

Dugard's classmates, others reflect on June 10, 1991



Memories of
Jaycee Lee
Dugard came
pouring out at
the Sept. 6
parade in
South Lake
Tahoe.
Photo/Lisa J.
Tolda

By Kathryn Reed

Phones started ringing at 6am – Jaycee Lee Dugard was found alive.

Facebook posts have been rampant – some from those who went to school with her, others from people in the Lake Tahoe area, others from strangers touched by this 18-year ordeal.

Dugard being found alive after being kidnapped June 10, 1991, is an incredible tale. Although she and her 11- and 15-year-old children who were fathered by the accused abductor are the victims, the effects of that day have stayed with so many who lived in South Lake Tahoe at the time.

Her high school graduating class didn't forget. The 1998 yearbook has a picture of Dugard.

"It feels personal in a way. It happened in our elementary school," said Taryn (Huber) Sharpe, who was a fifth-grader in

the classroom next to Dugard's. "It was hard to grasp. It didn't seem real. We thought we would see her again."

She said the initial call from a friend the morning of Aug. 27 made her excited, but wary – false sightings had gotten their hopes up in the past.

Now living in Bakersfield, Sharpe said some of her classmates feel guilty – the lives they've been able to lead while Dugard was holed up in a ramshackle compound without freedom and giving birth to her first child at age 14.

"It's overwhelming what people have to say on Facebook, what feelings, how they remember it, where people were, what they were doing," Sharpe said. "A lot of us are lost for words and don't know what to say."

Her church is talking about making a quilt for Dugard.

Stephanie Spees, who lives in Sacramento, was reminded of Dugard every time she saw a pink ribbon. Pink was Dugard's favorite color. Dugard was wearing a pink windbreaker and pink stretch pants the day she disappeared. Pink ribbons were tied all over town – especially at the school. It was her favorite color.

"I remember the day it happened. The news crews were coming up to the school. Counselors were coming and talking to us" Spees said. "It was intense for being so little. I wasn't allowed to go to the bus stop anymore. My mom drove me to school."

That was a common reaction throughout the area.

"I grew up here as a kid and I let my kids take bikes to the store, go to the bus stop. We were always parents who felt very safe here," said Kathay Lovell, who has four grandchildren growing up in South Lake Tahoe. "That day changed how we viewed safety for our children."

At baseball games for her grandsons, ages 10 and 13, they

aren't allowed to go to the bathroom alone. All adults keep a lookout for strangers.

A generation later it's common to see parents when the bus picks kids up and drops them off. Some were children when Dugard went missing.

Duane Wallace's kids regularly had parental accompaniment at the bus stop because he was nearly abducted as a fourth-grader when he lived in Modesto. That incident has stayed with him.

"I can tell you with our own kids we were very careful. We were very protective," Wallace said.

Karen Tinlin had the dual role of being a parent and principal of the school where Dugard was a fifth-grader.

"I used to let my kids play in the yard and never gave it a second thought. That summer I kept an eye on them like there was no tomorrow," Tinlin said.

At the school in Meyers, which had just a few days left before summer break, it was a bit surreal. Pink ribbons were tied on the kindergarten fence. A plaque in honor of Dugard is still at the school.

Sue (Louis) Bush remembers everyone at the school being upset. She was Dugard's teacher.

"None of the kids could believe this happened. It was a life experience for everybody involved," Bush said.