

“UNSOLVED WITH STEVE GREGORY” EPISODE 105 TRANSCRIPT

SEGMENT 1

Announcer

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere on the iHeartRadio app.

Steve Gregory

On any given day in Southern California, hundreds of investigators are working more than 10,000 unsolved cases. That's 1000s of friends and families who have lost loved ones, 1000s of people who got away with a crime, and 1000s of murderers who still walk the streets, killers who may be your neighbor, go to your church, or could be dating a close friend. For the next two hours, we'll highlight cases that have gone cold, baffled investigators or just needs that one witness to speak out.

This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory.

Fontana Police Department case number 10-01579, The murder of Minerva Gonzalez.

I had been meeting with detectives at the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department when I was introduced to Detective Katherine Clark, a cold case investigator with the Fontana police department. She told me that she's part of a task force at the Sheriff's Department that shares investigative resources. You see a lot of smaller agencies don't have the funding or staffing to operate a full time cold case unit. And most of the time Cold Case detectives are expected to work more recent cases as well. But detective Clark wanted to talk to me about a disturbing and heinous case when she says has really gotten to her. I can tell from the first few minutes into our conversation just how passionate she is about her work. And about bringing closure to families and justice to suspects. We arranged for a time to meet when she gives me the background on Minerva Gonzalez, a mother of two who was fatally beaten so badly. She was barely recognizable.

Detective Clark

So on January 25 2010, it was a Monday. Minerva left her home, probably around 8am to walk her two children to school at the time. She had two children ages four and eight, with her husband, Miguel. And they lived in the city of Fontana on Juniper and she would walk her children to school every day. The school was not very far away from their home. So she leaves her home to drop her kids off at school. The four year old was in preschool at the time. They both started school at the same time. But the four year old would get out of school at 11 o'clock in the morning, and the eight year old woman get off of school until the afternoon. So on this particular day, she walks her two sons to school. And as she normally did, and when she arrived to school, she saw a friend of hers, Maria, whom she saw all the

time, she lived in the neighborhood as well. She also had a child who attended school at Rendell Pepper elementary school in the city of Fontana. On this particular day, Maria Minerva, they have a small conversation with each other about volunteer hours, the mothers or parents, I should say, we're required to do a certain amount of volunteer hours every month, in their children's classroom or at the school. And these two mothers were the ones who took on the responsibility of that with their families. So they were having a conversation about that Maria let Minerva know that she was doing her volunteer hours on this particular day. And with that being said they had a standing agreement with each other. Whomever arrived to school, first, at 11 o'clock in the morning would walk both of the children from each family home. So with this conversation being had between Minerva and Maria, Minerva understood that Maria would be walking her son home. So she left school and walked home, as she normally did every school day.

Steve Gregory

Then what?

Detective Clark

Well, she arrived home. Best we can guess his walking time from the school. From the interviews that I've read. Sounds like the school bell probably rang at about 8:18, Maybe in the morning. And so Minerva likely arrived home sometime between, you know, 8:25 or 8:30, something like that. After that, Maria at the end of school when school it out for the preschoolers, she walked a nervous son home to their to their house on Juniper, and they knocked on the door, and there was no answer. So after there was no answer, Maria walked Minerva son and her child back to her home, where they stayed, waiting for Minerva to contact them. At about 3:30 in the afternoon. Minerva's husband Miguel arrives home from work, and he finds Minerva has been killed, brutally murdered in their home.

Steve Gregory

So this whole time, Maria, the friend had knocked on the door, and most likely, Minerva had already been killed?

Most likely.

And so how far away did Maria live from Minerva?

Detective Clark

She wasn't an immediate next door neighbor, but I believe she lived on the same block.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so in the same neighborhood.

Detective Clark

Correct.

Steve Gregory

Okay. And so when the husband gets home and in finds his wife, as you just described, brutally murdered, obviously, 911's called. So when investigators got there, what did they do to start unfolding this case.

Detective Clark

So, of course, the first thing the investigators do when they get theirs to secure the scene, they go through all that protocol. And they talk to Miguel, he's going to be the most important witness at this point, because he's the person who found Minerva, in their home. So he agrees to go back to the police department, and he speaks with investigators, and gives a timeline of his day, and how he spent his day.

And that, unfortunately, with, with homicides, a lot of times the perpetrator does end up being you know, somebody a loved one, a spouse, a significant other. So that is always somebody that we talk to initially anyhow. And in this particular situation, he's the one who found her body,

Steve Gregory

What condition was the body in? So she brutally murdered? What what condition was it?

Detective Clark

So she was severely beaten. The cause of death after her autopsy was a blunt force trauma to the head and neck. And the autopsy notes that she was struck more than 20 times. So there was a there was a massive amount of blood at the crime scene. And she, her person, her face was severely swollen. That's the way that Miguel explained it to detectives when he spoke to them.

Steve Gregory

So as you just mentioned, a lot of times, there's a nexus between the victim and a member of the family or a friend, in this particular case with respect to the crime, but in this particular case, how do you talk to the spouse of someone that you said was brutally murdered? Are you automatically suspicious in these kinds of cases? Or do detectives just start with a clean slate?

Detective Clark

You start with a clean slate. And the reason is, is because the facts will present themselves, you just have to give them an opportunity to do so. So I wasn't called to this investigation initially, because I wasn't a detective at the time. But what you would do as an investigator is just sit and talk to him the way that I'm talking to you right now. Get an outline a timeline of his day, what time did he wake up, maybe even ask him what did he have for breakfast, and get all the details of his day and get a timeline of what his day looked like. And while you're gathering this information, you get a pretty good indication as to where somebody's at emotionally and psychologically. And, and you can see if they leave out anything, you know, in a timeline of events.

