

Hi, Crime Junkies. I'm Ashley Flowers, and I'm Britt, and we don't get a lot of these, but today is a good day in Crime Junkie World. If you haven't heard, if you have been living under a rock, Alicia Navarro has been found. We did an episode on Alicia Navarro. Britt, I actually think it was two years to the day yesterday that she was found. Now, I'll give you guys just a quick refresher, but I'm actually going to attach the entire episode to the end of this update. So if you guys want to hear that whole story again, you can after we tell you the amazing resolution that she's been found. If you remember, we did the episode in Spanish and in English. You can find the Spanish one still in our feed, but I'm just going to attach the English one. But here's the scoop. So yesterday, which was July 26th, the press was hopping off because apparently Alicia, who is now 18, walked into the police station of a small Montana town near the Canadian border and asked for help getting her name off the missing juvenile list. It's reported that she came in alone and per spokesperson Jose Santiago, quote, she is by all accounts safe, she is by all accounts healthy, and she is by all accounts happy. Now he says that it appears she left of her own free will, which is somewhat expected because, Britt, you remember the note that she left, right? Yeah, she basically said that in the note, right? Yeah, she said that I'm going to run away. I'm so sorry, I will come back. It was very brief and it was in her handwriting, and they do like for a member, there's footprints like in her backyard, they thought that she left on her own. The big question mark was, did someone lure her? Right, because she was 14. 14. And remember, she is a person with autism. So the question now is, how did she get to this Montana town from Arizona? Where has she been? I say, how long has she been there? Has she been there alone?

Who's been with her? Yes, her mother, Jessica, you can imagine is just over the moon. And she actually released a short video on Facebook for everyone who has been a part of helping her locate her daughter, which is all of you here. So take a listen. Hello, everybody. Hola a todos. I do feel I owe this video to the community and to God, because at first of all, I want to give glory to God for answering your prayers and for this miracle. For everyone who has missing loved ones, I want you to use this case as an example that miracles do exist and never lose hope and always fight. My daughter, Alicia Navarro, was missing since September 15, 2019. She has been found safe. I do not know the details. I do confirm that she is my daughter. She is alive and she is safe. This is recent news for me. It was an hour before it was posted in social media and the news. I don't have details, but the important thing is that she is alive.

And I want to thank the community and God for all that you have done.

Now, obviously, there are still a lot of questions. Is she okay? Where has she been? Is there anyone who was involved with taking her when she was 14? Because even if she's saying it was of her own free will, she was still a minor. Right. But the thing I'll say is that at this time, her family is asking for privacy. Again, this is an ending crime junkies don't often get. So let's celebrate a good day. Send all of your good thoughts to Alicia and her family as they navigate this new path forward. And again, for all of you who want a refresher on Alicia's case, you can stick around and we'll play you that episode from two years ago.

Hi, crime junkies. I'm your host, Ashley Flowers. And I'm Brett. And today I want to tell you the story of a girl who thought she'd finally found what she'd been looking for, a community, a place where she could meet like-minded people, make friends and really feel like she belonged. But instead, she found something much darker. This is the story of Alicia Navarro.

Early on the morning of September 15, 2019, in Glendale, Arizona, a woman named Jessica Nunez

is waiting for her husband, Ivan, to come home. He works night. So for Jessica, it's kind of a nice thing to stay up and greet him so they can sneak in some quality time together while the kids are asleep. Totally relatable. Yeah. At 1am, as Jessica's waiting, her oldest daughter, Alicia, comes downstairs for a glass of water. Now, Alicia is 14 years old, about to turn 15 in less than a week. And it's not unusual for her to be awake at this hour because Alicia's got a very active online life. As Jessica told Sarah Turney on Voices for Justice, Alicia often stayed up late playing Minecraft or Roblox or chatting with friends on Discord. And most of her friends are online these days. You see, Alicia has been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. And while she's got a few friends that she's known most of her life, she has difficulty with in-person social situations. Online, though, Alicia feels more confident, so it's much easier for her to forge connections and maintain those relationships. So as Alicia gets her water, her and her mom, you know, chit-chat a little bit, and Alicia asks her what time she's planning to go to bed. And, you know, Jessica, being the mom, is like, you don't need to worry about that. Like, I'll get some rest once your stepdad gets home. So Alicia heads back upstairs. And just as she does, her mom looks at her one more time and tells her goodnight and gives her a motherly warning. Hey, don't stay up too, too late. Once Ivan finally gets home from work, Jessica goes to bed, and then she wakes up again before 7am to start making breakfast for her family. Ivan and their younger son and daughter are already up, but no one's seen Alicia yet, so it seems like maybe she's sleeping in. As she's putting together the food, though, suddenly Jessica notices something strange. She sees that the back door of the house is slightly ajar. Now, nothing's missing from their house and, you know, doesn't look like somebody broke in and, like, ransacked anything. And it doesn't even look like the door was forced open. It's just kind of, it's unnerving. Exactly. So Jessica goes out to the backyard to look around just to make sure everything's okay. But instead of feeling better and having her fears appeased, all at once, Jessica feels worse. When, according to Griselda Zatino's reporting for KTAR News, she sees that someone has moved and stacked some chairs up against their back wall, and they're stacked in a way that makes it look like it was to help someone maybe like climb out of their yard. The family also has some cinder blocks and a shovel resting up against the same wall, and near the chairs are some shoe prints that look like they could be the same size as Alicia's. And so that's when Jessica's mind flashes to the one person she hasn't seen since she woke up, Alicia. Jessica hurries up to her bedroom to check on her, but as soon as she opens up the door, her heart plummets out of her body right onto the floor, because Alicia isn't asleep in her bed just sleeping in or even up playing games on her computer. Her room is completely empty. In that moment, Jessica freaks out. She runs to call 911 and they say they will send an officer out to her right away. But she can't just sit and do nothing while she waits for police to show up. Jessica calls up a friend and asks her to come over to help search right away. Like, she is making plans immediately to do everything she can to find her daughter. And like, what's going through her mind at this point? Like, she had just talked to Alicia, and I mean, from what she told me, everything seemed fine. Like, I mean, I don't know. So that's actually one of the factors compounding Jessica's panic, because as Jessica told the Lost in Phoenix YouTube channel, they had had a great day the day before. They'd had a nice Saturday outing together and Alicia didn't seem upset at all. In fact, she seemed even happier than normal. So for her to be gone now, like based on everything she's seen, the idea of her like running away just doesn't make sense. And the thought of someone taking her is almost

