

Slept in phone booth

Markham teen safe at home



Una Skleryk pushed her daughter Karen past reporters and into their Raymerville home Wednesday after the 14-year-old girl was found by an aunt in North York. — Rob Donnelly

By ROBERT DONNELLY

While most of us slept safe and sound in our homes during Tuesday's violent thunderstorm, 14-year-old Karen Skleryk says she spent the night alone outside York Mills subway station in a telephone booth.

At 3:30 p.m., with the sun still shining, Karen went to the park adjacent to her Markham home on Beck Drive. She told her sister Emily, 15, that she would be back in time for dinner.

Karen did not return.

Lightly clad in only plaid shorts and a navy blue and white T-shirt, Karen was ill-prepared for the cool weather that evening. She carried with her about \$4 in pocket money and some Markham Transit bus tickets.

For almost two hours the Skleryk family looked for her, but came up empty.

The Skleryk's contacted her friends, drove around the neighborhood and visited the corner mall hoping to find their soft-spoken daughter.

They didn't.

Worried for her safety, especially in the wake of recent child abductions, they decided to contact York Regional Police.

From 7:30 p.m. Tuesday until she was found the following day at 4:20 p.m., York Regional Police and OPP mobilized an exhaustive search for the missing child.

Police employed two helicopters — one donated by an area resident — frogmen, and three teams of tracking dogs to criss-

cross the park, a nearby tributary, and the playground area unsuccessfully for clues that might reveal her whereabouts.

A large group of volunteers made up of family, friends and concerned citizens went from house to house in the Raymerville area asking questions and inquiring into any possible leads that might help find her.

"I can't see her walking around and going somewhere strange," said Karen's cousin Teresa Skleryk, "...it's a new area, and she's not an adventurous girl."

The Skleryk's had just moved into the area in April from Scarborough.

"She stays very close to home," she said, fearing the worst and concluding that the freckled little girl was probably abducted by a stranger while walking through the park.

Ten minutes before a massive volunteer manhunt was to start the mobile police command post set up next to Ramer Wood Public School received a phone call.

Karen was found.

The Grade 8 St. Matthew Catholic School student had been discovered by her aunt Elsie Zander wandering aimlessly in the Yonge St.-Wilson Ave. area of North York.

Karen told her parents that she had spent much of the 24 hours she was missing riding the subway system.

When asked by reporters outside her home where she was that night, she nervously replied, "In a

phone booth," adding that it was "great" to be home.

Although her mother Una Skleryk was too upset to speak to the media, her father, Harry Skleryk — a pipefitter at CP Rail — explained the sketchy details surrounding his daughter's disappearance.

Apparently, Karen while walking through the park became frightened by a stranger. Believing that she was being pursued she boarded a bus; eventually ending up on the subway.

York Regional Police staff inspector George Kydd downplayed the significance of the stranger in the park scenario, commenting that "there is certainly nothing at this time to suggest there has been any foul play or anything unscrupulous involved."

In a telephone interview, Emily denied that her younger sister simply ran away from home, pointing out that there were no family arguments prior to her mysterious disappearance.

She described her relationship with her wayward sibling as "close", and yet could not explain why when Karen realized that she was lost she didn't call home from the phone booth where she was sleeping.

"There was this stranger who was bothering her and I guess she just panicked," Emily said.

Upon being reunited with his daughter, a weary father smiled and said, "It's just a real happy ending."

Jog elimination at Warden is approved

Expropriation measures were approved by Regional Council Thursday for Markham to secure land needed to realign 16th Ave. on both sides of Warden Ave.

The expropriation is needed as part of the Town's project to widen Warden Ave. from south of Hwy. 7 to a half-kilometre north of 16th Ave.

Site preparation for next year's work has been ongoing in the area this year.

Regional Councillor Ron Moran said 16th Ave. on the west side of Warden Ave. will be routed north to meet 16th Ave. on the east side, thereby eliminating the jog.

"We need those properties and have negotiations going on now to acquire the land," said Mr. Moran in an interview. "We hope to start in the spring (next year)."



Anxious family members feared the worst before Karen Skleryk was found in North York. Here, her worried father Harry (left) and other relatives Irene Thompson, Colleen Skleryk, Paul Skleryk and Bill Skleryk talk with Weekender reporter Rob Donnelly. — Bill Lanning

Ed and Claudette



"When we get home, I want you to phone your mother." AIRD/86

Teacher re-elected

Jose Fernandes, district president of the Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation in York Region, has been re-elected to the provincial executive of the OPSTF.

Mr. Fernandes has been in the teaching profession for nine years. He received his teacher training at the University of Toronto.

He holds a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Toronto, a bachelor of education degree from York University, and is presently pursuing his masters of education degree on a part-time basis.



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