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know? Sarah Koenig But then he mentions that there was this one girl, an alibi girl. Rabia He's like, the only girl I could find is a remember there's a girl I go to school with. Her name's Asia McClain. He's like, right after I got arrested, she wrote me a couple of letters. And she said she also went to see my family. And she said she specifically remembers me being at the library, at the public library, right after school.Sarah KoenigThe Woodlawn public library is just across the parking lot from Woodlawn High School. It's not technically part of the campus, but it might as well be. Rabia He said, I gave those letters to Christina Gutierrez, to my attorney. He's like, but one apparently it didn't really check out. So he's like, I don't know. So they're not helpful to us. So this was the first time I heard of this girl Asia McClain. I had never heard of her before. Sarah Koenig Were you floored, like, wait, wait, wait, wait, what? I mean, like-- Rabia I wasn't floored at the time. Because I thought, if this girl wrote and the attorney-- what criminal defense attorney's not going to check out a potential alibi? So I asked him, I said, do you have a copy of those letters? He said, yeah, I have a copy. I said, send me a copy.Sarah KoenigAdnan sends the letters to Rabia, and here's what she reads. The first letter, the first of two, is dated March 1, 1999. That is one day after Adnan was arrested. At the top of the letter, she notes, "I just came from your house an hour ago.Dear Adnan-- I hope I spelled it right. I'm not sure if you remember talking to me in the library on January 13, but I remember chatting with you." She says, quote, "we aren't really close friends, but I want you to look into my eyes and tell me of your innocence. If I ever find otherwise, I will hunt you down and whip your ass. OK, friend?At the bottom she added a little note.My boyfriend and his best friend remember seeing you there, too.That's letter number one. Then the next day, on March 2, she writes Adnan another letter. This one's typed. It's chattier. She talks about the gossip at school, the bits and pieces of evidence about the crime that are circulating, what the students are saying, what the teachers are saying, about her visit to his house.Quote,Your brothers are nice. I don't think I met your mother. I think I met your dad. Does he have a big gray beard? They gave me and Justin soda and cake. There was a whole bunch of people at your house. I didn't know who they were. I also didn't know that Muslims take their shoes off in the house. Thank God they didn't make me take mine off. My stinky feet probably would have knocked everyone out cold. Why haven't you told anyone about talking to me in the library?She asks him.Did you think it was unimportant? You didn't think that I would remember? Or did you just totally forget yourself?Adnan says now that he does in fact remember seeing Asia in the library. The thing he remembers about it is so high school, Asia used to go out with Adnan's friend Justin. And Justin had confided that Asia was a "proper young lady." In other words, Justin wasn't getting any So Adnan remembers thinking he would now get to tease Justin about seeing Asia with her new boyfriend. Maybe the new guy was getting lucky, ha, ha. Anyway, Rabia calls Asia up. It's been a year since she wrote the letters, but she agrees to meet. Rabia And she told me, that day after school I went to the public library. And Adnan was sitting at a computer, checking email or something. And I sat down next to him. We started chatting. And Adnan was a very popular boy in school. He was handsome and popular with the ladies. So she was speaking to him. And her boyfriend shows up a little bit later with a friend. And she said her boyfriend was really angry at her, because he's like, why are you talking to him? You know, high school kids, why are you talking to him? Is he hitting on you? And she remembered very specifically that that day she went to her boyfriend's house with him, and they got snowed in. And it snowed really heavily that night. And she remembered that for the following two days, school was closed. So she had very specific details about why she remembered that day.Sarah KoenigAsia wrote out an affidavit on the spot. In it, she says she and Adnan spoke for about 15 to 20 minutes while she was waiting for her boyfriend to give her a ride. Quote, "We left around 2:40," unquote. Remember, Hae is supposed to be dead by 2:36. And then, the kicker-- "No attorney has ever contacted me about January 13, 1999 and the above information."So benefit of the doubt for a second-- maybe Adnan never actually showed the letters to Cristina Gutierrez, his attorney. Sure, he said he did, but who knows? Well, I know. Deep inside Gutierrez's notes on the case-- I have boxes and boxes of such stuff-- there's this in her handwriting. "Asia plus boyfriend saw him in library 2:15 to 3:15."Then there's another note, dated July 13. It's more than four months after Adnan's