

A missing child; a parent's worst nightmare. For Mary, it was both children. A 14-day parental visit became a nightmare. The children suffer trauma while gone. After an 18-month legal battle, Mary loses, and must send her children again. This time he does the unthinkable, they all disappear. But, where? Mary's hope with God is all that remains.

HOPE WITH GOD And A MOTHER'S LOVE

By TJ Olander

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*Hope
With God*
— AND —
*A Mother's
Love*

TJ OLANDER

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9. The Journey

~ The act of traveling from one place to another ~

Friday, May 28, Tom and I were up early to catch the first flight to San Antonio. We had planned to spend two nights, returning to Lincoln Sunday, May 30. My aunt and uncle lived in San Antonio, so we asked if we could stay with them through the weekend.

Once the plane landed, we got our rental car and headed for the Bexar County Courthouse in San Antonio. We arrived in plenty of time and found ourselves waiting for Sam. Sitting in that courthouse made me feel extremely uncomfortable. The last courtroom experience was a total disaster, I was not looking forward to this one except, this time, Sam would be doing all the talking. When he arrived, we went to a side room where we could talk. I brought him up to date regarding the phone call from the night before.

“The first and only thing Jennifer got out of her mouth was ‘We are moving’ before someone ended the call. I don’t even know the address of the home they currently live in. You don’t think...?” I did not want to say it.

“Let’s get in to see the judge and explain the truth about what’s been going on. She is a reasonable judge. She’s going to take this very seriously since Donnie and his attorney have obviously led her down the wrong path.”

Sam remained extremely calm. At this point, I needed that reassurance.

Time for the hearing. Basically, the intent of the hearing was to present the facts to the judge that the children, she ordered to spend an extended Easter vacation with their father, were never returned. Sam had no problem convincing the judge the children were now prisoners of their father and were being detained against their will. Although children did not have rights, they were still being held outside of the vacation times ordered by the court, basically from her decision. She

wanted to hear from me, so she put me under oath, and she led the questions. Flashbacks raced through my head reminding me of the last time I was on the witness stand. My anxiety level jumped through the roof, I started shaking and my heart was pounding against my chest.

“Mrs. Schumacher, would you please tell me how you and Mr. Schumacher arrived at the dates for visitation starting March 27?”

“I was trying to be conciliatory after losing my court battle in Nebraska. I knew I would have to follow the visitation rules set forth by the Texas Courts. Visitation was to commence Easter 1982. I called Donnie and offered the visit to be during Alex’s spring break, March 27 through April 4, since it would allow Donnie a longer time with the children rather than just the long Easter weekend.”

“Did you tell Mr. Schumacher he could also have the children the following week leading up to Easter.”

“No, that was when he appeared before you to get the time extended.”

“What were the dates you agreed upon?”

“Let me put it this way, I really did not agree, but after he went to court, he informed me the arrangement was from March 27 through April 11. The children were to return Easter night.”

“And did he return the children?”

“No, Your Honor, we went to the airport, but they were not on the flight.”

“Did Mr. Schumacher inform you they were not coming in on that flight?”

“No, Your Honor, but we asked the ticket agent, who informed us the reservations had been cancelled that afternoon.”

“Did Mr. Schumacher ever call to explain why he cancelled the tickets?”

“No, communication has been very limited.”

“Have you been able to speak with your children?”

“As I said, communication has been extremely limited. I have spoken to them but only for a short period of time. They are only three and five, they really don’t like talking on the phone.”

“Have you denied visitation from Mr. Schumacher since 1979?”

“No, Your Honor, Donnie and I agreed on a two-week visit in June 1980. When he made the plane reservations, he had extended the visit to nineteen days, without asking. At the end of the nineteen days the children were not returned. With Sam’s help, Donnie finally returned them after thirty-one days had elapsed. I started proceedings in Nebraska to see if we could get jurisdiction changed to Nebraska under the UCCJA. This was a long dragged out ordeal that lasted eighteen months. During this time, the judge ruled that visitation would not be outside of my home county until the issue could be resolved. During this time, Donnie was offered, on several different occasions, to come to Nebraska for a visit. In September 1981 Donnie was in Nebraska for one of the hearings and visited with the children on Saturday and Sunday. My pastor attempted, on several occasions, to set up a visitation during the summer of 1981, but Donnie always refused.”

“Okay, thank you, Mrs. Schumacher. I am so sorry this has happened to you and your children. You are dismissed.”

“Thank you, Your Honor.”

Sam took over and explained we had been doing everything imaginable to convince Donnie he should comply and just return the children, but to no avail. He then summed up the facts regarding the first visit and now this last visit, highlighting the legal steps he had gone through. He also outlined the steps Donnie’s attorney had gone through, undermining the legal system. She was NOT happy. She knew she had been duped.

