

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

Hi, crime junkies. I'm your host, Ashley Flowers.

And I'm Britt.

And today's story is about a bizarre, tragic mystery that's been haunting a family for far too long.

When investigators make a gruesome discovery after a fire, they don't know if a missing mom is one of the victims or the perpetrator.

But her family is convinced that she was set up.

And their only hope is that someone will come forward with information that they've been desperately seeking for nearly 16 years.

This is the story of Joelynn Offit and Alexis Brolin III.

Joelynn Offit is the kind of person who needs some time to calm down after an argument before she's ready to talk again.

Same.

I literally was like, this is me.

And listen, no one knows this better than her on-again, off-again boyfriend of four years,

38-year-old Alexis Brolin Jr.

So he's not shocked when she doesn't answer his calls on Wednesday, July 4th of 2007.

Now, even though they were supposed to visit his grandmother and watch fireworks.

And he's not surprised because, you see, they had spent the previous evenings together

at Joey's house in Sykesville, Pennsylvania

with their two-year-old daughter and brand new baby boy, Alexis Brolin III.

But they had gotten into a disagreement.

According to Alexis,

he had criticized Joey for giving the baby a bath in the dirty kitchen sink, which made Joey mad.

And then one thing led to another.

And their argument ended in Alexis taking their daughter back to his house in Clearfield about a half an hour away, leaving Joey and the baby alone in her house.

Oh, so they don't live together?

No, no, no, they used to.

But again, I said on-again, off-again, their relationship is rocky.

So even though they have two children, they're not rushing into anything.

Normally, the kids live with Joey, including her eight-year-old daughter

from a previous relationship.

But this week, it actually is just Joey and their one-month-old baby, who they call Lex, because her older daughter is spending a few weeks with Joey's mom, Sherry, who lives in Virginia. So, you know, with her toddler at Alexis' house and her older daughter with her mom, the hope is that Joey can have some one-on-one bonding time with her new baby.

So anyways, Alexis figures that she just needs space after their fight, so he doesn't pressure her to come to the fireworks, but he does call and leave a message apologizing, and he just goes on with his plans for the day.

So the next day, he tries calling her again, and she's still not answering.

So he goes over to her house just to check on her, but she doesn't come to the door when he knocks, even though her car is there.

Does he have a key to the place?

No, he doesn't.

And actually, according to an episode of Investigation Discoveries Disappeared, he must try, because, like, he finds that the door is locked, so he can't just, like, go in.

But even now, he's still not worried.

Like, he just assumes she's ignoring him, and they'll talk eventually.

Okay, as a personal connoisseur of the cold shoulder, there's, like, different kinds, you know?

So is this, like, very clear that she's inside and totally ignoring him, or...?

No, I actually don't think he can tell.

Because, I mean, I think, like, you know, he's not hearing anything as far as, like, what I've, like, read or watched or whatever.

It might be quiet inside, which doesn't mean one thing or another to me, because, like, with a one-month-old, any time of the day could be quiet time if the baby is sleeping, right? So...

1,000%.

Yeah, I don't think he's, like, paying attention to that,

or I don't think that the silence
sort of means anything, whatever.
I think he just sees the car, assumes she's there,
and just doesn't want to see him yet, so he leaves.
But when she doesn't answer the phone
on Friday the 6th, either,
that's when Alexis starts to wonder
if something else is going on.
Especially when he gets a call that day
from a nurse who works for a state health care agency.
Because, you see, Joey is enrolled in a program
that provides low-income moms with free prenatal
and maternity care.
And this nurse had an appointment to visit her
at home earlier that day,
but she tells Alexis that Joey
wasn't answering the door for her, either.
Although, again, her car was out front.
But this nurse noticed something else.
She said that the mail was piling up outside,
and that made her a little curious.
So she went, like, around and, like, peeked through a window.
And when she did, she saw a car seat
and a diaper bag on the living room floor,
but no signs of movement in the house.
So Alexis gets this call.
He decides then to, like, go make another trip
to Joey's Saturday morning.
This is now three days since he last spoke with her.
And this time, her car isn't there.
So he leaves, right?
Like, thinking, like, okay, like,
everything I thought was true,
like, you're not here, your car's gone, whatever.
But the car is back by Sunday night
when he stops by a third time.
As he stands outside the house,
he calls her from his cell phone
and he hears her landline ringing inside.
But besides that ringing, there's no footsteps.
There's no baby crying, nothing.
And I'm sure he's already tried her cell.
Well, she actually doesn't have one.
The landline's the only phone that she has at the house.

Okay, so has anyone heard from her?
Well, I mean, so far he only knows
that he and the nurse have been trying to contact her.
But, you know, now he's starting to wonder
kind of the same thing,
like, if something more is going on.
So this is actually the point when he calls her mom,
Sherry, to compare notes,
to find out if anyone else has heard from her.
And he learns that Joey hadn't talked to her mom
in a few days either.
But actually, up until this call,
Sherry, her mom hadn't been concerned necessarily.
Like, she just saw her daughter a week ago.
That was when Joey, Alexis, and their three kids
drove to Sherry's house in Virginia
so that she could meet the new grandbaby.
And like, you know, the whole crew went,
the whole crew stayed the night.
And when Joey left, she seemed happy.
Like, I mean, granted, fully exhausted.
Like, who is it with a newborn?
But happy.
And isn't Joey's older daughter with Sherry right now?
She is, yes.
The thing is, like, it's not like it's been a week
since she talked to her.
Like, they've had communications since the visit.
Like, Joey mailed them a package.
They've had a couple of phone calls.
The most recent one, I think, was, like,
on the night of Tuesday the 3rd.
But it's the 8th now.
So it has been five days since they spoke.
But again, you know, she was thinking this whole time,
you know, Joey has a newborn,
which, like, it feels like a lifetime ago.
But month one,
I was just trying to keep my head above water.
Like, so it's not weird to Sherry
that she hadn't called in five days,
which is why she also hadn't called her much
over the last few days either.
She just kind of wanted to give Joey space,

wanted to give her a chance to focus on the new baby to recharge her batteries.

