

Episode 104: Jami was a juror in a murder trial

Like a lot of people these days, I work from home. And I really enjoy that. But many years ago, I had a more traditional job where I worked in an office building with other people. And there was a thing I liked to do that some of my co-workers thought was a bit odd.

We got an hour off for lunch each day. And sometimes I'd go to the breakroom and eat, or maybe a few of us would get together and go have lunch at a local restaurant. Pretty common stuff.

But what I did some days is get in my car, maybe eat a sandwich while I'm driving, and go to the Sixth Judicial Court building. In this building are generally two types of people. There are those who are there voluntarily, because they work there. And the others are there, not because they want to be, but because they have to appear in court before a judge.

These proceedings are pretty much open to the public. It's just not something that a lot of people think about doing, unless you're an oddball like me. I'd get there and quietly slip into one of the courtrooms where court was in session, and sit in what's called the gallery. This is the open seating section where you might see family members of the person on trial, or newspaper reporters covering a case. Or people on their lunch hour with a weird curiosity about these things.

Most of the time, the gallery is mostly empty. One time when I went in and sat down, the judge noticed me, and stopped what he was saying, and asked me why I was there, or how I was connected to this case. I told him I was just there to observe, and he continued with the proceedings.

One of the times that kind of stuck with me was when I watched a sentencing hearing. The defendant had already been found guilty; I don't remember what he had done. But he was there in the courtroom, in the orange prison jumpsuit, appearing before the judge. And I watched as the judge sentenced this person to spend ten years in prison. There was just something about that, that to me was really intriguing.

And if that's the kind of thing that YOU find interesting, I think you'll enjoy this episode.

My guest today is Jami. She lives in the Los Angeles area, and a few years ago she was opening her mail and found that she had been summoned for jury duty. And the case she was assigned to was a murder.

Content warning for this episode – this story includes descriptions of violent domestic abuse, and murder. So please be aware of that going in.

In the first half of our conversation, Jami explained the details of the case so you'll know what happened. Then she'll go through what she experienced as a juror – not only during the trial, but afterward when she was contacted personally by one of the family members of the murderer.

Scott

Tell us about the case that you were involved in.

Jami

It was a murder case. It happened in the Santa Clarita Valley, which is at, like, the northern tip of Los Angeles County.

Scott

That's where you live, right?

Jami

It is. I've lived out here for about 10 years. The murder actually happened in Newhall - which is part of that bigger Santa Clarita Valley - in 2015. Well, I guess, I should say that I sat on the jury as the jury foreman, so that was how I kind of knew about the case. I think the murder case was reported, kind of, in the local news outlets, but it definitely didn't make any kind of national headlines or anything like that. Courtney Arvizu was the victim and Robert Arvizu was the perpetrator - those two met in January of 2015. Rob was much older than Courtney - Rob was in his early 50s. Courtney was 25 years old. They met in January of 2015. They started dating right away. I am not sure how they met. After the trial, this town is, kind of, like, a big valley out here in Santa Clarita Valley, but it's the kind of valley where everybody's kind of connected to one another in some way or the other. So, I came across some friends who I started talking about the trial and they said, "Courtney and Rob used to work out at my gym. They may have met at the gym." I'm not sure if they were both gym rats, but I do know that Courtney and Rob lived across the street from one another. Rob lived in an apartment in Newhall and Courtney lived with her mother in another apartment right across the street. So, they started dating in January and they, kind of, got serious and fell in pretty quick.

A couple of months later, in March, they went to a graphic design convention in Las Vegas because Rob, at the time, was a graphic designer and his employer had sent him there on a business trip. Courtney went with him and, on a whim, they decided, "Why don't we get married while we're here?" So, they did - they just kind of had an impromptu wedding in Vegas. They've only been together for a couple of months. After they've gotten married, they went out to celebrate. They went to a bar, and at a bar, they ran into one of Rob's former bandmates - Rob was really into music. I think Rob had some connection with Ozzy Osborne and some people in his band back in the day. So, they ran into one of Rob's old bandmates and he started drinking and things like that. Well, Rob and Courtney went back to their hotel room and things, kind of, got pretty dark. Rob, immediately started accusing Courtney of flirting with the old bandmate - "You're this. You're that." - and, sort of, calling her all these horrible names. We came to find out at the trial that this is something that Rob did not only to Courtney - he was very verbally and physically abusive - but he also did this to his former girlfriends years before Courtney. Courtney likely didn't know Rob's past when she met him. He probably charmed her. As an older man, he was into music, getting tattoos, and giving tattoos. There was some sort of appeal, but she probably had no clue what his past was.

So, they went back to the hotel room and started arguing. Then, the argument turned physical - Rob actually strangled her so bad that she ended up with petechia in her eyes, which are basically, like, little blood vessels, I think, that pop when there's so much pressure placed on your neck. In the police photos that were taken later, you could see the petechia in her eyes and red marks around her neck. While they were arguing, I guess, it got so heated and so loud, that some of the other hotel guests called the police or, at least, security. I think security was the first to arrive. Ultimately, the sheriff's department was actually called in - they documented the fight and took photos of Courtney, although she did not press charges at that time - I think.

Scott

What a crazy honeymoon story!

Jami

This was their honeymoon. I mean, right from the start of their relationship, things were not good - he showed his true colors right off the bat. That's what so many women got into but you can't blame the victim. I mean, there's manipulation and love bombing involved. There's the honeymoon phase - after somebody is abused, the perpetrator says, "I'm sorry," and probably buys them flowers, and it's just very easy, I think, for women to just fall back into the relationship even after something so traumatic happens. So, after that happened, they stayed together. They came back to Newhall and just, kind of, started living life as normal. A couple of months later - this is now May, they've been together for 5 months - Courtney and Rob were invited to a birthday party for Rob's best friend, Eric, who lives in the Valley - who lives in Northridge. It's a house party. So, they went there. There was even a picture of Courtney and Rob at the party shown at the trial. They have their arms around each other. Courtney's wearing, I think, like, a black tank top and some cute little short shorts. She was adorable. They each had a beer in their hand and they looked happy. But things quickly turned at the house party and Rob started behaving very erratically. I mean, he even jumped on this guy's back at one point - a guy who he didn't even know, who was another guest at the party. I think he bit him on the cheek so hard that there was an injury to his cheek. I don't know if Rob was intoxicated or what, but he was extremely erratic and inappropriate.

Scott

That is just bizarre behavior.

Jami

In the trial, other things would come out - his behavior was truly bizarre. Some of the behavior that one of his ex-girlfriends reported during one terrifying morning with Rob was that, years prior to meeting Courtney, he would abuse her and then get up and start dancing around and skipping - it was just weird. I don't know what was going on with Rob psychologically, but it's apparent that there are other things at play probably. So he started acting crazy at this party, verbally abusing Courtney, telling her, "You're a whore. You're a housewife whore. You're this. You're that." He was charging toward her in a very aggressive manner. I mean, the whole party was interrupted by this fight. Courtney was a firecracker - from what I could tell and from what people had said about her, she was not one to just, sort of, take this abuse lightly - I mean, she would fire back at him. So, she was at this party saying, "Fuck you, Rob! Fuck you!" So, they were just in this heated argument.

So, Rob had a best friend named Eric. Eric was married to a woman named Mei Lin, who was actually Rob's best friend before he even met Eric. When Mei Lin married Eric, that's when Eric sort of became Rob's male best friend. So, Rob was very close with Mei Lin and Eric. Eric's birthday party was being held at their house in Northridge. So, when he started charging after Courtney and being really verbally abusive toward her, Mei Lin and everybody tried to intervene. Mei Lin was even telling Courtney, "Please just shut up. Don't fire back at him. This is getting too much." At one point, Mei Lin basically told her husband, "Eric, look, you've got to get Rob out of here." So, Eric pulled him into another room in the house and Rob proceeded to tell Eric, "Courtney's cheating on me. She's screwing other guys at work. And this and that." Again, we found out as jurors from witness testimony that this is something that Rob did - so whether Courtney was actually cheating on him or not or not, we had no reason to believe that she was -

- we had every reason to believe that this is something Rob accused almost every ex-girlfriend whom he was with. I don't know if it was just deep insecurity or what, but he accused every girlfriend of, "You're a whore. You're cheating on me." and all of these things.