The judge had no problem issuing the Writ Of Habeas Corpus immediately, for Sam had supplied “good cause”; substantial reasons to take a certain action. It was noticeably clear, “... Said children are being unlawfully and forcibly detained by the Defendant, Donnie Schumacher...” She ordered, “the Defendant to produce the minor children before this Court on the 1st day of June at 8:00 a.m. at the courthouse to show cause, if he has any, as to why he should so hold said minor children in restraint of their liberty. It is further ordered that the Sheriff shall return said minor children to the custody of the Plaintiff, Mary Schumacher, and use whatever force is necessary.”

My heart was skipping! Could this be it? Could we be at the end of this roller coaster ride? I prayed, "Please, Lord, let it be so."

The judge came down from the bench and we all sat casually around a table until the Writ was typed to her satisfaction, signed, and sealed. She looked straight at me.

"I'm so terribly sorry, Mrs. Schumacher. I trust the Writ will be effective."

She was sincerely apologetic. I started tearing up and was unable to say a word. She knew. She looked directly at Tom and I and gave us explicit instructions.

"I'll be calling the Hondo Sheriff's Office to let them know you are on your way with the Writ. Take the Writ to them and then follow the county Sheriff to Devine to pick up the children. It should be that simple. Mr. Schumacher will hand the children over to the Sheriff and the Sheriff will give them to you. Sam, keep me informed. Otherwise, we will see you in court on Tuesday."

I interrupted. "But we don't know the specific house where Donnie lives. I sent the children only knowing a PO box number."

"Don't worry," she said calmly, "the city of Devine is not that large. By the time you get there the sheriff will have the house identified."

"Okay, thank you so much," I said.

As we were walking out the courthouse, Sam wished us luck.

"Let's hope this is the end of it!" he said as he walked away.

Tom and I both agreed with him.

We got into our car. Tom unfolded the map to determine how to get to Hondo. He then grabbed my hand and asked, "Are you ready to pick up the children?"

"I sure am!"

As we drove, I kept looking at the Writ. We finally had the legal piece of paper to make Donnie turn the children over to me. I was almost giddy with excitement. I looked over at Tom and he, too, had a smile on his face.

It took us about 45 minutes to get to the Sheriff's Office in Hondo. Just as she said, an officer was waiting for us. We got out of the car and introduced ourselves. Tom handed the Sheriff the Writ, we got

back into our cars, and followed him into Devine, another 30 minutes. When we pulled up to the house a county officer was already parked in front, waiting for us. The Sheriff whom we were following, walked over to our car.

“You wait here. We’ll go into the house and get the children.”

“Okay.”

We were just going to watch and wait. I was so nervous my teeth were chattering. Tom reached over and grabbed my hand to relax me.

They were gone too long. Something was not right. My heart was racing as the Sheriff finally approached the car. He asked that we step outside the car.

“My partner talked with the neighbors prior to us getting here and the neighbors said these people had been moving all day. My partner also said there was a car here just 30 minutes before we arrived. I am sorry, but we have no one at this address to serve the Writ. The house has been vacated. I will call the judge and let her know the situation. Again, I’m sorry.”

I fell into Tom’s arms, sobbing uncontrollably. Were we really 30 minutes late? I wanted to die I was in so much emotional pain. “Lord, I don’t believe this! How can this happen? Here we stand... ready to hold those little babies in my arms and we were 30 minutes late? I need You - NOW!”

My head started pounding! Did Donnie know about the hearing for the request of the Writ? Did he know they had to be gone by the middle of the afternoon? Did he know we were coming? Did we pass them on our way to Devine? I could not think. Getting the Writ signed was the first sign of hope I had in a long time, and now there was no hope, for now there was not even a PO box number.

We could not continue sitting in front of the house. The County Sheriff would not leave until we pulled away. Both of us were in a fog, so we just drove around. Devine was a small town. It could not be more than 4,000 people. Everyone in town had to know the family with seven kids! And I am sure they did.

The first order of business was to make several phone calls. We found a convenience store, for we needed to find a payphone.

In as much as I was still crying, Tom called Sam to explain the situation. Sam was furious.

“Jesus Christ, I don’t believe this!”

“No, we can’t either,” Tom said.

“I guess I’ll see you and Mary in court on Tuesday.” Sam responded. “You will be there, won’t you?”

“Oh, yes,” Tom guaranteed him. “We will be there.”

