



TUESDAY

XTRA

Second year passes as parents keep searching for missing son

WEST DES MOINES (AP) — Wednesday, Sept. 5, will be a long day in the longest two years of Noreen and John Gosch's lives.

It will have been two years ago that the couple's son, Johnny, left their home in this quiet, Des Moines suburb to deliver his Sunday newspaper route. He hasn't been seen since.

"Wednesday's going to be a terrible day... a long, awful day," Noreen Gosch said in an interview. "You always remember, but on Sept. 5, it hurts a little more."

There's been a lot of hurt for the Gosches in those two years, but not enough to stop them from doing everything in their power to find their son. The effort started with selling candy bars and buttons on Des Moines street corners, and it has progressed to appearances on national television, testifying before congressional committees in Washington and becoming part of a national effort to educate people about missing children.

The campaign to help all missing children is important, but Noreen Gosch said "the bottom line is that my son is still missing. That's what it all boils down to for me."

Mrs. Gosch said she resigned herself long ago to the fact that the search will be a long one. But there is some hope and the Gosches have had enough reported sightings that they are convinced he's still alive.

Mrs. Gosch said most of the people who report seeing Johnny say he has long hair, walks with a limp, has slurred speech and is now almost 6 feet tall. When they have a sighting, the detective goes to the area to search. So far, the closest he's come is within four days of the boy — and a man who is with him all the time.

"It's good on the one hand because we know he's alive," Mrs. Gosch said. "But it's frustrating because we can't be there at the same time. Someday, we will be."

The Gosches believe their son was taken as part of a national, organized child pornography ring. Experts in the field have told her "stringers" are sent to get young children for pedophiles — people who have sex with children.

"We've been told these creeps get \$12,000 to \$20,000 dollars a head, depending on how satisfactory the children are," Mrs. Gosch said. "Hey, the risks are pretty high if they get caught, so the pay has to be good."

To find Johnny, the Gosches have hired private investigators, sent his poster throughout the nation, held numerous fund-raising activities and given speeches across the state.

While the publicity is necessary to their cause, it also can be a burden. The Gosches have been criticized and often scrutinized for their efforts, but it doesn't matter to them.

In an earlier interview, Gosch said he and his wife wouldn't stop looking for their son "until our bones are dust and we can't move."

The search took on extra incentive in August when another Des Moines newsboy disappeared, under circumstances eerily similar to the Gosch case.

Eugene Wade Martin, 14, was preparing to deliver his Des Moines Sunday Register route Aug. 12. He had gone to a corner to pick up his papers. Witnesses saw a man talking to Eugene. Despite massive searches, hefty reward funds totalling more than \$100,000 and quick police response, there are no solid leads in Martin's case.

It was almost a carbon copy of Johnny Gosch's disappearance. He also went to a street corner to pick up his papers. Witnesses saw him talking to a man who seemed drunk or high, and suddenly Johnny was gone.

The major difference in the cases, said Mrs. Gosch, was the way police and the public immediately responded to Martin's disappearance. She and her husband have been critical of several people, especially law enforcement officers, for not searching for their son and for refusing to initially treat the case as an abduction.

"It was an atrocity that they didn't look for Johnny Gosch like they did for Gene Martin," Mrs. Gosch said. "At least the Martins didn't have to go through what we did, at least they didn't have the added burden of fighting the system."

Part of the reason Martin's case got quick attention was a law passed this year by Iowa lawmakers that made it mandatory for police to begin searching for missing persons as soon as they are reported. The bill, dubbed the "Johnny Gosch bill," was pushed by the Gosches because they said police didn't start looking for their son until 72 hours had passed.

Law enforcement officials say they are continuing their search for Gosch, despite his parents' public criticism.

"We absolutely are still involved in that case," said FBI agent John Evans. "Whenever we receive any information, it's covered. We are doing everything humanly possible to get that child returned to his parents."

Both Evans and Sgt. Lyle McKinney of the West Des Moines Police Department said they work on the assumption that Johnny is alive.

"I can't afford the luxury of theories about whether he's alive or dead," McKinney said. "We're still working on it. Obviously, the tips have slowed

down, but we still get information from all over and we check on it."

Both men refused to comment on the Gosches' public criticism of their efforts. Both said they wished they had more positive information.

Authorities have not officially linked the two boys' cases, but the public has. The two boys were both subjects of intense searches shortly after Martin's disappearance.

Mrs. Gosch said she is torn between being grateful for the help being offered now and being angry that it didn't come sooner. Mostly, she's angry.

"You bet I'm angry, I'm as angry as hell," Mrs. Gosch said. "Some people helped us, but a large percentage of the people in Des Moines condemned us. We faced a lot of narrow-mindedness and apathy in this town. It left a bad taste in my mouth."

The Gosches were helped by a volunteer group that still meets bi-weekly to plan fund raisers and to spread the word about child abuse and missing children. Dallas Davis, a volunteer, neighbor and close friend of the Gosches, shares the family's anger over its treatment.