So, Mei Lin and Eric decided, "It's time for Rob to go. This has just gotten too serious. We've got to get him out of this house. We've got to separate him and Courtney." So, that's exactly what Eric did. Eric got Rob into the passenger seat of his car, drove him home to Newhall, and get him out of there, basically. Meanwhile, Courtney was still at this house party. Courtney and Rob's relationship was still new - they'd only been together for 5 months - so she didn't really know these people at the party that well, but there she was all by herself at that party. She had been yelled at and charged up by her husband. Rob actually ended up leaving with Courtney's cell phone and her car keys, so she had nothing - she was at this party with no phone and no keys.

Eric and Rob got in the car and everything started off fine. Eventually, as Eric started driving, he had to pull over to the side of the road because Rob became violent towards him and started yelling at him, "You're taking Courtney's side! Fuck you!" This and that. Eric's like, "Look, you need to calm down. I'm going to drive you home." This and that. So, Eric started driving again. They got on the 405 freeway to drive home to Newhall - it's a very busy freeway for those of you who don't know. As he started driving on the freeway, Rob started acting up again. This time, he became violent with his best friend - he started punching and strangling Eric in the car while he was driving on the freeway. He was strangling him so much that Eric has to pull over again. It came out at trial that Eric had some MMA fighting experience. So Rob was a big guy, but Eric was also, like, not somebody to be messed with. So, Eric, I think, at some point, got Rob into some, sort of, like, headlock to subdue him and be just like, "Dude, stop punching me. Calm down. I'm going to drive you home." So, Rob calmed down again and they started driving on the 405 freeway all the way to New Hall, but they didn't quite get back to Rob and Courtney's apartment. They got to, like, a gas station somewhere in Newhall where Rob started acting up and became violent again. Eric was like, "I've had enough!" He opened the passenger door and Rob got out. Then, Rob dropped to his knees and started, kind of, like, pleading to Eric, "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have done that." Eric was like, "Look, that is enough." He had been assaulted twice now. So, Eric slammed the door and just drove off. So now, Rob's somewhere in Newhall close to his apartment, I think, at a gas station or something. Eric turned around and started driving back to the party. He had been injured pretty badly in the assault by his best friend, on his birthday, of all times.

Eric was driving back to the party, but before he got back to his own house, he decided to stop at a neighbor's house to assess his injuries - I don't know if he actually knew these neighbors or what made him stop there first before going back home - and they actually took pictures of his face. Those pictures were shown at trial. I mean, it was horrendous - his face looked like his nose may have been broken, he had blood on his face and all over his T-shirt. I mean, his eye looked injured. So, there was definitely some sort of assault that happened in that car by Rob.

Scott

The fact that they thought of taking pictures and documenting that... I mean, he must have already been thinking, "There's going to be some kind of criminal charges that come out of this."

Jami

Yeah, it was very serious - serious enough for them to take pictures and document it. I mean, his face looked horrible. I mean, it was a terrible assault that happened in that car. Eventually,

Eric got back to his own house. When he walked in, of course, his wife Mei Lin was just horrified. She's like, "What happened to your face?!" Of course, he told her about the assault in the car. Eric's back at the party. After Eric and Rob had left, Mei Lin was able to pull Courtney aside and tell her, "Look, I don't think you should go home tonight. You guys are in a bad place. You should just spend the night here. It's too heated. Things need to calm down." Courtney didn't want to do that, probably, because she was uncomfortable - again, she didn't know many people there. She probably didn't know Mei Lin and Eric very well.

Scott

It's hard to imagine such an awkward position to be in this house full of people who she didn't know, especially after being embarrassed by her husband.

Jami

Yes. It was a really awkward position to be in, for sure, but Mei Lin was doing her best to help her out. After knowing that Courtney didn't want to spend the night, Mei Lin offered, "Hey, I'll drive you to anywhere you want to go. Where do you want to go? I'll take you anywhere." I guess that Courtney refused that as well. At some point, Courtney just left the party without her phone and keys and nobody knew where she went - they only knew that all of a sudden, Courtney wasn't there anymore. By the time Eric got back from dropping Rob off, Courtney was already gone and nobody knew where she was, but they did know that she didn't have a phone, keys, or anything. She was just walking around the San Fernando Valley - by that time, it's nighttime. It's just a really scary and dangerous situation to be in.

Meanwhile, Rob was in Newhall and, just by happenstance, he came to this guy - I forgot his name - I want to say his name is Nico. A guy named Nico and his girlfriend were driving in Newhall. Nico was a friend of Courtney's. When he saw Rob - he knew Rob through Courtney - he pulled over with his girlfriend was in the car. Rob, kind of, told him what happened and he went like, "Oh, get in! I'll take you to your apartment." Rob got in the car and immediately started saying crazy shit. I mean, he was telling Nico's girlfriend, "If you don't fucking treat Nico right, I'll kill you!" That's like, first off, "Okay, whoa, that's really aggressive!" Also, Nico was not even really Rob's friend - he's Courtney's friend. So, why is he threatening his girlfriend to treat him right? That's the weirdest thing. Rob also said something to Nico to the effect of, "Well, I'm going to go to Mabel's bar and do some heroin. I'm going to go do some drugs at Mabel's bar." Mabel's bar is, kind of, like, a dive bar in Santa Clarita. I've been there before and nothing good happens there - I've seen fights happen there. I mean, it's just one of those bars. So, he was talking about doing drugs at the bar, "You better treat Nico right or I'll kill you," and the car ride quickly became very strange.

Nico and his girlfriend definitely want the car ride to be over sooner rather than later. So, they dropped Rob off at Courtney's and his apartment. I guess, I should back up a little bit so that people know that the apartment was Rob's first. Courtney quickly moved in after they started dating - she only lived right across the street. So, now they were sharing Rob's apartment. At Rob's home, Nico drove off - he couldn't get out of there fast enough. I think Nico testified at trial that Rob did call him one more time on his cell phone and say, "Hey, do you want to go to the bar with me or hang out?" Of course, Nico refused after that crazy car ride.

I think it was about 8 o'clock in the evening, maybe, by the time Rob got back to his apartment after being dropped off by Nico. Again, Courtney was somewhere in the valley - nobody knew where she was - and people were getting a little worried. Rob wanted to find Courtney. He also didn't know where she was. Eventually, Rob called Courtney's mother and said, "Look, we had

a fight. I can't find Courtney. Is she with you? Have you seen her?" Courtney's mom hadn't seen her. That was the first time she heard that they'd gotten into an argument and that her daughter was nowhere to be found. So now, Courtney's mom was worried and did probably what most mothers would do - she got in her car, drove to the San Fernando Valley, and tried looking for her daughter. I mean, she had no idea where to go - the valley is huge - but she was going to make an attempt. It came out at trial that Courtney really loved the restaurant, Chipotle. So, her mom was like, "Well, let me just go to Chipotle." She walked into Chipotle and said, "Hey, this is what my daughter looks like. Have you seen her?" They haven't seen her, so she left. Essentially, Courtney's mom couldn't find her daughter, so she just drove back home. At some point, there's another phone call. Courtney's mom then calls Rob. So now, both Rob and Courtney's mom got in touch with the goal of trying to find Courtney.

