Gone since May 20

Teen still missing, police suspect foul play

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

Despite a flurry of reports that she recently was seen in the area, West Bloomfield Police have yet to speak to someone who's talked to Kellie Marie Brownlee since her disappearance on May 20.

After her family asked in the media for help in finding the 17-year-old girl, police received reports from people who thought they saw her walking down the street or selling flowers at an intersection.

But none of the reports so far have turned up anyone who spoke to Brownlee after she disappeared hitchhiking to her West Bloomfield home from Twelve Oaks Mall, according to her mother, Loretta Brownlee.

Police suspect foul play. They are surprised that people report seeing the girl nearly two months after she disappeared with only the clothes she wore and without extra money.

BROWNLEE, WHO attended Walled Lake Western High School until she dropped out, went to the mall looking for employment. She put in applications for sales positions at three of the mall's clothing stores the day she disappeared, according to her mother.

An employee at a nearby root beer stand reported seeing her buy a pop and a bag of chips that day but since that was part of her usual routine, her family isn't sure if she actually visited the stand.

When last seen, she was wearing white painters pants, a peach-colored shirt with wine-colored high-heeled shoes and a matching purse. Brownlee is 5 feet 7 inches tall, 140 pounds with dark brown eyes and dark brown hair.

Although the search continues, some pessimism about finding her daughter creeps into Mrs. Brownlee's conversation.

"It's been all dead ends," said Mrs. Brownlee.

"People who called in (to the police) talked to her before May 20. I think she was hitching a ride home and somebody took her. I don't know what else to do."

BROWNLEE HAS two teenage brothers at home and an older sister in California. None have seen the girl.

Although she once stayed out all night with a boy friend, Mrs. Brownlee says her daughter hasn't ever before stayed away from home this long.

She advises other parents to "know the friends of your children and what they are wearing when they leave the house.

"It's something you don't pay attention to. One night I realized I didn't know what my son had worn to work that morning."

Her parents are offering a $1,000 reward to the person giving information leading to their daughter's whereabouts.

Anyone with information should call Office Tom Nelson of the West Bloomfield Police Department at 682-9200.

POW legislation ups disability benefits

Some of the estimated 3,000 former prisoners of war living in Michigan may be eligible for disability benefits under a law which went into effect Oct. 14.

The Former Prisoners of War Benefits Act of 1981 increases the benefits available to POWs, makes it easier apply for disability payments and broadens the list of service-related medical problems eligible for a claim, said Blake Moore, assistant veterans' service officer for the Veterans Administration's Detroit regional office.

Previous regulations, requiring the veteran's medical records from the time of captivity, are discontinued. Many times doctors and medical records weren't available in prison camps, Moore said.

Medical and psychological problems now recognized as service-related injuries include: malnutrition, pellagra, dysentery, beriberi, nutritional deficiencies, psychosis and anxiety.

Qualifying veterans will receive priority treatment at VA facilities.

The regulations and benefits extend to people who were prisoners during all modern wars. But James Warner, member of the National Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War to the Veterans Administration, said many Vietnam-era prisoners may not associate their health problems with their experience in captivity.

He urged these veterans to have a medical checkup to ascertain if they are eligible for a disability claim under the new regulations.

There is still much to learned about the problems of POWs, Warner said.

Studies of prisoners from World War II establish a relationship between prison camp experiences and a shorter life for survivors. This information may be important for survivors of North Vietnamese prison camps because they endured the same diet, parasites and bad treatment as some World War II prisoners, Warner said.

Many prisoners of World War II were held in Indochina, which later was called Vietnam, Moore said.

All Michigan veterans who were prisoners can call the VA's toll-free line, 1-800-482-0740, for further information about the broadened disability benefits. To save callers' an expense, their information and phone numbers will be taken, and the VA's POW coordinator will return the call.

Of Michigan's 3,000 POWs, 400 have been contacted by the VA concerning these benefits, Moore said.

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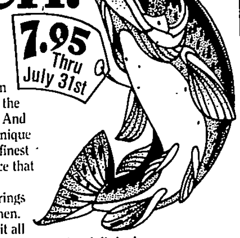

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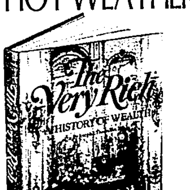

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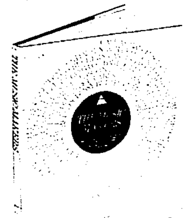

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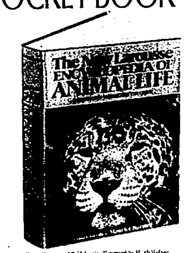

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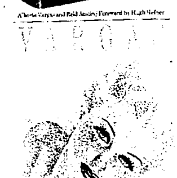

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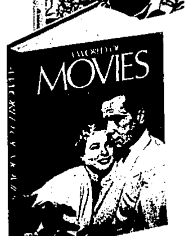

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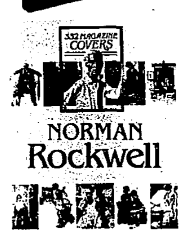

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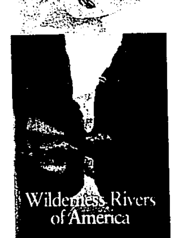

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