

An article a day of enduring significance, in condensed permanent booklet form

Return of a Runaway Child

Last July, in an article about the tens of thousands of children who disappear every year in the United States, Reader's Digest published photos of 19 missing boys and girls. Six of those youngsters have since been located, but thousands more have yet to be identified. Here is the poignant story of how one runaway, missing for more than two years, was found. Here, too, are photographs of more missing children and information on how you can help in the search for still others.

BY GARY TURBAK

FOURTEEN-year-old Tammy Hendley was browsing through the July 1982 Reader's Digest in her home in Twin City, Ga., when she came to the article "Missing: 100,000 Children a Year."* She looked at the



photos of the missing children. Suddenly, her eyes riveted on the picture (center photo) of a pretty girl with blond hair: "Marian Wavie Batson, Fla., Missing: 1/7/80, Age: 16."

The photo looked a lot like Tammy Ann Pickerman, a nurse's aide who worked with Tammy Hendley's mother, Lidy. Tammy

*The article originally appeared in *Kiwanis Magazine*.

showed the picture to her mother; Lidy agreed that it resembled the Pickerman girl.

The Hendleys agonized about whether to call the number given in the magazine. They did not want to cause problems for Tammy Pickerman or give false hope to the parents of Marian Wavie Batson. Finally Lidy's sister, Carolyn Sapp, made the call to the Dee Scofield Awareness Program in Tampa, Fla. She told the program's director, Betty DiNova, that a girl resembling Batson worked in a Twin City nursing home, was living with a young man named Steve Martin, and had a year-old baby.

Wavie had last been seen by her mother and stepfather, Katherine

School in Inverness. "See you tonight," Katherine called as Wavie stepped from the car.

When the 16-year-old did not come home, the Mancils began a search. They sought assistance from local police, the FBI, the governor, and even national television networks, but there was little anyone could or would do. "It was torture for us because we couldn't get any help," says Katherine. "We were ignored by the police. Our government didn't seem to care that a child had vanished."

But the Mancils are strong people. Jesse, 52, is tall and muscular. In 1980 he drove an 18-wheeler for a living. Katherine, 41, has the self-confidence that comes from 12



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HAVE YOU SEEN THESE MISSING CHILDREN?

1. Tony Vincent Oden, La., Age: 7; Missing: 5/21/81 with brother, Joel, age 4; 2. Cinda Leann Pallett, Okla., Age: 13; Missing: 9/26/81; 3. Rachel Moore, Washington, D.C., Age: 5; Missing: 2/17/82; 4. Karl Lorence Heikelh, Mich., Age: 11; Missing: 10/31/81; 5. Suzanne Fatma Zaki, N.Y., Age: 5; Missing: 2/19/80;

and Jesse Mancil of Hernando, Fla., on January 7, 1980. It was the first day of classes after Christmas vacation. Wavie was a high-school sophomore who got along well in school but wanted very much to quit. That morning Katherine had driven Wavie to the Citrus High

years of dispatching trucks across the country. Neither would admit that nothing more could be done to find Wavie.

So, Jesse and Katherine began their own search. They printed thousands of fliers bearing her picture. All the fliers asked that people

call collect if they could help, along with messages such as "Wavie Batson, please call home." The Mancils delivered stacks of the bulletins to truck stops throughout Florida and Georgia.

Thousands of people responded. Eleven days after Wavie's disappearance, four women "positively" identified her as the drugged girl they had seen with two men in a red truck. A few weeks later two more people said they had seen her in the red truck. Jesse and Kathleen were torn by thoughts of what might be happening to Wavie.

A trucker in Florida told Jesse that the girl in the flier had recently served him breakfast in a truck stop in Ringgold, Ga. Jesse was skeptical

Knowing that the girl worked the graveyard shift at the truck stop, Jesse and Kathleen raced to reach Ringgold before the girl got off work. When they arrived, they learned that she had quit her job and was gone. Several people, though, took a look at Wavie's picture and said, "That's her." The Mancils clung to the hope that Wavie might still be in the area.

Their hopes were dashed when they learned that the girl stood five feet, four inches tall—five inches taller than Wavie. What the Mancils had stumbled on was an incredible look-alike. Jesse and Kathleen would eventually track this "twin"—named Tabettha—up and down the entire Eastern Seaboard.



6. Juan Lee Hinton, Ala., Age: 3; Missing: 6/14/79; **7.** Debra Jean Cole, Ind., Age: 12; Missing: 8/31/81; **8.** Lynn Michelle Leadens, Minn., Age: 7; Missing: 10/17/80 with brother, Aaron, age 10; **9.** Ceadre V. Goodwin, Calif., Age: 9; Missing: 9/1/81; **10.** Tara Elizabeth Burke, Ohio, Age: 3; Missing: 2/6/82;

until the man mentioned that the blue-eyed blonde tilted her head while taking customers' orders—"kind of like she was deaf in one ear." Jesse's hopes soared. Wavie had no hearing in her left ear, but that information had not gone on the fliers.

Gradually the Mancils' limited funds dwindled because of the frequent trips and printing costs. Their phone bills ran as high as \$500 a month. But Jesse and Kathleen never stopped hoping—and praying. Each trip to the mailbox, each ring of the phone, brought the

chance that Wavie had been found.

Then, on Tuesday, June 29, 1982, Betty DiNova phoned to tell the Mancils about the report from Twin City. A few minutes later Katheleen called Lidy Hendley. Worried that the girl might be the elusive Tabetha, Katheleen asked how tall she was. "She's real short—about five feet," came the reply.

"Tell me about her," Katheleen pleaded.

"Well, she never hears me when she's down the hall," Lidy said. "She told me once she was deaf in one ear."

