

Families cope with missing relatives, unsolved mysteries

By KEITH PARADISE

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Jeanette Endley is addicted to the A&E channel unsolved mystery show “Cold Case.” She’s living a few of the plot lines.

Endley’s brother, Revell Reuben Jeeter, vanished from his Harrisonville, Fulton County, home in the summer of 2003 and hasn’t been heard from since. So when she watches a show that deals with unsolved cases, it’s with a bit of empathy.

“You watch this show and some of these cases take 15 to 20 years to solve and my husband asked, ‘My God, can we handle 20 years?’” Endley said.

Ida Carbaugh-Stevens and her daughter, Janice Zook, already have handled 20 years. It will be 20 years on Friday that Emerson “Red” Carbaugh walked into a Huntingdon County forest to do some turkey hunting and never walked out.

After two years of searching for Jeeter and almost two decades after searching for Red, the two families are simply searching for some closure.

“If you have someone in your family that dies, you feel sad, but you have some closure. We had no closure on it,” Zook said.

Carbaugh, who was 64 at the time of his disappearance, went hunting with his brother-in-law, Ralph Isset, in a field off of an old logging road on Broad Top Mountain the afternoon of Nov. 11, 1985. The two men split up when they went into the woods at 2 p.m. on a drizzly afternoon and planned to meet back at Carbaugh’s truck at a specified time. As afternoon became evening, Issett returned to the vehicle, Carbaugh did not. Issett fired three shots into the air, hoping Carbaugh would hear the gunfire and follow it. Still nothing. He then walked to get help.

It was too dark already to search that evening, but a search party was formed the next day at a nearby volunteer fire company. For almost two weeks, more than 1,800 people would search 12 square miles of woods for Carbaugh. Volunteers walked arm and arm through the rugged terrain, two different types of search dogs were brought in and even scuba divers. Even a helicopter was brought in from neighboring Letterkenny Army Depot with heat-seeking technology.

“We thought for sure the dogs would find something, but they didn’t,” Zook said. “No hat. No gun. No body.”

Carbaugh-Stevens said there were other hunters in the area that afternoon, that her husband had seen five men loading turkeys into the back of a truck near where the two men were planning to hunt. However, no one could ever prove that there was a

connection or that the men had been identified. She also said the events of that day ended her brother-in-law's days as a sportsman.

"Ralph would never go hunting again after that. He was really upset by it," Carbaugh-Stevens said.

Jeeter, 60 at the time of his disappearance, was also a hunter, living on 12 acres outside of McConnellsburg with his Jack Russell terrier, Bubba. He usually called his sister once a week, but skipped a couple of calls in July of 2003. Endley initially thought it was no big deal, thinking the weather was nice and her brother was out enjoying it. Then, she got a phone call from a Pennsylvania State Trooper.

"The thing that happened was that I was in shock, and then it was denial. I didn't want to believe it and I thought he'd come home," Endley said. "Not knowing is the hardest part."

Jeeter was reported missing by friend Gary Stoltz on July 21 when he didn't show up at Stoltz's for dinner two days prior. When police arrived at the home they found Bubba running around and no signs of forced entry. The doors and windows to his home on Buck Road were open and all four of his vehicles, including a brand new Chrysler PT Cruiser, were at the home. Police dusted for fingerprints and, much like when Carbaugh disappeared, they searched with police, neighbors, firefighters, dogs and a helicopter.

"I'll give Pennsylvania this, they did a great job in searching," Endley said.

Still, much like in Carbaugh's case, they found not one clue. One relative thought that Jeeter, who was single and retired, may have hit the lottery and run off to spend his winnings. Endley discredits the theory and points to the dog as her reason. The dog was his sole companion and the two were inseparable. In fact, the last time Jeeter was seen was at the Lincoln Way market in McConnellsburg where he bought two steaks: one for him and another for the dog.

"He was crazy about that dog. Even if he had, he would have left a note telling someone to take care of the dog," Endley said.

Endley loved living in Fulton County and said that her brother was looking to buy more property and suspects that he may have gone with the wrong person to look at land.

Carbaugh and Zook at least had a ray of hope with the one lead that popped up last year, albeit a false one.

Endley said that, although the case is still open and police are still looking for information, no new clues or evidence have turned up. She'll be making a trip from Pasadena, Md., to his home this week to winterize. She also takes care of his finances, but knows that each day that her brother is gone the chances of his return become slimmer.

"We take care of his property and have someone cut the grass just in case, for some strange reason, he comes back. But I don't think he's coming back," Endley said.

Both families have been in contact with the Doe Network and Pennsylvania Missing Persons network. The Doe Network has been instrumental in providing information on people who are missing, as well as matching up unknown bodies with missing person's reports.

In June, the network was instrumental in solving the case of Cynthia Louise Vanderbeek, a Maryland woman who was found strangled in a Fulton County forest 10 years ago. Nancy Monahan, Pennsylvania area director said that although there are no new developments in either case, that may not mean there isn't information out there.

"Maybe someone saw something 20 years ago that they just assumed the police knew; meanwhile, they didn't," Monahan said.

She did, however, concede that with each passing year the person remains missing, the chance of solving the case and getting closure diminishes.

"With each passing year witnesses and family members, let's face it, are dying," Monahan said.

Time has healed some of the wounds for Carbaugh and Zook. Emerson was declared legally dead seven years after his disappearance and the family held a memorial service.

"We have a memorial with no grave," Zook said.

An old boyfriend from high school, Orrin Stevens, got in touch with Ida more than a decade later and the two married. Stevens, a World War II veteran like Emerson, was instrumental in getting the a memorial for Carbaugh through the Veterans Association.

"With the help of God and friends and family we got through this," Zook said. "This, what happened to us, seems like something that would happen to somebody else. It's been like a nightmare for 20 years."

"I've accepted it and I'm just waiting to find out what happened to Revell," Endley said.

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