

UNSOLVED WITH STEVE GREGORY, EPISODE 102

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 gotten cold baffled investigators or just needs that one witness to speak out. This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory.

One of the most wanted men in America. NCIC number W-178849401. Nemesio Ruben Oseguera Cervantes aka "El Mencho". Current location: unknown, presumed to be in Mexico. The DEA says "El Mencho" is the kingpin behind the cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion. Translated as Jalisco New Generation Cartel, commonly referred to on the streets as the "CJNG". Oseguera-Cervantes is 52 years old and was designated a kingpin under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act by the Department of Treasury in April of 2015. Agent Kyle Mori is with the DEA here in Los Angeles and has been after "El Mencho" for years, Agent Mori says "El Mencho's" footprint in Southern California is huge. And he's cartel has a stronghold on drug trafficking here in Los Angeles. Agent Mori, thanks so much for joining us, who is "El Mencho"? And why is he such a big fish for you?

DEA Agent Mori

Well, Steven, thanks for the opportunity. And thanks for having me today. It's a pleasure to be with you. So "El Mencho" is, you know, obviously a big deal to the DEA, he's one of our most wanted targets, internationally, you really kind of came onto the scene in around 2010, in Mexico, and at the time, he came onto the scene, he was really just another sort of run of the mill drug trafficker that, you know, with the DEA investigate all the time. And really, throughout the past 11 years, 12 years or so, has really elevated himself to be the dominant drug trafficker in Mexico, leading the dominant cartel in Mexico. And at this point in time, with the number one capacity to traffic drugs, whether it be setting off methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, across the Southwest border new to the United States, and really was able to accomplish that in comparatively a fairly short amount of time.

Steve Gregory

And why is that? Why would someone like that be able to raise in the rink so quickly, when you've got a lot of competition out there?

DEA Agent Mori

There is a lot of competition. You're right. And, you know, over the past 11 years or so I've spent a lot of time thinking about that and been asked that quite a bit. And it really comes down to several different issues, Stephen, I think that, number one, he's not a dumb guy. He is an intelligent person who has a lot of life experience, what he may lack in formal school education he makes up for, I think, in common sense, and just straight up intelligence. So I think there's that I think he has natural leadership qualities. And he's able to was able to mobilize and convince rapidly, a lot of people a lot of foot soldiers to sort of follow him and start and go from sort of a street trafficker into what he is today, which is probably the number one trafficker, drug trafficker in Mexico with control over routes into the US. I think a couple other things, too. I think certainly Chapo El Chapo getting captured in Sinaloa being sent up and convicted, that's sort of left I think, a natural void in Mexico for really, you know, a major serious drug trafficker, and I think that opening allowed him to take over a lot of really important key pieces of real estate along the southwest border, so that he could traffic the drugs in the United States. And finally, I think that he was able to look at what a lot of the Mexican drug lords over the years have been able to do really well. And sort of combine all those they're not qualities to us, but qualities to him into sort of one conglomerate. And that effectively led him to be where he is today in a really, really fast amount of time.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Agent Kyle Mori with the DEA, and agent I want to ask you about, then if he was able to sort of rise up there because of the departure, if you will, or the apprehension of El Chapo, you know, a lot of these guys, don't they have to really posture for leadership or you. You said he's kind of got street smarts. He's been around the block. But a lot of these guys usually managed by fear. I mean, what's this guy known for? Is he got some sort of a brutal streak in him? Because El Chapo, for instance, had a brutal streak in him.

DEA Agent Mori

It did, I would say, he's even more brutal than Chapo. And, you know, talking really a little bit to the point I made. Yeah, a few minutes ago. You know, Sinaloa was really good at trafficking drugs. And you had a cartel like the Zetas, who a lot of people have heard of, we're really good at the violence aspect. Mencho's has been able to sort of blend those two and, and really been able to, effectively certain mayor's and such as some of the smaller city areas that he controls to allow him to traffic drugs, basically, with impunity. But I think that's an aspect of it. And I think, you know, I think he has a lot of respect, because he really started at the bottom, he doesn't come from a lot of money comes from a rural area in Michoacan, Mexico. He eventually came into the United States, it was literally a street corner heroin dealer in San Francisco, he was arrested and convicted in San Francisco, of being just a

street corner dealer, like we'd see, you know, in, you know, areas in LA. He was, we believe a police officer for a period of time in Mexico, local municipal police officer. So I think that all those things give him a lot of street credibility. And, and he's able to really lead with an iron fist and create a lot of fear. And a lot of that has really hampered our investigation, the fear that he's created, not only amongst potential witnesses that we would use, but also with some of those people that we've arrested.

Steve Gregory

Well, let's talk about the LA connection, then because I know LA is a gateway for the cartel. I mean, it is it is sort of the clearing house, if you will. And I've talked to Agent Wagner about this before, who heads up the office here in LA, about how, you know, the drugs come up from Mexico, and then they they're sort of distributed from here. So does El Mencho play a role in that?

DEA Agent Mori

Well, he obviously does at the head of the sort of the top of the food chain, right. So where he may not personally oversee movements of drugs into our area, he certainly oversees the entire operation. His cartel, the CJNG, or the Cartel de Jalisco New Generation operates a lot like a fortune 500 company or a lot like we operated the DEA where we're a top down organization, we have a clear leader. And then we have sort of upper management, middle management. And then, you know, the agents that work on the street to CJNG isn't much different than that. So he does, in essence, oversee the plaza bosses in Mexico who are responsible for importing, producing the drugs and then importing them into the United States and then overseeing the criminal street gangs. And the local dealers here in the LA area, that are actually putting the counterfeit pharmaceuticals, the setting all the methamphetamine, the cocaine, the things that we see every day, killing Americans. You know, they're putting those things on the street.

