

Nine years without Sophia



**MARIJE
SLIJKERMAN**

October 28, a perfectly ordinary day for most of you, but for us, a Dutch family in Amsterdam, it is a harsh reminder that another year has passed without Sophia.

It is now nine years ago that our beautiful girl disappeared in Murchison Falls National Park.

It sounds like a long time yet it feels as if Sophia left here just a couple of months ago. I can still clearly see her standing at the check-in desk at Schiphol airport.

Her huge backpack, bought a week earlier with her father and her solid hiking boots, bought just a few days before with me, her mother. Almost two months later I found myself on the banks of the River Nile, photographing one of those boots lying there, with a strong feeling something was not right.

Having just obtained her medical degree, Sophia was very much looking forward to this new adventure: working as an intern in Rubaga hospital in Kampala.

She completely immersed herself in the city, the people and the culture, even learned to speak Luganda. I have met with several of her Ugandan colleagues. They all spoke highly of her, praising her openness,



Sophia Koetsier

her dedication to the patients and her willingness to do anything. Including mopping floors, if that was what was needed.

After the internship ended, Sophia went to explore Uganda with two fellow interns, before returning home. On the sixth day of her journey she disappeared.

It is said she went to the toilet and was never seen again. The initial investigation was less than thorough. Quickly it was assumed Sophia had fallen victim to a wild animal, but without evidence as no remains were ever found.

On October 28, 2015 our lives exploded and a desperate search for our missing girl started. Thus far I have made 25 journeys to Uganda, one because I wanted to visit my daughter, 24 because I must, to find my daughter. My 26th journey is coming up soon. Always hoping it will be my last, hoping I won't go home alone.

Statistically speaking, the longer someone is missing, the slimmer the chance of to find them. But miracles do happen and I am a firm believer in them.

In the course of my trips I have tracked

down witnesses, gathered information and spoken to many people. Paradoxically, the more information I collected the more questions arose.

For quite a while, there was also communication with the Police. This contact unfortunately ended in the spring of 2022 when a new investigation was started by the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID). We were told to give them three months to produce a report.

Three months passed, six months passed, a year. Early in October, last year, we finally received a report. It did not tell us anything new and several important questions had not been addressed at all.

It was disappointing. Critical questions and relentless digging are essential to get to the truth. We hope we will eventually get to the truth about Sophia's disappearance.

For nine years now, the basis of our life has been insecurity and anxiety about Sophia's fate. And then there is the fear that this might be a life sentence.

It is not easy to live with this, but I am determined to take every road that unfolds in front of me. The only way to find out, if it leads to answers, is to start walking.

Giving up on Sophia is most definitely not an option. Hope springs eternal and if nothing is sure, everything is possible.

We can use all the help we can get and are hugely grateful to those who have always stuck with us and keep giving support where they can.

What we can't use are people who try to make money from our tragedy by falsely claiming to know where Sophia is.

Surely there must be more honourable ways to make money. Don't they know rewards are only paid after a missing person is found, never before?

Sophia's mysterious disappearance has received considerable media coverage, including a film made by Dutch public television. It can all be found here: www.findSophia.org.

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