

# The NEWS & NEWS

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## Search ends at Salem

Father and son reunited after 14-month search

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Brooke Ninemire Staff Writer



Jay Wells smiles with relief as he holds his 7-year-old son Jayson for the first time in over a year.  
Photo by Jessica Goff

**"I've been out in the middle of nowhere," were the first words Jay Wells had heard him speak since April 2006.** Those words came from his 7-year-old son Jayson, as the boy jumped from a police vehicle into his father's arms outside the Fulton County Sheriff's Office June 7. Before last Thursday evening, Jayson has been listed on every missing child registry throughout the country; he was found living with his non-custodial mother in a residence along Sycamore Road, just passed the Salem city limits.

After their divorce was finalized in December 2005, Jay Wells and his ex-wife Barbara C. Wells shared joint custody of then 6-year-old Jayson. April 16, 2006, Barbara Wells picked up Jayson for a weekend visit and fled their home in Groves, Texas. No one on Jay's side of the family had seen or heard from Jayson or Barbara since.

"We've missed a birthday, Christmas – all the holidays," said Jay's mother Barbara Ann Wells. "And he's my only grandchild to share these (holidays) with." "When (Jayson) went missing, I couldn't believe something like this had happened to me," Jay said. "And now – now I can't believe this day has finally come."

After Jayson and his mother disappeared, Jay began searching, placing his son on Amber Alert and registering with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the State of Texas, he and his ex-wife's home state of Kentucky and his ex-father-in-law's home state, Tennessee.

"After that, Mark (Miller) got involved. That's when things really got going," Barbara Ann said. Miller is the founder of the American Association for Lost Children, a non-profit, Christian-based organization that helps families find missing children free of charge.

"Instead of being a resource center, I go out there and physically look for the children and research the abductor," Miller said. "Years ago I decided I really wanted to do something that helped people. This is where the Lord guided me. It's been a blessing ever since."

Miller joined Jay in his search for his son in October 2006, he said. After months of rigorous investigation, Miller said he found a lead to the case that led him to Ash Flat. June 4 Miller, Jay and Barbara Ann traveled to Ash Flat and began to follow Barbara Wells' father James Nutt, who often traveled from Tennessee to visit a friend that resides in Ash Flat.

"Wednesday (June 6) was the key for us. We followed (Barbara Wells') father (Nutt) to the abductor," Miller said. Once the team visually confirmed Jayson and Barbara Wells' whereabouts, they contacted authorities, he said. Barbara Wells' was arrested sometime between 5 and 6 p.m., and Jayson was taken to the Fulton County DHS office for questioning and a physical examination.

After the trip to the DHS office, it was time for the reunion. Salem Police Chief Albert Rook transported the child to the Fulton County Sheriff's Department. Rook said Jayson didn't know he was going to see his father. "(Jayson) got excited when he saw his dad," he said. There was a combination of rolling laughter and tears, as Jayson was being passed between his father and grandmother.



"Oh, I haven't had this in so long," Jay said hugging his son. Barbara Ann commented how much he had grown as Jayson gave her a "big squeeze hug." "Well, I am like 57 pounds now," Jayson said as everyone laughed.

As Jayson spoke with his father and grandmother, it was learned that his mother kept him secluded by home schooling the child and had changed his name. "Well, my name used to be Jayson Wells, but now it's Robert Nathanael Nutt," he said. "And mama's is Barbara Catherine Nutt, now."

Not everyone is happy about the reunion. According to James Nutt, his daughter ran with Jayson for the child's own safety. He said Barbara took Jayson to protect him from a family member, she alleges sexually abused the child. "I know they were just doing their job, but they've been duped," James Nutt said of the authorities who arrested Barbara. "But we will get through this. We have strong faith." He said his daughter was a good mother who was only trying to protect her son. "It's never been about keeping the two of them (Jayson and his father) apart – it's protecting him from being traumatized any more," he said. Despite this, authorities said Jayson is safe, and there has never been any evidence to back up his mother's claims.

Barbara Wells is charged with two felonies: interference with child custody, from Jefferson County, Texas and a federal charge of unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. She is currently being held in the IZARD County Detention Center where she is awaiting extradition to Texas.



As for Jayson, he said he was fine living with his mother in the remote residence, but he was definitely ready to be home and go fishing with his dad. Jayson knew it had been a long time since he had seen his father, but he was shocked to learn that over a year had passed. "But, that's right – because I remember last summer I was a tick magnet out there," he said, wide-eyed.

**American Association For Lost Children, Inc.**  
**1-800-375-5683**