

AFTER FIVE YEARS, DISAPPEARANCE REMAINS A MYSTERY

By Justin Kloczko

Journal Inquirer, April 2014

ENFIELD — Five years ago this month, 43-year-old Awilda Marrero stepped out into a cold rain from her two-family house at 16 Asnuntuck St. without her purse, cellphone, or shoes, and never came back.

As of today, she remains missing. Law enforcement officials have no answers as to what happened to Marrero, a native of Puerto Rico who, at the time of her disappearance, was five days shy of becoming a grandmother for the second time.

The last time Marrero's daughter, Angelica Carmona — who was 17 then — saw her mother was around 11:30 p.m. on April 5, 2009. When Carmona woke up around 7:30 the next morning, her mother was gone.

Police said there were no signs of forced entry to the home and no commotion reported by Marrero's family.

Carmona, who was pregnant and living with her mother and her own one-year-old son at the time, initially thought maybe her mother went for an early morning walk, or perhaps went fishing, something she liked to do since the Connecticut River was just down the street.

But, then again, it all struck Carmona as odd because her mother likely left in her gray nightgown and bare feet. It had also been raining and cold at the time, so why would she leave without even a coat?

By the afternoon of April 6, with her mother still gone, Carmona called police, and a patrol officer responded. The next day, Detective Michael Bailey got involved in the case.

“The door was unlocked, which is why we think she left on her own,” said Bailey, a detective with the Police Department since 2005.

Police mobilize search

Police thought maybe Marrero had wandered off to the local soup kitchen, but no one there had seen her. They then did extensive searches for her along the Connecticut River. Police canine units scoured the area, boats were deployed, and officers even got assistance from state police, but nothing turned up.

“We haven’t had a sighting or remains match up to her since,” Bailey said.

At one point, it’s believed that a police dog picked up Marrero’s scent, which brought officers to the Connecticut River on South River Street, near a boat launch, but the track was lost there, Bailey said.

Carmona said the area was frequented by her mother as she loved to fish, and believes her mother’s scent could have been present there from another time, since she may have been by the river two days prior to her disappearance.

But Officer Christopher Moylan, a canine handler with the department, has another view. “Usually, it’s the freshest scent that’s out there” that a police dog tracks, Moylan said.

Marrero, who would be 48 now, had suffered from issues with depression, particularly bipolar disorder, and was taking medication around the time of her disappearance, Carmona said.

But she also said her mother was excited about the prospect of Carmona having another child — her daughter, Tiara, was born five days after Marrero disappeared. And Marrero loved being a grandmother — she adored Carmona’s son, Jacob, and had even bought clothes for the baby on the way, Carmona said.

Even Bailey admits, “There was incentive for her to stay.”

Still, police don’t think Marrero’s disappearance is a criminal matter. There have been no suspects developed in the case, Bailey said.

“We have no reason to believe it was a homicide,” Lt. Willie Pedemonti said.

Carmona said police have told her they believe Marrero committed suicide and they just haven’t found her body. But it’s a theory Carmona just doesn’t believe. Her mother wouldn’t leave her alone in the world.

Carmona said she and her mother came to the U.S. in 2004, and knew almost no one in the area. They settled in New Britain first, then moved to Enfield. Carmona later moved back to New Britain after her mother went missing.

At one point Marrero had a boyfriend who was involved with drugs but he was in jail around the time she disappeared, Carmona said. Other family members lived in New York City, and Marrero was in regular contact with them.

A cryptic message

The night before Marrero went missing she told Carmona’s boyfriend that if something happened to her to “take care of my daughter,” Carmona said.

Marrero also phoned her sister in New York City and said the same thing, Carmona said.

“The next day she was gone,” Carmona said. “I don’t know what she meant by that. That’s why for me it was really strange.”

Pedemonti said anything is possible at this point since police know so little about Marrero’s disappearance.

“She could have changed her life, started a new identity, and hasn’t looked back,” Pedemonti said.

But Carmona doesn’t believe that.

“She told me she wanted to help with the baby. Her intention was to stay with me,” Carmona said.

Carmona has her own theories of what might have happened to her mother.

“I think that maybe she got into a car,” Carmona said, but she cannot offer any further speculation if her mother was abducted or murdered.

“I don’t think she tried to commit suicide,” Carmona said.

Carmona believes her mother went missing between midnight and around 7 a.m. and left through a back door. Their home was on a dead end street and a neighbor’s security camera, which would have picked up activity toward the front of the home, was reviewed and didn’t show Marrero leaving through the front door, Carmona said.

Carmona, now 23 and working at a clothing store to support her two children with her boyfriend, said she wants some sort of closure on her mother’s case.

“If she’s dead or alive, we don’t know,” she said.

Carmona had inquired about applying for a death certificate for her mother, since she’s been missing for so long, but then didn’t follow through. She can’t give up hope that her mother’s still alive.

Carmona thinks about her mother all the time, checks in with police about the case every three or four months, and periodically puts up fliers about her around Enfield. She said the fliers have yielded no phone calls.

“She was the only person I had here,” said Carmona, tearing up beside two photo albums in the kitchen of her New Britain apartment earlier

this week. Carmona's father died in Puerto Rico when she was 12 years old. "I know my mom, I know she wouldn't leave me knowing that I have no family here," Carmona said.

They had lived a fairly solitary life in Enfield and had only each other to rely on. Carmona spent her time fishing with her mother and remembers her playing with her son.

Bailey said he's periodically checked for any possible activity associated with Marrero's Social Security number, but has found nothing

The Police Department could try harder, Carmona said.

"You can't hide a body for five years. If it's in the water, it shows up," she said.

But Bailey believes police have done all they can.

"We've reached a point where there is not much else we can do," Bailey said. "I don't believe she's alive."

Still, Bailey would also like the family to have closure, and both Bailey and Carmona are hoping renewed publicity about Marrero's disappearance might turn up some leads.

Marrero was last described as being just over 5 feet tall and 165 pounds with brown hair and

brown eyes. She has a scar on her upper right arm and "Joel" tattooed on her right thigh.

Anyone with any information about Marrero is asked to contact Bailey at the Police Department at 860-763-8935.