

Episode 11: Rumors

-Trunk Club Ad-

-MailChimp Ad-

Ira Glass

Previously, on Serial...

Detective MacGillivray

What did he tell you?

Jay

He told me that she had broke his heart and it was extremely wrong for anyone to treat him that way.

Rabia Chaudry

He was like the community's golden child.

Deirdre Enright

I think the odds of you like, getting the charming sociopath, you're just not that lucky.

Sarah Koenig

You don't think that I know you at all?

Adnan Syed

I mean for you to say that I'm a great person, a nice person I've only talked to you on the phone a few times.

Automated voice

This is a Global-Tel link prepaid call from Adnan Syed an inmate at a Maryland Correctional facility. This call will be recorded and monitored. If you wish to...

Sarah Koenig

From This American Life and WBEZ Chicago it's Serial. One story told week by week. I'm Sarah Koenig.

For two months now I've been grappling with rumors about Adnan. People telling me, "there's stuff you don't know about Adnan, stuff you need to know to understand who you're dealing with." These communications came in the form of phone calls, many phone calls, sometimes one on one, sometimes conference calls. Also texts and nervous emails, I can't tell this one I've spoke to that one and then that one gets worried that I've broken my word, which I promise I haven't. When Person 2 doesn't confirm the thing Person 1 told me and I report that back to Person 1, Person 1 often tells me Person 2 is lying to me. All these rumors are coming from people Adnan knew growing up in the mosque community, the South Asian families who attend the Islamic Society of Baltimore. Some of these people I'd already talked to during my first round of reporting for this story, but then once the series started and they heard how Adnan was being portrayed, a new round of phone calls began. The rumors themselves are nothing too dastardly. Nobody is saying, "I saw him do it" or "I have proof." None of it is directly connected to the crime. But likely there are a great many things I don't know about Adnan and some of the things I was hearing were giving me pause. So I checked them out as best I could, not every single one, some of them were so small that I initially was confused by the telling, waiting for the punch line that had already slid by. Such as, "He took a piece of my clothing, a piece of designer sportswear," and then over explained claiming, "it wasn't mine, or that he didn't know it was mine" and then apologised profusely. I, Sarah Koenig, am going to confess something right now. I have done exactly the same thing. More than once I'd wager.

On the other end of the scale was a story so incriminating that we thought, well if this one is true then we're done, our story is over and we can all go home. This was the biggie and I worked every angle I could to suss it out. I heard it second hand that someone said something about Adnan about a party fifteen years back. I spent weeks trying to learn first the name, then the location of that someone, then trying to contact that someone and then finally driving several hours to question that someone in person. I nervously knock at the door, nice guy comes out, we chat. He

tells me what I've spent all these weeks and hours waiting for, "Oh yeah," he says, "I remember Adnan. Nice kid. I remember he seemed sad when he and his girlfriend broke up." And so I prompt him, "I heard this thing, is that true? Anything else you want to tell me?" The guys looks blank. That's all he had for me. Imagine I have a file on my desk about this rumor and I just stamped it with my big cartoon stamp. Unsubstantiated. I cross it off the list.

There's one more rumor I'll tell you about in a minute, but first I want to talk about why relatively few people from the Mosque community are willing to talk on tape or on the record about Adnan. To give you a sense of what I'm talking about, here's Ali - not his real name and also this is not his real voice. Why the secrecy?

Ali

So now let's say you use my voice and use my first name and last name and you then play it on NPR radio whatever, and somebody from the community hears it. Within seconds that will travel throughout the whole community "--and this is what he said, he probably knows something, how do we know he's not involved or he did something, or why's he doing that and--" that's how bizarre or irrational their thinking is. But I don't know. It's very irrational thinking and it's sad because it's educated kids talking like that.

Sarah Koenig

But it's you, you're one of them. I mean you're basically saying I'm succumbing to this irrational--

Ali

Oh yes. I'm 100% guilty. I'm 100% brainwashed by it.

