



Vanished

Star Phoenix (Jim Gibson) - Saturday May 15, 2004

Nanaimo, B.C. — On a recent spring afternoon, Joanne Young stands on the dam in Nanaimo's Colliery Dam Park. It's the same place where volunteer divers plumbed the murky waters last fall, looking for anything to help explain the whereabouts of her daughter, Lisa Marie Young.

They found nothing — just as searches by police, volunteers, family and friends, have found nothing in Nanaimo or beyond connected to her disappearance.

Lisa Young, 21, was last seen in the early morning of June 30, 2002. She had been at a downtown nightclub.

Yet the rumour mills still sputter, but no longer with the force that once spewed out live sightings one day and unearthed remains the next. Thrown into this heartbreaking mix of expectations were tawdry — and maligning — speculations of cokeheads, date-rape drugs, porn video-makers, biker gangs and foul-smelling storage lockers.

"Aliens are the only ones we haven't heard (about)," observes Nanaimo RCMP Const. Jack Eubank.

Almost two years later, it's hard to miss the reality that Young has still not been found. There are constant reminders: the posters in store and car windows, the puckering billboard with her face on the outdoor wall of the Foundry Pub and Allison Crowe's benefit CD, "Lisa's Song".

Nanaimo is not allowed to forget.

"They still talk about it," says Mayor Gary Korpan, who has yet to meet Young's distraught parents. "A lot assume they know who did it," he says, inadvertently lubricating the rumour mill.

Among those who assume they know are Joanne and her husband Don Young, their grieving faces known to many in the city. Teary strangers hug them in stores.

"We can't enjoy life the way it was," says the missing woman's mother. "Too many places have too many good memories for the one-happy family of five.

Joanne Young is 41, but feels much older.

"Right now, I'm 110," she quips, in a flash of humour that surely once bubbled much closer to the surface. Her husband, a balding academic-looking man, is 47.

Several people seem to recognize Joanne Young during her visit to Colliery Dam Park. The psychic "sensed" her being near flowing water and a blue-roofed building.

Colliery Dam loosely fits the description, says Young, a petite woman with flowing black hair, dressed in black tights and bulky sweater. Her sweater is burgundy, the same colour as the older Jaguar in which her daughter was last seen alive.

The driver of the burgundy Jaguar, a twentysomething man, is still considered "a person of interest," says Eubank. And it's on this man whom the parents now focus all their attention,

The psychic is one of about 10 clairvoyants to date who have offered help — at times, unsolicited. Most expect to be Paid. Some bring comfort such as one who says Lisa Young comes to her mother in her sleep and brushes her hair.

If nothing else, the psychics give the parents a sense of something happening in an investigation which, in their eyes, petered out with the police questioning and releasing the Jaguar driver within weeks of her disappearance. The burgundy car had been searched.

Eubank insists the case is still alive.

Next Joanne Young points out other spots in the Nanaimo and Parksville-Qualicum areas with tenuous links to her daughter's disappearance.

She suspects her husband couldn't bring himself to tag along. It's been particularly hard on he husband. Some days he'd phone needing her in his van just to make it through his courier deliveries.

After several tries last year, she is just weeks back at her old phone solicitation job.

The Youngs are poor sleepers now, particularly on those nights their daughter slips into their dreams. Don Young woke his wife after a particularly telling one, Their daughter and some boys are playing basketball, a game she loved. They tease her about her knobby knees. She comforts her father saying, "Leave it alone, Dad."

But the Youngs can't.

Theirs is not the Hollywood hope that ends with a laughing daughter waltzing back into their lives. It's much bleaker.

They now simply want to find her body.

The possibility of her death wasn't an assumption that slowly seeped into their consciousness. They "knew" the first day, according to her mother, in an earlier interview at their two-bedroom North Nanaimo apartment.

Family portraits and small Roy Henry Vickers prints line the walls. Stuffed animals that mother and daughter once collected sit on the furniture.

"We were really tight, so we knew," says her mother.