Obviously, Courtney's mom wanted to find her to protect her. Well, we're gonna find out why Rob wanted to find her later. At some point - I don't know if Rob called Courtney's mom or Courtney's mom called Rob - they're on the phone again. Courtney's mom testified at trial that she could hear Rob and Courtney arguing in the background and Rob telling Courtney, "Get in the fucking car!" In the background, Courtney refused to get in the car, kind of, like, "No, fuck you! I'm not getting in the car!" So, it was apparent that Rob drove back down to the valley or somewhere and caught up with and found Courtney, but Courtney refused to get into the car. Meanwhile, Courtney's mom was hearing this exchange, which likely only made her more worried about her daughter because things seemed to be escalating. As far as time goes, I want to say that it's 9.00 - 9.30 o'clock in the evening by the time that exchange happens. So, Courtney's mom got even more worried. By that time, Courtney's mom was completely worried about her daughter. After that, she tried to call Rob a few times, but Rob stopped answering his phone. She didn't know where her daughter is, so now she had gotten more and more worried - like, she can't sleep.

By around 9.30 o'clock in the evening, Courtney makes her way back to Newhall and all the way back to her apartment. At trial, the prosecutor was not able to tell us how she got back home. We don't know if she hitched a ride, used somebody's phone, or called a friend - somehow, Courtney was able to get back to Newhall and back to her apartment. She didn't have her keys, so she couldn't get into her apartment. She also did not...her name was not on the lease. So, she went to the apartment manager's apartment. The apartment manager and his girlfriend lived in an apartment which was actually in the same complex as Courtney and Rob - they lived on-site and managed that apartment complex. Courtney knocked on the door at 9.15 - 9.30 at night, the apartment manager answered the door, and he saw that Courtney looked upset - Courtney's got mascara running down her face. She basically said, "I've been into an argument with Rob. I'd like to get into my apartment, but I don't have my keys. I just want to grab my things and go and spend the night with my mom in her apartment."

Scott

Which is right across the street...

Jami

Exactly. She could have just walked there. Courtney's name was not on the lease, so the apartment manager could not allow her with his master key to get into the apartment without Rob's permission. As this story unfolds - had this phone call never taken place, had they never gotten Rob's permission ahead of time to let Courtney into the apartment in which she had lived - you're going to go, "Oh my God... There were all these moments where her life could have been saved if something had been a little bit different." But none of these people knew what was

about to happen, so it's not their fault, but you can imagine how they feel. So the apartment manager called Rob - Rob answered the phone - and he said, "Hey, Courtney's here. She wants to get into the apartment. Her name's not on the lease. Do I have your permission to let her into the apartment?" Rob said, "Yes. I'll be right there." I think the apartment manager ended up calling Rob back and saying, "Actually, I don't think it's a good idea for you to come here. You don't need to come here. We've got your permission. We're going to let Courtney into the apartment. She's going to stay you know at her mom's. Why don't you stay where you're at?" - because he could sense how elevated this fight was. Rob said, "No, I'll be right there." The apartment manager hung up the phone with Rob again - it was around 9.30 at night by that time. The apartment manager's girlfriend got the master key and walked Courtney to her apartment. They walked upstairs, opened the door, and Courtney went in, immediately grabbed, like, some overnight things hastily so that she could just get out and stay with her mom. At trial, it was shown that she just grabbed, like, a Bath and Bodyworks bag that was in the apartment - there was a hair clip in there and just some random items - and it looked as if she just grabbed whatever bag she saw. It was apparent that Courtney was in a hurry to get her stuff and get out. I think we can imagine why she was in a hurry.

Scott

She probably knew that Rob said, "I'll be right there," and was on his way...

Jami

Yes, exactly. She also knew how possessive, controlling, and angry he was at her that night. She probably knew that, "He's going to come to find me here and it's not going to be good." There was a history of abuse - he had abused her in Vegas. So, she was in a hurry as she grabbed her things. Well, I think the apartment manager's girlfriend could also see how heated everything was and offered to walk Courtney across the street to her mom's house to make sure she got there safely. Courtney said, "No, I'll be fine. It's okay. You can go." So the apartment manager's girlfriend left. Now, Courtney was in the apartment by herself gathering her things. She had a cute little dog on a leash that she was going to bring with her to her mom's.

Because Rob got that phone call from the apartment manager, he left wherever he was and came screeching into the apartment complex - it was probably 9.45 o'clock at night. He came screeching in so loud that the apartment manager's son who also lived on-site in one of the apartments and helped, kind of, manage the grounds heard him screeching in. So, Rob screeched into the apartment. He parked his truck in the parking spot - it is directly in front of his and Courtney's apartment. The apartment manager's son was in his car at that time, so he drove up to their apartment, stopped, rolled down the window - Rob was getting out of his truck - kind of, confronted him, and said, "Hey, man. Like, you're driving too fast. It's against the apartment rules. You got to slow down. What's going on?" Rob said, "Oh, everything's fine." They kind of had a quick conversation. As they were talking, Courtney must have heard Rob pull in. So, Courtney opened the apartment door, walked downstairs - she had her dog in her hand - and yelled at Rob, "Rob, give me my fucking keys! I'm leaving!" How we know this is because the apartment manager's son actually testified on his conversation and confrontation with Rob about the screeching tires. He said that he saw Courtney come down. At that point, the apartment manager's son realized, "Okay, this is kind of a domestic situation." He felt a bit awkward and, like, "It's none of my business. I should get out of here." So, he said goodbye and left. At that point, he saw Rob walk up the stairs to the apartment. By that time, Courtney had walked back into the apartment after she confronted Rob.

So, Courtney and Robert were inside the apartment - now, it's closer to maybe 9.50 - 10.00 o'clock at night. At that point, there was witness testimony by a lady named Maria - she was a tenant at the apartment. She lived directly below Rob and Courtney. Her apartment had the exact same layout as Rob and Courtney's. She testified that between 10.00 - 10.30 ish, she was sitting in her living room watching TV - she knew the time because she had to be up early the next day for work, so she always went to bed right around the same time. She testified that she heard one loud thump between 10.00 and 10.30 PM - as if something heavy had fallen in the living room of the apartment directly above them. Essentially, what happened was, as soon as Rob got into that apartment, he beat up Courtney.

There were autopsy photos shown and it was just awful. There were crime scene photos shown and then there were also autopsy photos shown where you could really see that she had blood covering the entirety of her face - it was likely because, when you see the autopsy photos, she had two deep cuts on each eyebrow and, as you know, those tend to bleed a lot. So, that started bleeding. She also had a very deep cut under one of her eyes. I mean, she had been beaten up. She looked as if her jaw was out of place. Her face was slightly disfigured from the beating - you could tell that he was relentless in whatever he did to her. It was theorized at trial that Courtney was likely rendered unconscious from the beating - not dead but unconscious. At some point, she fell on the living room floor with her face down on the floor, but that was not the cause of death - I think that it had been reported in local news outlets that she had died from blunt force trauma. Although she did suffer a severe beating, her actual cause of death was asphyxiation. After Rob had beaten her up, she fell and landed facedown on the living room floor, he got on top of her and applied so much pressure to the back of her head that her face was smashed into the carpet, and she could no longer breathe - he cut off her airway. There was a medical expert who testified that it would take approximately 30 seconds for somebody to lose consciousness from their airway being cut off in that manner, and it would take another 2-3 minutes for somebody to die from their airway being cut off in that manner. So basically, Rob beat her up, and then took the second action of applying so much pressure that she could no longer breathe - that's how she died.

Scott

2-3 minutes - that's really an extended period of time to hold someone's head to the floor like that.