Sarah Koenig

Ali and others told me that their community is judgmental. Right and wrong is drummed into you early and often. Adults judge kids' behavior, which then gets reflected back onto their parents. This is certainly not unique to their community, and the other thing that isn't unique is how close-knit it is. Information and gossip travels swiftly, and you don't want to be the one that goes against the grain, or says something that could hurt Adnan or his parents. No one wants to end up in hot water. I live in a small town. I understand that. But what I hadn't totally understood, I think is how

scared people were when Adnan got arrested. I got an anonymous text recently that said, “I’m a Muslim male who attends the Baltimore Mosque. My father and Adnan’s father were good friends and had known each other for years. Adnan’s story had always been an urban legend to us kids growing up in the Muslim community. Clouded in mystery and used as a cautionary tale.”

Some people did speak out on tape. I mean, Rabia and Saad Chaudry obviously did, and there are others too, but there’s also a significant faction of people, including Ali, who are scared. Ali said his parents were especially protective, like a “10” on the protective scale, so that after Adnan was arrested, they were frantic about his safety. His own life changed because of it.

Ali

Drastically, I would even go to the mailbox, and my dad would be like, “Where are you going?”

Sarah Koenig

Are you serious? That really happened?

Ali

It really happened, I’m not even making that up.

Sarah Koenig

Because your mailbox was at the end of the driveway, or at the end, uh--?

Ali

No, my mailbox was attached to the the wall of my house next to the front door. I’d open the front door, and he’d be like, “Where are you going, who are you going to meet? Is it a girl? Are you going to give her a ride?” because they think Adnan gave her a ride, and so they think that that’s the reason they picked him up, because he gave her a ride. There was a girl named, -- that I used to give rides to in the morning who lived down the street from me, and after Adnan got picked up, she came and was knocking on the door like, “are you gonna come pick me up? What’s going on?” My dad went crazy. My dad dropped her off to school and in the car told her, “Don’t ever ask my son for a ride again.” (laughing)

Sarah Koenig

Oh my god, really?

Ali

Uh huh, yeah, and I think that's just the general-- look, I can't speak for everybody, but I think that's just how the community has become. Because it's just that fear that has stuck in. That's how it is. Even now if you go to a party and try to talk about Adnan's case, everyone just gets quiet. Not because they're saying that he did it, or that he didn't do it. It's just kind of like if you don't talk about it, then it doesn't exist.

Sarah Koenig

A bunch of people I talked to told me they feel guilty towards Adnan, that they let him down. Because they led him astray, or didn't protect him, or didn't mentor him, or didn't show up enough at trial, or didn't visit him in jail. Even the ones who are on the fence about his innocence said, "please tell Adnan I love him," or "please tell him I'm sorry." I often say back, "you should tell him yourself. You can write to him you know."

Then sometimes comes a pause. The reason Ali agreed to go on tape was that he wanted me to know this about Adnan.

Ali

I remember, especially in middle school and elementary--more into middle school--that when we would get picked for sports, Adnan was very athletic, tall, good-looking, kind of like the jock role, and I was more a chubby, short, kind of the nerdy kind of role, so he never made me feel that he always made sure that I got picked for the team. If other kids made fun of me on my athletic performance, or I couldn't shoot, or I couldn't kick the ball, or they would start poking fun, he would always have my back and kind of tell them to stop it or kind of watch out for me like an older brother. I'll never forget that.

Sarah Koenig

Adnan was the kind of kid who would stand up when your parents came into the room, Ali said. At parties or events, he'd be the first one to ask, "how can I help you, Aunty? Do you need help setting up those tables, Uncle?" This is what Ali, disguised and anonymous had to say.

Normally I probably wouldn't pursue rumors that on their face aren't connected to the crime at hand. But in this case, I decided it was worthwhile because of where these rumors come from. I think these rumors are coming from a feeling that a handful of people have. I've heard this from about four people, people who knew Adnan growing up. That Adnan was capable of committing this crime. I think they believe that they saw things in his personality that they think that I am not seeing. Namely, that he's duplicitous. The term "psychopath" gets thrown in sometimes. People told me he used his charm and his smarts to deflect suspicion or weasel out of things when he got caught. Pretty much what the judge said to him at his sentencing.

