewed best practices, helpful checklists, and supportive insight from families who have endured missing child incidents. Each aspect of the resource—in print, digital, or video—walks parents with a missing child through the process of working with law enforcement, the media, search and rescue professionals, volunteers, and others. It also addresses how to manage finances and safeguard well-being. And it provides numerous resources that will be updated and expanded in the years ahead. Here are its key sections:

- **“Steps to take when your child is missing”** provides a checklist of things to do or know before, when, and after law enforcement arrives to the missing child’s home.
 - **“The search: Understanding the work of law enforcement and volunteers”** outlines actions to take during the first 48 hours and beyond; how to collaborate and communicate effectively with law enforcement; and how to effectively enlist and manage volunteers.
 - **“The media and public engagement”** focuses on maintaining public awareness of a missing child’s case, strategically working with the media, effectively producing and sharing missing posters, and enlisting the help of public officials.
 - **“Financial considerations”** covers offering rewards plus accepting and managing monetary donations. It also offers advice on handling family finances throughout the missing child case.
 - **“Personal and family well-being”** suggests ways to regain and retain emotional and physical strength; care for the siblings of the missing child; and shares important considerations for reuniting missing children with their families.
 - **“A framework for understanding missing children”** explains the different types of missing persons cases and their unique dynamics, including family and non-family abductions, endangered missing cases, international parental child abductions, and children lured from home or missing from care.
 - **“Resources and readings”** highlights the best sources for specialized assistance and insight.
-

COVER STORY: SIDEBAR 2

About the Parents

Yvonne Ambrose is the mother of Desiree Robinson, who was lured away from home, then exploited and enslaved through sex trafficking. Desiree was murdered December 24, 2016, as she fought to escape the perpetrator to whom her trafficker first sold her, primarily via the now-defunct Backpage site. Yvonne vowed to be her daughter’s voice, in support of all victims of child sex trafficking, and has been instrumental through her work with law enforcement and congressional testimony to strengthen federal laws against traffickers. Yvonne describes her daughter as “a beautiful girl born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, with a smile to brighten any room. She had a bright future with hopes of being a physician in the U.S. Air Force.” For more, visit the Desiree Foundation Against Sex Trafficking [page](#) on Facebook.

Elaine Hall is the mother of Dylan Redwine, 13, who was murdered by his biological father in November 2012. After a relentless search effort driven by the steadfast commitment of his mother, Dylan's remains were found in La Plata County, Colorado, in June 2013, just miles from the home of Dylan's father. Elaine's work with local and state law enforcement and district attorney's offices in her home state of Colorado has resulted in better awareness and understanding of, and training on, endangered missing children for law enforcement and search personnel. "While justice was served for my son, the pain of living without him will never go away," she says. "To anyone facing such an ordeal, don't feel that it's not your place to speak up." See the Dylan Redwine: Journey to Justice page on Facebook [here](#).

Dr. Noelle Hunter is the mother of Maayimuna "Muna" N'Diaye, who in December 2011 was abducted internationally by her noncustodial father. Noelle's Mission4Muna campaign helped her rally local, state, federal, and international resources; stage protests in front of the Embassy of Mali in Washington, D.C.; plead with United Nations members to help return her daughter; and work with a Kentucky congressional delegation to pressure the Mali government to return Muna to her. ("Until she's home, I won't sit down, I won't shut up, I won't be quiet," she attested.) Noelle was able to bring Muna safely home in July 2014, and has since founded the [iStand Parent Network](#), which, with Muna's assistance, provides resources, support, and advocacy to survivors of international parental child abductions.

Jeffery Morehouse is the father of Atomu Imoto "Mochi" Morehouse, who was abducted internationally by his noncustodial mother on Father's Day 2010. Since that terrible day, Jeffery, an award-winning filmmaker, has worked relentlessly to find Mochi and bring his son home through complex and discerning work with local, state, federal, and international law enforcement. Jeffery is a founding partner and executive director of the nonprofit organization [Bring Abducted Children Home](#), working for the return of abducted children wrongfully detained in Japan. Every day for him is filled with painful reminders of his son—"a familiar phrase, a look, or smell can remind me of life before my son's abduction. Then I realize he's still missing. The nightmare continues. The search continues."

Colleen Nick is the mother of Morgan Nick, who at age 6 was kidnapped from a Little League baseball game while catching fireflies with friends. Since that day (June 9, 1995), finding Morgan has been a steadfast priority for her and her family. In 1996, Colleen became CEO of the [Morgan Nick Foundation](#), which has assisted thousands of families in crisis, successfully providing intervention, support, and reunification assistance to missing children, missing adults, and their families. She is also a nationally recognized advocate for missing children and adults; the co-founder of NCMEC's Team HOPE, a peer support mentoring program for families of the missing; and the embodiment of unwavering hope. As she explains, "Hope is not a strategy; it is an action." Learn more via the documentary, ["Still Missing Morgan."](#)

Ahmad Rivazfar is the father of Sara, brutally murdered by her custodial mother's boyfriend on September 22, 1988. Sara's older sister, Sayeh, was badly beaten in the incident, but miraculously survived. Ahmad emigrated to the U.S. from Iran in 1976, joining the U.S. Navy and

becoming a decorated pilot. He believes his heritage played a key role in the girls' reported abuse not being taken seriously, and for "being treated like I was the criminal during the investigation." Since Sara's death, Ahmad has served other families of missing children through NCMEC's Team HOPE and the Surviving Parents Coalition. Read more about Ahmad's family tragedy [here](#).

