# The enduring search for missing Katrice Lee 42 years later



On 28 November 1981, two-year-old Katrice Lee disappeared from a NAAFI supermarket located on a British Army base in Paderborn, West Germany, amidst a family celebration for her birthday. At the time of her disappearance, her mother, Sharon Lee, had briefly left the child with her aunt at the checkout to retrieve some crisps for Katrice's party. It was a moment that would change the Lee family’s life forever. Sharon last saw her daughter when she departed from the checkout, only for Katrice to vanish moments later, presumably trying to follow her mother.

The case has been marked by prolonged suffering for Katrice’s family, who feel that they have been consistently failed by investigative authorities over the past four decades. Richard Lee, Katrice's father, expressed that the Royal Military Police (RMP) took six weeks to interview the checkout staff and a staggering 36 years to release a photofit of a possible suspect. In March, Richard met with Victims' Minister Alex Davies-Jones to discuss the family's long-standing grievances about how the case has been handled. Despite finding some hope in the meeting, Richard remains cautious. He previously met with then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson but reported a lack of interest from government officials concerning Katrice’s disappearance.

According to reports, approximately 170,000 people go missing annually in the UK, which includes 75,000 children, highlighting the urgency of the issue. The Mirror, where this story is reported, has initiated a campaign named 'Missed' to advocate for improved handling of missing persons cases, particularly focusing on those from underrepresented backgrounds. Sharon, now 71, stated, "I’ve always had hope but 43 years on, I would just like an answer and closure, whatever that is."

Narrating the emotional toll of Katrice's disappearance, Sharon described how certain dates, such as Mother's Day and Christmas, serve as painful reminders of their loss. The family believes that Katrice was abducted rather than falling into the nearby River Alme, where investigators have speculated she may have drowned. Sharon disputes the notion that a two-year-old could have navigated through a busy supermarket and car park without being seen. “Our feeling was, and is, that she was snatched,” she argued, insisting that the RMP’s earlier conclusions lacked proper investigative support.

Over the years, the RMP has faced criticism for its handling of the case. In 2012, the police issued an apology for initial failings and reopened the inquiry under what is called Operation Bute. In 2018, a search was conducted along the River Alme, and an age-progression image was released to depict Katrice at age 38, reigniting public interest in the cold case. However, Richard has called for an independent or public inquiry into the mishandling of the investigation, questioning the motives behind a long delay in releasing critical information.

Natasha Lee, Katrice's elder sister, who was seven at the time of her sister's disappearance, vividly recalls the chaos and fear that engulfed their family. She remembers attempting to assist in the search and praying for Katrice's return. Reflecting on the impact of the long search, Natasha lamented the lost experiences that have accompanied the absence of her sister, noting in an emotional statement, “No sister should have to walk down the aisle with a button sewn into her wedding dress, close to her heart, because that is all they have left from their missing sister.”

The Lee family's quest for answers remains ongoing, enduring the weight of their unanswered questions across generations. Their case brings to light the broader issue of how missing persons cases are managed within the UK, especially for families from diverse backgrounds. As the Mirror continues its campaign, the hope remains for closure for the Lee family and others similarly affected by the mysterious disappearances of loved ones.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.forcesnews.com/news/disappearance-katrice-lee-how-investigation-unfolded> - This article provides details about Katrice Lee's disappearance from the NAAFI shopping complex near Paderborn, Germany, and how her family felt the investigation was mishandled.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disappearance_of_Katrice_Lee> - This page outlines the circumstances of Katrice Lee's disappearance, including the location and the ongoing efforts to find her over the years, as well as significant developments in the case.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/tyne-tees/2024-11-05/family-of-girl-missing-for-43-years-return-to-germany-to-find-her> - This news piece reports on the family's return to Germany in search of answers about Katrice's disappearance, highlighting their emotional journey and ongoing efforts for closure.
* <https://www.news.co.uk> - Unfortunately, this URL does not currently provide specific information about Katrice Lee. However, general news about missing persons in the UK could be relevant.
* <https://missingpeople.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do> - This website aids families affected by missing persons by providing support and advocacy, which is relevant to the broader context of the Lee family's situation.