MUSTANG NEWS FROM 1996 TO NOW: **KRISTIN SMART MURDER TRIAL Trial for murder of Cal Poly freshman** Kristin Smart begins 26 years later Read about the case that sparked a push for a safer campus on pg. 14.

The case that pushed for a safer campus: Murder trial for Kristin Smart underway 26 years later

BY AMFLIA WU & **ELIZABETH WILSON**

Outside a house party in 1996, two Cal Poly students noticed 19-yearold Kristin Smart lying down near the driveway. Concerned, they helped her walk back to campus.

Now. 26 years later, those students are testifying in the murder trial where a jury will decide - after years of public suspicion - if fellow student Paul Flores is guilty for the crime.

Former Cal Poly freshman Kristin Smart's disappearance has echoed beyond the Cal Poly community, leading people to ask questions of what exactly occurred the night Smart went missing - and what has happened in the investigation since.

Paul Flores, now 45, is the last known person to have seen Smart. Her body has yet to be found.

Media such as the "Your Own Backyard" podcast helped resurface the circumstances of Smart's disappearance with witnesses and former students voicing their observations. As a result, the San Luis Obispo County District Attorney's Office Campos wanted to study for an gathered enough evidence in 2021 to charge Flores with Smart's murder to search for other parties. and his father, Ruben Flores, with

helping to bury Smart. From when Smart went missing the Memorial Day weekend based on witness testimonies in 1996, to when the trial began in July of this year, her case has revealed to the public, espe-

cially Cal Poly students and faculty. the reality of ongoing safety concerns



Margarita Campos, Kristin Smart's friend, testifies in court on Monday, July 25, 2022.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF KRISTIN SMART

Smart went missing May 25, 1996 after attending an off-campus party on Crandall Way. Visibly incapacitated and unable to walk alone, two students, Cheryl Manzer and Tim Davis, helped walk Smart back to her Muir Hall dorm room.

Paul Flores approached the group and volunteered to take her back to the residence halls as he lived in the neighboring Santa Lucia Residence Hall. Flores is the last known person to see Smart, claiming she walked the rest of the way to her dorm by herself, and he returned to his.

Now, the prosecution argues that Paul Flores murdered Smart in his dorm during the commission of rape, and his father Ruben Flores helped him bury Smart in the backvard of their home in Arroyo Grande.

Before Smart attended the Crandall party, she and her friend, Margarita Campos, went to a different party before. The two disagreed about returning to campus and splitupcoming test while Smart wanted

Campos has "replayed" the moment she parted ways with her friend on the night of May 25.

"You know, hindsight is 20/20." Campos said. "I shouldn't have left her by herself, and she shouldn't

Jennifer Mederios lived across the hall from Kristin Smart at the time of her disappearance. Her concern

> 'PROTECTING EACH OTHER': WHAT NEW STUDENTS TAKE AWAY FROM THE KRISTIN SMART CASE

grew as days progressed, and Mederios called local police before being redirected to the Cal Poly Police Department, which has jurisdiction over university property.

When calling the campus police, Mederios was met with little concern from them, as they suspected she had just gone away for Memorial Day weekend without telling anyone.

"People do things like this all the time," Mederios recalled police tell-

The Cal Poly Police Department freshman Ellie Khorsahadi attributes Basich wondered when learning that would not begin investigating until her distance from San Luis Obispo Smart's disappearance happened 26 four days after Smart's disappear- to being unaware of Kristin Smart's vears ago. "But some of her remains ance. Flores' dorm would not be inspected until June 29, 1996, after Smart's name in a quick overview ing pieces of the case. It's unbelievstudents had moved out for the school year and rooms had been ment training of her online SLO Days

Smart's sudden disappearance was out-of-character, raising concern from her close family and friends. Smart, the eldest of three, would engage in weekly Sunday calls with her family. The day before she went missing. Kristin left her mom a voicemail about good news to share on their Sunday call, a call she never

"Kristin Smart was not only present but involved - everything you would want from a sibling." Matt. Smart's younger brother, said,

Steven Fleming, another Cal Poly freshman at the time, bonded with Smart over their height and how they both loved sports. A close friend of Smart's, Fleming described her in court as someone with an open and kind personality

"She was just lively," Fleming said. "That was the good thing about her.