Nacole Svendgard is the mother of Jessika, who was lured away from home and trafficked in 2010. Nacole struggled with navigating the law enforcement process; not knowing her daughter's whereabouts; and later, how to appropriately handle the family's reunification with Jessika. Through the journey of recovery, Nacole and Jessika have become powerful advocates for victims of sex trafficking and have been instrumental in the passage of legislation to increase victim rights, issue harsher punishments for sex offenders, and shut down websites that facilitate sex trafficking. Nacole recently told her daughter, "I could not be prouder of the woman, mother, and advocate you've become. Your resiliency is inspirational." Learn more via the documentaries "[I Am Jane Doe](#)" and "[The Long Night.](#)"

Patty Wetterling is the mother of Jacob Wetterling, abducted at age 11 on October 22, 1989, by a masked gunman near their home in St. Joseph, Minnesota. She and her husband, Jerry, would later create the [Jacob Wetterling Resource Center](#), which is dedicated to preventing child abduction and exploitation. Patty co-founded and is past director of NCMEC's Team HOPE, and has shared countless victim impact sessions with law enforcement across the United States. On September 1, 2016—almost 27 years after his abduction—Jacob's remains were found, and his abductor charged with murder. Jacob's zest for life is now embodied in "[Jacob's 11,](#)" which promotes 11 of his most endearing traits. Read about her new memoir [here](#).

[Photos]

Individual photos of the eight parent-authors that accompany each short bio.

COVER STORY: SIDEBAR 3

Parents' Advocacy Work Highlights

1994

Patty Wetterling championed passage of [the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act](#), the first U.S. law to mandate that each state maintain a sex offender registry.

1996

Patty Wetterling helped accomplish:

President Bill Clinton's [executive memorandum](#) requiring federal agencies to receive and post missing children's fliers in their buildings.

The passage of [Megan's Law](#)—which amended the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. It requires sex offender registration and public access to the offender's name, picture, address, incarceration date, and conviction.

2008

Ahmad Rivazfar and Ed Smart (father of kidnapping survivor Elizabeth Smart) lobbied for passage of the [PROTECT Our Children Act](#) (aka the Providing Resources, Officers, and Technology to Eradicate Cyber Threats to Our Children Act).

2010

Ahmad Rivazfar and Ed Smart (father of kidnapping survivor Ed Smart) embark on the first of many annual cross-country [bike rides](#) (from Rochester, New York, to Los Angeles—about 3,500 miles) to raise awareness about keeping children safe.

2018

Nacole Svendgard and Yvonne Ambrose (shown during a filming session) helped champion [two bills](#) into law: The FOSTA (Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act) and SESTA (Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act), which make it illegal to knowingly assist, facilitate, or support sex trafficking, and amend the Section 230 safe harbors of the Communications Decency Act (which makes online services immune from civil liability for the actions of their users) to exclude enforcement of federal or state sex trafficking laws from its immunity. The effort led to the shuttering of Backpage.com, which generated millions of dollars annually through advertisements of innocent women and children forced or coerced into sex trafficking—including Yvonne's late daughter Desiree and Nacole's daughter, Jessika.

2019

Backed by the Morgan Nick Foundation, Arkansas became the [first state in the nation](#) to achieve multi-agency certification for its Child Abduction Response Teams (CARTs). The certification recognizes that Arkansas' CARTs were developed according to standards set by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) after they completed numerous training sessions. The teams

consist of school personnel, victim advocates, and emergency management personnel, among others.

2020

After the death of her son, Dylan, Elaine Hall joined forces with the mother of another murdered child to make tampering with a dead body a more severe crime. After lobbying and publicly addressing Colorado politicians, Elaine and Laura Saxton [succeeded](#) in elevating the offense from a misdemeanor to a Class 3 felony. (The charge is usually added to a more serious crime, such as murder, and carries a sentence of up to 12 years in prison.) The new law was first used in the case of Chris Watts, who pleaded guilty in 2018 to killing his pregnant wife and two young daughters.

2023

A day before the National Missing Children’s Day event at the U.S. Department of Justice, Dr. Noelle Hunter and Jeffery Morehouse spoke before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing “Bring Abducted Children Home,” which was [televised](#) on C-SPAN. “We called for greater transparency in understanding why cases are closed without the victims being located or returned, and prescriptive responses in using existing laws and tools,” Jeffery said. Both have testified numerous times individually and jointly on international parental child abduction (IPCA) cases, advocating for improvements in federal and state legislation. “There’s been a groundswell of advocacy and awareness regarding children and families who are the victims of IPCA,” Noelle said. “Parents are standing together to hold leaders accountable.”

[Photos/captions]

1—Parent author Ahmad Rivazfar and Ed Smart, shown wearing cycling clothing, look at a map before their cross-country bike ride.

2—Parent-author Nacole Svendgard shares a smile with Yvonne Ambrose during a filming session in Salt Lake City.

3—Parent-authors Jeffery Morehouse and Dr. Noelle Hunter are shown outside the Department of Justice building in Washington, D.C., before the Missing Children’s Day commemoration.

COVER STORY: SIDEBAR 4

Parents to Law Enforcement: ‘We’re Counting on You’

The *Family Survival Guide*’s parent-authors—and subject matter experts who work daily to protect children—want law enforcement to weigh these points while working on missing child cases.

Be compassionate

“It’s easy to become immune to horrific crimes; you deal with them daily. But work to counter that. Each case is not just a number. Each case involves human beings.”

– Ahmad Rivazfar

“When someone in law enforcement tells me, ‘I can’t imagine what you’re going through,’ I often think, ‘Well, you do know.’ Anyone who’s ever lost sight of their child in a crowded environment can relate.”

– Jeffery Morehouse

“One of the officers initially working my daughter’s missing case told me, ‘Well, I guess [your ex-husband] got tired of you and left with Muna.’ That left me speechless. Fortunately the FBI agent I ultimately worked with was deeply empathetic and helpful. He said, ‘It’s going to take a long time to help you, but we are going to help.’”

