

# KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARC KLAAS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

## A MESSAGE FROM MARC

**T**he tenth anniversary of Polly's tragedy weighed very heavily on my heart and mind in the months leading up to October 1. Knowing that this milestone would be especially difficult, the KlaasKids Foundation and the Klaas family spent months preparing to enter the second decade without Polly's presence gracing our lives.

We wanted to do something significant to extend her living legacy and after much discussion, study, and thought came up with two projects designed to fill ever-present gaps in child safety. Hopefully, experience will judge our decisions to be wise and our choices to be meaningful.

Americans of Spanish origin comprise our majority minority population. 16% of America's under-18 population and about 20% of America's missing children are of Latino descent. Well over 20 million U.S. residents speak Spanish as a primary language. Yet despite the compelling and obvious need, there has never been a comprehensive Spanish language Internet resource for child safety. Until now, that is.

Realizing that the Spanish population is ever growing in the United States the KlaasKids Foundation decided to fill this void by commissioning our webmaster Greg Hyde to translate our very popular website [www.klaaskids.org](http://www.klaaskids.org) into Spanish. In production for many months, the Spanish language

translation [www.klaaskidsespanol.org](http://www.klaaskidsespanol.org) was launched on October 1, giving America's Spanish speaking population and tens of millions of families in Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Spain direct access to some of the best and most comprehensive child safety information currently available.

Our other project, while equally as important and ambitious, is collaborative rather than original. We have followed the Texas-based Laura Recovery Center ever since their important contribution to the February 2002 recovery of the remains of kidnap victim Danielle Van Dam. Invited to assist in the search for the seven-year-old San Diego resident, Laura Recovery dispatched a team of experts to organize and train a volunteer search effort. Within three weeks volunteers recovered and secured little Danielle's body for law enforcement. Later that year Laura Recovery organized and trained volunteer searchers on behalf of 15-year-old

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## KLAASKIDS.ORG NOW SE HABLA ESPAÑOL

By Greg Hyde, Webmaster, *Klaaskids.org*

In the United States, 13.3 % of our population today is Hispanic. People of Mexican origin comprise 66.9% of the U.S. Hispanic population followed by Central and South American at 14.3%, Puerto Rican at 8.6% Cuban at 3.7% and other Hispanic groups at 6.5%. Where I live, more than half the population is Hispanic.

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*When Marc Klaas proposed a Spanish version of the Klaaskids.org website, it made every kind of sense.. I thought we had just stumbled into an opportunity..*

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So, when Marc Klaas proposed a Spanish version of the Klaaskids.org website, it made every kind of sense. I contacted some companies who specialize in language translation and was shocked at the cost of their services. One company wanted \$60,000 to translate the site and another bid \$25,000. It only cost about \$6,000 to do the entire site in English, so how could it possibly cost ten times that much in another language? I thought we had just stumbled into an opportunity.

I teach web design and video editing part time at a local adult school, so I contacted Spanish-speaking colleagues hoping that they could direct me toward qualified translators. One teaching colleague,

Miguel Osorio, a U.S. citizen from Honduras, signed on to assist me in acquiring and organizing the necessary resources to complete the assignment by our deadline: October 1, 2003, the tenth anniversary of Polly's kidnap and murder.

Once Miguel began work in early June, I was able to calculate words per hour and get a handle on the magnitude of the assignment. By July, little progress had been made and I began to worry if I was in over my head. At least I had some completed work and was able to calculate that if progress continued at the current rate the assignment would be completed sometime in 2005!

I told Miguel that he needed to hit certain milestones and that we would have to hire additional help if there were any hope of completing the translation on time. I also knew that I needed to focus on the most difficult web sections first, as I could always hire additional translators to complete shorter documents as crunch time approached. So Miguel, on summer break, began producing at the desired, accelerated rate. Finally, progress.