incomprehensible.

Okay, but one thing that does dig out to me is Alicia asking her mom what time she was going to bed. I know I did this when I was a kid, maybe asking so that you could plan around that and to sneak around or do something else. Yeah. And you know, this isn't Jessica's first day as a parent. Those very words are playing in her mind too. And she tells the officer about that when they show up to her house to take a report. When the officer is there, Jessica walks them through the backyard and shows the officer the footprints that she found and offers her theory on what she thinks took place. According to the documentary Find Alicia Navarro, Jessica believes that Alicia did leave on her own. And she thinks more and more about the things she saw in the backyard, like the cinder blocks and the shovels. So Jessica comes up with a theory about how Alicia might have done it. She believes Alicia came outside and tried to stack the chairs so that she could get over the back wall. But when that didn't work, she thinks she then decided to climb up the cinder blocks, stacked in the yard and then leverage herself off of the shovel. And Jessica actually demonstrates it in the documentary, like the shovel's in a corner and she thinks Alicia put like one foot on the handle and swung her other foot like onto the wall so she could grab the top of the wall and hoist herself over. And do the footprints support this theory? Well, from what I can tell, based on interviews that Jessica has given over the past couple of years, it sounds like they do. As the day goes on, Jessica looks around the house and goes through these like, almost like mental checklists of Alicia's stuff. And as she's doing this, that's when she's noticing that some things are missing. As Andrea Cavalier reported for NBC News, Jessica notices Alicia's cell phone, her MacBook, a few pieces of clothing and a small backpack are all gone. But what stands

out to Jessica is that Alicia didn't take her computer charger, which could mean that she'd intended to get home before she needed it. Alicia also left behind her school computer and her desktop computer that she used for a lot of her gaming. Now, I wish I could give you a complete breakdown of this investigation and walk you through every single step. But the truth is, there's so little information out there about exactly what police have done and when in the course of the investigation, they do it. In fact, a lot of what we know in this case comes from Jessica Nunez herself, like from the second Alicia went missing. Until literally I talked with her a couple of weeks ago, she is out there like pounding pavement doing the work. Even on day one, she and

one of her friends go out to search the neighborhood. They're talking to neighbors asking if anyone's seen anything, if they've got security cameras that might have picked up footage of Alicia, basically just begging for any scrap of information about her daughter's whereabouts.

Okay, so I'm kind of torn here. Like, on one hand, if either of my kids were missing, I'd absolutely be out there doing the exact same thing and-

And I'd be helping you.

I was going to say, and you would be right by my side.

Yeah.

But on the other hand, it also feels like police should be doing this, especially considering, I mean, at least I assume they know about Alicia's autism.

No, totally. Like, I think the expectation for us is that police is doing that. But from what I could tell from her interview with, like I said, Sarah Turney on Voices for Justice, she assumes police are doing it too. Like, she's not trying to get in their way or do their

investigation for them, but she's trying to just make sure nothing is missed. And again, I'm not a parent, but I have to think like, even if police said they talked to somebody like, okay, good, you did your initial investigation, I'm going to go talk to them too. Because, you know, what if I ask a different question? Or what if they remember something?

Well, and also like the power of a parent asking might be more compelling than a police officer as well. Like, I can just imagine like, seeing a parent being like, have you seen my kid? And as a parent being like, Oh my God, no, but I will look to and like gathering that support, just being able to reach them at a different level.

