

KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARC KLAAS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

A MESSAGE FROM MARC

During the past six years, the case of Polly Klaas has opened the floodgates of public attention and concern regarding the safety of our children. Its effects have reached far beyond the establishment and efforts of the KlaasKids Foundation. New innovations, technologies, and ways of thinking come to the forefront as we take action for the sake of future generations. And, as we welcome the new millennium, the KlaasKids Foundation continues to influence and create innovative programs designed to benefit America's children.

Our most recent innovation is the introduction of the "Do-It-Yourself DNA Sampling Kit." This came about as a result of a question I asked scientists during a tour of the California DNA Laboratory in Berkeley, California. Now, parents can collect their children's DNA, at no cost, using household items.

According to recently released FBI statistics, crime today is at a 25-year low. As welcome as this good news is, there is more to the story. In 1994, the US Department of Justice announced that approximately 234,000 offenders convicted of rape or sexual assault were under the care, custody, or control of state and federal corrections agencies. A recently concluded KlaasKids Foundation survey found that there are now 318,112 sex offenders registered in the United States,

representing a 36% increase in only five years. So, please, don't take your eyes off your children just yet.

The Foundation's National Child Safety Awareness or Print-A-Thon Program visited more than 125 communities throughout the United States in 1999. During September and October, we implemented 50 events throughout Northern California in conjunction with Safeway Stores, Inc., and General Mills, Inc. This program alone allowed the Foundation to fingerprint and photograph more than 10,000 children at no cost to families. As is our practice, we did not database children's personal or privacy information. Our goal continues to be proactive, providing families with tools that they can use to avoid victimization.

Thanks to a generous grant from Mr. Keith Eckhardt of Allied Video in Englewood, Colorado, the Foundation has been distributing our safety video *Missing: What To Do If Your Child Disappears...* for free at our Print-A-Thon events. We are looking for

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MAKING BEANIE BABIES FOR POLLY

By Joe Klaas

Mollie Nagel, impresario of California's Sonoma County Queen Bee Beanie Baby and Bear Show, and Morgantown, Pennsylvania's Sally Winey, world-famous designer of the Beanie Babies that shook the world, have joined forces in the most imaginative way yet to raise funds for the KlaasKids Foundation.

Designing a New Beanie Bear

A Santa Rosa, California, mother of 8-year-old Annie and 10-year-old James, Mollie came up with the idea and tried it out on Sally.

"Why don't you make your most valuable Beanie Baby to date a signed, limited-edition Winey Bear for Polly?" Mollie suggested. "I'll offer them to collectors at Sally Winey events and give half the proceeds to the KlaasKids Foundation."

"A great idea," Sally agreed. "I'll make them in Polly's favorite color. They'll be cuddly little Polly Beanie Bears of fine purple mohair."

The Beanie Baby designer who created the most popular dolls in the world and her companion in charity have hearts as warm as those of their new Polly Beanie Bears.

Their inspiration quickly produced five different designs of Teddy Bears for Polly from Sally's renowned Winey Bear Collection. Each Polly Bear's left paw is signed by the designer who started the Beanie Baby rage that overtook the 1990s. Attached to each of the 500 limited edition Polly Bears is a small certificate of authenticity bearing the name "Polly"

and an identification number followed by the signature of "Sally A. Winey."

Supporting the KlaasKids Effort

"We sell each bear for the usual \$150 price of an original Winey Bear, but half of it goes to support the fine work for children being done by the KlaasKids Foundation," Mollie said. "I have two children of my own, and it's so comforting to know that the



The new Polly Beanie Bear

Foundation is making America safer for our kids."

Teddy Bear magazine's October 1999 edition features 128 pages of pictures and articles about Bears and BB Bean Bags. The cover story is titled, "Sally Winey: From Artist to Manufacturer." It's obvious that the Beanie Baby designer who created the most popular dolls in the world and her companion in charity have hearts as warm as those of their new Polly Beanie Bears.

Where to Buy Your Polly Bear

Looking for great Christmas presents for your family and friends? Polly Beanie Bears may be obtained from Mollie at her Queen Bee Distributing Company by calling (707) 792-1610. For Northern California collectors, Queen Bee presents A Beanie Baby and Bear Show every first and third Thursday at the Sun Plaza Resort in Rohnert Park, California.

Half of the \$150 purchase price (\$75) for each Sally Winey Polly Beanie Bear is deductible as a charitable contribution to the KlaasKids Foundation. ■

© 1999 by the KlaasKids Foundation. The *Klaas Action Review* is published quarterly for Foundation members. Dedicated to the memory of Polly Klaas, the Foundation's purpose is to inform parents, children, and communities about how to prevent crimes against children through personal action and support of legislation. Editorial: Freeman Communications, Berkeley, CA. Design Concept: Blackburn Design, Petaluma, CA. Printing: Marin Stat, San Rafael, CA.

IMPROVING REPORTING ON MISSING PERSONS

By Congressman Rick A. Lazio (R-NY)

Every day, thousands of families of missing persons throughout the country must suffer through the agony of not knowing whether a loved one is still alive. Each day these families have to endure this pain can seem like an eternity—and in some cases it is unnecessary. Even though the information we may need to find missing persons is gathered by law enforcement organizations, that information is difficult to access.

