

Hundreds Support Area's Black and Missing

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Since October 11, 2010, Valencia Harris has lived a nightmare from which she's yet to emerge.

That night, someone entered her daughter Unique's apartment and spirited away the 24-year-old mother of two. She has yet to be found.

"I never thought in a million years that this would happen to me," said Harris, owner of a geriatric nursing facility. "She had a soft, passive side and I was always worried about her. Someone came in the middle of the night on Oct. 10 and took her.

Sometimes I have to pull off to the side of the road and cry. I have 100 different emotions a day. I'm trying to keep myself balanced."

"Sometimes you don't want to get up in the morning. You just want to stay wrapped up in a ball. I couldn't imagine before what this felt like. I could sympathize before, now I empathize. All my faith is in the Heavenly Father. He gave her to me and he will bring her back to me."

Harris, 46, stayed until the very end of the 2nd annual "Hope Without Boundaries" 5K Run/Walk at National Harbor in Ft. Washington, Maryland. On Saturday morning, more than 700

people showed their support of the 265,000 black and brown individuals who disappear every year.

At the start of the race, the

throng stood poised to jump into action. And at the start and finish line, enthusiastic supporters cheered on the athletes.

Twenty-two minutes later, the first runner crossed the finish line.

After the race, everyone milled around in the parking lot overlooking the water. People chatted, laughed and enjoyed the sunshine and the warm weather which happened to be a vast improvement from last year. Young and old unwound by dancing to pulsating music provided by a DJ, then cheered loudly as Fox 5 Anchor Allison Seymour and Fox's Community Relations Manager Micheline Bowman announced winners of each category.

"This year, our focus is on empowering our community to take action," said Natalie Wilson, co-founder of the Black and Missing Foundation. "People need to tell what they know and do and say something. Too many of our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters are going missing. One million people of color have been reported missing in the past five years."

"There are a number of reasons such as the increase in the number of people who are lured into sex trafficking, especially teens. We need better laws. And parents need to do a better job and know what their children are doing on Facebook, social media and in their free time."

Grieving friends and family members couldn't contain their anguish and a palpable sense of sorrow pervaded the event. Missing eight-year-old Relisha Rudd wasn't far from many people's minds. She disappeared in March after leaving in the com-

pany of Kahlil Tatum, a janitor at a homeless shelter in Southeast.

Michael Muse's son Christian, who's been missing for almost two years, appeared on the race flyer. The older Muse ran in the event and dozens of family and friends came out to remember Christian.

"Really nothing has happened since my son went missing. I'm disappointed in the lack of action on the part of the police department," said the 48-year-old Ft. Washington, Maryland resident and member of the go-go band Rare Essence. "They immediately named it non-critical. After seven months, I found out that he fell off the missing persons list and no one had informed me of it. I had to refile the case. We got some air time after 16 months of him being missing."

"Now that I'm talking with the people at Black and Missing, I found out that he's not even on the National Missing Person's list. We've heard that he's been killed or in the streets looking homeless but it's always from someone who knows someone. I'm at my wits end to get someone else to care about it. What's strange is that he hasn't touched his bank account in two years and they still haven't investigated that. I hope that this walk will show mass media that we count. People of color are underserved in missing person cases. Hopefully this will show that we have to take care of us and that there are people, black or white that care."

Christian's mother, Cheryl Collier, said Christian had been

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Emotions could be seen on the faces of many spectators and supporters before the start of the 2nd Annual "Hope Without Boundaries" 5K Run/Walk at National Harbor on Saturday, May 24. /Photo by Khalid Naji-Allah

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Milana Muse is comforted by her father Michael Muse during the 2nd Annual "Hope Without Boundaries" 5K Run/Walk at National Harbor on Saturday, May 24. /Photo by Khalid Naji-Allah



Milana Muse, the twin sister of Christian Muse, who has been missing since July 15, 2012 listened as speakers made remarks before the start of the 2nd Annual "Hope Without Boundaries" 5K Run/Walk at National Harbor on Saturday, May 24. /Photo by Khalid Naji-Allah

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hanging with his father and she thought initially that they might have had a disagreement and he ran away.

"He just disappeared. In my heart I don't think he's dead and that he'll just show up one day. I almost lost my mind when it happened but I have a strong faith in God; I know he's protected," said the federal employee who lives in Accokeek, Maryland. "This has brought our family closer together, definitely."

Luan Cottrell of Gaithersburg, Maryland, enjoyed the am-

bience while volunteering at the May 24 event which she attended for the first time.

"I didn't know too much about the 5K walk and run. My friend told me about it. I don't have kids but I wanted to participate for others kids," said Cottrell, who wore a green shirt and a broad smile while standing in the parking lot cheering on walkers and runners as they completed their trek.

"I will do anything that I can do to help this organization. This morning, I just helped pass out T-shirts and bags as part of the hospitality team. Everyone has good energy. We all came to-

gether as one for a good cause. I would come out again next year and bring a couple friends."

Robyn Priest and Susan Parker traveled from Baltimore to participate. Both women, members of the social and civic organization Chums, Inc., – one of the race's sponsors – manned a table.

"There's strength in numbers," Parker said. "When you think that ... 40 percent (of those taken) are people of color, you can't say it's an isolated incident. We have to use the power of communication to reach out and try to bring peace to the families." **WI**

Sam P.K. Collins contributed to this story.

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