Since I was still attempting to get hold of myself, Tom phoned his mother next. There was simply no easy way to tell anyone the outcome of the day. It could not be sugar coated. The day just stunk! Tom’s mother felt horrible, but beyond that, there were no words to make anyone feel better.

Thinking I was strong enough to call my mother, I tried. As soon as I heard her voice, I knew I was in trouble, I burst into tears.

“Mary are you okay?” she asked.

“No, Mom, we got the Writ signed by the judge today but by the time we drove to Donnie’s house, they were gone! Moved! Vanished!”

“Who was gone?” she asked.

“Donnie, everyone, gone!”

I know I was not making sense, but it was the best I could do.

“Oh, Mary! I’m so sorry!” she muttered for she too was crying by this time.

“We don’t know what we’re doing yet but when we figure it out, I’ll let you know. We have to go back into court on Tuesday so we’re not coming home Sunday.”

“Okay. That’s all I can ask,” she responded.

We both had a difficult time saying goodbye.

Since we were dressed up for court, we needed to change clothes. We dug around in our suitcase, found some casual clothes, and went into the convenience store restroom to change. No doubt, they wondered who the strangers were in town, using the payphone and changing clothes in their restroom. Next, we had not eaten since early morning, so we picked up a sandwich from their display case and went back to the car to eat and attempt to think.

We soon discovered we had no paper to write on. We were not prepared for this. Guess we never dreamt there would be a requirement

for list making. I went back into the convenience store for paper towels so we could start writing our list: phone calls (work, my aunt), return car, rent another car, change plane tickets. I was not a lot of help, as my head was still going in circles. All I knew was my kids had vanished and we would not be going home on Sunday. And we were... 30 minutes late!

Sitting in a stupor I only had one direction to turn, to My Heavenly Father, where I prayed silently. "Lord, only You know what has happened and why it occurred. Right now, I am calling on You to help me as I ask you to pull me up and help me move forward. Please help me find a way, for right now I see no way." After waiting a little bit, I felt determined I was not going to let Donnie destroy me again. God was clearing my mind and supplying me with some strength. I had to consciously get a grip on myself and keep praying. "Lord, I can't move without You. You know exactly what I am going through. Give me strength in this time of need. Help me rise above this. In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen."

Once I determined I was not going to die, I could feel a little fight come back within me. It was imperative I get hold of myself, for I would be worthless to everyone if I did not. This was exactly what Donnie was counting on: driving me crazy so he could have it all. I had to remain strong for the children's sake.

Tom and I started thinking, maybe, just maybe, they had not gotten everything out of the house. Was there a possibility they would slip back into town and pick something up from the house?

I made a quick call to my aunt to explain a little regarding the highlights of the day. After explaining we were going to spend the night in Devine, I promised to keep her informed as to our plans. Tom positioned the car on a hill where we could observe the house. We basically sat in the car all night, one of us keeping an eye on the house while the other attempted to get a little sleep in the back seat. Needless to say, no one came back to the house Friday night. They were gone.

Saturday morning, we located a private investigator in the Devine area and set up an appointment to meet with him. Not knowing what direction to take, we hired Syd for a few hours to see what details he could find out. Being local to the area he had connections, certainly

better than what we were doing, watching an empty house. Not being able to spend another night in the car, we located a small motel near Devine. We both needed a good night's sleep if that were possible.

Sunday, we made a trip to Austin to see Arlene, Francis, and Cora. They did not realize we had come to San Antonio for a hearing, so they were genuinely surprised to see us.

"What brings you to Texas?" Francis questioned.

From the expression on their faces they had no idea what had transpired. It was not an easy story to share with them. They were shocked, for it sounded so unbelievable: a pending investigation from Social Services, a pending custody hearing, and now a true kidnapping. Arlene and I were both crying. There was only one message I had for them.

"If or when you hear from Donnie will you please try to find out where he is and talk him into returning the children," I begged.

They all agreed they would do anything to help for they knew the conditions the kids were living in and it was not good. All three agreed the children needed to be with me. The difficult question needed to be asked.

"If I need you to testify on my behalf for the custody hearing, would you be willing?"

There was a positive "Yes" from all three. I was not sure I could rely on them because I had asked all of them to testify for me back at the hearing on October 8, 1981. At that time, all three refused, stating they could not do that to Donnie. When called upon, I had my doubts regarding getting much help.

Arlene supplied me with the contact information for Donnie's uncle. I requested that she call him, fill him in on the situation, and ask him to call her if he receives word from Donnie. Arlene was going to call as soon as we left. Being too distraught for small talk, we kept our visit short. Truthfully, all I felt like doing was curling up in a fetal position in a corner and shutting the world out, but I knew that was not an option. Not if I wanted to see my children again.