Yeah, and not crowd her.

Yeah, totally.

Plus, when she now hears from Alexis, it's not even like his call makes her super concerned, because, you know, he's saying, like, I haven't talked to her.

And then she's like, OK, well, I haven't talked to her.

But then Alexis tells her about the argument that they had.

And now she's like, OK, this makes even more sense, because even Sherry knows that Joey totally shuts down and she gets mad.

So she figures out, OK, like, listen, she's just laying low.

But even though she's laying low, she's a mom.

She wants to make sure that Joey is OK.

So now she does try calling.

But over the next couple of days, all of those calls go unanswered.

And that is when Sherry starts to get worried, too, because even if Joey is angry with her boyfriend, why would she ignore her mother, her daughters, and the nurse who calls Alexis on Wednesday morning, July 11th to let him know that she's going to stop by Joey's house again?

OK, but this has been over a week with no word from Joey.

I mean, why hasn't anyone called the police?

Because, like I said, I mean, even a week, this isn't unusual for Joey.

According to something I found from WTAJTV, when she gets stressed or overwhelmed, which obviously she has been in this time of her life, she isolates herself.

And here's the thing is, like, even though she's never been formally diagnosed with anything, Joey's family says that she is developmentally delayed.

A psychologist once told Sherry that her daughter's mentality is that of, I mean, like a 14-year-old.

And her family, like, saw this, because even as an adult, Joey, who's like 33, has struggled with certain things, like keeping a job and maintaining long-term relationships.

Her nephew, Jason, says that she doesn't always make the best choices.

And he told our reporter, Nina, that she didn't seem to learn from her mistakes.

But, I mean, it's not to the point where, like, she has to be supervised or anything. She's capable of caring for her kids. So, again, this is why the family's not overreacting. Yes, it's been a week, but for her, this is still normal. Okay, but what about Alexis? He was so concerned when the baby was in a dirty sink. I guess, where is that emotion when days go by with no communication, no contact, no, like, checking in on his baby? I don't know. I go back to, like, this is her M.O. He's thinking she's gonna come around eventually. Yes, he might be concerned. But, right, like, okay, even if this dirty sink thing happens, like, he's concerned enough to say something and they get in the argument, but he's not, like, so worried. Like, a dirty sink isn't gonna kill a baby. You don't like it, right? But it's not gonna, like, kill the baby. And it wasn't enough for him to, like, take the baby out. And he does still, like, leave the baby with Joey. Yeah, like, he trusts her enough. So, like, yes, they got in this argument about her dirty sink, but I don't think that he doesn't think she can be a good mom or whatever. But here's the thing. Even though this is kind of her M.O., even though she's done stuff like this before, by the time the 11th rolls around, everyone agrees that something isn't right. So that morning, Alexis drives over to Joey's again, and this is while the nurse is still there. By the way, the nurse who doesn't know Joey obviously as well as her family, the nurse have been, like, recommending that they call police. So anyways, nurse and Alexis are at Joey's house, and the two of them look around, and they notice that nothing in the living room has moved. Like, again, they're looking, like, through the windows and stuff. They see that the mail is still piling up. And what's odd is, like, it's been in the mid-80s, like, temperature-wise, for days.

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But even though the house has no air conditioner, all of the windows are closed. And what they notice is that her car, again, is gone. So still not necessarily wanting to call police. Alexis decides to issue an ultimatum of sorts in the form of a pre-printed note that he leaves on Joey's door. Uh, pre-printed? Yeah, I mean, again, like, it's not like he's showing for the first time knowing she's gone. But basically, former Pennsylvania State Trooper David Ray told us that Alexis had typed it up about a half hour before going to Joey's that Wednesday. And in this note that he had typed up, he basically tells her, look, everyone's been trying to reach you. You need to call me or your mom or someone today. And if you don't, we are probably going to report you missing or contact child welfare. And then he also kind of adds in the note that he and their daughter are going to stop by again after dinner, so sometime around, like, 7 p.m. Now, I'm not sure if he actually does end up going back that night. But what I do know is that around 4 a.m., a couple who lives across the street from Joey wakes up to the sound of glass shattering. According to WJAC TV, at first, they think it's a car accident or something until they look outside and see smoke billowing from Joey's house. The couple calls 911 and volunteer firefighters hurry over. As they arrive, neighbors stand outside to fill them in about the family who lives there, the woman, her two young daughters, and her newborn son. Now, they say no one's been home all week and her car isn't there now, so the house must be empty. According to America's Most Wanted, responders quickly douse the flames that are spreading down the stairs and then they make their way to the second floor bathroom at the back of the house, where the fire is coming from. Now, within 20 minutes, they think that they've got it under control until they notice something is still burning. This time in the front of the house, and they realize that there is a second fire coming from the basement. Eventually, they get both fires out, and so they're able to start kind of like looking around, and they know that a fire with multiple points of origin

is a classic sign of arson.
And then it becomes abundantly clear
that that's what they're dealing with
when they find a gas can in an upstairs bedroom.
So at that point, they call the fire marshal,
who is a Pennsylvania state police investigator.
Now, when he arrives that morning,
the bathroom is still smoldering.
Like, he gets there soon.
And as he photographs the scorched, blackened mess,
firefighters try to clear out some of the smoke.
But suddenly, a piece of debris,
like falls into the bathtub, which is filled with water,
and the movement kind of like sloshes the water around,
and that's when they all see something in the tub.
According to that episode, it disappeared.
At first, they think it's an animal,
maybe a pet that got trapped inside.
But then they remember what the neighbors said
about a newborn living there,
and they realize this isn't a pet.
It's a baby.
It is a horrifying sight.
All that's left after the fire is skeletal remains
and one of the baby's legs.
There's also a large clump of hair
that's floating in the tub, along with a small paring knife.
Now, they have no idea what to make of the situation.
All they know is that they need more investigators at the scene.
So at 10, 12 that morning,
the fire marshal calls his state police colleagues.
But get this, while the fire marshal is on the phone
with a desk officer, another call comes in from Alexis.
He says that he wants to report his girlfriend missing.
And when he gives them her address, like, their heart stopped.
So they ask him to come down to the station.
And once he's there, they have him, you know,
talk them through the past week or so.
The argument, the unanswered calls, the ultimatum note,
her car coming and going.
And during this conversation, Alexis tells investigators
that Joey has been dealing with postpartum depression.
Actually, he even says in this conversation
that he wanted to take both kids for a few days

