

May 25, 2012

Dear Friends,

I remember 1979. It was my first full year as a resident of North Carolina. My mother made the decision to leave New York in December of 1978. The high taxes made it impossible to live there any longer. New York was falling apart, and it was time to leave. Vandalism was widespread. Crime was epidemic. The bridges and roads were in need of serious repair.

Thirty three years ago today, little six year old Etan Patz left home to catch the school bus for the first time by himself. His parents really had no reason to worry: it was only a short distance. All he had to do was walk to the end of the block, cross Broadway and then Prince Street and wait for the school bus to come.

Etan Patz never made it. He was the first missing child to appear on a milk carton. His parents suffered all these years not knowing what happened to their son. They never moved. They never changed their phone number, hoping one day he would return.

A former grocery stock boy confessed to murdering Etan Patz that morning. He was working at a Hispanic grocery store commonly called a bodega in New York. He lured him into the basement with the promise of a soda and then murdered the young child there. The man was only 18 years old. He confessed to the police that he had the urge to kill and knew Etan "was the one," he though he had never seen him before.

His disappearance changed New York forever. Mayor Ed Koch told parents whenever possible "don't let them out of your sight." Five hundred police officers were assigned to the case. They used load speakers to broadcast details of the case around town. Pictures of Etan were posted everywhere. 300,000 flyers were distributed. It even became a federal matter when Congress passed the Missing Children Act in 1982 requiring the FBI to help find our missing children.

Our hearts go out to Stan and Julie Patz as they relive the sadness of that day. Their hearts must be wounded knowing the details of their son's death. The legislation that Congress passed in 1982 created the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. This web site has valuable information about how to prevent such a crime from occurring and what to do when it does.

The National Center tells us that "Parents, guardians and adults who care for children face constant challenges when trying to help keep children safer in today's fast pace world. For decades, children were taught to stay away from strangers. But this concept is difficult for children to grasp and often the perpetrator is someone the child knows. It is more beneficial to help build children's confidence and teach them to respond to a potentially dangerous situation." Please look at this web site to learn more: www.missingkids.com.