"Noreen Gosch has been force-feeding this state for two years about missing children," Ms. Davis said. "But people still sit on their fannies, they still won't believe their children are in trouble."

"If no one gets upset, nothing gets done, does it? Anger can eat you up if you direct it inward, so you have to channel it outside," Mrs. Gosch said. "I don't care anymore if that upsets people."

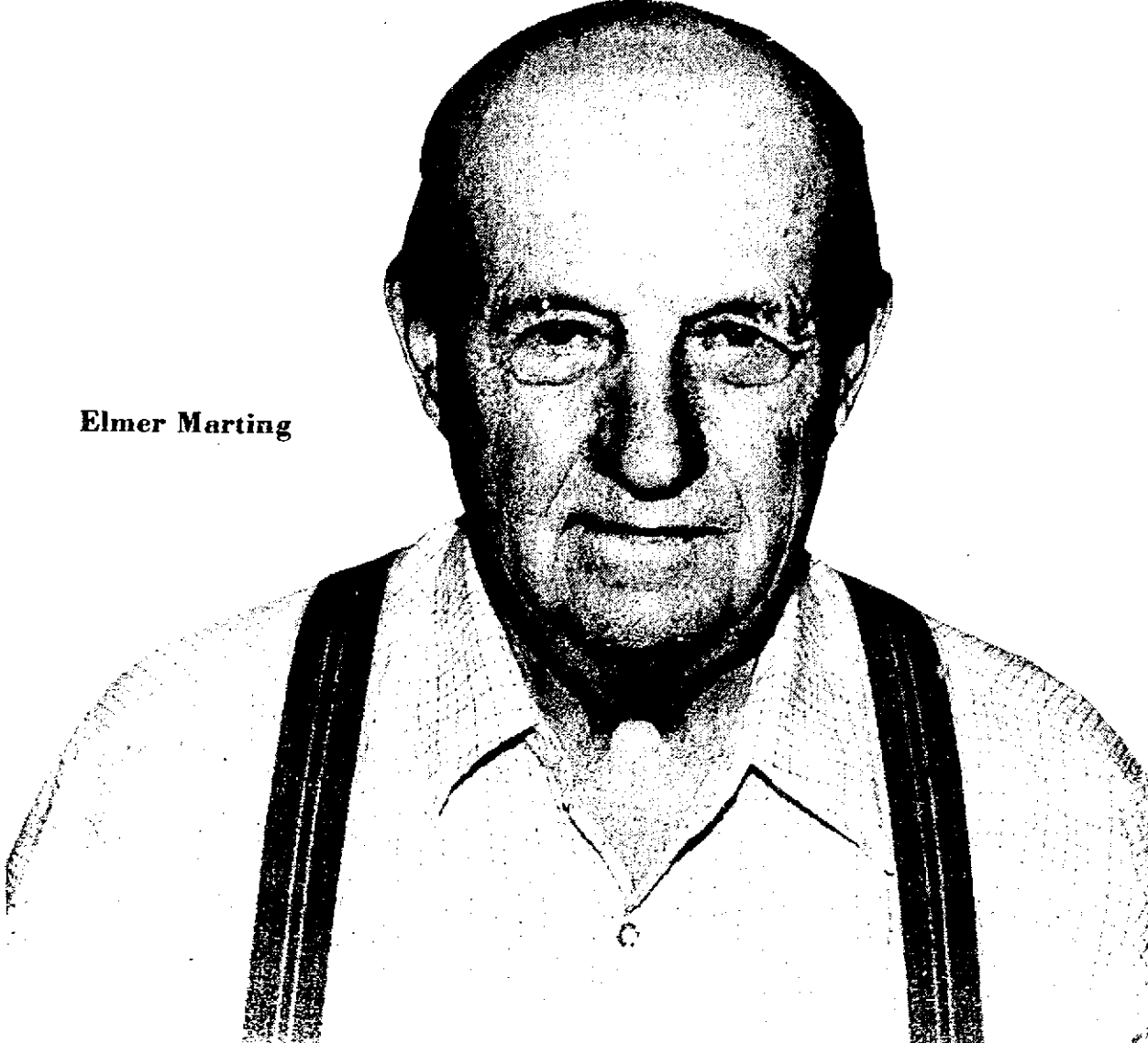
The family, including the couple's other two children, have had to be strong. Johnny's older brother and sister are gone from home, but they have not escaped the ordeal.

"They are angry too, and frightened that this kind of thing can happen and people can react so cruelly," Mrs. Gosch said.

Her daughter was the object of some of the unkindness that has been directed toward the Gosch family. When she was selling candy to help raise money for the detectives, a woman came up to her and spat on her, saying "Your mother is disgusting and I wouldn't do anything to help her."

