



MISSING!

To discover your child has been abducted is every parent's worst nightmare. Here's how one woman did everything imaginable, including flying to Korea, to get her little boy back.

BY ANNE BOKMA

FLIGHT RISKS

If you are concerned your ex may flee with your child, Carla Betker, director of Child Find Manitoba, suggests you take the following precautions.

- 1. Contact a lawyer and specify in writing custody and access, including the time the child should be returned after a visit with the other parent.**
- 2. Try to secure as much personal information about the other parent as possible, including any of the following.**
 - Social insurance, driver's licence and passport numbers
 - Credit card information and bank account numbers
 - Phone numbers and addresses for the other parent's employer
 - Vehicle make, model, year and licence plate number
 - Photo of child with other parent
 - Complete list of all relatives and friends and contact information
- 3. As long as the custody order is being respected, deal with the other parent in a civil, cooperative manner and maintain ties with the relatives, especially his or her own parents.**

"Grandparents usually know where their grandchildren are," adds Betker.
- 4. Provide the school or day care with a copy of the custody order along with a photo of the other parent and your child. "Explain who is allowed to pick your child up and when," says Betker. "If access is only on weekends, for example, the other parent shouldn't be picking your child up on Wednesday."**
- 5. Talk to your children. Teach them how to use a telephone, pay phone and e-mail, and help them memorize their name, phone number and address. "Kids who are abducted are often told the other parent doesn't want them or has died, so they're left believing there's no point in trying to find the other parent," says Betker. While she recognizes the difficulty of this conversation, reassure your children that you'll always love them.**

— Laurie Mackenzie

Jennifer and her six-year-old son, Ian*, are playing Lego on the living room floor of their home in Hamilton. Jennifer is Princess Leia to Ian's heroic Luke Skywalker. Constructing intergalactic scenarios of good versus evil out of these venerable building blocks is a regular ritual for mother and son. Ian's goal is to reach Jedi status. Jennifer, tired after a day running her environmentally friendly cleaning business, patiently goes through the motions. Then Ian surreptitiously slides Darth Vader out from behind the couch for the final battle. "Uh-oh," she stammers, playing along. "Here comes the bad guy." Ian looks at the villain in his hand for a long minute, then says, in an innocent way only a child can, "Is my daddy a bad guy?" Jennifer considers her words, then responds softly and slowly: "Your daddy is not a bad guy. He just didn't know how to be a good daddy."

It was Sept. 26, 2003, when Jennifer received a phone call from her son's day care in Hamilton, checking to see if it was OK that Ian's dad, Ed, pick him up early. Jennifer met and married Ed in South Korea, his homeland, after moving there to teach English. The couple had recently separated when the call came. Although they were sharing custody of Ian, this was Jennifer's day to pick him up, so she phoned Ed and asked what was going on. He told her he had just gotten a new job and wanted to celebrate by taking Ian to the mall to buy him something. "I never had any worries," she says. "I knew if there was any happiness in his life at all, it was because of Ian." Jennifer told Ed she'd meet him at 4 p.m. back at the apartment they once shared.

When they hadn't shown up by 5:30 p.m., Jennifer felt a knot in her stomach. She looked around the apartment and noticed things missing – the suitcases weren't in the closet and some of Ian's clothes weren't in the drawers. The clincher came when she couldn't find Fluffy, the big stuffed dog Ian slept with every night. She knew if Fluffy was gone, Ian was, too. At 6 p.m., now in a panic, she called the police.

It was too late. Ed was already on a plane with Ian, travelling the 15-hour flight back to his hometown on a small island off the coast of South Korea. He never left a note, so Jennifer imagined the worst. "I fully believed they were dead in some roadside hotel; that Ed had killed Ian and then himself." Three agonizing days later, Ed called her from Korea. He told her he was going to stay there and never wanted to see her again.

Ed and Jennifer met 14 years ago when she was 27. Jennifer had landed a job teaching English at a Korean university and Ed, who was trained as a metallurgical engineer, was one of her adult students. The two hit it off immediately and were living together on the university's campus three months later. There were signs of trouble within their first year together. Once, Ed got so angry at a perceived slight by a male friend that he ran outside and uprooted a small tree with his bare hands. Jennifer had to calm him down so he wouldn't go after the guy. But there were good times, too. "Ed was optimistic about life back then and could be fun to be with," she says. Eventually Ed's stepmother put pressure on them to get married. "I went along with it," says Jennifer. "There seemed to be no good reason not to." ▶

**According to
Government
of Canada statistics,
60,461 children were
considered missing in
Canada in 2006. While
running away was by
far the most common
reason (46,728
children), parental
abduction
accounted for 326
missing kids.**

and ask Ed what he did that day, he'd bark at her, telling her it was none of her business. She began to tiptoe around him, careful not to set him off. "I've never been a passive person, but in that situation I just changed," she says.

