

The Parking Lot

Around 6 a.m., January 25, 2021

“Any sign of her?” a leader of the command center asks.

“No, not yet.”

Richard spent the night in the parking lot of Taum Sauk Mountain, hoping and praying that his wife would find her way back to the car safely.

“Mr. Greiner, have you called your family,” another command center leader asks, doing his best not to sound alarmed.

“No, they have to work today. I don’t want to bother them.”

In a kind but firm tone, he urges, “I really think you need to call your children and let them know what’s happened.”

“It’s a four-hour drive.”

The command center leader voices his request with more urgency and concern, “Mr. Greiner, I’m sorry but this isn’t the time to be alone. *Please* call them.”

Temperatures dipped into the low 30s during the night. A heavy fog still blanketed the area. The fog turned to rain around 10:30 p.m. At 2:30 a.m., the lightning started making it too dangerous for the search and rescue teams to continue.

Richard spent the night in the car, hoping and praying she would return. But she had not.

And now, they are forcing him to face his worst fear, the dreaded thoughts he managed to suppress over the past 16 hours. He cannot allow his mind to go there. He refuses to acknowledge the possibility.

They don't think she survived the night.

He looks around at the teams reassembling for the morning search and realizes these are not search and rescue teams.

They are recovery teams. They are preparing to look for a body. His wife's body.

Choking back tears, he goes to the car, calls his son and daughters in Springfield and slumps in the seat as tears flood his eyes.

His son, daughter and son-in-law are on the road within minutes.

He still refuses to believe she did not make it through the night. She is tough. She is smart. She would never give up that easily. She will make it out. She always makes it out. She *has* to make it out.

It is not her time to go, he tells himself as the tears continue to flow down his face.