

# KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE KLAASKIDS FOUNDATION

A mile a minute....  
that is how fast your child can disappear



## A MESSAGE FROM MARC

The past two years have offered much opportunity for personal reflection. 2013 was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Polly's tragedy, which I *wrote* about in the last edition of the *Klaas Action Review*. The year 2014 now marks 20 years since the founding of the KlaasKids Foundation. Earlier this year I *penned* an open letter to Polly on her birthday, *reminiscing* about that experience two decades ago, and I *blogged* about being honored by the president of the United States as I battled debilitating grief. This edition continues with this theme of reflection as four other parents who lost their children have generously offered to share their stories. Only one has been reunited with their child.

Nine-year-old Michaela Garecht was kidnapped in front of witnesses from a supermarket parking lot in Hayward, California,

on November 19, 1988, and hasn't been seen since. In this issue, her mother, Sharon Murch, who continues to search for her precious daughter, shares her story with a focus on the endurance of hope and the therapeutic value of writing: How it has helped her to reconcile emotions and define her feelings.

On May 15, 1999, 12-year-old Andi Brewer was kidnapped, raped, and murdered. Three days later, Karl Roberts led the FBI to her remains. Andi's mother, Rebecca Petty, rose from the ashes of despair and recently graduated from Arkansas Tech University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. She is currently pursuing her vision of ensuring that children grow up safe by running for the Arkansas House of Representatives.

Steven Slinkard was completely unprepared when his ex-wife failed

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## MISSING MICHAELA

**M**y daughter, Michaela Joy Garecht, has been missing for more than 25 years, the victim of a witnessed stranger abduction. She was nine years old on November 19, 1988, when she and her best friend rode their scooters two blocks from home to the neighborhood market. They parked the scooters by the door while they went into the store, but when they came out one was not where they had left it. Michaela spotted it first, in the parking lot, and went to get it. As she bent over to pick it up, a man jumped out of the car parked next to it, and grabbed her from behind. Michaela screamed and her friend, Trina, turned to see the kidnapper throw Michaela into his car and take off with her.

The police were called and responded immediately. By the time I found out what had happened, they were already looking for her, and I had no doubt with the quick response time and with the eyewitness description, she would be found quickly. But she wasn't. Despite the efforts of the police, the media, and the huge and heartwarming outpouring of love and support by the community, she was not found at all.

After Michaela was kidnapped, I was tortured with thoughts of what she might be enduring right that minute. But I thought about those poor parents who had lost their children to illness or accident, and thought maybe I had it easier because in the very worst times I had that hope to carry me through, the hope that my daughter would come home safely. Every time a police car pulled up in front of my house I would run to the window, expecting to see Michaela sitting in the back seat. I would stand at my front door and gaze down the street where I'd watched her

disappear from sight, hoping to see her little blonde head bobbing towards home.

But a year passed then two years, five years, ten, 20, and now 25. I discovered that

hope is not always a brightly colored helium balloon that helps keep your spirits up. Sometimes it is dark and filled with lead, a weight that drags on you with every step you take, making you so weary you just don't think you can go on. But you do. You have to, because your child, who would now be an adult, your child who now would be just a little older than you were when you lost her, is still missing.

After a while, there is not much more that can be done, but you keep doing it anyway. For me, buoyed by the hope presented by other long-missing children having been found, I reach out to my daughter herself. I keep a blog at [www.dearmichaela.com](http://www.dearmichaela.com), in which I write to her, and even provide maps to help her get to embassies in other countries where she might be. I continue to talk to the media whenever asked,



Michaela Joy Garecht

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## MISSING MICHAELA



Sharon Murch with her daughter and friend  
(mother and sister of missing child Michalea Garecht)

not because I want to, but because I continue to hope that perhaps Michaela will see it someday, somewhere.

Not many, but some people have criticized me for not being realistic, for not recognizing that after more than 25 years the chances are Michaela is not alive. I do recognize that. But if I continue to knock myself silly looking for her and she is not alive, no harm is done to anyone but myself. On the other hand, if she is still alive, she may be suffering, and she needs me to keep looking for her. So that is what I do, and what I will continue to do, to look for my missing child, until the day she is found. ■

## A MESSAGE FROM MARC

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to return his three children after a court-ordered visitation and then disappeared in October 1995. He spent the next 18 years afraid that he might never see his kids again. Yet that did not stop him from reaching out through his own pain, doubt, and uncertainty to help others in a similar situation. Steven shares the elation he experienced just recently, on February 4, 2014, when he was finally reunited with a son he hadn't seen in almost 20 years.

