

Little Runaway – Jenna Smythe

Marie: Jessica Michelle Thrush was an only child - and a bit of a troubled child. She lived in Lakewood, New Jersey with her mother, Lori Thrush, and she hated it. She and her mother were fighting a lot. Yes, most of those fights were over her bad grades and bad friends, but 13-year-old Jessica was tired of her life. When one of her friends was murdered, she'd had it. She knew her dad lived in Canon City, Colorado and she began dreaming of living the good life with him. Canon City had to be better than this hole, right?

(musical interlude)

Sherry: Welcome to the Parricide Podcast! I'm Sherry...

Marie: ...and I'm Marie...

Sherry: ...and today we're covering the murder of Sharon Smythe by her daughter, Jenna Smythe. Jenna had two friends who participated in this murder.

Marie: A quick heads up, this episode contains instances of murder, betrayal, human trafficking, runaways, prostitution, and drug use - so listener discretion is advised. If you like the Parricide Podcast, please follow us on your preferred podcast platform so we can notify you of each episode as it is produced.

(musical introduction) Ring around the rosies; A pocket full of posies; Ashes, ashes; we all fall down.

Sherry: Jessica's mom, Lori, didn't like this idea at all. She wanted her daughter at home with her; safe and sound. Well, reasonably safe and sound because Lakewood wasn't the safest - nor the best - neighborhood in New Jersey. After a year of fighting about it, Lori finally relented and on September 1, 1993 - 29 days before her 15th birthday - fourteen-year-old Jessica moved from her mother's home to live with her father in Aurora, Colorado. She was very excited and as part of her fresh start she decided to go by her nickname Zoie - close to the name of Zodie that her mother had given her because she loved reading her horoscope.

Marie: That's a cute nickname.

Sherry: Yeah - kind of like zodiac. Zoie arrived in Canon City full of hopes and dreams. She knew her future would be filled with friends, laughter, success, and a loving father. But she was wrong. According to the Ashbury Park Press, her father's apartment was small and only had one bedroom. It's not clear if he knew Zoie was coming to live with him, but if he'd known he hadn't done one thing to prepare for this new life with his daughter. Living in cramped quarters would be hard on any relationship, but this situation was even worse because Zoie didn't know her dad very well - and he didn't know her. Zoie didn't even have a bed to sleep in and, remember, she already wasn't an easy kid. Apparently, her dad lacked parenting skills because Zoie said he quickly started fighting with her and - at some points - she claimed he hit her. Disenchanted, Zoie decided she would be better off without him. Zoie turned 15 on September 30th and it was not to be a happy year for her. Soon after her birthday, she ran away. But her dad reported her missing and she was picked up and returned to him.

Marie: Well, at least he cared enough to call her in.

Sherry: I think he was trying really hard to be a good dad to her. Sometimes it's hard for the parent who receives the child in their teens to, kind of, get up to speed and understand what's going on with their child.

Marie: Yeah. And they they don't know the child very well, like you said. And they actually - they don't know how to parent very well, because they haven't been a full-time parent.

Sherry: Right. It's not that they're bad parents, it's that they're inexperienced. And an experienced parent would be having a run for their money with this kid.

Anyway, it made her really mad that she was picked up and returned. She told her dad she wouldn't be staying; that he could not make her stay. She told him the next time she ran away she would just keep on running and never look back. He told her that that was fine with him; that if she ran again, he wasn't going to report her missing. She could just go. And she did exactly that. She ran. And he did exactly what he promised to do. He didn't tell anyone. And that's how this now 15-year-old girl found herself alone and living on the streets in Denver.

Marie: Okay. So, she was already in kind of bad shape in New Jersey, but in Colorado she went from a little trouble to completely homeless in just one year.

Sherry: Less than one year. Remember, she turned 15 thirty days after she moved.

Marie: Oh. Okay. So, it was almost immediately. That's too bad.

Sherry: Yeah. Well, Zoie told her mother she was couch surfing with friends. But she hadn't really been in Colorado long enough to establish friendships. This was, maybe, October and she'd only arrived in September.

Marie: Oh okay. So, more like a month after she arrived, right?

