

Hope, Encouragement, and Inspiration



Unsung Heroes

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Foreword by Zig Ziglar



Mark Miller of the
American Association for Lost Children

HAS ANYONE SEEN THIS CHILD?

MARK MILLER

ONCE UPON A TIME, Mark Miller had it made.

He was a successful stockbroker. He drove a fancy car. He had a closet full of clothes, he owned his own home, and his wallet was fat with credit cards.

Mark Miller had done lots of things. He'd worked for a computer dating service. He'd played the stock market. Recently, he'd added to his business interests by buying a Houston convenience store. He had good looks and a gift of gab.

Life in the fast lane was good, except that it wasn't. Something was missing from his life. In the back of his mind, there floated that free-form kind of dissatisfaction that most Americans suffer sooner or later in this materialistic culture.

It was, in fact, the same question I used to ask myself.

It's the question: "Is this all there is?"

Like everybody else in America, Mark Miller had seen children's pictures on milk cartons and on the fliers: "Have you seen me?"

But then one day, *the* flier arrived in his mailbox.

This time, instead of tossing it, he actually looked at it. There on the page: A picture of a big-eyed, skinny-legged little girl.

Those big sad eyes pierced his heart.

And they also answered his question, is this all there is? No. Not by a long shot.

Suddenly, Mark Miller had a lot of other questions as well. He called the number on the "Have you seen me?" flier and asked the people who'd printed it, "Do you actually *look* for these kids?"

Well... no.

He started calling other child-find groups all around the country and asking them the same thing. Invariably, the answer was no.

No, we are sitting behind a desk.

No, but we sure do *hope* that child gets found.

Mark Miller said, to heck with that. And he also said to heck with his life as he knew it, as well. Goodbye, house, goodbye credit cards, goodbye flashy car, for there is more to life than this.

That was 1987. Since that time, lost children have had no better friend, nor their abductors no more implacable foe.

As of this writing, more than sixty-five children have been found.

Please take another look at that statistic and understand exactly what it represents: sixty-five parent and child reunions.

Each of them is priceless by itself. It's an end to the stark, gibbering ball of fear in the stomach that only a parent can know.

Like any other private investigator, Miller does some of the work from his office, using a computer and a telephone. The gruntwork involved in these public record and utility company trackings can take months or even years as Miller tracks down every clue.

Whatever it takes is what he'll do—shadowing relatives, pretending to be a mourner at a funeral, posing as a pizza delivery man, Miller is determined to get abductor and his child. With virtually no surveillance equipment or law enforcement experience, Mark Miller and a small band of volunteers conduct intense, all-night, undercover investigations. They are protected only by prayers.

Miller is usually actively working fifteen or so cases at any given time, and another sixty or so await his attention in his desk drawer at the little Houston house that is his headquarters.

The children he reclaims amount to only the tiniest of drops in a huge bucket, he acknowledges, because the statistics are truly scary.

Many of the children Mark finds are taken by a parent without custody of the child. Each year, more than 300,000 American children are taken in violation of custody agreements or kept at least overnight past the end of the agreed-upon visitation problem. The real problem, though, is that of those, roughly half—

163,000—are still missing after one month. While the kids are far, far safer than if they'd been abducted by a stranger or sex criminal, it is still a bad situation.

Such a relationship is in itself abusive; add to the general ongoing trauma the gritty specifics of life on the run, moving from town to town, missing school for months at a time. There's no way that anything good could come from the situation. Miller says more than 90 percent of the children he has found have been physically or sexually abused.

Miller, more than any other single operative in the country, brings many such crimes to an end.

He is not a natural-born sleuth. He has read many books to learn detective techniques and has spent many hours talking to private investigators and police detectives to learn the ropes.

Part of his high rate of success is that he takes a practical approach, only taking those cases in which the parent has legal custody of the child, the abductor is known, and a felony warrant has been issued for his arrest. The reason for this is clear and simple; it keeps him on the right side of the law. If he took a child away from a parent who was not accused of abduction, he'd be a kidnapper as well.

Since there is a warrant, he can let the police do the dirtier, dangerous work for which he does not kid himself that he's equipped. The police, for the most part, appreciate his efforts. Frequently these fugitives are wanted for other crimes as well. Police will readily tell you they are too overwhelmed with tracking the more violent crimes to take time to look for children who are the center of domestic disputes; Miller handing them these cases virtually for free gets their case loads down and their solution rates up.

Miller's only reward is happy endings—or, sometimes in the wake of so-so endings, the tenuous hope of a good beginning. Not all the cases are so joyous. As often as not, they are bittersweet.

Even the happy endings have some downsides because of the nature of the situation. The longer it persists, the greater the problems will be.

There's the case of a Dallas-area mother named Jackie Gatewood whose daughters he traced to Texarkana, Texas. Emily and Anna, then two and four, had been abducted by their father eighteen months before.

For Mark, it was the culmination of a five-month investigation, but he had to have airtight proof of the girls' whereabouts. These were not just Jackie's children, but they were her very *young* children at the time of the abduction. Would they still remember her? Would they know that she had not deserted them, but that they had been stolen?

Finally, Mark found proof and took it to police.

The police walk up to the door of a trailer that has no stairs—just a door about three feet off the ground. Almost before you can tell what's happening, they have yanked a man out and spread him on the ground to cuff him while a little girl, Emily, stands scared and confused in the doorway.

Jackie, watching as well, was crying. She was crying even more after officers described to us the scene inside.

Cans of food, open, rotting on the counters. Filthy.

Bugs crawling around. It was wintertime, and the trailer was unheated.

The youngest girl had what appeared to be burn marks on her legs.

The children were therefore very glad to see their mother, and their crying, hugging reunion served as a reminder that yes, there is some good in a very imperfect world.

Mark was joyous but exhausted; he'd been going nonstop for days. "A lot of people don't realize what we go through—the days and days of stakeouts. We've put in a lot of hours in these situations, and we don't get much sleep. In the last eight days I've been averaging maybe four hours."

Then he looks at Jackie Gatewood reunited with her little ones and says, "But at times like this, it's worth it."

Mark Miller performs these services for free, because there are many parents like Jackie Gatewood who cannot pay a high fee to a professional investigator to find a missing child.

His motivation is obvious. Nothing warms his heart like one of those mother-and-child reunions.

Whatever the cause, it's results that count.

There is no one else who can match Mark Miller's success record of bringing parents and their abducted children back together. With no professional training and no law enforcement experience, Mark Miller somehow continues to baffle legal experts and private investigators all over the country with all that he has accomplished with just stubborn determination.