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Proof: A True Crime Podcast
Season 2: Murder at the Warehouse
Episode 1: A Spaceship in Manteca
Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Amber [00:07]:

This is the missing poster that I made the night that I found out that she was missing. And I just remember we drove all over the place. We were just putting them everywhere.

Susan Simpson: It was June of 2000, in the small town of Manteca, in California's Central Valley.

Amber was just finishing up her junior year of high school, and she was looking forward to a summer of hanging out with her friends -- including her best friend, 18-year-old Renee Ramos.

Then, that Friday, the phone rang. It was Renee's mother.

Amber:

That was like the first thing that Donna said when she called me. She said, "Jake says Renee's missing. He doesn't know where she's at."

Susan: Jake Silva, also 18 years old, was Renee's boyfriend of nearly a year. Jake and Renee were basically always together, 24/7.

Amber:

As soon as Donna said that Jake couldn't find her. That's when I thought something... was not right.

Susan [01:05]: That's when Amber started making the posters. In big bubble letters, she'd written the word "MISSING" above a smiling photo of Renee.

Jacinda Davis: What does the bottom paragraph say there?

Amber:

It says, "Our Renee has been missing since Monday morning, Memorial Day. We miss every bit of our little valley girl. We hope she comes home as the same beautiful young woman we remember her as."

Susan: That weekend, Renee's friends posted flyers all around the town, asking everyone they saw if they'd seen Renee. No one had.

Renee's friend Lori remembers being worried, but not panicked, when she found out that no one knew where Renee was.

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Lori [01:51]:

In my mind, she had just been missing. Because it doesn't happen in this town. You know?

Amber:

Right. I was just concerned. I don't think I wanted to think the worst so, it was more like, I feel like she might've been hiding somewhere but, you know, she wasn't.

Susan Simpson: Renee's friends and family kept hoping and expecting that she'd turn up. But she didn't. And then on Monday morning, their worst fears were confirmed.

Susan: How'd you find out that something had happened?

Lori:

My mom called me and said, "Lori... um, the police found a body of a girl, and they think that it's Renee. Like, they're pretty sure it's Renee."

And I just remember crying.

Susan [02:33]: Three people were arrested for the rape and murder of Renee Ramos. One of them was her boyfriend, Jake Silva.

But until recently, Renee's friends hadn't known there might be reasons to question whether Jake and his co-defendants had actually committed the crimes they were accused of.

Amber:

That's why I'm so confused by everything because I was so young when all this information hit me.

Lori: Right, we were still kids.

Amber:

And then of course you try to move on with your life later on. So, I didn't understand anything that was being told to me because it didn't make sense. Like, how am I supposed to make sense of this?

Lori:

Right, I just had to accept what came out of it. But I do remember always just being confused about it.

All the evidence and everything that was brought up to the surface, I literally remember asking myself, "So, what really happened?"

Amber [03:20]:

What is the actual truth? This whole time we just believed what we were told. If evidence proves different, it's definitely going to be upsetting.

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Lori: If that's the case--

Amber: If he didn't do it, who did?

Lori: Right, that needs to be found. Who did?

Susan Simpson [03:45]: I'm Susan Simpson.

Jacinda Davis: And I'm Jacinda Davis.

Susan: I'm an attorney and investigator.

Jacinda: And I'm a true crime TV producer.

Susan: And this is Proof Season 2: Murder at the Warehouse. Proof is a Red Marble Media production in association with Glassbox Media.

For the past year, we've been re-investigating what happened after 18-year-old Renee Ramos went missing in the spring of 2000, and we discovered that in this case not everything is what it seems. This podcast tells the story of what our investigation uncovered.

Jacinda: New episodes are released on Mondays. And on Thursdays, you can catch our Sidebar episodes – where we talk about the case, talk to guests, and tell you more about what's going on behind the scenes.

You can find additional materials about this case, including pictures, exhibits, and videos of people we spoke to on our website, at proofcrimepod.com.

Susan: This is Episode 1: A Spaceship in Manteca.

Donna Ramos [04:53]:

My name is Donna Ramos, I'm the mother of Renee Ramos. She's my oldest. She was born in 1982. She was always active. She had a lot of friends. She was like a magnet; people were always attracted to Renee.

Jacinda: Who in your mind did you think had done this to her?

Donna: Jake.

Jacinda Davis: When Donna Ramos found out that her daughter had been murdered, she wasn't left to wonder who could've done such a thing. Because the answer seemed obvious. It must have been Renee's boyfriend, Jake Silva.

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Jacinda: Right off, right away you thought Jake.