Since our original plan was to return home Sunday, the rental car contract expired Sunday night. So, our next task was to return the car and rent another. It sounded rather foolish, but there was no capability

of calling the rental company and extending the contract. We had to physically return the car to the airport and rent another car. I called my aunt, briefly explained what had transpired, and asked if the invitation was still open for us to stay with them the next couple of days. They gladly welcomed us. Even though my heart was breaking I found the commotion of their teenage household distracting, in a good way.

My boss was expecting me back at work the following morning. I called him at home and made him aware of the situation. After explaining what had occurred, he was more than compassionate.

“Take whatever time you need, Mary. Just keep me informed regarding the days you’ll be gone.”

“All I know at this point is we go back to court Tuesday. I know the earliest I would be back into the office would be Thursday, but I will let you know. Thank you so much for being so understanding.”

“It’s not a problem, Mary. Take care.”

Monday, we drove back to Hondo to speak with the county sheriff’s department. We spoke with the same officers we saw Friday along with an officer from the investigative team.

“Is there any information I can give you that might help you?” I pleaded.

“Ma’am, I don’t think you understand. There is not a case here. No charges have been filed. There is nothing we can or will do until there is a criminal charge. Our only involvement here was to serve the Writ.”

“You mean kidnapping your children is not criminal?” I tried to ask calmly but did not.

“Ma’am, the children are presumably with their father. Right? That does not constitute kidnapping.”

I was so exasperated I wanted to scream. Upon seeing my frustration, Tom thanked the officers, got me out of the headquarters, and tried to calm me down.

“You just can’t go in there and get upset like that.”

“Tom, did you hear what he said? They are not concerned one bit because the kids are with their father, so no harm, no foul. In their eyes, life is copasetic.”

“No, it doesn’t mean everything is okay. But what he said was true. Their only job was to serve the Writ.”

“Then, why did we come here?” I snapped at him.

“I wanted to get their business cards in case we need to contact them in the future.”

Since Tom’s father owned a business, Tom was familiar with public information recorded at the courthouse. Since Hondo was the county seat of Medina County, we headed to the courthouse to explore what information we could find. We located Donnie’s and Patricia’s marriage certificate and discovered her maiden name was Maria McCarthy, born in Dublin, Ireland. One can only guess how she became Patricia. The only thing we could find out about the house was that the house was being held as collateral by a financial institution, which implied Donnie used the house to secure a loan. That did not make sense because they had just purchased the house in July 1980. Scanning through reels of microfiche was painstaking, I lacked the patience to sit there, so we headed back to my aunt’s house.

Early Tuesday morning we found ourselves back at the San Antonio courthouse for the Writ of Habeas Corpus hearing. The judge had been made aware of the sheriff’s office inability to serve the notice. She also knew Donnie and the family had moved. After waiting the allotted time to see if Donnie or his counsel would appear, it took her no time at all to rule, she found Donnie in Contempt of Court for not producing the children. We waited until the order was typed, signed, and sealed. The judge had been trying to do the right thing but, after all this, she knew the truth. She looked me straight in the eye.

“I am so incredibly sorry. If you get any information as to where your children might be, come back and I’ll see if I can help you.” She knew, as well as I, that she had been tricked!

“Thank you,” I said, as tears puddled from my eyes.

As we were leaving the courthouse Sam wanted me to clearly understand what just happened.

“This is a civil contempt of court charge. It is neither a felony nor a misdemeanor, it is just a bench warrant she has issued for Donnie’s arrest because he insulted the court. This is not a criminal charge so the police will not perform an investigation. About the only way

Donnie will get caught is if he has a traffic violation, and if he is out of state, nothing will be done.”

“Oh?” I said bewildered. “So, you’re saying there’s nothing we can do?”

“That is correct, I suggest you go back home and see if anything comes up. I’ll be in touch.”

With that, he walked away.

Looking at Tom I just shrugged my shoulders and shook my head.

“So, basically, we have nothing,” I shuttered.

“Looks like it.” Tom continued, “Let’s go back to your aunt’s and uncle’s house, make a few phone calls, and process this entire thing. Maybe there is something we have not thought about. Come on, let’s get away from here.”

“Gladly,” I thought, courthouses were making me EXTREMELY uncomfortable.

Sticking around an extra day did not prove fruitful. We made a trip back to Devine, but no one would talk to us. It seemed the people in Hondo and Devine stuck together. You knew they had information, but they would not share a word. Perhaps they had been convinced I was the bad person in this chain of events, looking to kidnap the children or harm Patricia. We headed back to San Antonio, returned the car, and caught our flight. We were heading home, empty handed! I fought tears all the way to Nebraska.