Which brings me to the only rumor I heard that at least partly checked out. It was this: Adnan stole money from the mosque. Donation money. I heard various version on how this happened, or could have happened. But from what I can tell, the basic story is: people who come to pray on Fridays, and it is a lot of people, many hundreds, some of them put donation money into boxes. That's what Adnan skimmed. Two people told me they saw him do it. One person told me he'd seen it several times - he wouldn't go on tape - but the other guy did.

Anonymous Male #1

He was stealing from the mosque every Friday.

Sarah Koenig

This is a guy I can't name, whose voice we've also changed, see explanation above.

Anonymous Male #1

Because he was looked upon like the golden child, and his dad was very religious, and he would go out on missionary work and so on. So his family was looked at very good, religious family. He was collecting money, or you know, the donation boxes that would go

around on Friday after prayer, he was in charge basically, of getting all the boxes together and counting all the money and totaling it all up. He was pocketing thousands of dollars every week. Nobody questioned, you know, good little muslim kid stealing from the mosque. I mean, are you serious? You couldn't even imagine.

Sarah Koenig

You saw him actually take money?

Anonymous Male #1

You know, I absolutely saw him taking it, and I also have done it.

Sarah Koenig

This guy estimated that Adnan had stolen many thousands of dollars over time. Tens of thousands, maybe a hundred thousand dollars. This sounded fantastical to me, so I checked with Maqbool Patel. He was President of the Islamic Society of Baltimore at the time. He said he'd never heard of Adnan taking donation money, but that it does happen from time to time. Someone stealing, or trying to. There are people who take shoes, he added. "My own, brand-new shoes were stolen." Twice, he said that happened, once in New York and once in Baltimore. But if Adnan did take money, he said, there was no way it was a big amount. He said that on average, people donated about 2,500 dollars at Friday prayers. Maybe up to three thousand dollars if it was a special occasion. That money was used to pay the bills, he said. Keep the electricity and heat on. If they were even 100 dollars short on any given week, they'd have noticed. So sure, maybe 20 bucks or 40 bucks here or there, but not hundreds. Thousands, out of the question.

Adnan says it's true. He did take donation money. When I first asked him about it, he was unhappy. I've asked him so many, frankly, insulting things, so many nosy and inappropriate questions and he's never given me pushback. But this was the last straw.

What does it have to do with the case, he wanted to know. He's never claimed that he's innocent of killing Hae because he was a perfect, or even a good person, he said. So why talk about this? Why the double standard? Why wasn't I going into everyone else's closet and pulling out skeletons that made them look bad? Why do I protect other people and call him out on everything? He's endured other stuff in my reporting that he didn't think was fair to him.

Adnan

You go from my savior to my executioner on a flip flop flip flop, like Mitt Romney.

Sarah Koenig

But now he was sticking up for himself, he said. He seemed pissed and hurt and I understood it.

Adnan

I mean, and it's a very uncomfortable thing for me to talk about, you know what I'm saying? It's a very shameful thing that I did. I've never denied it. I don't see, I don't understand. I just think it's really unfair to me.

Sarah Koenig

If you don't want to talk about this, that's your prerogative. I'm not going to force you to talk about it. If you don't want to talk about it--

Adnan

Yeah, but I'm also not gonna sit here and you mention it and this is the only thing I don't talk about. You understand what I'm saying? So it's put me in a predicament like, it's like you're basically publicly shaming me for something that I've never denied that I did, anyway. And it has nothing to do with the case. But you won't do it to other people though, it's like why do I have to keep getting called out on my stuff and it's got nothing to do with the case, but you don't do it to nobody else.

Sarah Koenig

Well, I mean--

Adnan

You don't do it to nobody else, yo.

Sarah Koenig

A couple of days and phone calls later all was calm and he told me his stealing story. It was during the summer, maybe the summer before eighth grade he said.