arrest. This is written by one of Gutierrez's law clerks, who visited Adnan in jail. Quote, "Asia McClain saw him in the library at 3:00. Asia boyfriend saw him too. Library may have cameras."Why, oh, why was this person never heard from at trial-- a solid, non-crazy, detail-oriented alibi witness in a case that so sorely needed alibi witnesses? I can't ask Christina Gutierrez, because she died in 2004. So I put that question to a few defense attorneys. And they said, well, alibi witnesses can be tricky, especially if it's just one person. Because then it becomes one person's word over another. A single witness like that can backfire under cross-examination. Or they might take the jury's focus away from the weaknesses in the state's case. So there are conceivable strategic reasons why Christina Gutierrez might not have wanted to put Asia McClain on the stand. But what is inconceivable, they all said, is to not ever contact Asia McClain, to never make the call, never check it out, never find out if her story helps or hurts your case. That makes no sense whatsoever. That is not a strategy. That is a screw-up.When I first heard about the long-lost Asia letters and the lawyer's mistake, I thought, well, their fight is over, right? They've got an alibi witness who was never heard from. It's such a slam dunk. They're done.Adnan's family hired a new attorney, who filed a petition in court based on the Asia affidavit. His argument was that Adnan's trial could have turned out differently if Gutierrez had checked out Asia's story. And so Adnan should get some form of what's called post-conviction relief.The new lawyer figures he'll get Asia to come to the hearing. She'll vouch for her story. By this time, Asia had finished school and moved away. He finds an address on the West Coast, tries calling, sending messages-- nothing. Finally, he writes a letter to her, gives it to a private investigator, who goes out to Asia's house in hopes of delivering it.Asia's fiance comes to the door, opens it part way, tells the investigator that she cannot speak to Asia, but that from what he knows of Adnan's case, Adnan is guilty and deserved the punishment he got. Later, the investigator gets a call from the fiance. "We don't have to talk to you. Leave us alone."So Adnan's lawyer calls off the search for Asia, figuring once a witness turns on you like that, it's too risky to keep pushing. And then at Adnan's hearing on the new petition, it comes out that Asia had done the very thing they dreaded. Asia had called one of the prosecutors in Adnan's case, a guy named Kevin Urlick, and undermined her own statement. This is from a recording of the hearing. Mr. Urlick is testifying on the witness stand. Attorney Mr. Urlick, how did you learn that the [INAUDIBLE] petition? Kevin Urlick A young lady named Asia called me. Attorney And what did she say? Kevin Urlick She was concerned, because she was being asked questions about an affidavit she'd written back at the time of the trial. She told me that she'd only written it because she was getting pressure from the family, and she basically wrote it to please them and get them off her back. Rabia I don't know what happened to her and why she would do this.Sarah KoenigHere's Rabia again. She says it's not true that Asia was bullied into writing that statement 15 years ago. And she can't fathom why Asia would discredit her own statement like that. Rabia I don't know why. The affidavit was written voluntarily. I'm an attorney. I'm a licensed attorney. I work on homeland security. I have no reason to make something like this up. I didn't even know she existed until after the conviction. Sarah Koenig So what do you think happened? Why would they have this sort of violent reaction to helping out Adnan now? Rabia I don't know. It was just really odd.Sarah KoenigSo who knows what would have happened if Asia had shown up? Maybe it wouldn't have made a difference. After all, they had the original letters and the affidavit. That's all that should've mattered. But it didn't look good.It would be natural for the judge to wonder, why can't the defense produce this Asia person? Why is she making this call to a prosecutor? I mean, anyone would wonder. I wondered. I wondered if maybe she was pressured into writing that affidavit. And I wondered if she was hiding something.Like maybe she'd lied in those 1999 letters. Maybe she didn't really see Adnan at the library that day and had just wanted to insert herself into something exciting. And maybe now that she was grown up, she wanted nothing to do with any of it.So three, four months after I first sat down with Rabia, I had become fixated on finding Asia. I'm like a bloodhound on this thing. Because the whole case seemed to me to be teetering on her memories of that afternoon. I have to know if Adnan really was in the library at 2:36 PM.Because if he was, library equals innocent. It's so maddeningly simple. And maybe I can crack it if I could just talk to Asia. I write her a long, gentle, pleading letter and send it off to an address I