They separated in February 2003 and shared custody of Ian. "It was hard to leave Ian with him, but I believed he was a good father," says Jennifer. Ed begged her to come back, and after five months she relented, mostly for Ian's sake. The reunion was short lived. He'd yell at Ian and frighten him. After two months, Jennifer left for good. A few weeks later, she told Ed she was no longer going to pay the \$800 rent on the apartment. The next day Ed abducted Ian.

"I never knew if Ian would come back to Canada with me in a month, a year or in 10 years," says Jennifer, ▶

After they were married for a year, Ed began to change. He criticized Jennifer's attempts at Korean cooking and suggested she lose weight. "He'd get angry and frustrated, going a day or two without talking to me," she says. "Soon, he was staying out late with business colleagues and coming home drunk." Then, in early 2000, Jennifer became pregnant. "We decided to stay together but he told me then that he had been thinking about leaving me. I remember wishing he had left before I got pregnant."

Over the years they had enjoyed three trips to Canada, and Jennifer began to believe Ed would be more content here, without the intense pressures of the Korean business world. In early 2002, they moved to an apartment in Hamilton, where Jennifer had family, with plans to start a business offering home stays, tour guides and English lessons.

Months later, the business hadn't taken off. Ed couldn't find a job and was ashamed he couldn't support his family. He withdrew, spending hours surfing the Net and sleeping on the couch. When Jennifer would come home from her job at a local college

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recalling her thoughts in the days after her son was gone. "But I knew that at least I could go to Korea and work and live there as a kind of prisoner for however long it took to get him back. I had faith in my own strength. I felt like a mother lion. I just had to be with my child."

Jennifer set up headquarters in their old apartment and worked the phones for hours every day, contacting the RCMP, Interpol and the Canadian Consulate in Korea with the help of a private detective. Because Korea had not signed the Hague Convention, a treaty that protects children from abduction across international boundaries by ensuring their prompt return, Canadian officials could not force Ed to surrender his child. Jennifer hired a lawyer and worked with local police so that Ed would be detained at the airport if he came back. Her younger sister, Brenda,

took a leave from her job to be with her, to cook meals and provide support. Her mother kept track of all the paperwork, and her dad kept notes of everything.

During the ordeal, Jennifer's nerves frayed. She started to smoke and rarely slept; her only reprieve from the nightmare was an occasional hour of mindless television. When tears came to her eyes, she wouldn't allow them to spill over. "I shut down. When I awoke in the morning I would feel this bar of metal form in my body. My emotions would go away and I'd get working, doing whatever I had to do to get my son back."

One month after her son disappeared, realizing there was little authorities could do, Jennifer decided to take on the biggest acting role of her life. She would fly to Korea, play the suppliant wife, tell

Ed she regretted breaking up with him, try to win his trust and somehow figure out a way to get Ian home.

Before flying to the island where Ed lived, Jennifer stopped over in Seoul to meet the Canadian consul general, who offered help in getting her on a flight to Japan. "I went to Korea not knowing how long I'd have to be there," says Jennifer. "I wasn't certain whether I'd be thrown in jail by one of Ed's family members or if my husband would try to kill me." Packed in her suitcase were prescription sleeping pills, something she thought might buy her time to escape if she could sneak them into Ed's food.

When she arrived on the island on Oct. 19, Ed was there to pick her up. While he was distant and uncommunicative, his anger was muted. When they got to the house, ▶

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Ed plunked down on the floor and turned on the TV, as if this were any ordinary day. After being away from him for 23 days, Jennifer finally got to hold her son in her arms – close, tight and for a long, long time.

“Mommy, why did it take you so long to get here?” he asked.

Out of earshot of Ed, Jennifer whispered, “I didn’t know Daddy was taking you to Korea. I’ll never let this happen again.”