so she could just get some rest.
But he couldn't, he said,
because he's been trying to start this, like, website business
so he doesn't have time to care for an infant on top of that.
So he only took their daughter.
And in fact, the whole website business thing,
that's what Alexis says he was doing that morning.
He was home working on his websites.
So from what he's telling them, and keep in mind,
like, they haven't told him that they know anything at this point.
They just, like, were asking him questions.
And based on his responses, they're just like,
oh, she's missing, come in and talk to us, right?
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
So he doesn't, at least to them,
it doesn't seem like he knows about the fire.
So by the time he's done filling them in,
they break the news to him.
And so, you know, his first question is whether Joey was in the house.
They tell him that there's no sign of her,
but they did find a newborn's remains.
And even though they haven't been able to identify the baby yet,
I mean, I think it's pretty obvious to everyone that it's Lex.
And how does he react?
I mean, he cries.
Like, I mean, I think it's the reaction that they expect.
I think it's obviously a completely normal reaction, but he cries.
Now, while this interview has been going on,
investigators have been combing through Joey's house
looking for evidence.
And when they're there, they see that one fire was set
on a workbench in the basement,
and the flames had, like, climbed up the wall
and, like, burned clear through the top of the house.
And the second fire that they find was set in the upstairs bathroom.
But luckily for investigators, they realize that whoever this arsonist was
didn't do a great job, because even with all the damage,
some parts of the house are largely undisturbed,
especially on the main floor,
which is where they find something else that makes their stomachs churn.
Sitting on Joey's kitchen table is a large, half-open package
of raw, rotting hamburger meat,
like, to the point where it's crawling with maggots,
which is disgusting, but, again, good news,

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because they know that they can use this to get an ETA of when that meat was left out.

And they need every scrap of information that they can cobble together to make a timeline, because there is a significant gap between when Joey was last seen and when police learned that she was missing. Right, because we know she was last seen on, what, July 3rd, right?

Well, technically, it was, like, the 4th.

It was, like, the early morning hours of the 4th.

So if I remember, so Alexis said that he and their daughter went to Joey's on the 30th. It was, like, 7 p.m.

And then it was around 10 p.m.

He says, I think it was, like, he was trying to mow their grass with his new lawn mower that they bought.

Ugh, which I'm sure the neighbors were thrilled about.

Well, actually, I don't even think that happened.

He said he gave up because the mower wasn't working well or whatever.

But then he goes to the store after that, which is, like, 15 minutes away.

He picks up some groceries for Joey, but he, like, admits that he used her state benefits card to buy, like, her groceries, but then, like, also some stuff for his house, too.

So was the hamburger meat on the shopping list?

It was. And investigators actually get receipts to back that up.

But, you know, what's so interesting, too, is that part of what he tells investigators is that he and Joey had bought a can of gasoline for the lawn mower that day.

And what police realize is that it's the same can of gas that was used to start the fire.

So, again, that was kind of, like, all of an aside.

But that all happens on July 3rd.

Again, he's, like, trying to mow the lawn at, like, 10 p.m. doesn't work, whatever.

They get into this sink argument later that night.

And the argument's, like, happening, like, into the early morning hours of July 4th.

And it's at that point that Alexis left.

So technically, she's lasting on the 4th in the wee hours of the morning.

And now it is July 12th.

So investigators have a ton of time to make up for.

And a worried family to notify.

So local police in Virginia head to Sherry's and tell her that she needs to call the Pennsylvania State Police.

Now, duh, like, she knows that Joey was still MIA.

So when she makes that call, she is frantic.

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And they tell her to get to Sykesville as soon as she can because there's been a fire and a body was found. So Sherry and one of Joey's sisters make the five-hour drive, again, in a panic. And nothing can prepare them for the chaos of the scene. The blue two-story house that Sherry had bought her daughter just six months ago, which Joey had been so proud to call her own, is gutted. According to WTHA TV, most of her belongings are just strewn across the lawn. There are piles of just rubble and furniture and clothes and toys everywhere. And when she gets there, our detectives pull her aside and they tell Sherry and Joey's sister the terrible news about baby Lex. And they're asking them if they have any idea where Joey might be. But they don't. Like, they're totally in the dark. But as police keep asking questions, it starts to become clear to Sherry what police are thinking. They think Joey is the culprit. Because to investigators, the pieces fit. Joey is gone. So is her car. So are her keys. Alexis said they argued over the baby's bath. His body is found in a bathtub. And the chunks of hair in the bathtub with the baby look to be Joey's. Although, I mean, it's too burnt to even test. And they can't tell if it was pulled off or cut off or what. I guess for some reason, when you said there was a chunk of hair in there before, I guess I thought it was the baby's hair. No, no, no. I know there's so much information. The chunk of hair is the size of a ponytail. So way too much for a newborn. Even a newborn with a full head of hair. So they're thinking this is Joey's hair. And they're also wondering, speculating, if maybe she isn't experiencing some kind of severe postpartum depression or even psychosis. And in that state, maybe she killed Lex, then burned the house down to hide the evidence. Or maybe she accidentally killed him. I mean, saying it was intentional. And then she hungered down over that next week or so trying to figure out what to do. She knew the jig was up when she read that ultimatum note.