Jami

It is a long time. If you were to just sit in silence right now for 2-3 minutes, it is a long time. They also said that there has to be a tremendous amount of pressure. So, it just seemed obvious that he was enraged and wanted to finish the job. Ultimately, we had the option as jurors - we were presented with voluntary manslaughter, second-degree murder, first-degree murder, or not guilty. We deliberated for 2 days. The trial lasted about 2 weeks. We deliberated for about 2 days and we landed on first-degree murder on that second day. It took us a while. We knew that it was not voluntary manslaughter. Voluntary manslaughter is like... I've used this example before - "You are in a bar fight. You punch someone. On the way down, they hit their head on something and they die as a result of that head injury. You didn't mean to kill them, but your actions caused their death." We knew that it wasn't that. We knew that it was at least a second-degree murder. Second-degree murder is elevated and there has to be, what they call, malice aforethought. There doesn't have to be premeditation - that's first-degree murder - but there has to be malice or malicious intent. So, we believe that it was at least second-degree murder.

Why did we land on first-degree murder? I learned something new from the judge who, kind of, explained to us - I think the judge was the prosecutor - that, basically, premeditation can happen in a matter of seconds, minutes, days, or months. Everybody thinks of premeditated murder, like, "Oh, I gotta kill my husband for the life insurance money. So let me go to Walmart in the months leading up to it or the days leading up to it, buy all the supplies, lie and wait, and then kill them - that is certainly premeditation. Rob's premeditation was that he had already rendered her unconscious - she was laying on the floor and she was zero threat to him. By the way, Courtney was about 5-feet tall, maybe 100 pounds - she was not a big girl, she was petite - and Rob was a big and muscular 6' - 6'2" guy. She was no threat to him. She was unconscious laying on the floor, he could have left her there, he could have gotten up, she would have likely survived her injuries, but he took the second action of wanting to finish the job - he got on top of her and applied that pressure, which is what killed her in that 2-3 minutes. That's premeditation - he had a moment to think about it and decided to kill her - he premeditated it and he carried it out. So, that's where we landed on first-degree murder. I think that his legal team, later, filed an appeal, but it was ultimately upheld that this was, in fact, first-degree murder with premeditation.

Scott

So, after he killed her, how did it all come out? He didn't go to the police station and turn himself in, I'm sure...

Jami

Right. The evidence that was presented at trial shows that, after he killed her, he tried to clean up. So, he went to the bathroom - there was blood evidence in the drains of the shower, the sink, the towels. So, he tried to clean up, somewhat. He actually left Courtney there in the apartment, went to Mabel's bar, and tried to get in, but the Mabel's bar doormen testified at trial that he wouldn't let Rob in because Rob was clearly intoxicated. He said, "No, you're too drunk." So, Rob got in his truck and drove back home. So, what happened was, after he killed her, he tried to clean up, and he stayed in the apartment for a while. He actually drank a bunch of beers after he killed her because those were found in the bathroom. He tried to get into Mabel's bar but they wouldn't let him because he was too drunk. By that time, Rob got back in his truck, drove back to the apartment, and passed out in the bathroom.

During that time, Courtney's mom was still worried about her. Around midnight, she called the Santa Clarita sheriff's office and just said, "Look, can you do a welfare check on my daughter? Can you send somebody to the apartment and see if she's there and see if she's okay?" So, they did that. A sheriff's deputy showed up at the apartment around midnight. It was dark outside, of course. He knocked on the door. Rob answered the door, but he only cracked it open a couple of inches. It's completely dark in the apartment behind him - that's what the sheriff's deputy testified to. He said, "Hey, I'm here because somebody is very worried about Courtney. They've asked us to do a welfare check. We want to make sure she's okay." Rob said, "Oh, she's fine. She's sleeping. She's fine. We're both here. Everything's okay." The sheriff said, "Well, I have to follow protocol. I have to actually speak with Courtney to make sure she's okay. Can you please go wake her up and bring her to the door so that I can talk to her?" Rob shuts the door and never came back. The deputy knocked on the door - I don't know how many times he tried to make contact again, but Rob never came back to the door. Meanwhile, that sheriff's deputy got a priority call that he had to attend to so he had to leave the apartment, having never spoken with Courtney.

So, after about 1.5 hours went by, Courtney's mom was still awake. She was still worried about hearing nothing from her daughter, so she called the sheriff's department again. She said, "Hey,

can you go check on Courtney again? Can you please go to the apartment and make sure she's okay?" So, by this time, 2 different sheriff's deputies showed up at their apartment. They knocked on the door. Nobody answered. That was about 1.30 o'clock in the morning. They knocked on the door again but nobody answered, so they knocked on the door harder this time - that was what they testified - but at that time, the door actually swung open because they knocked so hard. A lot of us thought later, like, "Maybe they broke protocol and actually, like, unlawfully opened the door somehow." But regardless, we're glad that the door did open. What happened was the door opened slightly but it didn't open all the way because Rob and Courtney had one of those, like, hotel locks on the door - the kind of the metal arm that swings - so, if you lock it and somebody tried to open the door, it kind of, like, hold the doors open a few inches. So, the door opened a few inches and not all the way because of the hotel lock. At that time, one of the sheriff's deputies turned on their flashlight and started shining it inside the apartment to see what they could see. It was at that time that they saw a pair of legs on the floor and they knew, like, that somebody had passed out on the floor. So, at that time, they busted the door open, went inside, and discovered Courtney's lifeless body laying on the floor in the living room of the apartment.

There was a video shown at the trial of when the sheriff's deputies first entered the apartment and it was absolutely haunting and heartbreaking because there she was lying on the floor. Even though she died lying face down, by the time the deputies arrived, she was lying face up. Wrapped around her waist was her dog's leash. Her dog was barking at these officers because it doesn't know who they are. It was just the absolute saddest thing because Courtney was so close to leaving her apartment with her dog on a leash in her hand until Rob pulled up to the apartment and changed everything. I mean, she was this close to getting away! The leash was wrapped around Courtney's waist, so the dog was essentially stuck to Courtney and couldn't go anywhere. So, she lay there and she was pronounced dead pretty quickly at the scene. The dog was barking when they came in and it's just so sad to think about what the dog saw. It was a very haunting video that I'll probably never be able to get out of my mind because there's the dog's owner with her dog - there's nothing that the dog can do. The dog was attached to its owner's body and the dog was scared because the sheriff's deputies are walking in on the whole thing.

Obviously, her face was bloody. They can see that something has occurred. So carefully, the sheriff's deputies made their way through the apartment, probably, with guns drawn. At that point, they walked down the hallway slowly and that's where they found Rob passed out on the bathroom floor of the apartment - that's when they saw all the beer bottles and things like that. So Rob was arrested, apprehended, and put into the back of the sheriff's deputy's car. At that point, it was clear that he was intoxicated. As I said, Courtney was pronounced dead at the scene. They brought Rob back to the sheriff's station. Of course, they took pictures. The palms of his hands had a bunch of dry blood on them. There was blood found in other parts of the apartment. They took a statement from him and I'm pretty sure that he said he didn't know what happened. He probably claimed that he was drunk and didn't know what happened.

Basically, at trial, the prosecutor did a good job of, kind of, showing us what happened. I mean, Rob immediately beat Courtney up in the apartment. We know that she fell to the floor - Maria, the lady downstairs, reported that she heard the thump - and she was unconscious. We know that he cut off her airway and killed her. We think that after he killed Courtney - she was lying facedown - he went to the bathroom, tried to clean up, and took a shower. At that point, he tried to get back into Mabel's bar with Courtney's body still in the apartment, but they wouldn't let him in because he had drank a bunch of beer at the apartment after he killed Courtney - not before.

That's an important distinction because his defense would claim that he was in an alcoholic stupor - what he did doesn't remember because of the alcohol - but we know that he was sober before he killed Courtney because the apartment manager's son who confronted him for screeching into the air showed pictures of his truck and it was perfectly parked between the lines - it was, like, a perfect parking job.