Steve Gregory

And did he?

Detective Clark

No, he provided a very specific timeline of events on that particular day, what time he left for work, what time he arrived to meet his boss. He didn't work at one particular location, his boss would send them to multiple locations. So he gave specific locations and times that he arrived to those areas. And all of that was corroborated. And it all was verified by statements of people who saw him there his boss, and video surveillance at the locations that he was at.

Steve Gregory

Um, what did he do? What is it he did for a living?

Detective Clark

You know, I can't say for sure, but I know one of the jobs he did in the afternoon before he came home was at a gas station in the city of Riverside, where he was replacing, I believe, a gas hose or something along those lines.

When we come back, I want to talk a little bit about how you know when when you have a scene like that, and I don't know how much detail you can go into but I want to I want to find out from you if the

scene was informative and and what I mean by that is how much did you learn from the scene and I know it's you weren't there. But the initial investigators let's talk a little bit about that. But first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 2

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. We're talking with Detective Katherine Clark with the Fontana Police Department about the brutal beating death of Minerva Gonzalez in 2010. Minerva was a 29 year old mother of two. And before the break, I asked Detective Clark about the crime scene and what it told investigators

Detective Clark

A murder like that a lot of times investigators will describe it as being like an intimate type of murder, you're not shooting someone, you know, when you're, when somebody's is beating another person, they're in like an intimate space with them. You can hear them, you can feel them, you can, you know, probably even feel the blood coming off of the person as they're being beaten. So you kind of get that sense in these types of murders as well as very violent. It's not as if the suspect hit her one time. And then fled, you know, she was hit multiple times, until clearly she was no longer had no, no more life in her. So this type of crime scene, just looking at the photographs, you know, which is part of what I have to do with the cold cases is when I read through it, and go through the crime scene photos, and look at the evidence, and that's what it says to me.

Steve Gregory

So if it's something that intimate, does your experience tell you that it might have been someone she knew?

Detective Clark

It could be somebody that she knew, but not necessarily that she knew close. It could be? I mean, it's hard to say, of course, but it could be somebody who she saw in passing. Maybe it appears because of the consistency of her life that this person possibly surveilled her and knew somewhat of a timeline in which she left to take the kids to school and returned. So in that sense, maybe she crossed their path or something like that.

Steve Gregory

Was there anything missing from the house?

Detective Clark

Nothing obvious was missing from the house there was there was some jewelry boxes and in in plain sight that were open and there was nothing obvious taken.

Steve Gregory

Was she sexually assaulted?

Detective Clark

No, she was not sexually assaulted.

Steve Gregory

So what would be the motive?

It's very good question. At the time, again, with a specifically like a murder like this where, you know, the people in her life, their alibis, checkout, you ask yourself that same question. And during this timeframe, one of the one of the theories that investigators entertained was that possibly it was a burglary suspect that had burglarized her home in the past and that maybe had returned and perhaps she came upon them during the burglary.

So her house has been robbed before?

Detective Clark

Correct. She was a victim of a burglary on two different occasions.

Steve Gregory

Wair, her house had been burglarized twice before?

Detective Clark

Yes, sir.

Steve Gregory

What kind of a neighborhood is this? Is it was there a lot of these things happening?

Detective Clark

Um, there were there were burglaries. I mean, unfortunately, burglaries happen. And that happens in the nicest of neighborhoods. And it happens you know, in the in the lower

Steve Gregory

but twice in the same house?

Detective Clark

That is specifically the circumstances that surrounded the burglaries at her home were something that investigators couldn't deny. So she was burglarized in I believe it was February of 2007. And then in November of 2008, their home was burglarized. And on both occasions during these burglaries, she had her underwear stolen,

Steve Gregory

just her underwear?

Detective Clark

Other things as well. But the one item that stood out to investigators specifically on burglaries in a burglary that are two burglaries, I should say to subsequent burglaries is that her underwear was stolen in both burglaries.

Steve Gregory

Was their underwear stolen in this crime?

Detective Clark

Not that anybody could say for sure. No.

Steve Gregory

Um, then. So if we're looking at a sexual deviant of some kind, also, do you think that this crime could have been initially a, do you think the intent might have been sexually motivated and that something went wrong?

Detective Clark

That's not something that it speaks to me know if it is related to the person who was burglarizing her home. Those burglaries most of the time they they want to get in and they want to, you know, take what it is that they went for. I believe it's a it's called a fetish burglary. And then you know, their intention isn't to come across somebody. Not always but, you know, in this particular situation we had multiple burglaries across a timespan that had similar what we call mo from 2007 to 2013. The cities of Fontana, Rialto, Upland, Ontario Chino, Chino Hills and Rancho Cucamonga, they all had documented burglaries where women's underwear was being stolen. And then from 2007 to 2009. Fontana had I believe they documented we documented 10 burglaries just in our city in that two year time span where women's underwear was being taken. So at that point in time, and not to get away from the homicide, but it was something that because of the uniqueness of this type of you know of her situation, and with her murder, it was something that investigators had to really look into and educate themselves on. So, task force was put together and multiple suspects were actually arrested for several of the burglaries that occurred across multiple jurisdictions. None though, unfortunately could be definitively linked to Minerva as burglaries in the US. And that doesn't mean that any that the suspects didn't commit the burglaries at her home. It's just that there wasn't anything evidentiary to say that this specific suspect is the one who burglarized her house.

Steve Gregory

So the underwear, thefts, the types of people doing it. Are we talking all men here? It's all men, that the suspects that did these?

Detective Clark

Yeah.

Steve Gregory

I just feel like I have to ask it like, but is there any kind of a common pathology with these men?