Steve Gregory

Has, is there any evidence of his footprint here in Los Angeles, so that, you know, he physically has been here in LA?

DEA Agent Mori

There is well, well, not necessarily the he himself is been in LA ever himself. We believe he's been in Mexico for for decades, probably at this point. But we certainly certainly have evidence that Los Angeles is one of the primary trafficking hubs for his cartel, we see it based on our seizure numbers. We see it based on our overdose deaths. We see it based on the arrests that we make every day just last week, our group took down about six fairly significant CJNG traffickers here in the Los Angeles area on federal charges. So so we we do see his foot footprint here. Every day we come to work, even though he himself isn't necessarily present

Steve Gregory

Agent when we come back, I'd like you to tell us about El Mencho's bio, his background and how he compares to someone like El Chapo.

DEA Agent Mori

Absolutely.

Steve Gregory

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. Welcome back to Unsolved, I'm Steve Gregory. We're talking with Agent Kyle Mori with the DEA here in Los Angeles. His connection is a little weak because he's actually speaking to us from an undisclosed location. We've been discussing El Mencho, one of the most wanted men in the US certainly here in the LA area. The former avocado farmer turned drug kingpin has eluded law enforcement for years. Agent Mori did you say El Mencho has been spotted in Michoacan?

DEA Agent Mori

So that's actually where he was born and where his family is from originally, but his cartel and we believe he is based in the Jalisco area, which is a neighboring state, one of the most populous states in Mexico and home to its capital city of Guadalajara.

Steve Gregory

You know, we were talking about Los Angeles before the break and sort of his footprint in Los Angeles, where in LA, do you think his cartel is based? Are there specific pockets in the Los Angeles or Southern California area where he's most active?

DEA Agent Mori

I think we've seen probably the majority of the area and activity, actually in, in actual metropolitan Downtown area, south area of Los Angeles, we've seen seemingly some CJNG activity in the Santa Ana, Anaheim area in Orange County, and then definitely up through the Central Valley and Bakersfield, where he knit, we know that he definitely has some very strong sort of foot soldiers working for him trafficking in that area.

Steve Gregory

So back in 2018, and I can call him El Mencho, because I don't want to butcher his name. But Mencho along with 10 Others were indicted in, you know, you guys unsealed an indictment. And does that help you guys? Does that give you some more latitude and flexibility with you know, with which choose to grab him or go for him?

DEA Agent Mori

The unsealing of the indictment does, it allows us to do a bunch of things. And that's one of the things we did in 2018. Because, you know, we actually indicted Mencho with our with our fantastic partners at the Department of Justice, the narcotics and dangerous drugs section, I want to give them a plug. They're in Washington, DC, they do phenomenal work on international drug trafficking cases. So we've partnered with them out of DC, our group here in Los Angeles with them. And the first indictment on Mencho was actually in 2014. We unsealed the case in 2018. So that we can make public the reward and it was at that point, we made the \$10 million capture reward, we unveiled the tip line, which is manned out of Los Angeles, and the email and Twitter lines where people can submit tips. So unsealing the diamond really went a long way to allowing us to talk more freely about the case, because we didn't have to worry about making public what was previously confidential and sealed Grand Jury materials.

Steve Gregory

And you know, it's interesting, because in the indictment, you designate him as a kingpin, under what's called the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act by the Department of Treasury that had, I had never heard that before. So what does that designation do?

DEA Agent Mori

Yeah, so that that day in 2018, with the former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, where he got up on stage in that press conference, and announced it was it was a huge day and really the culmination, largely with a lot of the work that we've done with the prosecutors at the Department of Justice, us here in Los Angeles from DEA. So we did a couple things, we announced that the reward was a raise raised 10 million for information leading to his arrest or conviction, we unsealed the indictment and like you mentioned, we made public the fact or we highlighted the fact that he was named as a kingpin by OFAC or the Office of Foreign Asset Control in the Treasury Department. We worked tirelessly with our counterparts at the Department of Treasury. And what that essentially did, that action was allowed the US government through the Treasury Department and through our investigation, to place him on a list of blocked persons blocking him out of the US financial system. So that when you read or when your listeners may read or hear in the news about, about financial sanctions being placed, we see it a lot in Russia, in North Korea and Iran, sanctions being placed on oligarchs or or sometimes political leaders. That's we basically did that except for you used it under the Foreign Kingpin Act, which targets drug

traffickers. So what that essentially does is it locks these, these people that are placed on this list completely locks them almost out of the worldwide financial system. So that means they can't spend money essentially, they can't apply for credit cards, they can't have bank accounts, all that becomes essentially frozen. And that was a huge day for us not only to announce that we were intending to put him in jail, based on the indictment, but but also to lock him out of the financial system, which is so important. As you know, Stephen with these with these high level junctures,

Steve Gregory

We're talking with the Agent Mori from the DEA about "El Mencho", one of the most wanted men in the drug trade industry. And we're talking about this kingpin status. I would imagine, though, Agent Mori that he probably wears that with a badge of honor. Don't you think? He's a kingpin, now. The US has called him a kingpin for God's sakes.

DEA Agent Mori

That's true. Yeah.

Steve Gregory

Because it's a lot of ego in this too, isn't there?

DEA Agent Mori

You know, I think so. I haven't gotten a chance to talk to him about it. I. I will, because that'll mean that hopefully, he's, he's incarcerated.

Steve Gregory

Reason I say that if we look at El Chapo because that has become our most recent baseline for for kingpins is a Chapo and that's, you know, and, you know, his ego like he remember he met with Sean Penn and another actress who want to do a movie and all this other stuff. So I'm just saying is his wasn't kind of his ego, his downfall.