Also, the apartment manager's son said that he was completely coherent - he wasn't acting erratically or drunk or anything like that. He had a very sober conversation with him at that time. So we know that he killed Courtney, went into the bathroom, tried to clean up, drank a whole bunch of alcohol, got drunk, tried to get into the bar, got rejected, and went back to the apartment. We think that he probably went home and turned Courtney's body over to see what he had done, like, "Is she dead? What did I do?" Then, he went back to the bathroom and that's where he passed out - that's where he was eventually found. So, that's kind of how everything unfolded. If you think about all the things that happened, people could have saved Courtney's life, but they didn't know that she was in imminent danger at that time.

Scott

Right. Hindsight is easy. On the other hand, this is not a marriage that was destined for the last for a long time - it's something that would have happened, eventually, even if it wasn't on this night.

Jami

Those were my thoughts, exactly. Other jurors said the same afterward. It's like Rob was a ticking time bomb. There were some very key witnesses who testified - two of which were Rob's ex-girlfriends from years prior - and it was absolutely horrifying to hear what they testified to and the treatment that he inflicted upon them. They were both very lucky to be alive today. So, it's like, if he didn't kill Courtney on that night, he would have killed her on another night because he was a ticking time bomb. It's interesting because ever since I sat on the jury, I've come across people - I still live in the Santa Clarita Valley - who knew him. I have 2 friends who I realize were very good friends of Rob's back in the day before he met Courtney - they actually distanced themselves from him back then because he was just on a path of drugs, alcohol, violence, and just not being a good person. So, they were not shocked that this happened years later in his life. I also came across one of his former employers at a silk-screening shop here in the Santa Clarita Valley, where I was getting some things embroidered or silk-screened - we talked and realized that, at one point when she employed Rob, she was very close to him and her daughter. Rob had given her daughter a tattoo - Rob was a tattoo artist. She said that, basically, his employment ended there in a rage - he got so enraged with his employer. He left cussing and verbally abusing her, so she was also, like - of course, she was shocked to hear what he did to Courtney - "I'm not all that shocked because he had it in him to be a very angry person."

Scott

Yeah, he just left a trail of destruction wherever he went.

Jami

He did.

Scott

Well, let's talk about how you got into this trial. You got a jury summons... I'm wondering, was that the first time you've ever gotten a jury summons? And what did you think when you first saw that?

Jami

So it wasn't the first time, I had gotten one before - many of us do. I was able to get out of it - that was years prior. I called in and said that it was a conflict with work or whatever it was. So, I had never actually served on a jury or even stepped foot into the courthouse because of a jury summons. So, it was in June of 2017 - the murder happened in 2015. In June of 2017, I got a jury summons. Again, I was up to my old tricks - I called and got it extended because I didn't want to go. I was just busy in my career and in life. I had a young daughter at the time.

Scott

I always thought that, maybe, different states have different rules. I always thought that if you just say, "I can't do it because of work," that's not a good enough excuse - I didn't think that could get you out of it.

Jami

I think you're right and I think they've tightened things up. So, by the time I got this jury summons, I think what I was able to do was put it off, but not completely get out of it. So, I just kind of bought myself some time. I was able to just say, "Give me a reprieve." I can't remember how it worked, but I'd call in and be able to say at least once, "No, I can't serve this time. But in the future, yes." A month later in July, I was instructed to call in again on that same jury summons. I think how it worked was I got an extension, but the instructions were, "Call in again on July or whatever and see if you have to be called in at that time." So, I called in, and I think I was not required to go in, but I was instructed to call in again the next day, so I called in the next day. Lo and behold, they said, "Okay, you are now required to report to the San Fernando Superior Court." So, I went. Long story short, about 70 of us were instructed to go to the 4th floor, which I would later find out that it's where all the serious crimes like murder are tried. There was a bunch of us filling the hallway right outside the courtroom. I was sitting on a bench and a gentleman sat next to me - he was probably in his mid-50s. We struck up a conversation and he told me that he's a homicide detective. So of course, my ears perked up because I've always been into true crime. Of course, he started picking his brain, we started chatting, and he went, "This trial you're about to be served on is most likely a homicide trial." "Why would you say that?" He said, "I can tell by how many of you are here." So I guess, whenever it's a murder trial, they'll choose more jurors. So I said, "Wow, okay." After I was done talking to him, all 70 of us were instructed to go into the courtroom and we all sat down. We were all assigned a 4-digit juror number. The judge started talking about what are the instructions, how this is all going to go down, and how they were going to choose people to go sit on the jury chairs. He said something, but all I heard was "187." - that's when I knew this is a murder trial because I knew that 187 stands for homicide. I guess if you're a true crime addict or somebody who listens to gangster rap - which I also am - you'd know what 187 means.

Scott

It's like everybody knows what 420 means, right?

Jami

Yes. I know what that means too - I'm not gonna tell you why. No, just kidding. So, you knew this is a murder trial just like the homicide detective - he was right. They basically called out 18 of those 4-digit numbers and those 18 people were instructed to go sit in the jury box, and that's when they start getting asked questions - a general set of questions at first. I can't remember if it's the judge or the prosecutor who asked these questions - probably the prosecutor. They started asking these people, "What's your occupation? Are you married? What's your spouse's

occupation? Do you have children? Are they adults? What's their occupation?" So they were trying to get a sense of all of that based on some of those preliminary questions. Some people were eliminated from that jury pool, so they had to start calling other numbers and I was in that second round of numbers. They called my number, so I got up, went in, sat on the number 6 juror seat, and stayed there. So, I ended up sitting there. I think the jury selection process took about 2 days, and I just stayed there the whole time. I ended up being selected on the jury. I guess, when the prosecutor started asking more in-depth questions to find out if they want to keep you on the jury or not, that's when we, kind of, had a clue as to what this trial would be about. She started asking, "Have you or anybody in your immediate family struggled with alcoholism? Have you ever been a victim of domestic abuse? Have you ever been accused or charged with domestic abuse?" So, you could sense that something to do with alcohol and domestic violence would come out in this trial. They ended up choosing 12 of us to sit on the jury - I was juror number 6. There were also 3 alternates who sat in the front - if any of us were ever excused, they would be called in to sit on the permanent jury, but they had to sit through the whole trial.

Scott

Did those three also sit in on the jury deliberations after the trial?

Jami

No, they didn't, because all of us jurors were able to stick it out. Nobody was ever excused, so none of those alternates were called to sit as part of the permanent jury. When the deliberations happened, all 12 of us jurors who had been selected from the beginning went to deliberate and, at that point, the alternates' job is over, which is kind of disappointing for them because they sat through the whole trial but get no say in it - they're just there just in case.

Scott

What I was thinking is, what if one of the jurors passes out or has to be excused during deliberations? The alternates haven't really been part of the conversation up till that point, and they'd have to, kind of, come in halfway.

Jami

That's a great point. I hadn't even thought about how that would go. I don't know if they would have called one of those alternates in. Maybe, those alternates were given instructions, "Hey, the trial's over. You're not going to deliberate at this point." But I wonder if they got instructions that, "Hey, you're still not allowed to talk about the details of this trial because we may have to call you in for deliberations." I wonder if that happened - I don't know the answer to that. I had talked to 2 of those alternate jurors later after the trial because they wanted to know how the deliberations go, because they didn't get to be part of it. So, I talked to them and they were very let down that they didn't get to be a part of that conversation, but it was interesting to hear how they would have voted or what their decision would have been.

Scott

During the 2 weeks when the trial was happening, you weren't allowed to ask any questions or anything, right? You just kind of just take it all in. Can you even take notes?

