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the national coalition for **CHILDREN'S JUSTICE**

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MEDIA ALERT

On Sunday, April 17, CBS Sunday Morning News (9:00-10:30) will air a story (which NCCJ provided to them), on the struggle of an Iowa Family whose son has been missing since September, 1982 - Johnny Gosch was criminally abducted while serving newspapers. The story will give you some idea of the pain and frustration our system (NATIONAL CHILD VICTIM NETWORK) can save parents who find themselves in a similar situation in the future.

The parents, Mr. & Mrs. John Gosch drove from their home in Des Moines, Iowa to Chicago last December to preview NCCJ's system in the Rolling Meadows Hewlett Packard office. Their reaction:

"We have a missing child since September 5, 1982. There is a need for a network system such as the National Coalition for Children's Justice provides...it should have been in operation yesterday!"

John & Noreen Gosch

Because there was no system in place - they drove back home the same day to continue the search for their twelve year boy. He is still missing.



Noreen and John Gosch sit in front of a poster of their son, Johnny, 13, who has been missing since Sept. 5, 1982. The Gosches request that anyone with information about the boy call them at (515) 225-7456.

A story of sadness and survival

By SHERRY RICCHIARDI

Register Staff Writer
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Along with the stylishly curly hair, the fashionable clothing and the cool facade of a mannequin, Noreen Gosch wears the scars of a life marked by bad fortune.

But nothing, she says — not the death of her father when she was a teen-ager nor being widowed with two babies at age 21 — prepared her for the tragedy that has shadowed the Gosch family since Sept. 5, 1982.

On that warm Sunday morning, the Gosches' 12-year-old son, Johnny, vanished without a trace when he went 'out to deliver newspapers in a peaceful West Des Moines neighborhood where violence exists mainly on TV.

Dozens of stories have been written about the boy's disappearance, about the mystery man seen talking with him that morning, about the man's two-tone blue car and about Johnny's beloved dog, Gretchen, who returned home without him.

But little is known about the private side of the Gosch family — about their life before Johnny's disappearance, about how they have survived in the six

months they say "have seemed like six years to us."

Members of the family — Noreen, John, son Joe, 18, a Valley High School senior, and daughter Chris, 19, a college junior — have withstood moments of sadness that overwhelm them without warning.

"Everyone cries at times. . . . One day I was going to cook a Chinese meal, and I took out my Chinese cookbook and opened the inside cover. Johnny bought it for me for Christmas the year before, and there was a little note from him inside. Those things are like a double-edged sword. . . . It can cut you right in two," Noreen Gosch said.

She and her husband have been ripped by public criticism that arises in part, they believe, from the fact that "we don't cry or look sad enough in public," she said, her blue eyes flashing with anger.

It has been Noreen Gosch who has taken the brunt of

GOSCH

Please turn to Page 5A.

Gosch family has been showered

GOSCH

Continued from Page One

the criticism. "My husband travels a lot for his job, so I'm the one people reach," she said. "I've been criticized for speaking out too much. I've actually been criticized for taking the time to look good.

"People would rather see me arrive in public without makeup, with my hair matted and wearing a bathrobe. People don't feel I care enough for Johnny because I don't break down and cry A lot of people would like to see us become emotional wrecks and babble like idiots on TV, but we have resolved to maintain our dignity.

"I won't melt like a marshmallow. What good would that do Johnny?"

Said John Gosch: "We get up every day trying to figure out what we can do today to get a step closer. ... There's no book that tells the parents of missing children how to react."

"No. 1 Mom"

Noreen Gosch's eyes match the aqua blue jogging suit she had donned after work. She poured hot apple cider; the telephone rang every 30 minutes or so; a clock chimed in the background; Gretchen, Johnny's dachshund, lay quietly under the table that was laden with Johnny Gosch posters, newspaper clippings and the ever-present tape recorder that records every call.

Around her neck, she wears a gold heart that says, "No. 1 Mom." She said it was a Mother's Day gift from Johnny last year.

"We still get up in the morning expecting to see Johnny coming down the hall. ... At first it's like a dream, then it hits us all over again," she said.

"When I can't sleep at night, I walk over and sit in Johnny's room, not to be maudlin or shed buckets of tears but to remind myself what we have to

Noreen and John were married, John adopted the two oldest children. Johnny is their natural son, and they have a birth certificate from St. Luke's Hospital in Davenport to prove it.

The Gosches say Johnny's bank account was untouched and his wallet was found in his room the day he vanished.