Donna: Right away, I knew it was Jake, but I didn't know Ty Lopes was in the picture.

Jacinda: Jake's involvement in her daughter's death had not come as a surprise to Donna. But she was shocked to find out he hadn't acted alone.

When the police arrested Jake for Renee's murder, they also arrested Ty Lopes, the thirty-three-year-old uncle of Jake's best friend.

Susan Simpson: Do you think that Silva and Lopes were the only ones involved?

Donna: Well, I always thought that Ray Goans was involved, too.

Jacinda [06:26]: 21-year-old Ray Goans was the third person arrested for Renee's murder. He'd been friends with Jake and Renee – Donna had even met him once. But Ray never went to trial.

Donna:

I still to this day, no one ever gave me a reason. The prosecutor dropped his charges for I don't understand why.

Jacinda: Like Donna, Renee's friends had also suspected Jake right away.

Amber: It's easy to conclude or easy to believe it.

Lori: That it was him.

Jacinda: Amber and Lori were two of Renee's closest friends. They had known things about Renee's relationship with Jake that made him, at least, an obvious suspect.

Susan: Do you remember what your reaction was to hearing not just Jake, but also this Ty guy?

Amber: I didn't know who that guy was.

Lori: I think my reaction was, what the fuck?

Susan: And also, this Ray guy.

Amber: Oh yeah, Ray. I forgot about him.

Lori: Yeah, I didn't know them. We didn't know them, yeah.

Amber: Yeah, that was surprising that there was more than one person.

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Lori: But then Ray, they ended up letting Ray go.

Jacinda [07:10]: The first time Susan and I heard about this case, what immediately caught our attention was the fact that no matter what you believe really happened to Renee, something went wrong here. One way or another, justice was not served. At least not fully.

According to the version of events that the prosecutor said was the closest to the truth, there had been at least 5 people in all, maybe more, who had conspired to lure 18-year-old Renee Ramos to her death.

But only two were convicted. Which means most of those involved got away with murder.

And there's something else about this case too that caught our eye. The prosecutor said that there had been another dozen or so people present when the crime happened.

Donna Ramos:

That's always been bothering me. I just don't understand how someone can live, live their life without coming forward and saying, "Yes. This is what happened."

I mean, even if it was somebody that witnessed it, you'd think that they'd come clean and say, you know, "I was there 23 years ago," come forward and say, "this is what really happened."

Jacinda Davis [08:17]: Renee's mother, Donna, still lives in Manteca. Anytime she goes to the store, or stops at a gas station, or goes out to sing karaoke with friends, she could – unknowingly – run into people who were involved in her daughter's death.

And it's not just the people she doesn't know that Donna has to wonder about. According to the state's evidence, several of Renee's friends were among the teenagers who were there that night, but who stood by and watched as Renee was raped and killed but did nothing to stop it.

Jacinda:

Do you want to tell people like, "If you were there, just please let me know?"

Would you want to put that call out that you want to find out who else was there?

Donna:

Yes, I would like to know who, if there was somebody else there to please come forward and tell their story.

Jacinda: When we started investigating this case, it didn't take us long to discover that there are a lot of people in Manteca who believe there is more to this story than has ever been told.

Male Voice 1: I was under the impression it was like, between six and twelve people.

Susan Simpson:

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But if there were six or more people involved in the rape and murder, that seems like a lot of people to not go after. To only get two?

Male Voice 1:

In my opinion, it was like, all right, well, we got to get the boyfriend, you know what I mean? And then, maybe if we just get this creepy old guy, then people won't ask about nothing else, and at least we got something taken care of?

Male Voice 2: There was four people, they all got convicted.

Susan Simpson [09:45]: Only two.

Male Voice 2: Only two what? Jacob and?

Susan: And Ty. That's it.

Male Voice 2: I thought they had the sons-of-bitches.

Susan:

What if they got it wrong, what if one of them or both of them didn't do this?

Male Voice 3:

Well, yeah, that's a shame but I would hate for this to have to be reopened and s--, be dragged through it all over again. I think the way it ended up is just the way it is. Let it stay buried.

Susan: But if they got it wrong, then theoretically...

Male Voice 3: Well, that would be a shame, but...

Susan: People are out there who got away with murder.

Male Voice 3: Yeah. It's a scary thought.

Susan: And could do it again.

Male Voice 3: Or they already have. Who knows?

Susan [10:27]: The obvious answer isn't always the right answer. And it certainly wasn't in this case. Because what investigators believe happened to Renee was far from obvious, and far more sinister. It was an elaborate murder conspiracy carried out by her boyfriend and his many accomplices.

