

A-2—THE SUN-TELEGRAM

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The Wise murder case — one year later . . .

(Continued from A-1)

But the second polygraph test, along with all the background information compiled about him, convinced police Wise was innocent.

Despite the amount of time that has passed and the lack of solid leads in the case, Wise doesn't believe his children are dead.

"I still have a feeling — people put a lot of validity in feelings —," he said, "that deep down my kids are alive — somewhere — hopefully they are."

"I've accepted the fact they're not here. But sometime in my life, we will know one way or the other what's happened to them."

Wise moved in October to be near both his and his wife's families in Northern California. He was given a humanitarian transfer to Travis Air Force Base where he works as an aircraft mechanics crew chief.

He needed to get away, he said, but he also misses San Bernardino because he had lived there five years, and "most of my friends I made as an adult were there (and) I had my first house there."

After his two-year stint at Travis, he said he doesn't know what he is going to do.

He says he wonders continually about the reason behind the murder-kidnap and who did it.

"You wouldn't believe how many times I've thought back," he said, to answer those questions.

"Usually I got along well with people. In my life, I cannot say I've done anything to anybody that would cause this. But it must have been something my wife or I did."

He believes the act was deliberate and that the children were taken for a reason.

"I can't see it being done on a fluke," he said. "If they were crazy enough to stab my wife to death, then they were crazy enough to do it to my kids."

The kids might have been taken, he said, because they saw their mother murdered, and at least Jondell might have been able to identify whoever did it.

Or the murderer might not have intended to kill Beverly Wise at all, but did so because, "she was the type who would have put up a fight," Wise said.

"As I knew her, she would have done anything to save her kids and herself," Wise said. "She would have died trying to save the kids."

His wife was his greatest loss.

"In the beginning, it was my wife. I got married to be with her. We had planned on living our lives together."

"I miss my kids, but I feel I'm going to get them back. The real loss was my wife because I buried her. I know I'll never get her back."

Sometimes crying sessions help him relieve his innermost feelings.

"A hundred times I've looked at Stacey and I see Jondell and Tiffany. There are nights I stay up and cry wishing they were back. What else can I do?"

When unable to cope with the pain, he has talked to psychologists at the base.

They have helped, he said, because they can be objective and impartial to his problem.

As for finding comfort and solace from his grief, Wise said "that's tough to answer. I'm not sure I do."

"If I do," he said, "it's with my daughter. Being with her gives me some kind of comfort."

Stacey, now 20 months old, "has been the catalyst of my whole existence. I don't know where I'd be if it hadn't been for her."

Of Claude's family, perhaps the biggest burden of pain has fallen on the shoulders of his mother, Donna Howlett.

She had known Beverly since she was a child, and as an adult was one of her best friends. Beverly had lived with the Howletts for about six months while Claude was in the service and while she was being divorced from her first husband.

That marriage only lasted a few months, but Beverly became pregnant.

When Jondell was born Howlett said it was like the child was her own



Kidnapped children Brandi Jondell Summers, left, at age 5, and Tiffani Wise, age 2.



granddaughter because she and Beverly were so close.

And, as Claude's mother, Howlett also shares her son's pain over his loss.

"I can't kiss Claude's hurt away like when he was a child," Howlett said during a recent interview at Claude's home.

The last year has been like "living in a world of unreal," she said.

"If Claude and his family had been killed in an automobile accident, I wouldn't have been as upset," Howlett said. "That's an acceptable way to die in this society. But murder and kidnapping is something you read about that happens to other people or in a story book."

She said it was nine months before she was able to concentrate on anything besides what had happened.

"I really wasn't coping at all. I got worse as time went on. It was a total loss feeling. It's like being in the middle of the ocean all alone and there is nothing to get hold of. It's a desperate feeling."

It got to where there was no one to talk to, she said, "and you need to or you go insane." So she finally sought help at a center in Santa Clara where she could talk to people about her problems.

Her family has been very supportive, Howlett said, "but with the family, you just exchange pain, you don't get rid of it."

Like Claude, she has only recently begun to socialize again. She couldn't bear to be around people because they would always ask about what had happened.

"If you're upset and crying, you don't want an audience," she said.

She and her son don't talk much about what happened, because, she said, "if he's having an up day, I don't want to bring him down."

There are days when she believes both children are alive and well, but on others she thinks they're dead because they've been gone so long and all leads have fizzled.

"My terror is that Jondell couldn't survive long because of her illness," Howlett said. "I couldn't stand thinking about her suffering. I thought if she had died, I could grieve her death instead of thinking of her being mistreated. My gut level feeling is that Tiffani is alive."

