

Story Behind the Art: “*They Are Gone*”

For The Listening Room & Don’t Look Away, Inc.

“**They Are Gone**” was born out of a truth that is too heavy for most people to look at directly — the truth that children disappear every day, not only from their homes, but from our awareness, our systems, and our collective responsibility.

This 50x15 canvas was created during a season when the weight of missing, displaced, and forgotten children pressed deeply on my heart. I kept hearing the same phrase over and over: They are gone. Gone from safety. Gone from stability.

Gone from the places where someone should have been watching. As I wrote, the repetition became a heartbeat — steady, painful, unignorable. Each line reflects a different kind of disappearance:

- children who vanish into the foster system
- children who run away because home wasn’t safe
- children who are taken and exploited
- children who are overlooked by systems meant to protect them
- children who are missing, but no longer searched for

The poem is not just a lament.
It is a mirror.
It asks the question no one wants to answer:
What will we do?

This canvas is more than art — it is advocacy.
It is a call to awareness.
It is a reminder that behind every statistic is a child with a name, a story, and a life that matters.

The illustrations of the children were chosen intentionally — not to exploit pain, but to humanize it. To remind us that these are not numbers. They are sons and daughters. They are siblings. They are loved. They are missed.

Every purchase of this canvas directly supports The Listening Room (TLR) and Don’t Look Away, Inc. (DLA).

Your support helps us:

- raise awareness for missing and vulnerable children
- provide non-clinical emotional support to families

- advocate for better systems
- create safe spaces for youth
- build programs that prevent children from slipping through the cracks

This piece exists so the world cannot say, “We didn’t know.”

It exists so we cannot look away.

It exists so that even if the world forgets, we won’t.

Because they are gone —
and until they are found,
we will keep searching, speaking, praying, and fighting.

— *Deana Marie Starkey, MNPL*

President, Founder, Executive Director

Author * Artist