Maybe she freaked out and cut off all her hair with that paring knife that they found in the tub so she wouldn't be recognized. And listen, there are a lot of maybes or what-ifs or whatever. But the one thing they're certain of is that baby Lex is dead before the fire and now Joey is gone. But how do they know that if the remains were mostly skeletal? So a little bit of a fair warning. You can skip forward like 30 seconds. Trust me, they know or I can tell you. So it comes down to maggots. Basically, there are maggots underneath the skin. Because remember, there's one leg that was still kind of intact. And investigators know that there wouldn't be maggots if this had just happened within the last few hours. He must have been there for a while. That's so heartbreaking to think that, you know, she would have had to have been in a really scary, really severe mental state if they were thinking that she was in the house this whole time with her dead baby and this rotting meat. Yeah, if their theory, and I mean, keep in mind, it's just one possible theory at this point. But if their theory is right, she has to be in crisis. But there are some little things that don't 100% line up with their theory. Like, for instance, police find her purse and her ID both inside the house and her family says that she would never go anywhere without her purse. So if she did leave on her own, why didn't she take it? Okay, but if she's in crisis, if she is experiencing severe postpartum depression or even psychosis, then I think her usual habits are out the window. Like, we can't even consider those. She's not in her right mind. She's not really Joey right now. Which is true. And even, like, when her loved ones hear this, they're not even sure what to think at this point. Like, don't get me wrong, they don't believe for a moment that she would intentionally harm her child. But they don't know the state she's in. And, you know, if the baby died of something like SIDS, they wonder if she snapped or panicked if she was fearing that she would be blamed. So it's not even like that. She's spiraled, yeah. Yeah, it's not even like they're outright saying, like, oh, this couldn't have happened. Like, you know, we don't believe this at all. But they're like, I think to your point, they're knowing that she's not herself now. So, right? Like, her leaving without her purse or ID maybe isn't that strange. And while the idea of her in this kind of state and in this kind of crisis is an awful thought,

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it is preferable to the alternative that they're proposing, which is like, this was intentional and she's on the run. And like, that's what they cannot believe. So her family knows that if she did something, they're going to hear from her soon. She cannot survive on her own for long emotionally or financially. But then that means if they don't hear from her, then Joey might have met foul play too. And so if she didn't do it, what have they done with Joey? Of course, one of the biggest mysteries in all of this and maybe the key is her car. So they put out an APB for the red 1994 Saturn Coupe with Virginia plates and they start trying to piece together a timeline with the help from her neighbors, who along with Alexis can place the car at Joey's house up until the night of Sunday, July 8th. Although, according to Alexis, it wasn't always there, right? Like it was coming and going a little bit or at least one other time as far as he knows. Now, there is one guy who tells police that he saw the car outside of Joey's house just an hour before the fire started and it really stuck out to him because he says that Joey typically parks on the street in front of her house. But this time he says that she was parked on the street along the side of her house. But he didn't see her, he just saw her car? Right, just her car. And again, like it could be a little significant. Like I know with my neighbors, like I know their patterns, right? Like I know who parks on the street, I know who parks in the driveway, I know who parks in the garage, like all of that. The problem with this is, though, even though it seems a little important, police actually don't end up putting a lot of stock in this guy's story because when they really try and get into the details of this, he doesn't seem to be so sure of like the exact date that he saw this. Like at first he says it was right before the fire started, which you think you'd remember, but I don't know, when they push, it becomes a little fuzzier. But that being said, tracking the various car sightings is way easier than tracking Joey's steps. The couple who lives across the street, the ones who reported the fire, they tell investigators that her windows have been closed since July 4th, which again is really odd because they're usually open. Beyond that though, there's not a whole lot of information that these like neighbors can provide because most people in the area don't actually know anything about Joey. She doesn't socialize much beyond like just with her family, with Alexis, with the kids, and she's only lived in Sykesville since earlier that year. So where did she live before that? I mean, she moved around a lot. Like she grew up in Virginia, then she went to college for a year in West Virginia. Then according to Robin Acton's reporting for the Pittsburgh Tribune Review, she got married, she moved to Texas for a couple of years, then she returned home when she and that guy like split up. And then ever since she met Alexis in 2003, she had been kind of back and forth between

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Pennsylvania and Virginia.

But this is why Sherry bought her that house so she could have a permanent home for her family, no matter what happened with Alexis.

And Sykesville seemed like the perfect place to kind of lay down roots.

Like it had kind of this like safe little burrow with fewer than, I think it was like 1200 residents.

And literally, it's so small, and we're talking quite literally a one stoplight town.

And the property that Joey's house sits on is literally surrounded by the town's four churches.

And actually, it turns out that one of those churches is what yields a big leap.

You see, Alexis might not have been the last person to see Joey.

A youth pastor from one of the churches says that he saw Joey around maybe five or six p.m. on Thursday, July 5th,

like walking up the sidewalk, pushing a stroller.

Although he doesn't recall if he saw an actual baby in the stroller or not,

which a lot of people like online go back and forth like, oh my God, she's pushing an empty stroller.

That must mean something. And what I keep trying to make clear to people,

he's not saying he saw her pushing an empty stroller.

He just like did not lay eyes on the baby, which I think is an important distinction to make.

Right, because like you have like the little sun shield up, you have a blanket over it.

Like there's a lot of reasons he just might not have seen a baby.

A one month old, like granted, I had Joe in January, so she was like bundled up beyond belief.

And this is summer.

But yeah, you're definitely got like the whole sun shield, the whole, yeah, the whole nine yards.

And the baby could be sleeping, right?

And anyways, the one thing he does recall though, is that he thought that she looked quote unquote disheveled.

Okay, but what mom, I mean, let alone a mom of a newborn doesn't look a little disheveled sometimes.

Yeah, no, for sure.

Like I don't feel like I started looking not disheveled until like a solid six to 10 months in.

Okay, I haven't hit that point yet. Cool.

But like for him, I don't even think it was like necessarily like an appearance thing.

Like it was just her whole demeanor because what stuck out to him is that even though they had talked before,

on this particular day when he says hi to her, she actually didn't acknowledge him or even like make eye contact.

Oh.

So I think the whole encounter just felt really strange.

Plus, unlike that other guy who had the story about the car, this pastor says he is confident about the date

because he saw her outside of the church while doing some cleanup after his brother's wedding that happened there.

And this encounter, this is the last time anyone says that they've seen Joey.