Adnan Syed

During the Friday prayers. At lot of time there would be one adult and he would get four or five kids together and he would say, “look, I want you guys to go around and collect money from people, or stand there, you know how on different days there was different ways.” So it was usually anywhere from four to five of us, we’d all have little boxes or something and people would come and they would put money in them. Usually I’m not trying to make it sound like Oceans Eleven or whatever, but it was thousands of dollars in cash. Like ones, fives, tens, twenties and maybe fifteen hundred or two or three thousand dollars in cash and I don’t really remember who. I’m not saying it was me, I’m not saying it wasn’t me. The idea came up like “hey man, we could take sixty dollars or eighty dollars and go to the movies, go to the mall, play in the arcade, you know eat and stuff like that.” So eventually it’ll be a thing like one or two of us would pocket a twenty dollar bill and then pocket another twenty dollar bill and the other three, or two or three of us would do it and the other two would keep watch. I mean it was wrong, it was very wrong. It’s nothing that I’m proud of, I’m very ashamed of it. I don’t say that we were kids to try to put in context or try to make excuses. Well, maybe I am, right, it’s just that--

Sarah Koenig

What made you stop and what made you realise it was wrong?

Adnan Syed

I wish I could say that it was some feeling of religion or something or feeling of wrong but it wasn’t, I was kind of caught red handed so to speak.

Sarah Koenig

Adnan says he was caught red handed by Shamim his mother. He says she found some money in his pants pocket and asked him where it came from and the truth came out. He says she was horrified. It was the classic “I’m not angry, I’m disappointed.” More disappointed than she’d ever been in him he says. Adnan says back then, he didn’t think he was hurting anyone. They spent so much time at the mosque and they shovelled snow and they helped set up events and clean up, and so to him it was akin to taking twenty bucks from the till of the family store at the end of the night. He says of course as an adult he knows how wrong that is, but back then in eighth grade he didn’t fully get it.

Adnan’s telling of the stealing episode is a much more “boys will be boys” version than what I’d heard from other people who told me they saw in his actions something more malignant. A couple of people I talked to from the mosque community said, “This was so low. To take the hard earned cash of hard working people and at the mosque of all places. This was a terrible thing.” Other people said, “eh.” Mr. Patel the then President of the mosque was thoroughly unruffled by the whole thing. He obviously didn’t condone it but he more or less said “So what? It certainly does not a murderer make.” To him he said, if a young person does something like this it’s not necessarily a sign of bad character. Other mosque friends agreed. They didn’t see how it was connected to the crime and also, some people told me they’d shoplifted before or they’d broken the rules, so people in glass houses man. In the end these guys said what most of Adnan’s old friends say, he didn’t have it in him to kill someone. It wasn’t in his DNA.

To me this is the hard centre of Adnan’s case. *Can* you tell, really? Can you tell if someone has a crime like this in him? I think most of us think if we know someone well, we can tell. We act as detectives all the time, gathering evidence. Certain scenes we remember or the look on someone’s face or that thing he said when he got mad. And then we act as judge of character. It’s just a human thing. But of course it’s slippery because it’s so subjective. One person’s evidence of good character is another person’s evidence of questionable character. Case in point, I heard from many people that Adnan was the opposite of violent. That he was someone who would take the heat of tense situations.

Atif Iqbal

I’ve never even seen him in a fight, I’ve never even seen him mad at anybody.

Sarah Koenig

This is Atif Iqbal who knew Adnan from the mosque. That's his real name and his real voice.

Atif Iqbal

[Laughs] Exactly. Pretty funny it was me and him. Somebody told me that he said something about me and some other person or something and I went up there to confront him and he said "hey man, I don't know what you heard, I didn't say anything like that." I said, "man, if you ever say anything like--" I was getting all riled up and he just came and kissed me on my cheeks and that defused me completely.

Sarah Koenig

[Laughs] Wait, I missed that. He kissed you on your cheeks?

Atif Iqbal

He kissed me on my cheek and it completely defused me. I couldn't even be angry anymore. So that's why I couldn't even fathom the thought of him going out and killing somebody, I mean that's just so, I don't even know how to say it, it's just so out of his personality I would say.

