

"My best case ending for this was that Darryl was safe on an island with someone else who loves him. ... The worst case is this."

Kim Dotson, Darryl Dotson's widow

DOTSON | Phone has offered no clues

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called Mike Perros, a friend and former colleague in Danville.

"Have you heard anything new about me there?" Darryl asked.

"No," said Perros. "Why do you ask?"

"Things feel totally different," Darryl said. "I can't put my finger on it. I just get the feeling people feel differently about me."

This was out of the blue. Not to worry, Perros said. They hung up a few minutes later.

Driving home around 4, Kim couldn't reach Darryl by phone. Darryl was always reachable by phone. He went nowhere without his BlackBerry. By 6, when she got back to Lexington, he still wasn't anywhere to be found.

According to their weekend plan, she was supposed to go to a movie at Lexington Green with her book club and meet up with him for dinner so she went to the show, expecting to catch up with him mid-evening.

By 10 p.m., she was frantic. She called the police. She'd have to wait 24 hours before she filed a report.

She couldn't wait. She started calling hospitals and jails. She called his friends. She had family call the bus station, car rental offices and the airport. She tore the house apart and made a list of what was missing: a pair of pajama bottoms, a pair of jeans, his tennis shoes, a belt and his navy blue winter coat with the green lining, his wallet, watch, keys, wedding ring, phone and pocket knife.

She even thought to check the history of what he'd searched on the Internet in the last few days with no results.

She didn't sleep.

Never seen again

Darryl Dotson's disappearance caused barely a ripple outside of his and Kim's immediate circle because Darryl was 38, an adult with free will who could choose his whereabouts.

Because he was unemployed and had been struggling a bit with finding his next direction, questions arose about his mental state.

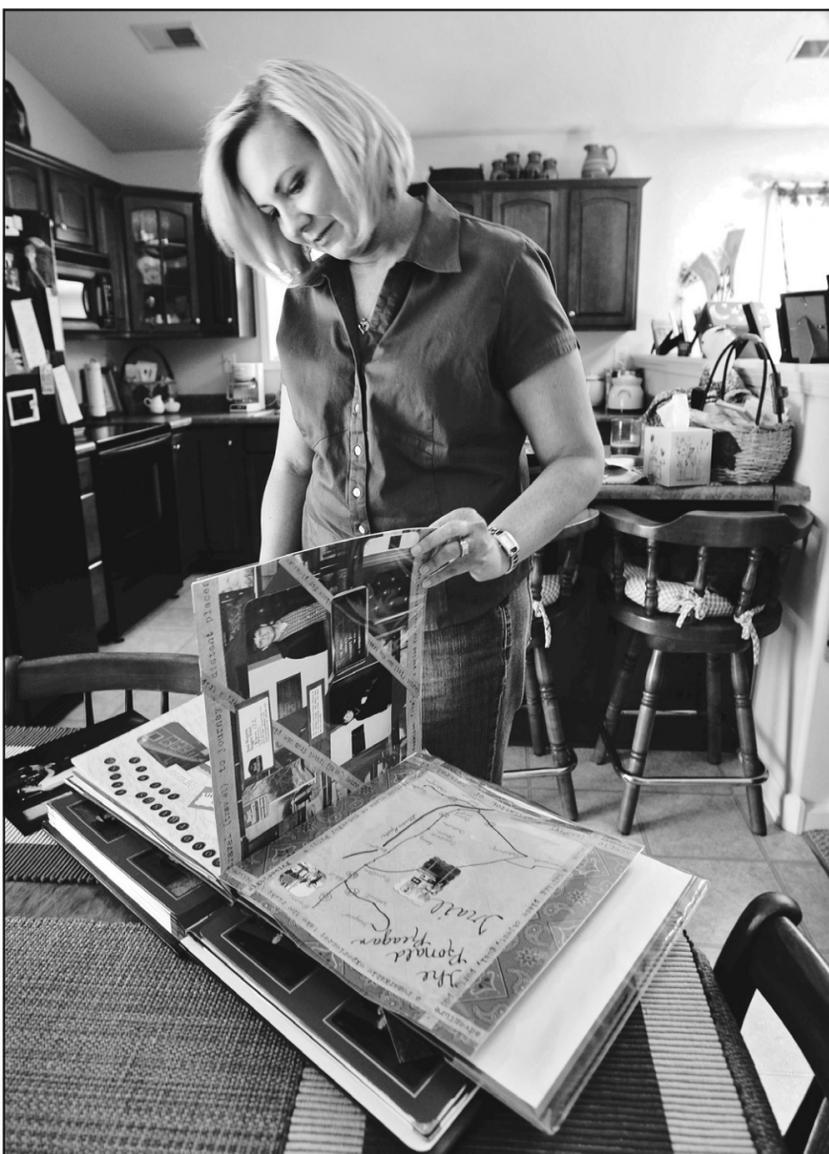
Valedictorian of his 1989 Montgomery County High School graduating class, he was the immediate past vice president of Danville's Kiwanis Club and, until August, an investment banker in that town's Farmer's National Bank. He had a law degree. His reputation, said his friend Perros, was one of "the highest principles."

