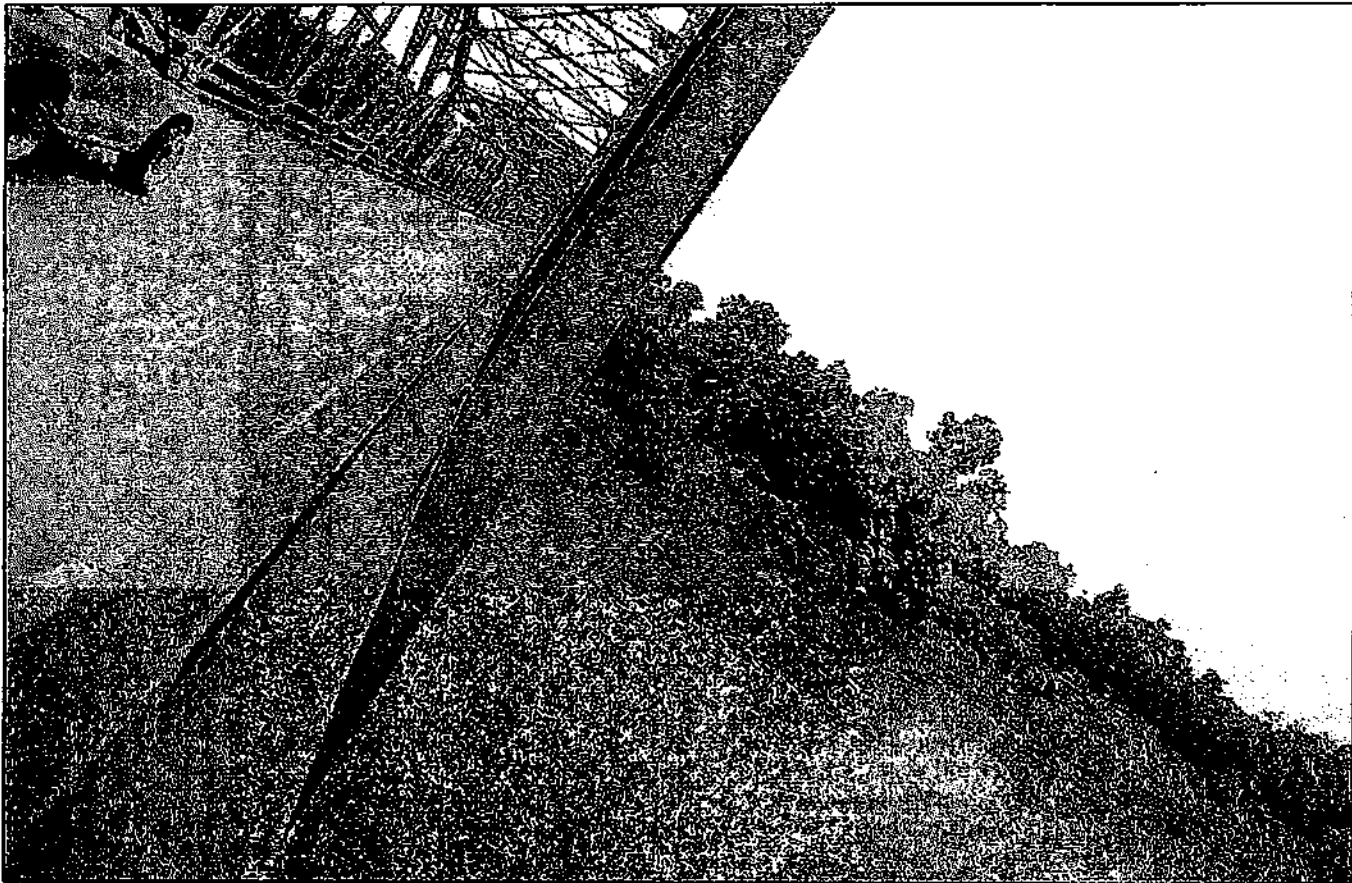


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SEARCH FOR A KILLER: ONE YEAR LATER



JOHN CONRAD / HERALD DEMOCRAT

Jennifer Lynette Harris was found about two miles down river from the Highway 78 bridge, authorities believe her killer possibly dumped Harris' body from the bridge into the Red River.

so many
Questions
so few **Answers**

After a horrific year, Jennifer Harris' family continues to hope her killer will be brought to justice

BY JERRIE WHITELEY
HERALD DEMOCRAT

For Jerry Harris of Hurst, Sunday will mark the end of what he calls the most trying year of his life. On May 12, a year ago, Harris' daughter, Jennifer Harris, left a friend's house promising to return in a few hours. She never returned.