Sarah Koenig

So for Atif, that kiss on the cheek is a tell. It's the real Adnan. But for that other guy who said that Adnan stole and thinks that Adnan might be guilty of the crime he's in prison for, that same peace-maker quality was something he brought up to me as evidence that Adnan was full of shit.

Anonymous Male #1

Taking tension out of the situation. He was the icebreaker and I knew that whatever was coming out of his mouth half of the time, it was just sweet talk or to take the heat away and half or majority of it was a lie.

Sarah Koenig

Here's the curious thing though. The same people who tell me they think Adnan was capable of killing Hae, or that stealing from the mosque was a great evil, or the Adnan was a pathological liar, they also tell me, to a man that Adnan was a great guy.

Anonymous Male #1

I mean he was such a good guy.

Sarah Koenig

This is the same anonymous person who thought Adnan had taken many thousands from the donation boxes.

Anonymous Male #1

He was so smart and he was so friendly and so many positive things.

Sarah Koenig

And that doesn't feel fake to you, like that part feels real too, is that what you're saying?

Anonymous Male #1

Genuinely he was good and he had that good side and he was helpful and he was caring and all that--

Sarah Koenig

You think a person can sort of contain both those things inside their personality?

Anonymous Male #1

I think it's very easy (muffled). I think if you corner anybody into a corner, they'll explode. Different people explode for different reasons.

Charles Ewing

Most of the hundreds of killers I've evaluated have been pretty ordinary people.

Sarah Koenig

This is Charles Ewing. He's a forensic psychologist and a lawyer. He teaches at the SUNY Buffalo Law School. He told me he's evaluated several thousand criminal defendants and testified in more than 700 trials as an expert witness. Mostly, lately, homicides committed by people in intimate relationships and homicides committed by young people. Ewing had listened to about half the episodes of the show. Obviously he can't weigh in on Adnan's psychological health, that'd be ridiculous. But I went to him to find out what's a valid way to try to understand what's going on when someone kills someone else. What's the range of options here? Ewing said most of the time he's doing insanity evaluations or evaluations for extreme emotional disturbance. Usually in cases where there's not a question of whether the defendant did it, more a question of why. Again, most of the people he's evaluating are pretty ordinary.

Charles Ewing

Some are extraordinary, there's some serial killers, some spree killers, some really awful psychopathic individuals. But for the most part, people kill not in a premeditated way; they're not evil, they're not sociopathic, they're not psychopathic. They kill because something happens that pushes them over the edge.

Sarah Koenig

In other words, murder isn't usually, strictly speaking a planned event. A lot of people who know Adnan, they can't get their heads around that Adnan *planned* to kill Hae. I hear it all the time. Here's his old Woodlawn classmate Peter Billingsley.

Peter Billingsley

The whole idea of premeditation just doesn't fit for Adnan. No, that doesn't fit at all. But I don't-- I know, it doesn't fit not one bit, with the person I knew.

Jane Efron

Of course there are some planned murders, but I'm sure this was not a planned murder.

Sarah Koenig

That's Jane Efron who taught Hae and Adnan English at Woodlawn. Her father was a cop.

Jane Efron

I can't buy that because that destroys everything that I feel about these kids, so I absolutely-- I think it was passion, an overdose of emotion. Of love, of jealousy, resentment, all of those things. It sneaks in on you and it dominates your thinking and you can't get away from it. But that's what I'm comfortable thinking. Planned, premeditated murder? Oh my Lord, no.

Sarah Koenig

I asked Ewing, can an otherwise seemingly normal kid up and do something like this, plan something like this, or even do it impulsively?

Sarah Koenig

Is snapping a thing? Because people say that all the time also, like, "maybe you snapped." Or, you know, "he snapped."