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And if investigators are right about that, then this case is still not solved, not fully, because several of the killers were never found. And if investigators were not right about that, then two men may have been wrongfully convicted of a crime someone else committed.

So, what really happened to Renee? And who was it that got away with her murder?

Manteca is known for being a bedroom community. Most of the people who live there, work elsewhere – many of them in San Francisco, which is only 75 miles or a 3-hour round trip commute away.

The town's nickname – at least, the one that was given to it by city planners – is “The Family City.”

Amber:

It used to be really boring because there wasn't really much to do. But it was cool because it, you know, feels like a safe town.

Lori: I thought it was fun because we were always on our bikes.

Susan Simpson [11:39]: Renee's friends Amber and Lori told us what it had been like growing up in Manteca in the 90s.

Lori: We would ride our bikes everywhere.

Amber: Yeah, because our parents thought it felt safe for us.

Lori:

We would go to the park and climb trees. We didn't have cell phones. We had to find each other by riding our bikes around looking for each other. And it was small back then. It's big now.

Amber: It got big real fast.

There has been a lot of development in Manteca in the past 23 years. A sprawling labyrinth of subdivisions has now replaced the almond orchards that once surrounded the town.

Lori: On the weekends, we would go to like, the orchard parties.

Susan: What were the orchard parties?

Amber: It consisted with like, a keg and some solo cups and--

Lori:

We would meet somewhere and then we would just follow everybody into the orchards.

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Amber:

A line of cars. And we'd just park in an orchard until the farmer found out we were there, and we'd get chased out.

Lori: It was fun, though.

Amber offered to drive us around town and show us all the places where she and Renee and the rest of their friends used to hang out.

Amber:

This roof right here on Fourth of July, we had just finished school, and we were on this roof...

Jacinda Davis: Right here?

Susan Simpson: That one there?

Amber:

Yeah, there's apartments up there, and you just climb out the window and onto the roof.

Susan: How'd you know those people?

Amber: I have no idea. I don't know. We had, we knew so many people.

Susan [13:01]: Renee had been one of the first in their friend group to get her driver's license, and a car. So back then, it was usually Renee driving everyone around.

Amber:

But that was such a fun car. Especially when there was, like, five deep in the backseat and, like, we're all piled on top of each other and sweating. And she would not turn on the air conditioner because it would waste gas, is what she would say.

I can literally hear her voice in my head right now saying, "It'll waste gas!"

She always would get this like, high-pitched voice when she would get excited.

Susan: Renee hadn't grown up in Manteca. But when she'd transferred into Lori and Amber's class in middle school, halfway through the school year, she'd found a group of friends who'd quickly embraced her.

Amber:

She's very bubbly. She was always, I was talking about, I think I was telling you about how funny she was. She was like...

Lori: She was very silly.

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Amber: She was ditzzy. And she'd always walk with this, like, a bounce in her step.

Lori: Yeah, she did.

Amber: If she had a ponytail, it would always be swinging. Our little valley girl.

Susan: Yeah. So that was a term of endearment for her?

Amber: Oh, yeah.

Lori: Yeah. It was just like a cute inside joke.

Amber:

Oh, when she was telling us her nationality and she was part valley girl, I just thought that was so funny.

From home video:

Friend: *So, what nationality are you?*

Renee: *Portuguese.*

Friend: *Portuguese? And?*

Renee: *And Finn.*

Friend: *And?*

Renee: *I'm a valley girl.*

Susan Simpson [14:52]: That was Renee, from some old home video footage that the girls recorded back then. Amber and Lori shared a copy of it with us.

Amber: It has some embarrassing moments because, you know.

Lori: We were kids.

Amber: Just us just goofing around and just being...

Lori: Silly girls.

Amber: Yeah.

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In one of the videos, Renee's friend is filming her, and zooms in for an extreme closeup on Renee's nose.

Friend: Is your nose hairs the same color as your real hair?

Renee: I don't have nose hairs.

Friend: Oh really? Are you sure?

Renee: I'm sure.

Friend: Who are those weird people that just skated by?

Renee: Skaters. I don't know who they are.

Friend: Do you like skaters?

Renee: Yep.

Friend: This has been a broadcasting of 20/20 with Barbara Walters.

Susan Simpson [15:27]: Back in 2000, skateboarding had been a contentious subject in Manteca. It was popular with the teenagers, but a nuisance to just about everyone else.

It was also a favorite subject of Manteca's local paper, which ran regular headlines like, "SKATER TROUBLES PERSIST," "SKATERS ARRESTED AT TACO BELL," and "COPS DEAL WITH INJURIES, NUDITY, AND VULGARITY [FROM SKATERS]", all alongside op-eds that urged city leaders to "GET TOUGH WITH SKATING HOOLIGANS."

