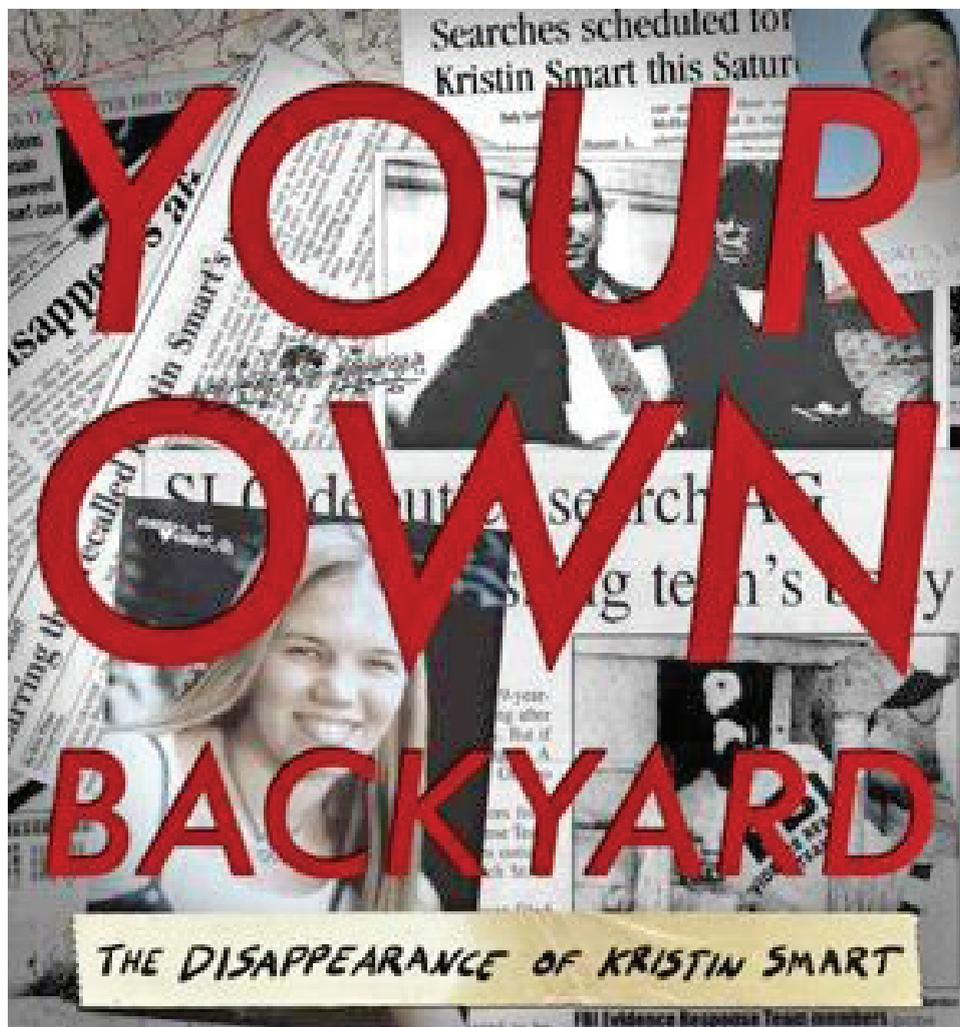



 PODCAST CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3


Local podcast host Chris Lambert unravels the almost 24-year-old unsolved case of missing Cal Poly student Kristin Smart, pushing it back into public view with more than 2.5 million downloads. He is hopeful authorities are close to solving the mystery.

the people helping her back. One of those being Paul Flores, the last known person to see her, and only suspect to this day of the Sheriff's Department since her disappearance," Lambert said. "Then I wondered who Paul Flores was and why I didn't know anything about him."

The next episode centers on Flores and his background, how his family came to the Central Coast and his past run-ins with law enforcement stemming from several DUI charges.

As it turned out, Lambert knew a few people that knew Flores in high school, and none of them had any good experiences, only "creepy memories" of him, Lambert added.

Several women who wanted to remain anonymous recalled stories of Flores following them and showing up in places he was uninvited.

"The more I uncovered about Paul's past and his future after the disappearance of Kristin was a consistent pattern of an awkward person who made women feel uncomfortable," he said.

Since the podcast aired, Lambert has had many people come forward giving character accounts of Flores, and he interviewed several that had experiences with Flores after he left Cal Poly that summer.

"I actually have more interviews taped with people, but I didn't have enough for a complete episode; when I get more information or figure out how to make sense of how to put it together then I will air them," he added.

Piecing the case together

Lambert believes the Cal Poly police and the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's office made crucial oversights in the beginning of the case that led to this being open for so long.

Smart's college dormmates tried to report her missing the next day, but campus police thought to wait in case she left campus with friends or went home for the long weekend.

