

In My Backyard?

Missing People Deserve the Power of Awareness

By Michelle Bart

For six months working on the search for **Caylee Anthony** it was heart wrenching and the most emotional difficult thing I have done in my life or career. Watching a family go through torment of broken leads, hatred humanity of others, and the confusion of truth of the circumstance in the disappearance of their only granddaughter, and not to mention the stress over the possibility of losing their only daughter was a roller coaster of emotions not only for the family but for all of us that were involved. I believed in HOPE until the very end, I believed in tips and witnesses until the very end, and I believed in justice for Caylee until the end and I still fight for the truth even now after we said our good-byes in a beautiful celebration to her life during her public memorial in February. **Caylee Marie** made an everlasting impact on my heart and soul. Caylee's case opened my eyes to an even greater epidemic in our society; how living in the United States of America should be a place our kids and our families should walk free from harm and yet every minute of the day hatred prevails and we lose the precious part of what God created, our loved ones.

I am heading up a national coalition to bring more awareness to those children and adults missing from loved ones across the country and for that matter around the world. Missing people that never deserved to be abducted or kidnapped but yet while you read this someone will be taken from the security of their life, the security of their families, and the security of living in a free country. Someone will be taken by a stranger or worse yet in the hands of a family member thinking running will be the answer to all the questions. Everyday hatred prevails and my heart aches more, my eyes fill with tears and my emotions fill with anger and yet I am safe, my family is safe, and I am one of the lucky ones escaping the madness.

This past week a 13-year old beautiful young lady names **Alycia Nipp** was kidnapped (by a homeless sex offender) and killed by a man that in my opinion should have never been able to walk the streets, but yet this devastating case that happened in my backyard of Clark County Washington is just one of many with similar facts and similar outcomes, but yet it continues. Then in Escondido, California **Amber Dubois** another teen with a bright future has gone missing and a family struggles to understand how their daughter disappears only a quarter of a mile from the doors of her school where she was excited to get to on February 13th to celebrate Valentine's Day with friends. No clues and no answers, but a family and community cling to HOPE of bringing her home safely. A week after a public memorial for **Caylee Marie Anthony** and only seventy miles from where Caylee's remains were found, **Haleigh Cummings** a beautiful curly blond haired 5-year old disappears from her own home and the safety of her dreams when she is kidnapped late at night. No clues, no motives, no answers and two families living in tents until the news of Haleigh's homecoming is announced by authorities and the televisions they cling to for information, leads, and media opinions. Another family with HOPE, many prayers, and a community that comes to a standstill awaits and exhausts all avenues to bringing home their angel. The national news a few days ago about a **Human Trafficking** ring would begin to flood the airwaves and once again innocent children and young adults are rescued from the oldest profession of society and yet the industry that most would call prostitution is now being seen as **Human & Sex Trafficking** and many of those in the "business" are also victims of kidnapping and were sold into this profession. Missing and abducted people who were never found, families with no closure, and loved ones with HOPE of someday seeing their loved one come home, may just be that "woman" of even "man" of the night in our downtown areas, and yet we say not my problem and not in my backyard.

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In January three twenty year olds were rescued from a trafficking ring only to find they were victims of kidnapping as children years prior. Are they safe now? Are they really reunited with their family? Physically may be, but the long term emotional effect will never be the same. As I continue to read the headlines and explore these cases, my thoughts go to the **Natalie Holloway** and **Jennifer Kesse** cases; could they be one of those in my backyard? Possibly. Could they have been trafficked overseas? Possibly. Do they deserve to be found? Most definitely. Two families left without closure, left without answers, and years of tears and emotions no family would ever want to endure. Years of tears and emotions, try twenty or thirty years of never knowing or even longer. Twenty years of a roller coaster ride is what the Sessions' family has gone through, **Tiffany Sessions** out for a daily jog in Gainesville, Florida and never came home. A favorite pastime and a major initiative with our political leaders, stay active and include daily exercise in your life, I don't think this is what any of them had in mind. A jog, music playing on her walk-man, and unwinding from her studies at the University of Florida and never to be heard from again, not acceptable in my mind and should not be in yours; let your voices be heard and don't let cases too old to remember fade away like a canvas exposed to sunlight. Together we can achieve more, and all of us must work the families, authorities, and wonderful organizations in getting the word out and not letting any missing person fade from our mind and fade from our view.

Whether a child or an adult goes missing by the hands of a stranger or the hands of a familiar face we must all take a stand and try to make a greater impact on bringing them home. The HEROES in all of this are the families that never let their loved one's story fade away, family members like **Ed Smart** (Elizabeth's father), **John Walsh (Adam's father)**, or **Cassandra Cales (Stacy Peterson's sister)**, the media supporters that continue to keep these stories visible to their audiences, the organizations and authorities that continue to work the cases, and those across the country touched by these stories.

It's that time again, actions from strangers. With a new era in the White House, and CHANGE on the horizon I challenge those reading my rant and raves to put your emotions to work; on your social sites, websites, and other avenues keep these faces of those missing visible to your audience. Those missing today or years ago may just be your neighbor, may be a colleague, may be in your classroom, or may pass you on the street. **Elizabeth Smart** is one of many *Faces of HOPE*, millions believed she was never going to be found and believed she was no longer with us, but nine months later was found by a couple who recognized her by the constant visibility her family strived for each and every day and today she is a *Voice of HOPE* for others. With over a million people missing in our country alone, your voice counts for every one of them...

Every minute of the day, hatred prevails. We can allow it to break us or make us stronger; it makes me stronger every day and I hope it will to you too. When faced with hate crimes in our neighborhoods, we start a neighborhood watch, well all of us throughout the world are faced with hatred and direct hate crimes including abduction of loved ones and its time for a national neighborhood watch and I have signed up, what about you? www.nationalvigilforhope.org

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