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## Saturday, August 06, 2005

### The Lovely Ladies of Lubbock Part I

The smell of baking cookies wafted through the sunny kitchen in Lubbock, TX, as the sound of laughter erupted from the next room. Joanna Rogers, then 16, was playing with her favorite niece, Brittany, age 3. In between making the batches of cookies and playing with Brittany, the multi-talented teen and her mother, Kathy, talked about her plans for the future, which sounded very promising.

These intimate family moments came to an end on the night of May 4, 2004, when Joanna Rogers said goodnight to her parents and went to bed.

And, in the morning, she was gone. All of her possessions were left behind, including her car keys, cell phone, shoes, and clothes. There was no evidence of a forced entry. As the daylight came, so began a parent's worst nightmare.

That nightmare is still ongoing today. For 427 mornings, Kathy and Joe Bill Rogers have woken up without knowing the whereabouts of their daughter, Joanna.

Kathy and Joe Bill hold tight to their memories of Joanna, and to hope. Kathy's pride in her

daughter is evident, but right now it is a bittersweet memory, one that she wants badly to come to fruition: "Joanna is a smart, motivated, strong willed and compassionate individual. Participating in debate competition and dance in High School were her passions. We talked, researched and prepared for college with advanced placement tests, SAT prep courses and potential scholarships. She wants to be a lawyer or psychologist. Joanna loves to read, any and everything. She is articulate and creative with her speaking and creative writing. I miss her passion for the underdog, and standing up for what is right."

Joanna takes after her mother in that she is a highly intelligent, no-nonsense individual. She would surely be proud of the way that Kathy has been the epitome of grace under pressure, and how she would not allow herself to succumb to fear and pity. Kathy knew that becoming frustrated about what she could not control or alter in respect to Joanna's disappearance, was a waste of energy. In times of frustration, Kathy would go right to the source and attempt to better the situation.

Even though they were alone in their situation, they had a tremendous outpouring of support in the community. Several searches were planned and executed, and upwards of 500 volunteers helped comb the area for miles around Joanna's home. A reward was posted. Kathy and Joe Bill went to work to spread the word about their missing daughter and were able to get Joanna's profile aired on several national TV shows, including America's Most Wanted, and CNN. A regional Amber Alert had also been sounded. The US Postal Service even distributed 52,000 posters of Joanna in partnership with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

"In our situation we have not felt a lack of understanding or caring. Rather it is more like nearly everyone we meet connects with us on some level. The fear that it could happen to them or someone they love sends a spark between us, and they can feel the pain without words. Tears well up, voices choke, we hug and we know without words that they care." Kathy acknowledges

the level of compassion from the Lubbock area, as well as assistance from several organizations.

“Personally my husband and I try not to give into the urge to hide from the world, friends and the public eye. Family, friends and the community have shown so much support, interest and caring that it is only right that we share what we know of the search for Joanna with others, via email, phone calls, interviews and public contact. Much of what has been done and continues to be done to keep Joanna in the public eye is not by me, but by a caring family, friends, community and media, dedicated law enforcement and organizations like Project Jason, Team Adam, United Response Search and Rescue Team and Laura Recovery Foundation. Our family alone could never have distributed thousands of posters, paid for billboards, featured her on AMW and national television news shows, put her into mass mailings, conducted extensive searches and maintained a website. This was all done through the caring and concern of others. With regard to success, I think the real measure of success will be when we find Joanna. But without the efforts of everyone who has been involved in trying to find Joanna there would be no hope of success. So I think the efforts bring hope, not only to us as a family but also to the caring community.”

The only thing that Kathy would go back and change, if she could, would be in the use of tracking dogs. “When we talk to people who ask us about what should be done when a person goes missing, we advise them to bring in search dogs as soon as possible. We don’t know if bringing in search and tracking dogs would have made a difference in Joanna’s case, but by the time the dogs were used, two weeks after her disappearance any trails that could have been followed from the house were useless.”

Kathy also asks that the person who knows what happened to Joanna come forward. She reminds all of us to have compassion for one another and those in need. “See themselves in the same situation, help, and understand.”

This is what every family of the missing needs.

In the meantime, Kathy and Joe Bill will keep searching, hoping, and praying. “Joanna, we love you and miss you every day. Our lives are empty and dark without your sparkle and light and we are waiting anxiously for the day when you will come home to us.”

Joanna’s favorite niece, Brittany, misses Joanna too and often asks Kathy “Where’s Joanna?” Kathy has to tell her now, after a year, that they don’t know, but they hope she will be home soon.

Kathy and Joe Bill weren’t going to be alone for long in feeling the pain of having a missing daughter. Just 10 weeks later, another young woman would disappear without a trace from their tight-knit community.

For more information, photos, and a printable poster of Joanna, please visit her website at <http://www.bringjohome.info/>