Then I hit gold. I was referred to the Institute of International Studies, which, with the local language institute, offered me unparalleled resources from which to secure the necessary talent to complete the project. Working through official channels, I contacted several second-

year Masters degree candidates for the project. One of the students, Sandra Sanchez, promised to help on the project and put me in contact with some of her classmates. Soon thereafter, four more students—Diana Cambron, Jennifer Beauchamp-Ankeny, Sharon Vengadesan and David Svoboda—had joined the team and offered to help us complete the project on schedule.

Miguel was cranking out the pages at a tremendous rate, but I knew that I still needed every one of the students to jump in and start working at the rate we had determined and actually follow through with their assignments. I was not disappointed. We got what we needed, on time, and in the format that was necessary to show all the diacritical markings and...

All the what? Well, as my son, Nathan Hyde, and I started dragging the text into our web applications, the special markings that make Spanish understandable—the diacriticals—the accented vowels, two dots, upside down question marks, etc. disappeared. Whoa! What is happening? With only two weeks to go we were assembling the graphics and pages ready for the text, and our beautiful Spanish translation was becoming hashed text by the time they reached the web. Yikes!

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# AMBER ALERT REALITY FALLS SHORT OF BELIEF

**B**eyondMissing, Inc., a federally funded, non-profit organization whose mission is to beat the clock and help in the recovery of missing children, recently released its survey findings on Americans' perception of the Amber Alert system. Conducted by KRC Research, the survey asked Americans if they thought there was a comprehensive Amber Alert system in place across the U.S., how quickly they thought Amber Alerts were issued, whether or not they feel it is vital to have an Amber Alert system in place, and their understanding of how the program works nationally.

## What is Amber Alert?

Amber Alert empowers law enforcement, the media, and the public to combat abduction through the

immediate distribution of critical information about a missing child. The program originated in Texas in 1996 after nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was abducted and murdered. The state of Texas organized a system that encouraged law enforcement agencies to alert the media following a confirmed child abduction.

## Is There a National System in Place?

Survey results report 63% of adults believe there is a national Amber Alert system in place. They also believe the program works much faster than the reality. Four in ten adults believe that from the time a child is abducted it typically takes an hour or less for Amber Alert to go

fully into effect.

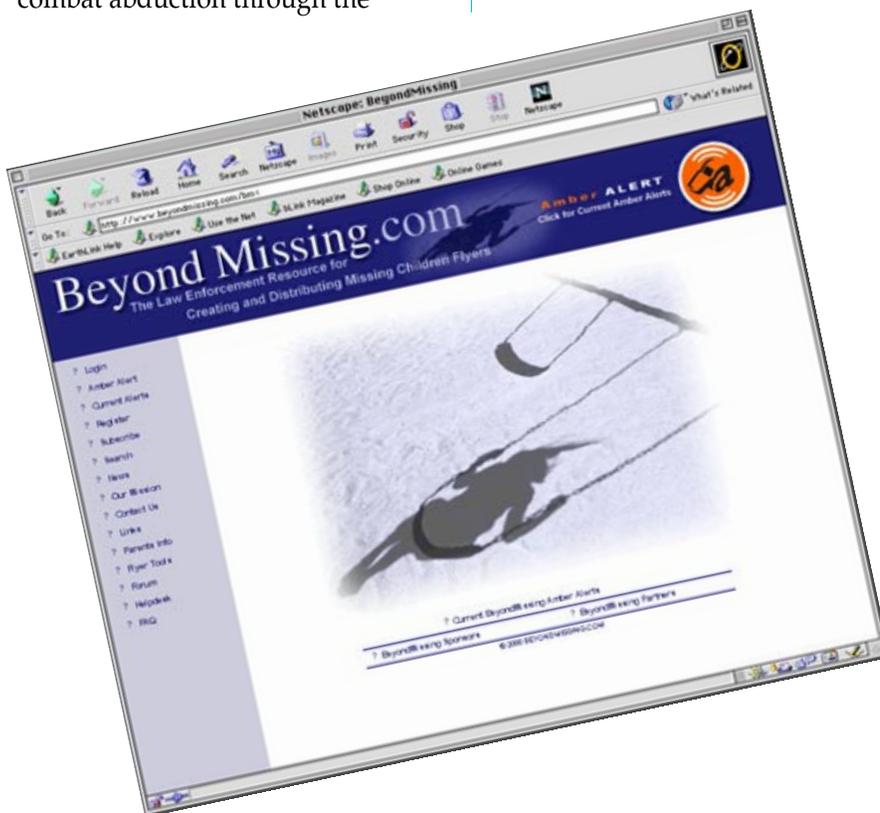
According to BeyondMissing Founder and President Marc Klaas, whose own child Polly was abducted and murdered ten years ago this month, "There is an overwhelming belief among Americans that a national Amber Alert system is vital. However the reality is that, except within California and Texas, the Amber Alert system is simply a plan stored in a binder in government offices." Added Klaas, "A kidnapper could disappear at a rate of a mile per minute without drawing undue attention. It is imperative for Amber Alerts to be distributed immediately and across state borders if there is any hope in recovering a missing child."

