

At Dewey HS, a reunion - and 27-yr. mystery

By DON SINGLETON
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

There was a reunion at a Brooklyn high school yesterday, with a mystery as its central theme.

Twenty-seven years ago, two teenagers from John Dewey High School headed off to a huge, Woodstock-like music festival in Watkins Glen, N.Y.

Bonita (Bonnie) Bickwit and Mitchel Weiser vanished and have not been seen since.

There was speculation that the young couple had eloped or joined a commune. Maybe even joined a cult. But as days turned to weeks and months, people began to fear the worst.

Yesterday, 100 members of the Class of 1975 gathered at Dewey High School on Avenue X to celebrate a reunion and to plant an 8-foot red maple tree in the missing couple's names.

The tree ceremony was "a dedication, not a memorial," because nobody knows if they're alive or dead, said Bonnie Shipper, a classmate who now lives in Mountain View, Calif.

It was four years after Woodstock when Bonnie and Mitchel left a camp in upstate Narrowsburg on July 27, 1973, and headed for Watkins Glen.

Bonnie, then 15, of Borough Park, and Mitchel, then 16, of Midwood — both from stable, middle-class Jewish families — set out with backpacks and sleeping bags to hitchhike the 75 miles to Watkins Glen.

For their close friends, it was as if the pair — neither the radical hippie type — vanished off the face of the Earth. They never called, they never wrote, and when school started again in September, they didn't show up.

For their families, it was the beginning of 27 years of pain — the pain of wondering without knowing, of searching without finding, of trying not to think about horrible possibilities involving serial killers.

That summer, Bonnie had been working at Camp Wel-Met, sponsored by the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in Narrowsburg, 90 miles north of the city.

"Bonnie was my best friend in high school," said Michelle Festa, valedictorian of the Class of 1974. "I went to Europe for the summer, and we had written letters to each other. She was working at Camp Wel-Met for a month, and Mitchel went up to pick her up, and they were going to go to the concert."

At first, everyone assumed the two — who had secretly exchanged wedding rings that summer — had run off to be together. But when there was no call or no letter, thoughts turned darker, to fatal accident, to murder.

"I could have been that little Jewish girl in the peasant skirt and the earth shoes," Shipper said with a shiver. "The whole thing is just heartbreaking."

Police were notified, but after investigations the families describe as perfunctory, the case went nowhere.

"They didn't do anything," Festa said. "We want to get the attorney general involved."

"There's a lot of different ways you can go," Mitchel's sister, Susan Liebegott of Brooklyn, said yesterday. "Maybe he got

HS Students Seek Missing Pair

By JESSE BRODEY

St. Valentine's Day was a time for serious business for students at John Dewey High School in Brooklyn yesterday. They were selling heart-shaped boxes of candy, cakes, greeting cards, jelly and caramel apples, heart-decorated T-shirts and other Valentine items.

Their goal was to raise \$1,000 to finance an intensive search for two fellow students missing since the Watkins Glen rock festival last July.

Mitchell Weiser, 16, and Bonnie Bickwit, 15, Dewey classmates, had their backpacks and sleeping bags to join the 600,000 rock fans at Watkins Glen, and haven't been heard from since.

Reports by Watkins Glen police and their parents to find the couple have been fruitless. Concern for them was a climax this month when it became evident that stories of their hiding in the East Village may not be substantiated, according to John Menas, a junior at the school.

Still Have Hope

The school Student Organization decided there might be some hope left and organized the Have-a-Heart Campaign, with Menas as chairman, to run the fund drive.

This week the students opened



Bonnie Bickwit Mitchell Weiser

among other students who just feel bad that two students from their school are missing.

Menas said students had various theories as to what might have happened. Some felt that Mitchell and Bonnie were held somewhere against their will. A few believed they had met "fool play." Some said they might have wanted to run off to

can't figure out," Menas said. "Both liked their families and their friends. They wouldn't run off like that. And it's most unlikely they became involved in drugs. They weren't that kind."

Menas said the \$1,000 would go to an organization called TRACERS that the students had heard about through a television program. TRACERS has been successful in finding 60% of the missing people it sought, Menas said.

Description Given

Mitchell, 5-7 and 145 pounds, had long brown hair parted in the middle and tied back, and brown eyes. He was wearing blue jeans, a turquoise T-shirt and tan desert boots when last seen.

Bonnie was 4-11, about 90 pounds and had dark brown wavy hair and brown eyes. She was wearing jeans and a blue shirt.

Listen to it

BAD LUCK KNOBLAU



When it rains, it pours. Bronx Bombers first-aid station at yesterday's Yankees' by a ball hurled into the stands by Chu beleaguered in recent days with ball-co of inning (below) over the way of his er sportscaster Keith Olbermann. See Spo



Daily News story on Dewey effort to raise funds to search for Bonnie Bickwit and Mitchel Weiser in 1974.

sick and was hospitalized. Maybe they got taken by a cult."

She recalled a day in 1985, when she was pregnant and thinking about her brother, then missing more than a decade, when the thought that he had been murdered flashed into her mind.

"I felt like a knife going through my chest," she said yesterday morning. And when she spoke at the dedication of the maple tree, with 100 members of Bonnie's class listening, she choked up. "I've always felt strongly that my brother would come home alive, but now it doesn't look like it," she said.

But then there were other incidents that brought hope.

"Years ago, when my parents were in Arizona, the phone rang and the operator asked my father if he would accept the charges on a collect call from Bonnie," she said. "He got all excited and said yes, but the operator told him, 'I'm sorry, she hung up.'"

No one called back. But the Weiser family has kept a phone listing in the Brooklyn directory since 1973, just in case Mitchel or Bonnie should ever call again.

Tiger displays a little di



REUTERS

Tiger Woods

By DAVE GOLDINER
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Tiger Woods may be golf's golden guy, but he stunned viewers on national TV yesterday by spewing expletives after making a bad shot at the U.S. Open.

The 24-year-old sensation had nearly finished another stellar round when he hit a shot into the rocks along the Pacific Ocean on the 18th hole at the Pebble Beach, Calif., golf course late yesterday morning.

Instead of a polite Tiger let loose with a st nasty words that an N crophone caught live cluding a different "F"

Woods, the sport's N traction and a role mo millions of kids, later gized for the outburst.

"You're working ver to keep your emotio check out there," he sa

He quickly regained composure and made the gaffe with a solid sl

"I hit a really poor sh said. "But I stepped up