DEA Agent Mori

You know, I didn't work on that case soon. But here's an interesting fact, the same prosecutors that are prosecuting EL Mencho also prosecuted Chapo. So they give me a really unique perspective, because the the prosecutors that I meet with every, you know, talk with every day about this case, also did the Chapo trial. So you're right. And I think from what they tell me, largely, that could have been his

downfall and was certainly an issue with him. But that's Stephen. That's what makes mento more unique is I don't know that he thrives on that. I don't think that he has the desire for the fancy restaurants and going out with the women. And the things that we heard all these tales of Chapo. I don't I think Mencho is much more discipline than that. You know, some of the things we've heard about him. He doesn't use drugs. He apparently doesn't drink. He doesn't party he's in. He's in excellent physical condition. He exercises regularly. So I think that's what's made him you know, so vexing to us is that is that he is disciplined. He's very disciplined to his craft.

Steve Gregory

And that almost makes him more frightening.

DEA Agent Mori

I would not disagree with you. I think you're right. Yes, he is different. And I think that's why I think our Mexican counterparts in the Mexican government would share this sentiment and that's I think, what's frightening us at the DEA, and me having lived and breathed this for the last 11-12 years. You're right. He is very different than the Pablo Escobar's, the Chapo's, a lot of the other traffickers, the kingpins we've seen over the years, his personality is seemingly very different than that. And that is right.

Steve Gregory

More with Agent Mori from the DEA. 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. For a deeper dive on these cases go to KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". We're discussing El Mencho, the leader of the CJNG Cartel and one of the most wanted men in America, Agent Kyle Mori with the DEA here in Los Angeles and has been on El Mencho's trail for years. Agent Maury, do you actually traveled to Mexico or stay closer to LA?

DEA Agent Mori

You know, so we certainly do, either myself or the folks on my team that I work with. And you know, and I'd be remiss if I didn't mention, I mean, we have an amazing team of intelligence analysts and chemists and diversion investigators and agents that work on this stuff every day. So whether it's me or the other folks on on, on the team that I work on, we're down in Mexico quite a bit. I mean, obviously, like everything COVID is kind of, I think, you know, negatively affected, our ability to travel as much as we were, but we are down in Mexico quite a bit, meeting with the prosecutors, the police officers down

there, and our counterparts, but I would say the majority of the work that we do with with our prosecutors here in the US is done stateside.

Steve Gregory

So take us through, if you will, sounds like you have a lot of Intel in I love the fact I can tell you how deep into this case you are because you're rattling off facts. Like it's second nature to you. So I know you're into this thing deep into this thing. So take us through a day in the life of El Mencho, what what is a day in a cartel look like?

DEA Agent Mori

You know, it's that I think is probably the most, the most mysterious thing that we've you know, we've we've gotten, we've had the ability to interview some folks that have spent a lot of time with him. You know, the tip line has been terrific. It has generated a lot of leads. So we have gotten, I think somewhat of a look into his life. But I think it's a I think it's a life of discipline. But I also think it's a life of constantly being on the run. I think, you know, we at DEA and our partners are certainly at the Department of Justice and FBI and some of the other agencies have done a phenomenal job. And you know, you on your show, Stephen have done a great job of sort of getting the word out there. So I think a lot of his life has really spent being on the run. And I think that if we can't capture him in the immediate future, I think the fact that we're keeping him on the run is positive, because if he has to focus a lot of his efforts and his time and his resources and money on staying out of jail, then that's less time that he can focus on making fentanyl and counterfeit pharmaceuticals and sending that poison onto our street and killing more more young people predominantly here in the US.

Steve Gregory

if I remember correctly, that fentanyl and those fake prescription meds that are coming from his cartel. That's what's flooding the streets of LA. Right?

DEA Agent Mori

That in the methamphetamine. Yeah, I mean, we're still just getting killed with with methamphetamine. Here. We're, we're seeing and and I think you know, our boss, you mentioned our Special Agent charge, Bill Wagner has done some segments with you. He he has the stats, but we're not we have not seen. We've not seen meth seizures. In LA and in California, like we've seen in the last two years, ever. You know, I've been doing this 20 years in law enforcement in California. I've never seen the amount and availability of methamphetamine and then getting into the fentanyl like we like we, like we have right now is such a massive problem. Everywhere, but specifically here in LA

Steve Gregory

Do you think that and I'm gonna go a little off topic here. I know. The illegal pot grows, for instance, up in northern Los Angeles County, the sheriff's department I went with him on a raid and they said that it almost tripled in the number of pot farms up there because of the pandemic. Did you see exponential sort of rise in these in these pills and these fentanyl in this math because of the pandemic?

DEA Agent Mori

I can't sit here and say that it's because of the pandemic. But what I can tell you having you know working in the streets as a DEA agent every day. Whether it's coincidental or or there is some direct correlation. It is clear that since around the time the pandemic started it seems like illegal drugs. Availability has skyrocketed, and price has plummeted, which is a really scary thing for everybody. That's why we've launched some things like the one pill to kill. We've continued with the Take Back events, like we're having a couple of weeks here around LA and Orange County. But yeah, it would take somebody smarter than me doing statistics in our intelligence shop, to kind of give you the why, but whether it's coincidental or not, there is no doubt that availability of drugs have skyrocketed since around the time, the pandemic seem to have started.

Steve Gregory

And one of the things I have learned from covering this, this issue is that if you go back to Escobar days, you know, you didn't have social media, you didn't have the advent of internet. And now if you fast forward past El Chapo and now to what's going on present day, there's got to be a bigger challenge for you because you're dealing with the anonymity of being able to buy these things without meeting anyone in person.