Sherry: Right. But her mom seemed to believe her and think she was fine. Her mom insists her daughter, Jessica, had not run away. But she never explains why she simply allowed her daughter to go live on the streets instead of having her come home to live with her after her dad and she didn't work out. So, it seems as though she was a runaway. One who called her mom occasionally, but her mother would have been powerless to bring her home at that point. Also, Zoie didn't tell her mother about her dad hitting her. She just said they'd been arguing and that living with him was not that great, so she decided to go it alone with the help of her friends. So, it's not really clear if her dad had really hit her or if she told her friends that to justify what she had done.

Marie: Oh. Okay. Well, but she might have also not told her mom because she didn't want mom to be mad at dad. It can get really complicated when there's abuse involved.

Sherry: Right. Zoie, predictably, dropped out of school. When she was living with her mom, she had gotten into trouble and ended up in an alternative school and it took her six months to get up to speed and return to regular school. She was very bright and very capable - but not very motivated.

Marie: Umhmm. And not very stable, it sounds like.

Sherry: Um, I think when she was with her mom, she was stable. And this was when she was with her mom that she wasn't doing well and went to the alternative school - and now that she's completely unstable she completely drops out.

Marie: Okay, that's really sad. But kind of the way it usually goes if you're a runaway.

Sherry: Right. Right. When you're homeless it's hard to keep on your studies, and show up to school, and find a place to live - or sleep at least. So, she just dropped out.

In December, she called her mom and told her she would be living with a woman named Beverly Lowe. But it isn't clear from the records that we have that Beverly even exists. Her mom thought that was better than the alleged couch surfing, so she felt that was an improvement - and she says she had never heard that Zoie had moved in with Sharon Smythe. Now, you just said that possibly she didn't tell her mom that her dad had hit her? It's true that she lied to her mom a lot, so that makes that even a bigger possibility.

Marie: Yeah, and this one also sounds like she's lying to her mom to try and make her feel better.

Sherry: Yes. So, after a rough winter of homelessness and hunger in the streets of Colorado, Zoie had the misfortune of running into 18-year-old Jenna Smythe; an older girl who immediately befriended her. This was in March or April. Jenna was serious, erratic, and fun! Plus, she could give Zoie something she lacked - the security that came with money. Jenna was running drugs for Eric Jones - and prostituting for him, too. And both of these activities can provide a desperate girl with a little bit of money. Jenna was allegedly instrumental in getting Zoie started in both drug running and sex trafficking with Eric. It gives a girl status, as well as responsibility, when she brings new talent to her pimp and Jenna appeared to be taking this new responsibility seriously.

(musical interlude.)

Sherry: Jenna had parents, too. Richard - who went by Dick - and Sharon Smythe. But she really didn't care about that. She was 18 years old and busy with a life of her own. She'd gotten involved in both drug running and prostitution because of her boyfriend, Eric Jones. Her mother was very unhappy about that and, by all reports, this lady was a Mama Bear. She was determined to get her daughter out of trafficking of all varieties - so she left her family (she had three other children; two of them were adults and one was still a child) at home with their father. She rented an apartment near where Jenna was conducting her life, and she tried to provide a stable place for Jenna to live - in this apartment in this dangerous area for this daughter.

Marie: She's a very brave woman.

Sherry: Yes. She was determined to love her and give her stability and bring her out of this life that she had built for herself - because her mother was convinced this was not a good life for her. But Jenna wasn't cooperating. She was fine with her life. And her mother just needed to let her be.

Sharon Smythe loved her daughter dearly. She wasn't sure what had gone wrong with her upbringing. Her other three children had turned out beautifully. They seemed to be very good people, but something most definitely had gone wrong with Jenna. She hated that Jenna was working as a prostitute and a drug runner. She did not like or trust Eric Jones. Jenna's mother was working hard to get her out of that line of work and back home. She'd even taken an apartment in town to stay near to the action in

which her daughter was involved. When Jenna brought Zoie home, Sharon saw a vibrant, young, sincere girl who was completely down on her luck. Zoie quickly stole a piece of Sharon's heart and - just like that - Sharon expanded her mission to include both girls.

Both of these girls were going to be saved from trafficking. Back then people didn't recognize sex trafficking as such. Girls - who were pulled into prostitution by boyfriends or by predators who lurked around bus stops looking for vulnerable and downtrodden children - were looked down upon. People didn't understand why these children chose to become prostitutes. They didn't understand the nature of sex trafficking like they do now. But Sharon understood, and she was up for fighting it.

Marie: Good for her! That's very brave and very scary.