One of those skating hooligans was Jake Silva.

Jake Silva: Unlawful skateboarding. They got me on a whole bunch of that.

SUSAN: That's Jake Silva. It has been a very long time since he last saw a skateboard. But back when he was 18, he was passionate about skating.

Jake:

Just the feel of it, just the freedom of it. Grinding on curbs and jumping stairs and jumping gaps and stuff like that. You get hooked on it. It just became my everyday routine.

SUSAN: Jake had spent most of his days just skating around town with other teenagers. We talked to some of the guys that Jake used to skate with about what that had been like.

Male Voice 4:

We're like a ragtag skateboarding crew. And, you know, we'd get into trouble, but it was nothing serious ever. We'd just goof around and skateboard where we weren't supposed

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to, and, you know, cops would tell us to leave places. And we'd laugh and leave. Get curfew tickets, stuff like that.

Male Voice 3:

Pretty much we're all shitheads being rebellious, you know, everybody thinks they're going to be pro someday, but no one was good enough to be pro.

SUSAN: Back then – back before he'd been arrested and convicted of the murder of his girlfriend -- Jake hadn't really stood out from the crowd he was running with. The people who'd known him then mostly remember him as just another skater.

Male Voice 5: Personality wise, um, I guess he seemed pretty laid back.

Female Voice 1:

Jake was always a nice kid. I mean, he came from kind of a poorer family and didn't really have a lot. But he was never like one of those dickhead dudes, he was always super sweet.

Female Voice 2: I thought he had really pretty eyes. I do remember that. He was tall. And he always looked like he needed a freaking haircut.

Susan Simpson [17:54]: It was the summer of 1999 when Jake Silva and Renee Ramos met for the very first time.

Jake Silva:

We had a mutual friend named Andrea that was my friend Robbie's girlfriend. And we were at Andrea's house one day and Renee was there, and we locked eyes and it was like...

We just clicked. Like, bam, like, instantly. We clicked big time, like wow.

Susan: Was it just love at first sight?

Jake: Pretty much, pretty much. It was just, I don't even know what words to say.

Susan: To Renee's mother, Donna, the relationship between Jake and Renee had seemed to move fast.

Donna Ramos:

Well, I remember hearing about Jake from her because Justin was her boyfriend. And one day she just came home from school, and she said, well, um I'm breaking up with Justin because I met this boy named Jake, and I really like Jake. And I said, oh, Justin's such a nice guy, you know. I'm sure she broke, broke his heart.

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So, when I first met Jake, I, I liked him. He was, seemed like an okay kid. He was quiet. Very quiet around me, and he didn't spend a lot of time with, with Renee at home. She got a skateboard. They always took off and just went on their skateboards.

Jacinda Davis: So your first impressions were, he was an okay kid?

Donna: He was okay. Mhm.

Jacinda: Yeah, not as good as Justin.

Donna: No.

Jacinda: But an okay kid.

Donna: Yeah. He was okay. He was just kind of quiet.

SUSAN: When Jake and Renee met, Renee hadn't been a skater. So Jake helped her pick out a skateboard, and started teaching her how to skate.

Jake:

She was learning. She was still awkward on it. But she learned kind of fast. I was trying to teach her how to ollie on it, I was trying to teach her how to do tricks on it.

Susan: Did she like skateboarding?

Jake Silva:

I don't know. Yeah, she did. I know it was because of me, but I think she liked it once she started getting into it and doing it.

Susan Simpson [20:16]: As time went on though, Renee's mother grew more troubled by her daughter's relationship with Jake.

Donna Ramos:

I saw a lot of red flags with him because he couldn't even keep- he couldn't even stay in school. So, I'm sure he was a troublemaker. I'm not sure what he did, but he must have been a troublemaker.

To Donna, it was clear that Jake was not a good influence on Renee.

Donna:

And then, another thing, when she did meet Jake, she was just hanging out with Jake because he wasn't going to school. So, in her junior year she didn't go to school very much. And then when she turned eighteen, which was in April of her junior year, she just didn't go.

Jacinda Davis:

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Yeah, it's not like you can pick up a seventeen, eighteen year old and stick them in your car. Like, how do you do that?

Donna:

Yeah, how do you, yeah, how do you make them stay in school? And, you know, Jake was just a bad influence. I just, if she had not ever met him, I really think she would've made something of her life.

Jacinda:

Amber told us that before Jake, like, she and Renee did really well. Like, they would study together, and they got good grades. And that, yeah.