It was four days since she went missing a report was filed. It was even longer until Sheriff's investigators were called and became involved as they tried to let campus police take the lead.

It just so happened that Flores didn't show for his previous DUI court date and a warrant was issued for his arrest just before Smart disappeared. Arroyo Grande Police knocked at his father's home in Arroyo Grande the same Memorial Day weekend and his dad Ruben Flores ended up bringing him to the station that Monday, two days after Smart went missing. Flores was booked with a fresh black eye, scratches on his arms and knees.

"We will never know how he got those, as he told several different stories to police from playing basketball to fixing stereo equipment in his father's truck," Lambert said. "What we do know is two months after her disappear-

ance, four separate cadaver dogs pointed to Paul's dorm room indicating presence of human decomposition, and not alerting anywhere else in several buildings, and nothing was done."

Several months later, a couple renting out Flores's mother's home (investigators didn't know Flores's parents were separated and living apart when initial searches were done) found an earring in the driveway and handed it over to investigators, who lost it, and also claim to have heard a watch alarm early every morning around 4:30 a.m. coming from a planter in their backyard for months. Smart's mother was taped in the first episode of the podcast having mentioned her daughter had to wake up around 4:30 a.m. for her shift of being a lifeguard at the pool.

"After uncovering all these pieces like evidence being lost, leads not being followed up on, (and) possible locations of her body never being searched, I just felt sad for the Smart family a series of missteps have let her to not be found," Lambert said.

He added that Flores initially was talking, but then lawyered up and plead the 5th Amendment against self-incrimination and hasn't talked since.

His family hasn't talked either and in witness statements Lambert has gathered, no members of the Flores family have cooperated. They gave unusual testimonies and wouldn't answer simple questions such as what Ruben Flores's route was as a telephone technician for

GTE.

"If I could get more information, I would want to know about Ruben's route as a payphone technician which he oddly wouldn't talk about in his deposition by the Smarts' attorney," Lambert said.

"When the new billboard was revealed with my podcast link at the bottom a few months ago, Paul's mother, Susan Flores, drove by us waving and taking pictures of us," he added. "That doesn't seem like normal behavior to me, why would she be gleeful and trolling?"

Lambert said he hasn't tried to contact the Flores family, other than an unsuccessful attempt to get hold of Paul, as when others tried to, Susan Flores physically assaulted someone and got arrested.

"I have had so many people reach out with tips and I look into all of them and forward leads to the Sheriff's department," Lambert said. "Some people think my goal is to get more ratings, but ultimately my goal is to find Kristin and help the Smart family have closure. Think about this: Their daughter has been missing more time than she was alive.

"I believe several people know the location of her remains, and I hope they come forward."

Lambert said he doesn't put advertisements in his podcasts and does accept donations to help him continue to investigate Smart's disappearance.

"People think I am trying to make money off the Smarts which isn't true at all," he said. "I saved for over a year when I quit my job to do this podcast full time, and my girlfriend makes a decent living to help support us as well."

Trying to help authorities

Lambert initially thought that since there wasn't any public news, the Sheriff's hadn't done much, but turns out in interviewing the department at the last episode that wasn't true at all.

Three sheriffs have come and gone since Smart disappeared, but the current one, Ian Parkinson, has been doing things behind the scenes, some of which the public doesn't yet know and some that are starting to come out, Lambert said.

"They told me they had done 18 different searches at nine locations and included K-9 cadaver dogs in three of those searches since 2011," Lambert said.

During the Parkinson's tenure, 91 person-to-person interviews were conducted, 364 new supplemental reports were added to the Smart case file, and roughly \$62,000 of hard costs from excavating to DNA testing have been spent, Lambert reveals in Episode 7.

Every piece of evidence has gone back out for further testing to forensic labs, all the physical items have been reexamined, and 140 items of new evidence have been recovered since 2011, according to Sheriff's Detective Clint Cole, of cold case and unsolved homicide.

Lambert also revealed the Flores' trucks have been recovered and are being tested.

In a recent break, the Sheriff's Department put out a statement that the trucks owned by the Flores family were located and are currently being tested.

"I think they are close to making a huge break in the case," Lambert said. "The search warrants that were just executed at the end of January and finding the trucks was the best development in years. It says a lot they are still on Paul as the person of interest after all these years."

Lambert says he has stated many times in the podcast he is not a Sheriff's investigator, but the information he has gotten and revealed in the podcast he believes has "kicked a hornet's nest" in spurring the public's attention on the Sheriff's Department to get this case closed.

"I understand they want an airtight case against whomever they are believing is responsible for Kristin's disappearance and death, but how long is too long," he said. "One giant nagging question is 'Where is Kristin?' and I hope they make their findings known soon."

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