The wedding was now ten days away. Tom and I were strongly considering postponing it until the children could be found. We made an appointment with the pastor hoping he could help us sort through the situation. After a long discussion, we decided it best to go ahead with the ceremony. That way the children would have an established home to return to when they did come back.

My friend that made the dresses for the wedding brought Jennifer’s dress to me.

“I can’t stand seeing this in my closet any longer. Every time I look at it, I cry. I don’t know how you’re going to get through this,” she explained.

“I’m not sure I will. I am not sure of anything right now. What keeps going through my mind is that we were 30 minutes late. Only 30

minutes! That is all, and now they could be anywhere. At least before, I may not have liked where they were, but I knew where they were. You understand what I am saying? This is an entirely different feeling. It is an emptiness I cannot explain. It runs so deep. It's like a vacuum that is trying to swallow me up from the inside out."

By this time, we were both hugging and in tears. After our visit I, also, had to get the little dress out of my sight. I took it to Jennifer's closet, pushed it against the back corner, closed the doors, and slumped to the floor.

Before I knew it, Friday arrived, and it was time for the rehearsal. Every day since our return had been a blur. Get up, go through the motions, go to bed. When I was at work I could still concentrate, I had to for I had missed a week of work. I did not want to be home, so I would stay at the office until I could not think straight. But here it was Friday and as they say, "The show must go on". It took everything within me to put on a smile and walk into the church.

The wedding party was gathered so we could get our instructions for the following day. The wedding party was small, so it was an easy orchestration. Everyone seemed jovial, but there was an elephant in the room. The pastor gave the instructions for the processional and everyone followed. Next, as Tom and I were facing the pastor you could see there was something on his mind.

"Mary, about this time in the service I would like to say something about the joyous occasion of being together, but there is an emptiness we all feel because of the children not being able to share this event with us. Will you be okay if I say something like that?"

I lost my composure along with everyone in the church. I was not prepared for that. Everyone was crying. No one had tissues. Instantly, I wondered if this was a huge mistake. What if I break down during the service? Who cries at their own wedding? Is this fair to Tom? Are we being selfish to go ahead and marry without the children? All these questions were racing through my mind. I reached out to the only source I had for strength. "Lord, I can't do this alone. Give me an exceptional amount of strength. I hurt all over. I need You."

Immediately the pastor jumped in.

"I can take it out if you prefer," he suggested.

It took me a while before I found my voice.

“I’ll be fine. We are having the service recorded so when we share it with them, they will know we acknowledged they were in our thoughts,” I muttered.

“Okay then, I’ll keep it.”

Tom’s mom was phenomenal, she hosted the rehearsal dinner at their home. She was a gracious host and did not want Tom or I to worry about a thing. It seemed that once we got past the part about acknowledging the children, everyone relaxed and had a good time.

There was enough excitement and activity the day of the wedding, I did not have time to think about anything else. My father walked me down the aisle. As we were about to start down, I wondered what his thoughts were. I wondered, “Is he still thinking I’ll be a two-time loser?” I never wanted to disappoint my dad, but here we were, commitment time. As I got to the front of the church, I looked at Tom’s father. I thought, “Is he still condemning me for being used goods?” And the children that authenticated me as used goods were not even here. My mind was a mess. What bride has those thoughts during her wedding?

The pastor started the service. My anticipation spiked as he came to the point of talking about the children. I held my head high as tears streamed down my face. Fortunately, knowing this was coming, I remained as stoic as possible. I could hear sniffles from everywhere behind me. The pastor paused, looking to me for guidance. I closed my eyes, “Oh, Lord, I need your strength! Help me get through this.” Tom was prepared to help me, at least he had tissues in his pocket. Once I got hold of myself, I gave the pastor a nod and he proceeded.

The reception was held in the recreation room in our development. It was a labor of love, for all the people helping. There was no way I would ever be able to show everyone my appreciation for all their work to get this accomplished. After everyone left and only family remained, Tom and I helped clean up. The food and gifts were taken to our townhouse. Even though everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, there was unquestionably an emptiness to the day. It was not what Tom and I had envisioned our wedding day to be...without the children.

Sunday afternoon we had family and close friends over for lunch and gift opening. A honeymoon was out of the question. The trip to Texas had cost me well over \$2,000 for air fare, car rental, court costs, motel in Devine, and food. Besides, we had been away an additional week from work that we had not planned on. Right now, it would be impossible for me to relax, I needed to go back to work where I could occupy my mind and escape.

