

'MISSING: WHEN THE SON SETS'

by Allyn and Arlyn Atadero

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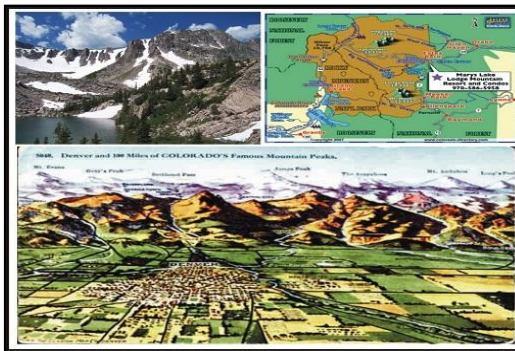
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Reviewed by: Olatoun Williams

Jaryd Atadero vanished 18 years ago under mysterious circumstances in the Colorado Rocky Mountains of North America. He was 3 years old. His father, Allyn Atadero, a physical education instructor at a middle-school in Littleton, Colorado, has written about his son's disappearance in a book entitled 'Missing: When the Son Sets'. I have seen 'Missing 411' the documentary film made by the group, CANAM Missing, about Jaryd's disappearance and I have read Allyn Atadero's book. This is what I learned about the events leading up to the tragedy.

On Saturday, 2nd October 1999, a group of hikers from a Christian Singles Association, were enjoying the splendid vistas of the Big South Trail 48 miles up the Poudre Canyon in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. There was a large sign at the entrance to the Big South Trail about child safety in these parts populated by large mammals such as elk, cougars, mountain lions, and bears, but the hikers, friends of Jaryd's father, in loco parentis, were so caught up in the splendour of the natural world around them, they did not pay attention to the three year old boy running around excitedly. Adults in clusters, chatting, stopping to take in the vista, moving slowly along. One key figure, in loco parentis, took a short break to rest. Nobody saw Jaryd striding forward along the trail, in pursuit of his own adventure.

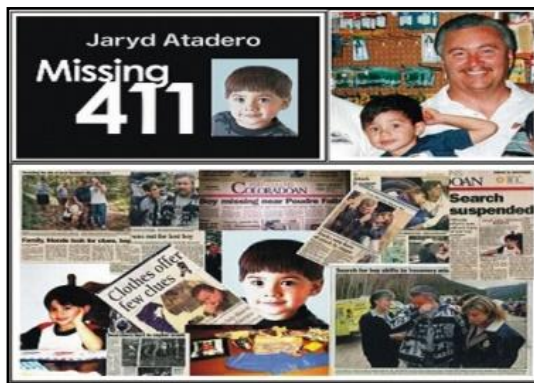


In the rustling and crackling of nature, they heard him coming, disturbing their peace as they stood quietly fishing. The 2 fishermen looked up to see a little boy. He called out to them, "Have you seen any bears?" "No" they called out. There are bears but we haven't seen any. And turned back to their fishing. 3 year old Jaryd was alone. Two adult fishermen turned their backs without thinking of the perils of the wilds to a toddler on his own. They were the last people to see Jaryd Atadero.

The story made world news. In the book's "Foreword" Allyn's twin brother, Arlyn Atadero, writes, *"Many parents have experienced that fleeting moment when they couldn't account for the location of a child. Those few seconds conjure up fears so devastating that the horror of actually living them is unimaginable to our human spirit...But when it actually happened...I stood by and helplessly watched my identical twin produce sounds of grief that I could never duplicate...They were sounds so primal that I was sure they originated somewhere deep from within his soul"*

The beauty of the setting sun heralds the darkness of the night to come. In the immediacy, clarity and intimacy of Atadero's narrative, I recognised an invitation to immerse myself in the fellowship of his suffering. I approached the book fearfully at first. I dipped in and out selectively, catching my breath before a passage close to poetry in which Atadero evokes the glory of the Colorado forests and the mountains holding Jaryd hostage and their implacable silence before his pleas for his three year old's release. Allyn Atadero's anguish so terrified me that I immersed myself instead in Jowhor Ile's novel about a fictional family grieving for a vanished son. My plan was to reference Missing within my main review of Ile's 2016 Etisalat prize winning novel which lays claim to some powerful lines and poignant moments in the life of its grieving family. 'And After Many Days' would serve as the veil behind which I could hide my eyes from Atadero's tragedy. But is it morally or philosophically sound to elevate the anguish of fictional patriarch over the grief of a real father who has lost a real

son? Is it philosophically or morally sound to subordinate the disappearance of a child who really lived to the disappearance of a boy who never existed except on the pages of fiction?