Sherry: I think so, too! I think she was very unusual. Especially since she had other children at home who needed her love and attention. And she was determined to make sure Jenna was okay. Sharon started her saving of Zoie by allowing her to move in with her. Then she loved, her fed her, and started talking to her about home and her future. Zoie had just turned 15 years old back in September - on the 30th - and this past year had been dangerous and exhausting. She missed home, she missed her mom, and she really missed being a kid. She just didn't know how to take everything back. Who she was now was a very different girl from the one who had packed her bags and headed to Colorado. Sharon knew exactly what to do.

She talked to Zoie about hope and forgiveness. She encouraged her to start talking to her mom about coming home. Zoie was surprised that her mother still wanted her to come home. As they chatted, Zoie suggested she might come home for the summer. She wanted her mom to rent a beach house where they could relax for (at least) the summer, reconnect, and work through some of their problems. When Zoie realized it was going to take money to get home, Sharon was again there for her. She purchased a bus ticket for Zoie that would take her right home to her mother. Sharon was a natural when it came to nurturing. She knew exactly what to do to help Zoie and her mom reunite. What she didn't understand was her own daughter's role in the trafficking of Zoie - or really how the world of gangs, drug running, and sex trafficking worked.

(musical interlude)

Zoe's mother, Lori Thrush, had never given up on her daughter. She'd always encouraged her Jessica to keep in touch with her by phone and she was beyond thrilled to think she might be coming home for good. Jessica had agreed to try to make it home by Mother's Day! Excited and relieved, Lori (who was living in a motel) had rented a beach house in Asbury park for the summer to facilitate their peaceful reunion. This was exactly what Jessica had asked her to do and, although it was a sacrifice, Lori was happy to do it.

Marie: I had no idea that her mom was in such dire financial straits. It must have been really hard to rent a beach house for a whole summer.

Sherry: I think so. But I think everyone wanted Zoie to be okay, and I think Zoie wanted to be okay.

Marie: Yeah. It sounds like she'd experienced what happens as a runaway and she was done with it. She was ready to go home.

Sherry: Right, and Jessica kept lying to her mother, so Lori felt she had a good handle on what her daughter was up to. But she really didn't know much about her life or what she was doing in order to survive. In fact, the last time she spoke with Jessica - on April 21st - she'd asked Jessica who she was hanging out with - because she heard voices in the background of the pay phone that Jessica was using. And Jessica told her, "It's my friend, Jenna."

Jessica then told her Jenna was 17 (well, she was really 18) and this didn't make Lori happy. This was the first time she'd heard of Jenna and she knew that older kids (and older adults) usually meant trouble for the younger street kids they befriended.

Marie: That's true.

Sherry: Yeah, but Lori was hoping Jessica's return would be a permanent move. She didn't know it, but Sharon had already purchased that bus ticket for Zoie, and the girl had her bags packed and she was looking forward to being reunited with her mother. She also didn't know about Eric - or understand that her daughter was now owned by a violent and controlling pimp.

Marie: The sad thing is Zoie probably also didn't understand. Usually, these young girls don't understand until they disobey.

Sherry: You're absolutely right. These girls look for belonging, they look for a place to sleep, they look for food, and - as you can see - once someone who really cared about what happened to Zoie helped her out, she was ready to go home.

But this is not what pimps want. They want to create an asset and keep that asset. So, on April 27th Jenna realized that her mother was planning to put Zoie on a bus so she could reunite with her mother - and Jenna knew this was bad for her. Eric was already grooming Zoie for bigger things and Jenna had brought her to him. Jenna had been instrumental in engaging Zoie in trafficking activities, and she knew that this pimp of hers would not be pleased to learn that she lost this young protégé.

Jenna suspected she would pay dearly for this, and she tried to tell her mother that. She and her mother fought about Zoie returning home to New Jersey. After a confrontation wherein Jenna screamed, shouted, and broke things around the apartment she stormed out of the house and went to meet up with Eric to share the bad news. Eric decided what needed to be done. Engaging the cooperation of one of his other prostitutes, Shauntiel Goree. Everyone headed over to Sharon's house to let her know who was really in charge. And Sharon wasn't ready for them.