Feeling like I had been dropped in the middle of the ocean having only a life jacket, I needed to determine what to do and where to go. The story of Saul came to mind (1 Samuel 9). Saul's father had donkeys that had strayed away. His father told his young son, Saul, to take a servant and go look for his donkeys. Saul had no idea which way to go. These were donkeys after all. They could be anywhere. Do you go north, south, east, or west? Saul did not know, he just started out, trusting God to lead him. Finding some similarity to Saul, I had no idea where to start looking, I just tried to remain calm and as patient as possible. I trusted God had a plan, for I did not know which direction to look; north, south, east, or west.

At this point God was my life jacket. If it had been up to me, I would have begged God to take my life, I was in so much emotional pain and mental anguish, there were no more tears left within me. In fact, there was not much of anything within me, I had become an empty, tired, depressed shell. God had revealed to me back in June '80 the intentions of Donnie's heart: if Donnie ever got his hands on the kids one more time, they would be gone. I had fought so hard for two years, yet no one listened, and, in the end, I was 30 minutes late. I prayed, "Lord, I don't know which way to turn. Please point me in the right direction."

It is funny how life keeps going despite the war going on within you. I was hurting so bad I wanted to give up, but God had other plans for me. Working twelve-hour days to catch up and stay ahead of the work demands was a requirement, work continued to be my escape. Sleep, on the other hand, was nonexistent, two to three hours a night was all I could muster. My brain would not shut down. Bills started coming in from our trip to Texas. The monthly phone bill was staggering, let alone receiving the next attorney's statement. As Tom

and I talked I felt the only fair thing to do was for me to absorb all the expenses related to the children. I would help with the normal household expenses when I could. To keep up, I sold all the furniture from my home in Omaha before moving to Lincoln, keeping only the children's things. If I felt they had outgrown anything, that was sold also. By the time I moved to Lincoln, only a small truck was required.

After dinner each night, Tom and I would sit at the table and brainstorm, making notes of leads someone could be following up on. The question was, Who? Tom occasionally made phone calls to the sheriff's office in Hondo and, every so often, we would hear from the Devine private investigator. About the only thing they both knew was the name of the man that had last been seen with Patricia at the house. Of course, his name was for them to know and not us. We soon discovered investigations do not occur without a criminal charge or a court order.

The Devine private investigator was able to uncover a few facts:

He found the name of the leasing agency where Donnie leased a new Chevrolet Blazer.

He had the name of the bank carrying the mortgage on Donnie's house.

Donnie was behind on his house payment.

Donnie had taken out a second mortgage on his house.

Donnie and Patricia owned a company called the Texas Man Fruits and Nuts.

Donnie worked at the local grocery store.

There was not a forwarding address on file with the post office.

The man seen with Patricia at the house the day they moved was seen back in town, but he was not the realtor.

So far, not worth the \$500 we paid him.

Depression consumed me for nothing was happening. Weekends, I felt like I was in a trance. Tom suggested little trips to take, concerts to attend, movies to see, anything to get my mind off the situation. My lack of desire to do anything was not fair to Tom. I would attempt to do activities with him, but my heart was not in it. At this point in time, I certainly was not a very loving wife. Just because I was hurting so bad did not mean I had to dig a trench and take up occupancy. But I

was there, and it was hard, at this point, even contemplating climbing out to enjoy life.

After the wedding someone in Tom's office remembered an article in the local paper regarding "Custody Child-napping" from April 8, 1982, a syndicated article from the United Press International. Since there were no laws written for children taken by their own parents, the article refused to call it anything other than "Child-napping". The existing kidnapping laws were written for the stealing of children by individuals other than the child's own parents. One interesting tidbit of information was that Senator Malcolm Wallop, a Republican from Wyoming along with Senator Alan Cranston, a Democrat from California had introduced the Parental Kidnaping Prevention Act to congress. "It would establish federal penalties for taking abducted children across state lines, expand the authorized uses of the Federal Parent Locator Service, and require states to follow more uniform custody regulations." Tom and I jumped on this and started a dialogue with these two senators along with seven other senators and representatives. We briefly told our story and requested their support for the bill. We received a ton of information. Talk about justice moving slowly. Senator Wallop introduced the bill January 1979. The bill was meeting resistance because many senators had a difficult time charging a parent with a federal crime, with possible penitentiary time, for taking possession of their own children. Little attention was given to the tremendous heartache and anguish caused from the incidents, let alone the costs involved and mental trauma on the children.

One of the suggestions returned from Senator Wallop in DC was for me to contact the Children's Rights, Inc organization in Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization providing advocacy services to protect abused and neglected kids. I explained my story. Much to my surprise, they responded immediately, providing the name in the DC Passport Office with the instructions to provide names, dates of birth, descriptions of the children and ex-spouse. The passport office would put a notice in the children's names, and I would get notified if applications were made on their behalf. If so, I would have fifteen days to file a restraining order on the Passport Office. Hallelujah, finally, someone helped.

