

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / UPDATE: Alissa Turney Trial

Hi, crime junkies. I'm Ashley Flowers, and I'm dropping in your feed for a quick little bonus episode. So for those of you who have been following us since the very beginning, you'll remember back in 2018, we did a couple episodes covering the disappearance of Alyssa Turney. Well, if you've been following the case, you'll know that just this last month, Michael Turney was acquitted of murder charges in Alyssa's case. After the prosecution, arrested their case, the defense filed a motion to have him acquitted without even presenting their case without going to a jury, and the judge approved. Many of you have asked us to bring you an update. You asked me questions about what's next. So I decided the best thing to do would be to bring on Sarah Turney, who has been Alyssa's biggest advocate over the years, to find out exactly what happened in court and what's next for her.

Hi, crime junkies. I'm Ashley Flowers, and I'm Sarah Turney. Okay, Sarah, I don't even know where to start. So I am going to kind of throw it to you. We know, or at least all of our listeners know, that your father was acquitted. So the thing you've been working decades up to, I mean, it's now officially over with not the outcome that you obviously wanted, but the outcome, I think you said you kind of expected.

Yeah. And I think you're correct in saying like, where do we even begin with this? But yeah, I mean, I will say that it was not the outcome I wanted, obviously, but you know, and you and I talked throughout the years of all this happening since I mean, you were the first person I called when my dad was arrested. And so you've been there through it all. And yeah, I think the writing was on the wall, unfortunately, there were a lot of clues from the investigators, the prosecutors, I should say, that they just didn't know this case. And that was clear for the entire time. So let me take a step back. We discussed really early on, you and I, that they were keeping me in the dark, they said, specifically, we are keeping you in the dark, we don't want to tell you witnesses, we don't want to tell you about the evidence, because the defense is going after you so hard. And what I mean, I've never talked about any of this. But for like one of the first motions they filed was to shut down everything I was doing, shut down my social media, shut down my podcast, especially, and they weren't successful. But because they went after me so hard, the state told me they're going to keep me in the dark and not tell me anything. And I only had a handful of meetings with them up until the trial, maybe three max. So we had almost no contact. And this is over a couple of years, right? We had a couple of years between his arrest and when the trial actually started. Yeah, about three years almost to the day. And so by the time trial came, and you know, the days leading up to it, the conversations I was having with the state made it really clear that they just didn't know the case. You know, asking me questions about the last day I saw Alyssa, asking me questions about the structure of my family, things that are easily accessible in that case file, which I have to assume if I have the case file, they have even more than what I had. So yeah, by the time we got to trial, they had already sat me down and basically said, it's not looking good, which before the trial started, yeah, our very last meeting, they basically said, we're going to do what we can. But you know, this is a really hard case. And they, like I said, you know, it felt very much like they were telling me that we were going to lose. And it got to the point where I even asked them, I said, well, why did you even take this case? If you didn't think that you were going to win? And the prosecutor kind of, you know, was taken aback and looked at me and said, you know, I wouldn't have taken this if I didn't think we could win it. So I was left in this really confusing place right

before trial and not with a lot of confidence.

What is, what would you have wanted them to do? If anything different? Because right, like I think we've talked about stuff like this, even on our show where it's been so long since Alyssa went missing. And it's something that I, that I think, right, like as you have fought over the years, it's not like there's going to be new evidence unless they find her, like find her remains, they've got all they're probably going to get. So there is this, like on one hand, like, at least try, right? Like if, if we don't, so do you think the prosecution was saying like, there's just not enough here, we're just giving it a go because it's, it's now or never? Or do you think it was more, there's enough here, we just don't have the time or resources to do what we need to do with it?

I think that there was enough there. Of course, you know, I'm not going to lie, like I'm biased, right? I think that there was enough there. I think the main issue is they just didn't study the case, you know, and leading up to the case, or to the trial, the prosecutor, Vince M Bardino, had another case, he had the canal killer, Brian Patrick Miller. And so for three years, I was constantly told, that case takes priority. That is our case right now. That is the case we're working on. So I think they literally just did not know this case. And they also just didn't use as much evidence as we were told would be used. There was so much that was admissible. I think that's a big misconception is that all these things were inadmissible. And that's not true. They fought to keep a lot of things in, and then ultimately just didn't use them.

So I mean, between my conversations with, you know, Detective Anderson, who's been wonderful, he worked Delissa's case for over 10 years, and the prosecutor, it certainly seemed like they had enough. I just don't think that they knew the case or utilized it very well. And what are some of those things that you feel like, hey, if this would have been shown or used, we fought so hard to keep it in, if we would have used it, maybe the outcome would have been different.