And this also fits in with that maggots meat that was found, which forensic experts conclude was left out on the counter sometime between July 3rd and July 5th.

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So a couple of puzzle pieces are maybe starting to come together a little. And regardless of what happened or why or whether she disappeared before or after the fifth, I mean, it is clear that Joey is the real key to unraveling this awful mystery. The more investigators can find out about her, the greater their chances are of locating her and finding out what really happened in that house. So to do that, they bring Alexis in for a longer interview. He tells police that he and Joey met online. At the time, they seem well matched. They're both single parents with similar beliefs, similar values. And then not long after they got together, Joey and her daughter, who was five at the time, they moved from Virginia to Pennsylvania to be with him. Now, he was there because he was studying psychology at Penn State and he lived in an apartment near the main campus. For a while, everything was good. But then they started arguing a lot and Joey and her daughter moved out. But she and Alexis kept seeing each other and she got pregnant in the summer of 2004. And kind of unsurprisingly, right when you have a relationship that's up and down like this, like their problems only got worse. When police run a background check on Alexis, they see that Joey filed a protection order against him in 2005, which eventually ended up lapsing. Whoa, what happened leading up to that? Well, the story that he gives police is that he wanted Joey to leave his house and then she refused, then she attacked him. So he grabbed her by her hair, pushed her out the door, at which point she called the cops. He got arrested and she filed for the protection order. And that might not have been the only incident, though. Joey actually documented a lot of their ups and downs online in this like Yahoo! discussion group for single moms. According to David Lorré's reporting for Court TV's crime library, Joey posted to the group 525 times from February 2005 to June 5, 2007. Now, some of this information hasn't been confirmed, but these are Joey's words. So I think they're at least valid to share here with the caveat, right, that like, again, not all things have been confirmed. So, Brick, I sent you a couple of her posts. Would you mind reading those just so we kind of get a sense of, like, what it is she's talking about? Yeah, there's one on March 17, 2005 that says, quote, Entered my protection from abuse, PFA, against Alexis today, and taking it to the courthouse tomorrow. It will grant me temporary custody of our baby as well as being in control of his visitations, likewise financial responsibility, without having to depend on his timing. I'm relieved, a little sad, and at peace, end quote. Then less than a month later on April 6, she posted, quote, I am eight months pregnant and have a six year old daughter. The father of our unborn daughter caused me to go into preterm labor and since I had him served

with a PFA order.

It was a so very difficult decision for me because it meant I was choosing to raise two children as a single mom, end quote.

She actually went on to say that the protection order would help ensure Alexis's visitation with their daughter would be supervised.

I think this one's important, it says since, quote,

He tends to have a hard time with not being physical confrontative and shows no initiative in taking special precautions, keeping young children away from his son, which I think is interesting.

His son, I'm confused, the newborn?

No, so I had mentioned that both Joey and Alexis were single parents when they met.

Oh, yeah.

He actually had a son and a daughter from previous relationships, and I think that's the son he's talking about.

Okay, so what happened with his son?

I mean, without going into too much detail, apparently there was an incident when this kid was a preteen that led to social services getting involved.

So I guess Joey didn't really feel comfortable having his son around her daughter.

But I mean, again, so you're seeing these posts, you're seeing kind of where she was at.

But despite all of this, like by the spring of 2007, Joey posted about how they were trying to work things out because she was pregnant again.

And she wrote that even though Alexis was a felon who had struggled with substance use disorder, having children had changed him.

And she told the group that he was going to propose to her, which she seemed really excited about. And just in FYI, I know I had said earlier, like, you know, some of the stuff she's saying can't be substantiated.

This quote unquote felon stuff is true.

So we did a state background check and it shows that Alexis pled guilty to robbery in the late 1980s. He was only given probation, but he violated it when he was found guilty of a misdemeanor.

The misdemeanor was like receiving stolen property and that happened in 1991.

So he had to serve a couple of years in prison and then he was on parole for a while.

So OK, so that's just some background.

Let's jump back to the police's interview with Alexis.

They learned about the ups and downs of their relationship.

And the thing that sticks out to them is that Joey and Alexis seemed to have starkly different views of where their relationship was heading.

Because in these interviews, he tells detectives that they were actually in the process of breaking up, even though they were still having sex.

And not only that, he says Baby Lex might not even be his son.

Does he actually have reason to think that's true or is he just saying it?

I don't know.

I mean, all we know is that they're obviously having problems.

But like this is what I'm saying about the like the contrast because everything they're getting from like Joey's family or Joey's online posts,

like to everyone on that side, to their knowledge, she and Alexis are engaged.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

They're planning to get married next year.

So if you would ask anyone on that side, could Lex have a different dad?

They'd all have been like for sure.

No.

Well, but regardless what Joey and Alexis's relationship was like, he's the boyfriend or fiance or maybe almost ex.

At the very least, he's the father of one of her children.

And he admits they argued the last time that they were together.

The police are going to look at him regardless.

Right.

And police do consider him a person of interest, but he's cooperative.

He answers questions.

He doesn't even lawyer up.

And he even speculates on Joey's potential whereabouts.

According to that episode, it disappeared.

He tells investigators that she may be running from her problems.

And he suggests that they check women's shelters because she's actually stayed in them before.

So he's saying he thinks Joey did something to Lex and set the fire?

Well, not quite.

I mean, he tells investigators that he doesn't know what happened.

Like he's just making suggestions where maybe they can find her.

And imagine Joey setting the fire to the house that she loved so much because he's still, he's not like even saying that she's like a bad person.

Like he describes her as this protective mother who clings to her kids.

I think he's just trying to like come up with anything.

So after their interview, he lets police search his home and even examine his computers.

And when they get worried about a nasty smell coming from his car, he even hands over the floor mat so they can test them to prove that the smell is just left over.

Like there's some kind of stench from leftover frozen turkey that he forgot about.

And was it actually turkey?

I mean, there wasn't any human blood or anything found.

So I think so, yeah.

So he's talking to them.

He's letting them search whatever they want.