Detective Clark

It's hard to say, I don't know, the details about the suspects that were arrested.

Steve Gregory

Those we rephrase based on your experience as an investigator, what is your past tell you or whatever you've studied, in your line of work? What does that tell you about the pathology of men who do these kinds of crimes?

Detective Clark

Specifically, these those kinds of crimes, I would say my instinct and again, I, you know, I'm not reading any books or anything. They probably are more socially awkward individuals. People who have low self esteem, who really don't have the confidence or understanding or wherewithal know how to just have a simple conversation with people of any sex men or women. And so, that would be what I would say to that.

Steve Gregory

We'll talk more with Detective Clark. I wanted to remind you to subscribe to our Unsolved with Steve Gregory podcast on the iHeartRadio app or wherever you get your podcasts. More on the case of Minerva Gonzalez, but first, this is KFI AM 640, Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 3

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. This is Unsolved. I'm Steve Gregory. If you have a story idea or a tip on a case, just dial #250 on your cell phone and say the keyword "unsolved". Also download the podcast. It's on the iHeartRadio. App, Apple or wherever you get your podcasts. We're talking with Detective Katherine Clark with the Fontana Police Department about a case from 2010. It's about the brutal beating death of Minerva Gonzalez. She was found. After having walked her children to school, she returned home. And sometimes shortly after that, she was beaten to death. Her husband found her later that day. And her kids were just down the street at a friend's house. And at one point, the friend, the family friend that was walking the kids home, had tried to get into the house knocked at the door. And it's very likely that the whole time she was probably on the other side of that door. Dead.

Detective Clark

Correct.

Steve Gregory

We've been talking about an odd twist to this case in that Gonzalez home had been burglarized at least twice before. Once in 07 and 08. And it was it in one case or both cases that her underwear had been taken both cases, both cases her underwear had been taken Were those the only items taken?

Detective Clark

No, there were other items taken in that burglary in those burglaries as well.

Steve Gregory

What kinds of things were taken?

Jewelry.

Jewelry, so on something like that, and I don't want to go too far down this path because I don't know if there's any significance to any of it. But then you also talked about a sort of spree, if you will of underwear thefts going on. From 07-09 in Fontana, there were 10 separate cases. But I can't help but wonder if this plays a role in because you've got the same house burglarized in 07,08. Then you have a third incident which ended up in the death of Minerva Gonzalez. I'm trying to piece together what kind of a man would do this. And we were asking you if there was a sexual component to this. You don't believe there is you don't think there might be a sexual deviance kind of connection to this?

Detective Clark

Well, I mean, if if the suspect was in fact there, again, to burglarize her home for underwear, there is a sexual element to that. But it stopped short of him sexually assaulting her.

Steve Gregory

But you also had said there was no evidence that she'd been sexually assault.

Correct. So you know, as an investigator, you, you try your best to keep your mind open, and take the investigation where the evidence leads you. But then you have things like this right, that also exist in the periphery of your homicide investigation, things that you can't ignore that you have to take into consideration. But you can't get tunnel vision on it and just say, it's absolutely you know, the same person who broke into her house before, you kind of have to try to keep an open mind. And so you, you know, kind of ping pong questions to yourself about? You know it, could it be him? If it was a burglar who she stumbled upon and he progressed to violence? Would you expect to continue to see this

person committing violence against victims instead of just staying, you know, at the level of a burglary? Would you expect him to progress to sexual assaults? Or would you know, so these are the types of things that you ask yourself as, as time goes on, you know, are there any other crimes like hers, where, you know, there's an unexplained homicide of a almost three year old mom, and she's got a history of these burglaries in her background.

Yeah. So talk a little bit about the house itself. And you had been showing me a diagram here, but you can't go into too much detail. But what does that tell you? What is it because that's a because you're seeing this after the fact? So when you look at the diagram into describe it, you've got some symbols on there, some diagrams and icons and whatnot, and they all relate to some sort of evidence, but there's a trail I'm even looking at it from this angle, and you can see clearly a trail from one end of the house to the other, and a diagram of where you believe the body was at. So what does that diagram with the evidence tells you?

Detective Clark

So this tells me this in collaboration with statements that we obtained through the investigation, such as from Miguel. We were told that so this is a duplex, it's a one bedroom, one bathroom duplex that also has a kitchen area and a living space, the living space is closest to what would be the front door of the location. And the back door is on the complete opposite side of where the front door is at. So if the front door is facing east, the back doors facing west, on the back of the house, parking for the for the house was in was in the back of the home, there was a covered parking in the back of the home. So cars would access that parking by driving down kind of an alleyway, westbound to the back of the home and where they would park. So we were told by Miguel that the family mainly used the back door to enter and exit the home. So what this tells me from where the doors are located and where my nervous body was located, is it appears that she tried to flee from the suspect during the attack, in an attempt to exit the front door to get away from him.

Steve Gregory

So, entrance was made in the back. Was there any evidence that the person was in the house before she got home?

Detective Clark

At this point in time, we can't say for sure.

Steve Gregory

Okay, and so we're again, where do you think that person made entrance?

Detective Clark

There's a window in the bedroom of the house that was previously broken during one of the burglaries. I believe, I don't know if it was Miguel or another member of the family boarded that window up with some plywood. And Miguel noticed when he got home that that was broken in. So the way that it appears is that's more than likely one of the ways that the suspect could have gotten into the home.

Steve Gregory

So I had asked you this earlier about sort of the neighborhood, were there are a rash or string of burglaries in that neighborhood. You know, that were non underwear related. But I mean, other just other types of burglaries?

Detective Clark

I don't have the statistics, but I know that there were burglaries.

