

The Fight Against Abduction and Child Exploitation

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Abstract

In the last century, abductions of missing children have gained public attention nationally. Communities have rallied together to search for abducted children. In the midst of tragedy, parents of missing children have founded programs to search for their abducted child, petitioned for legislation to be passed, and implemented new technological advancements in the search for their child. Over the past century, methods have evolved as technology advanced. Some methods were replaced with more efficient technological advancements.

Introduction

The Fight Against Abduction and Child Exploitation

In the summer of 1874, Joseph Douglas and William Mosher befriended Walter (6) and Charley (4) Ross by offering these little boys candy.¹ After five visits outside the boy's Pennsylvania home, Douglas and Mosher convinced the Ross boys to go for a carriage ride.² Douglas and Mosher sent the older brother Walter into the store to buy candy; while he was there, Douglas and Mosher abducted the younger brother Charley.³ Days after Walter was returned safely to his parents, Mr. Ross received his first of twenty-three ransom notes.⁴ Unable to pay the ransom, Mr. Ross involved the police.⁵ Police thoroughly investigated the case but were unable to locate Charley Ross.⁶

Approximately six months later, in December of 1874 both Douglas and Mosher died in Brooklyn, New York, during a failed robbery.⁷ While Mosher died instantly from a bullet wound, Douglas languished for two hours.⁸ On his deathbed, Douglas "confessed that the pair had been responsible for stealing Charley Ross."⁹ During his confession, Douglas admitted that Mosher was the only one who knew where Charley Ross was being held.¹⁰ Sadly, for years, various individuals have claimed to be Charley Ross bringing further anguish to the Ross family.¹¹ Although Charley Ross was not the first child to be kidnapped from the United States, "unlike the others who preceded him, his parents were able to turn Charley's abduction into a national cause and to bring their plight and their son's story to national attention."¹²

Thesis: This paper will argue that the 1874 abduction of Charley Ross precipitated awareness of abduction, child exploitation, and human trafficking.¹³ Additionally, the Ross family's efforts to fight against abduction inspired law enforcement agencies across the nation – as demonstrated by their ongoing research with trace evidence – to combat this endemic.¹⁴

¹ Heather Thomas, "The Kidnapping of Little Charley Ross". *Library of Congress*. (2019). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2019/04/the-kidnapping-of-little-charley-ross/>

² Ibid, (2019)

³ Ibid, (2019)

⁴ Ibid, (2019)

⁵ Ibid, (2019)

⁶ Ibid, (2019)

⁷ Ibid, (2019)

⁸ Ibid, (2019)

⁹ Ibid, (2019), para. 6

¹⁰ Ibid, (2019)

¹¹ Ibid, (2019)

¹² Paula Fass, "Child Kidnapping in America." *Origins*. (2010): para. 6. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://origins.osu.edu/article/child-kidnapping-america>

¹³ Ibid, (2010), para. 6

¹⁴ National Institute of Justice. *Assessing the Strength of Trace Evidence Fracture Fits Through a Comprehensive, Systematic, and Quantifiable Approach*. (2020). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/awards/2020-dq-bx-0012>

Commemoration and Awareness

In 1979, six-year-old Etan Platz vanished from New York.¹⁵ Paltz's disappearance aroused awareness and resulted in "the iconic milk cartons displaying photographs of young people who had vanished."¹⁶ On May 25, 1983, President Ronald Reagan enacted Missing Children's Days in memory of Etan Platz.¹⁷ Annually, commencement ceremonies are held on Missing Children's Day to honor the heroic individuals/agencies/organizations that help "rescue missing and exploited children and bring predators to justice."¹⁸

Organizations Founded after 1874 Abduction

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) was founded in 1984 by John and Reve Walsh, parents of abducted child Adam Walsh.¹⁹ This organization "proactively provide[s] assistance to victims, families, law enforcement, social service agencies, and others when they need help with a missing, exploited, or recovered child."²⁰ The Walsh's six-year-old son Adam was abducted and brutally murder in 1981.²¹ As a legacy to their son, the Walshs founded Team Adam.²² The NCMEC deploys team Adam on "critical missing children's cases."²³ This team consists of active and retired police officers who assist "families, communities, and forensic professionals" on long-term abduction investigations."²⁴ Adam's death transformed the protocols used by police agencies to search for missing children.²⁵