There's even a point where like a couple of days like into the investigation after the fire, he takes a polygraph.

But Trooper Ray isn't surprised when the polygraph is inconclusive.

Because like, I mean, even when you think about it again, not even from a sinister point of view, like this news is so fresh, there is bound to be an emotional reaction.

So overall, police are definitely not ready to put Alexis on a shelf.

But at this point, Joey being responsible still seems like the most likely scenario.

Okay, but is there anyone else who could have done it?

What about the father of Joey's older daughter?

No, I mean, he's in prison halfway across the country. It definitely wasn't him.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

But to your point, like police are looking into everyone they can think of.

Like for instance, there is a maintenance worker who worked around her house occasionally, but he's cleared.

They look into sex offenders, no leads there.

They also take a deeper look at her online activity because, you know, her family brings up this idea, you know, she's way too trusting.

And they tell police about this story, something that happened to her in the past.

Like this is all coming from Sherry. She relayed this in that disappeared episode.

But basically, Alexis told Sherry in 2006 that he intercepted emails that Joey was exchanging on his computer with a guy who claimed to be looking for a model to photograph.

But this guy was really only interested in shooting pornography.

Now, there's a lot of confusion about what actually happened with that.

And I don't know if, you know, it was just that one incident or if there were others too.

But that fall, Sherry was so concerned about this that she went and got temporary custody of her two granddaughters.

And Joey like hit the roof when she found out she went to counseling to get them back, which she did.

So naturally, police were intrigued when they found a computer in Joey's burned down house.

But the problem was her internet service was turned off for at least a couple of weeks due to lack of payment.

And ultimately, there's like nothing useful on the hard drive.

So they are looking at other avenues, but they're just not getting anywhere.

And it's not until three long days after the fire, this is now Sunday, July 15th, that investigators get the break that they've been waiting for.

Joey's red Saturn has been found.

It's parked in the Nittany Gardens apartment complex about 70 miles away.

And this is a significant location because Joey and Alexis actually used to live there when they started dating.

Oh, according to WJAC TV, police spend a week canvassing the complex, showing photos of the couple to everyone they can, but no one remembers them.

But one resident thinks they know about when the Saturn got there.

They say that it was parked in the complex by July 12th.

So I think it's important because, you know, if this is true that they saw it parked there on the 12th, that's the same day that the fire is set.

So the fire set early morning hours, yeah, then this car shows up.

So investigators search the car for evidence.

They spray the inside with luminol, but there is no blood, no fluids, nothing indicating foul play.

And of the fingerprints that they do find, none of them are useful.

Are there any surveillance cameras in the area that may have seen something?

Yeah, but here's the thing, like, every three days, that footage overwrites itself.

And we're at what? The 15th?

Yeah, so it ends up, by the time they, like, get there and then start looking for the footage, like, doing their canvassing,

I mean, they, like, just missed it.

Oh, my God.

Now, what's so interesting about specifically where the car was found is that it kind of plays into one potential theory

that's been floating around, which is that if all of this happened because she was experiencing something mentally,

maybe in her breakdown, she drove there thinking she still lived there.

Right, it's a familiar place.

Right.

However, when her nephew Jason sees a photo of the car, like the way police found it, he gets chills. Because it doesn't matter to him that she lived there.

He doesn't think she went there because she was in a panic state because he said in that moment, in an instant,

he was sure that his aunt wasn't the one who left there because of something specific he saw.

The Saturn had been backed into a parking spot and, like, backed in well.

Like, it was perfectly aligned inside the space.

But apparently, Joey was, like, notoriously a bad driver and she never backed into parking spots.

Like, it wouldn't even cross her mind to try it.

Okay, but if she's not herself right now, maybe she would?

Okay, so let me keep going because that's not, like, the main part.

Even if she is in a different state and her little habits are changing,

even the stuff that's ingrained in her, she's, like, not paying attention to it,

what doesn't make sense to her family is the fact that it's perfectly parked.

They're saying, like, even if she tried, even if she's, like, today's the day because I'm not Joey anymore,

I'm gonna back in.

They're like, there is no world in which she could have gotten that car,

like, straight in between the lines the way it was found.

It's a skill she doesn't have, right?

Truly. Plus, they say that they can see in the photos that the seat is pushed all the way back,

like, almost even into, like, a reclining position, which they say is way too far back for Joey to drive comfortably.

Like, she's very petite.

Her driver's license says she's 5'3",

but Sherry says she's, like, barely pushing 5'1".

Now, if you ask investigators, this doesn't prove anything.

But to her family, this is a smoking gun.

They know in their heart of hearts there is no way Joey parked that car.

So they try to come up with explanations that aren't the worst-case scenario.

Like, maybe someone helped her flee and that person parked it.

But ultimately, again, this feels like the biggest lead.

It is the biggest lead, but the problem is finding the car doesn't actually help find Joey.

And it just becomes this, like, frustratingly loose end.

As the days continue to pass with no sign of Joey,

her family becomes more and more disheartened.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

But there is one last hope, one beacon in this dark time that her family is still holding on to. Joey's daughter's ninth birthday is coming up in late July, and she would never miss it. If she left voluntarily and any sense of who she is remains, she is gonna reach out on this day. Even if it's just a quick call to say happy birthday, even if she just calls and hangs up, something. But the big day passes without a word. And this was, like, the turning point for them. They are more sure than ever that she is a victim. Either that or she is experiencing, like, full-on amnesia in her mental crisis and literally doesn't know who she is. So they ramp up their efforts to find her. They start a website. They set up a hotline for tips. They even talk to reporters. And Jason, her nephew, scours the internet looking for news stories about unidentified bodies. And what's Alexis doing all this time? You mean, like, for search efforts? Yeah, like, is he participating? Like, what's going on? Apparently he's not doing much. Like, he and Sherry had discussed, like, practical matters in this time. Stuff to do with, like, he and Joey's daughter, but he's definitely not by their side helping out, which feels like a red flag to some of her loved ones. But whatever their suspicions may be, they have no proof that Alexis was involved. Again, involved in what, how? And on top of that, I mean, Sherry's just trying to keep the peace, right? Like, this guy's going to be in their lives one way or another because of the daughter he shared with Joey. So, like, they're not pointing the fingers. And why point the finger when you still don't know what happened? Right. I mean, it's a tricky situation to navigate. Where are Joey's daughter staying with Joey missing? Well, so her older daughter is with Joey's family. Like, she was the one who was staying with Grandma anyways at the time, so she's staying with Joey's family. Joey's younger daughter, who she shares with Alexis, is living with Alexis. And her family's, like, during this time is still getting to, like, see her for visits and stuff. And actually, at some point, Sherry even gets joint legal custody. But it does mean that the girls are split up. They're missing each other, not to mention they're missing their mom and their baby brother. I mean, their lives, it's not an understatement to say they've been completely upended in this. Over the next few months, as everyone's trying to, like, figure out how to navigate this new reality, Sherry has to end up selling Joey's decimated house.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

