

Natasha Vargas-Cooper

December 31 2014, 11:19 p.m.

Today we're publishing the third and last in a series of exclusive interviews with Jay Wilds. He's the key witness in the 2000 murder trial of Adnan Syed, who was convicted of murdering his ex-girlfriend, Hae Min Lee, and is currently serving a life sentence at a Maryland state prison.

The case was covered by "Serial," the popular 12-part podcast. But Jay declined to be formally interviewed by the host and producer of "Serial," Sarah Koenig. These interviews mark the first time Jay has spoken publicly about the case. Links to Part I and Part II of the series can be found at the bottom of this story.

The following has been edited and condensed for clarity.

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What has your life been like since "Serial" first aired?

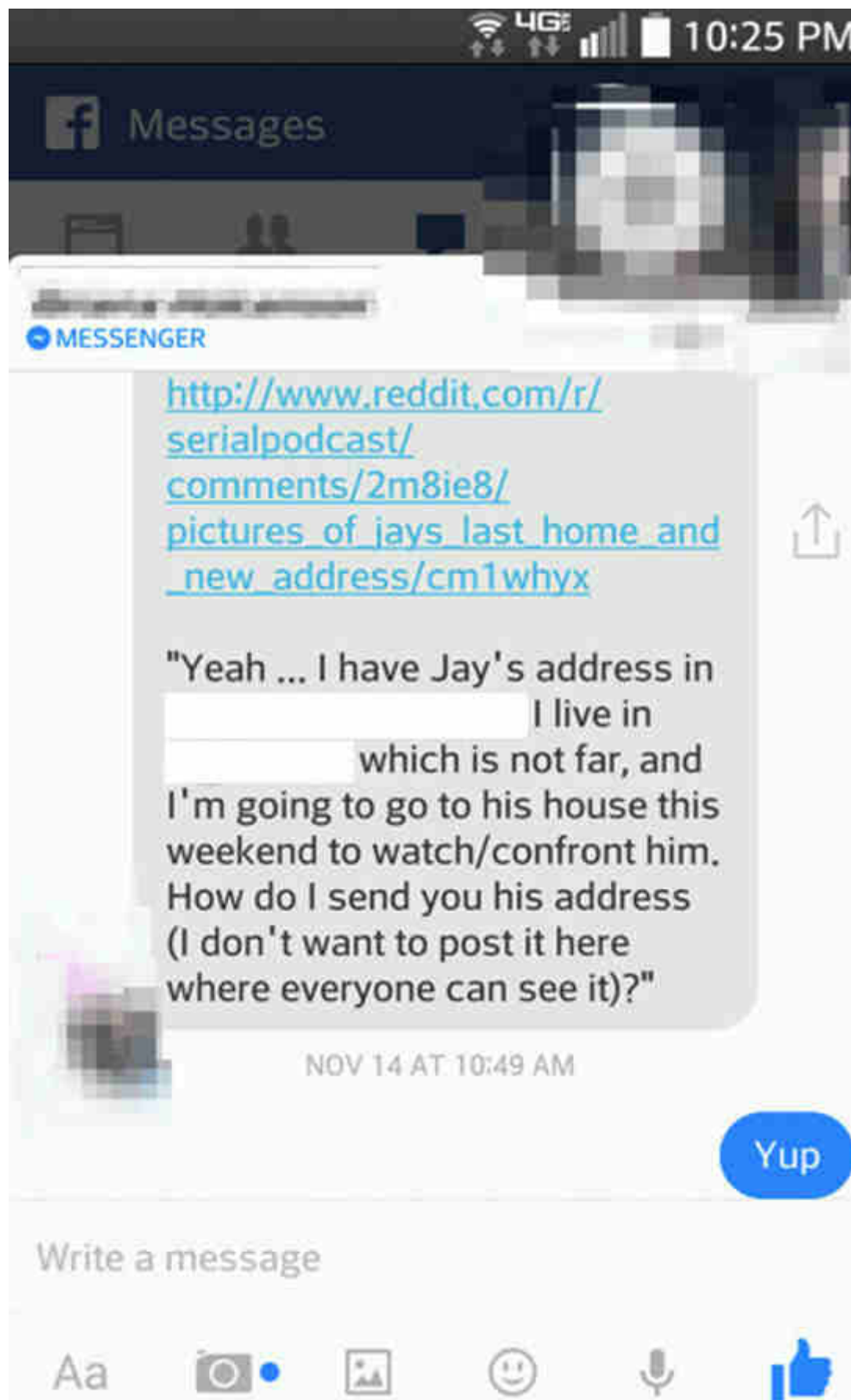
The thing that's been the most scary for my family has been people showing up at my house. Twice I've caught people videotaping our home and me.

When did you first notice strangers around your house?