In 1998, NCMEC created Cyber Tipline, which "provides an online mechanism for members of the public and electronic service providers (ESP's) to report incidents of suspecting child sexual exploitation."²⁶ In the last 36 years, NCMEC has assisted in recovering 348,000 missing children.²⁷

¹⁵United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs (OJJDP). *Commemorating National Missing Children's Day*. (2020). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from

<https://www.ojp.gov/files/archives/blogs/2020/commemorating-national-missing-childrens-day>

¹⁶ Ibid, (2020), para. 3

¹⁷ Ibid, (2020)

¹⁸ Ibid, (2020), para. 8

¹⁹ *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* (NCMEC). (2021). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.missingkids.org/footer/about/history>

²⁰ Ibid, (2021), p. Our Work

²¹ NBC News, Police: 1981 Killing of Adam Walsh Solved. (2008). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna28257294>

²² *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* (NCMEC). (2021). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.missingkids.org/footer/about/history>

²³ Ibid, (2021), p. Long-Term Missing

²⁴ Ibid, (2021), p. Long- Term Missing

²⁵ NBC News, Police: 1981 Killing of Adam Walsh Solved. (2008). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna28257294>

²⁶ *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* (NCMEC). (2021): p. Get Help: Cyber Tipline. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.missingkids.org/footer/about/history>

²⁷ Ibid, (2021)

Rachel Alert

The Rachel Alert was founded in 2002 in honor of three-year-old Rachel Runyan, who was kidnapped while playing at the park near her house before being murdered by her captor.²⁸ Her body was recovered by the side of the road, but unfortunately, her case went cold.²⁹ Rachel's father, Jeff Runyan, "crusaded for a child alert system."³⁰ The Rachel Alert laid the groundwork for the Amber Alert.³¹

Amber Alert

Broadcasters and local police collaborated in 1996 to establish Amber Alert – a network designed to notify individuals when a child is abducted.³² The acronym AMBER (America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response) commemorates nine-year-old Texan Amber Hagerman who was abducted and brutally murdered.³³ From its inception in 1996, Amber Alert has improved its network and expanded across social media outlets. For example, in 2013, Amber Alert was launched on Facebook.³⁴ Furthermore, Amber Alert has continued to modify its program and has made itself available on various devices, such as cell phones, computers, and TVs.³⁵ In 2019, it issued one hundred and forty-five alerts.³⁶

Project Safe Child

In 2006, Project Safe Child was launched by the United States Department of Justice.³⁷ Upon inception, the Department of Justice strived "to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims."³⁸ Psalms 82:3-4 says, "Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."³⁹ In 2016, Project Safe Child developed a new program designed to springboard off their old achievements and confront new issues.⁴⁰

²⁸ Criminally Intrigued. (2017). *Rachel Runyan Cold Case*. Accessed on August 19, 2021, from <https://www.criminallyintrigued.com/blog/2017/7/21/3-unsolved-cases-pt-i>

²⁹ Ibid, (2017)

³⁰ Tom Smart, & Lee Benson, *In Plain Sight: The Startling Truth Behind the Elizabeth Smart Investigation*. Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press. (2005): p. 113-114. Accessed on August 19, 2021, from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=762611>

³¹ Sean P. Means, "Family and friends celebrate Rachael Runyan, the 3-year-old whose 1982 killing inspired Utah's Amber Alert system." *The Salt Lake Tribune*. (2018). Accessed on August 19, 2021, from <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2018/08/25/family-friends-celebrate/>

³² Amber Alert, *Amber Alert Timeline*. (n.d.). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from https://amberalert.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh201/files/media/document/amberalerttimeline-508c_0.pdf

³³ Ibid, (n.d.)

³⁴ Ibid, (n.d.)

³⁵ Ibid, (n.d.)

³⁶ Ibid, (n.d.)

