

Boy's '94 disappearance fades further from memory

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"This case will never be closed, not until we know what happened."

-- Detective Sgt. Shelley Holloway, Livonia Police Department

The tips, if any, are few and far between now. As we approach the nine-year anniversary of the baffling disappearance of 4-year-old **D'Wan Sims**, the case is technically open but seems destined to remain a Metro Detroit mystery that has produced much speculation but no conclusive evidence about his fate.

D'Wan's mother told police she lost track of the Detroit youngster on Dec. 11, 1994, in a mass of Christmas shoppers at Wonderland Mall in Livonia.

Her story touched off a massive national search, intense media coverage, thousands of tips and scores of false leads about where **D'Wan's** body could be found.

Now, with the recent announcement that aging Wonderland Mall will be demolished next summer to build a retail power center, one can't help but wonder if **D'Wan** will be forgotten.

Detective Sgt. Shelley Holloway of the Livonia police sex crimes unit, now assigned to the the case, acknowledged that "there's really nothing going on" with the investigation. However, she emphasized it will not be closed until the mystery is solved.

"It's a sad and haunting situation," she said.

D'Wan's body -- if he was killed -- has never been found and Livonia police still don't believe **D'Wan's** mother's assertion that the boy was inside the mall the day he disappeared.

D'Wan's mother, named Dwanna Harris at the time, adamantly denied any wrongdoing and hired one of Detroit's top defense attorneys, Cornelius Pitts, to represent her. **D'Wan's** family continued to maintain the boy was abducted from the mall. But police said the boy did not show up on mall surveillance camera tapes and they could not locate any witnesses who saw **D'Wan** with his mother at the mall. They also said Harris flunked two lie detector tests.

"We are confident that **D'Wan** was not at the mall when his mother arrived there," Holloway said. "She is the one and only suspect. We've looked at other things, but it always leads back to her. We think whatever happened to **D'Wan**, happened someplace else. But there is a lack of evidence, and that's why there has never been a charge."

Hundreds of police, volunteers, friends and family scoured the mall and surrounding area, as well as parts of Detroit, trying to find **D'Wan**. His picture appeared in newspapers and fliers across the country, and he was listed in the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Detroit homicide police and investigators from the FBI, the Secret Service and U.S. Customs also took part in the search.

Cadaver-sniffing dogs were sent to several sites in Metro Detroit. In 1999, a child's body was found in Atlanta, but DNA testing showed it wasn't **D'Wan**. Then there were the outright hoaxes, like the woman who claimed **D'Wan** was being held hostage in a home on Detroit's east side.

Beverly Harris, the mother of Dwanna Harris, defended her daughter, whom she described as emotionally devastated by the loss of her son and by police interrogations. In newspaper stories, she recalled the sorrow of each passing Christmas without the little brown-skinned boy who liked the Power Rangers and watching television.

Dwanna Harris, unwed at the time of **D'Wan**'s disappearance, has married and is now named Dwanna Jackson. She could not be reached for comment.

In March of 2000, acting on a tip, Wayne County Sheriff's Department deputies and specially trained dogs combed Hines Park in Dearborn Heights looking for **D'Wan**'s remains without results.

The search goes on.

Caption: Luther Keith Luther Keith

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