Yeah, there are a few different key things. I think one of the biggest things was, you know, this, my brother, John's testimony about the note, right? Because in Alyssa's note that was left, it said something about her taking \$300 from our father. And that's easily explainable. My brother was a part of that situation. He remembers Alyssa taking \$300 from our father, getting caught and returning it. And that's something they didn't ask about on the stand. They also fought really hard to keep my audio in. You know, I have that infamous now conversation with my dad at that Starbucks from 2017, where he says, come to the deathbed, and I'll give you all the honest answers you want to hear. Or he offers to confess within, if the state gives him lethal injection within 10 days of that confession, they fought to keep that in and didn't use it.

Even though, when you were on the stand, that specifically gets brought up, right?

By the defense, yeah. And I say, because he says to me, but that's not what your dad says. He continually says that he didn't do it. And I said to him, play the tape. I was like, just play it then. Let the jury decide. And yeah, it just never got played. Interesting. Was there anything else that you really wish would have come out that didn't? Yeah, there were, you know, Shea Masterson is someone who has never spoken to the media. She's had some bad experiences in her own personal life with media. And she's honestly afraid of my dad. And so she's... Can you remind everyone who she is? Shea Masterson is our childhood neighbor. So Shea was like a third sister to us. Shea was right in between me and Alyssa age wise. And she grew up with us. I mean, she was at our house every

day. Like I said, we were like sisters. And so she saw repeated incidents of physical abuse and,

you know, they had the opportunity to fight for this one incident to come in. It was about two years before Alyssa went missing. According to Shea, our father pushed Alyssa up against a wall really aggressively because she was caught kissing a boy. And the state just let it go. They said, we're not, you know, we're not going to fight the defense on this one. And so all of Shea's testimony about what she saw was deemed inadmissible. But that one thing, the state just let it go. The judge was very much on the fence. And the judge said, make your case for this. And they said, you know, we talked to the defense and we decided we're just not going to admit it. Wow. So was there anything admitted about your father's treatment towards Alyssa? Only, I mean, not really. You know, everything had to basically be kept within that two year timeframe. You know, even Alyssa's letters that she wrote herself were deemed inadmissible. So basically, they said that if it didn't happen within two years of her going missing, you can't talk about it at trial. Yeah. So did any of the sexual abuse allegations make it in? No, we were repeatedly told that we couldn't talk about it, about molestation in any way, shape, or form. But what was also confusing to me is, you know, in that last meeting I had with the state, they said, oh, a woman came forward this week who says that your father sexually assaulted her. What? Yeah, because my father has a long-term history of sexually assaulting women, specifically women within the family that he's not related to. It's usually his sister-in-law. It was my mom's sister, his first wife's sister, and then this, his second wife's sister. And they've never, like, pressed charges or brought that forward. These are just allegations that have been made. Correct. Yeah. Correct. You know, and unfortunately, because of statute of limitations and everything like that, you know, and it was a different time back then. My dad's been doing this since the 70s, according to these women, and just so many have come forward. And, you know, in that meeting they said, you know, this would be great to use, but it's too late to admit as evidence. I was told that about so many things. And I think that's what was so frustrating, because they didn't want to meet with me. And by the time we got to that last meeting, you know, I was, I was prepared, and I was like, are we going to talk about A, B, and C? And they were like, that would have been great, but now it's too late. And in my mind, I was sending them all this information three years ago, and they just didn't touch it because it wasn't a priority for them. So that is what's so disappointing. How do you feel now? Because this has, this has been your life since you were 12. And then it actually completely took over once you kind of started this. What is, what has kind of been your life mission? And you, you were successful too. I mean, I was going to say to some extent, but I mean, your goal was to get him arrested, and you can't do anything beyond that. It's no longer in your hands to even push, like media attention isn't going to help anything. Once you did that, you, you achieved your goal. And now it has been taken to trial. He has been acquitted. What is life like now? It might be surprising for people to hear, and we talked about this, that I feel at peace. And it's a huge weight lifted off my shoulders, which makes me feel guilty, even saying. But I mean, I've been working on Alyssa's case since I was 12. I created her first flyer and her first website, and that has lived with me forever. And at 19, when my dad got arrested for the bombs back, and feels like forever ago now, I started working for him. And once I believed that he killed Alyssa, I started working for Alyssa. So this has been my life for 22 years, is living for other people, and I don't regret it. I don't regret a second of it. I would do it for Alyssa all over again. But it's very new to me. I've never lived my life for me. I've never,