Susan: She stopped caring so much after...

Donna: She stopped caring about a lot of things.

Susan: Things that weren't Jake.

Donna: Right. Everything centered around Jake.

Renee's friends had their own objections to Renee's new boyfriend.

Lori [21:47]:

I feel like when she met Jake she was really MIA, like she was with him all that time. So I actually wasn't around Jake that much. I feel like I only met him a few times, but every time I met him he was very like, no emotion.

Susan Simpson: What did he look like?

Lori: T-Shirt, baggy pants.

Amber:

Blond hair, blue eyes. And he did, he had really pretty eyes like, they were unique. And I remember Renee always talking about how his eyes were so captivating.

Lori: Aww.

Amber: Uh huh. So, yeah.

Susan: Could you see why she was attracted to him?

Amber:

Yeah, he was cute. I mean, everything else I didn't care for. I felt like she could do a lot better than that.

I was always trying to find - I was trying to get her to leave him all the time.

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Lori: Why?

Susan:

Jake says in one of the interviews, he's like, "Oh, her girlfriends hated me. They were always trying to split us up."

Amber: That was me.

Susan: Was that true?

Amber: That was definitely me.

Susan [22:42]: It wasn't just Amber, either. Renee had other friends who were telling her the same thing. But she wasn't listening.

Male Voice 2:

I told her, you know, "What are you doing with that guy?" Once, I remember.

Susan: What'd she say?

Male Voice 2: "Oh no, Tim. He's alright. He's alright. You just don't know him."

If anything, all the pressure on Renee to leave Jake may have just made her double down on their relationship even more.

Donna Ramos:

Well, Renee started getting more and more where she didn't want to be home anymore. She used to always tell me, "Well, when I turn eighteen, I'm not eve-, I'm not gonna be here anymore. I'm gonna leave. I'm, I'm leaving."

Jacinda Davis [23:20]: On April 17th, 2000, Renee turned 18. And she made good on her promise. She left home. To go be with Jake.

The problem was that Jake had turned 18 a month earlier. And when he did, his dad and stepmom gave him an ultimatum.

Silva:

When he turned eighteen my husband told him, "You're not gonna live here if you're not gonna work or go to school."

Susan Simpson: So Jake was kicked, was he kicked out?

Silva: Well, he left, you know, because, I mean, his dad gave him a choice.

Given the option of getting a job or getting kicked out to the streets, Jake decided on the latter. Which meant, when Renee turned 18 a few weeks later, she ended up on the streets as well.

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Jake Silva:

It felt like that's what we had to do to be free. That's why we did it, you know. It was because of me. Her mom hated me, her friends hated me, and the only way we could be together is to do that. So, we did it.

And I can't help but blame myself for it. If it wasn't for me, she'd have been at home with her friends, hanging out with her friends instead of with me on the streets.

Out on the streets, Jake didn't draw much attention. He was just another grungy skater kid. But Renee stood out. People noticed her and wondered what was going on.

Male Voice 2:

I just remembered, I'd looked at her, and I just thought, what are you doing? Why are you walking around? You have so many awesome friends. Like, why aren't you in a car with three other pretty little girls, driving around, doing girl things?

Renee's friends were equally baffled by the situation.

Lori:

I do remember like she was not living at home. And we were all like, "What, where are you going? where, what, why are you?"

Amber: Where are you?

Lori:

So, it was, it was not good. And I feel like we knew it wasn't good. But she wasn't gonna listen to us.

Amber: Now we're starting to sound like her mom. So.

Lori:

Right? Yeah, like, what are you doing? Why are you living on the streets? Like, why are you sleeping in your car? Like you have a house? It didn't make sense to us.

Jacinda Davis [25:29]: To Jake, though, it all made perfect sense.

Jake Silva:

It was just so fun, and just so comfortable, and just so, it was great. It was awesome.

Susan Simpson:

You see, you say that but to me, it sounds the exact opposite. It sounds so uncomfortable.

Jake: Well it was, but we were together.

Susan:

You could've had a warm bed every night instead of just sleeping in bushes and...

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Jake: I know.

Susan: But you were having fun?

Jake:

We did what we wanted, you know? Driving around in the car, listening to music all day, hanging out with our friends. You know, it was fun. I regret it, but it was fun.

As Jake describes it, he and Renee weren't being forced onto the streets because they didn't have any other options. They were choosing to live on the streets, because they were young and in love and having fun.

Jake:

Like Bonnie and Clyde kind of thing. We didn't feel right if we weren't together, you know? I had to be touching her, she had to be touching me. We were all over each other.