Well, and in my mind, even if I don't like find any new information, at least I'm doing something like the hardest thing for me. I'm sitting on the sidelines. Yeah. Oh, oh my God, I don't think I could do it. Now, the next day after a miserable, sleepless night, Jessica wakes up Monday determined

to keep searching. And when she goes into Alicia's room, that's when she makes a shocking discovery.

Jessica finds a note on top of Alicia's desk. And here, Brad, I want you to read it for us.

It says, quote, I ran away. I'll come back. I swear. I'm sorry. Alicia, end quote. Wait, so police didn't find this yesterday? From what I can tell, no, and I don't know if they just never went into her room. Basically, when I spoke to Jessica and the PI, because I had this exact question like, wait, when exactly was this found? They did clarify that it was Jessica who found the note and it was found on Monday, September 16. Now, as soon as she finds this, like that very same day, Jessica pushes hard for the Arizona Department of Public Safety to issue a silver alert. Now newer crime juggies might not be familiar with that term, but in Arizona, where Alicia is from, a silver alert is issued when a person who's over 65 years old or a person with certain cognitive or developmental disabilities goes missing. And under that definition, Alicia absolutely qualifies because of her autism. But authorities at the time are hesitant due to her age. However, Jessica is not about to let this go. She knows better than anyone that Alicia is at high risk due to her special needs. She's immuno compromised and she needs to take medication every day. She even has difficulty feeding herself and she isn't able to navigate public transportation. And she also has sensory issues. Like Jessica actually quit her job to care for Alicia after she was diagnosed with autism. And so the thought of Alicia out there already in danger without the support she needs, without people who love her, it is almost too much for Jessica to handle and it fuels her to keep pushing back on police. I mean, she fights tooth and nail because there's nothing in the statutes about age requirements and her persistence pays off. Arizona DPS puts out the alert making Alicia the first minor in history to have a silver alert issued for her. The alert describes her as having high functioning autism and being four foot five and 95 pounds. So she looks a little younger than 14 years old. She's got brown eyes, long brown hair and braces on her teeth. The alert goes on to say that she might be wearing a white sweatshirt and a white washed denim overall skirt. The silver alert only talks about Alicia, though it doesn't mention anyone she might have met up with or anyone she could be with. But as the days go by with no trace of Alicia, Jessica starts to wonder if she might have left home that night to meet up with someone she met online. She knows Alicia's habits like the way she much much preferred staying at home or for going out and how she wasn't prone to wandering off as some kids with autism

do. Her up and leading is so out of character that it just doesn't make any sense unless there was

something or more specifically someone who coerced her to leave. Do we know if Alicia has any history of meeting up with strangers from her online communities? I mean, Jessica knew she was into gaming and spent a lot of time developing relationships and friendships on the internet. So not necessarily meeting up, but there was an incident back in 2017 when Jessica found strange text messages from an unknown person on Alicia's cell phone, a person that Jessica believed to be a man. And again, this was someone that Alicia had met online. So do we know what the text said? We do. It's not something that Jessica or her PI want to talk about over and over. Basically what they've said, there's no proof at all that this incident is connected to her disappearance, which mind you, there's like two years between these like the text message and her going missing. And I don't want to like distract from the stuff that is important. But what I can tell you is that when Jessica found the text message on her daughter's phone, she freaked out and called police right away to report that someone was in contact with her daughter. It's not like she just ignored this incident was like, Oh, don't do that again. And Jessica made sure Alicia faced consequences. She took her phone away. She talked to Alicia over and over again to really like hammer home this message. It is not okay for you to talk to strangers from the internet. So she did everything that a parent is supposed to do in that situation. And she did her best to reiterate to Alicia that she needed to be careful online. Even Alicia's therapist was informed of this and reiterated to her the same thing. You have to be cautious with strangers. And they tried to hammer into her too. Like you can never give out your personal information. You can never send people pictures. And Alicia told both her mom and her therapist that she knew it. Like, I know, I know, I know, I won't. And so Jessica really did think that the message was getting through to Alicia. And you know, when I spoke to Jessica about Alicia's story, I couldn't help but think about all the horrible things and insinuations I've seen thrown at her online strangers accusing her of being a bad mom of not protecting her daughter just total BS because the thing is Jessica did everything she knew to do. And she said something that really stuck with me. She said, my daughter could be your daughter. Don't judge me. Learn from me. Jessica really did what she could in that situation. She talked to Alicia about this and tried to drill the dangers of internet into her. And she didn't feel like she could rip the internet away from Alicia completely. I mean, remember, it was Alicia's main source of social interaction and truly did improve her quality of life. Remember, this is where she built these friendships and these bonds that she doesn't have in her real life. Totally. And I remember telling you about this, honestly, even just a couple of years ago and you being floored, but there's a whole group of people that I met on internet years ago, like literally some of them about 15 years ago that I still keep in contact with to this day. Yeah, you had a whole secret life I had no idea about. But some of these relationships really helped me become the person that I am. And again, like we're still in contact. We've watched our kids grow up. We've watched each other get into relationships. It's been a huge part of my life. I totally understand this. Right. Like it's not, it doesn't all have to be bad. Like there are just these boundaries and thank God you were safe about it. But like trying to figure out how to instill that in a kid who always thinks they know better than their parents. Like I remember being Alicia's age and nothing bad could happen to you. You know what I mean? Like you're in that mindset for sure. And like again, like you said, I was incredibly honestly lucky. I wasn't even that safe about it. I was incredibly lucky to