Steve Gregory

So what kind of can you describe what kind of a neighborhood that is? I mean, are we talking about an economically depressed area of town? Are you talking about? I mean, what is more industrial, more residential?

Detective Clark

A residential area. It is in the older part of the city. I would say it's not as affluent as other parts of the city. So some of your lower socio economic families are going to live in the area.

Steve Gregory

Yeah, because when I'm looking at the diagram, and you say it was a one bedroom duplex, and how many kids were there?

Two kids

Two kids, and I see their bunk beds and the and the and the bed for the parents are all in the same room.

Detective Clark

Correct.

Steve Gregory

So it was very close quarters. And then you say so what was the condition of the body? You already talked about her physical condition, but where was she at? And what would lead you to believe that she was trying to get out the front door.

Detective Clark

So I believe she was trying to get out the front door because her body was located just inside of the front door of the residence and that's where the attack occurred.

Steve Gregory

Okay. We're going to talk more with Detective Katherine Clark about a case from 2010 in the city of Fontana, but first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 4

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory. And this is Unsolved. Before break, we were talking about the diagram that you have of the duplex. It's very, it's kind of tiny, it's a one bedroom where the family of four left. And you say, based on what you can tell by the evidence, and what the diagram shows you, it appears that's the perpetrator was at the back end of the house or the apartment, and somehow may have chased her she was trying to get out and the front part of the house or the front door, and that she was beaten right there. Or I should ask, does it look like she was attacked there? Or was she attacked somewhere else, and the person might have been trying to remove the body from the front door.

Detective Clark

So the forensic evidence on at the crime scene dictates or shows us that she was likely only attacked, I shouldn't say only but mostly attacked there at the front door just inside the front door.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so was there anything else there or anything that that gave you any further information?

Detective Clark

Yes. So the blood spatter and the pooling of blood helps to tell us that. Also, the way that her body was found in relation to the other evidence on scene indicates that perhaps the suspect even tried to move her body. It appears that maybe he was trying to move her body, maybe even in an attempt to remove her body from the home. But, but then abandoned that effort.

Steve Gregory

Yeah, because if that was in the morning, in daylight. And I assume in the duplex, you've got people right next door, correct. Yeah. So there's probably a lot of potential eyeballs watching. That said back in 2010, where you had already said that it was more of a lower income area of town. But any kind of see, I think that probably predates the ring cameras and the door cameras.

Detective Clark

Correct. There was some surveillance footage from a, like a convenience store that wasn't too far away. But nothing that you know, worked out to any leads or anything like that an extensive, we call it neighborhood canvass was conducted by patrol officers and investigators. Every single person who lived on that block was spoken to to see if they, you know, saw anything heard anything, any vehicles, anything out of the ordinary, and it didn't lead to any leads at that time.

Steve Gregory

Was this a close knit neighborhood?

Detective Clark

The neighbors knew each other knew each other. Correct. And I mean, everybody that we spoke to, who didn't know the Gonzales' is said that there are church going family, Miguel said the same thing. And so what we got from neighbors reinforced what Miguel said, in that regard.

Steve Gregory

Your experience - Someone who commits a crime like this, do they tend to live in that general area? Or do they tend to come from another area?

Detective Clark

That's hard to say? I can't say for sure, one way or the other? It could be it could be both

Steve Gregory

Statistically, what have what have you learned?

Detective Clark

More than likely somebody who commits a crime like this wouldn't live in the area, only because they would be recognizable to the people there. And the people in the neighborhood. I always say this is that, you know, our nosy neighbors, sometimes our biggest blusher, because they know who belongs where and when. And if even if you belong there, if you're there at the wrong time or in the wrong place, specifically in the neighborhood, they're going to be able to tell you. So that's why I would say probably doesn't live in the area.

Steve Gregory

So being that there was a lot of blood on the scene. According to this diagram, you've shown me there's a lot of pieces of evidence, anything at all, were you able to even extract any kind of foreign DNA of any kind?

Detective Clark

So without going into too many specifics, for purposes of maintaining the integrity of the investigation, there was a great deal of forensic evidence collected from the crime scene that we did process and we were able to obtain some profiles. So some, some genetic profiles. It's just sometimes the profiles that we are able to obtain from evidence don't always meet a standard to go into the quota system.

Steve Gregory

Oh, so you don't even have the minimum to find somebody to match it?

Detective Clark

Not through the quota system. There's new technology always coming about even even now in 2021, almost 2022, the technology has vastly improved from 2010

Steve Gregory

And can you redo it?

Detective Clark

And so there, that's always something we're looking at periodically, I will, you know, after a few years have gone by I'll call the lab and have a conversation with the analyst and ask if technology has improved since the last time we sent evidence over, and kind of get a good indication of what they're doing now and what they're capable of doing. And then assess if we're able to send the evidence back for reprocessing or not, or to a private lab. If a private lab has more capability than our local lab here.

Steve Gregory

I do want to mention that when you say codice, I mean, that's an internal term, but it basically is a clearinghouse of DNA databases.

Detective Clark

Correct.

Steve Gregory

Right. So people, when they do swabs on suspects, or, or convicted felons, or whatever the case is, all that information goes to this codice. And that's where when you collect DNA from a scene, it's like a fingerprint. You putting it in there, and you're hoping to get a hit Correct. Okay, so just want to clarify what that is. As we wrap this up, Detective, I like to ask this question of all investigators I speak with, but I wonder if you can offer us something about this case, this experience on this case, or anything that you've never said publicly before?