Right before Thanksgiving. I caught somebody taking a picture of my house.

You asked me if I read Reddit. Do you?

I can't. It makes me too upset. My wife has taken screenshots of direct threats and serious accusations about my character.



Screenshot courtesy of the Wilds family.

How does she respond to it?

She's devastated. Because we have young kids around the house, and we used to let them walk to school. Now we don't, because we don't know if someone from the Internet is going to take their picture, or harass them. And she is just trying to be protective of them.

Have you filed a police report?

Yes. We filed a police report. Someone reached out to my wife, somebody that she didn't know, saying that she was worried for my family. Then this person said she was worried because somebody posted our address on a public forum and said they planned to confront me.

A lot of this information, I assume, has been posted on Reddit?

Yeah. Now it looks like the moderators of the forum try to delete any personal information of ours after it's posted. But they weren't that good about it when the show first started. Sometimes stuff would be left on Reddit about me for days and weeks at a time before it had to be checked, and the post deleted. People were able to go onto my Facebook page and pull pictures of my kids, my dog, my house, my wife. People have also posted information about my family, criminal charges against me, my dad and my uncle. I don't know why that is at all relevant to what Adnan did. I mean, I know that I was a criminal, and I know that even after this happened, I didn't have an occupation. I mean, I kept doing my job of criminal shit. But I'm past all that now. I made a good home for my wife and kids.

Serial SERIAL SERIALPODCAST

Pictures of Jay's last home and new address (self:SerialPodcast)

submitted 18 hours ago by kippb

sorted by: **best**

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[–] [deleted] 17 hours ago

[–] jinkator 3 points 17 hours ago
Just go work out or like better yourself...read a book DO NOT CONFRONT JAY.

[–] jinkator 2 points 17 hours ago
WTF DO NOT DO THIS THIS GIVES THE PODCAST A BAAAAD NAME. Way out of hand DON'T DO THIS.

[–] bhokabhokabhoka 2 points 16 hours ago
You are fucking insane.

[–] distortederly 2 points 16 hours ago
Jerk off.

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About Us
Serial is a new crime procedural by the creators of This American Life. Adnan Syed has been in prison for 15 years for the murder of his ex-girlfriend, Hae Min Lee. Did he do it? This subreddit is a place to discuss your theories, predictions and other aspects of the show. Listen at SerialPodcast.org

Important Subreddit rules:
Remember that these are real people with real lives. We do not support doxing or harassment towards any of the people mentioned in Serial, or any users and posters in this subreddit. If we see personal information posted, including links to Facebook, personal addresses, or contact information, your comment will be deleted. Repeated offenders will be banned.

Helpful Threads:
COMPLETE Episode 8 Transcript
@redditmaette - when to download
FAQ by bhokabhokabhoka
Person List
"Atlas" of All Mug Posts
Link Library Need something? Look here!
Photos and articles related to case
Timeline of Events
Timeline of Events 2

Episode Links
Want to see discussions throughout the season? Look no further!
Ep. 1: The Alibi and Ep. 2: The Breakup
General Open Discussions, Ep. 1 & Ep. 2
Complete Episode 1 Transcript

Screenshot courtesy of the Wilds family.

Do you blame Sarah Koenig for the actions and speculation of the Reddit commenters?

I feel like she created an evil archetype of me and sensationalized my motives. It helped fan the flames of this story that people had already moved on from.

Have you reached out to anyone at “Serial” about the harassment?

Yeah, and I got an email back from Sarah about it. After I had posted the Facebook message, after you and I spoke on the phone, Sarah asked me for another interview.

From: Sarah Koenig

Date: Dec 24, 2014 6:56 AM

Subject: Your message

To: Jay Wilds

Cc:

Hello Jay,

I saw your post on Facebook. I'm raising my hand once again, to ask if you will talk to me. As you probably know, the final installment of my story was last week, but if you wanted to talk, we could always do another episode, so that you can tell your story about what happened to Hae, and about what happened to you. My goal has always been to get this story right.

Please know that, to me, this case has never been an entertainment. I am mindful all the time that everyone involved in this case is a real person – not an archetype, not a character, not a stereotype – but a real person. I don't know if you've listened to the podcast, but in every episode I tried to convey that, and to respect that.

If you change your mind about an interview, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

*Sincerely,
Sarah K.*

I sent her an email back asking if she'd been leaking court documents or my personal information to Reddit. My wife had told me [that she thought] either [Sarah or one of the producers was talking to a moderator on Reddit](#), and I felt that either Sarah or Rabia Chaudry [*Ed. note: an attorney who is longtime friends with Adnan, and who first brought the story to Koenig*] were giving confidential information to Reddit. I asked her if that's true.