find the group of people that I found and wasn't in a place where I was in danger, but it was still like a very formative thing in my life that still is a positive thing in my life today. Right. All humans want to connect with others and find a place where they can feel comfortable and understood and seen. And Alicia is no different. So while the internet is where Alicia felt happiest, Ryan Sims reported for AZ family's website that Jessica and the rest of Alicia's family have serious concerns that someone used Alicia's good feelings online against her, that they took advantage of her comfort on the internet by forging a relationship with her over a long period of time and eventually convincing her to sneak out of the house to meet them. Because to Alicia, this person wouldn't have seemed like a stranger at all. They'd have been a friend, very possibly someone she met in the gaming communities where she spent so much of her time. So do we know what the police think about this theory? Well, at this point, they won't confirm or deny if they think the online theory or online predator theory is valid or not. They do acknowledge that Alicia is in a high risk category for exploitation because of her age, her small size and her autism, though. As Jessica does more and more research on what she can do to help in the quest to bring Alicia home, she gets in touch with nonprofits for missing and exploited kids. And these groups agree that her belief is totally plausible. So from everything I've read about these really popular online gaming platforms for kids, they have like multiple player modes with chat functions. So if Alicia was chatting with a stranger who lured her out of the house, there would or should be a record of it for police to follow. Yeah, so since neither you or I are like true gamers or I don't have to say true gamers, gamers at all, we don't even have to put true in front of that. Yeah, we're not gamers cannot cannot even like use a controller. I did some research to kind of get a feel for how the chatting interactions work. And so as I understand it, these platforms definitely do keep records of group chat logs and private messages, unless you go in and manually delete them. But here's the thing, that's just for text chatting, not for voice or video chats. Oh, they may keep a timestamp of when these chats happened. I'm not 100% sure, but without a recording, it may not even be possible to know what was talked about or what took place in a chat, or even potentially every user she interacted with. And plus games like this have been around for less than a decade. So the biggest problem is like this idea of integrating law enforcement into this whole new realm of cyber safety. That's already like still a pretty young and new concept. Oh, yeah. And even like parental controls, like, I don't know about you, Ashley, I fully remember helping my parents set the password for parental controls on like our first desktop computer. What were they thinking? I mean, now having a teenager myself, I'm like as in the dark as my parents were, when it comes to technology that has come out in the past decade. And if I as the parent of a 13 year old, I'm in the dark, like, we're talking about policies and security factors and procedures for whole departments across countries. Yeah, I mean, this is the thing about like this younger generation, like, I mean, it's always been the thing, right? We're like a younger generation is able to catch on so quickly. And they're 20 steps ahead of us. And you can try and stay on top of it. But it's so hard, they'll always be three steps ahead of you. And that's talking about you as the parent who's like on top of it, or even closer to their age. I mean, there are detectives who are who are still right, like closer to our parents age. And there's this huge gap in like cybersecurity knowledge of like the people who are sent to investigate and the kids who are interacting in these communities. And like trying to fill that seems like a nightmare. And right in the middle of that gap, these predators have found a space where they also have a very clear advantage. Yeah, I mean, it's terrifying

