

POWER OF TWO

“These cases don’t always have happy endings, but providing closure is big,” says Derrica (right, with Natalie). Says Natalie: “It’s important that everyone missing have an equal opportunity to be reunited with their families.”



Thousands of African-Americans Go Missing Every Year.

THEY HELP FIND THEM

Sisters-in-law Derrica and Natalie Wilson make the media and police pay attention when people of color vanish without a trace **BY NICOLE WEISENSEE EGAN**

In May 2004 Tamika Huston, a 24-year-old African-American woman, vanished from her Spartanburg, S.C., apartment. Though her family sent e-mails, put up flyers and called newspapers and TV stations—the national media skipped the story. Huston’s body was found, her ex-boyfriend charged with murder more than a year later—just four months after teen Natalee Holloway went missing, a case that made headlines around the world. “It made me angry, but in a positive way,” says Derrica Wilson, 34, who’s from Spartanburg. “I wanted to help families like Tamika’s.”

So in 2008 she teamed up with sister-in-law Natalie and formed the Black and Missing



“IT’S WONDERFUL KNOWING WE’VE MADE A DIFFERENCE”

—DERRICA WILSON

week each to this. Derrica coaches families on talking to police and media; Natalie works her contacts in television, newspapers, radio and websites. They’ve partnered with TV One to produce a series of missing-persons segments and with nationally syndicated radio host Michael Baisden for a “Missing Child of the Week” segment that has helped find 14 kids alive. “I felt so helpless,” says Julius King, 27, a Navy technician in Virginia Beach, whose 6-year-old son Jahir went missing for several weeks after King’s ex-girlfriend allegedly did not return him after a visit. The Wilsons helped King work with police and got him on Baisden’s show. One week later the ex-wife was arrested and Jahir returned safely home. “I can’t,” King says, “thank Natalie and Derrica enough.” ●



KEEPING HOPE ALIVE

The Wilsons continue to help with the case of Unique Harris, 24, of D.C. (above and right), who disappeared in 2010. Says mom Valencia (top, left, with Groomes): “They’re phenomenal.”



Foundation (bamfi.org). The Washington, D.C.-area women use their skills—Derrica as a former cop and now a city agency investigator and Natalie, 43, as a communications specialist—to work with the police, media and families on hundreds of missing-persons cases. To date, the Wilsons’ efforts have contributed to 113 people being found—from murders to runaways to custodial kidnappings—including 71 where a missing loved one was found alive. It’s a daunting task: Thousands of African-Americans go missing each year (one-third of all missing-persons cases). The problem has caught Hollywood’s eye: Tyler Perry recently offered a \$100,000 reward for tips leading to the discovery of two missing Florida men. “There’s not another organization like Black and Missing,” says Diane Groomes, assistant chief of police for Washington, D.C. “They’re such a help.”

The Wilsons devote up to 40 hours a



A DAUGHTER LOST AND FOUND

Police and media can be slow to act when kids vanish in custody disputes, a common type of missing-child case. “I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t function,” says Rose Walker, 45, whose daughter Jhada, now 5 (left, with Walker at home in West Palm Beach, Fla.), was gone for six months last year after what Walker thought would be a spring-break visit with her father. Derrica and Natalie kept the case in front of police, and Walker appeared twice on Baisden’s show; a tipster who heard the interview led cops to Jhada, and a mother-daughter reunion ensued. “Natalie and Derrica,” says Walker, a nurse, “were a godsend.”

BOTTOM: PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFERY SALTER; HAIR AND MAKEUP: FRANCES LORIAN/ZENOBA.

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