John and Noreen Gosch, both 39, met in the Quad-Cities and married in 1967. Noreen said John is one of 14 children — "He never had anything given to him, either." Like Noreen, John also grew up on a farm, near Auburn in western Iowa. He attended barber school and served a hitch in the Marine Corps.

For five years they lived in Eldridge, where Noreen babysat and sold bakery goods to earn extra cash. A job transfer took them to Minnesota; they arrived in the Des Moines area eight years ago.

John is sales director for Carpenter Sales Inc., a Bondurant fertilizer company. Noreen works as a district secretary for Economics Laboratory Inc. and teaches yoga classes in West Des Moines.

The Gosches cite statistics showing that 90 percent of the parents of missing children divorce because of the strain on the marriage, or end up on alcohol or drugs to ease the pain.

"We have decided to come out of this stronger," John Gosch said during an interview in the front room of their modern, two-story home at 1004 Forty-fifth St. in West Des Moines.

No Christmas Tree

On Christmas Day last year, they painted a bedroom and washed drapes "to keep from going nuts," Noreen Gosch said. "We didn't put up a tree. The children said, 'Without Johnny we don't want Christmas.' We spent a silent day."

It has only been in the past few



Johnny Gosch
Missing six months

weeks that the family has been able to sit down together and eat at the table Johnny used to share with them.

"It was too painful to see the empty chair," Noreen Gosch said. "It was the marking of six months that did it. I just decided that we had to make some type of adjustment ... return to some type of routine. It was not good for any of us, for our health or our emotional balance."

The Gosches described their last evening with Johnny, who stood 5 feet, 7 inches tall and weighed 145 pounds the day he disappeared.

It was a happy occasion, they remember, because daughter Chris brought a boyfriend to dinner. The Gosches cooked a roast on the outdoor

do." The conversation gradually shifts around to her and her life before her marriage to John Gosch 15 years ago. She grew up on a farm near Grand Mound in eastern Iowa, the oldest of six children. She was only 15 when her father died after a lingering illness. She called it the turning point in her life.

"I had to buckle down and take responsibility at an early age. I dropped out of school for a while, but I did my school work at home and still maintained an A average. I started working when I was 15 and graduated from high school on time."

In high school, Noreen Gosch was a cheerleader and acted in school plays. Married at 19, she worked as a secretary. Her first husband died of cancer two years later, leaving her with a 10-month-old son, Joseph, and 2-year-old daughter, Christine.

Not long after her husband's death, a tornado hit the young widow's mobile home near Grand Mound and destroyed all her belongings.

She suffered broken ribs and cuts on her face from flying glass. The children were unhurt, but "all we had was what we wore on our backs."

Bizarre Rumors Fly

It was her earlier marriage, Noreen Gosch said, that led to a bizarre rumor that her first husband was alive and had returned to take Johnny. The Gosches produced his death certificate to show he died in 1965.

Another rumor circulated saying that Johnny was adopted and used his paper route money to run away to be with his real parents. Soon after

with kindness — and cruelty

grill. Johnny was excited about starting junior high school, and the kids sat around talking about that, his parents recall. He talked about joining the computer club and working his way into theater productions some day.

After dinner, the young people went outside to roughhouse with a football and basketball. Noreen Gosch called them in later for a piece of homemade apple pie.

Around 10:15 p.m., she said, Johnny announced: "I have to go to bed. I have to get the papers out in the morning."

"He came over and kissed me. I can still see his little face as he rounded the corner and yelled goodnight one more time to us. It was the last time we saw him."

Outing Was Planned

The family had planned a picnic and a day of water skiing and boating at Saylorville Lake that Sunday. Johnny had invited his best friend along.

It was common for John Gosch to accompany his son on the Sunday paper route to help with the heavier load, but he didn't on that morning last September.

One of the Gosches' recurring complaints about West Des Moines police and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation arises from the probers' insistence from the beginning that Johnny might be a runaway. John Gosch said that just a week ago, a police officer asked him if Johnny might have cashed in a life insurance policy and used the money to leave home.

"Johnny didn't even know he had one," Gosch said.

Noreen Gosch said her son saved money from his paper route to buy the things he wanted, such as a motor scooter and a pair of Adidas shoes to wear to school.

"Johnny bought those shoes a week

before he disappeared. If our son would have entertained thoughts of running away, he would have taken those shoes. . . . They meant the world to him," she said.

