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THE SEARCH

Woman Looking for a Long-Lost Son

By ANDREW JACOBS

There are many quixotic searches still going on around the ruins of the World Trade Center, but few are as uncertain as Jody Gee's search for the son she never knew.

For nearly two weeks, Ms. Gee has been walking around Manhattan, looking for the son she said she gave up for adoption four decades ago. All she knows is his legal name, Yosef Kahn, and that he lived in New York and may have been working in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11.

A resident of Metairie, La., Ms Gee, 56, and her son Joe spend their nights at a motel near La Guardia Airport, and their days hanging missing-person fliers around the city. Because she has no idea what Yosef Kahn looks like, the fliers have photos only of Joe, who is 20, and an image of Ms. Gee as a young woman.

"I'm not going to let anyone tell me he's not here," she said, defiant and tearful, as she wandered around Lower Manhattan tending to the ubiquitous papers she had posted days earlier. "I know he's here, and I won't leave until I find him."

When she was 16, Ms. Gee, orphaned and living alone in New Orleans, gave up her newborn son to a lingerie marketing executive from New York. She said the man, Monte Kahn, was a regular at the Bourbon Street restaurant where she worked, and Ms. Gee grew to trust and respect him. When he learned that she was a teenage mother on her own, he offered to adopt the boy and promised to raise him as a Jew, something that Ms. Gee, who is Jewish, said was important to her.

In what she described as an under-the-table arrangement, Ms. Gee said she signed some documents and Mr. Kahn took the boy back to New York, where he had told her he lived with his wife and a 5-year-old daughter. She said he did not leave an address or a phone number.

But before departing, he asked Ms. Gee to sit for a charcoal portrait on Pirate's Alley, she said. "He told me he would hang it in his office, and when Yosef grew up and asked about the woman, he would tell him I was his mother."

Ms. Gee moved on with her life, became an environmental investigator and gave birth to a second son. "I closed that chapter and rarely looked back," she said. Two years ago, she found out that she had cancer, she said, and was inspired to seek out the child she gave away. "I wanted Joey to have a brother, in case I wasn't around. I want to find him before I die."

She said she hired a private investigator, who found a Yosef Kahn who at the time was working in the World Trade Center. The investigator gave her the man's work number and tried to arrange a three-way call, but when that attempt fell through because the man was at a meeting, she never tried calling again. She does not have a home address or number or know what company he worked for. She said that in the chaos that accompanied her illness, she was preoccupied and lost the work number. "I stopped working, lost my home, and then everything fell apart," she said.

Although her son Joe corroborated many details of her account, there was no way to independently verify Ms. Gee's story.

The official lists of the dead and the missing do not include anyone with the last name Kahn, and she said she had vainly tried every Yosef, Joseph or Joe Kahn in the New York City phone books, although she has not tried the surrounding suburbs. Still, Ms. Gee, who walks haltingly with a cane, cannot be dissuaded from her single-minded devotion. Nearly out of money, she said she would return to Louisiana in a few days, but promised to come back to New York and continue her search.

On Thursday, Ms. Gee and Joe spent the afternoon at the family assistance center on Pier 94 scanning the weathered images of the missing and putting up fresh posters of their own. The fliers plead for information about Yosef Kahn, who would be 40, and end with the line, "Looking for you, alive or dead."



Frances Roberts for The New York Times

Jody Gee thinks her son may have been in the trade center on Sept. 11.

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