The reality of the Amber Alert system is that there is no comprehensive method for distributing information about missing children. Also, most Amber Alerts that are being distributed through local efforts can take up to eight hours to go into effect. Finally, if a child is kidnapped near a state border, there are few cooperative agreements between neighboring states or members of law enforcement.

## Understanding How It Works

When asked what they believe an Amber Alert is, 78% of respondents stated that it was a system enabling state and local law enforcement to share information about abducted children across state lines. 70% of Americans believed an Amber Alert was a highway sign or flash alerts to inform the public when a child is

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The Tenth Anniversary: Remembering Polly Klaas



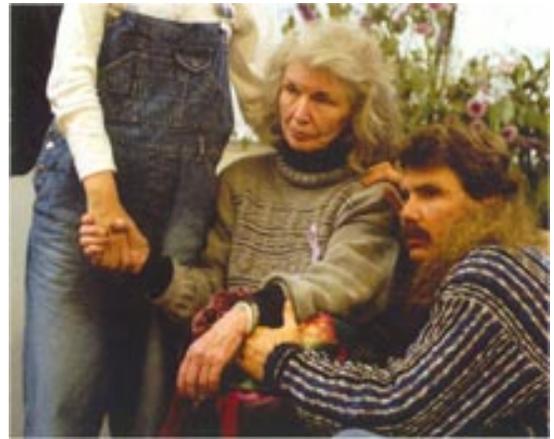


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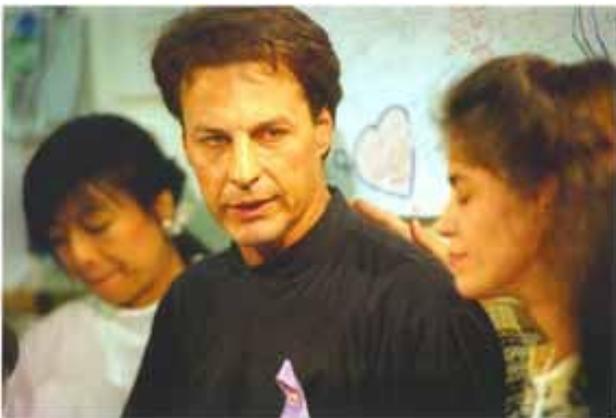


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## INTRODUCING THE LAURA RECOVERY CENTER

By Bob Smither

**T**he Laura Recovery Center, based in Texas, was established to honor the memory of 12-year-old Laura Smither, who was abducted and murdered on April 3, 1997, and to honor the 6,000 volunteers who put their own lives on hold to help search for her. After 17 days, Laura's remains were recovered from a retention pond in Pasadena, Texas. Her abductor and killer has yet to be charged.