Charles Ewing

Yeah. People sometimes lose it and when they lose it, it's not always all at once. I've seen a lot of cases in which people have over a relatively short period of time, nursed feelings of rejection or anger or hostility and they've slowly risen to the point at which the individual decides to kill somebody. Those feelings simmer for a while and one of the thoughts is, "Maybe I should kill this person. I'm not going to kill this person. I don't want to kill this person. But what if I did?" The person thinks about it, and then maybe confronts the other person, the person who's the object of the frustration and the anger. Then at that point, the victim or would-be victim says or does something that triggers it, that provokes the ultimate killing. Now the law looks at that as premeditated. I'm not sure that it really is

premeditated in the sense that we normally think of it. It doesn't have to be like a sudden impulse to violence.

Sarah Koenig

So that was news to me, that there's this sort of liminal phase, a simmering contemplation: "What if I killed this person?" That can take the place of actual cognizant planning, but end up in the same result. The other thing I've considered, in my more reachy moments, is whether Adnan did, or doesn't know he did it. I'm not the only person who's entertained that one. Here's Adnan's friend Laura.

Laura

I mean, I remember the cops telling me sometime they have murderers standing with a knife in their hands, next to the body, saying to them that they didn't do it, because your brain goes into this shock and it shuts down. I was like, "maybe that happened. Maybe it was an accident. Maybe he got mad." I mean, we get mad. Maybe he lost it for a moment and it was an accident.

Sarah Koenig

Apparently this is not as outlandish as it might sound.

Charles Ewing

People can go into what's called a dissociative state where they're really psychologically not where they are physically. Probably half of the people I've evaluated who have killed other human beings have some degree of amnesia for what they've done.

Sarah Koenig

Did you say half? Half the people?

Charles Ewing

Yeah.

Sarah Koenig

Wow.

Charles Ewing

About half. Yeah. And it's not total amnesia usually, although I've seen some people who have a complete amnesia for killing. But it can be partly, "I don't really recall the details, I don't recall doing this."

Sarah Koenig

Because literally, like the memory isn't in their brain anymore, or it never was in their brain?

Charles Ewing

Yeah, I don't think we know the mechanism by which this kind of denial or amnesia or combination works, but in the cases that I've been involved in where people have had some kind of amnesia, or partial amnesia, or denial, it doesn't last forever. It's very difficult to maintain that kind of facade. What I find is that over time people do recover traces of what happened and they know what happened. But I've also seen people who have genuinely snapped and who committed a homicide and then they realize what they've done and the immediate reaction for most people is, "oh my God, look what I've done," and "what am I going to do about? I've got to figure out somehow to cover this up."

Sarah Koenig

Do you think it's, is there another scenario where it starts out as a lie, a sort of cognizant lie, like, "I didn't do this, I had nothing to do with this," and then, over time, you truly believe that lie? Like you kind of erase the fact that you're lying and it just becomes the truth of it for you?

Charles Ewing

I think that happens. I haven't seen that happen in homicide cases, but I've certainly see it happen in ordinary life.

Sarah Koenig

Less often in homicides?

Charles Ewing

Yeah, I haven't seen it that, and it's probably just because of-- in most homicide cases, the evidence is pretty overwhelming that you did it.

Sarah Koenig

Off the top of my head, I can think of five different people in this story whom other people have told me they think are either pathological liars or psychopaths. That I shouldn't trust anything they say. This term, psychopath, gets thrown around so easily. As a kind of catch-all term for cold-hearted, and calculating killer. If Adnan did this and if he did it the way Jay tells it, he is so cold-hearted. I mean, Jay tells the cops that Adnan says to him, "all the other motherfuckers, referring to like hoods and thugs and stuff, think they're hardcore. But he just killed a person with his bare hands." If Adnan said that, does that mean the fifteen years since has been this very, very long con? That he's calculating enough to only pretend to be the normal sounding person that he is with me on the phone? Ewing told me a psychopath usually means a person who has little or no conscience, is glib, who can't empathize or relate to other people's feelings. They can read other people very well, but they don't have genuine empathy.

Charles Ewing

Another factor, to be sure, is what's known in the profession as superficial charm. These are people who come across very smoothly and effectively manipulate other people and manipulate them without them knowing it very often.