Police found her empty truck a few hours later near Lake Bonham. Twenty-four hours later, they declared her missing. Six days later, officers told Jerry Harris his daughter's body had been found in the murky waters of the Red River.

Since that day, Jerry Harris has waited for answers to the questions parents hope they never have to ask. Questions like, "Who dumped his daughter's body into the Red River and why?" He also wants to know why some missing persons cases, like the Laci Peterson case in California, garner national attention while his daughter's case has gone "practically unnoticed" by the media. And, he wonders if additional media attention can help solve his daughter's case.

Fannin County Attorney Myles Porter and members of the Fannin County Sheriff's Office know that Jerry Harris wants answers because they want them too. And although Porter said he does not know that additional media attention will help them get answers, he said it can't hurt.

Porter and Fannin Sheriff's Lt. David Perkins are trying everything

to break the case, including requesting help from Texas Attorney General's Office Investigators Jeff Bishop and Louis Laurel. Perkins was working with the FCSO when the Harris case began, and he was at the river when the 28-year-old's body was recovered. However, he was not actually working the case until FCSO Investigator Mike McClellan left this spring. The addition of the two state investigators and Perkins to the case brings a whole new set of eyes and ears to the hunt for clues.

"What we are doing is starting all over from scratch on the investigation to see what has been missed, if anything, and to try to come up with a potential suspect," Perkins said in a telephone interview.

He said there were suspects in the original investigation and there has been no change in the status of those suspects. Perkins, however, would not elaborate on who those suspects are or their relationships, if any, with Jennifer Harris.

Porter, too, is quiet on the subject of suspects. He said it would be unwise at this point for his office to focus too much public attention on any one person.

Jerry Harris said his family feels there is "a short list of suspects" and the family feels "that one of the people on that list is responsible for Jennifer's death."

Further, he said he hopes additional public attention to the case will help investigators find evidence that will narrow the list of suspects to one.

Perkins said the case has seen a

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Harris



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Sunday marks the end of what Jerry Harris calls the most trying year of his life. Harris and his family will hold a candlelight memorial for Jennifer Harris, who was found slain in the Red River six days after she disappeared on May 12. "It is just another way to try to get some closure for the family," Harris said.

"(Jennifer) met someone she thought she could trust. That person then turned out to be more dangerous than she ever thought he could be and by then it was too late."

JERRY HARRIS
on his daughter's killer

HARRIS: Family, investigators still looking for answers

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lot of activity in the past few weeks. "A whole new set of flyers has been distributed," he said. Those flyers ask anyone with any knowledge of what happened to Jennifer Harris to call authorities. Those calls, authorities hope, could lead the investigation forward and ultimately help to find the answers everyone wants.

Jerry Harris said while there are issues that remain a mystery in the case, he feels pretty sure about how his daughter ended up with the person who killed her.

