

# Three months later—still nothing

By CARL PETERSON  
City Editor

CALUMET — Three months ago tomorrow 11-year-old Karl Heikell just up and disappeared.

It happens.

But it isn't supposed to happen here.

This is a relatively quiet community, in many ways remote; a destination for travelers and a haven for the retired, an escape from the smog and uneasiness of city life, from frightening crime rates and homes with burglar alarms.

Industry is minimal since the many copper mines were shut down years ago. The emphasis now is on tourism.

Over the past few years there have been a couple of cases of disoriented elderly people wandering into the woods and becoming lost. But that's about it.

The disappearance of an 11-year-old boy — without a trace — is something else again.

"I keep that one right on the top of my desk," said Det. Sgt. John Aird at the state police post in Calumet.

Aird worked on the case from the beginning.

Karl disappeared the afternoon of Halloween, a Saturday. He had stayed away overnight before, visiting with friends. But he usually called to let his parents know where he was.

Sunday morning came. Where is Karl? Why isn't he home yet? What happened?

Patricia and Lawrence Heikell began looking for their son. By 6 p.m. Sunday their concern had turned to worry. State police were notified and

one of the area's most intensive and lengthiest searches began.

"Nothing," said Aird.

Every lead — and there were many of them — proved either a false sighting or simply a guess.

Police used aircraft and tracking dogs. Officers and volunteers made a wide-ranging ground search, over and over again. Vacant buildings and houses were searched. Homes that the boy had visited in the past were searched from top to bottom, room by room. Seven people were given polygraph tests. Northern Michigan Water Company even lowered a light into the large reservoir tank on Centennial Hill, near where the boy lived. His photograph was circulated throughout Michigan and Wisconsin. He's listed in the LEIN (Law Enforcement Intelligence Network) nationwide.

Searchers also checked mine openings, though all known hazardous shafts have been sealed and regularly inspected since a little girl fell into one of them years ago. Her body was never recovered, but playmates saw her slide into a small opening beneath a concrete cap.

Aird said the police have even had calls from mystics who gave their versions of what happened to the boy. Every and any lead was followed up.

"Nothing," said Aird.

"Everyday we're just hoping something will break," he said. "It's like running your head into a brick wall."

Aird was asked about theories.

"Anything I tell you would just be a guess. There's the possibility of foul play, an accident of some sort and a



KARL HEIKELL

slight possibility of his being a runaway. But that's a very dim possibility."

Karl had a few problems, but none that his parents or police think would prompt him to leave home.

His emotional behavior — temper tantrums, mainly — put him in special classes designed to help him cope, according to his mother.

She describes her son as being about two years behind in developing.

Aside from that, Karl was active in junior hockey and looking forward to the current season, with new equipment his parents had gotten him.

He's friendly and outgoing, "overtly

friendly — easily persuaded," his mother said.

After three months, "I still have hope," she said.

Christmas without Karl was perhaps the most difficult period the Heikells have had to go through so far.

"The night before, Christmas Eve, I had to leave work early," Mrs. Heikell said. "I just couldn't take it. And the next day, Christmas..." her voice trailed off.

Aird said he plans to send up an airplane with an infrared camera in the spring. He said the camera can detect decomposed bodies. It would be ineffective during the winter, when everything is frozen, he said.

"Two more months until spring," said Mrs. Heikell. "I hope it isn't that; it's something that's even hard to talk about."

The boy's father is unemployed now and "he's really taking it hard," said Mrs. Heikell. He has more time to sit and think, she said.

Mrs. Heikell learned of the nationwide parents' organization Child Find on the Phil Donohue television show and is thinking about joining it.

"But it costs \$50 and I'd want to be sure it's legitimate."

There's a \$650 reward fund at the state police post in Calumet, contributed to by various people. Aird would like nothing better than to see it claimed.

"In my 25 years with the state police this is the most frustrating case I've ever been on," he said.

He lifted a thick sheaf of papers from his desktop.

"Thirty pages of reports, and in the end you've got nothing."