Jami

We were definitely able to take notes, and we took a lot of them. I mean, my notepad was full. I mean, it was a 2-week trial - it's a long time. There are just so many details. So, they do give each juror a pad of paper and a pencil which, of course, you have to leave there at the end of

every day - you can't bring it home or anything like that. A lot of us took vigorous notes, and we were able to bring those notes with us into deliberations. Interestingly, we were not allowed to take them with us. After we reached a verdict, we had to leave our notepads there. The first order of business was that we had to pick a jury foreman. As you probably know, the jury foreman's job is not to carry the weight of deciding how the verdicts should go, it's really just to make sure that everybody on the jury has a voice and an opportunity to speak and state their opinion and their point of views so that it's not skewed toward just a handful of jurors making the decision for everybody. So, pretty quickly, I was chosen as the jury foreman. I think they asked, "Is anybody willing to be the jury foreman?" A few of us raised our hands and I had no issue with it. I raised my hand and there were some other people who raised their hands. I don't know why they selected me, to be honest with you. There was really no discussion of, "Oh, we think it should be..." I think, probably, somebody just looked at me and was like, "Okay, you're willing to do it," and everybody, kind of, looked around and be, like, "Yeah, sounds good. She's the jury foreman." It was interesting. You, kind of, don't know what you're getting yourself into.

Scott

It does. It seems so random. This is a job you've never done before and someone's life is hanging in the balance. It just seems a little bit haphazard...

Jami

It does. It seems like it should be more formal and all of this. I strongly felt the weight of being a juror and the jury foreman, absolutely. I mean, I lost sleep over it. I never took that lightly. Regardless of how I felt, based on the evidence that was presented about this defendant, what we're about to decide is going to impact his life and several other people's lives forever. So, it was very, very heavy. I did feel like I could be the person to make sure that nobody gets bullied in the jury room, that everybody has a chance to speak - some people are going to be more shy than others. We can make sure that they have an opportunity to speak. I felt like I could make it a safe space for all of us and to really listen and let everybody speak - we did that. I have to say that being on a jury was a very good experience - there were differing opinions, for sure, but it was interesting. As all 12 of us sat around this big rectangular table - I was on the right side of the table along with 6 other people. The 6 other jurors were on the left side - those were the quiet people whom I had to draw conversation out with, which was the hardest part of my job as the jury foreman - like, say, "Wait, you're nodding your head. What do you think? Do you agree with what this person was saying over here?" My people at my side of the table, including me, were very boisterous - we had no problem saying, "But what about this? Let's talk about this," getting up and writing things on the board to kind of map it out. So, one side of the table was boisterous, the other side was quiet. In terms of age and cultural makeup, it ranged from people in their - I want to say - mid-20s up to their 60s or, maybe, early 70s. There was a fair mix of Caucasian people, Hispanic people, and Asians. There were men, there were women. I didn't remember it ever being like, "Oh, wow. It's a bunch of 40-year-old females," or anything like that.

Scott

Well, that's the whole point of choosing people for the jury - to have a variety - right?

Jami

Yeah, absolutely. There was a decent variety, for sure. After we chose the jury foreman, we got right to work. Rob Arvizu, the defendant, was not only charged with some level of murder or voluntary manslaughter - it was up to us to decide - but also for the assault of his best friend, Eric, in the car on the night of the party. Fairly quickly, we decided to talk about the assault charges first - sort of, decide on those and get that out of the way so that we can move on to the

murder. We decided fairly quickly that, "Yes, he assaulted his friend in a very serious way." There was evidence of it. More than one witness testified about it. We had photos. So, we did decide that he was guilty of the 2 assault charges.

Scott

And the whole time, in the courtroom while this was all going on, before the jury deliberations, Rob was sitting there, right?

Jami

Yes.

Scott

Did you make eye contact with him? Or what was his demeanor during the trial?

Jami

We did, especially when we had the verdict - that was, sort of, the creepiest part for me because there was a point at which Rob made eye contact with every single juror, and it was just, "Oh, I don't want to look you in the eye." It was just very creepy. He had an interesting look about him. There were moments during the trial when there was laughter in the courtroom, believe it or not. The judge kind of had, like, a dynamic personality and he had said a couple of things, which I can't remember what, that made people, kind of, giggled a little bit in the courtroom - that's interesting as that is a murder trial - and Rob would laugh. There was one time when he swung back in his chair and, kind of, like, scanned the whole jury. Whenever he did that, I would be kind of, like, looking the other way. I was glaring at him a lot of times during the trial because, of course, I was trying to gauge his reactions to things and his reaction to the witness testimony. But when it came time to look him in the eyes, it was not something that I was interested in.

There were times during the witness testimony, his best friend, Mei Lin, who was the wife of Eric, who was at the house party - they had such a deep history together of being friends that Rob was actually the godfather to Mei Lin's children - she was called in by the prosecution to testify against Rob. So, although she knew what he did was horrible and did not agree with it and thought it was just atrocious, she was so deeply affected by, "Gosh, all these decades of being friends with somebody - you love this person - and here he is charged with murder and you've got to testify against him." So when she was walked into the courtroom to testify, she came in sobbing. She was already visibly shaking - like, just trembling. When her witness testimony was over, there was this tense and awkward moment, for sure, in the courtroom. When she was done with her testimony, she was excused from the witness stand. Then, every other witness would, kind of, like, get up and couldn't wait to get out of there fast enough. She sat there after she was excused by the judge and just glared at Rob. She was trembling and crying. We don't know what she was thinking. In my mind, I always thought she was thinking, like, "Why did you do this? You didn't have to do this. Why did it have to be this way?"

I've met people who actually said that Rob was a very charismatic and nice guy. Somebody I came across who knew him described him as a big teddy bear after the trial. So, I think Rob had different sides for sure. I think that he was charismatic. I think people really liked him, loved him, and thought that he was a big teddy bear. But then, they also saw very dark, ugly, and violent sides to him, especially to girlfriends - which we can talk about if you'd like. Then, we were like, "Okay, the assault charges - we're going to convict him of that. Let's talk about the murder." As I said earlier, we kind of decided right away that this was not voluntary manslaughter, there was malice involved, so we knew that it was at least second-degree murder. I think I told you earlier

that it took us the second day to get to first-degree murder - we got to second-degree murder on the first day. Some of us were ready to say, "This is actually first-degree murder."

At that point, you could see that not everybody was on the same page, and it was serious enough that we thought, "Let's sleep on it. Let's come back on Monday and we'll try to decide that." And that's exactly what we did. I think we came back on a Monday and, kind of, threw a bunch of things onto the board. As I recall it, I think most of the jury thought that this was first-degree murder. We explained it the same way I explained to you earlier, but there was one gentleman who just couldn't get to first-degree murder because he kept saying, "He just snapped. He accused her of cheating and he snapped. That made him so angry that he snapped." But to a lot of us, we said, "That's not normal or typical behavior. 1) There was no evidence that she was cheating. 2) It's not like he walked in on her having intercourse with another man right in front of his eyes. A lot of times, somebody would snap and kill their spouse because that's so shocking - that did not happen. He was accusing her of cheating at a party. I think that in any other typical relationship, if you believe that your spouse, girlfriend, or anybody is cheating, you're not going to go and beat them up and murder them - that's not typical behavior. So why are we going to give Rob, essentially, a pass for acting outside of typical human behavior and taking such an extreme measure because he was just so enraged by the thought of her even cheating?" So, that was our thought.

We said, "No, he didn't just snap, he didn't walk in, this is not what he called a crime of passion." It took a while - we all debated it for a while. Then, eventually, that juror realized and agreed that Rob didn't have to get on top of her and cut off her airway, he could have just left her there, she was no threat to him but he made that decision, he premeditated it - it was quick premeditation - he took that second act for 1-3 minutes and killed her. That's how we got to first degree. So, we sent a note to the judge from the deliberations room that we'd reached a verdict. Then, at some point, we all waited there for a while. Then, we were all ushered back into the courtroom, we took our normal seats in the jury box - I was back at number six. Then, the judge pulled the 3 verdicts - the 2 assault charges and the murder - out of the envelope and read it quietly to himself. Then, he put it back into the envelope, handed it to the court clerk, and she was actually the one who read the verdict aloud. I had no idea whether I was going to read the verdict as a jury foreman - I had seen that before. I was going to do it if that was part of my job - I would do it and get the job done - but I was very anxious and nervous to actually read it because all eyes would be on me and that would be a very heavy thing. I was very relieved to see that it was actually the court clerk who was going to read the verdict aloud. She read it and there was essentially no reaction from Rob.