Lisa Dahl's 23-year-old son, Justin Wesley Jones, was killed when he tried to break up a robbery in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district on March 27, 1994. Shortly after Justin's killer was convicted of second-degree murder, Lisa packed up her belongings and left the Bay Area for Sedona, Arizona, where she opened a restaurant. Inspired by the red rock majesty around her and Justin's indomitable spirit, Lisa

now owns and operates Sedona's award-winning Dahl & DiLuca and Cucina Rustica restaurants. Lisa has recently released a poem, published in this issue, that was penned by Justin as a gift to all of our hearts.

I thank Sharon, Rebecca, Steven, and Lisa for participating in this edition of the *Klaas Action Review*. For all of them, it would have been much easier to say no to my request for an article. Introspection is difficult at the best of times, but when done in the context of a dead or missing child, the challenge can become debilitating. However, as Sharon Murch says, the redemptive qualities of writing can also be profoundly therapeutic. Their generosity affords us a glimpse into the range of feelings and emotions that can span decades in a parent's quest for answers. ■

## A CHILD COMING HOME: SURVIVING A FAMILY ABDUCTION

**A**lmost 20 years ago, my ex-wife had our three children on a court-ordered visit. After our divorce some time before, I had been granted custody of our two sons and daughter in our hometown of Greenfield, Indiana. But I wanted them to have a normal relationship with their mother, and so off they went for a brief visit.

They never came back. They remained missing for the next 18 years.

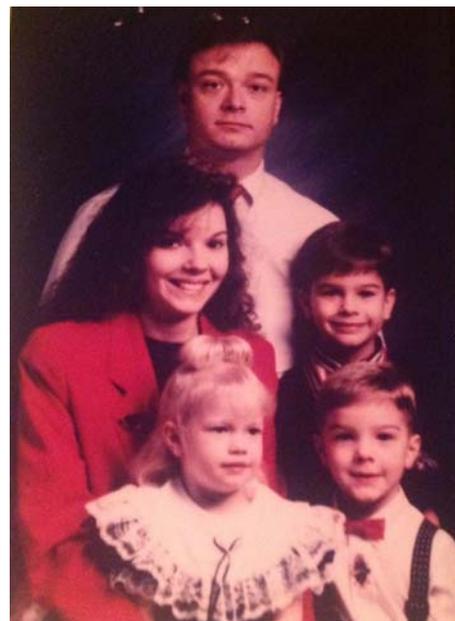
The personal impact was devastating. My desire and willingness to do anything to bring my kids home never faltered. However, my hopes of fulfilling that dream developed into a nightmare of despair. I became withdrawn and depressed as time went on – years passing without any knowledge or likelihood of finding my children. I stopped socializing with friends, while attending family functions became difficult and church no longer was a place of solace for me. I listened to my friends and family talk about their children, but I wasn't able to add anything to the conversation since my sources of inspiration were no longer part of my life.

I began to think I was being punished for something I had done and that I didn't deserve to be happy. Unfortunately, I did not seek professional counseling because I didn't believe anyone could help me without experiencing the same type of loss. My lifecycle became robotic in nature...sleep, eat, and work.

My spare time was spent surfing the Internet, placing information about my missing children on various websites. I sent flyers and letters to various organizations, schools, police stations and hospitals around the world to keep their abduction story alive. I hoped that someone, somewhere, someday would recognize a

picture of my children and advise authorities of their location.

The best thing I did was to become involved as a parent advocate with Team Hope, an association of the National Center of



The Slinkard Family

Missing and Exploited Children. I might not have taken advantage of counseling for myself, but I was able to positively impact other parents suffering a similar fate. It helped me to help them understand the process, show them how to locate resources, and give them an avenue to discuss their feelings with someone who could relate.

But my story – at least partially – ended far more happily than is the fortune of many parents of missing children. On January 27, 2014, my son Nathan, whom I had last seen when he was five years old, walked into the U.S. Consulate in Guadalajara, Mexico. He had been living in that country under an assumed name since 1995. He told them his American name and said he wanted to go home.

Nathan was able to provide the consulate agents with his original birth certificate, social security card, a picture of him with me when he was about four years old, and other important documents. He was also able to show identifying

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## A CHILD COMING HOME: SURVIVING A FAMILY ABDUCTION

body marks to confirm his identity. DNA comparison was not necessary since they were able to prove his identity without it.

Although Nathan is 18 years older and his facial features have matured from those of a little boy to a man, it only took a couple of seconds of looking at his picture to recognize him as my little brown-eyed, blond-haired boy whom I love more than life. The U.S. Consulate, National Center, FBI, and Hancock County (Indiana) Sheriff's Department coordinated their efforts to quickly bring my boy home.