Sarah Koenig

Now I'm running everything through my head, everything you just said, seeing if it applies of course (*laughs*).

Charles Ewing

Yeah.

Sarah Koenig

-- and some of it I can see it, like, "yeah, maybe," and other stuff, I'm like, "no, I don't think so." I mean, so it really does seem like Adnan is really-- functioning really well and is just fine in prison. He seems very adaptable and he's always had like a job with responsibilities and he's not been disciplined, really ever, except for having a cell phone and doesn't appear to have any kind of anti-social behavior. He's got lots of friends, he's maintained his relationships outside the prison with his family and his friends, certain friends. I mean, is that something that I should be taking into account?

Charles Ewing

(brief pause) I think so. Yeah. It certainly cuts against a theory that he's a psychopath, or that he's some kind of pathological person. But it doesn't rule it out.

Sarah Koenig

Right.

Charles Ewing

--and the fact is, most psychopaths aren't killers and most killers aren't psychopaths. There's a very limited overlap between those two spheres.

Sarah Koenig

Finally I asked Ewing, "should I be influenced by the fact that Adnan has so consistently maintained his innocence all these years?" Ewing said, in his experience, people who are wrongfully convicted always maintain their innocence, even when it hurts them, like in sentencing or parole. But on the other hand, he said, just because you say you didn't do it, even for decades, doesn't mean you didn't do it. There just aren't any rules for this stuff. Here's what I take away

from this conversation with Charles Ewing: I don't think Adnan is a psychopath. I just don't. I think he has empathy. I think he has real feelings, because I've heard and seen him demonstrate empathy and emotion towards me, and towards other people. He is able to imagine how someone else feels. But on all the other options, it's a toss-up. Could Adnan initially have been in some state of amnesia and denial and then supplanted that with actual lying? It's possible. Could he have had simmering feelings of anger and resentment that then boiled over in a not-quite-by-accident way? It's possible. Could he be truly innocent? It's possible. Ewing said he's often asked on the stand, "How do you know this person isn't lying to you?" His answer, he said, is always the same: 'I don't know.' In the course of his career, he's been fooled.

A handful of people who are listening to this story have told me one thing they think makes Adnan look guilty is the way he talks about, or rather, doesn't talk about other people involved in the case. Especially Jay. That if he were really innocent, we would hear him being madder. I know we've already talked about this, why doesn't he sound more mad, but there's another factor I haven't mentioned, and that is, as a defense attorney's explained to me, no good can come, and in fact only harm can come, from Adnan attempting to contact or influence people on the outside who are connected to his case. That's kind of inmate behavior 101. Because let's say Cathy changed her story, suddenly remembered something exculpatory for Adnan. Then the state found out that Adnan had been writing to Cathy, or threatening Cathy somehow, or talking smack about Cathy on a podcast. Then that could be used by the State to challenge the validity of Cathy's new information. Adnan is a smart guy, he's been an inmate for fifteen years, he knows the deal. He also knows there's nothing he can do to change other people's minds about him.

Adnan Syed

If a person genuinely doesn't think that I feel something towards the people who put me in prison, then me saying it, it really has no validity, in my eyes anyway because either you think I did it or you don't. If you think that I did it, then you can assume because I'm a normal-- I'm just a regular-- I think what happens is people come expecting a monster, and they don't find that, well next they come expecting a victim, and when they don't find that, they don't know what to think, and the reality of it is I'm just a normal person.

Sarah Koenig

I know, but I think actually-- I think that's right, but I think also what people do is they put themselves immediately in your position, and think "what would I do? How would I be

feeling? How would I act if I thought someone had done me wrong and put me here? I would be screaming to the rooftops,” and they’re not hearing you do that.

Adnan Syed

If someone-- I mean, there’s really nothing to say. If someone can’t imagine how I feel there’s no need for me to say anything to try to convince them otherwise. I mean, it is what it is. If a person can’t figure it out, then that’s not for me to say.

