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Catherine Shipp and her daughter, Calida, 6. The child had been abducted by her father.

Kidnapping nightmare over for Corona parent

By LANITA PACE-HINTON
The Press-Enterprise

Sleep used to come hard for Catherine Chavez Shipp.

Almost every night for seven months, the Corona woman would awaken from her sleep in a panic wondering if her child was all right.

Catherine Shipp's estranged husband, Charles Shipp, had abducted their 6-year-old daughter, Calida, and fled the state.

She reported the abduction to several organizations and agencies, including the Riverside County District Attorney's Office. On the average, the district attorney's office receives at least one parental-abduction complaint each day.

But time passed and Calida remained missing.

"I'd have these nightmares and I'd wake up screaming. I'd be wondering where she was or if she was sick," said the 35-year-old mother.

Catherine Shipp said she rests much easier since the American Association for Lost Children reunited her with her daughter April 21.

"These people have done more for me than anyone else," she said of Mark Miller and Elizabeth Whittington, founders of the Houston-based child search organization.

During the past two years, Miller and

Whittington have been credited with recovering 19 other children who, like Calida, were abducted by one of their parents.

Unlike many other child search organizations that act as clearinghouses for information on lost and missing children, the American Association for Lost Children conducts actual searches.

"We get out there and we do the dirty work," said Miller. "We locate them and then notify the authorities of where they are."

Miller and Whittington tracked Calida and her father to Kitsap County in Washington, west of Seattle. Calida, a petite blonde, had lost weight and missed a year of school.

Kitsap County Sheriff's investigators picked up the girl at her father's residence and held her until her mother arrived. Charles Shipp, who was wanted on a warrant for child abduction, turned himself in two days later. He was released without bail after promising to appear in court.

Catherine and Charles Shipp separated in January 1988 and Calida stayed with her father. Catherine Shipp said her former husband earned more money than she. She believed the girl would be better

(See ABDUCT, Page B-5)

Abduct . . .

(From Page B-1)

provided for if the father had custody.

Charles Shipp moved to central California with the girl and sometimes would not allow her to speak or visit with her mother, according to Catherine. Catherine later petitioned for and was awarded custody of Calida in September 1988.

When she went to get her daughter in Oakhurst, about 50 miles east of Modesto, they were gone.

"I called everybody," she said. She contacted the Riverside County District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation, the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center, The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and Find the Children, a Los Angeles-based organization.

After about six months, Find the Children referred her to

Miller and Whittington. They found Calida within five weeks. The break in the case came after Whittington searched Charles Shipp's mother's garbage and found some shredded pieces of carbon paper that had a Washington address on it.

Bruce Rouse, a senior district attorney investigator assigned to Calida's case, said he did not have a clue to the little girl's whereabouts.

"I wasn't even close," he said. Rouse said he and another investigator handled 272 cases of parental abduction last year. While nearly all of the cases are solved, the time in which they are resolved can range anywhere from a couple of months to several years.

"These organizations are helpful. A lot of times they furnish us with the leads that break the case," said Rouse.

"We realize that the police are dealing with drugs, gangs and murderers. Missing children are

pretty low on the totem pole," said Whittington.

Whittington, 35, a self-described would-be writer, and Miller, 30, a former stock broker, said they became involved in searching for missing children after they discovered that most missing children organizations do not physically look for the children.

"I felt that something more had to be done than putting up posters or putting their pictures on milk cartons," said Miller.

Miller, who started the organization in July 1987 while contemplating a career change, said he wanted to do something for others.

With the help of donations

from individuals and Southwest Airlines, Miller and Whittington have located children in California, Florida, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, West Virginia and Arkansas, at no expense to the parents who enlist their help.

"We are not in it for the money. I know that's hard to believe in this world full of con artists and people only concerned with 'me.'"

For Catherine Shipp, the nightmare is over. But for the thousands of parents of missing children, it continues.

"My heart goes out to every one of those parents. It's an awful thing for anyone to go through," said Shipp.

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