His wife, his parents and friends now were forced to examine everything they knew about him. His sister, Sandy, said the family threw every possibility on the table. The family history of stroke, his high cholesterol, the unlikelihood of another woman, the nutty thought of the witness protection program.

It was its own special kind of hell.

When his body was finally found in late May, his family found comfort in that but new questions, too.

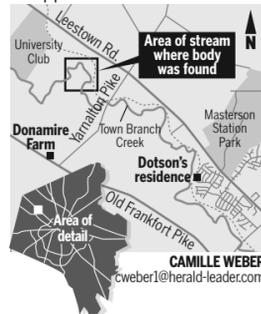
His body went into Town Branch, but his BlackBerry, which he never left home without, did not. It worked



CHARLES BERTRAM | cbertram@herald-leader.com

Kim Dotson looked over one of the scrapbooks she had made for her husband. Kim said she believes Darryl's death was neither suicide nor an accident.

Darryl Dotson left his home on Long Branch Lane sometime in the early afternoon of March 5. Parts of his body were found on Town Branch Creek near Yarnallton Road on Donamire Farm property on May 23 and again on May 30 downstream from his home despite repeated searches of the creekbed immediately after his disappearance.



for a full month, registering 284 phone calls and 2,387 text messages, mostly to Mexico and Texas, and was answered once by a guy who reported that he just found the phone in Masterson Station Park.

If he killed himself, as some suggest, how did someone get his phone?

What would be a motive for killing him, if his credit cards and money were found in his pockets when they found him in the creek?

And if it was an accident, how did it happen? They know he never would have been near the water in the first place.

The first weekend, March 6-7

Both Kim and Darryl's families rushed to help. They did the ground searches on consecutive days. They start-

ed along the Town Branch walking trail and through Masterson Station Park. They searched the tree line and the railroad tracks. They scoured the creek as far as they could imagine that Darryl would have walked. Kim waited by her phone, too upset to do much but panic and try to focus on where else to look.

The first week, March 8-14

It was the robbery-homicide division of the Lexington police who took the missing persons case. They asked about suicide.

She was willing to consider anything by now. They met on Nov. 17, 1997 and married exactly four years to the day later. They were each other's biggest fan, she says, even if he was a Reagan Republican and she was "a liberal's liberal."

He made people happy by just being there. He was so good-hearted, he'd been with Big Brothers/Big Sisters forever and worked with the Alzheimer's Association because his grandmother had suffered with the disease.

Things had been great for a long time but had gone south with his work lately. He'd voluntarily resigned from a job at Farmers that summer because of a disagreement with management, according to Kim. He'd left angry and had admittedly struggled with what to do next.

He tried creating a Web site (www.darryldotson.com) that he described as "a newspaper article, a radio station, a TV station, a marketing and advertising firm, a fund-raising firm, an event

Remembering Darryl Dotson

A memorial service for Darryl Dotson has been set for June 20 at 2 p.m. at the First Church of God in Mount Sterling. The public is invited. A private burial will take place later, when the body is released.

planning firm, a consulting firm, a travel consultant and a Christian missionary all wrapped up into one."

He rolled that in 2009 into a Web site called catsandqueso.com that was less complicated and focused on his three cats.

Money had been tight of late. He had been "depressed but not clinically depressed," says Kim, who has a master's in social work. He was an action guy. He had already sold links and ads that would frame some of the Web site's content, he told her.

He'd had a lot of stress, she knew. But suicide?

Here was a guy who planned weeks in advance "to the point of annoyance" for vacations, even weekend trips or for a meal at a new restaurant. She decided he wouldn't just casually comment on the Cats then wantonly destroy everyone who loved him.

Sunday, March 16, 11 p.m.

Someone called Darryl's brother, Tim, from Darryl's phone, but no one spoke when Tim answered. And no one answered when he tried calling back. The family rushed to the Dotsons' home. Darryl wasn't there.

Monday, March 17, morning

Kim looked at the phone logs online and saw that Darryl's phone had been in use. She called all the numbers and begged for help. A man finally answered her call. She pleaded with him to tell her or the police what he knew. He said he'd found the phone at Masterson Station Park. He said he'd talk to the police. No one heard from him again.

The police searched the park. It's unclear whether the police found any clues. Police spokeswoman Sgt. Ann Gutierrez declined to comment on the case.

The Dotsons' friends and family walked every field between Georgetown and Sandersville roads. They sent flyers to truck stops and homeless shelters coast-to-coast.

The police agreed Kim should keep the phone on and see what happened.

Between March 17 and April 7

Every few days, Kim sent copies of every call and text, including the date, time and number called to and from Darryl's phone, to police.

According to Kim, Lexington police originally told her they could not track the phone signal because they did not have the proper equipment. Later, she says, when they did attempt tracking, the triangulation worked to get them only within a two-block radius of the phone. Further targeting of the user, she was told, failed.

