

Mom: 'I want my son back'

After no leads, she insists that she, husband didn't hurt boy

BY MARGARET MCGURK | ENQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Marcus Fiesel vanished Aug. 15.

After eight days, police have identified no suspects, no leads and no material clues about what happened to the affectionate 3-year-old who still wears diapers and speaks just a few words.

Tuesday, Marcus' 30-year-old foster mother changed her earlier assertion and said her husband took and failed a lie-detector test, but she insisted that he didn't hurt the boy.



ZOOM

THE ENQUIRER / LEIGH PATTON

Liz Carroll on Tuesday wore the same clothes she wore Aug. 15, when her foster son Marcus disappeared. She hopes someone will recognize her

Liz Carroll appeared at a news conference in the same clothes she wore when she said Marcus disappeared in Anderson Township's Juilfs Park, hoping to jog the memory of anyone who saw them. Police have found no adult to confirm that Marcus was with Carroll that day.

She also backed down from her earlier statements that a deputy told her that he saw Marcus shortly after he disappeared.

"There is very little productive, positive information coming in that has helped the investigation," Steve Barnett of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office said. "It is really frustrating that no one saw Marcus in the park."

Carroll begged witnesses to come forward. "I want my son back," she said.

Thousands of volunteers combed Anderson Township and the park in the past week. On foot and on horseback, police scoured the area, joined by fire and rescue squads, cadaver dogs and divers. They used helicopters, infrared sensors and bloodhounds.

They didn't find Marcus.

DAY 1

At 1:18 p.m. Aug. 15, a Hamilton County dispatcher received a 911 call from 26-year-old park visitor Sean Fehn.

"There's a lady face down with her kids," he said.

The dispatcher asked, "Do the kids know what happened?"

Fehn answered, "No. They're all 4 or younger." On the 911 tape, he did not say, nor did the dispatcher ask, how many children were there. Tuesday, Fehn said he was certain there were three children near Liz Carroll. They were her 2-year-old son, Bryce; a 1½-year-old foster child (since returned to his birth family); and a 1½-year-old in her care.

Immediately, park district employees came out of their nearby office and spoke to the toddlers.

In minutes, an Anderson Township ambulance arrived. Paramedics took Liz Carroll to Mercy Anderson Hospital and used her cell phone to call her husband, David Carroll, who had taken the couple's three older children swimming.

When he arrived and asked about Marcus, park officials launched a search. He also said his wife had mitral valve prolapse, a heart condition that can cause fainting.

On the afternoon of Aug. 15, Anderson Township Fire and Rescue issued a red alert, a system to notify the township's 44,000 residents in emergencies.

The information immediately hit the airwaves and news Web sites. TV stations crawled a notice about Marcus across the bottom of the screen late into the night. The national Center for Missing and Exploited Children was alerted.

Volunteers streamed into the park. Lights went up as the sun went down. By nightfall, hundreds of people hunted for Marcus, in grid searches through the park, and on their own blocks, searching backyards, swimming pools, trash bins, drain pipes and storage sheds.

The search went on all night.

They didn't find Marcus.

A HARD LIFE

In January, police reported that Marcus fell from a second-story window at the Middletown home of his mother, Donna Trevino. In April, he was taken away from Trevino after he was found wandering in traffic. Police reported that the home was filthy and that Marcus' bedroom consisted of a 2-inch foam mat in a gated room, where the walls, carpet and homemade gate were smeared with feces.

To find a place for Marcus, Butler County officials turned to Lifeway for Youth, a faith-based organization that recruits and trains foster parents.

Liz Carroll said Marcus might have suffered fetal alcohol syndrome and was diagnosed with delayed speech, memory and motor skills that made him both trusting and sometimes difficult to handle. He was easily distracted and, she said, would sometimes take off his dirty diaper and smear his feces on nearby surfaces.