And she ends up selling it to one of the surrounding churches, which just has to, like, level it for a parking lot.

And all that's left to show that Joey and Baby Lex even lived there is just this little memorial.

Now, meanwhile, police have been following up on lead after lead.

But none of them are panning out.

Like, there was this rumor that Alexis may have intentionally set a small fire at his parents' house when he was younger,

but, like, they search high and low for proof of this.

They never even confirmed that.

Again, not that that would have, like, proved this scenario.

Well, what would that even mean?

Right.

So to her family, it feels like the case is at a standstill.

So in April of 2008, that's when they announced a \$10,000 reward for information leading to her whereabouts.

But unfortunately, information is still in short supply.

And not even just about Joey.

Even after police used DNA to officially confirm Baby Lex's identity, they still don't know how he died,

which, again, is another huge key to this.

Because there are no signs of trauma on the limited remains that they have to examine.

They know that Lex was a healthy baby.

There's no reason he shouldn't be alive, but they don't know why he's not.

Were they able to narrow down when he died at all?

Well, they have an estimate.

So they're thinking that Lex died on July 4th or July 5th.

Oh, by the way, this is when they're doing DNA and stuff.

So they actually did a test on Lex.

Because remember, we've got this weird claim from his dad that's saying, I'm not his dad.

The baby is Alexis.

This is his child.

So fast forward a little ways.

America's Most Wanted ends up airing segments about Joey's case twice.

It was in November and December of 2008.

Each time, like, there's some fresh round of leads that come in from across the country.

Like, one man says that he's certain he talked to Joey at a shopping plaza in Alabama.

Another call points police in the direction of some sort of cult or church in West Virginia.

But again, every time, every road ends up leading nowhere.

And over the next few years, police start leaning away from the theory that Joey is the perpetrator.

Because they know that the more time that passes, the less likely she's alive.

So kind of like the family has been believing for a while,

Trooper Ray starts to believe that Joey was a victim of foul play.

Now, I don't know exactly when this switch happens for him,

but he is definitely in that camp by the time he presents the case to the VDoC Society in January of

2013.

Now, we've mentioned the VDoC Society a few times.

For anyone who doesn't know, there are this, like, kind of high-profile team of active and former investigators who review unsolved cases.

And basically, the VDoC Society comes to the conclusion that the investigation should be focused on Alexis.

But every tactic they suggest, Trooper Ray has already tried.

And what makes things more difficult is that Alexis's cooperation had kind of dwindled over the years.

He even declined to take a second polygraph at his family's advice.

Though he does talk to the media a couple of times, like he was interviewed for that episode of Disappeared that I mentioned and for America's Most Wanted.

And every time he's interviewed, it seems like he's just as confused as everyone else.

Like, he told America's Most Wanted there was, quote,

Talk of postpartum depression and stuff.

But if an accident happened, you know, where's Joey now?

End quote.

Oh, I meant to ask, this idea about postpartum depression or possibly even psychosis seems to be a pretty big theory in this case.

But was she ever diagnosed or did anyone else see signs of it?

Or was it just Alexis kind of reporting on this?

It wasn't just him.

So that nurse that was working with Joey, she had confirmed to police that Joey was taking an antidepressant for postpartum depression.

Now, I mean, her family, again, she clearly has it.

We know she has it.

Her family says, though, like, you know, she's happy to have the baby.

She's looking forward to the future.

But my one tidbit that I'll add is someone who just went through this not too long ago.

Like, you don't always feel comfortable talking about it, even with the people that are closest to you.

So we know she had it.

I don't know who would be the gauge of, like, how bad it might actually have been.

So my point was Alexis is doing these interviews.

I mean, he tells Investigation Discovery producers that he doesn't know what happened, but his son is never coming back and he's trying his best to forget everything and move on.

But for Joey's family, there is no moving on.

Even after Sherry has her legally declared dead in 2016, they keep looking for her and police keep working the case.

Year after year, though, they got nothing to show for it.

Though there is an interesting, albeit unrelated, development that happens in June 2020 that I do want to mention.

Alexis, along with a few dozen other people, is indicted on federal charges involving drug trafficking, money laundering, and unlawful possession of firearms.

Okay then.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

Yeah, pretty big.

Like, this indictment came after this lengthy wiretap which targeted a massive methamphetamine ring.

And Alexis, he wasn't just involved, he's accused of running it along with another guy.

Whoa.

Yeah, according to court records, when police busted him, he had more than two pounds of meth in his possession.

So if he's convicted, he's facing a mandatory sentence of life in prison.

Now, right now, he's in county lockup awaiting trial, which has been delayed a few times.

And as of this recording, the trial is scheduled to start, I think, this summer.

Now, we tried to get what we could about this, but, like, lots of the records are sealed while it's ongoing.

But a bunch of his co-defendants have already pled guilty, including his wife, who was recently sentenced to a decade in prison.

And records from her case shed a little bit of light on their home life?

Hmm.

Then, Brett, I actually sent you what Nina dug up.

Can you give us a quick summary of the allegations?

Sure.

Basically, prosecutors say that during the investigation, neither Alexis nor his wife were gainfully employed.