DEA Agent Mori

That's 100% True, whether it's the dark web or some of these marketplaces that I think we've done a pretty good job of trying to shut down we have, you know, a cyber group now in Los Angeles that just work cyber internet type cases. But I'll tell you one thing, bringing it back to El Mencho and CJNG. That is as scary if not scarier, Stephen, as we're seeing Mass Recruitment of, basically, lower level people in the cartel on social media, we're literally seeing advertisements to join the cartels to go to training camps, paramilitary training camps, similar to what a police officer DEA agent would attend, to learn how to basically be a drug trafficker or a Sikario, which is like a like a hitman for the cartel, we're literally seeing advertisements for that on legitimate internet sites. So not only can you buy drugs, you can sign up to be a drug trafficker. And if you're somebody that, you know, maybe is lives in a lower socio economic, you know, environment, whether you're in Mexico, whether in the United States, and you want to make some money fast, and you have very little means and very little education, especially when people are desperate during times like the pandemic, you can only buy the drugs, you can sign up to sell them pretty much in the same spot. And that that's scary.

Steve Gregory

That is scary. That's crazy. We're talking with Agent Mori from the DEA. So what about identifying features? So if you've confiscated fentanyl, or illegal meds or meth here in Los Angeles or in the Southern California area? How are you able to identify the that came from El Mencho's cartel?

DEA Agent Mori

Yeah, that's a good question when we get all the time. So generally speaking, if we just come upon a pile of drugs, it would be really hard to tell. But as you know, haven't done stories with us over the years. Stephen, that's typically not the case, right? Usually a DEA, we're really good at doing long term, serious federal investigations. And so through putting together a lot of the doing a lot of analysis and putting together the pieces of the case is how we're able to learn. And it's could be something as simple as you know, a lot of these guys have the CJNG emblem because they actually do branding. Now getting back to your social media piece. They have an emblem for CJNG just like you would see Coca Cola or, you know, Apple, you know, everybody knows what the apple emblem looks like on the back of your iPhone, CJNG actually has emblems like that and people are actually putting them as screensavers on their computers on their phones. So a lot of it is simple as that. Others can be just good old fashioned police work interviewing folks. Other times we can check their travel records, border records, and a lot of it comes back to where it is they're traveling in Mexico. The Mexican cartels are pretty territorial just like the the street gangs in LA. You're not going to see a Sinaloa guy hanging out over in Jalisco, which is a which is a CJNG stronghold typically. So it's a lot of putting together the pieces, doing the long term investigation and putting the really the sweat into these cases.

Steve Gregory

Some final thoughts from Agent Mori, coming up 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. If you have a story idea or even a tip about a case you've been hearing, just grab your cell phone dial #250 and say the key word "unsolved". Just leave your name and contact information, a brief summary. And we'll get back to you that's #250 keyword unsolved. I'm Steve Gregory. And this is Unsolved. Talking with Agent Kyle Mori from the DEA about El Mencho, the leader of Jalisco New Generation Cartel or CJNG. So agent, there is a reward for Mencho, right?

DEA Agent Mori

Reward currently sits at \$10 million leading to his arrest.

Steve Gregory

So leading to the arrest, so that so he has to be in custody for someone to be eligible for that money.

DEA Agent Mori

So not technically, so it's actually information leading to his arrest or conviction. So there is some latitude as far as how the reward can be given out. But generally, generally speaking, it's if we receive information from an individual that leads directly to his capture, that person generally would be eligible for the reward. There's obviously some red tape that goes into it.

Steve Gregory

In your experience, will a reward that high shake the tree?

DEA Agent Mori

It definitely does. Oh, there's there's just no doubt. Anytime you can jack the reward, up to you know, 1 million, 5 million, 10 million, you know, or higher. There's no doubt that that kind of money, which is obviously life changing, is motivating to a lot of folks.

Steve Gregory

So then, in this case, when the reward was first announced, do you get an a steady flow of tips coming in? And has it tapered off? Or is it still strong?

DEA Agent Mori

No, we did so the day, the day in the weeks after former Attorney General Sessions made public the reward, it got just an amazing amount of media coverage both in Mexico, the United States and really around the world. We we got probably in the range of, of 100, or more tips a day. And you know, it kind of goes through ebbs and flows. I would assume that after this interview and the social media and stuff that go along with KFI and DEA, we'll see a bit of an uptick. So if it if it gets back in the news, for whatever reason, there's an uptick, and then it sort of ebbs and flows. But we get calls every single day. And we have consistently since 2018, we've gotten calls from Europe, from all over Latin America, from all over Mexico, from Canada from all over the United States. It's really touched about three or four different continents the tip line has.

Steve Gregory

okay, so as we wrap this up, tell everyone who you're looking for, what does El Mencho look like? What are his habits? Where would one might likely see Him or know where he's at? And, you know, what should people be on the lookout for?

DEA Agent Mori

So, you know, we had a lot of time, we'd actually one of the more unique tips I got is that the person thought they saw him at a bar in Detroit, Michigan, while we were appreciative of the tip, and we ran it down nonetheless, just like we would with any tip, that probably was not going to be a legitimate tip that one, so I would say that definitely in the Colima, Michoacan, Jalisco - states of Mexico would be would be probably a good place to look. I would say that any type of movement with large convoys of bodyguards would be certainly a really good tip. But at the end of the day, there's a couple of pictures of them online. There's certainly pictures on his wanted poster the DEA has put out. It's all over our Twitter page and all over our webpage. Please go on there to come take a look at the picture. If you think you've seen him when in doubt, call us. Somebody will respond answer, we'll get back to you. And we'd love to hear from you.