The three stormed the door of Sharon's apartment and quickly subdued her. Eric Jones held her mother down - and Jenna watched as Shauntiel Goree stabbed her to death. Zoie, who had already gone to bed for the evening in preparation for the long bus ride home tomorrow, heard the ruckus and tried to save Sharon. But she was thrown to the couch and bound by Jenna. Shauntiel finished stabbing Sharon, and Eric taped her mouth and nose to ensure she would not be revived. Jenna had been instrumental in getting Zoie under control on the couch. Now that her mother was dead, Jenna turned her attention to Zoie. She stabbed her as she laid bound and gagged. Eric then came over and slit her throat, and then taped her mouth and nose with duct tape to ensure she would not be revived.

Jenna alleged Shauntiel and Eric were the ones who decided that Zoie had to die. Their work finished, the three ransacked Sharon's apartment, loaded into her car, and left. About 2½ half miles down the

road, they tossed the murder weapon - a knife from Sharon's kitchen - out the window. And that was that.

Marie: Why did they throw it out the window so close to the house?

Sherry: I think they thought it was far enough away.

Marie: Okay.

Sherry: Remember, these people are pretty young.

Marie: Yeah. They are pretty young, and I just think it was a really brutal murder. It sounds like.

Sherry: Extremely brutal. It breaks my heart to think of the lives of those people and the terror they must have felt.

Marie: And I don't understand why you would murder the people who are disobeying you. Like, if the goal is to keep Zoie as an asset. Why did they murder her, too?

Sherry: I think that Eric realized that Zoie was going.

Marie: And she wasn't going to cooperate - even if they killed the mom.

Sherry: Right. So, he had lost his asset and I think he decided that he would make a lesson of her. Everyone on the streets would know exactly what happened to Zoie.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: Sharon and Zoie's bodies were found the next day and the police immediately began a search for Jenna. They found her at a friend's house in Pueblo, playing video games. Jenna told the investigators she had been kidnapped by her friends who had stormed her mother's home and murdered her - like home invasion style. At first Jenna told police she was forced to watch as her pimp murdered her mother and then her best friend. She described how she escaped her mother's home and fled - barefoot and in terror - after the brutal murders. Then she claimed Eric and Shauntiel had actually kidnapped her, and that she'd been lucky enough to escape. But she couldn't explain how she'd come to be hanging out at a friend's house playing video games after the murders. Or why the police hadn't been called after her escape. But the investigators took her at her word for the time being and charged Eric and Shauntiel with the kidnapping of Jenna and the murders. But as Jenna's story changed - and often defied logic - it became clear that she had an active role in these murders.

Marie: Yeah, that wasn't a very good story. If you witness the murder of your mother, and you really don't want to be there, you're not going to go play video games.

Sherry: No, not at all.

Marie: If you're scared at all.

Sherry: Not at all.

Marie: So, there are two important subtexts here. One is that of runaways, and the other is sex trafficking. The problem of runaway youth is a national one. Every year 1 - 1.3 million youths run away

from home. Most of these kids run away from parents who care for them, right into the arms of predators who have plans to sex traffic them - or force them into drug running.

Running away from home - even a bad home - is almost never in your best self-interest. If you are in an abusive home, please talk to a trusted relative, clergy member, or a teacher at school. They can often help you find different living arrangements that are better than being on the street. If you are mad at your parents, tired of living by their rules, feeling you have to hide something like drug use, or have a friend who is encouraging you to run away - know that running away is not in your best self-interest. Yes, it is annoying that your parents are in control, but running away leaves you subject to a different and less gracious form of control - your need for food and shelter. And predators are out there right now looking for runaways to traffic - and they're very good at this. It's how they make their living. They will go to great lengths (including murder) to keep you under their control. As we've described in this episode.

We want to make people who have already run away aware of a really good resource called the National Runaway Safe Line and you can call them at 1-(800) RUN - AWAY. They're available via phone, text, or email. And, of course, your question is what will they do for me? It depends on what you want to happen. If you want to go home, they will work with you and your family to facilitate that. Before you head home, they can provide mediated phone calls with your family if needed. They can secure you a Greyhound ticket to get back home, or to a safe alternative living situation, at no cost to you. If you need food and a safe place to stay - because you want to remain a runaway - they will help you locate local runaway shelters and other safe living conditions that can serve to keep you out of harm's way. If you just want to let your family know that you're okay, they will establish free communication that will provide your family a great deal of relief without giving away your location.

Now, if you're already trapped in a bad situation - and you're at the mercy of a predator - they can also help you escape that situation. So, please give them a call. They won't judge you. Your information will be kept confidential, and no one will pressure you for information you don't want to share. So, again, that number is 1-(800) RUN - AWAY or 1 (800) 786-2929.