Now, nearly 20 years after my children went missing, I have one of my children back in my life. I cannot begin to describe the elation and new sense of wholeness I feel. Nathan's return has provided me with a rejuvenated, renewed awareness in life's vigor. While I still don't have complete closure, as I have had no contact with my other children, I have a renewed degree of resolution. Nathan's assurance of Andrew and Sydney's safety and good health gives me great comfort and relief.

The old saying, "as one door closes, another one opens," has always held strong meaning for me. Having Nathan back and the probability of someday becoming reacquainted with Andrew and Sydney has closed a long and painful chapter of my life. But it isn't over yet. There are more aspects to closure than simply being reunified with your missing loved one. Unfortunately, I hadn't allowed myself to fully process my grief back when my children were taken from me and I didn't process it over the many years they were missing.

I now find myself working through the remaining stages of grief, as well as feelings of confusion, anger, and anxiety. I am anxious to understand the experiences my children have

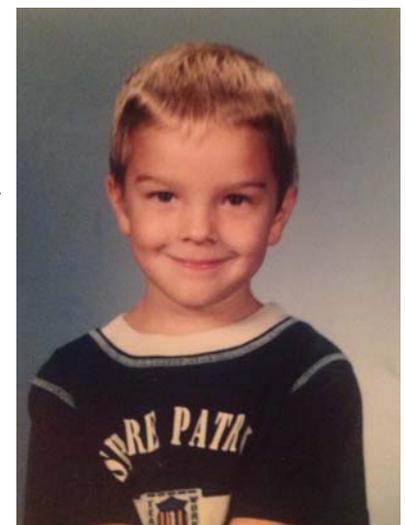
had over the years and about them accepting me, wanting to be a part of my life, and allowing me to be a part of their lives. I am angry when I think of the milestones, memories, the hurts and joys of their lives that I missed out on while they were growing up. I am confused by how my life has changed, once again, on a dime.

The life, routine, and norm I lived the past 18 years changed. I am a dad again. I no longer have to suffer the complete unknown and uncertainty about my missing children's well-being, safety, and welfare. I now can worry in the same fashion as most other parents for their adult children. My daily routine, as well as my spare time, is no longer spent in the same way as I did for so many years.

Looking back over the past two decades of my life, I am now able to better scrutinize my actions and thoughts. Of course there are some things I wish I would have done differently. No two people react to tragedy in the same way; everyone responds in their individual, unique manner. There is no right or wrong way for a parent or family to approach the fear, pain, and uncertainty of a missing child.

Although Nathan is the only one of my children who has returned home so far, I maintain hope to

be blessed with a relationship with Andrew and Sydney in the future. ■



Nathan Slinkard

## STILL STANDING: DAUGHTER'S LOSS LEADS TO NEW BEGINNINGS

I stand for a moment on the lawn of the Arkansas State Capitol, and think about what has brought me here. Briefcase in hand, I head inside, determined to set a course to help make the state a better place. Why? Because of my daughter, Andi. She is why for the past 15 years I have devoted my life to children and crime victims. Today, I will file to run for Arkansas State Representative for District 94, the House of Representatives. Me: A woman, daughter, mother, a person who would never have thought anything like this could be possible.

I gave birth to Andi three days shy of my seventeenth birthday, a baby with a baby. I never experienced true love until I laid eyes on that wonderful creation. I loved her desperately and raising her to the age of 12 was a blessing. Then on a fateful day, Andi went missing from her father's rural Arkansas home. After a three-day statewide search, authorities informed me she had been kidnapped, driven down an old logging road, brutally raped, and strangled to death by a predatory monster.

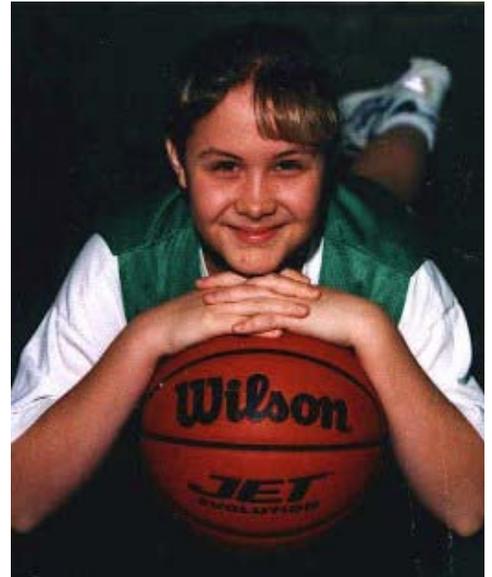
I cannot explain what it feels like to have a child who has been savagely murdered. At first, I felt like a tamed animal who had gone feral. My mind could not process the pain and suffering she must have endured in those last moments. Thoughts of my child begging for her life were pure and utter torture. For several months, I could barely breathe. Then, help came in the form of a letter from Marc Klaas from the KlaasKids Foundation. Marc offered words of strength and

encouragement, even in the midst of his own tragedy of losing Polly. Other families who had suffered a similar tragedy began to reach out to me as well, and I began

to rise up slowly from the depths of hell on earth.