During the search, an unusual relationship developed between the police, the community, and Laura's family: each party trusted the others to do the right thing. We call this the Triangle of Trust. Laura's family trusted that everything was being done to find Laura; the community, acting through the recovery center established to search for her, trusted that law enforcement would follow all leads and diligently investigate her abduction; and law enforcement trusted the recovery effort to not interfere with their investigation.

This cooperation kept the focus where it belonged—on Laura, the missing child.

In the aftermath of the Smither family's experience, other families with missing children began turning to them for help, and toward the end of 1997 the *Laura Recovery Center Manual—How to Search for a Missing Child* was completed. Laura's parents, Bob and Gay

Smither, founded the non-profit Laura Recovery Center Foundation to help other families with missing children and to make the manual available to other communities.

The Laura Recovery Center statement describes its mission: "To foster the Triangle of Trust among Law Enforcement, Community, and a missing child's family and thereby inspire citizens to prepare for and be able to respond immediately in addressing the needs of a missing child."

### The Response

*Flyers are always appropriate.* Flyers are useful in every missing child situation and effectively notify a child's

community that they are missing. The Center creates and posts flyers to our website at [www.LRCF.org](http://www.LRCF.org). When flyers are uploaded to the website, an e-mail is generated to everyone who has signed up on the website requesting missing child notifications.

Flyers posted to our missing person page can be e-mailed and faxed directly from the page. Families use this facility extensively, and media and law enforcement also take advantage of this unique opportunity.

*Ground Searches.* Using the procedures outlined in the *Laura Recovery Manual*, the Center organizes ground searches for missing children believed to be abducted. Although it is often difficult to determine if a child has been abducted or run away, we hope that we err on the side of the missing child, and we encourage law enforcement to follow suit. We don't decide to organize searches lightly. When a child is abducted, the child's community will want to maximize the recovery effort. We try to mobilize and focus that energy so that is used effectively to search for the missing child.

The Laura Recovery Center is not a search and rescue organization. We empower the child's own community, using emergency volunteers, to search for missing children. Typically, we provide two persons to help the community organize the search, and we train local volunteers to continue the search after we withdraw, usually after three to five days.

All information gathered during a search is provided to the jurisdictional local law enforcement agency. Even when the worst has happened, a search can provide valuable information for law enforcement. Clearly, the faster remains are recovered, the more evidence will be preserved for the purposes of prosecution and the prevention of further crimes.

### Education

The Laura Recovery Center offers abduction prevention programs to school groups and community organizations. Our program has several components, all of them focused on preventing abduction.

*SKATE (Smart Kids Are Taught Early) Program.* We educate children and adults about preventing abduction by focusing on known child lures and escape techniques that children need to be aware of. The program presents information to children in an amusing, non-threatening way. The presenter often starts the presentation with a

fishing pole and line that has a teddy bear where the bait should be. This immediately engages children and introduces them to the concept of lures. When the presenter says he is not fishing for fish, but for children, the understanding of a lure is well established. In 2002, we presented the SKATE program 240 times to over 15,000 children.

For adult-only audiences, we provide information about sexual predators in their area in addition to the key topics covered in the SKATE program.

*Distribution of Educational Materials.* We make brochures about lures used by would-be abductors, common sense rules about personal safety, and material from other organizations available to the public.

*Child ID Kits.* In 2002 we produced and distributed almost 20,000 Child ID Kits in our area and nationwide. Free upon request, the printed portions of the kit can also be downloaded from our website at [www.LRCF.org](http://www.LRCF.org). Our kit is comprehensive, providing a means for parents to consolidate information that might be critical if their child were ever missing. In addition to fingerprints, the Kit has places for photographs, hair samples, distinguishing marks, medical information, a DNA sample, and other information.

*First Responder Course.* Our First Responder Course focuses on Law Enforcement agencies. Illustrated with casework experience, we have been presenting this program to Texas law enforcement agencies for three years. Since our course has been certified by the state of Texas, officers receive in-service training hours for taking the course.