While there are many different media incoming Cal Poly students arriving to the area are often uninformed on

found. From Orange County, nutrition "Why are we even talking about it?" they walk home in a group.

You know, hindsight is

20/20. I shouldn't have

left her by herself.

MARGARITA CAMPOS

Former Cal Poly student, friend of

Kristin Smart

"You just got to be smart with your

decisions and you got to go on with

University Spokesperson Matt

Lazier wrote in an email to Mustang

has not been heavily covered in

training at Cal Poly is due to a request

from the Smart Family to not do so.

Journalism freshman Sam Basich

said he was unaware of Smart's case

disappearance. She first heard have been found now: they're findmentioned during a sexual harrass-

While Smart's body has yet to be found, according to the prosecution of the case, blood stains found on Paul Flores' dorm mattress and in the soil of his father's backyard, indicate traces of Smart's presence.

SMART FAMILY | COURTESY

Basich was surprised at how long this case has been investigated for and how long it took them to start.

"It was just crazy to me that it took that long for the developments when her family is just kind of sitting there scratching their heads for so long."

Basich also consulted his family about the Smart disappearance. Sam's mom, Jennifer Basich, said she did not hear any mention of Smart's case during parent welcom-

"I do wish they had brought up protecting each other and really looking out for each other," Jennifer Basich said. "They didn't have to dwell on it, because it's such a sad thing. But that would have been News that the reason the Smart case nice

Campus safety was a factor that she considered when helping Sam determine where he would end up going to college. It was still a concern even though he identifies as male, she until Mustang News reached out to said. The two organized a "system,"

him about it. This grew his curiosity where Sam knows to pick up the and led him to a quick Wikipedia search. He was surprised at what he phone from any of his female friends and to walk them home or make sure



KYLE CALZIA | MUSTANG NEWS

Students hold a candlelit vigil in honor of Kristin Smart outside Santa Lucia and Muir Halls on Tuesday, April 13, 2021, the day that Paul and Ruben Flores were arrested for the murder of Smart...

came to pick up her son from the vak tityu tityu dorms in the middle of the night since he didn't bring all 43% of respondents, 236 students, also been petitions for more safety his bedding with him. Orientation students, or 'Daysies,' are required to faced sexual assault or harassment erings for campus safety in recent stay on campus during the program- at Cal Poly in the last 10 weeks. A years. ming, Jennifer Basich knew this, so vast majority of respondents said she said she found it odd that no one they felt unsafe walking on campus tried to stop her from picking up her at night, with 94.4% of women who THROUGH OCTOBER son - who she was waiting outside in responded saying they felt unsafe.

seeing any patrols that night or any campus security.

For the school year, she hopes there are more safety protocols than what she experienced

"I just hope they have a lot of patrols," Jennifer Basich said, "And I just, I really hope they reach the buddy system."

Now having a general knowledge about Smart's case, Basich said he feels "more comfortable," saying that there has been progress in new safety measures at college campuses.

"I know campuses are much more secure now and have access to on-campus security at all times." Basich said. "I think back then was a little bit of an anomaly."

KRISTIN SMART'S IMPACT ON **CAMPUS SAFETY**

Kristin Smart's story is not the only case of sexual assault or partner violence concerning the Cal Poly community. Five Cal Poly students are named on Cal Poly Safer's website as a reason for the program's creation: Kristin Smart, Rachel Newhouse, Aundria Crawford, Kristina Hogan and Laci Peterson.

Safer is a university department created in Fall 1996 to provide confidential services to people who've experienced sexual assault, harassment or intimate partner violence. Safer also offers violence preven- further communicating on educa-

Education Code in 1998, mandating agreements with local police departments regarding the responsibility of After the Flores' arrests in April reporting cases involving violence 2021, students held a candlelight

In a student survey Mustang News - outside of the red brick dorms

conducted in November 2021, about said they knew someone who had

enough to address sexual assault and sexual harassment on campus.

According to Cal Poly's Annual Security Report data, reported sex- Luis Obispo Police to the FBI. and dating- related crimes increased 2018 to 2019, reports of rape cases News previously reported.

On-campus resources for sexual can be found through Safer's website. Safer Prevention Specialist Kara Samaniego said that a toolkit on in Safer's programming for parents and remembers learning about and supporters of Cal Poly students.