Sarah Koenig

I think what Adnan’s saying is, it’s a trap to try to convince people. A few weeks ago, after these rumors started surfacing, I got a letter in the mail from Adnan. It was eighteen typed, single-spaced pages. He gave me his reluctant permission to talk about it. He wrote about lots of things - his religion, his case, how he’s managed over the past fifteen years. It’s a good letter, he’s a good writer, but it swung from pole to pole, from distrust to gratitude to confusion. Adnan is obviously aware of this podcast, that it’s out in the world and I could tell that my story had messed with his equilibrium. When he was convicted of murder, he said the biggest shock for him was that people thought he was capable of this hideous thing. That people didn’t believe him. “As I look back now” he wrote, “I realise there was only three things I wanted after I was convicted. To stay close to my family, prove my innocence and to be seen as a person again. Not a monster.” The third one he says he’s managed, inside prison.

“People in here know me as a stand up guy. Guards, inmates, staff, people I’ve been around for fifteen years have seen me every day, recognise me as someone whose word can be trusted. I guess what I’m trying to say is that I was able to find the peace of mind in prison that I lost at my trial.”

And now I come along, at Rabia’s behest, not his, and yank this door open again to the outside world and to all its doubts about Adnan’s integrity. Stirring up the most painful possible questions about whether he’s a monster. It’s his nightmare basically, to be accused of manipulating everyone around him. Of course, I’ve had a sense of this feeling from him now and then, over the year that we’ve been talking. But his letter made plain that in forty hours of taped conversation, he was weighing every word. His goal was to keep it all business. He wanted me to evaluate his case based on the evidence alone, not on his personality. “I didn’t want to do anything that could even remotely seem like I was trying to befriend you or curry favour with you. I didn’t want anyone to ever be able to accuse me of trying to ingratiate myself with you or manipulate you.” Having to do

that made him feel bad he said. I had a rough year, my step father died in April, then my father died two months later. Adnan knew that, “but I couldn’t say anything to you because I had to stick to what I know. Can you imagine what it’s like to be afraid to show compassion to someone out of fear they won’t believe you? I was so ashamed of that.” This second guessing, this monitoring of everything he says to me, and therefore to the outside world, about anything really, but especially about his case. He writes in his letter that it’s crazy-making.

“I’m always overthinking. Analysing what I say, how it sounds and the fact that people always think I’m lying. All this thinking, it’s to protect myself from being hurt. Not from being accused of Hae’s murder, but from being accused of being manipulative or lying. And I know it’s crazy, I know I’m paranoid, but I can never shake it because no matter what I do, or how careful I am, it always comes back. I guess the only thing I could ask you to do is, if none of this makes any sense to you, just read it again. Except this time, please imagine that I really am innocent. And then maybe it’ll make sense to you.”

At this point he wrote “It doesn’t matter to me how your story portrays me, guilty or innocent. I just want it to be over.”

It will be. Next time. Final episode of Serial.

Serial 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 today by Joel Lovell. Research and fact checking by Michelle Harris. Administrative support from Elise Bergerson. Our score is by Mark Phillips who also mixed the episode. Our theme song is by Nick Thorburn, who provided additional scoring. Special thanks today to Studio Rodrigo, the company that designed our website and to Rich Oris who codes everything. And to Julie Farris, Marianne Hammel, Thomas Mauriello, Shivani Lamba of Forensic Outreach. Lydia Myers of Pick ‘em Up Productions. Detective Robert Cherry, Tom Snyder, Lisa Scalpone, Erin Henkin, Jake Halpern, Jake Pollini and Shannon Son-Hagenson from the Whitman Project. And a huge thank you to everyone who gave money over the past two weeks. We were able to raise enough through your donations and through sponsorships to have a second season of Serial. Thank you so much. If you want to listen to all our episodes from Season One and find photos, letters, and other documents from the case, *and* sign up for our weekly emails, go to our website SerialPodcast.org. Support for Serial comes from Audible.com [ad removed] and from Trunk Club [ad removed]. And from MailChimp [ad removed]. Serial is a production of This American Life and WBEZ Chicago.

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