

A Secret Society: Vanished Voices

Scores of Marylanders are missing unbeknownst to most

By Kat Johnson

She didn't want to disappear.

Her plans were solid. She was going out with a co-worker that evening. All she had to do was finish out her shift, meet with her estranged spouse, go home and change, and then she'd meet her friend back at the store they both worked at.

On September 27, 1986, 23-year-old mother Bernadette Caruso, a loyal friend, sister, daughter, aunt, and employee finished her shift at Shaw's Jewelers in Baltimore County at 5 p.m., got in her Chevy Cavalier, and drove off from East-Point mall into thin air.

Bernadette is forever in 1986, remembered only by those who worked the case, her family and friends, and memories jarred by occasional news updates. There are no new leads, no publicly named suspects, but endless yearnings for answers from those who loved her. Her face is an ageless entity on the web now – hung like wallpaper on several mystery sleuth sites such as the Doe Network, an international organization that assists police and families in missing person cold-cases and its Maryland Chapter: Maryland Missing Persons. See www.doenetwork.org and <http://www.marylandmissing.com>, a site run by an HGS employee.

Ocean City Police Chief Bernadette Dipino remembers this case all too well. She has followed the case through the years as it has grown colder. In 1986, she

The Doe Network: Case File 435DFMD



Left and Center: Caruso, since 1986, Right: Age-Progression by Wesley Hentle

Bernadette M. Stevenson Caruso

Missing since September 27, 1986 from Baltimore County, Maryland
Classification: Endangered Missing

Caruso's profile on the Doe Network site

was a rookie cop and assigned to help in this investigation. She recalls night after night of searching for Bernadette in parks, alley ways, roadways, everywhere and anywhere. She's never forgotten seeing the struggle first-hand that Bernadette's loved one's endured.

Babies on backs, fliers in hand, Bernadette's family took to the streets of East Baltimore to swamp the areas of Chase, Essex, and Dundalk with knowledge of her disappearance. They were bound and determined that their niece would not be motherless for long. Neighborhoods were searched relentlessly, family and friends were interviewed, but no trace of Bernadette or her vehicle showed up in 1986, nor has it since.

Families like Bernadette's aren't alone.

MI Motley Crue loses a fan

Tracey Gardner-Tetso was a huge fan of the 80's rock band Motley Crue. When she heard they were coming to the DC MCI center in the spring of 2005, every one understood perfectly that she was going. *She could not wait.* She talked about it constantly, non-stop at times.

The 33-year-old dispatcher from Rosedale told coworkers on the last Friday she worked once again how excited she was. So, when she didn't show up at the March 4th concert, eyebrows immediately went up. Everyone knew something was dreadfully wrong. Tracey wouldn't have missed the concert for anything.

Her vehicle was clocked at a Baltimore toll tunnel going the opposite way of the DC concert about 45 minutes after the concert had started. Then someone pulled it into a Glen Burnie Days Inn parking lot, parked the vehicle, and walked away. Like Bernadette, Tracey too was separating from a spouse. Her husband Dennis was supposed to be moving out that weekend. "He [Dennis] has been invited to all the search parties for Tracey, but hasn't shown up once," said Cathy Gardner, Tracey's mother back then to a local newspaper.

"Getting the word out has been equally as [\(continued on page 34\)](#)



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Who is Jane Doe?

Somewhere in the perfect world a mother has never stopped missing her wayward daughter. In a retirement home, there is an elderly man wondering what happened to his daughter who eloped due to his harsh words, "Over my dead body will you marry him." Maybe in that world there's a sister who is still contacting the police decades later to find out if they've made any progress finding her.

For nearly 35 years, Baltimore County police have combed the United States trying to find such a family so they can claim a pixie-faced young woman with umber hair, found September 26, 1976, in Lorraine Park cemetery in Woodlawn, Maryland. Jane Doe was strangled, abused, and abandoned, at likely no more than 22 years old. She possibly had a tattoo of "JP" on one arm. They have contacted every state in the union to compare fingerprints of missing women. They have searched far outside the US. They have religiously put out the word on this case year after year.

When police emerged on the scene back in the mid-70's, they would have never guessed they were viewing Baltimore County's future most frustrating case. A pretty young woman, they had no doubt she'd be missed by someone. Days passed into weeks and months, and then years. Jane Doe became a department mystery. A homicide victim without an ID. A nameless girl without a family.

Since 1976, she has steadfastly remained Jane Doe.



Vanished Voices (continued)

tough. Until Motley Crue put out a press release we had to fight the local media for coverage," said Gardner. Motley Crue offered a \$10,000 reward when they heard their fan went missing on the way to their concert. America's Most Wanted suddenly had interest, MSNBC called, Rolling Stone called, papers as far as Australia suddenly called.

Cathy Gardner held fundraisers and organized raffles to increase her daughter's reward fund. On the weekend she spent her days searching landfills, woods, and parks for her daughter's body, quite often alone. She's hired a well-known psychic, Jackie Barrett, and her family has had endless cardio visits since Tracey's last day. She advocates for other families of the missing. Years have passed, and the husband is now in prison for Tracey's murder.