find online. I'm calling people who know her or who I think might know her. I'm checking the same loop of Facebook, MyLife, LinkedIn sites over and over, trawling for clues about where she might be or how she might think.If you're wondering why I went so nuts on this story versus some other murder case, the best I can explain is this is the one that came to me. It wasn't halfway across the world or even next door. It came right to my lap. And if I could help get to the bottom of it, shouldn't I try?I start running down all the other information in Asia's 1999 letters. She mentioned there were security cameras inside the library. So my producer and I went to see the very nice manager there, Michelle Hamiel. Sarah Koenig Was there a security system back in '99 that could've been checked at the time? Michelle Hamiel Probably, yes. I'm going to say yes. Sarah Koenig OK. And what system was it? Michelle Hamiel I have no idea. [LAUGHING]It was an old system. Sarah Koenig Yeah. But you think probably video? Michelle Hamiel It was video. And that was part of set up. Every morning you put a videotape in. Sarah Koenig Were you guys recycling the videotapes? Michelle Hamiel Yes. I think it ran for a week. So you had a Monday tape, a Tuesday tape, a Wednesday tape, and so forth. Sarah Koenig So even if, on the very day that Asia had written her first letter, Adnan's lawyer had run out to find the security tape, it probably would have been nonexistent by then. But what about the computer Adnan was supposedly using to check his email? Sarah Koenig To use the computer, did people have to sign in, write their name down? Michelle Hamiel They did. Sarah Koenig And what was the system then? Michelle Hamiel Piece of paper and pencil. Sarah Koenig And those, by any chance, weren't logged meticulously and kept for 15 years, were they? Michelle Hamiel No. [LAUGHING]Sarah KoenigBummer. We got nothing. Then there was the mystery of Asia's boyfriend, Derek, and his friend Jerrod. All winter and spring, every time I went to Baltimore, I went to Derek's mom's house looking for him, and to Jerrod's window tinting business. And then finally-- Sarah Koenig All right, so you're Jerrod Johnson. Jerrod Johnson Yes, I am. Sarah Koenig You don't know how excited we are to be talking to you. I've been looking for you for, like, four months. Jerrod Johnson What did I do? Sarah Koenig You didn't do anything. But we were hoping maybe you remembered this moment. On January 13, 1999, do you have any memory, by any miracle, that you went to Woodlawn public library branch near Woodlawn High School to pick up Asia McClain with your friend Derek? Jerrod Johnson I have no idea. Asia McClain. Is that a person or a book? Sarah Koenig It's a person. Jerrod Johnson No, no recollection of it.Sarah KoenigScratch Jerrod. Derek was my last hope. Eventually I caught him at home. Considering I woke him up, he was exceedingly courteous. He showed me a photo of Asia and him all dressed up. They dated most of senior year. Sarah Koenig What's up here? Derek This is our senior prom. Yeah. Sarah Koenig You guys both look really beautiful. Derek Yeah. That's Asia, yeah.Sarah KoenigBut Derek couldn't remember that day either-- shocking, I know. He used to pick Asia up from school almost every day back then, either from the library or from the front of the school. And he says he spoke to a lot of her friends just to be polite. Derek And it's very possible that I could have spoken to the gentleman and her on that day. But it's very hard to remember 15 years later. But it sounds like this definitely could have happened. I don't think Asia would-- Asia's not the type of person that would lie just to-- Sarah Koenig That's what I'm wondering. Derek She's definitely not that type of person to get involved with a lie. She's not that type of person. So it seemed pretty credible to me.Sarah KoenigOne day I got a call on my cellphone from a blocked number. You guessed it-- Asia. I wish I could say that my charming, persuasive letter is what prompted Asia to call. But the truth is, she never got my letter. I had the wrong address. But she was calling because I'd followed up weeks later with a one-line email. And she was responding to that, a little confused. Asia McClain It's just crazy. I mean, I have a couple minutes if you want to chat about it. Sarah KoenigI recorded our conversation on the cell, which is why the sound quality is so bad. Sorry about that. Asia is now a 33-year-old stay-at-home mother. And she has not spent the last 15 years worrying about Adnan and whether he's guilty. Asia McClain I trust the court system to do their due diligence. Because I was never questioned. I was never informed of anything pertaining to the case. I don't know why he was convicted.Sarah KoenigAsia said she was spooked when the private investigator came to her house. I don't know if that's why she didn't testify at the hearing or why she made the call to the prosecutor. But she told me that when she got the knock at the door, quote, "that was not cool." Because