

Missing "shy" 8-year-old girl

July 1, 1984
Dark Canyon, San Jacinto Mtns
1984-014

By Bill Blaschko

A frantic mother told us that her frail, shy, 8-year-old daughter was missing below the Fuller Mill Creek picnic area. The Mojeske family was visiting the area for the day and their two children were having fun playing in the creek. Toni, the daughter, gradually worked her way downstream apparently without realizing what was happening. Although her parents were unaware that their child was drifting away, a number of other visitors to the area remembered seeing the cute child further and further downstream. Once Toni's parents became aware that their daughter was lost they instituted a hasty search. The sheriff was called when Mr. Mojeske and his son were unable to find Toni.

In short order our team was called out, and assembled at the road head by 8:30 PM. We were told by Mrs. Mojeske that Toni was so shy that she would probably not answer our calls. Also Toni had many severe allergies and the mother felt it quite possible that she may have succumbed to a reaction to mosquito bites. We were unable to get an accurate description of Toni's footprints, but did learn she was wearing only a light shorts outfit. With this information we sent our teams into the field. Jim Fairchild and I were assigned to follow the stream bed of the North Fork down from the point the child was last seen while other teams followed the highway and the ridges to the sides. It was just getting dark as we set out and I switched on my head lamp after only 10 minutes of hiking. The night air was warm, still and thick with mosquitoes. At first the banks of the stream were covered with footprints of every description, but as huge boulders increasingly blocked the way the prints thinned out. Jim and I scrambled around and over the boulders mostly in silence, occasionally calling out to Toni. Soon the going got so rough that we doubted that our subject could have gone that way. About this time we heard Joe Erickson reporting over the radio of a possible voice contact from his position on the highway. Jim and I turned 90 degrees to the right to help check out this possibility. To our disappointment we soon realized that Toni was not in this area and bushwhacked our way back to the creek bed. I felt my hopes waning as Jim and I worked our way through the patches of poison oak and nettles looking for any evidence of Toni.

The creek began to level out, making the going easier, when we found our first good clue. In a sand bar in the middle of the stream there was a single set of fresh, small footprints. After excitedly radioing in this information we proceeded downstream. What we



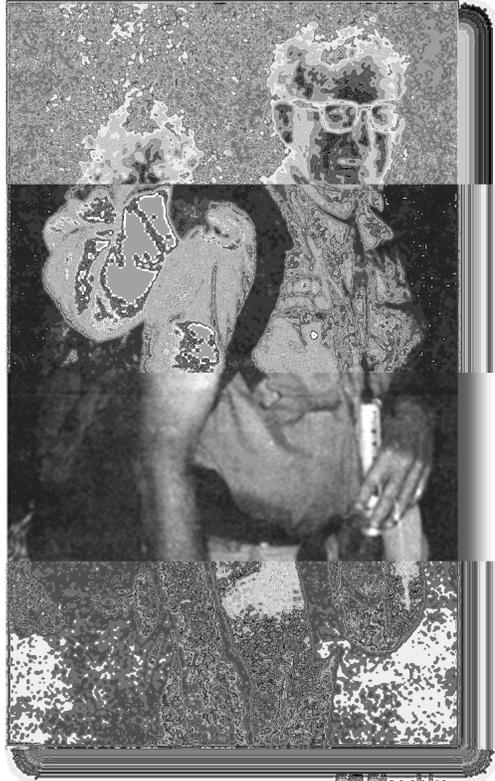
found was a recurrent pattern of footprints whenever a sand bar blocked the main part of the creek. Toni was walking in the water almost all the time and therefore leaving no prints. The San Jacinto Truck Trail crossed the North Fork River a couple miles downstream of our location. A search team including Mark Rhodes and Mel Krug was driven to this point by members of the Pine Cove Fire Department. Jim and I continued on while Mel and Mark reported that they could find no evidence that Toni had gotten that far. Jim and I had lapsed

EYES OF A CHILD - Sometimes an expression is worth a thousand words. This being the case with little Toni Mojeske just after being found by RMRU members Bill Blaschko (pictured) and Jim Fairchild.

into small talk when a little voice interrupted our conversation. Toni was a little ahead of us bedded down in a glade of ferns right beside the creek. The time was 2:10 AM and the first order of business was getting the shivering child warm and fed.

While Toni sipped on some apple juice I relayed the good news back to base. Toni did not turn out to be quite the personality that her mother described. A frail child could not have traveled the two miles through rugged terrain that Jim Fairchild felt was the equivalent of 8 miles of regular hiking. Also Toni was anything but shy. While Jim and I waited for Mel and Mark to hike up from the truck trail, Toni told us all about her adventure. She said she had been splashing water up on rocks to leave a trail for followers and that she had stopped walking at dark. Toni also quizzed us in depth on how we had been sent to look for her.

When Mel and Mark reached us Jim emptied his pack and Toni jumped in. The rest of us divided up Jim's gear and we hiked down to where Bob and Marge Muir of the Pine Cove Fire Department were waiting to drive us out. During this hike Toni continued to be a "walkie talkie" as she told us all about her family life, friends and recycling cans with her brother. On return to base camp all appeared to be back to normal as Toni snuggled in her mothers arms. My thoughts turned toward a warm breakfast until I learned that the team of Cameron Robbins and Rob Gardner had not yet returned. The radio that this team was carrying had not been functioning and Cam and Rob didn't know the search was over. Rob realized that the radio wasn't operating and was able to effect some ingenious field repair work to reestablish communication. At 7 AM after a marathon hike Rob and Cameron reached the highway and the team headed off for breakfast. Rob wished that his walkie talkie had worked as well as the "walkie talkie" we rescued.



Bill Elaschko

LOADED PACK - With Toni Mojeske loaded in RMRU member Jim Fairchild's pack, Jim and Bill prepare to hike back to the road.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.