

To Our Riders, Volunteers, Shepherds, Law Enforcement, Families of Missing Children and our Recovered Missing Children in The Ride for Missing Children CNY 2011

On behalf of the Steering Committee of the Mohawk Valley office of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and The Ride for Missing Children CNY, I would like to thank all of our Riders, Volunteers, Committee Members, Law Enforcement, and the Community of Central New York for a most amazing, meaningful, and successful Ride for Missing Children 2011.

The weather gave us many challenges. I want to thank everyone for your teamwork and cooperation as we quickened the pace to get to the Slavic Pentecostal Church. We worked together to get us safely off the road away from the lightning and storms. Each of you showed great strength, determination, and teamwork - the cooperation from everyone was extraordinary. While we were at the Church, the Ride Administration went through many scenarios of how to safely complete our Ride. Unfortunately, we had to cancel one of our most meaningful Silent Tributes at Midstate Correctional Facility. We did not want to put the schoolchildren, our Volunteers, and Families of Missing Children in danger from the storm. We regret that we were not able to have this special Silent Tribute as it symbolizes so much of the meaning of the work we do.

Letters from some of our Parents of Missing Children

Attached to this e-mail are three letters from Mothers of Missing Children who traveled a long distance to be with us for this year's Ride. Wanda Cotton, Kathy Teague, and Betty Stringfellow, have written letters that were going to be read at a special ceremony before we arrived at Silent Tribute at Midstate Correctional Facility. They have asked that we share these letters with you and let you know how much they "Thank You" for what you are doing and the strength you give to them.

Please take a few moments at a quiet time of your day or evening to read these letters and reflect on the meaning of our Ride. You will see the impact each of you has on so many Families of Missing Children across our country. You truly are doing amazing work

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you...

Our Shepherds were absolutely incredible!! They kept us safe and working as a Team. **Law Enforcement** - we thank the many agencies who came to help us from across our Community to be partners in our mission. **Our Volunteers** - I estimate that they lifted the sum total of 6,793 gear bags, 2,250 gallons of water, and an incredible amount of food, tables and support materials to make our Rest Stops efficient and support our Riders during the day. Each bag, table and container lifted with a smile and a sense of purpose that they are an extremely important part of our Mission. To the **Families of Missing Children** and the **Recovered-Missing Children** who joined us, we thank you very much for your Inspiration that you give to each and every one of us. To the **Community of Central New York** - all of us appreciate your Support for the work we do; this is truly an incredible Community.

And now ...we prepare for The Ride for Missing Children CNY 2012



Silent Tributes – The Ride for Missing Children 2011

Friday, May 20, 2011

Each year at our Tribute Midstate Correctional Facility, we have invited Parents and Families of Missing Children to write a letter about the child for whom they are searching. This letter is read at a special ceremony at the Tribute Site before the Arrival of the Riders. They have asked us to share these letters with our Riders and Volunteers.

Tribute to Sherry Lynn Marler

From her Mother, Betty Stringfellow

It was June 6th 1984; I worked as a waitress at the Waffle House in Greenville and had to be at work by 7:00 a.m. My husband's Aunt was spending the week with us, so Sherry was sleeping on the sofa in the living-room that morning. As I opened the door to go to work she turned over and I thought I had awakened her, but she settled back down and I went on to work. That was the last time I saw or heard from her.

Later that morning my husband had to go into town. He told me he was backing out of the driveway when Sherry came running out of the house with her shoes in her hand, wanting to go with him. Sherry loved to go with him wherever he went. He said when they got to town he went to the bank to sign papers, but before he went inside Sherry said she wanted something to drink, so he gave her a dollar to go buy a soda and told her to meet him back at the truck in fifteen minutes. He went inside the bank to take care of business. When he got back to the truck, Sherry wasn't there. He said he waited about fifteen minutes and was mad at first, but when she didn't show up in the next ten minutes he started to really worry that something was wrong. It wasn't like Sherry not to do what she was told to do. He knew something was very wrong.

He called me at work hoping she had decided to come over to get something to eat. I told him I hadn't seen her and that is when our nightmare began.

We haven't seen or heard from her since that day. My husband died not knowing what happened to her. When he was in the hospital a few days before he died he told me, "Betty, I wish I could go get Sherry and bring her home to you, but I can't because I don't know where she is." He never could get over Sherry being with him when she went missing. I told him all the time it could have happened if she had been with me.

