

"I totally believe in his innocence," Chaudry says of Adnan (in his senior class photo).

SERIAL
MURDER
MYSTERY

Fighting for Adnan

Before Adnan Syed was charged, convicted and sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his ex-girlfriend Hae Min Lee in 1999, Rabia Chaudry knew him only as her brother's best friend. "I didn't hang out with him—he was a kid," says Chaudry, 42, who was 24 when Syed, a 17-year-old senior at Baltimore's Woodlawn High School, was arrested. "But he was the least confrontational, nicest person—the only friend of my brother's my mother liked. I was sure he was innocent from the very beginning." That certainty started Chaudry, who now has a law degree, on a crusade to prove it. Concluding the case had been badly

RABIA CHAUDRY
WON'T REST
UNTIL ADNAN
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IN THE MURDER
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mishandled, she ultimately contacted *This American Life* staff producer Sarah Koenig; the result was 2014's wildly popular *Serial* podcast. But Chaudry and two other attorneys kept digging, pro bono, launching their own podcast, *Undisclosed*, and on June 30, the hard work bore fruit: A Baltimore City circuit court judge threw out Syed's conviction, citing significant flaws in his 2000 defense. When Syed's new attorney, C. Justin Brown, called to tell her, "We won a new trial!" Chaudry burst into tears. "I just lost it," she says.

In her new book, *Adnan's Story: The Search for Truth and Justice After Serial*, Chaudry details the long battle that led to that moment—though more fighting is still to come. The Maryland attorney general's office is appealing the new ruling, and Lee's family remains convinced the right man was caught. "We continue to grieve," they said in a statement. "We continue to believe justice was done when Mr. Syed was convicted of killing Hae." But Chaudry believes that evidence she helped gather—including details about Don Clinedinst (see box), the boyfriend Lee told a friend she was meeting the day she disappeared—will exonerate Adnan. "It would be justice," Chaudry says, "for him *and* Hae."

Chaudry was in law school when

police arrested Syed in February 1999. Lee, 18, who disappeared on Jan. 13, had been found strangled, her body buried in Baltimore's Leakin Park. At trial, Syed's acquaintance Jay Wilds—who was threatened with the murder charge itself and who, in exchange for his testimony, was charged only with accessory after the fact, for which he received probation—said he helped Syed bury Lee and that Syed drove her car from the site. But no soil turned up in Lee's car or on Syed's clothes.

While Chaudry worked to uncover what really happened that day, she also visited Syed in prison and began talking on the phone with him regularly. "I'm like a big sister to him," she says. In between caring for her daughters (now 7 and 19) and her work as a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., she "took advantage of the momentum *Serial* built" and connected with lawyers (and fans of the podcast) Susan Simpson and Colin Miller, along with Fire

'Seeing his family suffer keeps me going. As long as there's life, there's hope.'
—RABIA CHAUDRY

1. Chaudry looks over a map created by prosecutors showing the cell towers "pinged" by Syed's phone the day Lee disappeared—which they used to suggest he was near where her body was found, now a point of contention.

2. Lee in her high school yearbook photo.

3. Leakin Park, where Lee's body was discovered in a shallow grave.

4. "He says, 'I'm ready to come home,'" Chaudry says of Syed (in court in February 2016), "but I want to come home knowing I'll never go back."

Book Excerpt: What About Don?

Hae Min Lee's boyfriend Don Clinedinst, a lab tech at LensCrafters, was cleared early in the investigation.

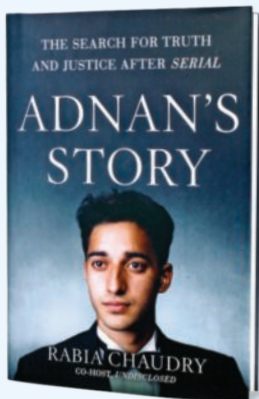
Don told police that on Jan. 13, the day Hae disappeared, he was filling in at a store he didn't usually work at, the Hunt Valley LensCrafters. The police never actually visited the Hunt Valley store. Instead they verified Don's whereabouts with a manager at Don's usual store. The police considered his alibi airtight. *But Chaudry's colleague Susan Simpson discovered some interesting things.*

The manager at the Hunt Valley store, where Don allegedly filled in on Jan. 13, was in fact his mother. Don's regular employee number was 0162, but the time card from Hunt Valley showed it as 0097. And while Don said he worked at Hunt Valley to fill in for another lab technician, the employee work schedule indicated there was no such shift for a lab tech at the

store that day. Simpson raised the possibility that Don's time card had been falsified, and Bob Ruff, a fire chief with his own podcast about the case, decided to find out for sure.

Bob started calling around, beginning with a local LensCrafters that referred him to "corporate." What the HR manager there told Bob shocked him: "If you're looking at two time sheets for the same employee with two different ID numbers on them, one of them has been falsified." Bob then asked the retail manager at the Hunt Valley store about how time cards could be changed after the fact. The manager said, "Don's mother was the general manager... she could have made the changes."

But time sheets had to be changed within a week of the pay period—in this case, by Jan. 22. Simply put, I am entirely convinced the time sheet was not just falsified. It was falsified at a time before anyone except the murderer knew Hae had been killed. This, along with the fact that police were not able to contact Don until 1:30 a.m. on Jan. 14 10½ hours after Lee was last seen raises serious questions about where Don was the afternoon his girlfriend, whom he never attempted to reach after that, disappeared.



Chaudry at home in July 2016 and (inset) visiting Syed, far left, in prison circa 2003 with her daughter, brother and friends.

‘We have climbed the biggest mountain in getting a new trial. It’s in our favor right now’

—RABIA CHAUDRY

Chief Bob Ruff, who was pursuing his own podcast. In addition to information about Clinedinst, they found evidence that

undermined the reliability of cell-tower records that had placed Syed in the park where Lee was buried. In granting Syed a new trial, Judge Martin P. Welch specifically faulted Syed's defense attorney Cristina Gutierrez, who died in 2004, for not challenging the prosecution expert who vouched for the cell records. "I don't know how to thank her," Syed's mother, Shamim Syed, says of Chaudry. "This would be impossible without her. She's family to us."

Although it could be up to a year before Syed knows for sure if he'll be getting that new trial—and he remains in prison as he waits—Chaudry says the judge's decision "has lifted a great burden off his soul." Hers too. "The spotlight we put on this case made the court pay attention," she says. "Sometimes people say, 'What can one person do?' But one person can do a lot."

By **Jeff Truesdell** and **Diane Herbst**