³⁷ USDJ, (2016)

³⁸ Ibid, (2016), p. Project Safe Child Home

³⁹ (English Standard Version, 2001)

⁴⁰ USDJ, (2016). *About Project Safe Child*. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.justice.gov/psc/about-project-safe-childhood>

Developing Technology to Combat Child Abduction

NamUs

In 2007, the National Institute of Justice established a center often referred to as "NamUs," which is designed to locate missing/unidentified individuals.⁴¹ NamUS continues to develop new and advanced technology which aspires to "enable medical examiners to capture an unidentified person's appearance."⁴² Through NamUs's groundbreaking work, 53% of missing individuals have been located.⁴³

Interdiction for the Protection of Children

In 2010, the Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) Program was co-founded by Texas Ranger Cody Mitchell and DPS Lieutenant Derek.⁴⁴ Interests have spiked internationally in places like the UK due to the Texan's IPC Program.⁴⁵ Texas' IPC Program has trained over "10,000 officers in Texas, nationally, and internationally."⁴⁶ In eleven years, the IPC Program has successfully rescued over five hundred "missing and endangered" children.⁴⁷

Trace Evidence

Unlike "NamUs" and IPC Programs, trace evidence is still in its infancy.⁴⁸ During criminal activity, the fracture of material results in trace evidence.⁴⁹ Trace evidence is crucial during an investigation because "the realignment between fragments left at the scene and those recovered from an individual, or object of interest" could link a suspect to the scene of the crime.⁵⁰ The validity of trace evidence still needs to be established before it can be used to prosecute individuals.⁵¹

Digital Forensics

Law enforcement officials have used digital forensics to locate both missing children and pornography sites.⁵² For example, digital forensic scientists charged Stuart Campbell with the abduction and murder of his niece Danielle Jones based on examining text messages

⁴¹ Danielle Weiss et al., (2017). "Lost but Not Forgotten: Finding the Nation's Missing". *National Institute of Justice*. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/lost-not-forgotten-finding-nations-missing>

⁴² Ibid, (2017), para. 2

⁴³ Jessica Hagar, (n.d.). *The National Missing and Unidentified Missing Person's System (NamUs)*. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://operationladyjustice.usdoj.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh281/files/media/document/oljnamusslides.pdf>

⁴⁴ Texas Rangers Hall of Fame, (2021). *Protection of Children (IPC) Program*. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://www.texasranger.org/texas-ranger-museum/texas-rangers/child-protection/>

⁴⁵ Ibid, (2021)

⁴⁶ Ibid, (2021), para. 2

⁴⁷ Ibid, (2021), para. 1

⁴⁸ NIJ, (2020). *Assessing the Strength of Trace Evidence Fracture Fits Through a Comprehensive, Systematic, and Quantifiable Approach*. Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/awards/2020-dq-bx-0012>

⁴⁹ Ibid, (2020)

⁵⁰ Ibid, (2020), para. 1

⁵¹ Ibid, (2020)

⁵² Val McDermid, (2014). *Forensics: What Bugs, Burns, Prints, DNA, And More Tell Us About Crime*. New York, NY: Grove Press. Accessed on August 19, 2021

between the two.⁵³ Digital forensic analysts painstakingly watch videos and sort/label pictures found on pornography sites.⁵⁴ These extensive protocols are followed in hopes of locating abducted and exploited children.⁵⁵ In 2009, 78,000 images were discovered on the computers of Scotland's largest pedophile ring.⁵⁶ There are roughly 100,000 'snuff' sites on the web; unfortunately, once one site has been discovered and removed, another one takes its place.

Infamous Abduction Cases in the Early 2000s

Abducted individuals infrequently return to their families after being in captivity for years; that is why the return of Jayce Dugard to her mother made national news.⁵⁷ Jayce Dugard was kidnapped when she was eleven years old and remained in captivity for eighteen years.⁵⁸ Dugard's time in captivity consisted of verbal and physical abuse – the physical abuse resulted in two pregnancies by her captor.⁵⁹ After years of being brainwashed and held hostage by her captors, Dugard was allowed to venture into stores, as long as she was accompanied by her captors.⁶⁰ Astonishingly, no one thought Dugard looked familiar or linked her to the missing eleven-year-old girl.⁶¹ Dugard was twenty-nine years old when she was reunited with her mom on August 26, 2009.⁶²

Similarly, Elizabeth Smart, who was kidnapped from her home when she was fourteen, also made public appearances with her captors.⁶³ Unlike Dugard, Smart was forced to by her captors to wear a white hijab (and other disguises).⁶⁴ She was instructed not to say a word to anyone when they went into public.⁶⁵ Smart was likewise ill-treated by her captors and experienced similar hardships and abuse as Dugard.⁶⁶ After approximately nine months of captivity, Elizabeth Smart was reunited with her family.⁶⁷ However, unlike Dugard's case, Smart's abduction helped pass the 2003 Child Protection Act.⁶⁸

