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Anthonette Cayedito missing since 1986

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Need the public's help

Few things can rattle a community like a person going missing. The idea that someone can disappear without a trace and no information about what happened to them can cause a whirlwind of emotions: hope that they will be found safely; worry that no one knows where they are; fear that a bad fate has befallen them.

For long-time residents of Gallup and surrounding areas, those feelings have plagued them for over three decades. April 6 marked the 34th anniversary of the day 9-year-old Anthonette Cayedito was taken from her home in the middle of the night.

Despite a bevy of tips and leads that have come up in the years since, the fate of Cayedito is still unknown.

TIMELINE OF THE INCIDENT

The early hours of April 6, 1986 were quiet for a family living on Aztec Avenue. But things would soon take a tragic turn.

This much is known about the sequence of events, which was described by Anthonette's sister Wendy Montoya to crew and producers of the TV series *Unsolved Mysteries*: at some point in the middle of the night, Montoya said she heard two men knock on the door. One of them claimed to be their "Uncle Joe."

Montoya said that Cayedito opened the door and was immediately carried off. The men took Cayedito into a brown van that sped away from the residence, and Cayedito has not been seen since.

At the time, Anthonette's mother, Penny Cayedito, told law enforcement that she last saw her

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daughter fast asleep in her room at 3 am. Several hours later, she checked in Anthonette's room again and her daughter was nowhere to be found.

BEGINNING OF THE INVESTIGATION

There were a number of leads in the case early on.

The first major lead was a phone call to Gallup Police Department from a frantic young girl claiming to be Cayedito, telling the dispatcher she was in Albuquerque. It came about a year after the incident.

Before she could give any further information, however, a man yelled at her, then grabbed the phone. The young girl then screamed several times before the call was disconnected.

As part of the *Unsolved Mysteries* segment that aired in 1992, Penny Cayedito, now deceased, told the crew the voice on the recording was indeed her daughter.

"And just by the way she says her last name, and the way she screamed sends chills all over my body," she said. "A mother knows, and I know that was her."

The next major lead came about four years later as a reported sighting of a young girl matching Cayedito's description in Carson City, Nev. The young girl was seen with a couple at a diner, where she reportedly left a note on a napkin that read "Please help me." But by the time the waitress saw the note, the couple and young girl were gone.

THE SEARCH CONTINUES

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While new information and leads have become less common, Frank Fisher, public affairs officer for the FBI Albuquerque Division, said the investigation continues and that Cayedito's case is very important to them.

"We still occasionally get tips on the case, but we'd like to get a lot more," Fisher said April 8. "It is why we use the anniversary of her disappearance to get this case back into the public spotlight."

Fisher said the FBI is urging anyone who has potential information or leads about the case to come forward.

"It's been 34 years, that's way too long for someone to be missing," he said. "It's time to close this case. It's time to bring her home. Her loved ones and the community deserve it. We want to do that for them."

When asked about the initial investigation, Fisher said the FBI and local law enforcement did everything in their power to track down Cayedito and find out what happened to her.

The search continues for each of those divisions.

"We have not stopped looking for answers," Fisher said. "We are still working with Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety and Gallup Police Department to come up with answers."

Just as it took Montoya several years before she spoke about what she witnessed the night Cayedito disappeared, Fisher said other people who may have seen or heard something at the time may be willing to come forward now.

"Maybe someone wants to get something off their chest. We're ready to hear them," he said.

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As for the investigative methods used, Fisher said they have used every tool at their disposal in both forensic and psychological investigations to find any potential leads.

“If there is the remote possibility that we could solve this case by using any of the technologies on hand, we wouldn’t hesitate to use them,” he added.

Fisher said the FBI is at the point where they need the public’s help to bring closure and discover the fate of Cayedito, especially with her case being so tragic.

“This was a precious little girl, 9 years old, who disappeared from her family’s house. That should not happen in this country,” Fisher said. “This case strikes a chord in everyone, particularly parents and people who have relatives. It was such a tragic event, and we want to bring closure to this case.”

It is the sense of justice that drives everyone in the FBI, Fisher added. He also emphasized they will not stop investigating until the case is solved.

“If anybody has any information, no matter how silly or small they think that piece of information is, call us. Let us look into it. Don’t just sit on it,” he said.

Anyone with information on this case is encouraged to call Crimestoppers at (505) 722-6161 or the Albuquerque Division of the FBI at (505) 889-1300. You can remain anonymous.

By Cody Begaye
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