Since I had contacted the Children's Rights, Inc I started receiving their quarterly newsletters. How sad to read the stories others were facing, remarkably similar in nature to mine. Most parents being unsuccessful finding their children, after spending tens of thousands of dollars for the search.

The intent of the newsletter was to share information regarding the progress of the Federal Child-Snatching Bills as well as which states had passed the UCCJA. In one newsletter, they wrote about the long-term effect on the kidnapped children: "the effect of child-snatching is not easily seen, like scars or bruises, but are inside, and difficult to heal." I certainly agreed with that statement. It had taken me nine months to mend Alex from the first emotional visit in '80 and he was only gone thirty-one days. The article went on: "It is common among these children to seek counseling. These children very often have no sense of community because of frequent moves and admonishments and instructions not to talk about their past. They do not trust anybody. These children are usually told: the parent died, the parent is trying to find them to do harm to them, or that parent doesn't love them or want to see them anymore."

Upon reading this, there was only one source for me to turn, I started praying. "Lord, I know these children have been told some terrible things. I commit them to your loving hand and ask for you to protect their little minds."

A pending court date was scheduled for July 9, 1982, for a Change of Visitation hearing. Sam had set this hearing the end of May when he filed for the Writ hearing. At the time this motion was filed, Donnie and his attorney had been notified. Thinking that under the current circumstances this hearing would be cancelled, I called Sam to check on the status.

"Hi, Mary, as far as your question goes, no, I'm not going to cancel the hearing. I realize it seems unnecessary to have a hearing on visitation when we do not know the whereabouts of the children. I want to get before the judge, along with Donnie's attorney, and see what Donnie's attorney has to say."

Hesitantly, I inquired, "Okay, Sam, do I need to attend?"

“Oh no, it will only be the three of us. You don’t need to go to that expense right now.”

“That’s fine, just let me know what happens.”

Relief swept over me for I did not want to step foot into a courtroom again.

“I will. Thanks.”

“Thank you, Sam.”

After the hearing Sam called to inform me of the activities of the day.

“To start things off, Donnie’s attorney never showed.” Sam almost seemed giddy. “We don’t know if he’s no longer representing Donnie, but it seemed strange he didn’t appear. Perhaps he did not want to get an earful from the judge regarding the shenanigans of his client. Anyway, the judge and I did not talk about visitation, but the judge did write a formal Violation of Custody order against Donnie. In Texas, this is a Class 5 Felony.”

Before I got too excited, I asked, “So, what does that mean? We already have the Contempt of Court Charge.”

“Again, the contempt charge is civil, and nothing will be done about that. The Violation of Custody is the lowest of felony charges, so realistically, probably nothing will occur, but once it gets on file at the Medina County Sheriff’s Office, since that was the origin of the kidnapping, if the detectives want to poke around, they have the legal means to do so.”

“That’s good, Right?” I asked.

“You have to remember this is a Class 5 Felony. All the other cases take priority over yours.”

“At least they can ask questions if they have time. Maybe we will learn something,” I was trying to remain optimistic.

After hanging up I had to drive to the library to read about a Violation of Custody Order Class 5 Felony. Basically, the charge is made against the person who takes any child under the age of eighteen from the custody of their parent. This charge fit Donnie. The next question was whether anything would transpire from this.

Because of the family business, Tom had access to information the normal person would not have available. He ordered a credit report on

Donnie which was full of personal information. At the time the report was pulled, Donnie and Patricia owed \$27,500. One of the more interesting items was a new loan from Texas Lending, opened March 1982, for \$19,000. At the time we did not know what to make of it. There was a note on the account that stated, "payments were slow due to the fact the ex-wife is to pay her share of the joint accounts." How interesting! Not only was I receiving calls from creditors, my aunt and uncle in California were being harassed asking about Donnie's whereabouts, as well as Arlene was fielding all kinds of questions regarding her son. These people were relentless, but I understood they were attempting to recoup their own loss.

Tom and I were both frustrated, but it seemed to be getting to Tom more since he was used to making things happen and fixing problems. What made this so difficult was that we were dealing with another state. Besides, the charges were not severe enough to warrant people spending time on the case. Tom would call the Medina County Sheriff's Office with questions. Then, he would call Sam to see what could be done. I knew they all thought we were crazy. There were times I thought I was losing my mind, but I could not, for my children's sake.