In early 1999, I introduced a bill called “Jennifer’s Law” that addresses this problem. The legislation is named after Jennifer Wilmer, a native of Long Island, New York, who has been missing since 1993. Jennifer left home at age 21 to move to California in an effort to follow her dreams of making it on her own. One day she left her house in California to pick up an airline ticket to go back to visit her parents, but she never made it to the travel agency.

Jennifer’s Law, just recently passed by both houses of Congress and waiting to be signed into law, provides \$2 million in grant money to the States to improve the reporting of unidentified and missing persons. By entering complete files on unidentified victims through the utilization of existing technology, states can cross-reference missing persons files and help solve cold cases.

The Problem

In 1975, the Federal Bureau of Investigations created the Missing Persons File within its National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. Eight years later, they added an Unidentified Persons File to the NCIC. Currently, local law enforcement agencies enter informa-

tion into the Missing Persons File, but are not required to cross-check cases with the Unidentified Persons File. Without this complete information, the possible connection between missing child and unidentified child is never made.

The technology to do this has been available for 16 years, and all law enforcement officials have access to it. However, the sad fact is that the system remains completely underutilized due to manpower restrictions and a lack of oversight.

As it currently stands, if a deceased person is found and cannot be identified, there is no way to make a possible match to a missing person. Therefore, the families of missing persons might never know if their loved one is alive or deceased. These families deserve the sense of closure that comes with knowing that their child is no longer among the missing.

The Answer: Jennifer’s Law

Jennifer’s Law requires state law enforcement to report information on unidentified bodies they find to the NCIC. The bill also provides funding for the associated costs, making available the necessary resources to utilize the current technology of the FBI and enable the cross-referencing of the two databases.

Thousands of people like Jennifer are reported missing every year. The families of these missing people are still awaiting news about their missing loved ones. Without the full use of the cross-referencing system available with the NCIC, these families may never have closure. Enactment of this legislation will assist in bringing that closure to parents of missing

children so that other families will not have to endure the additional pain the Wilmers have suffered.

When signed into law, Jennifer’s Law will help ease the suffering of families coping with the anguish of unanswered questions. It will reassure them that everything possible is being done to reunite them with loved ones. The funding for this project is a small price to pay compared to the cost of not knowing that someone you love has been found. And without this funding, thousands of families will be deprived of a chance for closure, a chance to move on at last. ■

MARC’S MESSAGE

Cont. from page 1

corporate sponsors to underwrite the cost of future distributions so that we can continue to offer this comprehensive package to families for free.

For more information on the “Do It Yourself DNA Sampling Kit,” sex offender registration by state, or to obtain the video, please check out the KlaasKids Foundation website at www.klaaskids.org.

As we say farewell to the twentieth century, we can all take pride in knowing that we have made strides in securing the rights of America’s children. During this holiday season, we ask you to join in our ongoing campaign through your generous tax-deductible donation. I also urge you to consider joining as a Foundation member by filling out the *Klaas Action Review* subscription form on the last page of this newsletter.

May the season bless you, and keep your children safe. ■

CHILD PERSONAL SAFETY: WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW

By Kenneth Wooden, Child Lures School Program

I became familiar with the alarming scope of crimes against children as an investigative reporter for the major networks in the 1970s and '80s. As a parent I was appalled, and that compelled me to launch a national prevention effort. I went directly to those who prey on children to learn how they disarm unsuspecting youngsters.

In interviews conducted at prisons across the country, I learned that in most cases of abuse and abduction, children are not physically overpowered or threatened with a weapon. Instead, they are deceived or caught off-guard by what I call "lures." My 20 years of research identified 16 different lures used individually or in various combinations, by predators both known and unknown to the child. My background as an educator inspired me to use this invaluable information to create the Child Lures School Program, which has been adopted by more than 1,000 school systems across the country.

When it comes to every parent's worst nightmare—the criminal abduction of a child—the FBI estimates that 200–300 cases occur across America each year. Roughly half are murdered. In over 50% of these cases, the initial

In most cases, children are not physically overpowered or threatened with a weapon. Instead, they are deceived or caught off-guard by any of 16 kinds of "lures."

contact site is within a mile of the victim's home; 74% are girls, and 50% are 12 or older.

What is not figured into these statistics are the untold number of children who are abducted, often for short periods of time, abused, and then let go. In fact, most crimes against children go unknown to the general public, many taking place in the homes of neighbors, friends, and

co-workers—by people we would never suspect.

Communities are beginning to declare war on these criminals, mainly through the passage of notification laws (i.e., Megan's Law). While undoubtedly helpful, I fear these laws may give communities a false sense of security for a variety of reasons.

First, the responsibility of registering rests on the criminal himself. Not surprisingly, many offenders take their chances and don't bother to register. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for those who abuse children to have dozens of victims before being caught for the first time. Many others are arrested but never convicted. Some are convicted, but "plea down" to escape being placed on a list of registered offenders. Keep in mind that most crimes against children are never even reported. Most disturbing of all: A reported 20–30% of these crimes are now perpetrated by other children, many victims of abuse themselves.