All this, yet no Tracey.

Montgomery County case

In 2004, a Jane Doe case that stumped police in multiple states was connected via a missing persons web site. For nearly ten years, no one was able to put a name to a body found spring 1995 near the Tuscarora Mountain in Pennsylvania. Jane Doe was covered with brush and had no identification, jewelry or personal belongings to help police identify her. The remains were estimated to belong to a woman between the ages of 20-35.

About a month earlier, just over the state line in Montgomery County, Maryland, Cynthia Vanderbeek's mother and sister

became concerned when she failed to show up for a family christening, where she was to become a godmother to a niece in late March 1995. Vanderbeek, 47, and her husband were supposed to stop by on their way back to Florida where they lived. They were traveling from Maine. In late March, Stephen Vanderbeek stopped at his mother-in-law's home alone. He had never visited there without his wife. Family, alarmed, filed a missing person report in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Despite similarities between the missing and found date, neither case was connected by the FBI database of missing and unidentified remains. The case remained unsolved until a Montgomery County detective sent Vanderbeek's profile to be listed on The Doe Network. Immediately the detective was notified of the eerie similarities between the body found in Fulton County, Pennsylvania and Vanderbeek. A DNA test proved in 2004 that the body found belonged to Cynthia Vanderbeek.

This was the fifth such case the Doe Network provided Maryland authorities that led to close out an unidentified person case. Since then, nine more cases in Maryland like this have been connected.



cross the US

Each year, over 800,000 persons disappear in the U.S., according to the National Center for Missing Adults. Ninety-seven percent of the missing persons return within one week. Another one percent will return within a month, one percent become body pick-ups, and another one percent are never found. The FBI database of missing and unidentified

remains lists almost 6,000 unidentified deceased persons. Experts cite this is likely only 15% of actual unidentified cases.

In 1975, the Federal Bureau of Investigations created the Missing Persons File within its National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. Eight years later, 1983, they added an Unidentified Persons section to the NCIC.

This same year, Adam Walsh disappeared in Florida. His parents had no support in getting people or local authorities to look for Adam, citing him as a voluntary disappearance. Thirty days into the search police in the next town over didn't even know of the disappearance. The media was of no help. Adam's parents created their own fliers and hung them all over the town he disappeared from.

After Adam was found deceased, his parents went on to press the nation to change the laws involving missing children cases. In 1985, Congress appropriated funds for what is now called the National Center for Missing Children. Soon after, every state in the nation had created a state clearinghouse for missing children.

In 1990, police still weren't required to do immediate searches for missing children. The 1990 National Child Search Assistant Act required every police agency to enter information of missing children into the FBI's NCIC database and withdrew the 48 hour waiting period for missing children.

In 1994, a young girl name Megan Kanka went to a neighbor's house to see some new puppies. Megan was brutally

murdered by a repeat sex offender. Soon after, her parents enacted legislation to track habitual sex offenders, which soon became US law and established sex offender registries as we know them today.

In 1996, a young girl name Amber Hagerman was abducted in Texas. At this time, there was no requirement for police to do an immediate search for any missing child. Amber was found murdered two days later. As a result of this, legislation was pushed to enact emergency alerts in child abduction cases and the Amber (America's Emergency Broadcast

Response) alert was developed. **Note: Most Amber Alerts are result of domestic issues; there are less than 115 actual stranger abductions a year.**

More changes came. The Adam Walsh Protection Act was passed in 2005,

which required police to put abducted children into the NCIC database within two hours. "Suzanne's Law" required police to treat 18-21 year olds disappearances like children's disappearances. "Jennifer's Law" required all unidentified bodies to be put into the NCIC database. Funding was appropriated for the National Center for Missing Adults, and just two years ago the Department of Justice created collaboration between law enforcement, the public, and medical examiner's office with the introduction of the Namus.gov website.

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Maryland COLD CASES

Help solve Maryland's biggest mysteries

Vanished Voices (continued)

Solving Cold Cases

In the late 90s, a small group of people who loved mysteries started gathering in an AOL chat room, far before shows like CSI and Dexter made it socially acceptable to enjoy forensics and cold cases. Participants were housewives, law enforcement agents, every-day workers, family and friends of missing persons, and several had lived to tell, like the Maryland member. They were from all over: Toronto, Buffalo, Missouri, Boston, Tennessee, Switzerland, New Jersey, West Virginia, and so on.

They often typed their nights away discussing famous crime cases to the point there was little left to say, so they started looking into local cold cases.

Members soon found themselves living at libraries, wearing out librarians to help them find cold-cases on microfilm. A Michigan journalist joined the group and started developing a website to post these cases. Within months, they had researched hundreds of missing person cases, and started comparing missing person cases to unidentified human remains. They dubbed themselves the *Doenetwork*.