The red, white and blue Adidas shoes, along with a pair of Johnny's favorite blue jeans, a shirt and underwear, are packed in a suitcase that sits on his bed along with unopened Christmas and birthday gifts. The suitcase was packed in October so the Gosches could leave on a moment's notice should their son be found.

The Gosches theorize that Johnny was abducted by two men. "It was slick and highly organized. I think they plan their abductions — indicators point to that," said Noreen Gosch. "We've done our homework. We know what's going on in other parts of the country."

The Gosches feel they would know intuitively if their son were dead. They have a "gut feeling," they say, that he will be found alive.

So far, 82 psychics have called, written or shown up at the Gosches' door. Often, their suggestions border on the ridiculous. One urged the Gosches to obtain the names of every person who sat in the second row, section C of Sec Taylor Stadium during the entire baseball season last year because one of them had news of Johnny.

There have been the false leads and, even now, there are crank calls. Recently, a youngster attempting to imitate Johnny's voice begged, "Help me, mom. Help me." The call was traced to a West Des Moines phone booth. Some callers scream, "Johnny's dead" into the phone and hang up laughing.

"Why so much cruelty to our family? Why so much cruelty about a little boy who never did anything to anybody?" Noreen Gosch asked.

"This is the test of a lifetime. We

have experienced the finest and the worst of human nature. Some people have been cruel right to our face."

The Gosches say that some of their friends have "come through and been true blue." But others have faded from their lives because "it's too painful for them and too uncomfortable. . . . After a certain period of time, they begin to ignore you," Noreen Gosch said. "But the kindness we've had expressed to us far outweighs the cruelties."

They talk proudly of the 150 volunteers who work with Help Find Johnny Gosch Inc. throughout the state to help raise money for private investigators and of the 90,000 posters with Johnny's picture on them that are circulating worldwide.

Won't Give Up

The Gosches have become outspoken advocates of children's rights. They often speak to groups of parents to create greater awareness of the dangers children face. They spend their time away from work on efforts to find their son — they help volunteers arrange fund-raising dances and candy sales. They mail out posters and write speeches.

"A lot of people say they're bored with the Johnny Gosch story. Well, I am completely sick of the circumstance, but we don't have a choice. We have to see it through to the end," Noreen Gosch said.

"Some days, we'd rather not get out of bed — it's too painful. But Johnny doesn't have the luxury of quitting. If his parents give up, what's left?"

Comment

TODAY'S COMM

Troubled adults are pushed beyond their ability to contain abnormal sex drives, leaving children as prime targets.



Kenneth Wooden, this page, below.

KENNETH WOODEN

Perils Stalk Children Beyond Atlanta

Atlanta and murdered children are now synonymous. Daily, the national media bring the viewer and reader an update on the youthful tragedy in the southern metropolis.

But Atlanta is not unique: Across the nation, children, like debris washed upon the shores of the great sexual revolution of the '70s and '80s, are being sexually assaulted, murdered, forgotten. Some are as young as six weeks, others are 3, or 8 or 15. Unfortunately, the press, law enforcement officials and the general public are unaware of just how common the problem is in every part of the country, and many children die singly and obscurely, their silent deaths lost to the American conscience.

Sometimes the murders occur in groups, like the four pre-teens in Oakland, Mich., or the three "double initial" murders in Rochester, N.Y. Periodically, they splash across the front pages in groups of 20 or 30, as in the Dean Allen Corll/John Gacy killings in Houston and Chicago, respectively - and now in Atlanta. But for the most part, they die alone in the backwoods and back bedrooms of America. Others, from wealthy, middle-class or blue collar/welfare neighborhoods, at first reported missing, are later identified by grieving parents.

4,000 Murdered

A leading pediatrician from the Medical School at Iowa University estimates that more than 4,000 children are murdered annually in the United States but that many of them go unreported. The 1979 FBI Uniform Crime Report listed 2,773 homicides involving children. Some of these murders were reported in the

newspapers, others were not.

But citizens tend to set up human defenses that protect them from having to accept the violent death of a child. Nor can they easily accept the fact that the killer is rarely a stranger. Almost without exception, he or she is either family or friend, one who can quickly and sufficiently win the child's confidence, so as to carry out the crime promptly.

The death of a child from illness or accident is most sorrowful: The death of a child from sexual molestation is almost too horrible to accept. That, perhaps, is the main reason we allow the murders to continue singly or in multiples without focusing on them as a whole. It is better to forget such horror than to face the dark side of the mirror - ourselves. We know only too well the members of our own families whose human frailties have given way to some form of sexual contact with children. But because it is ugly, frightening and threatening to our own lives, we avoid looking at the mirror. We don't want to face, much less expose, our husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers, sons, nephews and close friends who have crossed through to the dark side.