Detective Clark

Well, this, I guess, is also some more personal than professional. Minerva was a young mother, she had two children, four and eight years old. And if you think about it, those two children went to school that day with their mom. And they expected that they'd see their mom after school, either picking her up, either that either her picking them up from school, or them arriving home to her. And the last thing that they ever expected that day was to never see their mother again. And so I tried to remember that, you know, this has impacted their lives in a way that most people probably would never be able to understand. And so if there's anybody out there who knows anything, because they've heard something, or they saw something that maybe they never told investigators at the time, you know, it would do a great deal for those. Now, they're young men, I guess you would say, you know, I'm sure in their lives to solve this case and close that door for them.

Steve Gregory

Have you spoken to anyone from the family?

Detective Clark

No.

Steve Gregory

You haven't. And then one final thing. Do you suppose that a person that commits this type of a crime has done it before and or will do it again?

Detective Clark

Yes, I believe so.

Steve Gregory

Detective Katherine Clark, thank you so much for your time and best of luck to you on this case.

Detective Clark

Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

Steve Gregory

Coming up, we head to the LA County Sheriff's Department to discuss the tragic shooting of an 18 year old man but first, this is KFI AM 640 Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 5

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Homicide case number 021-09050-275-011, The death of Diego Ortega Reza

Diego's Mother

Speaking Spanish

Steve Gregory

That's Diego's mother at a press conference asking for someone to step forward to help catch those responsible for shooting her son. She doesn't speak English. But Diego's brother Ullises does.

Ullises Reza

I'm here just to speak on behalf of my brother and just portray who he was. He was a very quiet and enthusiastic kid. He had just graduated high school. He wanted to do so much in life. But that was cut short.

Steve Gregory

A family friend also asks for help.

Reza Family Friend

I just want to ask the community to step forward. If they have any information to please come to the police so they can do some work. And also don't feel afraid just they are here to serve us to help us to keep us safe. Don't be afraid people. This guy was so awesome. He was a nice person. These families are awesome family. So this is something that they didn't deserve. And by stepping forward, talking to the community telling anything, anything that is suspicious report, we could prevent these type of cases. Thank you.

Steve Gregory

Our next stop is Sheriff's Homicide Bureau in Monterey Park. That's where I meet up with detective Julia Levinson were set up in a large conference room. So that's why you're gonna hear some echo, detective let's get started with a little bit of background on Diego Ortega Reza. What What can you tell us about this young man?

Detective Levinson

Diego was really kind of just starting out in life. He was 18 years old. He had just graduated high school and was planning to attend college in East LA. After college, he was trying to make the decision as to whether he wanted to go into the Marine Corps, or law enforcement. He had a loving family, his parents were immigrants. He had several brothers and sisters. And this really appears to be a family who the parents brought their kids up to be polite, intelligent. And by all accounts, that's the young man that Diego was.

Steve Gregory

You know what, when you're when you're looking at cases like this, you know, it always fascinates me that, as a detective, you really have to get to know the family, you sort of have to dig deep on a family and their background. How do you balance that with knowing the facts that are in front of you, and then getting to know a family and its background? How important is that to you for a case like this?

Detective Levinson

It really is because getting to know the family helps you get an idea of who your victim is. And also on a personal level. You want them to understand that he's not just another case like, this is Diego, it's not victim number. You know, 115 this is this is a young man and we want the family to know that his death and finding out what happened and who did it is almost as important, if not as important to us as it is to them. I say almost because I don't want to take away from the mother's pain and what the family is suffering. But like we take this personally.

Steve Gregory

So talk to me about the day you got the call.

Detective Levinson

This case actually, we did not get the call the day it happened. It initially came in as a gunshot victim, an assault with a deadly weapon. So East Los Angeles station was the first to arrive and they conducted the initial investigation. Diego unfortunately passed five days later on July 10, which was when my partner and I were assigned to the case.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so how does that work? Then when you say East LA station, were the first on scene. Do detectives with that station actually start? How does that work?

Detective Levinson

So that's exactly how it started. In this case. East LA station got the 911 call. They had units responded to see. They had a detective assigned to the case that night. They did a very good initial investigation. They called our crime lab out, they established a crime scene. They collected the evidence on scene that they had available to them, and they documented everything. Once the case becomes a homicide, then the responsibility shifts to our bureau.

Steve Gregory

So what happened that day?

Detective Levinson

So Diego, along with his younger brother and a friend had been at a 4th of July party. They left the Fourth of July party shortly after midnight. So this was on July 5. They were driving home through East Los Angeles and as they were driving westbound on Cesar Chavez Avenue, as they approached Lorena street, gunfire erupted from what we believe is another vehicle. The driver of the vehicle realized that Diego had been shot. And so as they passed through the intersection of Cesar Chavez and Lorena he drove straight through to White Memorial Hospital, White Memorial Hospital, Diego was assessed and they realized they needed to transfer him to LAC-USC Hospital, which has a trauma unit. He was transferred to LAC-USC and was hospitalized in the intensive care unit. Unfortunately, he passed five days later.

Steve Gregory

Was Diego in a car?

Detective Levinson

He was, he was the front passenger in his best friend's minivan.

Steve Gregory

Minivan. And so the other car pulled up and you say, Do you know at all if anybody else in the car what did they see in the car with the shooter?

Detective Levinson

Well, that's that's kind of one of the things that's a little bit frustrating in this case is that it happens so quickly. And it was late. The driver and the passenger really didn't have a chance to get much of an impression of any other vehicles on the road. They were aware of other vehicles, but they aren't able to say that's the car that shot us.

Steve Gregory

Not even an idea whether it was a car or an SUV or color or anything?

Detective Levinson

At this point, not with any certainty.

Steve Gregory

Wow. And then that part of town I suppose there were no traffic cameras or anything like that.

