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From the Clarion Ledger June 13, 1994

From Clarion Ledger May 24, 1994

11-year-old girl missing in Grenada

■ Karen Zhou was last seen Saturday evening when she went outside to play.

By Carmen McCallum
Clarion Ledger Staff Writer

GRENADA — Set apart by language and fear, Wen Hua Zhou is awaiting word of her missing 11-year-old daughter.

Karen Zhou, a fifth-grader at Lizzie Horn Elementary School in Grenada, left the River Hill Apartments about 6:30 p.m. Saturday to play. She hasn't been seen since.

"I do not know what has happened," said her mother in broken English.

Grenada police Sgt. Ricky Downs said Zhou's stepfather, Shikong He, told them he allowed the little girl to go outside and play.

"He told us he lost track of time and didn't think about it again until 11 p.m. when she hadn't returned," Downs said. "He then went looking for her. There's a swimming pool and plenty of grassy area around there. He couldn't find her and called police an hour later."

Downs said officers searched the immediate area then branched out into the county, searching the area and talking to the girl's friends.

Zhou, 35, whose American name is May, said she has lived in Grenada since February 1992.

She said there is no possibility that her first husband, Zhou's father, could have taken the girl. "He is in China. There is no letters, no exchange of letters, no writing between them. Karen has not heard from him," she said, sniffing.

Zhou and her husband have a 16-month-old son. She works at The Grand Palace Chinese Restaurant in Grenada. He does computer work for Walmart.

"Nobody knows why the Karen left," said Tonia Rowland, who works with Zhou at the restaurant. "Her mother was at work until 11 the night Karen disappeared. She told us later that Karen had been excited about participating in the softball games this week at school. That's all she had been

talking about.... We've been putting signs and posters up. We've got to do something. We can't just sit here."

James Saxon, Lizzie Horn Elementary School principal, called Karen a good student. "She's been here two years. I know her pretty well. She wasn't having any problems that I know of. She's still learning English, but she does real well."

Saxon said school officials were questioning and talking to the girl's friends.

"We haven't ruled anything out at this point. We're following all leads," said Downs.

Anyone with information about the girl should call the Grenada Police Department at 226-1211.