As they saw it, all they needed was each other. That, and Renee's old Plymouth station wagon.

Jake:

That was our spaceship. The back seat, it was a bench seat, pulled a lever and it would fold down. That's how we were able to put the mattress back there. That's why we called it our spaceship. It was kinda like a small motorhome, you know?

For a time, Jake and Renee called the spaceship home, while they lived and skated on the streets of Manteca.

Donna Ramos:

And then she drove it home one day and the whole front windshield was smashed. And I said, "You can't be driving that car, it's smashed. You're gonna get a ticket."

So, she just said, "Okay," and then she just took off and said, "Well, I'm gonna go see Jake."

Jacinda Davis [27:20]: With the spaceship out of commission, Jake and Renee had to find new ways to get by.

Nozaki:

They were just kind of couch surfing Sleeping at friend's places or at parks.

Susan Simpson: Would you use the word homeless to apply to them?

Nozaki:

Not really, you know, because you have friends that take care of you, not really homeless.

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That's Matt Nozaki. Or, as most people in town know him, Fuji. Fuji was one of those friends that helped Jake and Renee out. His place was great to crash at, because unlike most of the teenagers in their circle, he had his own place – well, kind of. His room was a detached garage in his parent's backyard that had been converted into a dwelling unit.

Which meant Jake and Renee could come and go from Fuji's place without his parents ever knowing.

Nozaki: Usually they slept on the floor. Threw down like a blanket, slept on the blanket.

Susan: How often do they do that?

Nozaki: I'd say a few times a week.

For a time, Renee and Jake floated around from couch to couch, and from crash pad to crash pad. Renee didn't see her friends that often. They spent more time with Jake's friends – mostly skaters, and most of whom never really knew Renee all that well.

Male Voice 5: She was a really sweet girl. She's super nice.

Female Voice 2:

She was really very small, thin short blonde hair. I just remember her being tiny, just a tiny little thing.

Male Voice 6:

She was friendly, kind of quiet until you get to know her. I'd see them at parties and stuff like that. You know, that wasn't really part of my crowd.

Jacinda Davis: For a time, Renee even had a job, so the couple had some spending cash. She'd been working at the McDonald's on the east side of town, but that was kind of a longways to walk to get there, and besides, the work was kind of boring. So, Renee decided to stop working there.

She never technically quit. But she did stop showing up for her shifts.

But between crashing with friends and finding good parks to sleep at, Jake and Renee managed to get by even without any money.

Susan Simpson [29:20]: How'd you get food?

Jake Silva:

Going home to my dad's, she'd go home to her mom's, or we'd go do a dine-n-dash, or we'd do just whatever, however.

Their favorite place to dine-n-dash was at Denny's. They'd walk in, eat a meal, and then walk out without paying.

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But then one time, Jake and Renee were out with their friend Ray in the nearby town of Tracy. And they couldn't find the local Denny's. So, they decided to try to dine and dash at a different restaurant. And at first, everything seemed fine. Renee walked out of the restaurant without a problem.

Jake:

'Cause, my thing, my thing was making sure Renee got out. She would always get up and walk out first.

Once she's out in the parking lot and looking in I see her, so we, we start to stand up, and they were on us right away. "Hey you haven't paid yet. Where you going?"

I was like, oh shit we got caught.

Jake and Ray were charged for the dine-and-dash and ordered to pay for the meal they'd tried to skip out on.

Jake:

We ate like seventy dollars' worth of food. Sodas and ice cream and all kinds of shit. It was like seventy, or seventy-five bucks we owed. That's the whole reason why we decided to go to Labor Ready.

Although Renee hadn't gotten charged, Jake says the three of them agreed they'd share the cost of the ticket. Which meant they now had to figure out a way to get some cash, and fast.

Their court date was set for a Tuesday. So they decided that the day before – on Monday, May 29th, 2000 – they'd go work at Labor Ready.

Labor Ready was a temp agency that provided day laborers for work sites around town. And the appeal of working there was that, rather than having to wait for a paycheck to come in, they could go work for just a day, and then get paid in cash that same afternoon – just in time to pay off their dine and dash bill at court the next morning.

Susan: Do you remember the last time you saw Renee?

Nozaki: It was the Monday morning they went to Labor Ready.

Susan Simpson [31:56]: The night before they went to Labor Ready, Renee and Jake and Ray had crashed on the floor at Fuji's place. Fuji remembers the three of them leaving his place together.

Nozaki: They said that they were all going to get work, so they left really early.