This review is the memorial I have erected to the real child, Jaryd Atadero; to his life- all three plus years of it. It is a memorial to the love of life shining from those beautiful brown eyes. This review is my homage to Jaryd's father, Allyn. As he waited day and night for answers from the Sheriff's team and other individuals authorised to comb the Rocky Mountains, the onslaught of imaginings about Jaryd's fate, his terror, his bewilderment, would have vanquished a man of lesser conviction about the faithfulness and mercy of the Christ he worships.

An arsenal of documentation: official/field incident reports, interview transcripts, press cuttings, emails from concerned people, emails from world-class experts in relevant fields, 'Missing: When the Son Sets' is Allyn Atadero's diary of every event related to Jaryd's disappearance, a diary in which every thought racing through his fevered mind, is communicated with shattering honesty. Chronicling the painstaking and fervent efforts to find Jaryd, the book records the role played by national and international media and the media's increasing value to the family. The book remembers in touching detail, the numerous acts of kindness with which the family was blessed by one another, blessed by friends and from across the United States, blessed by strangers overtaken by reverence for the sanctity of a child's life. Atadero relays information - often received after the event - of calls to the Sheriff's office to offer assistance: trained search dogs, tracking expertise and on one occasion, an aeroplane.

At first glance, the SAR effort undertaken by the State Government looked good: looked to Allyn like an impressive supply of resources deployed to find his little boy: "What a blessing it was to watch as the search and rescue members prepared themselves, as if Jaryd were their own child." writes Atadero. "The urgency displayed in their eyes was staggering as they grabbed their dogs and charged towards the trail...Go, I whispered, 'Find my son'. He describes the dive team 'searching every nook and cranny of the river' and the Huey UK-IN sent by the Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming, swooping the skies, scouring the location where Jaryd was last seen. The investigating deputy conducted interviews with witnesses - each one of the group of hikers to whom Jaryd had been attached and the fishermen who interacted with him. The interviews told a story of the shocking failure of adults to protect a 3 year old child.

More failure was to come. What had looked like an impressive deployment of resources in the fruitless Sheriff led SAR, would quickly, to the distraught father, appear grossly insufficient. He became vocal: instead of 4 search dogs, there ought to have been 20. Instead of 60 people on the search there ought to have been 3,000.

Fault lines emerge in the narrative: an "us", the Sheriff's office, and "them", Jaryd's unrelenting father and his family. A recurrent complaint is the failure of the Sheriff's office to relay news to Atadero about the progress of Jaryd's case. He recounts a conversation caught on camera in which the Sheriff complains about his tiredness with the case. A host of unclear variables raised questions yet to be answered and converged to slow down Search and Rescue. *If the area where Jaryd disappeared is a crime scene, why has the designation not been made official? Has the case been politicised? People are saying so.* The frustrating intransigence of the County Sheriff is put on full display in Atadero's story: the Sheriff's rejection of the help of volunteers which Allyn felt was desperately needed and his refusal of the counsel of experienced trackers, notably Rod "Seaux" Larreau, whose opinion about Jaryd's whereabouts was ignored. Larreau's mapping presented a priceless opportunity which would ultimately be vindicated. We see the SAR effort thwarted by the arbitrary, baffling, restrictions imposed by the Sheriff which included a threat to have the Atadero family arrested if they attempted to participate in the search for their son. In a bombshell moment, Atadero tells of a sighting of his son which he pursued only to learn that the Sheriff's office had already rejected the sighting: a sighting which to him, Jaryd's father, possessed hallmarks of truth.

