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CHRIS JENNINGS / HERALD DEMOCRAT

Una Mae Herd was last seen walking south in the 1400 block of Harrison street in Sherman on June 25th, 2006. Despite an exahustive search by the Sherman police, several other agencies and many local volunteers she has not been seen since.

After two years, Una Mae Herd case still active

BY MARY JANE FARMER

HERALD DEMOCRAT

It was two years ago June 25 that Mrs. Una Mae Herd went for her usual morning walk, during which it appears she vanished without a trace. It was the last time anyone remembers seeing her.

Sherman police have not let go of the case, saying it will remain open and active until it is resolved.

Sherman Police Detective Jeremy Cox said the Sherman criminal investigation team is now considering bringing in a cold-case squad, a new set of eyes, in their attempt to find Mrs. Herd, who will be 84 years old now.

The morning was crisp, one of those Chamber-of-Commerce type days, temperatures in the 80s and the sun rising at 6:23 a.m. It was Sunday and Mrs. Herd was to have joined her brother-in-law Bill Newell and her great-granddaughter, Brenda, then 19, at the Whataburger, a routine that hadn't changed in about 10 years.

Mrs. Herd was unusually close to Brenda, according to her parents,

Mary and Steve West. Mary, too, was close to her grandmother, who raised her during her teenage years, when she moved in with Mrs. Herd. Then, when Mary and Steve married and Brenda was born, Mrs. Herd kept Brenda during her pre-school years and then carried her to and from school as she grew up. She was "Mimi" to Brenda for the next almost-20 years.

Mrs. Herd, against a routine that didn't vary, didn't show up at 9 a.m. that Sunday to have breakfast with her loved ones. About 10 a.m., a worried Brenda called her parents, and the three of them met at Mrs. Herd's home in the 1200 block of North Harrison. Brenda had her own key and let them in. What they found was a cup of coffee that appeared fresh, a bowl that indicated she had eaten breakfast, the Sunday newspaper opened and sitting on the kitchen table, her purse, car keys and car in their normal places, but no sign of Mrs. Herd or her house keys.

They called police, who, after learning it was out of character for the diminutive woman to miss the Sunday-morning breakfast, instigated a search. At first, they went door-to-door, and later set up a grid hunt that expanded and was joined by friends and neighbors, Sherman firefighters and off-duty police officers. Some searchers rode motorcycles and others horses, which let them get into denser terrains, many walked on foot, and the Texas Department of Public Safety sent its helicopter to search from above.

Reportedly, one neighbor said he saw a light go on inside her house about 5:30 a.m., which Mary West said was the time she would have risen. Her daily routine was to walk to Old Settlers Park and back again, family said. Another neighbor two blocks northward told police he had seen Mrs. Herd walking back toward her home about 7 p.m. The Wests said there were others who said they had seen her that morning, but none of those alleged sightings proved to be helpful.

The family later called in a volunteer search group, and then spent the next several Sundays standing on North Harrison, holding up signs with Mrs. Herd's picture and stopping vehicles, hoping to find a motorist with a similar Sunday morning routine who might have seen their loved one. Still, no information.

"We hardly saw anyone on Sundays," Mary West said. "There were maybe a few people between 8-8:30 (a.m.). We thought there would be more, and we don't know if people just got scared and don't drive that route any more, or just what happened."

One item not found that morning was Mrs. Herd's house key, and Mary West said that wasn't a concern because, if she had pockets in her trousers, she would have carried it. They didn't know what she wore that day, except for the one neighbor's description, saying she wore white or light-colored Capri pants.

In the Spring of 2007, the family was cleaning Mrs. Herd's home and discarding items as part of Sherman's Spring Clean-Up, when they happened upon her house key, placed on a flower pot outside her back door. They immediately called Sherman police, Steve said, and a detective took possession of the flower pots for fingerprinting and the house key.

"It would make sense for her to have left them there, if she didn't have any pockets in the clothes she wore that day," Mary West said.

Cox said they are constantly reviewing the information they have on hand. "We keep tearing it apart, hoping to find something new, something overlooked," Cox said. "There have been no new developments." The decision to bring in a cold case squad isn't final.

Sherman police have stayed in touch with Steve and Mary West. Steve West said, "We feel they are doing all they can do. We don't know any more today than we did the day she went missing."

The family calls police every time they hear of a deceased person having been found, and, Steve West said, Cox follows up on that information.

When asked if Mrs. Herd could have left the house with someone else, Steve West said that would have been out of character, because she always drove herself wherever she went. They do not know if anyone called and invited her for a Sunday morning excursion or if police have pulled her telephone records to see what calls were made that morning.

The Wests have also sent a request to a network television show, asking them to get involved. They received a card back, saying only that they had received the request, and there has been no further word from them.

Steve and Mary West describe Mrs. Herd as "good as gold. She's always helped anyone who needed help. She always had a garden and

grew tomatoes. She loved to travel and, until recently, took vacations with a friend."

Mary added, "She's just a genuinely honest, wonderful person."

Cox and Sherman Police Lt. Carl Hudman asks that anyone who has even the most minute of information to call them, no matter how trivial it may seem.

"It's horrible," Mary said as tears flowed down her cheeks. "Somebody you love very much is just gone, and you don't know why or where."

"The only hope we have," Steve said, "is that somebody knows something and will, finally, come forward. All we can do is put it all on Sherman police and on someone doing the right thing."

"We want her back," a despondent Mary said.