oh, I'm trying not to cry. I've never had a night where I can just watch Netflix without guilt, that I'm not doing more for her. And it's weird. It's really weird. I'm not used to it, you know what I mean? Because I don't think a lot of people know that when I was fighting for her, especially getting the media attention, I tried so hard to be that perfect person for people, to say the right thing, to wear the right thing, to just be very agreeable. And so now it's kind of like I'm finding myself all over again. I mean, I'm happy for you, because again, there's nothing that we can do to change it, right? It is what it is. And because of the laws, there's no going back at trying again. And it makes me really happy that you found peace, at least in that. And that you know, obviously, I don't need to tell you what I will, that you did everything for her, like she couldn't have asked for a better sister. And I hope you know that. And I know she's so proud of you. I'm so proud of you. Thank you. I know. Well, and it's like, you know, when I was fighting and everybody, you know, a lot of people asked me, well, don't you want to find her body? And like, yes, of course, I would love to have her remains. But for me, that's not closure. You know, finding her remains doesn't give me any more peace or closure. And it's the same way with this acquittal. It's, I think, you know, I know the truth. And I think most people know the truth of what happened, you know, the writings on the wall. And I told the state very early on, you know, if we don't win this, it's going to be very much a Casey Anthony O. J. Simpson situation in that public opinion is what it is. And like I said, I know the truth. And I have a lot of peace in that I don't need a judge or a jury to tell me what I already know, what the police already know. Was the part of the judge's decision to, again, just just acquit him, didn't even make it to the defense's case or the jury, was part of the decision because the judge really believed that she could have run away and be out there? Or did the judge, do you think, accept that she's deceased and just said there's not enough evidence that Michael Turney killed her? I agree with the judge in that he believed the state did not present their case. And I think it's as simple as that, you know, the state kept saying, we're going to present all this in the closing arguments, and they didn't even get that far before he was acquitted. So whatever they had planned for those closing arguments never happened and never made it to the judge. So, you know, looking back, I, and again, it might be kind of shocking, I agree that the state did not present their case. I agree with the judge. Did they ever tell you what they planned on putting in their closing arguments? No. I had almost no insight into the trial. Yeah. Have you had any contact with your dad? No. Only through him talking to me through his media interviews now. Is he doing a lot? Yeah. Oh, yeah. He's doing the circuit of media now. Saying what? You know, I've only watched a few. I try not to torture myself, but he has constructed this brand new story, which is really convenient to me because it's using all these little bits and pieces from trial. These points that the defense was trying to make has now been woven into his story in a way that he has never told it before. So, yeah, he's just crafted a new story about Alyssa leaving. One of the things that we've talked about here has always been so important is this recording that you have of him. It's something that you have talked about a hundred zillion times that he will tell you on his deathbed what happened. Do you have any desire to ask him what happened now that he, I mean, he literally can't get in trouble for it? Yeah. I do plan on soliciting him for a conversation if he'll have it. I mean, you know, according to these media interviews, he loves me and I'm still his child, so hopefully he will speak to me. I want to have one last conversation to see if

you will say anything. I'm not hopeful. He is not a kind man and I don't believe that he loves me. For him to give any type of confession would be a form of love. It would be a form of loving me or any of his children more than himself. I don't think he'll ever give that. I think that he is very much under the belief that he is the Bruce Willis of his own action movie, talking about going and killing these two men from the Union to get revenge for Alyssa and, you know, he's always the victim and the martyr at the same time, right? He's always, he's overcoming some wrong that must be righted and, you know, now it's being arrested for Alyssa.

What is next for you? I mean, I am now in what we're calling my Sarah era, which I love, where I'm just, yeah, you know, I'm taking a lot of time to rediscover myself and rediscover really my passion for everything. During the trial, I needed a lot of time away from true crime. You know, I'm not going to lie. I've been working on a lot of stuff in the background, but I needed so much downtime and I'm glad I took it because now I'm ready. Now I'm ready to get back in it, be in my Sarah era, and I have a ton of projects coming up, you know, things that I've been trying to develop in the background throughout these past three years, new things that are coming

up, but I'm not going anywhere. I very much want to be in this space and I will stay here.

And do you plan on revisiting your sister's case? Because I know so many people have been asking you questions over the last three years, wanting answers or wanting updates and kind of, I don't think a lot of people realize totally why you've been so quiet unless they've been really following you closely. But like you said earlier, you've basically been forbidden to talk about your sister's case at all until the trial was completed. So no matter what people said, no matter what happens, like you had to stay silent, which could not happen easy.

