



Maureen Himebaugh and her pal Roxie in her Del Haven home holding a picture of her sons Mark and Matthew (see inset image for larger view)

Where is Mark Himebaugh?

Still No Trace of Missing Boy after 19 Years

By Danielle Davies

Like many mothers, Maureen Himebaugh's eyes light up whenever she talks about her son, Mark. She describes him as an intuitive and bright boy who loves nature and animals, who is curious—she calls him 'Curious George'—and who loves his mother. But unlike most moms, Himebaugh hasn't seen her son in almost 19 years and she has no idea where he is.

The last time Maureen Himebaugh saw Mark, he was standing in her neighbor's front yard. That neighbor happened to be her mother. Maureen was driving away, on her way to take her mom to a local auto shop. She considered asking Mark to come along—he was the kind of kid who went everywhere with his mother—but she could tell he was more interested in watching the local firemen put out a fire that had broken out in the marsh across from their home. Mark was 11 and their town—Del Haven—was a small, safe community. The trip to the auto shop shouldn't have taken more than 15 minutes. Maureen Himebaugh thought she had no reason to worry.

But when she returned home from the auto shop, a trip that took closer to 40 minutes because the fire had tied up traffic, Mark was gone. It was November 25, 1991.

A search ensued. There were eyewitness reports of different sightings of Mark, but they were from prior to his disappearance. The area was combed over, but there was no sign of him—except for one red-and-white sneaker found on the beach.

Anyone from South Jersey can remember the pictures of Mark Himebaugh that first circulated, then literally covered the area. Donations were made to "Friends of Mark" to raise money for a reward upon Mark's return. Former heavyweight champion Riddick Bowe dedicated a bout against Elijah Tillery to Mark, wearing his picture on his boxing shorts, and he donated \$15,000 to the cause. Psychics were consulted. Middle Township Police, the New Jersey State Police, and the FBI are all still involved in the case, yet there has never been another sign of the 11-year-old who went missing in 1991. Mark would now be 30 years old.

Though it has been 19 years since Mark disappeared, Maureen Himebaugh remembers that day clearly. "I can tell you the story like it was yesterday," she said.

Himebaugh begins by pointing to a spot in her home where the couch sat the last day she saw her son. "I was sitting there," she said. Himebaugh is living in the same home she was living in then. While she has made some changes to the interior in order to make room for her mother who moved in several years ago, she still looks out the same window to the very marsh that held Mark's attention on that fateful day. She still passes the park where Mark was last seen. And she still frequents the ShopRite where she used to shop with her son.

How can a mother bear to be reminded of her son's disappearance day in and day out?

"I couldn't go there for years after he disappeared because he always went with me," Himebaugh said of ShopRite.

The picture of Mark and his brother that accompanies this story was taken by Himebaugh just a few weeks before his disappearance. Mark, on the left, is wearing one of the sneakers that was found when he disappeared. In the picture, there are three miniature pumpkins on the ledge of her home. Maureen placed them there to represent herself and her two boys. It was the first Halloween after she had separated from her husband. Himebaugh continues to place three miniature pumpkins out front every fall.

"I still believe in my heart that he could be another Jaycee," Himebaugh confessed, referring to the case of Jaycee Dugard who was returned to her California home 18 years after her abduction when she was 11 years old. "I still dream about him. I am prepared for the worst but hope for the best."

While the original Middle Township detectives on the case have retired, the case is still ongoing with Sergeant McHale of Middle Township collaborating with Lieutenant Bill Kirkbride of the Cape May County Prosecutor's Department. The FBI and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also continue to be involved.

"It is not acceptable to me that there is no answer," said Sergeant McHale. He was with the Middle Township Police Department the day Mark went missing. "I would not in any way call this is a cold case. We actively pursue leads. I believe the answer will come with determination."

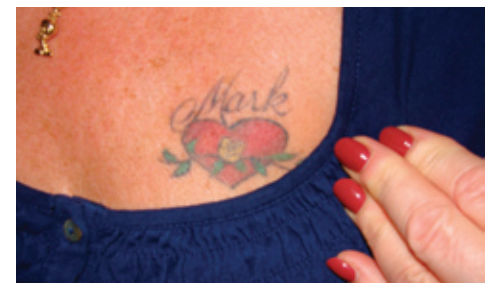
Unfortunately, even the advent of DNA identification hasn't helped to pinpoint a suspect. The single piece of evidence found on the case—Mark's sneaker—was handled by so many people.

For her part, Himebaugh stays involved. She publishes a picture of Mark as well as part of a poem she wrote for him in local papers every year. She continues to communicate with detectives working on the case. And, for the past four years, she has attended the annual Amber Alert Symposium, which the Department of Justice says focuses on the families of abducted children and program developments. Himebaugh also has a full time job and a full life, a close-knit extended family, a boyfriend and another son, Matthew, living close by.

Himebaugh has lived with this ongoing tragedy for almost two decades now. In the beginning, the minutes turned into days, then into weeks, then into months, she said. But now, she enjoys having the opportunity to talk about her son.

"He makes me happy," Himebaugh explained. "You have to turn it around and take the good out of it. I can remember my son saying that you'd see people walking their kids in the mall—and Mark's posters were in a lot of stores back then—and you would see a mother looking at a poster and squeezing her kid's hand just a little bit tighter, probably thinking that this could happen to her."

Please note that even with the passage of time, police and prosecutors are open to looking into any leads that come in. The Middle Township Police Department can be reached at (609) 465-8700 and the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office can be reached at (609) 465-1135.



Maureen's tattoo of Mark's name that she had placed over her heart.