### Conclusion

The Laura Recovery Center works to respond quickly to those families and communities that are struck by a child abduction. In addition, we teach abduction prevention education programs to children and adults, as well as teaching a Texas State certified course about child abduction to law enforcement officers. The Center operates strictly on voluntary donations, and does not charge for any services.

A community has the will and the ability to put volunteers out in the field to search for their missing child. Every community can reach out to find their own missing children, and the Laura Recovery Center is here to support them. Together, everyone achieves more. ■

## BEYONDMISSING.COM SURVEY RESULTS

(continued from page 3)

abducted. 63% of respondents believe that the Amber Alert system encompasses a national network of computers that enable information exchange.

"Our survey findings reinforced what BeyondMissing has been working so hard to communicate since 2001: Our children are no safer today than when my daughter Polly was kidnapped in 1993 if we do not implement a comprehensive Amber Alert plan," said Klaas. "The legacy of an abducted child is oftentimes a policy to help improve recovery efforts. Policy and plans are ineffective without a means to implement them."

### How Can We Respond?

BeyondMissing provides a missing persons flyer creation program, funded by a federal grant and available to law enforcement agencies at no cost. By registering on [www.beyondmissing.com](http://www.beyondmissing.com), sworn police officers can create flyers of missing persons and distribute those flyers to other law enforcement agencies via fax or email. Families of missing persons can also log on to BeyondMissing to create their own flyers in both English and Spanish and post them throughout their communities.

BeyondMissing also offers an Amber Alert application to law enforcement agencies, which can be distributed to other law enforcement agencies and community organizations via fax, email and SMS text messaging. BeyondMissing's Amber Alert notification system provides critical coordination in areas served by multiple Amber Alert plans and provides primary coverage to areas not currently served.

To view a comprehensive analysis of the BeyondMissing, Inc. Amber Alert survey, log onto [www.beyondmissing.com](http://www.beyondmissing.com), select News, and then select Amber Alert Survey. ■

# REMEMBERING MY BEST FRIEND POLLY

By Oona Risling Scholl

It's difficult to talk about someone whose voice you can't remember. It's a bit like describing a rose you found in the dark. There were textures and smells and shapes, unique qualities that you discovered then—but now that it's daylight and time has passed, you can only remember that it was beautiful, and you can't explain how or why.

Ten years ago Polly was the girl I considered my best friend. We met one morning when my sister baby-sat Polly's younger sister. I was so shy I could barely say hello, but fortunately Polly was the opposite in that regard. She was confident and nice, and talked me out of my shyness right away. Within a half an hour we were on our way to the playground for a game of handball, talking about our favorite school subjects.

Everyone in my family has a memory of Polly. Even my brother, who was five years old when she died, remembers her at his birthday party. My sisters remember her spending the night; my parents remember the spontaneous improvisational dances we performed. I remember strangers asking if we were sisters, which made us laugh. She had an impressive sense of humor that I greatly admired, witty and sometimes unforgiving.

We went on trips to San Francisco and to state parks. We built Lego towns, performed impromptu theatricals, dressed up, and played Nintendo. We panned MadLibs until our ribs ached from laughing so much.

We rarely disagreed. It was she who always gave me the bigger half

of the cookie—never begrudgingly, but with a wonderfully unabashed grin. She rarely smiled: She grinned, full fledged, and often. She loved to laugh, and always had jokes at the ready.

Marc and Violet took us to Disneyland the March before Polly's death. I'd never been there before, and I was terrified by the roller coasters. Polly bet me I'd love them, and convinced me to try one. As we waited in the hour-long line, she kept telling jokes and elbowing me to keep my mind off the upcoming ride. Of course, it was great. All I can really recall of that day was being breathless with excitement the entire time, and not wanting to leave.