Because of the tragedy of the abduction, rape, and murder of my child, unbeknownst to me I became the expert, on this horrendous type of criminal behavior. I knew I needed to learn everything I could to fight this kind of crime or my daughter's legacy would be at risk – and so would other children.

I began to speak to law enforcement, my community, parents, children, and eventually law makers. I studied everything I could on the issues, walked the halls of Capitol Hill in Washington DC, encouraged President George W. Bush to sign the Amber Alert into federal law (what an honor that was), and this past fall I graduated from Arkansas Tech University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. I have currently been



Andi Brewer

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## STILL STANDING: DAUGHTER'S LOSS LEADS TO NEW BEGINNINGS

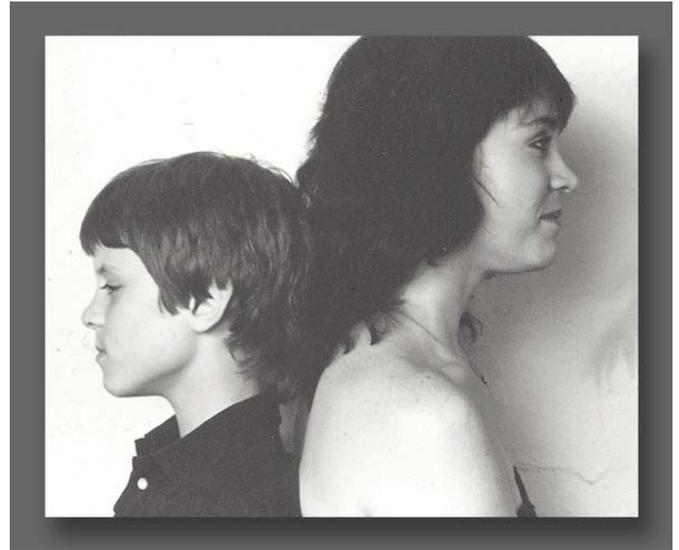
accepted into the masters of leadership and ethics program at John Brown University.

Which leads me back to standing in front of the Capitol building in Little Rock, Arkansas. My state senator, Bart Hester, impressed with my determined nature and what he calls my "pizzazz," had asked if I would be interested in running for state office. Due to term limits, my state representative was leaving an open seat in my district. After much thought, I realized that although I am not a career politician or a woman seeking the next rung on a political ladder, I was a person who had had the worst of the worst happen to her and was still standing. And that must mean something.

I also have an agenda: to help make sure that children grow up safe, that civil liberties are protected, and my state and the United State Constitutions are upheld.

These thoughts rush through my mind as I walk up the stairs in the state Capitol to sign up to run for the House of Representatives. In the end, I hope and pray that one day I will be able to hold my daughter again in the heavenly realm and kiss her sweet face and say to her, "It was all for you. I fought for you." And to feel her hug me back and say, "Thanks, Mommy," will be all I ever needed. ■

Rebecca Petty is a 2014 candidate for Arkansas State Representative District 94. Learn more about her campaign by visiting her website at [www.rebeccapetty.com](http://www.rebeccapetty.com).



### Justin Wesley Jones

To all our dear friends,

Please accept this poem of my son, Justin, as a gift into your heart.

Justin's Mom,  
Lisa Dahl

*Love is man's most advanced tool to find truth  
God did not create man to sit in fear  
and wait to be saved by God  
God, in his brilliance, created man and equipped  
man with the potential to save himself  
So long as man hunts man,  
the atrophy of man will continue  
Man's potential, through time has been in a  
continual state of self sabotage, through his  
divisional action; fear, anger and  
hatred are the roots of death  
Love is the solution  
We reap what we sow.*

Justin Wesley Jones  
8/17/70 - 3/27/94

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2. Donate your car to: <http://www.klaaskids.org/cardonate.htm>

3. MyBroker Donate: <http://mybrokerdonates.com/>

4. Checks can be made payable to KlaasKids Foundation and sent to:

KlaasKids Foundation ~ P.O. Box 925 ~ Sausalito, CA 94966

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*Thank you in advance for your contribution and support!*



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