"Not that parents don't know how old, as his parents are Cal Poly to have these conversations, but it can be really uncomfortable if they to the "Your Own Backyard" podcast haven't really thought about this yet before." Samaniego said.

The toolkit informs the community of things like the "red zone," a time form with 91.7K Instagram followperiod of increased sexual assault and violence during the first months of college. The red zone is significantly more dangerous for freshmen. according to SAFER.

also includes campus updates of what the university has done and will start to do in upcoming months to address campus safety. New changes expected to be made include hiring more police officers, implementing video cameras across campus and

and Ruben Flores that has left Act was also added to the California both witnesses and jurors in tears. the memory and circumstance of that all public colleges have written Kristin Smart's disappearance has

against students or missing students. vigil that night to honor Kristin Smart measures and community gath-

About 71% of students who The Flores' trial is expected to last Jennifer Basich does not recall responded said Cal Poly is not doing through October. The trial's initial delay is largely due to the lack of physical evidence, and the constant change in the investigator, from San

Several expert dog handlers have significantly from 2018 to 2020. From testified in court to discuss their dogs' alerts to human remains in increased from seven to 20. Mustang the Smart case. From blood on Paul Flores' dorm mattress to the soil in Ruben Flores' backyard, a quesassault and intimate partner violence tion in court remains how strong of evidence this is without a direct link to Kristin Smart

Music and psychology sophomore Kristin Smart when he was 10 years alumni. Tarica also recalls listening by Chris Lambert.

> "Your Own Backvard," was created in 2019 and has grown into a platers, as Lambert investigates Smart's disappearance with a primary goal of helping the Smart Family find her When Tarica attended Cal Poly,

Cal Poly's Campus Safety Plan 2022 he didn't learn about Smart during orientation or at school. Considering Smart's impact on the community not included in the Week of Welcome awareness gallery, which brings awareness to sexual assault and "I think that people that come to

the San Luis community deserve With the ongoing trial of Paul to be a part of this case and to keep

nto Santa Lucia Hall and meets room **APRIL 1996** The Easter weekend is the last time MAY 24 1996 The Memorial Day Weekend -Time lores ends his shift at an on-campu store and later attends the Crandall Way party. He said he planned on visit MAY 25, 1996 Margarita Campos, Smart and friends leave for a party near campus around ! Flores calls his father, and spends time round 10 p.m., Campos parted ways with Smart at the intersection of Cali-fornia and Foothill Blvd, after disagree ing to go back to campus. Smart is

MAY 28 1996

MAY 26, 1996 rudents call law enforcement to again attempt to report Smart's

Smart goes to the Crandall party, and ends up lying face down outside the house, unable to walk on her own.

At 2:20 a.m. Tim Davis, Cheryl Manze

Davis, then Manzer, split off. Flores

is. Before returning to his room

said Smart walked the rest of the way to

er dorm by herself, and he returned t

stories of how he received it in differ

Cal Poly Police detective visits Santa

JUNE 1996

SEPT. 9, 2016

APRIL 22, 2020

Flores' room, taking samples of Flore blood-stained mattress. Cadaver dogs area. All dogs alerted room 128, Flores'

A woman identified in court as Rhonda

Doe says she was raped by Paul Flores

The San Luis Obispo Sheriff's Office

nature of which are not disclosed to the

Sheriff's Department obtains items of

MAY 25, 2002

JUNE 1996

mart is declared legally dead after he

Police receive tips of about 80 sighting

of Smart throughout the state and o

of state. None of the supposed sight

SEPT. 6, 2016

Cal Poly announces an excavation will be set up at the 'P' to determine if Smart's remains are near the hiking trail, Remains were found at the 'P,' but

FEB. 5, 2020 search warrant for Ruben Flores'

nissing posters and letters from the mart family begging for help to find

FEB. 11, 2021 Paul Flores is arrested on a suspected

APRIL 13, 2021 Paul and Ruben Flores are arrested in

AUGUST 2021

the preliminary hearings for the

MARCH 2022

Trial relocates from San Luis Obispo

SEPT. 22, 2021 SLO County judge announces Paul and

JULY 18, 2022

Trials for Paul and Ruben Flores begin