

## **Hope, fear mingle as search goes on Parent of missing 3-year-old girl never thought it could happen to her**

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### TORONTO

Like most parents, Keri Deon could not even comprehend what it was like to be the parent of a missing child. She never thought it could happen to her.

But the mother of a three-year-old Toronto girl missing since last Wednesday says she knows that feeling now. "It's a mixture of hope and fear," Ms. Deon said in an interview in her daughter's bedroom yesterday.

Kayla Klaudusz went missing from the back yard of her apartment building in the west end of Toronto last Wednesday evening. Extensive searches by police and volunteers throughout the area have so far turned up nothing.

Ms. Deon said she had always felt secure in her neighbourhood. She has lived in the same apartment building for 17 years, since she was six years old.

"This was our home for so long," she said. "This was our security."

Despite the fruitless days of searching, Ms. Deon still believes Kayla is alive.

She strongly believes somebody knows where her daughter is, and would like anyone who has information to speak up. "I can't believe nobody saw anything."

If somebody has abducted her daughter, that person is probably afraid of being caught, Ms. Deon said. "Drop her off at a store. Drop her off anywhere."

While Kayla's father, Steve Klaudusz, is taking part in the searches, Ms. Deon is staying close to home and the police command post nearby, waiting for any new developments.

"I think that waiting is the most treacherous part," she said. "It's very frustrating sitting here."

Kayla was "street-proofed" and knew not to talk to strangers, her mother added. "Kayla was the type of child who wouldn't trust anybody."

The little girl, described by her mother as a tough kid, "wouldn't put up with anything without a fight. She likes to show she's the boss," Ms. Deon said.

She said her daughter is probably scared and wondering why her parents haven't come to get her.

Ms. Deon is not even going to think about the search being scaled down. "I'll deal with it when it happens."

Late yesterday, Metro police announced they will continue the search for at least another day.

Staff Sergeant Diane Shillington said that at least 100 uniformed officers will search houses and apartments in the area from Roncesvalles Avenue to Dunn Avenue, and from Queen Street West to Lakeshore Boulevard. She added that all residences within 45 metres of Kayla's home had been searched at least twice.

"We still have about 30 per cent of our target area to search," Staff Sgt. Shillington said. "We aren't going to give up just yet."

But police admitted that every avenue they had investigated turned out to be a dead end.

An RCMP helicopter equipped with heat-seeking radar was brought in Saturday night from Ottawa, buoying hopes that Kayla might be found among the dense bushes in the High Park and Humber River areas. But the helicopter located only a large raccoon and an amorous couple during its three-hour flight early yesterday morning. Police said the device would not be used again in the investigation.

As 200 police officers knocked on doors Saturday and Sunday, more than 100 volunteers, including Kayla's father, cut through weeds and bushes along the Humber River. The volunteers centred on the area after a psychic said last week that the girl was alive and near the river.

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