Sherry: We should probably talk about human trafficking, too. Because that is such a huge issue and something that played a very important role in this story.

Marie: You're right. Human trafficking is a little bit more difficult to cover, because there's a couple different definitions - and it's a lot broader than most people think. When I think of human trafficking, I think of, um, like that movie, Taken. Where they kidnap a girl and they're selling her, um, and it's this very clear problem where the girl is being used like a consumable good.

Sherry: That show is so scary.

Marie: It's way too scary! But that's what I think most people think of. But it doesn't always even involve the sale of a person, or the sale for sex. The trafficking of humans tends to be confined into one unified concept - but it's a lot more complex. According to the United Nation's Office on Drugs and Crime, 79% of human trafficking in the world can be categorized as sex trafficking. So, that's only about 80%. But the second most prevalent form of trafficking is forced labor - at 18%. So, sometimes that's like farm workers who are being worked without pay in pretty bad conditions.

Sherry: Oh! Or the child soldiers in Africa?

Marie: That's right. It's forced labor.

Sherry: Okay.

Marie: And then, of course, you've heard about Jeffrey Epstein - who trafficked myriad children for sex with the participation and cooperation of - it's unclear exactly who, but we know for sure many societal leaders.

Sherry: That is so gross and so horrible. I hope all of those people are ashamed of themselves.

Marie: They probably aren't. They did this for many years. But it is; it's very depressing. But that was all about sex trafficking. But the trade wasn't always for money. Sometimes it was for social and political capital.

Sherry: That's true.

Marie: So today we talked about young girls being used to run drugs - which is a kind of forced labor. The girl carries the drugs to a customer, collects the money for the drugs - then her life depends on returning to the dealer with the money in hand. It doesn't matter if she's robbed, she's got to get that money back. And this is, of course, another kind of forced labor. But we also talked about minors who are prostituting - which is a form of sex trafficking. Even if she consents to being trafficked, it's not prostitution and sex trafficking - because she is underage.

Sherry: Oh. So, it's kind of like Statutory Rape laws?

Marie: It is. You can't be a prostitute if you're underage - you're always a victim of trafficking.

As we look at all these different examples, it becomes clear that trafficking - at its heart - is not about the transaction; it's about exploitation.

Sherry: Ah. Okay. So...so, like Jaycee Dugard was sex trafficked even though she wasn't being sold or prostituted.

Marie: Yes. She was being exploited. She was a child. He wasn't selling her for profit, but she was being held against her will and coerced into being his sexual and emotional partner - which is the same thing with Elizabeth Smart. She was also kidnapped and used both sexually and emotionally by both of her captors.

Sherry: Which was terrible for her.

Marie: Yes, it was. And I say 'both of her captors' because, if you remember, that was a situation where the man decided she was going to be his second wife - and his first wife was probably equally culpable in her kidnapping and abuse. So, it can get really complicated trying to define sex trafficking and determine exactly what is human trafficking. And it's really kind of dangerous to narrow the focus on sex trafficking to only the transactional portion of trafficking, because a lot of these women's heartbreaking and horrendous stories fall in between the cracks.

Another kind of sex trafficking that's really uncomfortable is parents who are in really bad situations who will trade sex with their own child for food or shelter. So, if you're about to be evicted and your landlord is attracted to your minor and says, 'Well, if you let me sleep with the minor, you guys can not be evicted.' That's also sex trafficking.

Sherry: That would be a horrible situation to be in.

Marie: It is really horrible. And it's very coercive, because you're choosing between your child being homeless or your child being sexually abused.

Sherry: Right. Or your child being sexually abused or your child being alive in some cases.

Marie: Yeah. And it's just...it's the kind of thing that we think doesn't happen here, but it happens in America every day.

(interlude music)

Marie: As you mentioned before, when it comes to sex trafficking the rules that govern Statutory Rape um run parallel to minors in sex trafficking.

Sherry: That makes sense.

Marie: Umhmm. So, a minor child who has run away from home who meets a 19-year-old boy – just, you know at a diner or a bar - who takes her back to his apartment and trades sex for a dry roof over her head; that's sex trafficking. Even if they like each other and believe she's engaged in consensual sex - that's trafficking - because she's being raped statutorily, under the law.

Sherry: Oh. But if it's keeping her safe, and she's trading sex for a roof over her head, isn't that just her choice?