The three weeks that followed were surreal. The first time Jennifer took Ian out for a walk, Ed followed them. Once, she went to the village centre and managed to call the Canadian Consulate to let them know she was safe. As the days passed, Jennifer continued to play the docile wife, serving Ed food and even promising they could perhaps try to have another child. “I took all the blame and said and did all the right things.”

Then, a miracle. Ed told her he would give her another chance and she and Ian could live together in Canada again. He booked a flight home for her and Ian; she assumed he would follow a week later, after he finished up some work in the company he was running in Korea.

On Nov. 9, 21 days after she had arrived in Korea, Jennifer was taking Ian back home. As the two of them boarded the plane, Jennifer was short of breath and weak. She was terrified the whole plan would backfire. Ed called out for Ian to come back and give him another hug. “Watching them together, I knew this would be the last time he’d ever see Ian,” she says.

Twenty-four hours later, Ed called Jennifer at her parents’ place, demanding to know why the phone at their apartment wasn’t working. Jennifer could now tell him the truth: she was going to live with her parents, and he would have to go to court to win visiting rights if he wanted to see his son. Enraged, Ed screamed that he would kill her and burn down her parents’ house. Jennifer called the police, who put out an alert at the airport to detain Ed if he entered the country. They also gave Jennifer a personal alarm device that she could set off if Ed got near her.

In the days that followed, Jennifer never let Ian out of her sight. She arranged for intensive trauma therapy for herself and her son over a period of several months. A journal entry from that time captures the sense of fear that pervaded her life.

“Sometimes I wake in the middle of the night, frozen in fear. I can hear my son’s rhythmic breathing and thank God he’s beside me. Then I hear a creaking floorboard and my eyes flash to the door handle. The part of my conscious brain that knows he is still in Korea is ▶



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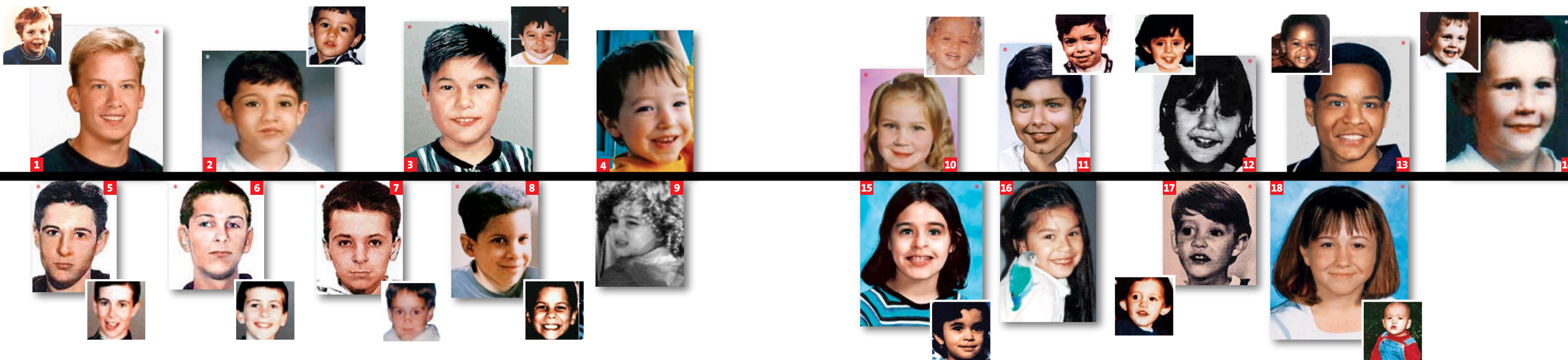
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squashed by the other part of me that is scared to death that he is here in the house with his hand on the door, ready to enter the bedroom and scoop away my son. I jump up and lock the bedroom door, then dive back into bed, wondering how long I'll be awake tonight."

Jennifer stayed with her parents for nine months before feeling safe enough to move out on her own. For a time, Ian turned into a child who always hid behind his mother's skirts. When she signed him up for a preschool program, he ran out of the room screaming after her. He would become distraught if she left him with a sitter. Jennifer found it impossible to work and lived on social assistance. It wasn't until he was four that Ian would feel comfortable with his peers once again and could bear to see his mom walk out the door. Jennifer got a part-time job as a curator and art show coordinator at a local cultural centre.

Mother and son have made great strides in the four years since the abduction, although sleeping troubles plague Jennifer to this day. With government funding, she launched EcoWorks, an environmentally friendly home-cleaning business. Two years ago, Jennifer met her boyfriend, Simon, a man who has become a father figure to Ian.