because I think that they're they're preying on that, right? Like, they've noticed that, oh my God, law enforcement can't keep up. They're moving so slow. These kids are moving so fast. If a predator... There's basically a hole in the fence where we can get through. Yes, where no one's watching and there's nothing like we can even put up to stop them. On September 20, just five days after Alicia went missing, Jessica and her family have to contend with a heartbreaking event, Alicia's 15th birthday. Since they'd already made plans about how they were going to celebrate, Jessica had hoped that maybe just maybe that would be enough to bring Alicia home. Jessica told Tamron Hall during her appearance on the Tamron Hall show, a girl's 15th birthday is a big event in her community. And it's often celebrated with a quinceanera. But Alicia hadn't wanted that for herself. Instead of a big party and a fancy dress, Alicia had told Jessica that she just wanted a red velvet cake and to go to a fancy restaurant where she could try steak for the very first time. Jessica knew how important trying new foods was for Alicia because her sensory issues limit the food she'll eat. But now, with Alicia's disappearance and open wound in Jessica's soul, there won't be a fancy dinner. There's just the cake that she preordered before Alicia vanished. Determined to push through the pain and make the day count, Jessica puts out a call on social media asking for volunteers to come to a local park where she passes out pieces of red velvet cake to anyone who comes to help search. ABC 15 Arizona aired some footage from the event. And honestly, it is so hard to watch because there's Jessica struggling through her tears to lead the crowd in singing happy birthday. I mean, it absolutely broke my heart. Oh my god, I can't even imagine. Throughout the rest of September, Jessica does everything she can to keep Alicia's case in the public eye. She puts up more flyers all over Glendale and Phoenix and she gives a ton of interviews on local news. Basically, if someone offers her a platform to talk about Alicia, Jessica is there. The national media does take a little bit of interest in Alicia's case like live PD does a segment with the Glendale police talking about her disappearance and her efforts finally seem to be paying off because 15 days after Alicia went missing, Jessica's hopes get the boost that she'd been praying so hard for. That live PD segment about Alicia's disappearance leads to a pretty big tip. According to ABC 15 news, a woman calls in and tells police that she saw Alicia walking with a man near North 67th Avenue in Bethany Home Road and that the two of them were holding hands. And then a second woman calls who also says that she saw Alicia in that same area. So how far is this from her house? It's about 10 minutes due west. Nothing in my research material clarifies when these sightings took place and while it's not much to go on, for Jessica, it's honestly better than nothing. Yeah. But ultimately, the sightings don't lead anywhere and by Christmas of 2019, the case seems to have gone cold. The Glendale police do give Jessica updates whenever she asks for them, but with no breakthroughs and hardly any clues, Jessica's left to her own devices. As Caitlyn Keenehan reported for the Arizona Republic, she continues with her own searches all over Glendale and the Greater Phoenix Metro area, going out night after night into unsafe areas of the city, looking for Alicia. And when she's out there, she's seeing the cold hard reality of life on the streets like seeing sex workers, people with substance use issues, really coming face to face with the fringes of society and it takes a toll on her, but she won't stop. She can't stop. She has to keep hoping, praying and keep advocating for her daughter as 2019 turns into 2020. As time passes, Jessica keeps reaching out to police, begging for updates about Alicia. And when they're able to answer her calls, she's able to get some information on what steps they've taken during the investigation. For example, they share how

they've tried to ping Alicia's cell phone to get her location. But Jessica learns that Alicia's phone was turned off the night she disappeared. So there's been no way for police to track where she might have been that night. Along with trying to ping Alicia's phone, the Glendale PD tell Jessica that they did a tower dump on one of the cell phone towers near their house. Now, if you're not familiar, what a tower dump does is basically instead of searching a tower's records for activity of a specific phone, it basically takes like every activity from every phone in like a certain time frame that you give it or like in the parameters of your search or whatever, every single phone that is used in that tower. So in a city with Glendale's population with Phoenix right there, that's got to be a lot of phones and tons of records to go through. Yeah, right. And like, and again, you're hoping that someone came into the area and actually had their phone on, maybe they had their phone turned off. And even more than that, there's no way to know if the person Alicia was with that night was even using their phone. Like if they have a personal phone, they could have been using a burner, which means they're going to be running in circles looking this stuff up. Right. And as a parent, when I hear about this, my immediate thought, and I'm sure Jessica has to be thinking something similar, at least, is did the police look into that person who was texting Alicia back in 2017? Like, for me, at least that'd be like the first place I'd be looking. Yeah. So when I talked to Trent Steele from the non-profit anti-predator project about this, he's basically the PI who is working with Jessica on Alicia's case. He said that investigators aren't sure if it's the same person or not. Like, of course, they've considered this, but they even looked up the report because like I said, Jessica did exactly what she was supposed to do in that situation. She got law enforcement involved back in 2017. She even filed a report, but that report isn't very detailed. So when they go back to look at it, there's just not even enough information to say if those incidents can be connected. Well, and I know I brought it up, but I mean, what's worse, so many predators out there that you encounter two and two years or the same person just waiting and grooming Alicia for two years. Both of those are terrifying, right? For sure. But I have to imagine those texts are still on Jessica's mind as she talks to police and tries to learn all she can. She also finds out that police did do video canvassing of the neighborhood and the businesses nearby. They also checked with ride-sharing companies and public transportation. They made contact with group homes and registered sex offenders near Alicia's house. And she found out that the FBI is helping at least somewhat with all of the computer stuff. And that's very general stuff, but like I assume trying to like pull information and figure out who she was talking to. But even though she's facing an unimaginable crisis and holding on by the skin of her teeth to try and be a good mom to her other kids, no matter how painful it is, Jessica isn't giving up. Now she works with private investigators, she keeps calling police. And then, well, we all know what happened to the world in March last year. You know, Ashley, I remember in March last year, you and I talking and being like, this is going to have ripple effects in solving cases, in finding answers, in how investigations proceed. Yeah. And I hate that this is part of the story. Yeah. And here's the thing about COVID in this investigation. Not only did it slow everything down, but as Jessica said on Voices for Justice, since everyone started wearing masks during the pandemic, that gave predators a whole new way to hide in plain sight. Everything it turned upside down, right? Like we as a society went from noticing when someone covered their face to noticing when they didn't. So now, you

know,

Jessica has all of this other stuff to be worried about. I mean, she's constantly worried for her daughter's safety and who she might be with. Now she's worried she might be out there in plain sight, but nobody can notice her. And on top of that, she worried about what we all were worrying about. Like, is her daughter like actually healthy? Could she get COVID? Remember, she's immunocompromised.