My husband has been gone for eight years now and my son will be forty three years old on June 13th. Sherry has been missing for twenty seven years on June 6th. She would be celebrating her fortieth birthday on August 18, 2011. Sherry went missing one week before her brothers 16th birthday. We don't know any more today than we did all those years ago on June 6th 1984. I still miss her so much. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about her. It's hard to think about all the things Sherry herself and all of the family missed out on: Her last year of school, the wedding we will never be able to give her, the children that she never had the chance to have, the grandchildren we will never see, the family time we never got to have.

I don't know who took my baby girl away from us or why, but whoever it was I have forgiven him or them in my heart. I will never forget what this person or people has put my family through all of these years. We missed out on Sherry, we missed watching her grow into a lovely young lady, but I have forgiven, not forgotten, but forgiven them. I had to go on living for the rest of my family. I thank God everyday for the strength he gave me to get out of bed and do the things I had to do. I now have ten grandkids and three great grandkids. They make my life worth living, but not a day goes by that I don't think of Sherry. When things get really bad and I can't seem to stop thinking about Sherry, I take comfort in a poem that my son wrote for me a few months after Sherry went missing. **After I read this poem I finally let myself cry for the first time.**

Larry wrote this poem for me twenty seven years ago and left it on the counter with the simple note: "Mama read this poem."

"Something Inside"

There's something inside	At the close of the day
That makes you go on	There's something inside
Though the road is rough	That makes you pray
And things go wrong	Asking for courage
There's something that lifts	Along life's way
Your heart in a song	It dwells in your heart.
The world's in a hurry	This something inside
Of't passing you by	Helping you face life
With a lump in your throat	When you'd rather hide
You wish you could cry	It's God's love within you
But something inside	Always ready to guide.
Keeps your head held high	
No matter how weary	

Psalms 32:8 - I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.
Love Ya! Larry

Randy Sellers – Tyran Cotton

Wanda Cotton's Story

My sincere thanks and gratitude to Superintendent Hulihan, the Midstate Corrections Officers, local and state law enforcement and members of the Ride For Missing Children for the invitation to share our story.

On August 16th, 1980 our lives were changed forever. Our oldest son Randy Lee Sellers, who was 17, disappeared on that day and has never been found. Randy had decided to go to the Kenton County Fair that evening with his friends. We were told that while he was at the fair, he became intoxicated. The police said that they took him into custody and made the decision to take Randy home. Our home was in a very remote area of the county, where there wasn't a lot of traffic. The police said that they could not locate our house, so they made the choice to "give Randy a break" and let him out to walk home. The area that Randy was dropped off was within a half of mile of the Licking River, which was near flood stage at the time. An eyewitness came forward stating that he saw Randy, staggering in the road and two police cars parked a short distance from him. Randy never made it home that night, and the eyewitness who saw Randy walking down the road, is the last person we can verify to have seen our son. The next morning Randy's friends called to ask us if we knew that Randy had been picked up by the police at the fair. We were shocked. We contacted the police and they denied having any contact with Randy. After a 24-hour period had gone by, we were told that they had indeed picked our son up at the fair. People, who were living in the area where the police let Randy out, stated that they saw Randy walking toward the river. A man who lived in a house close-by said that he had found footprints in his muddy garden. The police never sent someone to analyze these footprints. Another local man claimed that he heard splashing in the water and a boys voice around the same time that Randy disappeared. Many, many searches in the river and the area where Randy disappeared failed to ever locate any information that would help us to find Randy. It was like our son had disappeared off the face of the earth.

When Randy disappeared there was no support or help for parents of missing children. We felt as if we had to beg and plead to get the local media to show our sons picture and tell the details of his disappearance. We sat by the phone waiting for any calls. We tried to locate anyone who may be able to help us with our search. Our hearts broke, as we would watch the parents of the children in Atlanta on national news, screaming to the world for help that someone was murdering our children. About 1 year after Randy's disappearance I met a wonderful lady named Kim Brookes, a social worker, who worked with abused inner city children. From that day forward I had a friend who helped me and other parents to get our message out about our children. She organized and put on the first conference for missing children in Covington, Kentucky that brought Mitch McConnell, Mr. And Mrs. John Walsh, Robbie Calloway and other professionals from around the country. From that conference John Walsh and Robbie Calloway met and went to Washington to start the fight for missing and exploited children. There fight led to the missing children act that made a monumental step forward in this countries effort to find our children. Many other laws were soon put into act and eventually the national center for missing and exploited children came about.