Are you, are you just like, Hey, this is behind me now? Like,

I'm going to help other families. I'm going to move forward. Or do you want to go back and revisit? Do you want to bring an update on your show Voices for Justice or anything like that?

Yeah, absolutely. I'm going to finish Alyssa's story. There is like you said,

so much that people don't know that have happened, you know, that's happened over these past three

years. And I didn't even get to finish telling her story when the arrest happened. So there's still so much to tell, you know, meetings with detectives, meetings with prosecutors, some really insane things like people moving my dad's stuff right after he got arrested.

There's a lot to talk about. And I just want to finish her story and make it complete because right now it's, you know, it's kind of up in the air. I stopped mid episode almost and then gave the update about the arrest and then had to go silent. So I want to finish it.

Do you know when?

Pretty soon, coming soon.

Okay, I'm really excited. Is there anything else that you want people to know or that you want to correct or wish they knew or anything like that?

Oh my gosh, I mean, probably, probably so many things to correct. But I think overall is I just want to still encourage families to fight, you know what I mean? My, when I heard the acquittal, which was, you know, kind of staggering, I had to ask my victims rights lawyer who was amazing. I was like, wait, does this mean it's over? Because it's hard in the moment, right? But one of my first thoughts was all the families out there fighting because a lot of families do look up to me, which is hard for me to admit because I'm just not that person.

But so many families look up to me and so many families are on the same media mission that I was on a few years ago. And so I just want to say to all the families out there listening, don't give up just because this didn't go the way that I think most people wanted it to or thought it would. Don't give up. There's still a lot of hope out there. And yeah, I just don't want to discourage families. That's that was like my biggest thing. So scared for that. I mean, this isn't the outcome you wanted, but I don't think there's anything discouraging about your story. I think that you fought with all the odds against you. And again, you're the one that got it here. And did you do a lot of work that whether it was used or not used, it was there because of you? Well, thank you. I will say actually one thing to correct since you brought that up is there was no new evidence for the arrest. And that was something that I've been really tight-lipped about because that was a huge question is what led to the arrest? Why now? Yeah.

And I asked the same question and it was nothing. Absolutely nothing. Basically, when the detective called me and told me my dad was arrested and I have this recorded, it's like one of my favorite things. He was like, you did it. You did it, kid. And we had this moment because there was tension over the years. I think there's always tension between families and detectives at some point. And we had this beautiful moment where it was like, we did it and we did it together and it was just really lovely. So yeah, I want to correct that that there was absolutely no new evidence. It was just the media pressure. It works. I know media pressure moves mountains. I mean it because it's true. That's amazing. Well, I appreciate you coming and giving everyone an update. I promise this time it's recorded. For those of you who don't know, the very first time I interviewed Sarah, I was a brand new baby podcaster. She just happened to be in Indiana. I went to your little hotel room and I had my little setup. We did this probably two hour recording and then I had to call you a couple of days later and be like, all of the audio is static. I don't know what happened. It's all gone. I was mortified. I was ashamed. I was like, well, I have no future in podcasting. This is going to be one of my last episodes ever and I'm glad that it's not. I'm glad that we're here. That is my favorite Ashley story. It is. It's so funny because I'm like, you didn't know me. You come up to my hotel room. You record with me and then you lose the audio. It's my favorite because I don't think anybody sees you that way. Like a hot mess. I prefer they didn't. As human, I see you as so human. No, that's like my favorite Ashley story because it was so natural too and I'll never forget. I was on the airplane going to Indiana for work and my coworker next to me, she knew what, you know, that I was fighting for my sister and she goes, I have this really good feeling about these two girls. They make this show called Crime Junkie and I was like, what's that? It was so early days. It was like early 2018. Yeah. Yeah. And before the plane took off, I pulled up my laptop really quick and wrote you an email. It was like probably two sentences, you know what I mean? And before we took off, you responded and you were like, absolutely, like let's talk. And it was just from the very beginning, I don't know, you've been so friendly and so warm and I just, I love that origin story of us. It's one of my favorites. Yeah. You remind me all the time I should not have gone to your hotel room to interview you. You shouldn't have. I know. I broke all the Crime Junkie rules. You did. I could have been a murderer. All right. Listen, could have been a shot. We're here now. Thank God it was you. Thank God we became lifelong friends. Exactly. You guys be sure to go follow Sarah's show Voices for Justice. Again, she's going to be doing a

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big update on her sister's case coming soon, but she also has cases that she covers every single week where she works with other families. So again, that's Voices for Justice.