– Dr. Noelle Hunter

Know the laws—and think ahead

“I’m a father who had legal custody of my son but had to convince people of that. It’s important to know that IPCA [international parental child abduction] actions are not a custodial dispute, but a [federal crime](#) that requires local law enforcement to enter the case into NCIC. ... Also, when a missing child becomes an adult, please don’t remove them from NCIC. That sorely limits parents’ resources, such as access to age-progression photos available from NCMEC.”

– Jeffery Morehouse

“[Federal law](#) requires immediate entry of missing children into NCIC. ... But we know what kind of stress you’re under. We know you might get four more calls after ours and then it’s time to leave your shift. But while you might forget, we don’t. These are our children.”

– Nacole Svendgard

Communicate regularly and respectfully

“When talking to parents, talk to them the way you would want to be talked to if your child was missing. Treat us with dignity. ... Also, check in with us at least once a week to update us with

any news or a good support resource.”

– Yvonne Ambrose

Stay current with training and technology

“Let’s train all our first responders, from dispatchers to the hospital workers who handle sexual assault exams. And let’s provide more training at the academy level, where there’s little to no time spent on the subject.”

– Nacole Svendgard

“Everything is changing for the better, but you have to know what exists and how to use it. Not knowing can be a matter of life and death.” – Patty Wetterling

Learn the signs of sex trafficking, and why children go on the run

“Look closely into what, or who, has caused a child to leave home. There’s the real danger.”

– Yvonne Ambrose

“In talking with detectives about runaways, I’ve heard, ‘Well, she’s 17 and with her boyfriend.’ That’s when I respond, ‘Well, until she’s 18, she’s our responsibility.’ ”

– Captain Stacie Lick, CART Coordinator, Gloucester County (NJ) Prosecutor’s Office

Be cognizant of cultural bias

“Not all parents of missing children speak English or understand American laws and cultures. Sometimes I felt like my Iranian heritage had law enforcement looking at me as a criminal.” – Ahmad Rivazfar

“Why isn’t the media reporting more on crimes involving marginalized or minority communities? Are they not learning about them from law enforcement? Or are they choosing to overlook these cases?”

– Patty Wetterling

With a family member’ doesn’t always mean ‘safe’

“Just because a child is with a biological family member does not mean they are safe. On the contrary, family abductions are the leading cause of AMBER Alerts. In my situation, law enforcement was convinced that a father could never hurt his child. That took a whole week out of the[investigation] process. So much can be lost in that time.”

– Elaine Hall

“I would often hear, ‘At least you know he’s safe; he’s with his mother’—completely discounting that a federal and state crime occurred, and that a healthy parent does not kidnap her child to a

foreign country, cutting him off from the only life and people he has ever known.”
– Jeffery Morehouse

Find out what resources exist for victim & family emotional and financial support

“People think that once you and your child are reunited it’s all hugs and kisses and happily-ever-after. But that’s really when the hard part starts. It’s critical for parents to connect with a survivor-led advocacy group. Find out which therapists can ‘get’ where a child is coming from— or where they need to go as a family.” – Nacole Svendgard

“Help parents understand what victim assistance funds may be available, and how to access them. ... I know parents who just walked away from trying to find their child because of the heavy emotional and financial cost involved. It really takes a toll.” – Dr. Noelle Hunter

[Display quote]

“A runaway child is a missing child, and we must assume that the child is in danger and investigate it as such.” — Charles Fleeger, AATTAP Region 3 Liaison and Texas-Brazos Valley AMBER Alert Coordinator

COVER STORY: SIDEBAR 5

So what can *you* do?

Here's how to use the *Guide* to help parents, colleagues, and yourself

- Promote the *Family Survival Guide* website ([AMBERAdvocate.org/families](https://www.AMBERAdvocate.org/families)) by providing a link to it on your agency website as a resource for parents of missing children; encourage other agencies to do the same.
 - Print these 5x7-inch information cards on durable cardstock for first responders and investigators to share with families of missing children. Visit bit.ly/FSG-5x7-cards to access the card and its printing specifications.
 - **Download and print the *Guide* from our website** to keep handy at your agency and at training academies. Also give copies of it to child- and family-advocacy partners, shelters, and hospitals. Find our suggested printing specifications at [bit.ly/FSG print](https://bit.ly/FSG_print).
 - **Take or request an AATTAP class** that provides the perspective of a parent of a missing child. Follow our class offerings at bit.ly/AMBERAlertTrainings or email us at askamber@fvtc.edu.
 - **Get advice on demand** at [AMBERAdvocate.org/families](https://www.AMBERAdvocate.org/families).
 - Download the *Guide*.
 - Search online content.
 - Watch powerful videos.
 - **Access our *Guide*'s QR code** at bit.ly/FSG-QR. Keep it on your cell phone or laptop to easily text or email it to the family member of a missing child—or anyone else in need of the resource.
 - **Watch the videos on our website**, especially those that focus on how law enforcement can best interact with, and help, parents of missing children. Visit bit.ly/FSGvideos.
 - **Share the updated *Guide* with your Public Information Officer (PIO)**, who in turn can share it with their local and regional media contacts—using it as a springboard to discuss how your team handles missing child reports, decides/issues public alerts, and deploys its Child Abduction Response Team (CART).
 - **Check out documentaries, a new book, and websites** highlighting our parent-authors' powerful stories and life-saving advocacy work that are noted throughout this issue.
-

COVER STORY SPOTLIGHT

An Open Book

The new memoir of Patty Wetterling, *Family Survival Guide* parent-author, is an intimate and candid ‘must-read for anyone working on unsolved abduction cases.’

Dear Jacob: A Mother's Journey of Hope

By Patty Wetterling with Joy Baker Minnesota Historical Society Press

348 pages, \$29.95

Web extra: Read Joy Baker's blog post, “This is really happening,” for her thoughts on working with Patty: bit.ly/JoyPost.

