



Elizabeth Harris with two of her children, Rosalynn and Rudy

## All That Remains

Roxanne Paltauf vanished three years ago, leaving her family with only memories and investigators with few clues

BY JORDAN SMITH

The dreams are all strikingly similar.

In the shadows of the hallway outside the bedroom door, the air feels thick and gloomy; it's hard to see what lies ahead or behind, or any details of the surroundings. At the far end of the hall, the front door suddenly opens, and there is Roxanne, wearing her yellow shirt, her hair brushed smooth and falling over her shoulders. She walks into the house – bright and light and so very real. Your eyes widen, and you walk toward her. You can smell the powdery scent of her Love's Baby Soft perfume. You are full of questions: "Where have you been? What happened to you?" She smiles nonchalantly and quickly brushes aside your inquiries. "I'm fine," she says, "don't worry about me. The real question is," she says, "how are you?"

And then you wake up.

If you are Elizabeth Harris, or one of her four children, this is the kind of dream that consumes your sleep. When you wake, you know at least one thing is real: Roxanne Paltauf – your first born, your big sister – is gone. She's been gone for nearly three years now, vanished in the dusk of a July evening outside the Budget Inn near Rundberg Lane and I-35. There are leads to finding her – some very good ones, in fact – but as yet there are no answers. There is little hope that she will be found alive. Indeed, for Roxanne's siblings and her mother, the reality that haunts waking life is that Roxanne is likely dead. Murdered. And what now remains are only questions: What happened, where is she, and will her family ever be able to bring her home?

### 'Have You Seen Roxanne?'

The last time Elizabeth Harris saw her daughter was just before July 4, 2006, when Roxanne dropped by her mother's Cherrywood neighborhood home to pick up a few personal items. She had been staying for the previous few days with her boyfriend, then-30-year-old Louis Walls, at different motels off the interstate near Rundberg Lane. She and Walls, with whom Roxanne had been romantically involved for nearly two years, had made a habit of spending time together at one of the motels along that stretch of southbound I-35. Mostly it was out of necessity: Roxanne's mother did not like Walls, and for whatever reason, Walls' mother, with whom he lives with his two young children, didn't particularly care for Roxanne. If the two wanted to spend any time together, they had to find somewhere away from home to do so.

Truthfully, Harris didn't like the idea that her daughter would spend any time with this man – and at 18, Roxanne was still just a girl, Harris says – let alone in a motel near Rundberg Lane, an area known as a crime hot spot. But what could she do? Roxanne was legally an adult, and she was going to do what she wanted. Walls is "a hustler. He's a player. I think he's a burden to society, to tell you the truth. ... Before Roxanne went missing, I told her that," Harris recalled recently. "I said, 'This guy is no good.' [But] the more you pull her away, the closer she gets to him. It was just one of those things. She was a young girl – she is young."

Indeed, Walls isn't exactly a saint. According to court records, he's been in and out of trouble since 1995 – for robbery, selling fake crack, and more recently, for threatening his current girlfriend (who, like Roxanne, is also significantly younger) and for violating a protective order she has against him. Harris said Walls boasted of being a member of the Bloods street gang, but she thinks his involvement is likely marginal, that he only fancies himself a player. Nonetheless, Walls' behavior toward her daughter made her nervous, and she made it clear to Roxanne that she didn't want him around the house. (Walls did not respond to phone messages requesting an interview for this story.)

Despite how Harris felt about Walls, Roxanne and her mother were close. "She [told me], 'We talk two or three times a day,'" said Tim Young, a private investigator who has worked pro bono on Roxanne's case. "Mothers say that all the time, so I didn't necessarily believe it" – not at first. "But [Roxanne's] phone records showed that was true." Everyone connected to Roxanne's disappearance – friends, family, and Austin Police investigators – agrees Roxanne and her mother had a special relationship. In fact, their close bond made Roxanne's disappearance – and Walls' account of what happened – all the more disturbing. "Wild horses couldn't have kept that girl away from this house," says Harris' longtime boyfriend Patrick Doyle.

According to phone records, Harris last spoke with Roxanne on the afternoon of July 7, 2006. "The day she came up missing ... I asked her to come home," Harris recalls. The family planned a shopping trip to San Marcos the next day, and Harris wanted Roxanne to join them. Harris wasn't "jealous of her time with Louis," but Roxanne had been with him for nearly a week, and her mother thought that was enough. "She said: 'I'll be home mom. I'll be there; we'll go shopping.'" Roxanne never showed up, "so we went ahead and went without her." By the time the family got home, Roxanne still had not returned to the house – Harris was puzzled by her absence but not yet worried. That changed several hours later when Harris received a call from Walls. "He goes: 'Have you seen Roxanne? Have you heard from Roxanne?' I said: 'Well, what do you mean? She was with you.'"

Walls said he hadn't seen Roxanne since roughly 8:30pm the previous evening, when

the couple got into an argument "about the past," Harris said Walls told her, and Roxanne stormed out of their motel room. Walls told Harris that he went out after her but that she told him to leave her alone and continued walking, along the service road toward Rundberg, making a left onto Middle Lane. Walls told Harris that he went back to their room to "cool off" and that 20 minutes later he went back out to look for Roxanne. He couldn't find her. She had simply disappeared, he told Harris. "Four hours after I talked to my daughter she came up missing," Harris says.

Harris called police to report the disappearance and, at her urging, so did Walls – although he'd already checked out of the Budget Inn and returned to his sister's apartment at the Walnut Creek complex. But because he'd cleared out, taking Roxanne's belongings with him, neither Harris nor the police were able to search her belongings, as they were when she left the room, for clues to her whereabouts.

More disturbing was Walls' behavior in the hours and days after Roxanne disappeared: According to Harris, he was not at all interested in helping her search for Roxanne. He kept her cell phone for nearly a week after she went missing and used it to make some 300 phone calls, beginning with a breakneck pace of dialing all over town: to the main number for a series of motels strung along the Rundberg/I-35 corridor, to local singles "chat" lines, to a strip club, to various friends and ex-girlfriends – one call after another, literally, for hours and hours on end – before finally returning it to Harris. He also kept her purse and other personal effects – including clothing that has never been returned. Indeed,

when Harris finally got Walls to meet her to return Roxanne's property, she said he provided her with a bag of clothing belonging to some other female – clothes that were way too large for Roxanne, whom some friends lovingly referred to as "the pencil," and that were not at all her style. Although Walls maintained – and continues to maintain to police – his initial account of the circumstances surrounding Roxanne's disappearance, his behavior was quickly making Harris very wary. Even the initial conversation she had with Walls the night after Roxanne supposedly took off started to take on a different tone as she replayed it in her mind. "It was the way he asked about Roxanne, he didn't ask, 'Can I speak to Roxanne?' He said, 'Have you seen Roxanne?'" she



Roxanne Paltauf

COURTESY OF PALTAUF FAMILY

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