Steve Gregory

We are talking with Agent Mori with the DEA and I've got one final question for you here. I asked this of investigators tell us something about this case about El Mencho, something you've never said publicly before about it.

DEA Agent Mori

You know, Stephen, I think it's more almost on a on a on a little bit of a personal level something that I don't you know, talk about a whole lot like I said I've been in law enforcement 20 years myself. And you know, this past week was was rough for all of law enforcement for DEA in in particular we we had three of our agents shot in Tucson, one of them passed away. You know, we're not a big agency. There's only 5000 of us around The world. And when one of us dies in a shooting, trying to arrest a drug trafficker, it really hits home. And I think with particularly with Mencho, is, you know, he's killed hundreds, if not 1000s of police officers in Mexico. And while those officers may not be our partners here in the United States, they wear a badge just like I do, just like we all do, here at DEA and to think about the sheer number of them that he's murdered, that are good, honest, hard working cops that he's killed, to continue his enterprise is, you know, that's why we do this everyday. That's why I continue to do this. And then when it hits home, and we see, you know, an agent that isn't going to go home to his wife and his daughter that night because he was murdered as a result of this stuff. You know, that's why we work so tirelessly. You know, 15/20 hour days once in a while, you know, to track this guy down.

Steve Gregory

Agent Kyle Mori, DEA Los Angeles on the trail of El Mencho. Thank you so much for your time, and good luck, you know, let us know keep us posted.

DEA Agent Mori

Thank you so much.

Steve Gregory

Next, a missing child case from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. But first, this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 5

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. To see exclusive pictures video and other multimedia go to KFIAM640.com key word "unsolved". We've also got a transcript of this episode. Also, if you want to contact the team, just email us at unsolved@iheartmedia.com. And don't forget, if you have a story idea or a tip, just dial #250 on your cell phone and say the keyword "unsolved". I got a call from Eric Ogaz. He's a Detective with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Division and he like other detectives in the department also handle cold cases. Detective Ogaz says he's got another case for me. And he manages to juggle that case with other active cases. You see a lot of agencies don't have the additional staffing and funding for separate Cold Case units. So everyone has to pitch in. Ogaz is really passionate about giving closure to friends and family of those who've been killed or gone missing. Which brings us to our next case, the disappearance of Scott Kristen Echols. Case number 01-92-03870. The Henry number is 119-92. This is a story That's every parent's nightmare. One minute you see your child, the next minute you don't, the Echols family haven't seen Scott since 1992. Detective Ogaz is the lead investigator. So detective This is one of those stories that must really get it you anything dealing with a child whether missing, abused or killed. All of these have got to weigh on you.

Detective Ogaz

Yeah, they do. I mean, especially when a child, eight years old goes missing is totally unaccounted for such a long period of time, like disappeared off the face of the earth. It's frustrating.

Steve Gregory

So let's start at the beginning. So go back and take us back in time, the date and the time the place. Okay.

Detective Ogaz

Well, Scott Echols was a eight year old boy. He was last seen on July 25, 1992. At about 10 o'clock in the evening. He went missing from the 3500 block of Nolan St. in San Bernardino, also known as the Muscoy area, okay. His father last saw him on the couch sleeping in the living room.

Steve Gregory

So, so his parents are just as dad was at home,

Detective Ogaz

His mother, and his father was home along with three siblings.

Steve Gregory

Okay, so the father says he last sees him on the couch. What happens next?

Detective Ogaz

Well, around 10 o'clock, his father hears a knock on the door. His father didn't get a bed, and it didn't assume anything about it. And the next morning, he noticed that Scott was missing.

Steve Gregory

What time of night was this, again?

Detective Ogaz

10 o'clock at night.

Steve Gregory

10 o'clock at night? The father didn't think that was suspicious?

Detective Ogaz

I guess not.

Steve Gregory

So who first discovered to Scott was missing?

Detective Ogaz

Well, in the following morning, when his father got up, he realized Scott was not on the couch in the in the living room. And he didn't report Scott missing for several days afterwards. So his initial thought was Scott either ran away because he was having problems at school. Also, Scott was one of those kids that even though it was eight years old, he kind of was getting into trouble quite a bit. He was missing school. He was known and seen to be actually drinking alcohol at times, smoking cigarettes. He was on probation for an arson. So at first, the father just didn't really do anything about it kind of that set for a couple of days.

Steve Gregory

Did the Department have any track record with this family? I mean, had the department been over to the house before?

Detective Ogaz

They've had I would say mainly probation has had contact with with Scott reference missing school and obviously the arson as far as law enforcement contact, what prior contacts we had that house, I was going to leave in an investigation part that we have.

Steve Gregory

So you talked a little bit about Scott being involved in alcohol at a very young age and smoking whatnot. So what was his home life like?

Detective Ogaz

Well, he lived in a lower income area of Muscoy. I will say this, the residence wasn't really well kept. Seemed like the Echols family was on hard times. We're not really good have much money, the house the apartment was not in very good conditions. And that's the situation that he lived in.

Steve Gregory

What did the father do? Do you know what his occupation was?

Detective Ogaz

I do not recall this time when his occupation the mother, I do not recall it. I do not believe they're working but I'm not positive on that.

Steve Gregory

So Scott, what school was he going to?

Detective Ogaz

He was going to, I'll have to check in the reports.

Steve Gregory

If you've got to jog your memory, you know we can talk about that a little bit later. Okay. The reason I asked this is because obviously there were other kids his age too. So did he have friends? Did he have a lot of, you know, interactions with other kids?