By Denise Gee Peacock

Patty Wetterling may be retired from offering her unique parent’s perspective on missing child investigations for AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) and National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) classes—but in a way, she’s still teaching. Her newly released memoir, *Dear Jacob: A Mother’s Journey of Hope*, is practically a 348-page course on her nearly 27-year quest to find her missing son, Jacob, with the help—and sometimes hindrance—of local, state, and federal law enforcement.

Patty speaks frankly about what went right and what went wrong during the years. And for a few officers involved in the case, “it may be a harsh read,” she says. “But it was important that I provide an honest perspective. There are many lessons that law enforcement can learn from the book.”

Dear Jacob is Patty’s movingly personal take on the events leading up to and following Jacob’s abduction on October 22, 1989, in St. Joseph, Minnesota. That day, as night began to fall, her 11-year-old son Jacob, his 10-year-old brother, Trevor, and their friend, Aaron, 11, were riding their bikes back to the Wetterling home from a nearby convenience store when a masked gunman emerged from the roadside. Ordering them into a ditch, he asked each boy his age before telling Trevor and Aaron to get up and run toward the woods. “Don’t look back or I’ll shoot,” he told them. Ultimately, they did look back, and Jacob and the man were gone.

What unfolded was a search that would last nearly three decades—and become one of America’s highest-profile child abduction cases.

In the early days of the investigation, the Wetterling family saw “amazing community and investigative support,” Patty says, noting, “Compared to what many parents experience, we had the sun and moon and stars” in large part because an FBI agent happened to have a son in Jacob’s class. “It was personal for him.” The agent called the Minneapolis bureau, which sent an agent to help oversee the search effort for about six months. “Plus the Stearns County sheriff at

that time helped us in every way—we had dogs, horses, the National Guard, you name it. But one by one, the resources, and ultimately our contacts, went away,” she says.

Meantime the Wetterling family endured extortion attempts, erroneous psychic visions, and “horrifyingly false leads,” Patty says— including one from a tipster who said Jacob had been abducted by a satanic cult and was sacrificed on Halloween.

As the case appeared to be going dormant, Patty did her best to keep Jacob top of mind for every investigator connected to it. She also dedicated herself to helping other searching parents. In 1991 she joined the board of directors for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), serving as chairperson for three of her 27 years with NCMEC, and co-founding its parent-to-parent support program, Team HOPE. She also helped create national policy change through her advocacy work.

As time passed, leads dwindled, communications ceased, and staffing turnovers occurred— along with missteps and missed opportunities.

Despite her national efforts, back in Stearns County, Jacob’s languishing case was almost unbearable. Whenever Patty was working with NCMEC or meeting with lawmakers in D.C., “I felt relevant, impactful—that my work was truly making a difference,” she says. “Yet in my own hometown I felt powerless, insignificant, and somewhat brushed aside” while trying to get updates on her son’s case.

Then, in 2013, a Minnesota blogger introduced herself to Patty at a fundraising event. Joy Baker, a writer and marketing consultant, had written about Jacob’s case several years earlier for her blog, JoyTheCurious.com. Patty was unaware of Joy’s work, but learned that Joy had recently received new insight into the case from a man named [Jared Scheierl](#).

Nine months before Jacob’s abduction, Scheierl, then age 12, had been kidnapped and sexually assaulted by a man who, after releasing him, told him to run and not look back or he would be shot. When Scheierl decided to share his story publicly, other victims came forward, and new leads were generated. Joy also befriended the man the sheriff had identified as a “person of interest” in Jacob’s abduction, and helped him share his side of what happened that night.

“It was important for him to clear his name and also find out who took Jacob,” Patty says. Though Joy’s approach seemed unconventional, Patty ultimately realized that she was “reaching all kinds of people with her blog that never have been reached using traditional media.” And “between Joy’s investigative skills and Jared’s desperate quest for answers, they were asking questions that had never been asked—and truly making a difference,” she recalls.

What most concerned Patty was the feeling that merely by talking with Joy and Jared “somehow I was betraying the very people I had trusted the most” in Jacob’s case—law enforcement. “We just needed to figure out how we could all work together” without compromising the integrity of the case. Thankfully, “Joy was willing to share all her leads with investigators,” Patty says

(though she was later dismayed to learn that many of those leads were apparently not followed up on).

Joy's efforts helped "shake the tree," sparking renewed public interest in Jacob's case and related media coverage. Emboldened, Patty convinced state and federal law enforcement to take another look at Jacob's case in 2014. Within a year, the FBI's Child Abduction Rapid Deployment (CARD) team would use advanced DNA technology on old evidence to pinpoint Jared's abductor, who they also believed to be Jacob's killer. The man had been arrested in 1990 but released due to a lack of solid evidence to charge him. He ultimately took a plea deal before informing law enforcement where they would find Jacob's buried remains, which were discovered on September 3, 2016.

When the search for Jacob ended, Patty felt like her son had been taken away from her all over again. Throughout the years she had never lost hope that Jacob would one day return home, much like other missing youth that had been reunited with their families, including Steven Stayner, Elizabeth Smart, Shawn Hornbeck, Jaycee Dugard, and the three young women in Cleveland: Amanda Berry, Michelle Knight, and Gina DeJesus.

After a period of grief and self-reflection, Patty emerged with a renewed commitment to continue helping other children from falling victim to predators—and advising parents of missing children as well as law enforcement. "There are missing children still out there, and it is up to us to find them," Patty says. (As of the book's publication, "NCMEC had found 56 children who were recovered after more than 20 years," she notes.)

"One of the main reasons I wrote the book was to help other families going through trauma. They may not be experiencing their journey the way we did, but hopefully they can learn that they will get through it," Patty says. "They'll get through it by finding resources and supportive people—and never giving up." And no matter the outcome, she says, "everything they experience will help them help the next person in need."

Patty also wants the book to help inform law enforcement, "for whom I have tremendous respect," she says. "I hope they'll be energized by what they learn."

