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COVER STORY

SAFE AT HOME

Culleoka teenager returns to her family after suffering 'severe emotional trauma'

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Your tips, support, and encouragement made the difference in our search for Elizabeth Thomas!

#BringElizabethHome



Elizabeth Thomas reunited with her family Friday after being flown home from California by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.

The 15-year-old Culleoka Unit School freshman was found Thursday morning in the rugged, mountains of northern California. She allegedly was kidnapped by 50-year-old fired teacher Tad Cummins, who was arrested and taken into custody by the FBI.

"There is no doubt that she has suffered severe emotional trauma and that her process of recovery is only just beginning," Thomas family attorney Jason Whatley said. "The family is extremely grateful for the thoughts and prayers of the nation and asks sincerely for those continued prayers as Elizabeth becomes able to process the last 39 days."

Cummins and Thomas allegedly left Columbia in the morning March 13. The two were on the run for 38 days before being

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation sends a thank you to the public after finding Elizabeth Thomas safe from harm. (TBI illustration)

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38 DAYS ON THE RUN

Cummins urged his wife not to call police

Before Tad Cummins ran low on money, Cialis and options in northern California, he was making plans to run away from Columbia with 15-year-old Elizabeth Thomas.

A criminal complaint filed against Cummins in the U.S. District Court in Nashville shed light on the fired school teacher's actions before and after he allegedly ran away with his former student.

Columbia Police Department officer Jonathan Hardison, who serves on an FBI task force, detailed the investigation of Cummins after he allegedly kissed 15-year-old Elizabeth Thomas in his classroom on Jan. 23.



James Bennett
Editor's Notes

Hardison said Cummins and Thomas were involved in a sexual relationship. "It is believed based on the investigation to date, as set forth herein, that Cummins, age 50, and victim, age 15, are involved in a sexual relationship and traveled in interstate commerce to continue their relationship and to engage in unlawful sexual activity," the criminal complaint against Cummins said.

Cummins and Thomas

were located Thursday in the northern California mountain community of Cecilville — 2,477 miles from Columbia. Cummins was arrested and taken into FBI custody. Thomas was returned to her family.

Cummins told the witness who turned them into police that he was broke, needed to borrow money for food and gas and needed a place to stay. Thomas and he were captured outside a remote, unfinished cabin.

The newest revelations from the document concerns the 2015 Nissan Rogue that Cummins used to drive across the country with Thomas and a note he left for his wife, Jill.

Cummins borrowed the Nissan Rogue belonging to his wife, the complaint said. Cummins told the Maury County Public Schools employee that he was going to a job interview at the Williamson County Medical Center.

Jill Cummins found a note from her husband that night, saying he was gone to Virginia Beach, Va., or the Washington area to clear his head, the complaint said.

"He said he would be back and urged his wife not to call police," the documents said. "Cummins denied doing anything wrong and asked his wife to forgive him. At the

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REVELATIONS IN THE COMPLAINT

The U.S. District Court complaint alleges Tad Cummins:

- ◆ Told his wife he was going to Virginia Beach or Washington to "clear his head."
- ◆ Took out a \$4,500 payday loan on his wife's 2015 Nissan Rogue.
- ◆ Obtained two refills of his Cialis prescription, a drug used to treat erectile dysfunction, before leaving town.
- ◆ Stayed at two Super 8 motels in Oklahoma while on the run under his own name.

Weather

Today, cloudy with showers. High 57. Winds N at 10 to 15 mph. Chance of rain 60%. Tonight, rain showers early with clearing later at night. Low 49. Winds N at 5 to 10 mph. Chance of rain 40%.

Monday, sunshine and clouds mixed. High 74.

Tuesday, sunny skies. High 81.

Wednesday, sunny with afternoon clouds. High 82.

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COMING IN NEXT SUNDAY'S NEWSPAPER



Don't miss our second edition of *Maury Life* magazine, with Hampshire Unit School senior Ben Zolkiewicz on the cover. The magazine will be inserted into the Sunday, April 30 edition of *The Daily Herald* for subscribers only.



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