The Labor Ready was just around the corner from Fuji's place, in a little blue building off of Yosemite Avenue. Jake and Renee and Ray had spent most that night just skating around town goofing off, until finally, at around 3 or 4am, they'd gone to Fuji's to crash.

Proof.

Not for very long, though. Fuji set his alarm for them – for 6am.

Nozaki:

You had to get there early to get the jobs because they hand them out fairly quick. So, you got to, got to beat the rush. You can't just show up in the afternoon and expect to find work.

Susan: So that's why they were getting there at six AM?

Nozaki: Yeah.

Jake, Renee, and Ray had made it to the Labor Ready a little after 6am that morning. But that's when the plan began to fall apart.

Of the three of them, only Ray had ever worked there before, and knew how the process worked. But he decided he was too tired to get a job. He told the others that he was heading over to a nearby park instead, where he knew he could get a blanket and take a nap.

Since it was Jake and Renee's first time at Labor Ready, they had to register first before they could even get their names added to the call list. For Jake, that was a problem – he didn't have a social security card or a driver's license, so he couldn't even sign up for a job at all.

That left Renee. The lady at the front desk had her go through the registration process, which took about 20 minutes. Afterwards, Jake and Renee sat down together in the waiting room to see if she'd get assigned to a job site.

Then at around 8 or 9 am, Jake started to get sleepy too. And that's when he made a decision that he says haunts him to this day: He left.

Jake:

If I wouldn't have left her at Labor Ready, if I'd stayed there like I was supposed to, protected her, I wouldn't be sitting here now.

Susan Simpson: Why didn't you stay?

Jake Silva:

We were up all night that night. And we knew the town so well and everybody, you know? We felt safe there, I guess, just a dumb idiot kid, I don't know.

Susan: So you were just tired and wanted to go nap somewhere?

Jake:

Yeah, the park. Fuck, oh man, it's been eating me alive all these years. I don't know what the hell happened.

Proof.

Susan Simpson [34:07]: The plan had been simple. Renee would wait there at Labor Ready until she found out if she'd got a job or not. If she did get one, she'd go to work, and then Jake would be there waiting for her when she came back that afternoon to get her check.

And if she didn't get a job, she'd just go to the park and meet up again with Ray and Jake there.

Jake:

If she doesn't get a job, and something comes up, and there's nothing available, to come straight back to the park, meet us at the park. And she never showed up.

So, we thought maybe she got a job, we didn't think too much of it, you know?

It turned out though that Renee had not gotten a job. Which shouldn't have surprised them really because what they hadn't realized was that Monday was a holiday – it was Memorial Day. Most businesses were closed, and there wasn't as much work to be had. Some of the men there that day did get assigned to a job sites, but Renee didn't.

So, when Jake went back to Labor Ready expecting to find Renee there after her work shift, he instead found out that she hadn't gotten a job at all.

Jake:

I went in, and that lady behind the desk, said that Renee left out going left on Yosemite, not right, not towards the park.

Yosemite Avenue is one of the main streets of Manteca, connecting the east and west sides of town. Renee had been supposed to meet Jake and Ray at the park, which means that when she left Labor Ready, she should have turned right onto Yosemite Avenue.

But Jake says the woman at the counter told him Renee had turned left instead – heading east, towards the other side of town.

Jake says he doesn't know why she would have turned left instead of right. He also says that he never saw her again.

Renee had left the Labor Ready building, walked out onto the street and vanished.

Jake:

I've been blaming myself for this shit for years. My dumb ass, I left her at Labor Ready like that.

And then there's the fact we were on the street period. I should've just, I should've just told her to go home, go home to your mom, go home to your friends.

I was the reason why she was out there on the streets, and vice versa. You know. We should've just both went home.

Proof.

Susan Simpson [36:18]: Fuji remembers Jake and Ray coming back by his place later on that afternoon.

Susan: What's the next thing you heard about Jake or Renee or anything?

Nozaki: They came back asking if she had come by.

Susan: That day?

Nozaki:

Yeah. Because I guess they had left her at the Labor Ready because they didn't have work for them.

Susan: What did they say, "Where's Renee?" Or?

Nozaki:

"Did Renee come by? She here?" And I said, no. I hadn't seen her since that morning.

Susan: Did they seem concerned or they just?

Nozaki: They seemed kind of surprised, I guess they had been looking for her.

Jake's friends all told us that Renee never showed up that day. Or any of the days that followed. None of them had been that concerned, though.

Susan: Jake was telling you he didn't know where Renee was

Male Voice 5:

Yeah. I didn't think much about it because we're all kind of, like, hanging out in the streets so people take off for a couple days at a time. Wasn't a big deal.