Empowering Our Children

So, how do we best protect our children? The key is knowledge. Even very young children know that some things can be dangerous—moving cars, hot kitchen stoves, electrical outlets, swimming pools, and so forth. Just as we routinely instill in our children a healthy awareness of potentially dangerous things, so too can we teach them to avoid potentially dangerous people and situations.

Some well-meaning individuals feel it is unreasonable and even harmful to "make children responsible for their own safety." I find that line of thinking unrealistic, since we simply cannot be with our children every minute of every day. In fact, the growing-up process necessitates that we help our children become increasingly independent and teach them how to make decisions for themselves. That includes being able to size up people and situations.

Understandably, protecting kids from abuse and criminal abduction is a difficult topic for parents to face. Recently, a mother called me and confessed to being absolutely terrified by the idea of someone abusing her child or, even worse, kidnapping him. How could she broach the subject when she could barely even let herself think about such a violation of innocence?

I suggested she compare it to installing a smoke detector in her house or having a fire escape plan with her family. The thought of a fire is terrifying, but the chance of it actually happening is remote. However, being prepared for the possibility is essential—and helps put one's mind at ease. Above all else, keep things in perspective: Most

people are kind, safe, and dedicated to the well-being of children. Statistically speaking, most youngsters will pass through the garden of childhood untouched by abuse.

Children are eager to learn personal safety strategies, for they cater to basic survival instincts. Keep in mind that most youngsters today are well aware that crimes can and do happen to children. You might be surprised how well informed your kids already are from watching the news, reading the paper or just talking to classmates. I've personally taught Child Lures Prevention strategies to over 250,000 children who assure me that they felt empowered rather than scared.

Child Lures Prevention Strategies

Some basic personal safety strategies follow, excerpted from the Child Lures School Program's *Parent Guide*:

- Avoid scare tactics. Explain that most adults would never do anything to harm a child; those who do are the exception.
- Teach children basic sex education, i.e., the areas of the body covered by a bathing suit are private.
- Establish that inappropriate touches are against the law. This gives children confidence to assert themselves with those who try to abuse them.
- Allow children to express affection on their own terms. Do not prod them to "Give Uncle Jimmy a kiss" or "Give Aunt Susan a hug."
- Develop strong communication skills with your children. Explain the importance of reporting attempted or actual abuse to you or another trusted adult. Stress that there should be no secrets from you, especially those involving grown-ups.
- Volunteer to chaperone extracurricular activities, especially those involving overnight trips.
- Do not rely entirely on "The Buddy System." While it may make children (and parents) feel safer, its effectiveness is questionable. In many documented cases, sisters, brothers and playmates have been victims of terrible crimes when together.
- Teach children that, should they become lost or separated from you, it's generally a good rule to seek out a woman for assistance (preferably a mom or someone working behind a counter at a place of business).
- Make sure that even very young children know their full name, complete address and phone number (including area code). Practice dialing a 911 operator with them.
- Youngsters should never get in a car or go with someone without your direct permission. Children should be

extra cautious if they are promised a gift or money or asked to help look for a lost puppy or other pet. They should refuse, get to safety, and report the incident immediately.

- Above all, encourage children to recognize, trust and follow their instincts—and listen to your own instincts. If a situation or person makes you or your child uneasy, believe in your feelings and act on them.

Taking Charge of the Problem

Child exploitation has mushroomed into a social epidemic that robs far too many youngsters of their full human potential. All too often, it contributes to learning disabilities, school drop out, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, and even violent crime. The recent surge in violent behavior among young people, both in and out of school, highlights the need to address these problems at their root.

When I was growing up in the 1940s and '50s, polio was the disease most feared by children and parents alike. Thanks to Dr. Jonas Salk and his vaccine, polio is now preventable. Think of child lures prevention as a vaccine as well. Teaching these prevention measures to kids should be as routine as taking them for their scheduled immunization shots.

Preventing crimes against children is so basic to their well being and educational success that it must be incorporated into every school's permanent health curriculum. Parents, schools, and Child Lures Prevention: Together we can make child exploitation as uncommon tomorrow as polio is today!

Contact Us!

For more information on the Child Lures Community Plan, visit www.childlures.org or write to:
 Child Lures Prevention
 5166 Shelburne Road
 Shelburne, Vermont 05482

Ken Wooden is a leading child safety expert whose work on behalf of children spans three decades. A published author with a background in education, Wooden is creator of the Child Lures School Program and its supplement, the Child Lures Parent Guide. Both are used by over 1,000 school systems nationwide. ■

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

The KlaasKids Foundation relies entirely on the gifts of its thousands of wonderful supporters. It would be impossible to list each one of you due to lack of space; in this donor roster, we recognize those who have made a special effort, giving a gift of \$50 or more. However, gifts of any size are always welcome. Many thanks for your wonderful generosity on behalf of America's children.

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Members may also receive:

- Information on starting a National Community Empowerment program.
- Safety information for your children.
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