[Photos/captions]

1—Image of the new book, *Dear Jacob: A Mother's Journey of Hope*

2—Photo of authors Patty Wetterling and Joy Baker outside the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota

3—Photo of Jacob Wetterling, shortly before his abduction and murder in 1988.

4—Patty Wetterling meets with President Bill Clinton after passage of Megan's Law.

5—Below right: Patty is shown with AATTAP training leaders in Puerto Rico. This marked the last time she would speak to a class during her 27-year tenure of providing victim impact presentations—during which she discussed her family's story and helped officers learn how to best work with victims' families.

SUB-SIDEBAR

Top 5 Takeaways from Patty's book, which acclaimed Minnesota crime reporter Carolyn Lowe calls 'a must-read for anyone working unsolved abduction cases.'

- **Don't get stuck on a single suspect if the facts aren't adding up.** "Toward the end of Jacob's case investigation, it was clear that our sheriff was onto to the wrong guy; he wouldn't even look at other people, despite new information emerging," Patty says. "But when Jacob's remains were found, he was in tears. I could see how much he cared. He'd just been going in the wrong direction."
 - **Avoid the "been there, done that" mindset.** Just because evidence has been reviewed "a million times" doesn't mean it won't require another look. "After the FBI sent in their CARD team, they looked at the evidence differently. They re-analyzed the clothing Jared had been wearing during his assault, which was still held in evidence. And though it been tested several times, they used advanced DNA technology and got a hit on the guy who assaulted him—who turned out to be the same man who assaulted and killed Jacob." So as technology advances, "don't stop looking at what you have," Patty says. "Don't stop talking to earlier suspects."
 - **Pay attention to the periphery.** Regularly scan social media sites and discussion platforms for pertinent information or suspicious posters. Create Google searches for your crime victims and suspects. And follow the findings of reputable crime blogs. "Some true-crime bloggers are careless with the information they receive," Patty says. "Joy, on the other hand, was trained as a reporter, and her writing, reputation, and tenacity reflect that" (which is why Patty tapped her to help write the memoir). She also sensed that "Joy was working harder to find Jacob than anybody else on the planet."
 - **Training is everything. So is knowledge of specialized resources.** "The training provided by Fox Valley Technical College and NCMEC is such a gift for law enforcement—as is the training offered by the FBI and state crime bureaus," Patty says. She recommends attending conferences where survivors of missing child cases are slated to speak or missing child cases are given an in-depth review. For specialized assistance, NCMEC "should always be a first call," she says, noting the experienced support available for law enforcement via [Team Adam](#), and for families, caring mentoring from [Team HOPE](#).
 - **Don't let cases truly go cold.** "Have a plan to revisit them every five years or so," Patty says. "Schedule a roundtable meeting of all the best minds in law enforcement and ask, 'What more can we do with the tools and information that are now available?'"
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AMBER ALERT: ON THE FRONT LINES

A Textbook Case

The swift action to locate a missing New York college student, who was found unharmed in Mexico, proves the importance of connections and collaboration—even when it crosses the U.S.

By Jody Garlock

Deputy Chief of Police Joshua Sticht has been with the New York State University Police long enough to know the ebbs and flows of student stress levels at the University at Buffalo (UB). The first six weeks of fall semester, and a few weeks toward the end of spring term, one is likely to find students either adjusting to their new environs or finalizing exams and often concerned about their grades. That's when Sticht and his team are most likely to field missing persons calls, typically from a parent unable to reach their child.

"We get a fair number of missing persons calls, but usually find students reported missing within the first hour," Sticht said. "It might be something like a student is at a friend's house and no one has seen them for days."

But a May 2023 call from a worried mother unable to reach her son before his final exams proved to be far from routine. The wide-ranging case would lead investigators south to Mexico and involve numerous law enforcement authorities, including New York State's Missing Persons Clearinghouse (NYMPC), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) of Fox Valley Technical College.

The case's outcome was a positive one, with the teen swiftly and safely located, thanks in large part to a word all involved in the case mentioned: "Collaboration." There was collaboration between the parents and UB police; between UB police, the NYMPC, and FBI; and between the NYMPC and AATTAP. Collaboration was also strong between AATTAP and contacts developed through its Southern Border Initiative (SBI), which works to support the seamless operation of AMBER Alert plans in cross-border abduction cases.

"We have access to a lot of technical tools here, but once someone is out of the state, we're really stuck," Sticht explained. "Collaborating early and bringing in a number of different resources was key."

The case also reflects how AMBER Alert programs are used more broadly as a cornerstone tool to locate endangered missing youth. In this case, the missing student was 19—making him too old for an AMBER Alert. But his age, combined with facts uncovered by New York law enforcement, proved he was indeed vulnerable and perhaps in grave danger.

The investigation unfolds

On May 11, a resident adviser—responding to a welfare check prompted by the boy’s mother—discovered the student had not been seen for two days. The adviser promptly reported the student missing to UB police, who in turn visited his dorm room. There they discovered two “red flags”: His cellphone had been left behind (“College students just don’t do that,” Sticht said) and his university-issued ID card— needed to access campus buildings and his meal plan— had not been used in several days.

“This ramped up our concern,” Sticht said. “Sometimes we have situations where everyone is in full-blown panic mode, and we find the person studying in the library. But this was different. No [electronic] devices were hitting the networks. And every tool we would normally use [to locate someone] was hitting a dead end.”

Within hours, UB police added the missing teen to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database in accordance with Suzanne’s Law (enacted after another endangered missing New York college student was ineligible for an AMBER Alert; see related sidebar).

The following day, New York State’s Missing Persons Clearinghouse (NYMPC) received additional information from the boy’s mother that led them to consider issuing a Missing Vulnerable Adult Alert for him.