to her, if Adnan did do it, quote, "the last thing you want is a murderer being pissed off at you, knowing where you live."But she had a remarkably clear memory of what happened on January 13, 1999. She had an internship at the time, and so she got out of school much earlier than everyone else. Derek was supposed to come get her at the library along with Jerrod, but they were very late. She remembers seeing Adnan come in after Woodlawn let out for the day. Asia McClain Adnan came in. He sat at the table. And we weren't really close friends or anything like that, but we knew each other. And we chatted or whatever. And I can't remember. I think I must have asked him how he was doing or whatever, and he said fine. And he told me that him and Hae had broke up. And I was like, oh, well, that's a bummer. And I was like, what happened? And he was like, oh, well, she is seeing this other guy, some white dude. But he was pretty chill about it. He was just like, you know, well, if she doesn't want to be with me, then that's fine. I just wish the best for her-- that kind of attitude.Sarah KoenigI'm not sure why Asia's memory of this interaction is so clear all these years later. My best guess is that, because she wrote it down at the time in those letters and then the affidavit, that the details somehow stuck. Sarah Koenig Do you remember what time you were talking, this would have happened in the library? Do you remember what time that conversation would have happened? Asia McClain I don't. Because I know school let out around 2:15. So it was probably around 2:30. Sarah Koenig Because you had said you got out of school earlier than other people. So were you there, were you at the library, before 2:15? Asia McClain Oh, yeah, I had been at the library for a few hours. Sarah Koenig Oh wow. Asia McClain Yeah, I was pretty pissed when Derek showed up. And he asked me why Adnan was. That was teenager boy language. He's like, you know, who the hell is that?And I said, don't even start with me. Because you're a few hours late. Don't worry about who that is, you know? I remember that day, because that was the day that it snowed. Sarah Koenig Were there snow days after that, do you remember? Asia McClain I want to say there was, because I think that was like the first snow of the year. I wouldn't have even remembered if it hadn't have been for the snow. And the whole-- I just remember being so pissed about Derek being late and then getting snowed in at his house. And it was the first snow of that year. Sarah Koenig The snow is important. Hae disappeared on a Wednesday. That night there was a huge ice storm, which is unusual in Maryland. It ended up being a state emergency. And school was closed for the rest of the week.Asia started asking me questions about the case. Wasn't there DNA evidence? And what exactly was Jay's part in the whole thing? She wasn't sure Adnan was guilty. She said things I've now heard from so many people since. He seemed like he cared about Hae. He didn't seem angry or upset. I thought there was more proof. Asia McClain Even that day, I didn't walk away thinking, oh, I just started something. Do you know what I mean? If you want to base his innocence off of his composure at that moment, I would say he's innocent. But I'm 32 years old now, and I know that there's people out there capable of heinous acts that can keep a calm demeanor, you know? And I know that there are people who flip out on a moment's notice and do something that they regret for the rest of their lives. Even now, it would be nice if there was some technicality, something that would prove his innocence. Great, you know? One less evil person I've met in my life, you know? Sarah Koenig But I think, Asia, you might be that technicality. Do you see what I mean? If you're saying that you saw him on this day at that time, that means the state's timeline for their whole theory of the case doesn't make any sense. Asia McClain It's a possibility. Sarah Koenig Because they're saying he was in the car with her at the very time that you're saying, no, I saw him at the library, and we were talking. Do you know what I mean? That's exactly the window where they're saying she was murdered. Asia McClain [SIGHS]Sarah Koenigin case you couldn't hear that, it was a sigh. And I completely understand that sigh. That's how I feel a lot of the time. Because I talk to Adnan regularly, and he just doesn't seem like a murderer. A few minutes after I hung up with Asia, Adnan called on schedule. Adnan Syed Hey, Sarah, how are you doing? Sarah Koenig I'm good. I'm good. So I was just talking to Asia McClain. Adnan OK. Sarah Koenig You don't sound very excited. Adnan I had a-- well, I really-- Sarah Koenig This was not the reaction I expected. I felt like I'd just interviewed an ivory-billed woodpecker. But when I told Adnan what Asia remembered, instead of being excited, Adnan said it was heartbreaking. Adnan Syed I mean, on a personal level, I'm happy. Because, in a sense, I'm not making this up. And at least, if nothing else, it's kind of