Over the years we have continued our search for Randy. When Randy disappeared our only other son Tyran was age 13. Randy's disappearance completely devastated his life. 10 years after Randy's disappearance, Tyran committed suicide by jumping of the bridge into the river where he thought his brother had drowned. It took 4 months to recover Tyran's body from the river. Five years after Tyran's death a man by the name of Donald Leroy Evans, who was a convicted serial killer that confessed that he had picked Randy up on the night of August 11, 1980. He took him to a state park about thirty miles from our house and shot Randy in the head with a .45 caliber pistol and buried him in the park.

He had been convicted of murdering a 10-year-old girl from Mississippi, but claimed he had killed more than 40 people across the United States. He drew a map of the park, which was 800 acres, and showed approximately where he thought he had buried Randy. With the help of the police and my friend Kim Brookes, Donald Evans was flown to the park where he claimed he had killed Randy. Donald had insisted that he wanted national media to be present when he arrived at the park. When he got to the park, there was no media, so Donald refused to get out of the van and show the police where he supposedly killed and buried our son. Many letters, phone calls and even money were sent to Donald, in an effort to find out any information he may have. Through all of this I still don't know if my son was murdered, if he drowned in the river, or if he is walking around somewhere with amnesia. If Donald did murder Randy, I will never know because Donald was murdered in prison on death row in January of 1999.

When Randy disappeared his brother Tyran and I made a pledge to one another that whoever died first, the other would make sure that the search for Randy continued and he would never be forgotten. It is only by the grace of God, that my husband and I have been able to survive and keep Randy's memory alive. My husband and I would like to help other family's who have experienced the same tragedies we have. If we would have had the support that is available today the cases surrounding our sons Randy and Tyran may have turned out differently.

After almost thirty one years Randy is still missing. It is people like you'll hear that have helped Parents of Missing and Exploited Children like Ms. Betty, Ms. Cathy and myself to have HOPE that we will find our children again and be able to united with them again.

I would like to thank you'll from the depths of my heart for all you have done to keep the memory of my Randy alive and give me the HOPE to continue on!

May GOD Bless you for all you have done for all of us.

Thank you, LOVE ,

Wanda Cotton

Mother of Randy Sellers and Tyran Cotton

Vinnyette Teague

By her Mother, Kathy Teague



VINYETTE MY CHILD MY PRECIOUS CHILD THE SOUL THAT EXISTS THROUGH ME,
I CAN FEEL YOU OUT THERE I CAN PICTURE YOUR SMILE AS I WONDER WHERE YOU MAY BE.

MY HOPES MY DREAMS YOU'RE IN EVERYTHING EACH BREATH I BREATHE IS FOR YOU,
I FEEL YOUR LOVE SUBSTAINING ME YOUR HEART SO PURE AND SO TRUE.

AS I VISION YOUR FACE JOY FILL THE SPACE RESERVED AS A PLACE JUST FOR YOU,
NO WORDS CAN DESCRIBE NOR TIME CAN ERASE, SO I PRAY AND KEEP FAITH JUST FOR YOU.

VINYETTE MY CHILD MY BEAUTIFUL CHILD MY DAUGHTER, MY FLESH, MY BLOOD



UNTIL GOD SENDS YOU HOME I WILL CONTINUE TO SMILE MOST OF ALL

I'LL CONTINUE MY LOVE!!!!

WRITTEN BY: DONNIE D. JOHNSON



Words to share Heidi Allen with you - written by her sister, Lisa M. Buske

Thank you all for your willingness, dedication and compassion - training and riding the 100 or so miles in honor of CNY's missing children. Also, thank you for volunteering in any other capacity you may have done. The words "thank you" can't convey the level of appreciation my family or myself have for each of you. Thank you for helping New York State not to forget my sister or the other missing children of Central New York.