Male Voice 6:

She's got to be somewhere, it's fucking, couldn't be too far. Manteca's not that big, you know.

Nozaki: He was always asking if I'd seen her or asking if anybody had heard anything.

Susan: And no one had?

Nozaki:

Nope, we had no idea where she was. I just figured maybe they'd gotten in an argument or something. She was trying to teach him a lesson, or who knows. This kind of stuff happened all the time between couples.

Susan Simpson [37:35]: It wasn't until Thursday June 1st, three days after that morning at Labor Ready, that Renee's family found out something might be wrong.

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Jacinda Davis:

So, when did you first start to worry? Or when did you first realize no one had seen her?

Donna Ramos:

Her job at McDonald's, they called me. She said, you know I'm kind of concerned for Renee, because her boyfriend Jake is here, he keeps coming in and asking if, if she's been to work.

Jacinda Davis [38:09]: Renee's manager called Donna and told her that for the past three days, Renee's boyfriend had been showing up at the McDonald's and asking if anyone had seen her. No one had. But the manager thought it was weird, and she wanted Donna to know.

Donna decided to go find Renee but didn't know where to even start looking. She didn't know any of the new skater friends that Renee was hanging out with.

Then Donna's mother -- Renee's grandmother -- remembered that, a couple weeks earlier, Renee had stopped by home to do some laundry. Afterward, she'd asked her grandmother to drop her off at her friend Fuji's house.

Donna:

That's how we knew where Fuji lived. So, I said let's go over to Fuji's we've got to find Her.

When we got to Fuji's we pulled up and Ray Goans was there, Fuji was sitting there on the sidewalk. Jake wasn't there. I have no idea where Jake was. And I just thought something's off here.

These kids aren't, they're not straightforward with me. Something's going on. So, I was like, "Where's Renee? When did you guys see her last?"

And they just acted like, "We don't know. We haven't seen her."

Ray told Donna that they'd dropped Renee off at the Labor Ready on Monday morning, three days earlier. But he said they hadn't seen her since.

Two days later, on Saturday, June 3rd, when Renee still hadn't turned up, Donna went to the police station and filed a missing person report.

Donna:

So when I went to the police department, they just kind of well, sorry, you know, well, she's eighteen.

You know, the whole weekend went by I just, I knew, I just knew something, I just knew something weird was going on. Something was off.

Jacinda Davis [40:02]: Jake says during this time he'd been concerned as well. But he wasn't yet alarmed by Renee's disappearance.

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Jake Silva:

The whole time during that week, she never showed up at any of the normal places that we went to. We hung out at Fuji's, went to the park, you know, I mean she didn't show up nowhere. And all my friends and everybody was telling me, she's with her friends, you know her friends hate you, you know her mom hates you.

So that whole time, I was under the impression that she was leaving me, that she was gone. That her friends had convinced her to leave me finally, you know? And then out of nowhere, people are saying they found a body.

Susan Simpson [40:50]: On the morning of Monday, June 5th – one week after Memorial Day, when Renee had been seen walking away from Labor Ready – Renee's family was out searching for her.

Donna Ramos:

And then, when my mom and my mother-in-law came home and they said, "Oh, we were at Labor Ready. Labor Ready just told us some horrible news, they just found a body at Home Depot construction site. A small female."

And so, right away we just, all three of us just started crying. We just all just, just got in a group hug and we just started crying because I just knew, I knew then. I just knew. A small female body at the construction site.

We all just three of us knew. So, we just stood out there and just cried.

That was the worst day of my life. It was the worst day ever. I just knew, I just knew it was her.

Jacinda Davis [42:13]: Next week, on Proof:

Construction Worker 1:

He goes "Hey, I think I found a dead body."

I said, "What?"

He goes, "Yeah come here," and so I grabbed the insulation with it and pulled it back and I looked at her and I looked at him and I said, "It's just a mannequin."

Donna Ramos:

I told him that she had had a black eye. She had a black eye about two weeks before she was murdered.

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Male Voice 5:

Instantly, everyone thought it was him. Fingers pointed at him right off, right off the gate.

Susan: Jake?

Male Voice 5: Yeah.

Jake Silva:

Eventually I would have got over it and it would have been fine, just, at that time, it was really bad.

Amber:

I had a lot of guilt. I felt like what I did spurred what happened to her. I really felt like I may have stirred up something that led to her death.

Jake Silva: Do you honestly, do you think it's me?

Detective: Yeah. I think there's a pretty good chance it's you.

Jake Silva: Why? Why would I kill my own girlfriend?

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That's all for this week... thanks so much for listening.