After a couple phone calls to Sam, he asked that I follow up with a letter regarding all the questions we had. I apologized to Sam if we seemed to be unreasonable, but we were extremely frustrated. It had been another six weeks now since Donnie kidnapped the children and as far as Tom and I knew, nothing was being done to locate them. We had several questions.

- 1) How did he secure the loan from Texas Lending?
- 2) Do you know of any additional judgements against him?
- 3) Why didn't my judgement show up?
- 4) Can't the police talk with Donnie's attorney?
- 5) Who was the man with Patricia at the house the day we served the writ?
- 6) Has Donnie's friend been contacted to see when he last talked with Donnie?
- 7) Since Patricia is originally from Ireland is anyone looking into restricting passports?

- 8) Is Patricia a citizen?
- 9) Why can't Patricia be charged as an accessory?
- 10) Has anyone looked at Donnie's employment/unemployment records?
- 11) Did they apply for food stamps?
- 12) Can the kid's school records be gotten?
- 13) Are they still using their checking account?
- 14) Does anyone have access to their charge cards?
- 15) The PO box number has been closed, but there is no forwarding information available. How is their mail being forwarded?
- 16) Does anyone have access to phone records?
- 17) Is Donnie maintaining payments on his leased car?
- 18) Is Patricia's car leased? If so, by whom?

We thought these were good questions that needed to be pursued. The problem was Sam was an attorney and not an investigator. Again, we did not know where to turn.

Even in Lincoln, Tom and I were on our own. Tom's father did not want the story shared with anyone because he did not want the family name/business associated with the "situation". He wanted to protect the family name. Those in Tom's office knew about the kidnapping, but very few of the details were shared. We decided even Tom's family members would be kept at a distance regarding the details. Not wanting to be a family embarrassment, that was the way Tom and I kept it.

Sam was becoming frustrated with us, especially after receiving the letter with the eighteen questions. He did not have time to investigate anything, after all, he was the attorney. From our perspective not nearly enough was happening. Missing now for 2 1/2 months was unnerving me; I needed to know someone was making some progress.

Sam called one afternoon.

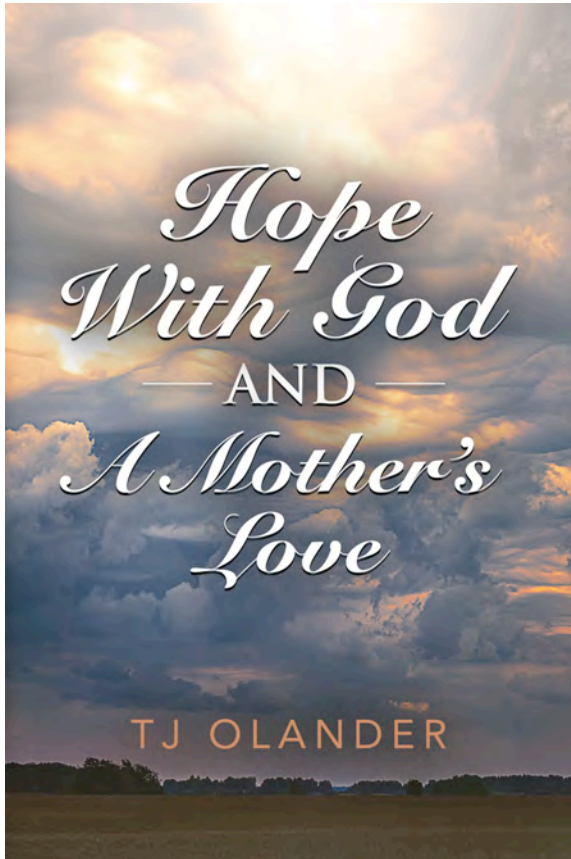
"We seem to be running into a situation here. You have more questions for me than I can make inquiries about. I have done some research and talked with some of my colleagues and I am proposing that you hire a full-time private investigator to continue with the

investigation. They have ways of getting information that I cannot. I have inquired around and there is a pair of investigators here in San Antonio that come highly recommended by my colleagues. I have been in contact with them and they are expecting your call.” He gave me their contact information. “If you decide to seek their assistance let me know.”

“I appreciate this Sam. I am sorry if you feel we have been badgering you with questions, but I feel that valuable time is being wasted. I miss my children.”

“I know you do. If you decide to hire them, I’ll help supply any information I have.”

“Fair enough, I’ll call and at least get some information. I’ll be in touch.”



A missing child; a parent's worst nightmare. For Mary, it was both children. A 14-day parental visit became a nightmare. The children suffer trauma while gone. After an 18-month legal battle, Mary loses, and must send her children again. This time he does the unthinkable, they all disappear. But, where? Mary's hope with God is all that remains.

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