The mother had reported to NYMPC that her son was on the autism spectrum and had poor decision-making skills. Online luring seemed a possibility. The parents had learned their son had been communicating via the Discord app with individuals in Mexico and had used PayPal to send someone money.

They also noted that on May 8—the last day their son had used his university meal plan—he had withdrawn funds from his bank account. What’s more, he had recently asked his mother for his passport, explaining he planned to visit Niagara Falls, which straddles the Canadian border.

After a review of his cell phone records showed he had made a 3 a.m. phone call to Delta Airlines, all indications pointed to his attempt to travel to Mexico. Meanwhile, UB officers were able to confirm the student had flown out of Buffalo to Shreveport, Louisiana, giving them “a lucky break” in the case, Sticht said. But with 1,200 miles separating the New York team from the boy’s last known location, collaboration with other law enforcement agencies would need to happen quickly.

Tim Williams, Missing Persons Investigative Supervisor at the NYMPC, contacted the New York State Intelligence Center (SIC) to inquire about getting help from U.S. Border Patrol, and together they learned the youth had flown from Shreveport to Dallas, and on to Mexico City. With confirmation that the teen was no longer in New York—or even the country—a Missing Vulnerable Adult Alert was nixed. Instead, after Williams briefed NYMPC Manager Cindy Neff on what was now a cross-border case, she decided to contact Yesenia “Jesi” Leon-Baron, who

coordinates AATTAP's international and territorial training and outreach, including the Southern Border Initiative.

That proved to be a smart move, Neff said. Leon-Baron had FBI contacts at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, and within an hour Leon-Baron was talking with the U.S. Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT). In turn, the OPDAT source was briefing the U.S. State Department's American Citizen Services group on the case.

Surprisingly swift resolution

On May 13—roughly 48 hours after the teen was reported missing—Mexican authorities located him in Querétaro, about 135 miles north of Mexico City. The youth had begun using a different name and living in an apartment with two people close to his age. Local authorities and the FBI interviewed the teen, who said he was fine. But he wanted to stay in Querétaro. The parents confirmed his identity via photos and spoke with their son.

While the parents are exploring ways to best help their son, those involved in the search for him are proud of how quickly they were able to locate him in another country—and how relieved they were to know he was found unharmed.

Neff credits Leon-Baron for accelerating the search due to her connections in Mexico: "Once Jesi reached out, they got right on it."

The case represents "the very essence" of AATTAP's mission to build relationships and collaborate, Leon-Baron said. "The success of this investigation is due to the partnerships built with AMBER Alert Coordinators in the U.S., and Southern Border Initiative relationships established in Mexico," she said.

Having solid relationships ahead of time was crucial, Leon-Baron says. "It's being the bridge, if you will, to pass it on. Without that, it would have prolonged the opportunity to recover the teen quickly."

Back on the UB campus, Sticht is pleased with the work of his officers, who remained the point of contact for the parents even after the case left his team's jurisdiction. "Collaboration is really what got this done," he said.

- **MAY 11**

University at Buffalo Deputy Chief of Police Joshua Sticht and officers begin the search for the missing teen.

- **MAY 12**

Tim Williams of the New York State Missing Person Clearinghouse (NYMPC) offers assistance.

- **MAY 12**

NYMPC's Cindy Neff reaches out to the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP).

MAY 13

The teen is located in Mexico after AATTAP’s Yesenia “Jesi” Leon-Baron helps accelerate the search.

- “Cases like these are the very essence of AATTAP’s border initiatives—to improve on and collaborate with other agencies in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. territories to ensure swift communication and action.” — Yesenia “Jesi” Leon-Baron, AATTAP Project Coordinator for International and Territorial Programs, Child Abduction Response Team (CART) Training and Certification

[Photos/captions]

1—Image of the University of Buffalo at New York campus

2—Uniform patch detail with this caption: Lieutenant Kathy Zysek was a key contact with the parents of the teen missing from the University at Buffalo, where about 30,000 students are enrolled.

3—Campus sign denoting the University of New York at Buffalo

4—Photo illustration showing a map of the missing teen’s locations on certain dates

5—Photos of key individuals involved in the search for the missing college student.

SUB-SIDEBAR

Suzanne's Law: An alerting alternative for young adults

The 1998 disappearance of another missing New York college student, [Suzanne G. Lyall](#), prompted a federal law to help ensure that young adults who don’t qualify for AMBER Alerts will not fall through the cracks after being reported missing. With AMBER Alerts extending to age 17 or 18, depending on the state, concern arose about the safety of 18- to 21-year-olds. In 2003, President George W. Bush made [Suzanne’s Law](#) part of the national PROTECT Act, which established a nationwide AMBER Alert system that same year. Suzanne’s Law mandates that any missing youth between the ages of 18 and 21 be promptly added to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. The law is named for Lyall, a State University of New York at Albany student who has been missing since 1998. In addition to Suzanne’s Law, some states have missing college student alerts that can be activated when a student of any age is missing and deemed at risk.

[Photo]

Image of a missing-poster for Suzanne G. Lyall

FACES OF THE AMBER ALERT NETWORK

Captain Jada Breaux

Looking out for children in Louisiana's Indian Country

By Rebecca Sherman

As the new Captain of the [Chitimacha](#) Tribal Police Department in south Louisiana, Jada Breaux's days are often packed with administrative duties and supervisory obligations. The work she's most passionate about, however, is looking out for all those she calls "my children" on the Chitimacha Reservation. It gets her out from behind her desk to work with youth as an instructor for the D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program. This passion also keeps her training for any missing child case she may have to handle— and sometimes requires giving law enforcement colleagues in surrounding parishes a crash course in two words that tend to stop people in their tracks— "sovereignty" and "jurisdiction."

"Many think Tribal sovereignty means working with outside law enforcement is not welcomed or encouraged. But even though we're on sovereign land, we function just like everyone else— and know working with our regional and state colleagues is crucial," Breaux says.