Scott

What about his family? I assume he had some family members or friends with him. Did they have any kind of reaction? How did they behave?

Jami

He didn't really have any family there. For a couple of days, we saw a woman with big white-rimmed glasses and another woman sitting next to her who came for a couple of days - I think that may have been his mother, but I can't say for sure - but they were not there often. They were only there for, maybe, like, a couple of days. There was a gentleman who was there every single day. He sat at the back of the courtroom on Rob's side and we, the jury, never knew who this guy was. I had always thought that, maybe, he was part of the media - I didn't know who he was. After we deliberated and were excused from the trial, we found out from the prosecutor - who we found in the elevator on the way down, who happened to answer some of our

questions, which was nice of her - that was actually Rob's stepfather and that he was in the courtroom every single day.

What happened was Rob had two daughters with a woman from years ago, and that woman actually did testify at trial on Rob's behalf - he didn't have many people who testified on his behalf, but the mother of his children did testify for him. He had two daughters. I don't know if he and his baby's mother lost custody or gave up custody because both of them were on drugs and not living a lifestyle that was conducive or healthy for 2 children, so they did not have custody - the custody was given to Rob's stepfather at that time. So, that man who was in the courtroom had custody of Rob's children from a very young age. He moved them to Alaska and that's where he raised them until they became teenagers. I want to say that they're probably teenagers or, maybe, in their early 20s by now - they're probably teenagers by the time their father went on trial for murder. So, it was interesting that he had these 2 daughters, but he never really had custody of them from a young age - it was his stepfather. The stepfather was there every single day because he wanted to know for certain whether Rob was guilty of what he had been accused of so that he could accurately explain to his daughters, what their father had done or not done. Interestingly, that man made contact with me after the trial. He got my email address and he emailed me - it was a very tense moment, but he was actually very kind, open, and well-spoken in his email. He told me that the jury probably had come to the right conclusion, and that he didn't condone what his stepson had done at all. I think his words were, "Rob is probably where he should be."

Other than that, Rob did not have family or friends. Sitting on his side during court says a lot. I think that Rob had probably burned a lot of bridges in his life due to his substance abuse, his behavior, and whatever else that may have been going on. I think he burned a lot of bridges. Courtney did have family there and it was very, very difficult to see them. Her mother was there on a few occasions. After the autopsy or the crime scene photos were shown, she did not show up. According to the prosecutor, she had a mental breakdown and she was not able to bring herself to court for the sentencing. Where I was sitting on the juror box, I was the closest to the gallery. My seat was right on the edge of the left side of the jury box, so whoever was sitting in the gallery was right there next to me. When the autopsy and the crime scene photos were shown on the screen in the courtroom, just a few feet away from me were Courtney's mother and sisters. I don't remember any other moments when I started to cry because I always told myself, "You can't do that. It's not professional. It's not your tragedy. It's Courtney's family's tragedy to endure and you just can't do that." I did that quietly and nobody probably knew, but that was one moment where I became emotional because I'm a mother and I cannot imagine that being a moment that I would have to endure.

Scott

You can't avoid empathizing with another mother - not necessarily just a mother, but another person...

Jami

A human who lost somebody they love, let alone your own child. So, that was very, very heavy. So, we convicted him of first-degree murder. I was not able to go to the sentencing hearing. By the way, the jury had nothing to do with sentencing - we only decided on the verdict - the judge was going to handle the sentencing and we knew that from the get-go. The judge said, "This is not a death penalty case. You are not going to decide on sentencing. You're going to decide on the verdict only," which took some weight off of our shoulders. There was already enough to decide on a verdict, but I did follow up later and saw that the judge sentenced Rob to 28 years

to life in prison. I believe he got 25 years for the murder charge and 3 years for the 2 assault charges. I think that the judge made a comment and said something like, "I don't know if you're a monster, but you're certainly a bully. You've used your size and your whatever to inflict great harm on somebody." Rob never issued any kind of apology. His statement said something like, "There's been a lot of lying during the trial and calling out of other witnesses who testified against him." He also claimed, "Someday, I might be able to tell you what happened but, at this point, I don't remember." So again, he claimed that he was probably drunk and didn't remember killing her, which I think is not true. The only thing he said at the end was, "I apologize for all that's going on here." He didn't say, "I apologize to Courtney's family. They've lost someone." - nothing like that. I think his apology was more general, almost like, "I apologize for all the lying that's gone on here." Who knows what he meant by that? It was just a very general apology, but nothing was directed toward the victim's family.

Scott

So, if his stepfather was able to contact you, have you ever thought about what if Rob gets out of prison someday and contacts you?

Jami

Yeah, I have absolutely thought about that. In fact, about two years ago, I got a random call that basically said, like, an inmate was trying to contact me from prison. I do know that there are scams that go around and do that. If you want to accept the call, you have to give a credit card. So, I don't think it was Rob, but it shook me and, sort of, like, triggered something in me to go, "Oh, my God. Is he trying to contact me?" I don't believe that. I think that's probably some sort of scam. I don't have any family or friends who are in prison, so I don't think anybody was trying to contact me. I think it was probably a scam, but it was scary. I will tell you something very, very strange that I still can't wrap my head around to this day. My husband and I own a landscape construction company and we operate our business out of, like, an office warehouse in the LA area. One day, I went out to go get the mail at our office as I do every day, I saw this magazine in there which said something about tattoos and, instantly, I thought of Rob Arvizu - I don't know why. This was, like, a couple of years after I sat on the trial. They talked so much about Rob being into tattoos. He was tatted from head to toe. Like, he had tattoos on his hands, he had tattoos, I think, on the back of his head - his head was shaved bald. He had a very interesting look. I just associated tattoos with Rob. So, I went to get the mail, saw this magazine, saw the edge of it, and it said something about tattoos. Then, I was like, "Oh, I had a flash thought about Rob Arvizu." I pulled the magazine out and it was addressed to "Arvizu Ink." I know for a fact that Rob was a tattoo artist and he would give people tattoos at his apartment. I believe he actually worked professionally at it and, maybe, had his own business doing tattoos. That's not a common last name that you run across all the time. So, it said "Arvizu Ink." He was a tattoo artist. His last name is Arvizu. I was like, "This is his business. Why am I getting Rob Arvizu's mail at my business?"

Scott

Did it have that name but your address?

Jami

Yes.

Scott

That's weird. Yeah.

Jami

I was baffled. My face turned white. I went in and told my husband. We were both trying to figure it out. I guess - if I did a little more research, I could confirm - I'm almost positive that Rob had a business called "Arvizu Ink," but I could be wrong. Maybe, this is a totally different Arvizu who had a tattoo company. It was a tattoo magazine - I opened it up and it's all about tattoos. So, I was just completely baffled. So, what I did first was I contacted the previous owner of the building that we now own and asked him, "I have a random question for you. You can answer it or not, but did anybody named Robert Arvizu ever work for you before?" He immediately said, "No." So I thought, "Okay. It would make sense if Rob worked in the building that we now own first and, maybe, that person got his mail sometimes." So to be honest with you, I have no idea why I got that magazine. I can't confirm that it's actually for Rob Arvizu, but it said Arvizu Ink. To this day, it's just a weird, random, and spooky thing.

Scott

You have a true crime podcast yourself... Did this experience, kind of, prompt you to start doing that? I know you were already into true crime before, but did this, kind of, spurred that along?