On that trip I learned the astonishing truth about Polly's dislike of the Beatles, a fact I could barely comprehend. "How could anyone not like the Beatles?" I thought. It was like saying you didn't like to breathe, or eat peanut butter. I remember that Marc and Violet were just as surprised, and we all nagged her to explain just *why* she didn't like them, and all she said was, "I don't *have* to. They're nothing special. Jeez." and left it at that. I was confused but ultimately in awe: After all, despite what everyone else said, she didn't care what others thought. I had no idea what that felt like.

Polly was a wonderful person, and I'd felt lucky even then to have her as a friend. She died so suddenly and in so horrible a way that for a long time I couldn't grasp the reality of it. And through the ensuing nightmare, the friend that I knew and loved became something I didn't quite recognize, a poster child for tragedy. She became a holy relic,

untouchable and unknowable. It is sad for me to see how her name is now synonymous with murder and grief. The Polly I knew was vibrant, funny, and very real.

Things have changed for my family in the wake of her death. In order to bring a kind of sanity to the household, my parents put knobs on all the windows so they only opened eight inches or so, and added motion detector lights in both yards. Night walks are rarely, if ever, taken alone. We always say "I love you" to each other before we leave or hang up the phone. We unconsciously prepare for the worst, no matter how well things are going, or how safe the world feels that day.

A few weeks after the kidnapping, Eve gave me a ring of Polly's, for me to keep until she returned. It is one of the few things I have left of her. For seven years I wore it on my left hand, the same finger, every day. Then, when I was house-sitting for a friend, I took it off to do the dishes, and couldn't find it again. I took the house apart, and then took my own house apart. Finally, I resolved to have the face of the ring tattooed on the inside of my left wrist. By this time, nearly a year had gone by.

One night as I was drifting off to sleep, my parents came into my room and woke me up by placing the ring in my palm. My father said he'd found it in a cupboard in the bathroom, just sitting there. I don't believe in God or angels, or any superior being who might watch over our respective fates. I need facts and proof. There was nothing but the

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## MESSAGE FROM MARC (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

Elizabeth Smart. Since 1997 the Laura Recovery Center, founded by the parents of murder victim Laura Smither has been America's sole source for independent no-cost search expertise.

Therefore, on October 1, after consultation with Laura Recovery and careful consideration the KlaasKids Foundation announced the opening of our East Coast headquarters, the KlaasKids Search Center, operated by our new Director of Search Operations Mr. Brad Dennis. We are pleased to have Brad on our team, having known him since he volunteered to organize the search for Polly while serving our country as a Navy SEAL in 1993. Upon invitation from the family of a missing child and confirmation that

the child is 18 years or younger, has been entered into the FBI's NCIC, and is believed to be a kidnap victim, the KlaasKids Foundation will underwrite Brad's expenses to travel to the requesting community to organize and train search volunteers. We look forward to working in concert with the Laura Recovery Center on this important and vital outreach effort to assist the families of America's missing children.

After a year of unparalleled success in which it performed far ahead of schedule and below budget estimates, our sister non-profit organization BeyondMissing, Inc. is introducing a bold new look for the Internet and releasing a survey on America's perceptions of the Amber Alert. The BeyondMissing missing child flyer creation and distribution website [www.beyondmissing.com](http://www.beyondmissing.com), available for free to America's law enforcement community, has so far contracted with the States of Texas and California, representing approximately 20% of America's under-18 population, to provide high-tech, high-speed Amber Alert services. Currently in negotiation with several other states, we anticipate a time in the not-so-distant future when America finally realizes what 63% of the population already believes to be true: a comprehensive, interconnected National Amber Alert Network that extends from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Statue of Liberty. Key survey findings are reported starting on page 3.

Time plays such tricks on the mind. I recently asked one of Polly's best friends Oona Risling-Scholl to write an article about her impressions of the tragic time and how it has

affected her life (see opposite page). Her beautiful remembrance touched my heart as I am sure it will touch yours.

