

Beth Holloway speaks to Texas BPA members

Persevering mother inspires, opens eyes

by Susanna Lawson



Beth Holloway

Beth Holloway, mother of Natalee Holloway who disappeared in Aruba nearly four years ago, visited Taylor High School in Taylor, Texas on Monday, May 18, 2009. Later that day she spoke to students at Austin High School. Both presentations were sponsored by Taylor High School's Business Professionals of America chapters, sponsored by Mrs. Barbara Leschber and Sue Lawson.

Like many people all around the world, you have probably heard about the disappearance of Natalee Holloway in Aruba. She had just graduated from high school and was enjoying her senior trip when something terrible happened to her on her last night before returning home. Natalee has not been heard from since May 30, 2005.

By her own account, Beth Holloway lived a quiet, somewhat uneventful life as a speech pathologist for children with special needs for 22 years. Her life changed quite dramatically in the summer of 2005 when her daughter Natalee disappeared.

The tragic story became the leading news mystery when it happened and still continues to make headlines today. Beth has appeared on every television network in the nation, including ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, FOX, MSNBC, and CNBC. She has captured the world's attention as she has searched for her missing daughter.

Barbara Walters selected Beth Holloway as one of the world's most fascinating people for her perseverance in seeking answers to what happened to Natalee.

Beth spoke movingly about her experiences and inspired the student audiences with her message of hope, faith and personal safety that she shares with young adults and people of all ages across America.



At left, BPA President Lucas Alderete presents Mrs. Holloway a dozen yellow roses.

Beth continues to work on educating the public on personal safety and travel safety through her book "Loving Natalee," and through her Travel Ed workshops. She is a dedicated teacher committed to sharing Natalee's story so that others may learn from it. She is a model of how to endure tough times and an inspiration to all who hear her personal story and we appreciated the story and heartache she shared with our students.

Students reflected on the morning's presentation in many ways. Jessica Tapia, a graduating senior, remarked that it struck her that Beth Holloway "...was a normal person before this happened and now her life has forever changed. What she said helped us understand how we could be safer, and that our parents aren't bugging us without a good reason. It made me think and opened my eyes."

Matt Reyna, a Taylor High Junior, thought her talk was inspiring and was surprised about how different the laws are in a foreign country. "It was stuff you just never think about before you go on a trip." A younger freshman, Liana Reyes, wrote in her journal that "...after the talk I felt like I knew her (Natalee), or she could be my best friend or related to me. I just wish they could get justice and put those guys that did that to her in jail."

Louis Flores was astounded that the whole auditorium was virtually silent throughout the presentation. "I admire Natalee's mom for being so strong and for telling us all that stuff. It had to be really hard for her." Chelsea Waechter remarked that "...if I were in her shoes, I wouldn't be able to be as strong, but it was really amazing to see her and hear her story. I'm sure she did it to help us."



Beth Holloway is joined by THS instructor Barbara Leschber and THS Principal Kimberley Mason just following her presentation to a packed high school auditorium. (Photo by Sue Lawson)

During DEAR time today, students heard a portion of the book written by Beth Holloway.* "...second to the great tragedy of losing her is if we fail to learn from what has happened." Many students realized that that is the reason she came to speak at THS. In her presentation, Beth Holloway talked about the "transitional age group" between high school and college and how students need their own specific message about personal safety. This means they must never get into a situation or condition in which they can't choose their own free will."

From her book, *Loving Natalee*, she writes: "...safety plans have to come full circle, because young adults' personal safety is their own responsibility now, and they've got to have their own back. ...Once Natalee got into that car, she was at the mercy of her perpetrators and could no longer protect herself. Pay as much attention to how you end your evening as you spend deciding what you're going to wear and who you're going out with. A full-circle safety plan is something you have to take responsibility for."

*Holloway, Beth. *Loving Natalee*. Harper Collins Publishers, 200 & 204, 2009.
Interviews and journal quotes are from students in Mrs. Sue Lawson's BCIS and Keyboarding classes.