In Salem, Oregon, a district attorney reinforced this "dark side of the mirror" theory when he spoke of his community. From a 1,000-page investigative document on the 1979 murder of 11-year-old Stephanie Newsom, he admitted that "... most of the information is quite sensitive and documents police inquiries into local residents who are sex offenders... There's some pretty ugly stuff in there."

In Atlanta, a top task force member told me, "I never suspected how unsafe our children are in this city - they don't have a ghost of a chance." A 1977 report in Marion County, Indiana, allowed that "there are 400 to

500 known sex offenders living in the county and repeating sex crimes daily... but there is no way we can possibly keep track of the whereabouts of all of (them)..."

Increasingly, throughout American culture, moral standards are being relaxed. Heightened sexual fervor and tempo in movies and television is commonplace and the sensual hype in advertising has become normal and expected. The Freudian message emitting from all forms of media today, wittingly or unwittingly directs its appeal to personalities whose varied sexual interests include sadomasochism and pederasty. More and more troubled and weak-willed adults are pushed beyond their ability to contain abnormal sex drives, leaving children as prime targets for molestation and murder. Senseless murder after senseless murder, the threads of untold horror for our young weave a tapestry of national disgrace.

Take a Stand

Michigan State Police Captain Robert Robertson, who headed an investigation of a series of child murders, summed up the problem:

"This is something we won't be able to handle until the public becomes aware of it and angered by it. Nothing has ever been accomplished until society took a stand - the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement - somebody has to get outraged."

Who then will become outraged? Will it be the family members who grieve for their young dead? Will it be those communities and individuals who have looked into the dark side of their mirrors? Will it be a coalition of youth groups, religious and civic organizations under a common banner? One thing is certain: The banner awaits a carrier and its first national breeze of concern.

Kenneth Wooden is author of "The Children of Jonestown" and other works.



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

May 20, 1981

Mr. Kenneth Wooden
Director
The National Coalition for
Children's Justice
240 Nassau Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

Dear Mr. Wooden:

Thank you for your May 6 letter with regard to the disturbing frequency with which children are victimized by violent crime.

As I communicated to you earlier, having had a number of contacts over the years with the Princeton community, I am aware of the critically important mission and the accomplishments of the National Coalition for Children's Justice, and am pleased that you have worked productively in the past with Department of Justice officials.

Please feel free to communicate to me your views on children's justice issues, and I would also invite you to raise these issues with Jeffrey Harris, Executive Director of the Attorney General's Task Force on Violent Crime, Department of Justice. It is important that the Task Force members are also made aware of your experience in this area.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

F. Henry Habicht
Special Assistant to the
Attorney General

NOTE

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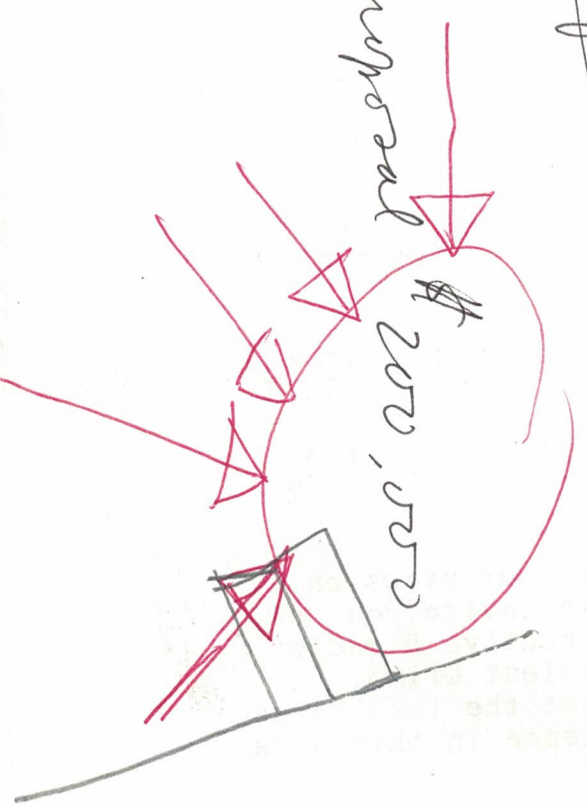
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