Jami

It definitely did. In fact, that's how Rob's stepdad got a hold of me - I sort of told this story in the first episode of my podcast called Murderish. I had already been mulling over the idea of starting a podcast before the murder trial came, but I didn't know what kind. I knew it would probably be true crime because that's what I've always been into. And I was an avid podcast listener. I had already been doing research to start a podcast, but had not taken any real steps to launch it. Then, I sat on this jury and thought, "This would be an interesting story to tell." It's really what kicked me into high gear of launching Murderish. So yeah, the answer is, "Absolutely. This made me want to start a true crime podcast." I always knew that this would be probably my first episode and somebody around town must have told Rob's friends and family about the podcast. So, his stepfather had listened to the podcast about me telling the story, kind of, from A-to-Z from a juror's perspective. There was one thing that he said, "I do think that you told the story accurately based on what went down in the courtroom." I thought that was nice because I truly wanted to not do any sensationalizing and just really tell a true factual story of this case. So, yeah, I had already planned to start a podcast, but I was like, "I'm gonna do it now," and I never looked back. It's been 4.5 years.

Scott

How many episodes do you have right now?

Jami

I just surpassed 100. I think I'm currently writing episode 104. It's been a ride.

Scott

It's got to be - when you're doing a true crime podcast. I ran into this sometimes on some of the stories I cover on my show. It's a real balance to tell the story - to have the person tell the story in my case - but not cross the line to shock and exploit what happened just for the shock of it. Do you ever find yourself, kind of, walking that line?

Jami

Absolutely. I've covered some cases where the child was a victim, and those are always the toughest. Sometimes, I went through spurts where I say, "I just really can't do any child cases right now. It's just so dark. I'm a mom. Even if you're not a parent, it's just so hard when a

helpless human being is murdered in such a tragic way and to add another layer when there's sexual assault involved, especially with a minor." That is where I try to be very, very careful to not regurgitate detail-by-detail because I don't think it's necessary. You can say that it happened without getting into detail because you never know who might be listening. So, yeah, you do walk that fine line, for sure. I do like to tell a full-bodied 3D story so that people have all the important facts, but I always try to be careful to not cross that boundary - that goes with any victim. There were some times when there are details that I gave on the show that make me cringe - somebody died, their murder was just horrific - but there's a way in which I think you can say it, tell it, highlight the victim, and make people see them as who they were - an actual human being. I think, it's so easy to disassociate yourself and just listen to their story as a murder victim - all the gory details of how they died and all of that. So, make sure that you can tell the details of who that person was and make them a real person in the listeners' minds.

Scott

Yeah. Well, for me - I'm sure I speak for my listeners as well - if there's any one little glimmer of light in this story, it's that the dog survived.

Jami

Yes, the dog did survive. That is probably the number one question I get asked after people listen to the episode I did on the case - What happened to the dog? I want to say that the dog went to live with Courtney's Mom, I think - I can't be certain. So, all these details were coming to me. Also, after this trial, one of Courtney's sisters reached out to me - her little sister. Interestingly, she was never in the courtroom because I believe her father would not allow her because it was just too heavy. I think she was, like, 9 years old at that time, and I understand that. She was extremely sweet. I think she did allow me to ask a few follow-up questions, but I want to say the dog ended up with one of Courtney's family members, if not her mom. So, the dog was okay. Again, it goes back to a helpless being - being a victim in any way - and that includes pets, children, and things like that.

Scott

Well, how can people find your podcast? I know it's called Murderish. Where are you on the web? Where can people find you?

Jami

Yeah, they can find Murderish on my website - murderish.com. I'm also really big on Instagram - I love doing fun Q&A's there. I've started to do a lot of - not a lot - Instagram lives. You can find me on Instagram - @murderishpodcast. I also have a really fun murderish Facebook discussion group. I have a Facebook page, which is fine, but I'm really active in the discussion group. I guess if you just search for "Murderish podcast discussion group", you'll find it. It's got just under 3,000 members and it's not, like, so dramatic. I've been in some other groups and they're super-dramatic - there's a lot of drama and a lot of fighting. We really don't have that in my group, which I'm really lucky. We have a lot of fun. We talk about murder cases and just share different memes and things like that.

Scott

All right. Well, that's where people can go to get involved with Murderish. Jami, thanks for sharing the stories. Super interesting. I've always wanted to be on a jury myself, but I've never gotten the notice. I don't know if it's because I'm not registered as one of the two main parties or because I have family in law enforcement - either way, I probably would be disqualified. So, I think that kind of rules me out a little bit, but it's really interesting to hear how it all works.

Jami

Thank you. I'm so happy to be on your podcast. I love your podcast. By the way. It's such an interesting format. There are so many crazy stories that have been told on your show that almost don't seem real.

Scott

Rob Arvizu is currently incarcerated at the High Desert State Prison in northern California. I contacted him directly, to see if he had any comments of his own for this episode. He did receive my message, but he chose not to reply.

And while you were listening to Jami tell this story, you might have been thinking, "Hmm, that voice sounds familiar" – and that's because you hear her voice each time you listen to THIS podcast –

Jami

There is a man standing in front of me in my bedroom.

Scott

Yep, that's Jami. She was a guest on this podcast a couple of years ago, and she told the story of the time a strange man followed her home one night, and actually got inside her house. Pretty creepy. That episode is called "Jami found a stranger in her bedroom". So this is the first time I've actually had a guest on the show TWICE.

And you already know Jami is the host of the true crime podcast Murderish – but what you may not know is that she is about to launch a SECOND podcast. It's called Dirty Money Moves. It's about incredible crimes committed by women. I'll have more details and a link to that in the show notes for this episode, at WhatWasThatLike.com/104.

You know, hearing Jami talk about this case and her experience being on the jury made me think of the movie called 12 Angry Men. The original one is a true classic, made in 1957 and starred Henry Fonda – you can currently watch that one on YouTube. Then it was remade with Jack Lemmon in 1997, and that's on Amazon Prime. They're both really good.

And speaking of YouTube, I wanted to let you know I'm gonna be expanding what I do on the podcast YouTube channel. At the moment, every What Was That Like episode gets posted on YouTube. So you can listen to it there if you want. But I'll be adding more videos there in the near future, on a pretty regular basis. I'm still working on putting that together and I'll be talking about it more pretty soon, but if you want to see what's happening, check out the YouTube channel and subscribe at WhatWasThatLike.com/YouTube.

And that brings us to this week's Listener Story, about a scary situation involving some crazy weather.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

(Listener Story)

My story happened on August 19, 2009. I was living in Minneapolis. On that day, I was driving home from a friend's house in a rainstorm that very quickly turned into a severe thunderstorm with high winds and very bad visibility. I was driving southbound on 35W. All of the sudden, I saw this gigantic tree sailing sideways hundreds of feet through the air along with all of this other debris. I realized that, "This is very dangerous. I need to get off the highway. I need to get pulled over." So, I found an exit and pulled into the off-ramp. As I was pulling off, another tree branch had slammed into my windshield and cracked the full width of the windshield. So, I slammed on my brakes. I was still at the exit and not on the other road that I was trying to merge on. It's not the best place to stop, but I didn't really know what else to do. Then, maybe, just a second later, I felt my car begin to lift up off the ground - just lurching upward like in a vacuum. For the next second, that just stood still for an eternity. I was terrified... There were no more thoughts, no more words - just the feeling that I'm about to die. Suddenly, it was over as quickly as it had come. My car was on the ground. There were debris and tree branches everywhere. All of the windows in all the shops around me had been shattered. I was just screaming my head off, "What the fuck!" I was screaming to myself as I continued to drive home. Then, as I got home, the tornado sirens started, and I hadn't really put everything together yet. I thought, "Oh, well. The storm was already so crazy. There must be something worse coming." So, I took shelter in my bathroom for hours and just watched the news. Then, I finally figured out that the tornado had already passed. When I saw the path of where the storm had gone, I realized, "Oh, it went right through where I had been driving - that moment that I felt the car had been lifted up."