like, at least someone other than Rabia knows that this did take place. Anything that can kind of support what I'm saying to be the truth, that I didn't do this, is great. But from a legal perspective, it's like, I wish she would have come to this realization maybe like a year and a half ago, you know what I mean? Because it's kind of like, it's too late. I'm sorry, I definitely appreciate it. And I definitely kind of hear the elation in your voice. But now I feel like I punctured your balloon. Sarah Koenig No, no, I totally see what you're saying. I hadn't thought about it in that way.Sarah KoenigWhen I told Rabia I talked to Asia, she immediately burst into tears. Because they were all correct. It was too late. The judge ruled on Adnan's petition a few weeks before I spoke to Asia-- denied.The judge wrote in his opinion that Christina Gutierrez's decision not to use Asia McClain as an alibi witness was strategic. After all, Asia's original letters didn't specify an exact time. And Gutierrez could've reasonably concluded that Asia was offering to lie in order to help Adnan. And finally, he wrote, Asia's letter contradicted Adnan's own alibi. Asia says she saw him at the public library, but Adnan said he was on the school campus the whole afternoon. Maybe the judge didn't understand that Woodlawn library is basically part of the campus. But anyway, Asia's story, then, is legally worthless. A witness who says she saw you at the exact moment when the state contends you were strangling a young woman in a car is worthless. A few days after I spoke to Asia, she wrote me an email. "I've been thinking a lot about Adnan," she wrote.All this time I thought the courts proved it was Adnan that killed her. I thought he was where he deserved to be. Now I'm not so sure.Hae was our friend, too. And it sucks feeling like you don't know who really killed your friend. Hae was the sweetest person ever. If he didn't kill Hae, we owe it to him to try to make that clear. And if he did kill her, then we need to put this to rest. I just hope that Adnan isn't some sick bastard just trying to manipulate his way out of jail.Sarah KoenigI wrote back, "Believe me, I'm on exactly the same page."Coming up this season on Serial. Male Speaker I think that there are other people involved. I think maybe he was set up somehow. Female Speaker Clearly you could tell something was going on that wasn't good. I mean, it was just strange behavior for anybody. Female Speaker Basically threatened me, like, you know what happened to Hae. This is what's going to happen to you. That's how I felt that day. Sarah Koenig What are you thinking right now? You have the same smile I do. Female Speaker I'm literally thinking, like, could he have gone crazy? Male Speaker Jay told me he was being blackmailed by Adnan. Because Adnan knew that Jay couldn't go to the police. Rabia Like if this works, every question we've had for the past eight months, he knows it. Male Speaker Yeah, I mean, who else did it? They're running out of suspects.Sarah KoenigSerial is produced by Julie Snyder, Dana Chivvis and me. Emily Condon is our production and operations manager. Ira Glass is our editorial advisor. Editing help from Nancy Updike. Fact checking by Karen Fragala-Smith. Special thanks to Lou Teddy, Jane Marie, Seth Lind, Alyse Bergerson and the entire staff of This American Life, and to my in laws Ethan Shire and Janet Leveen for putting me up in Baltimore so many times in the past year. Support for Serial comes from MailChimp, celebrating creativity, chaos, and teamwork since 2001. MailChimp. Send better email. Serial is a production of This American Life and WBEZ Chicago. The podcast episode from Serial called, The Alibi by Sarah Koenig, follows an unsolved murder case from 1999. A boy named Adnan Syed is framed for the murder of a girl named Hae Min Lee. Some parts of the story make sense, but others do not. It feels like information is missing at times and that there are some individuals trying to keep some statements from the public. Sarah's entire persona and brand is investigating true crime so when this case "fell into her lap" (as she mentions in the episode), she could not turn down the opportunity. There is no doubt at all that taking on a such a heavy topic can weigh you down over time and Sarah demonstrates how time consuming it can be as well. As she dives in head first to this case she beings by gathering all the information needed to make it easier for her. Serial Logo Outside of this podcast, I listen to a lot of true crime related ones on my own time. Podcasts like A Morbid Podcast, Crime Salad, and Two Girls One Ghost (which is more paranormal, however they touch on a lot of murder and crime cases). Using the form of a podcast to investigate cases and tell stories is a very interesting tactic. Even though there is no video (sometimes some podcasters will upload a video version), just by listening you feel more involved. By the use of music, sound effects and changing up their tone of voice I think that it is a very smart way