Then she replied. She said, 'No,' but I didn't believe her. I did not think she was being honest with me. She wrote back [*Ed. note: the following is an excerpt from a longer email*]:

*From: Sarah Koenig
Date: Dec 29, 2014 8:14 AM
Subject: Re: Your message
To: Jay Wilds
Cc:*

'You say I am not answering specific questions, but I am. Here is my answer, again, as clear as I can make it: Neither I nor anyone I actually work with – the staff of Serial and of This American Life, has EVER given anything to Reddit. Period. Nor did we authorize or deputize someone else to do so. It would have been stupid and irresponsible for us to have given anything to Reddit. We're not that dumb, for one thing. And anyway, I don't believe in crowd-sourcing an investigation. This is not a loophole or a sneaky way to have plausible deniability. It's a straightforward, complete and true answer. As for Rabia – I'll say it again: I

don't know. She might have posted it, but I don't know. I don't know because she hasn't told me, and I haven't asked. Again – do you want me to ask Rabia about this?' [Ed. note: Chaudry say she 'never' posted personal information



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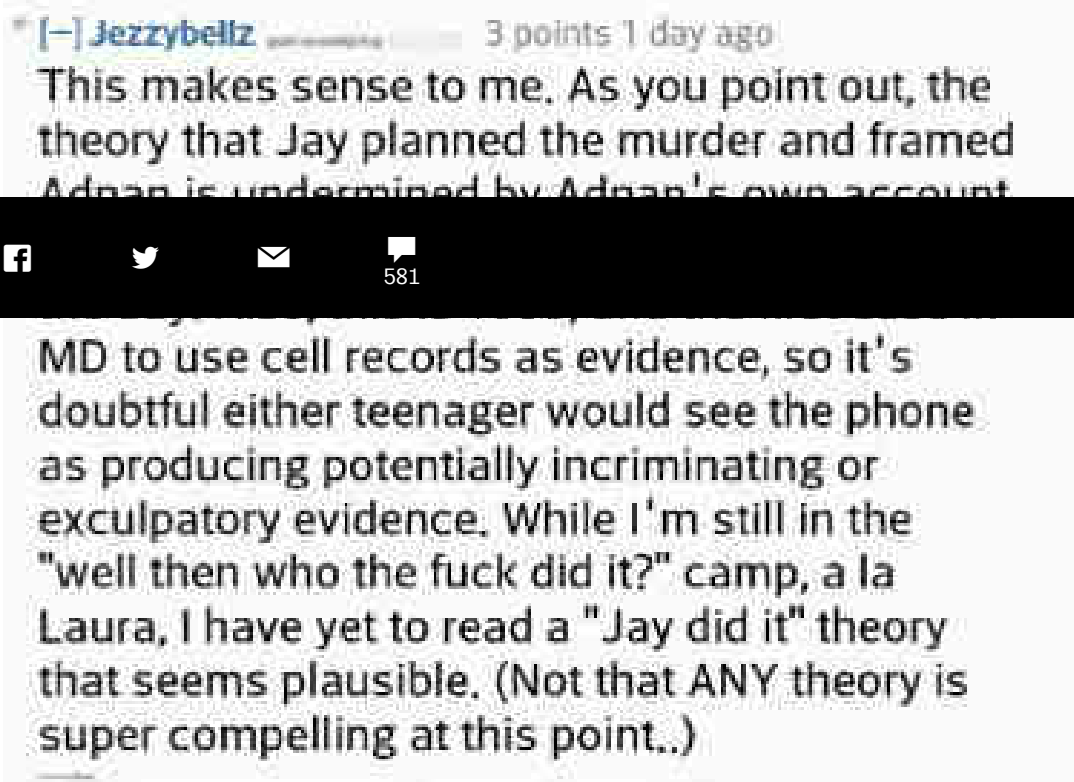
You seem to be under the impression that I want to do you harm, or have a secret agenda or have purposely withheld information to make you look bad, or have knowingly reported things that aren't true. None of that is correct – in fact, the opposite is true. I realize you might not be able to accept that right now – or perhaps, ever – but my intention has been the same from the beginning: To get the story right, and to treat everyone fairly. There are so, so many things I could have reported, but didn't, because they seemed potentially damaging or unfair, and they weren't directly related to the crime. Not just about you, but about other people involved in the case. In other words, I'm not out to get anyone, or to damage anyone's reputation. I only reported information that we deemed relevant to understanding the case.

It sounds like you don't believe Koenig still.

I don't.

Has the show affected your employment?

Yes. Of course, there's no way I can actually prove it, you know. But when the podcast started I had a job in construction. I was hired on for a project. About three weeks after the podcast started, when it really started to blow up on the Internet, and my name was out there, and people were speculating, and the word murder would pop up with my name, I was told that – by my supervisor – that they hired too many people for the job, [and] had to let five of us go. But within a week a couple of those people were hired back, along with a new person. I don't think they got rid of me because they think I committed a murder. But I do think they didn't want to take [that] on, you know? They don't need people coming to the worksite, confronting me or harassing other people I work with.