A few weeks into Darryl's disappearance, police told Kim that he "must no longer be with us or he was the best person to ever disappear because there had been no trace of him."

No money had been taken out of their bank account. He hadn't used his credit cards. They had searched his laptop, run checks on his Social Security number and run his information through federal databases. They had secured detainment orders if he were stopped by any law enforcement within United States borders. Nothing.

The gone-baby-gone theory was losing steam even for police.

This narrowed the family's options of what happened to three: With his family's history of stroke, he had suffered a stroke and was wandering somewhere still unidentified. Or with his strange questions just before his vanishing about "feeling off," perhaps he'd had a psychotic break and was similarly lost. Or somebody killed him.

April 7

Kim, with the permission of police, turned off Darryl's cell phone service. With 284 phone calls and 2,387 text messages, she figured they had enough to work with.

Saturday, May 23, just before 6 p.m.

Harold "Cowboy" Kipp was making his rounds on Donamire Farm. It's a trip the night guard makes 20 times a night, looping through the 700-acre horse farm to make sure things are in order.

It was the smell that came across the creek and over to the farm road that made him get out of the truck to look. He thought he'd find a dead deer.

Instead, he found most of a body, chest down, headless, its legs drifting out toward the center of the creek.

"Pranksters," he thought. So Cowboy found some waders and ventured into the 3-foot-deep waters of Town Branch. At 6:09, the police got the 911 call.

Cowboy was absolutely sure the body had just gotten there within the last 12 hours.

Tuesday, May 26

The largely skeletonized body was tentatively identified as that of Darryl Dotson. In the corpse's front pants pocket, the coroner found a wallet, some credit cards and a few dollars. Darryl kept his BlackBerry in that pocket as well.

Fayette County Coroner Gary Ginn said the body had been in the water for "a fair amount of time." He added that the decomposition was consistent with being in the water for three months at this time of year, with the water in the creek rising and falling along the debris-strewn bank.

He could not answer the question that had plagued the Dotson family. They had repeatedly looked for him along the creek, and he hadn't been there. So, where was he on March 5? March 6? March 7?

Kim is certain this was not an accident. Darryl wasn't an outdoors person. He wouldn't have left the concrete walking path near the creek by their home. He didn't like the water. He didn't even like to get in a hot tub. He did not know how to swim.

Saturday, May 30

Coroner Ginn had barely gotten the cooler of drinks out of the back of his truck when the firefighter asked him to come and see what his volunteers had found. About 75 yards downstream from where Darryl's body had been found, a skull with some skin attached. Ginn examined it but noticed no visible trauma and "no unusual holes."

Both of Darryl's arms, his hands, his left clavicle and his left scapula, as well as his coat, are still missing.

"That doesn't matter," said his sister, Sandy. "In heaven, he is whole, he is handsome, he is all in one piece."

Thursday, June 4

Using Darryl's dental records, State Forensic Anthropologist Emily Craig confirmed that the remains found in Town Branch were his.

Police spokeswoman Gutierrez said they will wait for other medical information to come in to determine if the case should be ruled a homicide. Craig has not yet determined the cause of death.

The Dotson case is now labeled a death investigation.

The 39-year-old widow sleeps when she gets too tired to stay awake. She is not able to turn off the light yet.

"My best-case ending for this was that Darryl was safe on an island with someone else who loves him, though I'd have killed him." She allows herself a smile.

"The worst case is this."

Herald-Leader staff writer Ashlee Clark contributed to this story.

Reach Amy Wilson at (859) 231-3305 or at 1-800-950-6397, Ext. 3305.

POP

Date set for new CD from Whitney Houston

The date for Whitney Houston's comeback has been set. Arista Records says her long-awaited album will be released Sept. 1. So far, there's no word on a title.

Houston, 54, is one of the best-selling artists of all time, but she hasn't released a CD in seven years. In recent years, she's been defined more by drug problems, marital woes and erratic behavior than by



Houston

her voice. But lately, Houston has appeared to return to form. She wowed the crowd when she performed at her mentor Clive Davis' pre-Grammy party in February.

McCartney to play N.Y.

The New York Mets are inviting an old friend to play at their new stadium: Sir Paul McCartney, who will perform the first concerts at Citi Field on July 17 and 18.

McCartney said he's excited to be the first to play the stadium, and he's "really looking forward to a buzzing show." The 66-year-old former Beatle was a surprise guest last summer for Billy Joel's concert at Shea Stadium. The previous home of the Mets — shut down to make way for Citi Field — was also where the Beatles performed for a sold-out crowd of screaming fans in 1965.

Susan Boyle aims for D.C.

Susan Boyle, 48, who was hospitalized last weekend after coming in second on Britain's Got Talent, may take weeks to recover, says her doctor. But Boyle's brother John, 59, insists she'll be ready to serenade President Barack Obama, who has invited her to perform July 4 at the White House. "So as you can see, her dream is still very much alive," John told the Daily Record.

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