Detective Ogaz

He did have several friends that he hung out with, and they've all been spoken to. And of course, I've not seen him. The thing with Scott, Scott was known to also panhandle. He was a very friendly kid in the neighborhood, he would walk the streets, basically. And if you saw a homeless person, picking up cans, you'd go help that homeless person pick up cans, and then try and get a portion of the money. Once they were done. He was also known to go like to the Walmart and hang out there and panhandle.

Steve Gregory

Where did he pick that up?

Detective Ogaz

I do not know. I just think because he spent a majority of time outside of the home, just kind of wandering the streets. That's something that he learned to people he met. Like you said he apparently he was a very friendly child, he would approach people and talk to him. And I think he just picked it up by talking to people and helping.

Steve Gregory

We're talking about eight year old Scott Echols, who went missing July of 1992. And if he was coming from a low income home, he had three siblings. Do you remember the ages or even though the ages of the siblings had anyone close to his age? And what did

Detective Ogaz

I will say this, he had actual total of five siblings, only three of them I believe were living at the residence at the time, he had two older siblings. And then he had three younger siblings.

Steve Gregory

So were the siblings involved in raising him at all or taking care of him or this sounds like all the kids kind of fend for themselves?

Detective Ogaz

Exactly. Yeah, it's kind of fending for themselves.

Steve Gregory

So how do you approach something like this, detective? I mean, you've got a missing child. Now that you you've only recently picked up this case. I mean, it goes back to 1992. Where does one start?

Detective Ogaz

Well, as you can imagine, this case was publicized in the news. The detectives and investigators at that time got numerous leads and tips. Most of the tips are more of opinions and not actual facts. So I'm basically going to binders that has probably 2000 pages where the interviews and going through interviews and trying to find inconsistencies or holes or or new approaches in the case leads that we could actually follow.

Steve Gregory

Detective, we got to take a break. So that'll give you a little time to look up Scott's school as well. This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

SEGMENT 6

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. We've been speaking with detective Eric Ogaz. He's with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's

Department Homicide Division. He's also investigating the disappearance of Scott Echols, a boy who was just a couple months shy of his ninth birthday, a happy go lucky boy who made friends easily, and appeared to be more comfortable hanging out with the homeless than hanging out at home.

Detective Ogaz

Correct. I was able during break, look up that school and he went to Vermont, Elementary.

Steve Gregory

Is a big school was a small school. Do you know?

Detective Ogaz

this is an average sized elementary school in San Bernardino.

Steve Gregory

And so we were talking about him being very friendly. So when you talk about a cold case, and something like this detective, do you, obviously there were detectives talking to kids back in 92? Do you search out those kids today?

Detective Ogaz

Oh, absolutely. And those are things that we're working on. And that's another thing when you're when you go through this report, and you see time and time again how people say he was very, he was a friendly, approachable child, he would approach people, when you think about the fact that there was a knock at the door at 10 o'clock at night. And then the next morning, Scott's missing, tends to make me believe that whoever knocked on that door at 10 o'clock at night, Scott knew.

Steve Gregory

Whether it was a friend his own age or or an adult.

Detective Ogaz

Either one I mean, I can't imagine a 10 year old or correction and an eight year old boy, opening the door to someone that he does not know. And not being scared or yelling for his father, his mother and just willingly suspectedly just going out. I mean, there was no conversations of anyone hearing of any type of a struggle or, or anything else. And there's no signs of that.

Steve Gregory

Based on your experience on a case like this. Where do you mean, when you know that, and you just kind of said that it, you tend to believe it's probably someone he knew or recognized. So how do you go back and backtrack his life?

Detective Ogaz

Well, that's what's difficult. I mean, first of all, we're fortunate that He's only eight years old. So he doesn't have a long life to backtrack. But it's very difficult in this particular case, because he was friendly with so many people, we have, you know, homeless people that he was helping Panhandle with collect cans with, people in his apartment complex, other kids mean, so we go back into contact as many people as we can find that lived in that area. And back then they did do door to door searches and contacts. So I have a long list of names of people that were initially already interviewed. So I'm trying to go through the report and figure out key people based upon statements, things that they observed or heard that I could follow up on.

Steve Gregory

And we're talking a long time ago. And when the people if you've talked to anyone that remembered him from back then I don't want to get it to who I talked to you but I will. Let me say the reason I'm asking you that what I'm getting at is do they have a vivid memory of him? I don't care. You know, you don't have to tell me who but do those people that person have a vivid memory of Scott?

Detective Ogaz

Yes. And the thing is, you got to also understand being a cold case and go on back that far. Not some people were deceased, that I needed to talk to you. Some people have moved out of state. Sure some are still still local. And part of this is we have to sometimes travel out, you know, out of state even to meet these people and sit down and talk with them. But that's not a problem because the ultimate goal is to find out what happened is Scott and resolve this.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with detective Eric go gas with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Homicide Bureau about this missing child, Scott Echols from 1992. You said something here that this got me very intrigued. His friendship with the homeless. How big of a part does that play in this?

Detective Ogaz

It's hard to tell. I mean, you're talking about, you know, once again, an eight year old child, you know, walking the streets, talking to random, random people that are homeless, and helping them out. And obviously, there's numerous homeless encampments, you know that I'm sure the kid possibly went back to. It's hard to track down those people because you don't necessarily you don't know who those homeless people were. You just try and talk to neighbors in the area. See if anyone could put a name to some of those people. I'm not saying that a homeless person is necessarily our primary suspect or lead. But nevertheless, that's a lead we need to track down and try and find out what people were in that area at that time that were homeless that he was assisting.