What's hardest, she said, is dealing with the uncertainty.

"I have a prayer — and I make it every day — that we'll have them back alive or dead, just so we'd know. If an officer came to my door right now and told me they were found dead, I'd go to pieces, but tomorrow I'd start living again."

Finding who did it would take no pressure off me. It's the police's job to find the killer. I'm not worried about that. Whoever he is will pay someday."

To console herself, "late at night when I can't push the thoughts away, I write to them (Jondell and Tiffani). Sometimes it's sad, funny or happy."

She also writes letters to Stacey describing Beverly and her relationship with Claude.

"I want her mother to be something to her," Howlett said, wiping away some tears. "I want her to know about her mother, so she'll know something about herself. I want to get it on paper. I want to make her real and do it now while it's all fresh."

Another consolation is that Howlett believes if the children are alive, they are probably being treated well.

And until something definite is known one way or other about the children's fate, Howlett is not going to give up.

"I've already gone through in my mind what I'd do year by year if this continues," she said.

Last year she spent hours wrangling with various media sources just trying to get information on the air and in print. Some sources did finally do stories. But she believes that had the story been given national exposure from the beginning, the children would have been found.

Because a year has passed, she has again contacted newspapers and radio and television stations in hopes that they will do an update.

The killer might feel he's safe now, she said, or maybe he gave the children to someone who doesn't

know they have been kidnapped. Jondell might see her picture in the paper, too, Howlett said.

The reward fund of \$1,000 still exists and is in a Santa Clara bank in Howlett's and her son's name. Howlett said she also checks out anything she hears that might be related to the crime.

She still keeps in touch with the police and has contacted numerous psychics, even though Claude and the police don't believe in them.

This frustrates Howlett.

"If the police had a solid lead, it would be different," she said, "and this attitude would be understandable."

Police have said any good information given by psychics was and is checked out, but that for the most part, the leads were vague and loaded with generalities.

"My mind has gone through every conceivable why and way it could have been done," Howlett said. "I keep thinking that some way, something wasn't spotted. I'm not blaming. But how could they disappear? Maybe lots of people saw it, but nobody reported it. These things give me many a sleepless night."

Like Claude, she believes Beverly was probably killed because she was trying to prevent her attacker from taking the children.

"She would fight anyone that got in the way of her children. She was extremely defensive of them. She was the ultimate in being a mother."

Miners seek group to oust Arnold Miller

GALLIPOLIS, Ohio (AP) — A group of United Mine Workers members met here Saturday to try to start a movement they hope will result in the ouster of UMW President Arnold Miller.

More than two dozen representatives from seven UMW districts attended the meeting. Don Nunley, a District 6 official and long-time opponent of Miller, said representatives came from Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and West Virginia.

"What we're attempting to do is to call a special constitutional convention and amend the process for recalling our international officers," said Nunley.

He said members of the group were disenchanted with Miller because "he sold us clear down the river and everybody in the union is going to know that before this contract expires."

As the group met, Miller lay in a Miami hospital bed in serious condition after having suffered a stroke last week.

Case will be solved, police say

By TINA MAY

SAN BERNARDINO — Information gathered in the Wise case, which one police homicide detective called "the most extensive investigation ever done in the city's history," crams three filing cabinet drawers in the police station here.

And although a year has passed with no solid leads in the murder last March 30 of Beverly Wise, 26, and the abduction of her daughters, Brandi Jondell Summers, 5, and Tiffani Wise, 2, police still believe the case will be solved.

Initially, time was the enemy because the murderer had at least a three to six hour lead before the crime was discovered. And investigators feared for the safety of the children, especially because Jondell suffered from cystic fibrosis and without the necessary medicine she would eventually die.

Now, time works to the investigation's advantage. Bliss said, because "the further from the crime we go, there's more chance that the culprit will expose himself."

son hasn't surfaced yet." There was no sign of forced entry into the home.

An 11-member task force was formed to investigate the murder, but by the end of May, two homicide detectives were assigned to it full-time because the momentum of the case had slowed down.

"I wish the department was in the position to assign two people just to work that case full-time until it's solved," Klein said. "But we had 21 murders after the Wise case that had to be investigated."

Bliss said he reviews the case often, and as recently as last week, a

witness to the possible getaway car and abductor was questioned.

"I think this is one of the few cases I've allowed myself to become emotionally involved with," he said, "because of the gravity of the crime and the kidnapping of the children."

"Just looking at the notes is depressing. But you learn to put it out of your mind."

Added Klein, "It's one of those cases you're involved with from the onset. You don't remove yourself from it. You're still consciously thinking about it no matter where you're assigned. You're still looking for the lead to it."