Their only income was from selling drugs.

The state had removed his daughter from their care in April 2020, but she was actually at their house when police raided it after his arrest.

They found a loaded gun on the kitchen table and nine other guns in the home.

Meanwhile, at least one of the men Alexis worked with was actively threatening to kill him over money he owed for a drug debt.

Which is like scary stuff, right?

I mean, this is like no small thing.

Yeah.

Potentially a great opportunity when he was arrested to go back to him and talk about Joey.

Like, maybe if there is something that he didn't tell them before, maybe he would now if there's a deal to be made or something.

But when they went back to talk to him, he, like, had no interest in doing it.

And neither did his wife or the other co-defendants.

No one tells police anything useful about Joey.

But I think it's still important to note they've never named Alexis as a suspect regarding what happened to Joey or the baby.

Though as of right now, he is the only person of interest.

Joey's family doesn't know why anyone would want to hurt her or her son.

They think that whoever is responsible staged the scene to make it look like she killed the baby and then set fire to their house.

That way, all of the investigators' focus would be on finding a mom who flipped out instead of the real culprit.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

They are positive that someone out there knows what happened to Joey and to Baby Lex. I mean, their only desire is to find her and to find out what happened in that house. And that desire for answers even outweighs their desire for justice. I mean, Shari is plagued, she said, with nightmares. She hasn't slept well since Joey vanished. They just want to bring her home. They just want to lay her to rest next to her son so they can be together. If Joey is alive today, she'd be 49. At the time of her disappearance, she was about 110 pounds with reddish brown hair and a noticeable lisp. This case is still active. David Ray is retired from the state police now, but he is still working on the case because after his retirement, he went on to be an investigator at the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office. So if you have any information about Joey or about Baby Lex or what happened in that house, please help this family get the peace that they deserve. Call the Pennsylvania State Police at 814-938-0510. You can find all the source material for this episode on our website, crimejunkiepodcast.com. And you can follow us on Instagram at [crimejunkiepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/crimejunkiepodcast). Britt and I are actually off next week. We will be back the following week with a brand new episode. But make sure to stick around for the good segment. Somehow we have made it to the end of May already. And I don't know about you, Britt, but I am ready to hear some good. Yes, please. Yes. And Crime Junkies, don't forget you can check out the good page on our website, crimejunkiepodcast.com to recap on past month segments, even submit a story of your own. We love reading each and every one of them. So please, please, please keep submitting. We actually will have a direct link to the page in our show notes. But drum roll, please. Britt, you want to share some good with us? Sure. Ashley and Britt, I'm not sure you will actually be able to read this. I know you must get tons of stories and emails every day. I debated even writing since I know there's so many. But I genuinely believe in letting people know when they've made a difference and you both truly have. My oldest daughter is 13 years old, adopted, physically indigenous and lives with mild intellectual disability. Her disability makes it hard for her to learn and understand that things aren't always what they seem, among many other things.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

She also, by nature, wants to believe the best of people.

She's been an avid lover of Roblox for a while now, so like any internet safety aware parent, I gave her many talks about internet safety and never talking to strangers online.

Always met with, yes mama, I know, and a slight eye roll.

I know that eye roll. I had that eye roll. I still have that eye roll.

In September of last year, I discovered that not only has she been speaking to multiple strangers online,

she'd also given her personal cell number to several.

I was horrified and I was terrified for my baby who already lives with such a significant risk for victimization.

Oh my gosh, this is an Elysia Navarro, like immediately all over again.

I'm getting sick to my stomach.

Pause, Ashley.

This is the good, right? Remind me. Please remind me.

I wish I could tell you I handled it graciously, but I didn't.

I lost it on her and we had a big fight.

The fight happened hours before we had to leave for a camping trip,

so I had to pack my angry teenager and younger daughter into the car and go for a long drive.

Despite being angry at me, she asked to listen to crime junkie on the drive, something we love doing together and have spent hours listening to.

By an absolute fluke, I chose the Elysia Navarro story and we listened.

Stop.

I've never seen my daughters drop so many times as I did while she listened to you tell Elysia's story and say all the things about internet safety and internet predators,

I had said countless times.

But cool, Ash and Britt made more of an impact in 55 minutes than I had had and I don't even know how many talks.

At the end, she looked at me speechless and said,

Mom, I didn't know.

I'm like gonna cry. I think that's so cool.

Now, when we talk about internet safety, she is attentive and open and reminds me of things you said in the episode.

She's also watchful of her little sister and reminds her often not to talk to strangers.

I don't know what to say other than thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you for sharing stories and honoring those whose lives are forever changed by evil.

Thank you for something to bond with my daughter over as the teen years make coming ground more hard to find.

And thank you for helping me teach a lesson that I couldn't on my own.

One that helps me keep my girl safe while she learns to navigate the world.

All the very best to you both and your families, Tristine from Calgary, Canada.

Oh my God.

I have tears streaming down my face, Ashley. I don't know about you.

I think that is so sink and cool.

And it's such like, it says so much about Alicia and her family too.

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MISSING: Joey Lynn Offutt

Like obviously when we tell these stories, like, you know, we were working with anti-predator project.

We wanted tips about Alicia, but by them sharing the pain that they've gone through and their own story of loss,

they're also like another girl, another kid could have been saved.

Right.

This is what makes sharing that pain.

That's what it's all about.

Yeah.

Yeah, it's just so much, it's so much bigger.

You know, when people like ask me sometimes I'll get interviews or whatever and they're like, you know, have you solved any cases?

And I'm like, you know, there's been resolution, you know, with cease of justice and, you know, have identified those or whatever.

But we've made Tristine's daughter safer.

Yeah, but there's this like, I think this whole preventative thing that if cool Ash and Britt, which like, I'm going to save this for my daughter one day, that I, that if we can, if we can do that for a younger generation, even an older generation, like we, man, we all have a lot to learn.

I just like, oh, we did a good job.

We did.

We were done.

We did what you said I had to do.

I think this is so cool.

What a good way to end.