Jaryd was no-where to be found. Why could abduction not be a possibility? David Paulides of *Missing 411* describes Jaryd's vanishing and the handling of it by law enforcement as one 'giant puzzle'. Why abduction was persistently ruled out by the Sheriff is the recurrent question of Atadero's book and a giant part of that puzzle.

I commiserated with Atadero over the Sheriff's intransigence, guardedness and control. I felt his pain and frustration before rumours of sightings and the possible scenarios put forward to explain Jaryd's disappearance, which increased with the years. But while 4 years is far too long to wait to have your child restored to you, at least Jaryd's remains were found. And if it happened by happenstance - with a couple of hikers stumbling on his clothing - we must never forget the concerted effort of resources in SAR activities - however limited- that preceded the restoration and of the publicity organised to support it.

I believe that those rigorous, coordinated investigations made possible by harnessing government's resources and -finally- harnessing the expertise of other authorised agents would ultimately, even without the two hikers, have led to the Comanche Peak Wilderness. This is the unfathomable spot - a breath-taking 550 vertical feet above the trail where Jaryd Atadero was last seen, where his remains were found.

We witness the exhausting media circus. No matter how tired Atadero became in the glare of the lights and the media's sustained attention, he never forgot the potentially pivotal role of the media in cases of missing children and referred to the press nearly always, as his friends. As the story unfolds, we see with increasing clarity, the central and powerful role of law enforcement and of government, represented by the Sheriff and his agencies (Emergency Response Team, Victim Response Team); and, notably, by Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo who would go on to pass legislation to dedicate the Big South Trail to Jaryd Atadero and his legacy.

Many people played key roles in the outcomes of Jaryd's story. Atadero remembers to commend and thank each one of them: Dr. Michael Baden - forensic pathologist who helped put paid to the terrifying notion that a mountain lion had consumed his child; I recall his joy at the sight of Deputy Jose Romero in the early days of the tragedy. But the greatest credit he gives to tracking experts: Rod 'Seaux' Larreau, member of the Green Berets who knew where Jaryd would be found and provided the improbable and priceless map included in the book and Don Bendell, a Vietnam Special Forces veteran 'who uses his skills to track those who become lost or missing'.

In an appendix to the book Atadero provides links to the website of CANAM MISSING and to the documentaries produced by this team of retired police officers led by David Paulides. The group has been invaluable in advancing the cause of Jaryd Atadero and others who have vanished in the wilds of North America. With their own book "Missing 411" and their documentaries which feature Jaryd's case as the first in the series, these ex-policemen demonstrate a unique resourcefulness which will benefit future SAR efforts worldwide. In a great service to humanity CANAM Missing has offered its SAR prowess to the families of the missing in America: intervening when all (ostensibly) possible leads have been exhausted and traditional police searches have failed; reviving cold case files, conducting researches, on scene investigations and generally getting to grips with "*...the issues associated with people who go missing in the wilds of North America.*"

Contrast this humanitarian service and its rigor with the ineptitude, the indifference, the violence and the lawlessness of the system we encounter in Jowhor Ile's Nigeria based novel which I reference at the beginning of this review. Two things come to mind: the first -arguably more about the system's deficiency than its indifference - is the 48 hour period required by law to elapse before Bendic Utu, fictional Paul's father, could officially declare his son missing. In America, where the Ataderos live, the National Child Search Assistance Act, passed in 1990, prohibits law enforcement agencies from requiring a waiting period before taking a missing person's report.

If Allyn Atadero endured 4 years of silence about Jaryd's fate, the fictional Utus of Nigeria received no information whatsoever about Paul until an estimated 12 or 13 years had elapsed. Ajie, whose point of view dominates the story and who was by my estimate, 12 when his older brother disappeared, is in his twenties, fully grown, when the truth comes out - by happenstance. Or

its moral equivalent. This 12/13 year time lag, is the second - and by far greater - systemic crime against the family at the centre of Jowhor Ile's fiction.