On a more personal level, Violet and I believe that we have finally emerged from the abyss and are again able to appreciate life and all of the beautiful possibilities that it offers. We listen to music and appreciate the various art forms, we socialize without guilt, and we look forward to every day and the possibilities inherent therein. This does not mean that we will ever forget Polly's tragedy or ever forgive her killer. These are scars that will remain forever and that will exist as a veil of grief for all of our days. I guess it only means that by fighting back, by giving meaning to her death, and by continually building on her ever-expanding legacy, we have finally re-entered the positive flow of humankind.

So, exactly ten years to the day after Polly was kidnapped, we can reflect with grim satisfaction that her living legacy of child protection is truly on the vanguard of the child safety issue. On behalf of Violet, the entire Klaas family, and myself, thank you for your support and your consideration. ■

### MY BEST FRIEND POLLY

*(continued from page 8)*

honesty of my parents' word to go by. I would like to think it was Polly—her spirit—who brought the ring back, but I find I can't fully embrace that idea. So far, however, nothing has proved otherwise.

The last conversation I had with Polly was six hours before her kidnapping, when I called to invite her to spend the night. She said she was busy, and asked if I wanted to do something the next day. I said "Definitely," and that I would call her in the morning. She told me she missed me. "I miss you, too," I replied. When we hung up I was smiling. I knew she'd be my friend for a long, long time. ■

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Send us your email address to receive the electronic *Klaas Action Review* in your mailbox, along with alerts, mailings, and updates. Your participation is important to us! The KlaasKids Foundation can be reached at [info@klaaskids.org](mailto:info@klaaskids.org).

# KLAASKIDS.ORG NOW SE HABLA ESPAÑOL

(continued from page 2)

Nathan and I looked at what was happening and started ticking down possibilities and solutions.

This is where I am really glad my son joins me on these projects. Besides being an experienced web programmer, he grew up playing computer games, is very puzzle-oriented and considers unanticipated challenges like games to be enjoyed. I dragged my computer over to his home office and we sat next to each other studying the alternatives, the process, the areas where it was breaking down, the applications under which it broke, the sequences that worked and he came up with a solution.

I really dislike getting into these situations, but it was an adrenalin

rush when we got our solution worked out. We both worked until our fingers and hands were numb and our eyes were red and dry. Yes, you are supposed to take a break every hour, do some exercises, do some walking around, blink at least a few times, grab a caffeinated drink or two, and go at it again. Which we did—at least the caffeinated and going at it part.

All the translators rose to the occasion and completed their tasks on deadline despite the fact that they are fulltime students with burdensome scholastic workloads. So, on Wednesday, October 1, 2003 at 5:00 p.m., we were able to show Marc a Spanish web site version of the Klaaskids.org web site. The domain name is [www.klaaskidsespanol.org](http://www.klaaskidsespanol.org),

and we were able to complete the project for much less money than the projected estimates.

It has been very wonderful working with Marc over these last seven years, developing the site and providing information that I believe has helped the world be a better place. The English version, [www.klaaskids.org](http://www.klaaskids.org), gets over one million hits a month from all over the world. We get emails and calls from mothers and family members who have discovered or learned something new and useful from the site about protecting their children.

Now another portion of the world will benefit from the information we provide proving once again that by working together we can change the world. ■

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## JOIN THE FOUNDATION AND HELP FIGHT CRIME!

To join the KlaasKids Foundation, please fill out this form and return it to the address below. Your tax-deductible membership costs just \$15.00 per year, and includes an electronic subscription to the *Klaas Action Review*, with news and information, practical tips, events, and more.

Members may also receive:

- Information on starting a National Community Empowerment program.
- Safety information for your children.
- Information about how to support legislation against crime in your state.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

As a personal gift, you will also receive the Children's Identification Packet and a beautiful "Polly, We Love You" pin, in memory of our inspiration, Polly Klaas.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find my tax-deductible donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Discover Card       Visa       MasterCard

Credit card number is: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Be sure to check out our website at [www.klaaskids.org](http://www.klaaskids.org) for regular updates and information on child safety. Give us your feedback!*