Screenshot courtesy of the Wilds family.

What's so frustrating about this is that there haven't been any clear fights. It hasn't been confrontational. It's been a hundred little things that have happened, like cars parked outside my house for an hour, somebody just stops talking to me at work before I was let go, people taking pictures. It's the doorbell ringing, and my wife jumping up six feet into the air, because she's so scared. It makes me feel paranoid. And it also makes me really angry, because the mistakes I've made are on me and not on my family. And there's a part of me that just wants to break away from them and live in the bushes or the Appalachian mountains, so they can be safe.

Has this affected your wife's work?

That's my biggest fear. So far it hasn't crept into her work life. But she works in the nonprofit world, with needy people. And she works for places that fundraise, and it makes me sick to think that maybe people might not give money to these very good places that do a lot for people, because of me.

I'm not trying to insult anyone, but a lot of times people don't read any further than what they see on a headline. I know my criminal record is out there. One of the charges is domestic violence. But I was never convicted. It was an argument over a set of keys with an ex-girlfriend I wasn't getting along with. People don't read to the end of a document to see 'unsubstantiated' or 'not convicted.'

My family are normal, regular people. They've never been stabbed, never had anyone call them on the phone saying they're going to kill them. My wife is a normal, suburban type of person. She's not used to



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aren't operating protocol for her.

Have you considered changing your name?

I can't. No. They'd have to kill me before that happens, and if that means living like a dog in the bushes, that's okay. No one is getting my name. It's the one reason why I haven't taken down my Facebook profile. For a while it was even public.

I'm going to ask you something that I have no real personal interest in, nor did it stick out to me that much in the podcast. But it seems to be something that people have really latched on to. And those are likely the people who will be reading the interview. So let's give them what they want. Are you cool with that?

Okay.

There's a theory circulating on enthusiastic web forums like Reddit that you felt threatened by Adnan's relationship to your then girlfriend Stephanie. And that's why you have some type of vengeance plot against Adnan.

[Jay laughs] I dated Stephanie from junior high until about junior year of college. I loved her a lot, but if there was any risk of infidelity it was going to come from me. I know they made a big deal on the podcast about her and Adnan both getting crowned homecoming court [*Ed. note: the two were crowned prom prince and princess*], but I was like, 'Yeah baby! Go get your crown!' I knew what that crown was coming home to. So no, I was at no point threatened by Adnan. But I can tell you about the time that Adnan threatened me about Stephanie.

Please do.

A few days after night at Leakin Park with Hae –

The night of the murder?

Yeah. He drove Stephanie to my house, because her car had broken down. We talked for a minute, and he said something like, 'You know, I

can be alone with her whenever I like, because me and Stephanie are friends.’ I took that as a threat. Not that he could steal my girlfriend, but that he could hurt her. I told him to his face, ‘That’s not a very



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I called her yesterday. We’re only loose acquaintances now. But since I’ve been talking more, I just wanted to make sure she was OK with it – that I was opening up about all this. Because, like I said in the past, I had shielded her from as much of this as I could. We got into it a little bit. I told her that she was naive about Adnan. After the murder, she didn’t believe that he did it. We argued a little bit because I leaned on her and said, ‘I wouldn’t have ever really been in contact with Adnan had she not suggested that I sell weed to him.’

Okay. One last question. What did you end up buying Stephanie at the mall?

I think was a gold bracelet. Possibly a gold necklace. I know that it was a piece of jewelry that came in a jewelry box, and it cost about 70 or 80 bucks.

Ed. note: The Intercept contacted Sarah Koenig for comment. In response, ‘Serial’ producer Julie Snyder emailed the following statement:

Thanks for reaching out. It’s been interesting to read what Jay has to say about what happened on January 13, 1999. Although like so much of our experience over the past year, this new information also opens up a door to a new room filled with questions.

Our reporting is solid and we believe we accurately and fairly represented Jay’s statements to police and his testimony at trial. On seven separate occasions over the last five months, we have requested an interview with Jay, either on the record or off. We have tried to keep the lines of communication open with him, contacting him well before the podcast began airing, during the run of the story and as recently as last week.

As far as leaking documents, we have absolutely never released any documents or any personal information to Reddit or any other outlet. In fact on many occasions over the last few months, whenever we have seen news outlets or online forums release personal information and the like, we have requested that information be removed. Most places complied, some did not.

READ [PART 1](#) AND [PART 2](#) OF JAY'S INTERVIEW.

Matt Tinoco, Alleen Brown and Ken Silverstein, contributed to this story.



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