Still, she said, he was making progress. She said she and her husband planned to keep him as a permanent foster child (not an adoptee) and expected Trevino to sign off on the plan in September. "He's ours until he's 18," she said.

DAY 2

Wednesday, hundreds of people arrived at Juilfs Park. Search and rescue teams came from Campbell County and Delhi Township, among others. Local businesses donated food. The Red Cross set up shop to feed volunteers and hand out bottles of water before teams set out to search in 90-degree heat.

Meanwhile, police searched the Carrolls' Union Township home in Clermont County and removed some items. Barnett said the parents were not suspects. "There is nothing sinister there," he said.

That evening, speaking from her hospital bed over a speakerphone, Liz Carroll said her husband had been questioned by investigators that day and took a polygraph test.

Less than a week later, she told The Enquirer that she didn't know if he had taken a test. Then, on Tuesday, she said he was told he failed. "But we don't believe that," she said.

At 8 p.m. Wednesday, the volunteer search was called off. "We have searched over five square miles up to eight times," Anderson fire and rescue chief Mark Ober said.

They didn't find Marcus.

DAY 3

The search called in the cross-jurisdictional group called Task Force One, including members from across Hamilton and Clermont counties, who used horses, dogs and divers to explore hidden and inaccessible spots.

They didn't find Marcus.

THE FOSTER FAMILY

Liz and David Carroll have four children, ages 8, 7, 5 and 2. Both used to work in retail jobs, but for more than two years have made their living providing day care for Clermont and Brown county

agencies. Liz Carroll told The Enquirer that they lost their day-care license when Marcus went missing.

They filed for bankruptcy in 2004, which she attributed to youthful credit-card use.

In June, David Carroll, 29, was charged with domestic violence after he pushed his wife into a pool table and a door, according to a Union Township police report. The charge was later dismissed, and he was ordered to pay a fine. Liz Carroll said Tuesday that it was not a violent incident and she called police only to stop him from driving after he drank beer while on medication for bipolar disorder.

DAY 4

Liz Carroll left the hospital. Restaurateur Jeff Ruby, a former Anderson Township resident, announced a \$10,000 reward for anyone who found Marcus or led police to anyone who hurt the child.

Police continued to search.

They didn't find Marcus.

DAY 5

The Carroll family moved out of their Union Township house. Liz Carroll later would say they moved temporarily to avoid TV cameras and gawkers. Barnett said: "They're not a flight risk. It does not hinder our investigation. ... We're not labeling anyone (a suspect) at this time."

At the end of the day, they stopped looking for Marcus.

Barnett said, "We're not searching any more. Unless we get a lead."

DAY 6

At a prayer service at Jacot Park in Middletown, Marcus' birth mother, said, "Maybe I didn't do things right, but he is severely handicapped. I really tried to take care of this little boy." The foster parents looking after Marcus' brother and sister revealed that the children had been taken from them by Butler County authorities, who launched a review of all cases handled by Lifeway.

DAY 7

Liz Carroll told The Enquirer that she fed the children breakfast that day, stopped at Blockbuster to pick up films and went to the park. She said she headed for the parking lot at 1:10 p.m., to keep a 2 p.m. appointment for Marcus.

DAY 8

Police said the last time they could confirm that anyone outside the Carrolls' family and friends saw Marcus was Aug. 10, during a meeting with a Lifeway caseworker.

Police also said they could not confirm that Liz Carroll stopped at Blockbuster Aug. 15.

David Carroll did not attend the news conference. His wife said he was looking after their children.

"I'm just as confused as everybody else," Liz Carroll told reporters, "except I know 100 percent he was at the park with me - and my husband, myself, nobody harmed him. Nobody hurt him.

"I don't know if we'll find him, in what condition we'll find him ... I don't know. I'm asking for help."

Staff writers Jessica Brown, Sharon Coolidge, Eileen Kelley, Sheila McLaughlin, Quan Truong and William A. Weathers contributed.