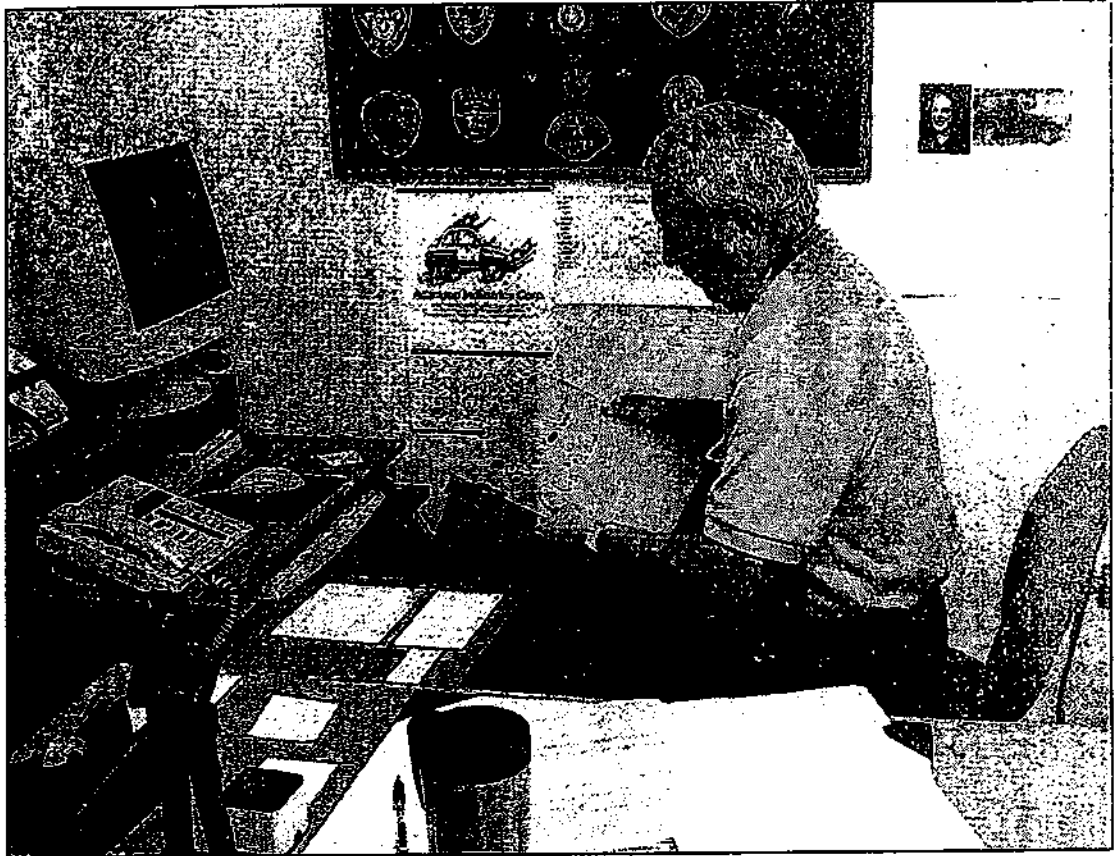
"She met someone she thought she could trust. That person then turned out to be more dangerous than she ever thought he could be and by then it was too late," Harris said. He added that his daughter was a kind, compassionate young woman who always wanted to walk away from relationships on friendly terms. Thus, he said, she would have met a friend for a talk, even if she were having problems with that person.

The fact that Ms. Harris appears to have gone willingly with the person who ultimately killed her is one of the parallels between her case and that of the nationally reported disappearance of Laci Peterson.

Both women appeared to have vanished while en route to do something else. Mrs. Peterson was last seen walking a dog and Ms. Harris was last seen driving away to meet someone. Both women were missing for an extended period of time and both were found dead in water.

One striking difference between Mrs. Peterson's case and Ms. Harris' is the amount of media attention the two cases have attracted. The fact that Mrs. Peterson was known to be pregnant and disappeared on Christmas Eve might have caused her case to draw more media attention, but that does not explain the lack of interest in Ms. Harris' case.

Jerry Harris said members of his family have approached large media outlets about the



JOHN CONRAD / HERALD DEMOCRAT

Lead investigator Lt. D.F. Perkins with the Fannin County sheriff department places a box of files on the Jennifer Harris case on the floor. Perkins inherited the case about two months ago, but had been assisting Lt. Mike McClellan on the case from the beginning.

case but have not seen any interest. And although local newspapers have run advance's about the candlelight memorial the family plans to hold on Mother's Day, Jerry Harris was quick to add that this vigil was not conceived to draw media attention.

"It is just another way to try to get some closure for the family," Harris said. He said the media is welcome to the event but it is really for "Jennifer's family and friends to have a chance to honor her memory."

Nonetheless, Jerry Harris said he hopes any additional attention the case gets from the media will be helpful. Bob Jarvis, former Grayson County attorney, said media spotlight on a case that has stalled can be a good thing.

"A lot of the time when the media gets involved, it highlights the situation and it assists (law enforcement) in getting other potential sources to come

forward. Then, it is up to law enforcement to do a good job of taking those tips and developing suspects from them," Jarvis said.

He said it's then up to the prosecutors to try the case that has been developed. It is not up to the media, Jarvis said, to investigate the case. And, Jarvis agreed with Porter's stance on not identifying people as suspects to the media. "That should never be done until (law enforcement) has enough evidence to support an arrest," Jarvis added.

Jarvis continued that just because authorities have talked to a person once or twice does not make them a prime suspect in a case. Jarvis said in a murder case "anyone and everyone is a suspect." People remain suspects, Jarvis said, until law enforcement can clear them in some way.

Perkins and Porter say the case will stay open until it's

solved and they hope that will not be much longer. The both point out that some murder cases take years to solve.

Jerry Harris said he will continue to keep up with the case and those working it for as long as it takes. He said his daughter would not want her family to continue to grieve for her but he thinks it would be fitting to her memory to make sure the person who killed her is brought to justice.

Happy Mother's Day, Mom...
I hope your day is a Happy Mother's Day and a bright one, from your son.
Love, Bob