Right. So all of that fear on top of all of her other worries for Alicia's safety is what leads Jessica to the Anti-Predator Project. Like I told you earlier, Jessica's been doing all kinds of research on missing children since Alicia went missing as a part of her nonstop effort to bring her daughter home. And when she comes across this group, a PI that she's been working with reaches

out to make the initial contact in March of 2020. Right away, this new partnership feels hopeful for Jessica. Unlike the Glendale Police, who have their attention pulled all over the place to focus on an entire city's worth of crimes, the Anti-Predator Project is able to dedicate all of their time just to fighting child exploitation. Jessica appreciates how they answer every single one of her calls. That's something she said to me on the phone. She's like, no matter when I call Trent, I know he will pick up. I know he will return my text messages. I know he will return my calls. And they're able to do that because they're able to give that specialized attention to Alicia's case's needs. Jessica told me the one thing she wishes most is she wishes she'd known to call them day one. But there just isn't an instruction manual for this kind of horrible situation that parents find themselves in. Around the one year mark of Alicia's disappearance,

Jessica gets wind of some other potential sightings. According to the Glendale Daily Planet, police in Nebraska reach out to law enforcement back in Glendale about a woman who could be Alicia. And this woman or young girl is spotted in the city of McCook, which is at least a 16-hour drive away. But Jessica's hope once again drops when it's confirmed by law enforcement that the woman in question isn't Alicia. When it finally rolls around in September 2020, the one-year anniversary is one of the hardest days of Jessica's life. At that point, the case is ice cold and it feels all but hopeless. But even in her darkest hours, Jessica's determined to keep Alicia's light burning. And even though she knows in her gut that technology was used to lure her daughter away, she decides to try something new. And maybe, just maybe, technology can help bring

Alicia back home. Jessica decides to start a TikTok account to help keep Alicia's case in the public eye. Oh, so she pulls a Sarah tourney? Literally. So one of Jessica's friends at church knew about Sarah and how she turned to TikTok in her mission to get justice for her sister, Alyssa. And that friend suggested that Jessica try the same thing. And so even though she's naturally a pretty private person, Jessica makes an account under the handle, find Alicia Navarro. To date, she's racked up over 250,000 followers and almost 7 million likes.

When Jessica was on Sarah tourney's show in February of 2021 to talk about Alicia, she also talked about how her goals for her TikTok have evolved. I mean, obviously, first and foremost,

she wants Alicia home safe. But also, she wants to talk to other parents directly and tell them the things she wishes she'd known before this happened. And that motivation, that is part of why we're talking about Alicia's story today. And just like when we talk about other dark topics,

like child sex abuse, talking about online predators can be hard. No parent wants to think about the worst of the worst of humanity having access to their children. The fact is, that's the world we live in today. Oh, for sure. And I know I've said it a couple of times in this episode already, but as a parent of a teenager who's in this world of technology now and, you know, a toddler who's growing up into it and in 10 years will be a teenager and the technology will be even more advanced and confusing for me. You know, this terrifies me. I think a lot of parents

can relate to this struggle of understanding that our kids live in this era of technology and have the entire world right at their fingertips. And that's amazing and incredible and exciting. But there's still kids who need, you know, guidance and protection. And how do you balance preparing kids for the world they're going to face, like online and offline, honestly, while also making sure that they're safe in this realm where, like we said earlier, there's a giant hole in the fence when it comes to predators being able to get in. And that didn't exist 30 years ago. That didn't exist 15 years ago.

Yeah, I mean, it's terrifying because you said it best, like they have the whole world at their fingertips at an age when they have no idea how to be responsible with that or how to use it. And they need so much oversight. And I think parents often struggle with like, where's that line? And so that's why we're working with the Anti-Predator Project and supporting their mission to combat human trafficking and sexual predators. Because we want to arm parents with every weapon

possible as they fight to keep kids safe online. I hope kids hear this too and understand, like, it's not your parents just like being mean or, you know, crossing the line, like you don't have helicopter parents. Oh, for sure. I was actually just thinking this is an episode that Eli has to listen to. Yeah. Now, when I spoke to Trent from the Anti-Predator Project, who like I mentioned before has been working closely with Jessica since March of 2020, one of the questions I specifically asked him was, how can parents be proactive in keeping their kids safe online? And here's what he had to say. We live in a really crazy world with with the explosion of the internet. And, you know, it breaks my heart to see Jessica have the regrets that she does because she didn't do anything wrong. And she's a fantastic mom and a fantastic advocate for her daughter. It breaks my heart every day to see what she's going through. You know, the the real issue here, and we're seeing it really heavily in this generation. And it's really not anybody's specific fault. But the but the issue is this, we've got a group of kids right now that have grown up with technology, right? Since day one, they've had iPads, iPhones, smartphones, tablets, everything at their disposal, the internet, you know, they have no idea what dial up internet is. They have no idea, you know, what analog phones are. I mean, we're we're dealing with kids that technology is their world. And they're being raised by parents that did not grow up with this technology. And quite frankly, don't really understand it on the level of their of their kids. So what happens is, is kids are always going to be kids, right? And when we were growing up, we all did the same things. We lied to our, our parents about what we were doing. And, you know, hey, Friday night, we're staying at this friend's house. But really, we were, you know, out in the woods with our friends drinking beer, whatever, right? Or we snuck off with our girlfriend or boyfriend that our parents didn't like. And, you know, back then, you know, it was the consequences weren't as high. In today's world, the internet has, and the internet and having access to the internet has provided a way for bad guys to get at kids at all times, you know, used to be,