Marie: Well, it's not her choice. Because she's a minor. Minors don't have the ability or the right to consent to sex with adults. We strip to them of that ability using statutes to protect them - and that law stands for a 16-year-old girl who has sex with her adult boyfriend, as well as a 16-year-old prostitute. Both, according to statute are being raped. So that's why we call it Statutory Rape.

Sherry: True.

Marie: But only the prostitute is being sex trafficked - despite the fact that both of these (oh) despite the fact that most of these children will be picked up in a prostitution raid and run through the system as though they were adults.

Sherry: So, a 16-year-old who is picked up is not taken to foster care or taken care of?

Marie: Most of the time, she's not. She should be, but they're usually just treated like prostitutes and charged with prostitution.

Sherry: That's terrible.

Marie: It is because they are very vulnerable, and they didn't get there because they were in a good situation.

Sherry: I guess that's why it's important to identify it as sex trafficking. In reality, if you look through a different lens - that of sex trafficking - you realize how much exploitation and how much coercion is built into that system.

Marie: It's a lot harder to say, 'Oh yes, that 16-year-old should go to jail.' Even if you call her a prostitute.

Sherry: Right. She's a victim.

Marie: She is.

When it comes to runaways, they are often short on resources and find themselves caught up in sex trafficking or forced labor because they have no resources and no options. This is where organizations such as Runaway Hotline - like we talked about - spring from. Not everyone agrees with everything they do there, because most parents want to see a child from a good - or even just okay - home returned home. In reality, that child may not return or, if returned, the child may just run away again. So, as a public, we have to decide whether it's better to leave them to the nefarious hands of human traffickers or if we should provide them options other than returning home. Both decisions have some pros and cons. Most runaways don't have good adulthoods - even if they're not trafficked. Returning a child to a good home allows the child access to the Social, Educational, and Economic Capital that could help them be adults with choices and opportunities - but only if the child will stay once returned home.

Sherry: That's very true - and very tragic.

Marie: Yeah. It's hard. Because if they won't stay at home there's no point in returning them home over and over. And then the more difficult decision lies in what to do with the runaway from a bad home. Sometimes terrible or completely unprepared people become parents, and returning the child simply guarantees they will not survive their upbringing. Which is a really unfortunate reality. We all wish that wasn't true, but sometimes that's the case. And it's even harder because there's no place to return them to. In this case, based on the information available, Zoie had a home to return to but was choosing not to return home to her mother for a while - for whatever reason.

In this case, Jenna was grooming her for human trafficking of all forms - but she was doing it for Eric. And this is one of the ways we see how the victim often becomes a perpetrator. Jenna had gotten into human trafficking in one of the most classic ways. She had this boyfriend. She liked the boyfriend; he turns into her pimp, and all of a sudden she's part of an organization.

Sherry: That's true. That is very common - and something that girls don't see coming.

Marie: And I think probably why so many parents don't want their daughters dating older men or boys they don't know.

Sherry: Or shady men.

Marie: Yeah. Because this is one of the most common routes into sex trafficking.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: So, in the end, both Zoie and Sharon were murdered in the name of human trafficking. Sharon, because she was interfering with an asset that both Jenna and Eric thought of as theirs - Zoie's life.

According to Sex Trafficking in America (published by the Guardian Group) one out of every seven runaways will be coerced, charmed or forced into sex trafficking before they become adults. And that's a lot of kids when you consider that over 1 million kids run away from home each year. And these data don't even start to cover the Throwaway Children - children who are kicked out of their home without their parents making arrangements for their care and shelter.

Sherry: I don't understand what parent does that.

Marie: It's awful. And it almost guarantees that that child is going to struggle or fall into the hands of unsavory people.

Sherry: Very true.

Marie: But they're a lot harder to track because no one's reported them missing. There are no great answers here, but hopefully one day we - as a society - will figure out how to get this right. For now, there just aren't great answers. Kids are lured into to sex trafficking at every point of vulnerability. And some kids are even groomed for it as they play on their computer; while their parent is, you know, in the next room making dinner or even sitting next to them watching TV.

Sherry: Which is a very good argument for keeping track of what's going on with your kid electronically - by phone, by computer, by games.

Marie: Yeah. The games are really hard, because a lot of them have in-game chats and then one of their friends who they've known for a year says, "Oh, add me on Facebook." And that friend turns out to be a pedophile.