Steve Gregory

So you got to tell me when you first looked at that, you know, you've got this large three ring binder, that's it looks closely, three to four inches high in paperwork. And when you look through that and find out that he assimilated more with the homeless than perhaps his kids his own age, did you know right away that this was going to be even a bigger challenge because by virtue of being homeless, and back then you I can't imagine you've contacted anyone in the homeless community that remembers him?

Detective Ogaz

Yeah, well, I have not talked to any of the people in the homeless community as of yet. There were people that were homeless that deputies and Investigators spoke to at the time, right, that I still need to track down. The first part about these cold cases is you really got to go through the whole case. And as you mentioned, how big this book is, we basically write down a list of things to do and people to contact or leads to track down at that point now, where we're going to start tracking down some of these leads, we have spoken to several people. But we have not gotten into the meat of some of the interviews that we need to do, if that makes sense. Yeah.

Steve Gregory

But you said to have you had to travel out of state yet. Now this one,

Unknown Speaker

not for this case. Yeah. As I said, we're just at that point, now we're going to start really getting things going. And that's why I think it's great that we're discussing this on the air being an old case, maybe someone knows something has heard something and figuring out Hey, enough times gone by the, you know, investigators need to know what happened to Scott Echols because you're missing it at that age. He deserves that.

Steve Gregory

When we come back, we'll talk more and I want to also delve in I'm just going to give you a for fair warning. I'm going to talk to you about theories and theories about theories. Okay, so I'll just give you a warning there. But I also want to touch a little bit on the home life because I think that also could be a message for families to when they're hearing this in the fact that they may just take for granted. You know when the doorbell is ringing at 10 o'clock at night, that perhaps parents need to be a little more aware. Like that more with detective Eric Ogaz, but first, this is KFI AM 640. Time 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. To learn more about this case and others go to KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". And if you've got a tip or story idea, grab your cell phone and dial #250 and say the key word "unsolved". We've been talking with detective Eric Ogaz with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department's Homicide Bureau. He also works cold cases. In fact, we're talking about one that's he just recently delved into eight year old Scott Echols went missing 1992, July 25. In the Muscoy area of San Bernardino, and, you know, it's unusual, because he was at home with his entire family. So it's almost his entire family, he had siblings, their mom and dad were there. The doorbell rings 10 o'clock at night, Scott was sleeping on the couch, he goes to answer the door, and then no one ever saw him again.

Detective Ogaz

Correct.

Steve Gregory

So when you think of something like that, you've already mentioned earlier that you believe that it was somebody Scott probably knew or was comfortable with or recognized. About theories? Do you develop theories? I mean, do you work off of theories? Or do you just only work on what's in front of you?

Detective Ogaz

Well, it's both you work off of what's in front of you. But you got to be careful with theories. Because when you get a theory in mind, sometimes you stay focused on that theory, trying to make that theory and you cannot do that you got to be open to what the case provides to you what leads you have and be open to the total investigation, and not narrow yourself down to theories, if that makes sense.

Steve Gregory

Sure. Well, yeah, but it's got to be one part of the process, I'm assuming. Because you gotta remember everybody, I kind of get a kick out of this. Almost everything anyone knows about homicides, in solving cold cases they see on TV, correct. And it's all done in 40 to 47 minutes, and you wrap it all up. And it's

just like you have all this technology, you have all this net, the other but that's not really the case. You guys are really, I mean, in all the years I've known detectives, you, you're having to employ some pretty basic stuff. You know, sometimes you don't have that magical computer in that that lab whiz down the hallway. That's this tying it all together for you. Correct. So I mean, you're on the phone a lot, right?

Detective Ogaz

Yes, on the phone a lot out making contacts out in the streets a lot talking to people a lot. Absolutely. It's not just sitting behind your desk.

Steve Gregory

How do you balance working on a cold case like this? And the other cases you're working on? Because how many are you juggling right now?

Detective Ogaz

I'm currently working four cold cases.

Steve Gregory

So when you come in your work day, lay that out for us?

Detective Ogaz

Well, basically, on priorities and leads. Like this Scott Eccles case, I made it a priority right now to dig into it. Like we've mentioned before, how big this case is, I just devoted this whole week, you know, the last couple of weeks, I'm sorry, last couple of weeks into actually reading all the interviews, going through the crime scene, you know, going through everything that's there to look for angles, I can't, I'm focused on this case, I can't jump around like an hour on this case scenario. In that case, I give it all my attention. And once it's done, I put together my list of to do's, and then I just start focusing on that. And I do that with each case.

Steve Gregory

So when you said crime scene in this particular case, is that house still there?

Detective Ogaz

yes, it is.

Steve Gregory

Any members of those families still around any member of his family?

Detective Ogaz

I don't want to put that out if that's okay,

Steve Gregory

that's fine. No, that's fine. No, and what I'm getting at is, is that if you because a lot of times this many years later, 1992 for for God's sakes, you know what, sometimes those places have been torn down and rebuilt? Absolutely. So did you? Did you go out there and visit? And were you able to sort of get a sense and visualize what happened?

Detective Ogaz

No, I have not actually drove out to the crime scene. Crime scene. I know it's still there. The address is still showing us there. But I have not gotten out there yet. Like I said, this last week and a half, two weeks, I've been focusing on reading and made a couple contacts trying to locate where people were at, and basically building a to do list.

Steve Gregory

So let's talk a little bit about parental responsibility. You've already mentioned that, and I don't mention all of this to lay blame. I'm not that's not what my goal is here. I think it's more about awareness. You've already mentioned that when I asked if, if members of the family were in your system, you said no, but they were in the probation system.

Detective Ogaz

Yeah, I know that probation that says contact was okay. So can you tell us what the probation was for? The probation was for a few things for an arson and then he was also missing school a lot.