My sister's name is Heidi Allen and she was abducted from the D & W Convenience store in New Haven, New York on April 3rd, 1994. She was working alone on Easter Sunday so her co-workers could spend the morning home with their kids. Although my sister was old enough to work, she was still just a kid. My sister was eighteen years-old when she was kidnapped, legally still a child.

Heidi was a hard-working and determined young lady. We both attended a private high school and the school closed after Heidi's junior year. Instead of returning to public school, Heidi applied to Onondaga Community College for early admissions. Not only was she accepted a year early but completed her senior year high school credits simultaneously while earning her first year's college credits. Both of which were done with honors. She never gave up and welcomed the challenge. Heidi was attending Onondaga Community College and was scheduled to graduate in May of 94 with her associates degree. She didn't reach this goal because she was abducted the month before graduation. She was ready to conquer the world as all eighteen years should be as they prepare for graduation until tragedy struck.

It has been just over fourteen years since my younger sister disappeared. She is still missing and her case is still open - with our local Sheriff's department still meeting on a monthly basis to discuss her case.

My sister's case had a lot of firsts - 1st time the New Haven Volunteer Fire Hall was used as a "Command Post" for the purpose of searching for a kidnapped person. 1st kidnapping in Oswego County to have a professional search and rescue coordinator brought in - Rick Benningfield who at the time was working with the "Heidi Search Center, Inc." out of San Antonio Texas. <http://www.heidisearchcenter.com/aboutus.html> For the 1st time in Oswego County and New York State history, the 27th Brigade commanded by Col. Robert Schunurr arrived with two-hundred troops to assist with the search. Also joining them was "the Civil Air Patrol, volunteer reservists and active-duty soldiers from the 10th mountain division from Fort Drum, New York." (Kinne - Post Standard) Next came two or three search and rescue dog teams - making the search for my sister, the largest in Oswego County if not New York - not sure about the state-wide though.

We are into the 14th year of not knowing where Heidi is - two people were arrested and tried for the kidnapping of my sister. One of which was acquitted and the other is serving a 25 to life sentence. Even with one individual in jail - we don't know where Heidi is - why she was abducted - or if we will ever see her again.

At the beginning of this season in my life I didn't see much hope. Yet, because of outreaches like the "CNY Ride for Missing Children" and organizations like the "Missing and Exploited Children" and the "Center for Hope" - hope and encouragement has been renewed and instilled in not only my life but anyone affected by the loss of a loved one due to an abduction.

I would like to thank God for the void He and only He has filled in my life and for the wisdom, talents and compassion He has blessed each of you with. It is people like you that make a difference.

You are a chosen and special group of individuals. You are riding for our loved ones, for the family and you are riding for some one even more important - the child protected from abduction. With each stop you make during this ride - you are a witness to your love and dedication to keeping all children and people safe from harm.

You are reminding the children, teachers and families on this ride of the children still missing. While sharing our missing loved ones with the people you meet during this ride, you are also sharing knowledge. With knowledge, comes power... Thank you for educating the children of CNY to be aware of strangers while also empowering and encouraging the family with your dedication and endurance.

As you ride your bicycle for the multitude of missing children in CNY, you are saving a children's lives. You may never know how many lives you have saved from a predator, yet through your willingness to ride your bicycle - each of you has made a difference.

Thank you on behalf of myself, my family and especially on behalf of my sister; Heidi Allen - still missing after 14 years. Thank you for riding...you are making a difference in the lives of CNY's children and their families.

The Ride for Missing Children CNY 2012 will be held on the third Friday of May - Friday, May 18, 2012. Please mark your calendars to join us again.

The Ride CNY and the Mohawk Valley office of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC-NY/Mohawk Valley) have a great deal of work to do over the next year. We need more Volunteers to serve on our expanding list of Committees to make this Ride a successful and meaningful event and to support our education programs . We will be sending out messages outlining how you can help us by joining our Ride or Center Committees. The work that we do in preparing for 2012 has already begun and we need your help.

Thank you again to everyone for such a wonderful day. We now take another step to continue the awareness, and to continue our mission: "to make our children safer one child at a time".

Frank

Frank R Williams, chairman

Kate

Kate Alcott, Vice President

Tony

Tony Artessa, Vice President

John

John Nabors, Vice President

Kathleen

Kathleen Rutishauser, Vice President

Steering Committee

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children-New York/Mohawk Valley

The Ride for Missing Children CNY