Katheleen's heart began to pound, but she was still not sure that the girl was Wavie. And, after years of wild-goose chases, the

August 25, and her mama's name is Katheleen Elsie." Katheleen began to cry.

Borrowing \$195 from relatives and friends, Jesse and Katheleen left immediately for Twin City. By six o'clock the next morning the Mancils were in the tiny Georgia town, where a meeting between them and the girl had been arranged.

At first sight of Wavie, Jesse Mancil ran to embrace her. Wavie's arms locked around his neck. "I love you, Daddy," she sobbed. A moment later it was mother and daughter embracing. "Do you want to come home, baby?" Katheleen asked.

"Oh, yes, Mama, I want to come home. I love you all so much." The



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11. *Travis Andrew Johnson, Wis., Age: 5; Missing: 6/11/82; 12.* *Lisa Michelle Stock, Neb., Age: 2; Missing: 12/2/80; 13.* *James Frank Overland, La., Age: 5; Missing: 12/18/81; 14.* *Joyce Hsia, N.Y., Age: 6; Missing: 8/16/80; 15.* *Philip Lee Brown, N.M., Age: 6; Missing: 6/30/81;*

Mancils could not afford—financially or emotionally—another fruitless journey.

Katheleen asked Lidy if she would check two more details: the girl's birthdate and her mother's given name. When Lidy called back she said: "Her birthday is

2½-year ordeal endured by Wavie, her parents and two sisters had ended.

Later, Wavie told her story. She had not intended to run away. She had wanted only to skip school that January day, but friendly strangers had offered her rides to a nearby

truck stop and then to Georgia. With each additional mile she put between herself and her parents, Wavie became more frightened, fearing punishment when she returned. Each hour she was gone made it more difficult to turn around. Finally she felt there could be no going back.

Wavie began using the name Tammy Ann Pickerman. In her travels through Georgia, she fell in love with Steve Martin, and they had a baby. Only Steve knew she had run away from home.

Dozens of times she picked up the telephone and dialed her parents' number, but before anyone answered she would panic and hang up. She wrote, but never mailed, hundreds of letters to her

take care of you so that one day I'll see all of you again. I want you to know how sorry I really am. . . .

Steve Martin came home with Wavie too. He had feared the Mancils' reaction to the out-of-wedlock baby, but Jesse and Kathleen bore no animosity toward the soft-spoken father of their granddaughter.

On July 10, Wavie and Steve were married. They live with the Mancils in Hernando. "I am so very happy to be home," says Wavie. "I wish I could tell all runaways how much they'll regret leaving. I'd tell them not to act on the spur of the moment, not to be stubborn, and not to think the worst of their parents. I had no idea my parents loved me so much."

"We are so very grateful that the Hendleys got involved," says Kathleen Mancil. "Thanks to them, we have our daughter back."



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16. Andrea (Hennig) Powell, Texas, Age: 14; Missing: 3/29/82;
 17. James Wilfrid Trotter, Calif., Age: 14; Missing: 4/19/79;
 18. Heather Lee Wieder, N.J., Age: 7; Missing: 4/20/82;
 19. Jason Madjdi Amini, Idaho, Age: 8; Missing: 2/25/82

parents. When she finally did come home, one of these tear-stained messages came with her. Part of it reads:

I love and miss you more than I could ever explain. I'm ashamed of what I've done. I pray every night that God will send you my love and

WAVIE Batson is not the only missing child pictured in Reader's Digest to have been found:

* In Lamar, Colo., a school worker recognized Tamara Buck, 6, missing from her Minnesota home for 16 months. When Tamara's parents separated, the court

gave her father custody. Tamara's mother took the girl and eventually settled in Colorado. The girl is now back home in Minnesota.

* Shannon E. Zelber, 12, spotted his own picture in Reader's Digest. His father had taken Shannon with him when he had left home in January 1982. Shannon and others persuaded his father to return him to his mother. He arrived back home on August 17.

* A Utah dentist recognized Jamie Marie Dake, 6, as a patient of his. Jamie had been taken by her mother from the legal custody of her divorced father in February 1981. She is now living happily with her father on their farm near Kansas City.

* Matthew Lawrence Lopez, reported missing by his grandparents in March 1981, was found in California living with his mother.

* Sabrina Raynell Drake, missing from her Oklahoma home since August 15, 1980, was located before the Reader's Digest story was published.

And readers alerted to the problem by the article discovered two more missing children whose pictures had not appeared in the July issue.

Kristin Cole Brown of Child Find, the agency to whom information about most of the missing children was directed, estimates that they received more than 1200 calls from Reader's Digest readers. "We encourage people to call even if they aren't one-hundred-percent certain that a child is the same as the one in the photograph," says Brown, "or if they know of any other missing children. Anyone who calls is guaranteed confidentiality."

The thousands of missing children do not live in a vacuum. They go to school, the movies, the supermarket. Many are seen by dozens of people every day. But these child victims will remain missing until one of those people picks up the telephone. Somewhere, the child's parents are waiting for that person—for you—to make that call.

If you have information regarding the children in Nos. 2, 7 or 16, contact Dee Scofield Awareness Program, Inc., 4418 Bay Court Ave., Tampa, Fla. 33611 (813-839-5025); for all others, contact Child Find, Inc. (800-431-5005).



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Creature Discomfort

MY HUSBAND, arriving home after a few drinks with his friends, went to the refrigerator, took out a plate of our dog's food and ate it with gusto. I didn't have the heart to tell him what he had done. But when he complained of a headache the next morning, I called our doctor. His advice: "Bring him in if he starts chasing cars." —Contributed by Mrs. C. Johnson