Steve Gregory

Okay. You said he was a troubled kid. You say the home was kind of a kind of a mess. Correct. A physical It found sounds like parentally. It was a mess, too. Doesn't sound like there was a lot of parental oversight.

Detective Ogaz

No, it did not.

Steve Gregory

Did you get the sense from looking at this or talking to anybody related to it, that perhaps the other siblings were in similar situations?

Detective Ogaz

I know that that was investigated and looked into I know that child protective services was involved. That's something that they came to conclusion with. Our main focus right now at that time was to locate Scott Echols and see what happened to him.

Steve Gregory

But in the reason I bring all of this up, is did any part of his home life do you believe played a role in his disappearance?

Detective Ogaz

Oh, absolutely. I mean, I don't think that and like say, I'm not trying to cast blame either. But just being a parent myself, you know, I would not let my son at, you know, eight years old, just roam the streets and accounted for and hang out panhandling at corners, and then have knowledge of that and allow that because it's just unsafe. You don't know who isn't coming contact with and there's no control.

Steve Gregory

Do you? Do you think the parents knew he was paying handling?

Detective Ogaz

Absolutely. Yes.

Steve Gregory

More with Detective Ogaz from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. But first, this is KFI AM 640. Time for a news update.

SEGMENT 8

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere we're live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved.

We're wrapping up with detective Eric Ogaz from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. Detective, we've been going over some theories about Scott's disappearance. Are there any others worth exploring?

Detective Ogaz

I guess the only theory would be it was going through, like I said, the crime scene there was no I can't put this out. I think it's safe to say that there was no signs of any force entry into the home. There was a knock on the door leads me to believe that Scott left was someone that he knew. And I think that would be somewhat common sense, you would think that and that's the theory that I'm kind of running on right now is Scott knew the person that he left with and felt safe leaving with

Steve Gregory

as far as parents go in, as parents listen to this, because a lot of people listening have children, what would be your recommendation for them to to sort of prevent this from ever happening to another parent.

Detective Ogaz

I could just give my own experiences and parenting and just be involved. You know, I know we all work and have jobs or, or have things going on in our lives, that being involved with your children, doing things with them, holding them accountable and responsible for their actions, and not making excuses for him. If you have a child, that's a problem child that's getting into trouble that may require more attention and more time from you.

Steve Gregory

Is there any evidence at this point? We talked about the parents? Is there any evidence that they perhaps could have ever been charged with negligence or endangerment, child endangerment, anything like that was that ever brought up? Because of the fact that he just disappeared.

Detective Ogaz

I know that there was an investigation into that. And obviously, I can't I don't want to put out the conclusion of that investigation in what consequences they did face or did not face.

Steve Gregory

Was there ever anybody that up any person of interest whatsoever in this case?

Detective Ogaz

There are several people of interest from then or now? I would say from then, and then still including now.

Steve Gregory

Do you think Scott Echols is still alive?

Detective Ogaz

No, I do not.

Steve Gregory

You were experiencing all these years. What's usually the timeframe for a child like that after they've either been abducted or missing like that? What typically happens?

Detective Ogaz

In majority cases, I would say, the child lost their life. But we have had cases and I'm sure you're aware of where, you know, kids have been held and raised in other homes, and later on as found as adults. And that's basically what we need to find. We have a child that's unaccounted for, and it's our job to figure out what happened to Scott.

Steve Gregory

I'll take it one step further. Do you think Scott lost his life in San Bernardino? Do you think he's lost his life somewhere else?

Detective Ogaz

That would be very hard to say. That'd be totally speculating. I know he left was last seen in San Bernardino, where he went from there at that time. I do not know.

Steve Gregory

the homeless areas and or the homeless folks that he hung out with. Were there any parts in town that he frequented? I mean, were there areas he was known to hang out

Detective Ogaz

While he was actually known to travel from Muscoy actually into the Highland area even and was been seen by witnesses out there panhandling with with homeless people. One thing about Scott though that was another thing I didn't mention. Scott was afraid of the dark. Every sibling and his parents said how scared he was of the dark that even at nighttime, he would sneak into the parents room and try and sleep on the foot of their bed. They would wake up the course and tell him to go up back out to the living room. At nighttime, if he was out in it started to get dark. There is numerous statements that he would always find a ride to get home. And sometimes those rides were just from strangers, he would see and say came here right home because he did not like being out after dark. And here it is 10 o'clock at night. He gets a knock on the door. And supposedly I believe left with someone that he knew and felt safe with even though it was at dark and tonight we're talking

Steve Gregory

With Eric Ogaz with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and finally as we wrap this up, do you know what he was wearing that night?

Detective Ogaz

Yes. information we had. He was last seen wearing a angels baseball team angels white shirt, and it was cut off like a half shirt. And Levi's.

Steve Gregory

So if anyone has any information or remembers anything about this case, what did they do?

Detective Ogaz

Just give San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department a call and ask for the homicide division detective Eric Ogaz or if you want to remain anonymous and use the tip line through you guys. Yep, absolutely

that I mean no tips too small you know we understand what we're getting a lot of tips but we will investigate and track down every single one of them and in hopes to solve and resolve this case

Steve Gregory

Well let's hope we jog some memory hopefully. Thanks detective, much appreciated thank you.

That's gonna do it. For more on this and other cases go to our web page at KFIAM640.com keyword "unsolved". And if you want the podcast of tonight's episode and other episodes, go to the iHeartRadio app and enter Unsolved with Steve Gregory.

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. Coming up next, it's Coast to Coast but first, this is KFI AM 640. Time for a news update.