Now in Grade 2, Ian is a fun-loving, rambunctious kid who is learning to read and write and has a passion for swimming and soccer. But there are still times when he holds on to Jennifer's hand tightly, hugs her and says, "Please don't go." Many days at school he has a parting ritual that involves taking the teacher's hand at the exact moment he lets go of his mother's. He waves at Jennifer until she disappears from sight, then happily joins in with his classmates.

For a long time, Jennifer lived in fear that one of Ed's family members would come to Canada and try to find

her. Then Ed started sending Ian Christmas and birthday presents at her parents' home. Ed e-mails Jennifer every few months now, and, although these missives used to be angry and threatening, over the years they have become calm and considerate. He asks about Ian and begs to have some contact. Jennifer remains cautious. "Part of me never wants Ian to see his father again, but I have to consider Ian's feelings as a boy who may one day need to have an understanding of his father. When he grows into a man, I wonder if it's something I may have to allow."

If what she lived through has taught Jennifer anything, it's that any woman is susceptible to abuse. "I'm an assertive, independent person, but I ended up in a relationship I shouldn't have stayed in. Like a lot of women, I stayed because I thought I could make it better. But you just can't."

**Name has been changed.*

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>1. Julien Pottle
Date of birth: Jan. 31, 1987
Missing since: Jan. 17, 1990
Missing from: Saint John, N.B.</p> | <p>6. Trevor O'Brien
Date of birth: May 5, 1985
Missing since: Nov. 9, 1996
Missing from: St. John's, Nfld.</p> | <p>10. Angelica Haley Cooper
Date of birth: July 19, 1996
Missing since: April 7, 1999
Missing from: Surrey, B.C.</p> | <p>15. Nina Akbarian
Date of birth: Aug. 20, 1992
Missing since: July 9, 1996
Missing from: Toronto</p> |
| <p>2. Christopher Turgeon
Date of birth: March 14, 1996
Missing since: Dec. 18, 1999
Missing from: Squamish, B.C.</p> | <p>7. Mitchell O'Brien
Date of birth: Nov. 29, 1991
Missing since: Nov. 9, 1996
Missing from: St. John's, Nfld.</p> | <p>11. Mark St. Louis
Date of birth: June 25, 1993
Missing since: March 21, 1997
Missing from: Windsor, Ont.</p> | <p>16. Zaina Trujillo Talib
Date of birth: April 14, 1999
Missing since: Nov. 11, 2005
Missing from: Toronto</p> |
| <p>3. Alex Gonzalez
Date of birth: Sept. 18, 1988
Missing since: Aug. 21, 1991
Missing from: Toronto</p> | <p>8. Joshua Stanley-Fried
Date of birth: April 17, 1991
Missing since: Feb. 1, 1997
Missing from: Toronto</p> | <p>12. Sara Flores-Quintana
Date of birth: May 18, 1987
Missing since: Feb. 18, 1995
Missing from: Toronto</p> | <p>17. Isaac Flores-Quintana
Date of birth: Nov. 9, 1989
Missing since: Feb. 18, 1995
Missing from: Toronto</p> |
| <p>4. Valor Heath Howell
Date of birth: Sept. 7, 2000
Missing since: Dec. 1, 2004
Missing from: Grand Forks, B.C.</p> | <p>9. Faye Alsadoon
Date of birth: June 26, 1997
Missing since: July 5, 1999
Missing from: Whitby, Ont.</p> | <p>13. Jermaine Allan Mann
Date of birth: Sept. 6, 1985
Missing since: June 24, 1987
Missing from: Toronto</p> | <p>18. Sigourney (Sigi) Teresa Chisholm
Date of birth: Sept. 20, 1991
Missing since: May 17, 1993
Missing from: Toronto</p> |
| <p>5. Adam O'Brien
Date of birth: Oct. 28, 1982
Missing since: Nov. 9, 1996
Missing from: St. John's, Nfld.</p> | <p>14. Steven Gerald Surette
Date of birth: Jan. 12, 1991
Missing since: Aug. 1, 1995
Missing from: Moncton, N.B.</p> | | |

*Experts have created age-enhanced photos in some cases to give an idea of what the child may look like some years after he or she has gone missing.

PHOTOGRAPHY, COURTESY OF CHILD FIND CANADA