Detective Levinson

At this point, yeah, no traffic cameras.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Julia Levinson, a detective with the LA County Sheriff's Homicide Bureau. We're talking about the death of Diego Oretga Reza. More when we come back. This is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 6

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app, download and subscribe to the Unsolved with Steve Gregory podcast on the iHeartRadio app, Apple podcasts, Spotify or anywhere you get your podcasts. We're talking with LA County Sheriff's detective Julia Levinson about the shooting death of Diego Ortega Reza, an 18 year old who was killed while riding in a minivan following the 4th of July party in July of 2021. So, Detective before break, you talked about Diego being in a minivan and another vehicle of some kind coming up on the left side of the van.

Detective Levinson

The shots came from behind the van behind and they went through the back window towards the front passenger seat.

Steve Gregory

In your experience, on a on a something like that on a Is that what you call it a drive by? Or what kind of shooting do you classify that?

Detective Levinson

I wouldn't necessarily call it a drive by and at this point. We don't know if it was we don't know if it was gang related. We don't know if it was road rage. It's a car to car shooting.

Steve Gregory

But in your experience on something like this, what typically does it turn out to be? Does it turn out to be a simple road rage? Or does it? Is it typically a gang? What is it typically you find out on these?

Detective Levinson

I don't know that you could say it typically is it there's so many incidents of road rage, there's this could have been a gang initiation. You know, there's there's literally 100 different things that could have happened. And that's what's really frustrating in this case is we need somebody to come forward with some information so that we can move forward.

Steve Gregory

Were there other vehicles in the intersection?

Detective Levinson

There, we do have some security video from one of the local businesses that which does show a vehicle that was making the left turn onto Lorena. At this point, though, we can't say that that's the car that's going to be our suspect vehicle because if for some reason it's not then we've chased our tail and wasted a lot of time.

Steve Gregory

So how many people were with Diego in the minivan?

Detective Levinson

There were three. It was Diego, his best friend and his younger brother.

Steve Gregory

And what are those two guys telling you? What were they able to talk about?

Detective Levinson

Diego's younger brother was particularly traumatized by the incident. He has impressions of what happened. But again, we're talking about something that happened literally in the blink of an eye. And so once it happened is is they weren't expecting it. So you'd have this sense of what happened. Did what I think just happened happened, not real and then realizing that his brother is mortally wounded. And for the most part, the driver, same thing. These are young guys, these are not worldly people. We have a standard processing. Yeah, we have a 17 year old and a 19 year old and our victim is 18 years old. They've never really encountered anything like this before. The fact that the driver of the vehicle had the presence of mind to know I need to keep going and get straight to the hospital is for me, you know, he did a good job. Unfortunately, he was so concerned with what was going on with Diego, that he doesn't have a lot of impressions of, again, what happened, how it happened? Why did it happen? And there's just one car that's turning left? Could that have been the person? I don't know. And so he just wanted to get his friend to the hospital. And so we have statements from them, but their statements have not at this point led us to an investigative avenue that has been fruitful.

Steve Gregory

And especially coming from behind, there's not a lot of visual acuity at that point.

Detective Levinson

Yeah. And we can't say that the shots came from behind and then the driver executed a left turn and before they got to the intersection of Lorena I mean we just at this point we can't be sure of that.

Steve Gregory

Do you suppose again based on your experience do you suppose that those in the car that were so traumatized by this, do you know whether or not there's a chance that their memory of that could come back the subconscious memory can help somehow.

Detective Levinson

you know, I don't want to get into psychology at the you know that that's that's a little bit beyond my ever

Steve Gregory

Has that happened to you before. Were such a victim or the witness of a crime has later down the line. Remember detail that helped?

Detective Levinson

Yeah, yes, it's there. There have been cases that I've worked in the past were further along in the investigation, not necessarily homicide cases. But further along in the investigation, somebody will offer up either they didn't think it was, it was important at the time, or it's something that hey, you know, I was thinking about this. And now I realized that, you know, X, Y, and Z happened, or I saw this, and now, it's come back to me.

Steve Gregory

So when you pick up a case like this, after you say your East LA detectives, started the preliminary work on this, and you pick it up, when you look at something like this with so little information, where on earth do you start?

Detective Levinson

Pretty much at the beginning, we go out and we re interview the witnesses, or the victims, we go out and we look at the crime scene, we'll walk and look for video, we do a lot of it's it's a little bit redundant, but it helps put your put your mind in the frame of what happened. Because sometimes just reading it in a report, and talking to the handling detective who was initially assigned, really doesn't give you enough of a picture of how it went down. And you really want to you really want to have an idea and be specific about Okay, where were they? Where were they where were they traveling? Where were the shell casings, so pretty much you go back and start at the beginning.

Steve Gregory

There's a \$15,000 reward for this. And I know that sometimes it's a little tough to get that reward. This is a pretty important part to this because, sadly, money motivates people to remember. Do you do you think there is somebody out there that saw what happened?

Detective Levinson

I think, I think absolutely there's somebody out there that knows what happened. I think somebody said something, you know, in terms of witnesses, we'll see people or people are reluctant to come forward. And if if this motivates somebody to come forward, and it gives us information that leads to a conviction, then it's money well spent.

Steve Gregory

Thank you, detective. Appreciate your time. Thank you. Next, a follow up to a case we featured in an earlier episode. It deals with the kingpin of one of the largest drug cartels in North America. But first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 7

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is unsolved. In an earlier episode, we highlighted the case of El Mencho, a drug kingpin with a \$10 million reward for his capture. Now there's new information for that. We asked DEA agent Kyle Mori back to the program.