you know, you, you taught your kids about stranger danger at the park, right? You see a strange guy at the park or at school, you're on, you tell a teacher, you tell a police officer, you tell an adult, then you could come home and you could lock your doors and you could lock your windows and you can keep the bad guys out at night. You can't do that anymore because the bad guys come in through your cell phone and they come in through your computer and your tablet. So it's a whole new type of stranger danger in today's world. And the best advice that I can give, and I tell this to parents all the time is you've got to be very involved in your child's online life. Know who they're talking to online, know where they're going online, you know, know what's happening, you know, and also let's use some common sense, right? Yeah, one of the things that drives

me nuts that I see all the time in today's world is kids that are, you know, seven, eight, nine years old, running around with iPhones and smartphones. There's no reason that a kid that young should have unfettered access to the internet, you know, anytime they want. And I get that in today's world, that's the thing to do. But for all the unfettered access they get to the internet, guess what? The bad guys have the same types of access to them 24 hours a day, every time they have that device in their hand. And we're seeing bad guys infiltrate, you know, these, you know, virtual reality games, these games that are meant for kids, you know, as young as two and three and four years old, we're seeing bad guys, you know, start penetrating these online platforms that they're literally using, you know, to get kids started in very young ages and first and second grade to learn things.

You know, one thing that he said that stuck with me was kind of towards the end where he said that it's not any parent's fault. The internet has given predators access to all kids, not just any kind of kid or any type of kid, not just gamer kids, not just social media kids, like you're in their room, you let them in their room. Oh, totally. And when it moves online, not only do these creeps have more access, but they get to hide behind this veil of anonymity with a screen and say whatever they want, pretend to be whoever they want, you know, reading those intentions gets way more complicated. And it could be really difficult for neurotypical people to spot this inappropriate behavior online, let alone someone like Alicia, who already has difficulty reading social cues and figuring out a person's intention.

Yeah, I think that again, going back to like kids don't even know what to look out for, stranger danger I think can be easy to talk about when you're talking about real life and the creepy guy at the park or someone you don't know, but they have predators have this way of just like slipping in as someone who who is supposedly their own age, just like them at a school just nearby them. And it doesn't cross many of these kids like minds that they're that they're lying and they they weasel their way into the point where all of a sudden they don't feel like a stranger anymore. And you know, just as we've been talking about this whole episode, like parents can do all the right things. Jessica did all the right things and you can still wind up in this horrific situation, which is why I wanted to hear from Trent about what parents should do if all goes wrong, if the worst happens and their child goes missing.

So we've been working on this on a lot of different angles because

Jessica's stories is not unique. And if I had a dollar for every parent that I sat with that said I can't believe this is happening to me, I wish, you know, I had done something different. I would be a very wealthy individual right now. So right now, the best advice I can give parents is obviously file a police report, take care of that first, get that done, make sure the law enforcement's notified. But then contact an organization, a qualified organization, and I say that because

there are unfortunately some groups and some organizations out there that they might be well intentioned, but they get involved and they they quite often end up doing more harm than good. Contact a qualified organization, whether that's a private investigative group, whether that's an awareness group, but contact a qualified organization that can start pulling together resources and getting the information out there immediately. They can start getting your child's information, their photo, their description, everything out there immediately. Start calling their friends, start calling school teachers, you know, places that they hang out at. Don't wait. The worst thing you can do is wait to see if they come home. And unfortunately that happens a lot, you know, especially if your child happens to be identified as a runaway, right, is you're just said, listen, they're going to run away, they're going to be home. Well, don't sit and wait to see if they're going to come home. Go to their friend's house, go to the places that they check that they hang out at, and please contact a qualified organization to help you get the word out and to help you look for your child. Every second counts. And because of that, we're working on some stuff. And Alicia's case has kind of been the driving force behind some of the new things that we're working on. One of the things that we're working on, and we've reached out to some other organizations, maybe to partner with us on this, you know, there's, they have amber alerts and they have silver alerts that go out. But the unfortunate reality is that in order to qualify for those two situations, you have to meet certain criteria. And sometimes that criteria can take, you know, anywhere from hours to days and even weeks sometimes to sift through. And by the time that an alert is put out, there's been a significant time lapse. So we're trying to cut down on that. So we're working, I've got a friend who works for a company that has technology that has the ability to push out alerts through cell phone signals and through social media platforms. And we're currently in talks with them to work to develop a system that will allow parents to be able to call right away when they notice their kid is missing, even law enforcement. Because law enforcement, listen, they've still got to go through the same protocol and checklist as everybody else to get those amber alerts and those silver alerts issued. So this is also going to be a tool law enforcement can use. You know, law enforcement parents can call this, call a number, a set number right away, within minutes and hours of a child going missing and say, Hey, listen, this is what happened. This is my kid's description. I'm going to send you this information. And this system can pump this out to a network much quicker than they can get an amber alert out or a silver alert out. Now we're in the very, very, you know, early stages of putting this together. And we don't know if we're even going to be able to get the funding and everything to get it put together. But it's, it's one of the things that we're working on, because time is so valuable. And Jessica is right, you know, law enforcement right now, especially in today's world with everybody talking about defunding and a lot of places have been defunded severely. They were short staffed before, but when you take an area the size of Glendale and the size of the Phoenix metro area and you start adding all those missing persons and missing children in there with the short staff that law enforcement has in today's world, they've got an uphill battle. And we've, we've worked very well with a lot of law enforcement agencies. And we have a lot of law enforcement agencies that are short staffed right now that that give us a call and say, Hey, listen, can you guys help us out? So it's, it's very important every second counts and, and, you know, law enforcement right now more than ever is, is backed into a corner where it's very tough for them to do a lot about it. As of this recording,