of storytelling. You truly can listen to a podcast no matter where you are vs reading a book or watching a documentary. As much as I really enjoy listening to podcasts, I am a huge fan of this genre of book. I have read many thrillers and murder mysteries and each time it feels like you are present and helping with the case. My favourite book series that I have read in this genre is called A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. It follows a high school student investigating an unsolved murder case at her that took place at her school 5 years prior. The book incorporates pictures of emails, evidence, voice memo logs, etc. Which is a very interesting tactic and allows the reader to follow along. A Good Girl's Guide to Murder: Series I find unsolved mysteries completely fascinating, so overall I really enjoyed this episode, and could totally see myself continuing my listen to learn more. The way that Sarah spoke and slowly revealed information had me on the edge of me seat wanting to know what was to come. She spoke in welcoming tones, and even though she was being very informative, it gave off the impression that the listen was right there by her side. Sarah links pictures and diagrams (Timelines: January 13, 1999 & Who, What, When) that allows the listener to feel involved in each steps of the case. Midway through the episode, Sarah introduces a girl named Asia who is really Adnan's only Alibi throughout this entire case. It is revealed that Asia physically saw him during the period of time of the supposed murder. Asia claims that she had seen him on a regular basis and would consider the two "friends". After court and the arrest, Asia wrote to Adnan (pictures of the letters inserted below). Asia's Letter to Adnan, March 1, 1999 Asia's Affidavit, March 25, 2000 When these letters were brought up in court they were brushed off, and the judges ignored Asia's statement about Adnan being innocent. They wanted to believe that he was guilty and completely capable of committing this crime. However, after listening to this episode it became harder and harder to believe that Adnan was not innocent. The court not using Asia's witness statement as any evidence or proof caused a lot of frustration for Adnan and his family and 100% shifted their reality completely. I could not even begin to imagine what they went through at the time and even over the years as the podcast aired and became quite popular. Personally I believe that it was probably very invasive for his family when this story came to light, especially because of how detailed and descriptive it was. The interviews from his friends specially, portrayed him in a bad light in many ways. Being this much in the public eye can have it traits but it can also be very negative overtime. Sarah had made a lot of great points as well leaning towards believing in Adnan's innocence. She mentioned that she visits/speaks with him twice a week and has learned a lot about who he is on a deeper level. At the end of the podcast Sarah even states that he really does not seem like he could be a murderer. In the end I believe that Adnan was in the wrong place at the wrong time and the chain of events then unfolded. The topic Sarah opens the podcast with is speaking about memory and remembering past details from something you've experienced. She quickly interviews a few boys asking if they can recall what they did the weekend prior, and all of their memories are hazy. If it was not too much of an event there is a lesser chance that someone is going to recall every detail about what happened. How Memory Works I want to specifically touch on how memory can shift after experiencing something traumatic, and how speaking about memory at the beginning set up this thought. When your body goes through something extremely traumatic there is a really good chance that your brain is going to block out parts and cause your memory to be a bit fuzzy. Asking somebody to recall a very detailed moment from something traumatic that happened to them in the past is not going to result in much information. When Sarah interviews individuals throughout this episode, there is a visible pattern of not being able to recall specific details that she is looking for. I believe that this could be the result of one of two things. Either the individual was not as involved as Sarah had assumed, or they had blocked out the memory from that time. Because of this, it makes it hard to really believe either side of the case without any clear facts. If somebody cannot clearly recall what specifically happened, it is difficult to pick a side. Overall, this podcast was very enjoyable and hooked me immediately. Sarah chose a very interesting case to investigate and speak upon. She collected as much information as she possibly could and told the story very well. As this is her profession, she is very skilled at knowing what questions to ask when and how to further a conversation appropriately. If you are looking for a fast paced and detailed investigation, it is worth checking out.