

**FINDING  
BABY  
HOLLY**

## What Was Found in the Forest

I had waited ten months for this. Until now, I hadn't felt ready. And even though I knew the time had come, I still found myself feeling anxious as Troy and I parked our rental car beside a small office building.

I was thankful for the bright sunshine and perfect seventy-five-degree temperature. A cloudy, gloomy, rainy day would have made this visit harder. Sadder. Instead, this gorgeous April day just outside of Houston, Texas, was filled with light and life.

Troy retrieved his machete out of the back of the car.

The detectives had warned us, so we had prepared as well as we could.

"It's a thick, overgrown woods," they'd explained on a Zoom call when I'd told them I was going to make the eight-hour drive from my home in Oklahoma. "Lots of vines, brambles, bush palmetto, and thorny undergrowth. Wear long sleeves and long pants. And better wear boots. Parts of

it may be marshy.” We’d taken their advice. Troy had added the machete.

“There’s the red and white satellite tower, just like they told us,” I said, pointing. “And that must be the dirt road leading to it, right across the street.” Cars raced down Wallisville Road in front of us, so we stood for a few minutes, waiting for the traffic to clear enough to safely cross.

Now that I was finally here, my nervousness was beginning to fade. I felt God’s reassuring presence and was thankful He had prepared my heart, just as I’d prayed.

We made our way to the base of the tower in less than five minutes.

“Now we enter the woods to our left. The site should be about forty to fifty feet in,” I said. “To a clearing that was back there . . . forty-two years ago.” Troy charged forward. I followed, stepping carefully through the undergrowth. I didn’t know exactly what I was looking for. There would be nothing to mark the spot where, on January 11, 1981, the bodies of Tina Linn and Harold Dean Clouse, my parents, had been found in a horrific way.

The college-aged son of a local resident was out with his four huge German shepherds on January 6 when he noticed one dog had something in its mouth. From a distance, he couldn’t tell what it was. A squirrel maybe? The media account I’d listened to said the young man had been very shaken when his dog laid a human forearm, with a hand still attached, at his feet. The boy had called the police, who cordoned off the area and started a search. Five days later, they’d first found my dad’s body, then my mom’s some twenty feet farther in.

After a few more minutes of walking, Troy and I came to a small break in the trees. You could hardly call it a clearing,

but it was close enough. I didn't need to go any further. I stopped, stood very still, raised my face to the sky, and just listened. Three sounds. Traffic from Wallisville Road, bird-songs floating on the breeze, and the rustling of trees. All three were gentle. I noticed the tops of tall pines extending above the lower canopy of scrubby deciduous trees around me. Were those pines over forty years old? Had they stood as silent witnesses to the evil done here?

My heart was full but calm. I had wondered what emotional response I would have. Quiet tears? Heart-wrenching sobs? Raging anger? Overwhelming grief? None of those, as it happened. My soul was somber, but peaceful—evidence of the healing God had already been doing in the past ten months.

I did have some dark thoughts, though. I knew the detectives forty years ago were fairly certain that this was not the murder site, but more likely the dumping place for their bodies. But if you were looking for a spot to commit murder, this one was certainly desolate enough. Who'd brought my parents here? And why? I'd been told that all those years ago, this had been acres of woods. The road had been here, yes, but it hadn't been as well traveled then. A doctor's office and a church a little farther away hadn't been here then. Just the tower—a radio tower at the time—and the small dirt road leading to it. Probably just a remote, undeveloped site that the murderer, or murderers, figured would go undiscovered for a long time. I started to think about the condition they'd been found in but decided not to follow that train of thought. I didn't need anything ugly in my mind right now.

I listened to the sound of Troy thrashing his machete through the undergrowth nearby, still hunting for the elusive

clearing to satisfy my hope of finding the spot. I smiled, knowing that my tender hearted husband would have cleared the entire forest floor for me if that's what I wanted. "I think I'm good, hon," I called. "I don't need to go any farther." He stopped and walked toward me. Had my parents been found exactly here? Ten feet farther or to the left? It didn't matter, I decided, whether I was standing on the exact spot or not. Either way, their bodies had long since been removed, and either way, the sweet-sounding chirping I heard and the rich Texas woodsy smells I inhaled were the same ones that had wafted over my parents' bodies for a short time. A ray of sunshine lit up a palmetto plant, and I looked up and prayed for healing and restoration for our family and resolution and justice for my parents.

Together Troy and I made our way back toward the small dirt road. I was glad I'd worn boots for the marshy spots we trudged through before returning to the crumbling road.

"Ready for our next spot?" Troy asked gently, referring to the potter's field where my then-unidentified parents had been laid to rest. We'd been told it was about a half hour away.

"I'm ready." And I was. I really was. I was grateful we'd come. And I was glad we did so privately. The producers of the ABC television show *20/20* had asked if they could accompany me, but I'd decided against it. This was personal, and I'd needed to keep it that way. I appreciated their understanding and respect.



I'm ready to tell you my story, and I'm glad you're reading it. So much good has already come through the research I've

done to write it. Over the last year, I've interviewed so many people—the most precious of whom are my *new* family. My grandma Donna, the mother of my dad, and my aunts and uncles, the siblings of both my parents. Not only have my visits with them made me feel loved and blessed, but I feel that through their memories I've come to know my mom and dad a bit. Allison Peacock, the amazing forensic genealogist who worked so determinedly to discover the true identities of my parents some forty years after their deaths. That's an amazing adventure I can't wait for you to read! The impressive and kind and tireless detectives of the Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit of the Office of the Attorney General of Texas who not only found me, a person missing for forty-one years (I was not quite one year old when my parents were murdered and I went missing), but who are all still working hard to solve my parents' murders. And of course, the incredible team at NCMEC, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, who helped find me and so tenderly reached out and protected me during my most vulnerable days. There are others, too, whom I mention in the acknowledgments. I've come to treasure my relationships with all these good people.

Remember that many of the people who've aided in my research are working from memories of things that happened forty years ago. Memories fade. They're subject to distortion and interpretation, filtered through personal experiences—which is why, as the detectives from the cold case unit reminded me, eyewitness accounts are often unreliable. Some of the events I share were remembered somewhat differently by different people, so at times, I've had to make a judgment call on how to describe them. I assure readers that everyone did their best, and so did I, in reporting truthfully, to the best

of our knowledge and ability. In other words, please extend some grace if it turns out that some things I say are a bit off the mark.

As you read, I'd like you to understand my reasons for writing this book. First, there is an active ongoing investigation into the murders of my mom and dad. I am hoping and praying that through this book and the media interest it generates, new evidence or witnesses might surface to help solve that case. Second, I realize what a privilege I've been given in being "found." So much good has come because of it. You'll discover how as you read. By writing this book, I wanted to share that good news. Third, mine is a story of what happens when so many good and faithful people work so hard together. From law enforcement across four states, to forensic genealogists, to NCMC personnel, to generous people along the way, they and their organizations deserve to be recognized and praised.

But above all, there is a loving and gracious God who has intervened in many ways in my story. Without Him, there would be no story to tell. In fact, without Him, as you will see, I may never have lived to see the day those searching for me finally found me—in the most unexpected of ways.

That same God loves you, whether you know Him yet or not. I hope and pray you meet Him through these pages.