Confusion over the Tribe's authority to issue AMBER Alerts or subpoena critical information can create life-threatening delays. Thankfully Breaux has a good working relationship with the St. Mary Parish Sheriff's Office, which can help her with such needs. But neither the Chitimacha, nor the state's three other federally recognized Tribes, have Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) in place to seamlessly engage with state law enforcement when time is of the essence—particularly when searching for Tribal missing children. Breaux aims to change that.

"Without collaboration, nothing can be accomplished," she says. We spoke more with her shortly after seeing her at the 2023 AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) and AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AIIC) [Symposium](#) in Arizona.

What challenges are unique to your job?

I started my law enforcement career at the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office before making the move to the Chitimacha Tribal Police Department 17 years ago. It was an entirely new world for me. One of the most unique challenges is understanding jurisdiction. You have to learn where [oversight] falls— be it Tribal, state, or federal. Currently Louisiana's Tribes do not have active MOUs allowing us to directly initiate AMBER Alerts or request search warrants. And while I respect the system, it can be frustrating. For instance, in investigating one juvenile case, I submitted a search warrant to a social media company, and they replied that they were not able to honor it because they don't recognize the Chitimacha Tribal Court as a legal entity. Before having to go through all the extra steps needed to issue that warrant, we fortunately were able to locate the child; but the situation was eye-opening. It would have cost us a lot of

extra time, which is not on our side when children are missing. I would like to see this change.

What are some of the initiatives you’re working on to foster understanding?

One of the biggest challenges is the lack of awareness about Indian Country. I’m a firm believer in knowledge and education, so I’m working with AATTAP/AIIC Program Manager Tyesha Wood and Project Coordinator Valerie Bribiescas to bring training here this fall. We plan to invite all the Tribes in Louisiana and the law enforcement agencies with whom we work. We also want to host trainings on Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) investigations. We need to strengthen and sustain our public safety partnerships.

What motivates you to go into work?

One of my motivations is the community I serve. While I’m not a member of the Tribe—my father’s mother was a member of the Choctaw Nation—everyone here has embraced me as one of their own. I have attended countless weddings and graduations, and watched a whole group of children become young adults and succeed as they chase their dreams. I’d like to think that I’ve had a small hand in that from being their [D.A.R.E.](#) instructor, or just the officer who hung out with them at school. I’ve had former students thank me years later for helping them make difficult choices by using tools from the D.A.R.E. program. There’s nothing more rewarding than being able provide resources to our children and watch them not only become productive members of our Tribe, but also of our society.

[Display text]

“People don’t realize how difficult it is for Tribal law enforcement to have its legal documents upheld across the country. We need to see positive change occur to help us more effectively and efficiently do our work.” — Captain Jada Breaux, Chitimacha Tribal Police of Louisiana

[Photos/captions]

1—Captain Jada Breaux is shown with one of her D.A.R.E. essay winners

2—Head-and-shoulders portrait of Captain Breaux

3—Map showing the location of the Chitmacha Tribe in south Louisiana. The text accompanies the image: The Chitimacha, with about 1,600 members, is the only Tribal Nation in Louisiana that still resides on its original land. The reservation now encompasses 950 acres adjacent to Charenton, in St. Mary Parish, but its territory once spanned the entire Atchafalaya Basin of the Gulf Coast— from Lafayette to the west and eastward to New Orleans. *Map: nationalatlas.gov*

SUB-SIDEBAR

Ashlynnne Mike's legacy:

A law to help Tribal children—and law enforcement

Chitimacha Tribal Police Captain Jada Breaux remembers the deep sense of loss she felt after hearing the news that Ashlynnne Mike had been abducted and murdered on the Navajo Nation in 2016.

“But it was only after I heard Ashlynnne’s mother, Pamela Foster, speak at the 17th annual National Indian Nations conference that I learned more about the heartbreaking [story](#)—and the jurisdictional confusion following Ashlynnne’s abduction being reported.”

Like many Tribal leaders across the nation, Breaux realized that if communication weaknesses and jurisdictional misunderstandings could happen to the nation’s largest Tribe (spanning three states and 27,000 square miles) what did that portend for the 573 other federally recognized Tribes, which have much significantly fewer resources?

Born from this tragedy was the Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country [Act](#) of 2018, created to foster greater collaboration between Tribes and their state and local law enforcement counterparts, and to strengthen resources. To accomplish this, the U.S. Department of Justice’s AMBER Alert in Indian Country initiative helps Tribes learn what the law entails, and provides numerous no-cost [resources](#), from training events to Technology Toolkits (“which we’ve already put to good use,” Breaux says).

“At the end of the day, everyone in law enforcement should have the same goal: to find a missing child as quickly as possible, using every available resource,” Breaux adds.

AMBER ALERT BRIEFS: U.S.

U.S. Marshals' innovative search operation recovers 225 missing children

“Operation We Will Find You” has safely located and recovered 225 endangered missing children, including a 6-month-old infant. Led by the U.S. Marshals Service, which worked with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the 10-week [initiative](#) was the first of its kind to involve state and local agencies in 15 areas with large clusters of critically missing children. [Searches](#) were conducted in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Riverside County areas from March 1 to May 15. According to law enforcement, more than 40 cases involved trafficking, and of the cases closed, 86 percent were endangered runaways.