Both of these remarkable and resilient women have hurdled over obstacles and rebuilt their lives. Smart once said, “How will I integrate what's happened into who I choose to become in the future?”⁶⁹ She answered this question when she established the Elizabeth Smart

⁵³ Ibid, (2014)

⁵⁴ Ibid, (2014)

⁵⁵ Ibid, (2014)

⁵⁶ Ibid, (2014)

⁵⁷ Paula Fass, “Child Kidnapping in America”. *Origins*. (2010). Accessed on August 18, 2021, from <https://origins.osu.edu/article/child-kidnapping-america>

⁵⁸ Biography, (2016)

⁵⁹ Ibid, (2016). *Jaycee Dugard*. Accessed on August 19, 2021, from <https://www.biography.com/crime-figure/jaycee-dugard>

⁶⁰ Ibid, (2016)

⁶¹ Ibid, (2016)

⁶² Ibid, (2016)

⁶³ Tom Smart, & Lee Benson, *In Plain Sight: The Startling Truth Behind the Elizabeth Smart Investigation*. Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press. (2005): p. 113-114. Accessed on August 19, 2021, from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=762611>

⁶⁴ Ibid, (2005)

⁶⁵ Ibid, (2005)

⁶⁶ Ibid, (2005)

⁶⁷ Ibid, (2005)

⁶⁸ Ibid, (2005)

⁶⁹ Good Reads. (2021). Accessed on December 8, 2021, from <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/59104-a-child-called-it>

Foundation based on her motto “I believe” (she aspires to make a safe place for victims to divulge their traumatic experiences).⁷⁰

Recent Abduction Cases

In the early 2000s, Dugard’s abduction captured the nation, because seldom does an abducted child return home after five years. In the last decade, two abduction cases have made history and brought hope to families who have missing children. In mid-November of 2022, an abduction case over fifty-years old made the news.⁷¹ Sharon and Jeffrie Highsmith’s twenty-two-month-old daughter Melissas was abducted in August 1971 by her baby sitter.⁷² After fifty-one years, the family was reunited through one of those online genealogy tests.⁷³ The story behind Melissa’s abduction and what her life was like has yet to be released by the family.

Another abduction case that surpasses both Dugard’s time in captivity and Melissa’s fifty-one years apart from her family, was the abduction of Dollie Ann Henson who was abducted when she was five years old from a friend’s house in Houston, Texas.⁷⁴ After Henson’s kidnapper died, Henson began searching for her family and was reunited with them 55 years later.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Since the 1874 kidnapping of Charley Ross, law enforcement individuals have implemented new technology and established different protocols for child abduction/exploitation cases. Furthermore, victims and families of abducted children have founded organizations and partnered with government operations to provide monetary and emotional support to parents of abducted children. The efforts to rescue and reunite families span more than just state borders: it spans oceans and across multiple countries. Charley Ross's parents made the first step toward publicizing and ending child abduction/exploitation, and many families have followed in their footsteps. "In every bad situation, life gives you a second chance to make it right. Some take it, others leave it, and some don't see it".⁷⁶ The parents who have stood up against abduction have taken that second chance and used their harrowing experiences to assist others.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Smart Foundation. (2021). Accessed on December 8, 2021, from <https://www.elizabethsmartfoundation.org/>

⁷¹ Jordan Mendoza. “Their daughter was kidnapped 51 years ago. Decades later, they finally found her”. *USA Today*. (2022). Accessed on February 13, 2023, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/11/29/dna-test-texas-parents-reunite-daughter-kidnapped/10791639002/>

⁷² Ibid, (2022). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/11/29/dna-test-texas-parents-reunite-daughter-kidnapped/10791639002/>

⁷³ Ibid, (2022).

⁷⁴ Julie Henthorn, “10 Abducted Children Who Found Their Way Home Decades Later”. *Listverse*. (2023). Accessed on February 13, 2023, from <https://listverse.com/2023/01/10/10-abducted-children-who-found-their-way-home-decades-later/>

⁷⁵ Ibid., (2023).

⁷⁶ Brain Balance Georgia, (n.d.). *Quote Master*. Accessed on August 19, 2021, from <https://www.quotemaster.org/leaving+a+bad+situation>

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