Their first "Solve" was right here in Maryland. Baltimore City had an unidentified human remains case in 2000. Found with the woman was a t-shirt that said Wynn Family reunion. Members searched online for reunions of the Wynn family and contacted t-shirt designers in the area. They searched outside of Maryland when nothing turned up, and found an Indian tribe in North Carolina who had a Wynn family reunion that year.

When members were contacted, they said that two sisters had come from Baltimore to the reunion and provided information on them. The online sleuths provided this information to the Baltimore police and a few months later it was determined to be Brenda Wright, one of the sisters who attended this reunion.

Since then, the organization has made over 65 matches of this sort, with a high concentration of matches in Maryland, as well as finding many missing persons who disappeared. This has led to unwanted press attention in local and national press: calls from the Greta Van Susteren show, CNN, People Magazine and most recently a mention in the Lifetime movie, "Bringing Home Ashley." It has also led to an honorary guest spot at the prestigious Vivodq Society, government appointments to state task forces, calls from police all over for assistance on cold cases, crime solver rewards, consultation requests from mystery writers, unwanted calls and letters from federal inmates, stalkers, and kooks, as well as very close bonds with families of the missing.

Raising Awareness

Twenty-five years later, Bernadette Caruso is being remembered by family and friends at a Missing Person Event in Middle River, Maryland. The date is September 25, 2011, almost a quarter century since Bernadette was last seen. The event is hosted by her family, who

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now runs an organization called the Maryland Task Force for the Missing and Unidentified.



Bernadette's sister Susan Bowerman, an immaculately dressed woman with curly hair, dabs at her eyes and says, "Bernadette would never have left her daughter and not come back. She did not disappear on her own. She did not want to disappear."

Attendees also included Rosalie Faulk, whose

daughter Leanne disappeared in PG county in 1983, former Baltimore homicide detective Sam Bowerman, who investigated the Caruso case and went on to marry Bernadette's sister Susan, criminal profiler Pat Brown, Rick Gardner, whose daughter Tracie Tetso disappeared in Rosedale years ago, Carla Proudfoot, Director of the state police Maryland Center for Missing Children, Stephanie Lurz, friend of Tracey Mosley who disappeared in Reistertown, the family of Phylcia Barnes, a North Carolina honor student who disappeared last year while visiting relatives in Baltimore and was found murdered, legislators, the Baltimore chapter of the guardian angels, and many volunteers for the missing.

Families know vigils and organized events bring about attention on these cases. Press attention is hard to come by. The Washington Post once had three missing person cases on the front page, all on the West Coast, meanwhile there wasn't a scant mention of two local missing persons. Another time a Leesburg [\(continued on page 55\)](#)

like throwing the ball really far." I would love to be able to say that quote is a Gross (haha!!) exaggeration. It is not.

This Season: The Skins realized we're just a little feeble at the QB position. So to bolster the Grossman powerhouse, they went out and recruited a 30-year-old guy who hasn't even played football in 5 years. Further, Cooley is out for the season with a busted knee, Randy Moss is now homeless, but we're devoid of the problematic Alberta Haynesworth and gruesome/fictional talent of Donovan McNabb. But hey, as any true fan will fervently attest, this could be our year.

Vanished Voices (continued)

runaway with a nice zip code made all the local and state papers, and even made it to America's Most Wanted. Meanwhile press attention was nearly nil for an African-American kidnapped child, despite an Amber Alert, who disappeared 30 miles away.

Bias is wide spread, but it is not necessarily a race issue. The Laci Peterson case received so much

attention, not so much that she was a pregnant white woman, but she also disappeared in the town where Chandra Levy's family lived. Modesto, California is also home to a big missing person organization called the Carol Sund Foundation, and they got behind the Peterson case. Phylicia Barnes' case made national news and remained in the news, but much of this was due to the work of her family. An Uncle reported, "We stood under the windows of important people all day long so Phylicia remained in the news."

Few cases rarely capture the curiosity of a nation, and local cases quickly become a story no one wants to talk about - too depressing for most. Meanwhile families suffer, often begging reporters to keep the last ounce of their loved one's memory alive by a newspaper article or TV. Tracey Tetso's family has been bumped from scheduled local news interviews many times. Many aren't even this lucky. Tracey Mosley disappeared in 1995, and got two scant mentions in the Carroll County Times newspaper. Other women like Wanda Campbell, Kimberly Dixon, Stephanie

Gant, Edna Bland, Trina Johnson, Ramona Reed, can't be found when searching for articles on their disappearances.

Cases like Laci Peterson's are common household names people recognize when it comes to missing persons. They span the country, leaving impressions that these are the only persons missing. Meanwhile local cases often are unbeknownst to most locals. In Maryland alone, there are over 900 missing person cases, and over 210 sets of unidentified human remains, missing without a trace. Unfortunately so -- when you have unsolved and unidentified homicide victims, and the public is unaware of this, someone is getting away with the perfect crime.

That can easily be changed. As Robert Stack of Unsolved Mysteries used to say, "Perhaps you hold that *final key* to solve this mystery."