



BY T.J. EDWARDS

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?

## THE KIDS SEPARATED FROM THEIR PARENTS AT THE BORDER?

**DID YOU EVER GET** lost from your parents as a kid? Perhaps you became separated at an amusement park, a shopping center, or at a large public event. You couldn't find your parent(s) or they couldn't find you. This is something most never forget. I still have memories of getting lost from my parents as a very young kid. I was maybe 4 or 5 years old. I became lost and separated from my parents at a very busy retail shopping complex. Apparently, it seemed like a good idea to sneak away from my parents and hide inside a clearance clothing rack.

After a long period of waiting and wondering why my parents hadn't yet found me, I emerged to discover my parents had vanished. I frantically searched the store. Minutes felt like hours. I was all alone. This was likely my first experience of feeling anxiety and panic. They were the same feelings I felt on 9/11 when terrorist flew American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon near my Army office cubicle. Anxiety. Panic. It was horrifying! Strangers ultimately rescued me and the store made a "lost child" announcement. Panic shifted to joy as my mom arrived to reclaim me. But that short-lived joy returned back to panic when my Mom swiftly spanked me on the spot!

Since 2017, large numbers of children have been separated, even completely lost, from their parents at the southern border between the United States and Mexico. In fact, **according to a PBS News Hour program on February 6, 2023, some 5,000 children have been separated from their parents at the southern border.** To be clear, children separated from parents at the border doesn't compare to a kid lost at a shopping mall. But as a kid or a parent, you can probably relate to the nightmare feeling of not knowing where your family member is located and have no way of contacting them.

Illegal immigration is a difficult subject, as well as an absolute "hot potato" political issue. On the right, America needs to enforce laws against illegal immigration. And on the left, America should take a more humanitarian approach.



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In 2014 during the Obama administration, hundreds and thousands of illegal immigrants surged across the U.S. southern border. This immigration surge was said to have started because of violence in El Salvador. That violence spread to Honduras, Guatemala, and into Mexico. The Obama administration permitted temporary protections for undocumented and unaccompanied minors—a

policy that was called, "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" or DACA. The Republicans blamed the Democrats for the surge in illegal immigration. Anti-immigration sentiment surged in mostly Red or Republican leaning states.

In the meantime, the U.S. Border Patrol were making record number of illegal



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Double negatives are a No-No in English.

Apologies for the opposite of a double negative.

immigration arrests. Large camps and facilities were erected, and once detained, families were allowed to stay together. The numbers became so great however, that many families were released and allowed to stay with relatives or friends in America to await asylum court hearing dates. This was often called, "Catch and Release" which candidate Donald Trump politically leveraged based on the growing anti-immigration sentiment in America. Building "a wall" to separate the U.S. and Mexico even became a central campaign promise for Donald Trump.

"Catch and Release" was terminated during the Trump administration. In 2017, a new "pilot project" at the southern border took effect. It called for zero tolerance for illegal immigrants. Children were separated from their parents at the border. These parents were either detained for a court hearing or returned to their country of origin. Meanwhile, children were separ-

ately detained. They were often released to a family member who was living in America or to a willing foster care family.

If you watched any television news during the summer of 2018, you'll remember seeing the shocking images of distressed children being held in custody at the southern U.S. border. These kids were often detained in fenced-in enclosures. They were seen clustered together on bare concrete floors and wrapped in shiny silver foil blankets for warmth. In June 2018, Propublica released an audio tape of several of these children crying as they were separated from their parents. It triggered a huge political up-roar, with demonstrations and protests in over 700 cities. Two days after Propublica's tape release, President Trump signed an Executive Order that ended involuntary separation of children and parents.

Despite your political point-of-view, it was unfortunate and perhaps even immoral to know that our country had a border policy that

pulled children away from parents without any plans in place to reunite them. The last time that happened in the U.S., according to research, was during the darker times of relocating Native Americans or during the days of the slavery trade. In 2023, 5 years after the fact, we still do not know "whatever happened to" many of these children that were separated from parents at the border. **Many remain unaccounted for today. Lost or completely missing.**

The Biden administration took on the task of reconnecting children with their families after they were split at the Southern border. While the Biden White House has succeeded in uniting some 600 children with their parents, roughly 1,000 children remain separated. My hope is this difficult work continues until all families are reunited, regardless of who sits in the White House next. ■



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