DEA Agent Mori

Thanks, Steve, for having us back. Yeah, I mean, you know, Rosa Linda Gonzalez Valencia, who is Mencho's his wife was arrested. Right around the Thanksgiving timeframe in in Mexico. And of course, it's significant, because, you know, like, like I said, on previous appearances on your show, any member of Mencho's inner circle or family that is actively involved in, in helping him traffic, drugs, or commit violence or launder money or anything that's under investigation by the DEA here in Los Angeles, we're going to be interested in that. So although we had nothing to do with that particular arrest, I think it's still interesting and, and obviously noteworthy, because of the closest to Mencho himself

Steve Gregory

And remind everyone why she is an important get for the Mexican Government and your operation because she's very high ranking, right?

DEA Agent Mori

I think it's particularly noteworthy because, you know, I think it just shows that whether it's us or the Mexican law enforcement or law enforcement in general, coming sort of globally, is sort of getting closer to Mencho is sort of closing in on his world, if you will, and putting additional pressure on him. Showing that, you know, we're not going to relent, we're going to continue this despite and continue to take the fight to him and, and investigate him and all of his associates and family that are involved.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Agent Kyle Mori, with the DEA here in Los Angeles about El Mencho. It's a case we highlighted and featured here on unsolved. So agent, the capture of Mentos wife, you talked a lot about her role in this and her financial role in it in she I think you characterized her as sort of the Chief Financial Officer. Right?

DEA Agent Mori

Well, I think that's something we're still trying to determine, Steve. I mean, it's it's, you know, based on I think, what the Mexican government has put out, and again, we weren't, you know, specifically involved

in the arrest, but it's apparent that, that their investigation has sort of led them down that hole to believe that she's involved, you know, particularly the financing or the money laundering aspect. That's something that we're still trying to look at and trying to confirm, you know, on our side, obviously, the laws are different in the countries, there's different rules and different protocols that have to be followed. And that's something that we're looking into. We're using all of our investigative resources and the team that I talked about last time I joined you that's working every day on this stuff. We're trying to determine what if any, exactly that role is, but that does to appear to be what the Mexican government is investigating and ultimately led to her detention a couple of weeks ago.

Steve Gregory

How closely do you work with Mexico, your counterparts in Mexico there? You know, a lot has been said about corruption in Mexico and in the cartels, buying off politicians, police officers killing police officers and other law enforcement? How closely do you work with them? And how much do you trust them?

DEA Agent Mori

I mean, we work with them very closely, particularly on the cases that our group here in Los Angeles spoke about last time, there's a group of agents and Intel analysts, chemists, diversion investigators, along with prosecutors that are working on these types of cases. And these types of cases meaning, kingpin type targets that are located overseas that are responsible for trafficking the drugs into the US, we have some groups that focus primarily on local targets and impact type cases and violence type cases here in the Los Angeles area. Our group in particular focuses on targets that are located in the source competent countries, whether it be Colombia or Mexico, Peru, some of those type places. So those relationships are extremely vital to us. We can based on the number of different investigative tactics that we have, we can carry out the investigations here. But if the target is located in a foreign country like Rosa Linda's, in this case, or or men show or or, you know, any his associates, we really rely on those relationships heavily. We have to share information back and forth. We we have to rely on and trust our counterparts in the Mexican government, whether it's law enforcement, military, the prosecutors, and they have to have trust in us. Those meetings occur Frequently we traveled down there, they had meetings, they travel up here to meet with us. And, and it and it is a relationship that is built on trust. And it's a relationship that's worked out. Well, they've extradited a number of, of of Mencho's relatives and Associates. And, you know, we obviously appreciate that and appreciate the relationship.

Steve Gregory

Now, does the Mexican government have a DEA so of sorts? I mean, do they have a separate agency dedicated to the like your drug enforcement administration? Do they have a similar agency?

DEA Agent Mori

No, in fact, Steven, we were one of the only countries really in the world. I wouldn't say the only but we're one of the only countries in the world and certainly in the Americas that have dedicated agencies to different missions. You know, US law enforcement is unique in the sense that, you know, we have the ATF that focuses on alcohol, tobacco, firearms, explosives. You know, DEA, obviously, we're pretty much single mission and in, you know, narcotics related offenses. You know, whether it be IRS that works on, you know, primarily tax and financial crimes. That is fairly unique to the US government, Mexico, Canada, most other countries have a National Police. And they handle they'll certainly they have a drug division that handles drug cases, organized crime, weapons, things of that nature. But we have counterparts that we work with, that specialize in drugs in Mexico, but primarily, they have their federal police that they carry out all law enforcement operations on a federal level,

Steve Gregory

Based on your profile of El Mencho. Agent. How upset Do you think Mencho is because of the arrest of his wife separate from the fact that that less you can characterize it otherwise, is a pretty big blow to the operation?

DEA Agent Mori

I can't really speak to whether it's a blow to the operation or not, that's something that we're still looking into our intelligence, our investigation, because I think first of all, we have to make a determination as to how involved in the in the actual operation she was, you know, from, from our standpoint, that's something that we're looking into. And it's it's been ongoing for a long period of time. With regards to how upset he is, you know, I think we talked about a little bit that last time, I mean, I don't know how closely he follows a lot of this stuff, my guess would be like, you know, like, you know, any of us that would have a family member that would be incarcerated would be upset and would, you know, be concerned about that? You know, to what extent that he is that's something I think we hope to find out at some point because that'll reflect the fact that he's in custody and is able to tell us about that. But I don't know specifically, his level of of anger or frustration over the arrest.

Steve Gregory

When we come back. Agent Mori will tell us about a new reward dealing with yet another member of El Mencho's family and there's a connection between this very program and El Mencho's hometown, and I gotta tell you, it freaked us out a bit. This is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 8

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Before the break, I teased everyone telling them that we want to talk about yet another family member that has a pretty significant reward out for him. And this is El Mencho's step son. So tell us who that is and what the rewards about.