Lisa Young lived with a roommate in the neighbouring apartment. Her mother still must touch its door in memory whenever she passes. Her father was to help her move to a new apartment the day she went missing. She was poised to start a new job at a call centre after a three-month break from bartending and five years before at a McDonald's restaurant. She had planned to return to school.

And she had always been good about keeping in touch, using her cellphone, when she stayed over anywhere. Lisa Young never called that Sunday morning. Nor did she answer her cell.

The Youngs last saw their daughter about 11 p.m. the night before when she left their apartment, saying she was having a bath and then going out.

"Isn't it a little late?" her father remembers asking her. After all, she was to have a busy morning moving.

Like every father, Don Young worried about his attractive daughter ranged from the "dangerous" height of her high heels to the sobriety of her friends behind the wheel. Weeks earlier at the family's regular Sunday brunch, he sought her assurance that she was always with friends when out at night.

"I've always got someone," she told him in the exasperated manner of sons and daughters wishing their parents would finally realize they are no longer children.

But it would appear that his daughter was not always with friends the night she went missing. She had gone to the Jungle Cabaret, one of several downtown clubs on Nanaimo's Skinner Street. She had once been a well-liked employee there. It's not a club police readily associate with trouble.

It was a long weekend and downtown, says Eubank, was "a happenin' place." It was about 2 a.m. outside the club that police have their last sighting of her.

But the Youngs have pieced together sketchy version of her travels after that. In part this came from what their daughter's friends told them and what they learned second-hand from tapping into a network of cabbies and couriers.

Their version goes: She left the club with two male friends. Needing a ride, they asked a stranger if he wanted to go to a party. He did, taking them first in his burgundy Jaguar to the Harewood area and later to another party in the Nanaimo Lakes neighbourhood. Lisa Young left her friends there, telling them she was hungry. The driver offered to take her to a fast-food outlet.

Instead, he stopped at a residence leaving her in the Jaguar from which she phoned her friends back at the last party site. She was worried about the driver.

But RCMP refuse to confirm any of this. The Youngs don't even know where the driver claims he dropped off their daughter. It is not unusual for police to be vague about possible future evidence, particularly in what Eubank calls "a complex investigation."

Apparently the Youngs were a little too free with information the RCMP had once shared with them. They even received a letter, basically cutting them off from further details from the RCMP.

The parents even have photos of the parked Jaguar which Joanne Young snapped from the street outside the house where the car owner, the driver's grandparent, lives.

At one time her husband begun e-mailing the grandparent, until he warned off by the RCMP.

Eubank won't confirm this or even that Joanne Young late in July 2002 was taken by RCMP to confront the Jaguar driver, in a small room with a large photo of her daughter and a white board on which the troubling words, "Rape," "murder" and "accident" were written.

It was a brief meeting, she reports, in which she asked the driver to tell her where her daughter was. She remembers him saying something like "I can't," before pausing and then trailing off with "I'm sorry, I don't mean to disrespect your family."

What struck her about the driver was how unlike she imagined him to be.

"He doesn't look like a monster," she recalls telling the RCMP officer. Monsters, he replied, come in all shapes and sizes.

While the RCMP won't confirm any of this, those familiar with RCMP investigation techniques say Young's account is plausible.

Don Young's last encounter with the RCMP was chilly. He had warned them he was planning to update the posters. The new batch would be more than just photos and a description. The new ones would name the driver.

The RCMP asked the Youngs to reconsider.

Last January, the Youngs went ahead anyway. No one refused to display their posters. One downtown Qualicum Beach store owner burst into tears when asked to replace the old poster with the revised one.

Three months later in Qualicum, Joanne Young sees only one poster missing from the Memorial Avenue storefronts. She is pleased by this, believing keeping the awareness alive is the only way she'll ever find out what happened to her daughter.

Young refuses to accept the possibility that the driver is telling everything he knows. Her husband is not quite so adamant.

"It is possible," he says, letting this thought trail away into that infinity which is a missing daughter.

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