Another man stood up at the end of one of Mrs. Gosch's speeches and told her he thought she didn't have a son named Johnny and had made the whole thing up for the fame.

"I told him I hoped the next child taken was his," she said. "It was the only time she lost her cool in public."



Elmer Marting

Personality of the Week —

Elmer Marting

by Brian Meyer
Register City Editor

POSTVILLE — Elmer Marting, perhaps the foremost woodcarver in Northeast Iowa, is a patient man by nature and by necessity.

By nature, because from a single piece of wood he carves his most famous item: chains. Some are large and complicated as an interlocked jigsaw puzzle and others as small and ornate as a toothpick-and-matchstick necklace for his wife, Helen.

By necessity, because at age 75 (76 this Saturday) he has had six heart attacks and must take things slow and sure. But he keeps carving. You might say he is chained to his craft.

A farmer most of his life on land southwest of Postville, he carved easels and toy chests there. When he sold the farm in 1976, the chores were over.

"I couldn't play cards good enough to suit the other guys," he says.

"He doesn't care to go down to the tavern and play cards," Helen adds.

"I didn't know what to do with myself, so I started carving," Elmer says, standing in his basement—a veritable museum of a woodcarver's craft.

"You'll never see more chains than you see here." A true statement. Chains of every sort and wood hang on the walls while exhibits of carved horses, wagons, flags and such, line all four walls. He estimated he's made over 400 chains, but Helen, sitting in the middle of the basement steps, says she thinks it's over 500.

His very first chain hangs in a special place on the wall. It looks rough and boxy compared to the later intricate and accomplished chains hanging nearby.

Elmer picks up a board with a line of carved chickens attached.

"I woke up one night with this idea. I said I was going to make something no one else had." He pulls a string in the bottom of the board and the chickens begin bobbing up and down, pecking at the board, Elmer smiles.

"One night I dreamed of a bike I had 63 years ago. One with those big front wheels. The next morning I started carving." He holds up the finished bike, a

marvel of wooden spokes. "I challenged myself to do as many spokes as I could. One hundred and twenty-eight spokes in that front wheel. About twice as many as they're supposed to have."

And Elmer's proud of all his work because of two things: No bolts. No glue. Everything hangs together through pure craftsmanship with knife and drill.

"Here. What do you think that is?" He hands over what looks to be a cheese slicer, but instead of a wire for cutting, it has wooden teeth. "A Norwegian chain saw," Elmer's eyes practically sparkle with mirth.

"Look. A diamond ring." It's all wood. He slips it on his finger, then off again.

Along an opposite wall, 77 chairs hang, all made of different types of wood. Some of the wood comes from distant lands like Africa or South America. He found these foreign woods at woodshops in Chicago and San Diego.

The other wood he gets is from friends, neighbors, sawmills or anyone who "has a stick lying by the corn crib or up in the driveway," he says.

"Anybody here you know?" he asks, lifting a tableau of an auction scene, with the people made of walnuts and butternuts. A walnut auctioneer is trying to sell a carved horse, while horse traders jabber nearby.

"Anything you can think of, I've made," he says, standing before a carved 16-horse hitching team and wagon. It was going to be 40 horses but his health slowed him up. "I might make it to 40. I might finish it just for fun." It takes three or four days to carve a horse.

Elmer uses no models or pictures to stimulate his imagination. It all comes from his head. Many of his ideas come from what he remembers of his early years on the farm—the horses, the threshers, the animals. "I just did 'em the way I looked at 'em when I was on the farm. I carved that gang plow just the way I sat on it."

The smallest things, done with toothpicks and matchsticks, are a little too small these days. "My eyes ain't good enough now," he says. Not like his first

days of carving, when he'd work from 6:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. straight. "At first I worked straight through just to see what it would look like when it was all done."

Elmer has shown his wares at many fairs, celebrations and woodcarvers' shows. He says he always had the biggest crowd around his table. He has the ribbons he's won encased in the basement.

He doesn't sell his works. "They'd never pay me for the time I got stuck in them." He does give pieces he's made to his children and grandchildren.

Elmer and Helen have five children: Elmer Jr., Robert,



CHAIN FLAG — Elmer Marting of Postville stands beside a wood chain flag made of blue basswood, red cedar and white pine. The flag has 1,380 pieces. (Photo by Brian Meyer)

Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 4, the 248th day of 1984. There are 118 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

- On Sept. 4, 1781, Los Angeles was founded by Spanish settlers. On this date:
- In 1882, the Pearl Street electric power station built by Thomas A. Edison began operation in New York City.
- In 1886, Apache Indians led by Geronimo surrendered to Gen. Nelson Miles at Skeleton Canyon in Arizona.
- In 1888, George Eastman patented his roll-film camera, and registered his trademark Kodak.
- In 1917, the American expeditionary force in France suffered its first fatalities in World War I.
- In 1948, Queen Wilhelmina abdicated the Dutch throne for health reasons.

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