DEA Agent Mori

So on December 1 of this year, DEA announced jointly with the State Department who handles these types of issues that we're offering an up to \$5 million reward for information leading to the arrest or conviction of Juan Carlos Valencia Gonzalez, who most commonly goes by the nickname "Pelon". This individual Juan Carlos is the stepson of El Mencho. So he's actually the biological son of Rosa Linda, the the woman we were just talking about who was recently arrested on on Mexican drug trafficking or money laundering charges. So it is her biological son from a prior marriage. That marriage ended, she apparently remarried Mencho when Juan Carlos was a young child Mencho raised the child from the time that he was a toddler, and, you know, brought him into the drug trafficking realm. And he is now a fugitive. And he is indicted, he was indicted in a DEA Los Angeles case in October of 2020. And we unsealed the indictment and announced this reward along with the State Department.

Steve Gregory

And what is he known for when I was looking at the sort of the narrative on him, he seems like a pretty bad dude.

DEA Agent Mori

He what I think is different with him is the propensity for violence. We have information indicating that he is the head of the armed wing, which is called the elite group or group of elite. Under elemento, that arm winged, as you can imagine, is responsible for kidnappings, intimidation and violence corrupting a political officials. And you know, it's not uncommon in Mexico, we've seen this for for decades, where the cartels have a lot of infighting for territory, for use of routes, things of that nature, and they need a large army essentially, to go out and fight these fights. And it appears that that's what Juan Carlos is in charge of this elite group. There's, you know, lots of stuff if you Google it, or go on to YouTube. There's lots of videos that are, frankly, pretty horrifying. And so that's why it's important for us to get this information out to ask folks, if they know where he is, or they think they know where he is they have any information to give us a call at our tip line, send us an email or tweet. And there's a reward for up to \$5 million has just been offered.

Steve Gregory

Now. You're when you profile these individuals and you do your research. Is there any indication that the stepson has the same sort of I don't know demeanors that his stepfather has, you talked about elemento being kind of quiet, reserved, very secretive. He doesn't want the spotlight much like El Chapo did so but with the younger generation, they tend to be they tend to want to be a little more public. Do you see that with the stepson? And do you think that could be could eventually contribute to his downfall?

DEA Agent Mori

You know, and, you know, this is so far that at least I can talk about publicly. This is the third individual Juan Carlos, that is a child or stepchild of Mencho that we have indicted and are extradited. As your listeners may know, we arrested men show and Rosa Linda's daughter, Jessica Joanna who pled guilty and is now incarcerated in the United States serving a prison sentence. We indicted and extradited their biological son who goes by the alias Menchito or little Mencho. And this is now the third one to date that we will at least talk about for now. That that is under investigation has been indicted. So they all seemingly have a little bit of different personalities, but it it and maybe in a little bit of a disturbing sense. It does appear that Juan Carlos is a little more like his dad a little more reserved, disciplined and maybe does doesn't enjoy the spotlight as much, which is, I think a big reason we're putting this record out there so that we can sort of shed light on him and his operation and violence and drug trafficking capacity and get him into custody sooner than later.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Agent Kyle Mori with the DEA, I want to wrap up with this, and it's kind of off the wall and kind of unusual, but, you know, we kind of have a handle on who listens to the show who goes to our website and whatnot. And we were reviewing some analytics the other day, and we noticed that we're getting some traffic from Jalisco, Mexico, Puebla, Mexico, and all of a sudden, those people are logging on to our website. What am I to make of that, especially in the areas where El Mencho is actually from? I mean, what What should we make from that?

DEA Agent Mori

Well, I mean, I think that, you know, your show, and I think the work that we're doing is having the desired effect, which is getting the word out there, right. That's the whole point of doing this, the point of doing this, obviously, is to enlighten your, your listeners, and the general public about some of the threats, not to scare people, but enlighten them into some of the threats that we as Americans face. You know, from the dangers of the Mexican drug cartels, you know, and their impact here in the United States. So. And I think the fact that you have, you know, based on what you're saying some new listeners, in these areas is fact that the words getting out there that, you know, through social media efforts through, you know, from DEA Los Angeles, from the Department of Justice from the State Department, from our interagency partners, the word is getting out there. And, you know, folks are looking at this stuff on the internet. I can tell you, Steve, that that directly corresponds to the fact that since you know this first aired on your show Unsolved, we've seen an uptick in tips on our CJG Mencho tip line, both email and phone calls. So that means this is working folks are listening to this stuff. And they are hopefully submitting tips, because really tips from the public, whether they're in Mexico, Colombia, the United States, wherever. That's what eventually leads to the capture of these violent folks gets them in custody. And I think like I mentioned last time, we've received tips from Europe from all over Latin America, Mexico, the United States, Canada. We get tips all every day from all around the world. And I think this is working.

Steve Gregory

Agent Kyle Mori. Always a pleasure. Thank you so much for updating us and we appreciate all your efforts. And thank you for what you do.

DEA Agent Mori

Thanks for having me, Steve. Always a pleasure.

Steve Gregory

Thank you, sir. That's gonna do it. For more on this in other cases, just go to our website at KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". And don't forget to download and subscribe to our podcast on the iHeartRadio app. Unsolved with Steve Gregory is a production of the KFI News Department for iHeartMedia Los Angeles Robin Bertolucci, program director Chris Little news director. The program is produced by Steve Gregory and Jacob Gonzalez. The digital producer is Andro Mammo. The field engineers Tony Sorrentino, and the technical director is David Callaway. Coming up next it's Coast to Coast but first this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.