Artificial intelligence increasingly makes kidnapping scams more believable

Imposter scams have been around for years, such as ones involving callers claiming a grandchild has been in an accident or robbed—and needs money. In those cases, would-be kidnappers pose as the grandchild or use generic recordings of someone screaming in the background. These attempts to extort money weren't always successful, but federal officials are now warning about a new virtual kidnapping [fraud](#) that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to clone a loved one's voice. AI programs are inexpensive, easily accessible, and can create good voice likenesses from just a few seconds of [dialogue](#) taken from social media posts. The FBI reports that most scam calls involving AI originate from Mexico and target Latin communities in the southwestern U.S. These sophisticated ruses can be successful, with fake kidnappers stealing an average of \$11,000 from each victim. To avoid getting scammed, families are advised not to mention upcoming trips on social media or to give financial information to strangers on the phone. They also should create a family password or phrase that can help identify whether a kidnapping is legitimate. Wisconsin police find missing child in

11 minutes with new 'Project Lifesaver'

Police in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, were training to use a [new technology](#) called “Project Lifesaver” when an opportunity to effectively use it in real-time came with the report of an endangered missing child with a medical condition. Officers ended their training session and immediately began a search for the child, who to their relief, had previously been enrolled in the nonprofit Project Lifesaver program. The child was found in just 11 minutes using radio technology that tracks signals from a transmitter worn on the child's wrist or ankle. The technology was developed to protect and locate “at risk” individuals with cognitive disorders and relies on specially trained search and rescue teams to use it. Beaver Dam police have been using the [program](#) since 2018, and the officers involved in locating the child are certified as electronic search specialists by the Project Lifesaver International organization.

AMBER ALERT BRIEFS: INDIAN COUNTRY

OJJDP releases statistics on missing youth

According to a newly released “2022 Missing American Indian and Alaska Native Persons: Age 21 and Under” [report](#) from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), of the more than 10,000 cases of American Indian and Alaska Native youth reported missing in 2022, 65 percent were between the ages of 12 and 17; girls represented 4,000 of those cases compared to 2,500 males. Additional statistics from the report, based on data from the FBI’s National Crime Information Center (NCIC), showed that 190 of the case entries (about 4 percent) were for males under age 12, compared to 165 entries (3 percent) for missing girls under age 12. More detailed information can be found in the report.

Official: More inclusive alert criteria needed

The death of an Indigenous girl whose body was found on Tribal land near Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, has prompted calls to expand AMBER Alert criteria. The 8-year-old’s body was found five days after authorities conducted a welfare check and began investigating her suspicious disappearance. A Canadian Centre for Child Protection official said that while AMBER Alerts remain “very, very important,” a process needs to be in place for those who don’t meet AMBER Alert [criteria](#).

California introduces new Feather Alert

In response to the ongoing crisis of people missing from Tribal communities, California has enacted a new [Feather Alert](#). The statewide notification, similar to an AMBER Alert, can be issued for missing Indigenous people or Tribal members. “We’re hoping it’s beneficial, because we really need it,” said Keely Linton, who heads the [Strong Hearted Native Women’s Coalition](#) in Escondido. Linton noted that while much of the concern is for missing Indigenous women, some Tribes report more missing men.

Native American Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan cites ‘urgent and critical need’ for MMIP solutions

Native Americans who lost loved ones to violence, or experienced injustice, testified during a Not Invisible Act Commission field [hearing](#) in Minneapolis. As part of the federal government’s efforts to address the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) crisis, Tribal members detailed their emotional losses and the apathy they experienced in trying to get cases investigated. They recommended more collaborative training between law enforcement and Tribes. Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, a Native American, said there is “an urgent and critical need” to keep communities safe and support those who have lost loved ones. The commission will use information gathered at its hearings to recommend best practices for solving MMIP cases.

AMBER ALERT BRIEFS: INTERNATIONAL

'Most wanted' couple captured in Mexico

After an international manhunt, five missing and endangered children from the United States have been safely recovered in Mexico and their fugitive father and his girlfriend apprehended. Edgar Salvador Casian-Garcia and Araceli Medina—formerly on the U.S. Marshals Service's [15 Most Wanted List](#)—were charged not only with multiple counts of child sex abuse, but also for the murder of Casian-Garcia's son, whose remains were found near the boy's Pacific Northwest home. An official at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), which assisted law enforcement in the search, [said](#) the fugitives' capture is testament to the importance of collaboration and community involvement in safeguarding children.

U.S. foster parent charged in boy's kidnapping

After being kidnapped by his foster parent and her mother, a 5-yearold U.S. boy was [found](#) safe in Vietnam and returned to his biological mother in Washington State. Foster guardian Amanda Dinges and her mother, Amber Dinges, fled with the boy after it appeared he would soon be transitioning back to living with his birth mother. After Diplomatic Service Security personnel obtained custody of the boy at the U.S. Consulate in Hanoi, the abductors were charged with second-degree kidnapping and first-degree custodial interference. Brittany Tri, the birth mother's attorney, [said](#) the boy is doing well; his mother is unsure how he was able to leave the U.S., since she had never applied for him to have a passport.

Kenyan group using age-progression imaging

A child who goes missing at age 4 will look vastly different at age 10, and a Kenyan organization is [helping](#) the public see the physical changes. Missing Child Kenya has been using forensic imaging technology to age-progress last-known images of missing children. The group hopes the images used on posters will increase the chance of finding children who have been missing for years. Missing Child Kenya says it has helped locate more than 1,000 children since its founding seven years ago.

Near 5-year search for U.S. girl ends in Mexico

The sweet face of 4-year-old Aranza Maria Ochoa Lopez in a "Stay Kind" shirt served as continual motivation for U.S. authorities who worked for nearly five years to find the girl, [last seen](#) in 2018 at a Vancouver, Washington, shopping mall. Earlier this year FBI agents got the long-awaited news that Aranza had been [located](#) in western Mexico, and shortly thereafter were able to escort the now 8-year-old back home. Though the girl's mother, who had

kidnapped Aranza, was taken into custody in Mexico in 2019, Aranza had remained missing. “For more than four years, the FBI and our partners [in the U.S. and Mexico] did not give up,” said Richard A. Collodi, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s Seattle field office. What the girl had experienced while missing is unclear, but “our concern now will be supporting Aranza as she begins her reintegration into the U.S.”