Sherry: Right.

Marie: A lot of times sex trafficking online, in person, however they meet the trafficker - there's usually this pattern. The victim gets engaged in a relationship with the trafficker - whether that's for romance, friendship, drugs, acceptance into a group, or some combination thereof. Then the trafficker switches tactics in order to maintain control - and that's when they see the dark side of their trafficker (that first time they disobey). The trafficker's tactics may include psychological trauma, shame, emotional attachment, or physical threats to themselves or to their family to keep her in line. It is usually her, but it can happen to boys, too.

Sherry: Oh, yeah. I was reading the statistics, and it is saying that fully 75% of all of these victims are female. And when you split it down into just children, it's even higher.

Marie: Yeah. It's - I'm not trying to exclude the boys, but it is mostly girls. But for anyone escaping trafficking - it's dangerous. And anyone attempting this, should take a page from Sharon's book and get some help from experts. Because a trafficker will kill even her own mother to maintain control of an asset.

Sherry: As we saw here. If you suspect you're seeing - or living - in a human trafficking situation - please, *please* do not try to handle this situation by yourself or focus attention on the child in any way. You can contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 to find help in extricating yourself - or someone you care about - from a trafficking situation. You can also text them at 233733. We also want to share one other number with you: the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children can be reached at 1 (800) THE-LOST. Use this number to report a missing child - but first contact your local law enforcement offices.

Marie: So, before we wrap up, what happened to Jessica's mom? What did Jessica's mom do with this: thinking her daughter was coming home and, instead, bringing her body home?

Sherry: Jessica's mother was devastated; as you can imagine. And she'd already moved to the beach house - to the new area - and tried to get ready for the - I know - for the return of her daughter. Umm (holding back tears).

Marie: That's so awful.

Sherry: Yes. And she had to decide what to do with her daughter's body.

Marie: Instead of spending the summer reconnecting and...

Sherry: Exactly. When Jessica's aunt died, she took one look at that grave and she told her mom that she wanted her to promise her that - if she died first - to please not put her in the ground. When asked why, her mother says she simply said, "Things put into the ground are supposed to grow."

Marie: That's so sad. Just like she was.

Sherry: I'm sure her mother made that promise, never dreaming that Jessica would be gone before her. Jessica was cremated in Colorado and her ashes were sent to her mother two thousand miles away in New Jersey. Her beautiful, spirited, loving daughter had died too soon.

Marie: That's awful. And right when she thought she was getting her back.

Sherry: (tearfully) Yes. Sorry.

Marie: No, it's okay. We usually don't have to talk about parents who bury their children.

Sherry: Yeah.

(musical interlude)

Marie: So, when it comes to the Justice side, Shauntiel Goree - the second prostitute who assisted in the murders - was convicted on two counts of First-Degree Murder and sentenced to Life Without Parole. She is still in prison and serving out her time in an Oklahoma facility. Eric Jones - the pimp - was also convicted on two counts of First-Degree Murder and was sentenced to Life Without Parole. I'm not sure where he's being held, but he should still be in prison.

Jenna pled guilty on two counts of Second-Degree Murder. This was back before it became a more common practice to give the instigator of the crime the same sentence. Plus, she had cut a plea deal - so that's why she only got second degree. She was sentenced to 27 - 53 years and she was released on probation in 2017.

Sherry: That doesn't seem long enough.

Marie: No. I don't think it's long enough, either.

Sherry: But it did put the two primary players in prison for their lives.

Marie: It did. And I hope that - in that time that she was in prison - she's changed and can live a life where she's not a danger to others.

(musical interlude)

Sherry: We'd like to thank Jade Brown for our theme music - and the Asbury Park Press, the Daily Sentinel, the Guardian Group, the Polaris Project - which houses the National Human Trafficking Hotline, and the National Runaway for a variety of information and photos that we used for this show.

Marie: If you like our show and want to reach out to us, you can find us at the Parricide Podcast on Facebook and Twitter. Or you can write to us at parricidepodcast@parricide.org. You can see photos for this case at parricide.org. Just click on the Parricide Podcast once you get to the website.

Sherry: We love that you're interested in parricide cases and we love recording them for you. If you like what you hear, please help us out by sharing our podcast with your friends and leaving a review for us.

Bye for now.

Marie: Bye.

(musical theme) Ashes, ashes; We all fall down.