I went online to look up facts about Missing People in Nigeria paying special attention to Rivers State - the setting of Ile's novel. Culled from police files and recorded by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the numbers recorded for Missing People in Rivers State are improbably small: 8, 5, 18, 9, 12, 66, 10, 2 missing people for the years 2002 – 2012 with the exception of 2008 and 2009 because data for these years is, according to the researcher, unavailable. I looked at the other 35 states and Abuja FCT. No striking differences but what did show up visibly was the data recorded for many of the Northern States: Data was recorded as N/A – not available. Published on www.nairaland.com, the table does not display statistics beyond those documented for 2012. In 2014 when 276 girls were abducted from a school in Chibok, Borno State, in the North-East of Nigeria, national media broadcast the news about this staggering number of girls gone missing in a single night from the same place, only after international media broke the news about the Chibok girls across the globe. I do not find the stifling figures in the NBS table negligible: every soul that goes missing is one too many tragedies but don't these figures convince you that in all probability no-one is counting? Are they not evidence of the child safety crisis in our country?

With 'And After Many Days', Jowhor Ile has crafted an evocatively titled requiem for a fictional school boy gone missing in a city stalked by the wild beasts of law enforcement. His novel is the cry of the universal human family, "a howl in the forest" for our loved ones, for their protection, for human safety in human spaces, particularly on our city streets. I thank Jowhor Ile for drawing attention, with his debut novel, to the plight of the untold number of Nigerians who have experienced the loss of a child in this devastating, shockingly under-reported way.

In 'Missing: When the Son Sets', Allyn Atadero presents his painstaking and ongoing efforts to solve the mystery of his son Jaryd's disappearance in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and his own life since that time. The book, and today, his advocacy work for missing people and recreational safety, are the altar of God he has built to hallow Jaryd's memory. This father's inextinguishable love for his son is the strong, solitary flame burning on that altar. Leafing through "Missing: When the Son Sets", I shook my head gently, hearing the anguished cry of Allyn Atadero's broken heart *"for all who have lost a child.*

My Preamble To 'What Did Jesus Say'

Jesus went missing when he was 12 years old. His step-father, Joseph, and his mother, Mary, were beside themselves with fear. They spent a whole day looking for him, frantically weaving in and out of the convoy of people – family, friends, strangers- heading back to Nazareth from Jerusalem where they had taken part in the Passover Festival. The last place they thought to look in was the Temple in Jerusalem. Three days went by before they found Jesus there, calmly studying the Word and sharing knowledge with the Temple priests. Doing what he loved to do. Mary and Joseph were astonished (and perhaps a little angry?). He – curiously (and perhaps infuriatingly!) – was calm. Looking with love into their anxious eyes, with the mildest astonishment, he said, 'Did you not know I would be in my Father's House?'

('What did Jesus Say?' by Allyn Atadero published in 'Missing: When the Son Sets' page 351)

Link to Missing 411 Documentary about Jaryd Atadero's Disappearance produced by CANAM Missing and narrated by David Paulides:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QjBFM56EC8>

Authors' Biographies

Allyn Atadero is a physical education instructor at a middle – school in Littleton, Colorado, USA. Allyn and his twin brother, Arlyn, own The Poudre River Resort “nestled between the Poudre River and the Colorado Rocky Mountains”.



*(Left) Co-Author, Allyn Atadero
(Right) Co-Author, Arlyn Atadero*

‘Missing: When the Son Sets’ is the book he has written to record his 3 year old son, Jaryd’s, disappearance on the Big South Trail of the Rockies and his on-going effort to solve the mystery of Jaryd’s disappearance and ultimately, Jaryd’s death. Today Allyn Atadero is a passionate advocate for missing people and recreational safety. His efforts in collaboration with committed US law-makers have resulted in: the Jaryd Atadero Whistle Project with the goal of trail safety for elementary school children; the Amber Alert law – an emergency alert system in Colorado which notifies broadcast media state-wide when an abduction of a child has been confirmed; and a proclamation, under Governor Ritter, of an annual Recreational Safety Awareness Week in honour of Jaryd Atadero and the ‘great search and rescue teams’ in Colorado.

Arlyn Atadero is currently the assistant superintendent of the McCabe School District in El Centro, California. Arlyn is a graduate of Arizona State University and has a master’s degree in education.



Reviewer, Olatoun Williams