Alicia Navarro has been missing for almost two years. As Trent told me during our conversation, the theories around what happened to Alicia haven't changed. Law enforcement, Jessica, and the anti predator project believe that everything started online. They don't know when or where online exactly that Alicia first encountered this person, but they believe that she befriended someone over a period of time or they befriended her, gained her trust and convinced

her to leave home and meet them. They believe that by the time Alicia realized this person wasn't who she thought they were, at that point it was too late. Her mom, Jessica hasn't given up hope of finding her. And she has been a tireless advocate for Alicia, raising money for billboards here in the States and across the border in Mexico. And that being said, there's actually going to be a companion episode to this where we're having this entire episode translated into Spanish, just in case there's somebody in Mexico or wherever Alicia is that needs to hear this in another language to be on the lookout for her. Jessica has been giving interviews, trying to prevent this nightmare from happening to other families. It's agonizing for her to give all these interviews and relive the pain that no parent should have to face. But Jessica understands the power of these platforms. Getting Alicia's story and her picture out to the right person could make a huge difference. It could make all the difference. It could be the community who cracks

this case open, people like you crime junkies, people who are paying attention. And Jessica is determined to keep making people pay attention because like she told me, quote, I'm not giving up. I'm not one of those mothers who's going to stay quiet. End quote. The Glendale Police Department

are still working the case and the FBI are still involved trying to get information off the computers Alicia left behind. Like I said, one of the difficult parts of this case is the fact that not all these local agencies are trained in a way to get information off these computers. I mean, again, this is why they had to get the FBI involved. And it's not just the Glendale PD, law enforcement all over the country, like aren't trained or prepared to really fully investigate this kind of crime. And one of the things that the anti predator project is working to change is this specifically one of the projects that they want to tackle in the coming years is to create a cyber forensics lab that will help law enforcement in all 50 states combat online grooming and trafficking, prevent abuse before it starts and bring kids home safely. And that's in addition to all of the amazing work that they're already doing, like boots on the ground, trying to find kids like Alicia and support parents like Jessica. And even supporting the families that are experiencing this. Right. And that is like that has always been their core mission. That is like why they started it, what they're doing. And now they're like, listen, we're able to do, you know, X amount of cases a year. But but this is the problem we keep seeing in all these cases is we can do all the boots in the ground. But if nobody can get the information off the computer, so let's fix the problem at its core. Yes, exactly. Now, thanks to everyone in our fan club. And those of you who have been listening to our ads, audio Chuck was able to give \$60,000 to the anti predator project. That's enough to fund their operations for an entire year. But if you want to help them do even more than they can in a normal year, if you want to help them, you know, work with more families or again, start funding this cyber crimes unit, there are a couple of ways that you can help. You can go to [anti predator project.org](https://antipredatorproject.org) to make a tax deductible donation, or you can buy something from their clothing line at [get apparel.org](https://getapparel.org),

with all the profits going directly to the organization. Before we go, there's one last thing I want to mention. If there's any chance, even the smallest sliver of hope that somehow somewhere Alicia herself hears this, Alicia, I just want you to know that you are loved. You're loved and missed beyond all words. I talked to your mom, she misses you so much. And no matter what happened that night, your family wants nothing more than for you to come home.

No one is mad at you. It doesn't matter what happened, how you got there, what you've done, or haven't done, what you've been through. Your parents love you, your siblings love you. And I mean nothing, nothing in this world is ever, ever going to change that. If you have any information about the disappearance of Alicia Navarro, please call the Glendale Police Department at 623-930-3000.

We'll have links to the anti-predator project in the show notes and on our website, along with all of our source material. You can find that at crimejunkiepodcast.com. And be sure to follow us on Instagram at [crimejunkiepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/crimejunkiepodcast). We'll be back next week with a brand new episode. Crimejunkie is an audio chuck production. So, what do you think Chuck? Do you approve?