

SERIAL KILLER/RAPIST RODNEY ALCALA'S FIRST KNOWN VICTIM, MORGAN ROWAN, SPEAKS OUT:

IN MY OWN WORDS

BY

Morgan Rowan

I was 16 when he raped me. He had hurt me earlier when I was 13 or 14. He also unsuccessfully attacked my friend when she was 15 on her own front lawn in broad daylight ...managed to get her pants off, but her brother chased him away. Her parents wrote it off to a teenage prank—he would have been 24 at the time.

The dark side of the sixties...

I share this story today as a wake-up call to listen to your instincts. I write this here to share with your daughters and granddaughters...not in this graphic detail, but paraphrased in your own style about the dangers of ignoring your own instincts, bowing to peer pressure, and not sharing important events with your parents or loved ones. I write this to never forget the lessons learned. But mostly, I write this to remind you that we all carry our scars and our history....be good to each other...

This was my brush with a serial killer. Let me warn you; it's violent and graphic. Feel free to skip it.

When I was 13, maybe 14, and more immature than most, I started hanging out in Hollywood with a wild child friend of mine. I looked more like a 10-year-old, and I was so small I still bought my clothes in the children's department.

My girlfriend, Evie, and I were out in front of a teen nightclub in late afternoon. It was still bright sunshine, and the famous [Hullabaloo Club](#) was not open yet. Evie wandered off with some schoolmates she happened upon, and that left me alone with two guys much older than me talking to each other in the parking lot of the club. I

knew one of them. A friend of mine had a bit of a crush on him. He was rakishly handsome, bright white smile and thick wavy hair. He stood strong and confident with dark piercing eyes—his name was Rod. He was one of the many somewhat older guys who hung around the club each night. I would later find he was 23 at the time, far from a boy, but I didn't know that then. I wanted his attention, of course. I was a kid—so I went up to this older 'boy' and scratched his arm playfully with my fingernails. He laughed, hugged me, and went on with his conversation. I loved that attention, of course, so I continued to run up and scratch his arm lightly until his laughter dissolved and he became annoyed. He stopped his conversation and said bluntly..." If you don't stop that, I'm going to take you out back and rape you."

A moment of awkward silence, and then we all three laughed at the ridiculousness of what he had just said—but being so young, this was big-time adult stuff, and it was game on. I continued to run up and scratch his arm. His friend said goodbye and walked off.

As soon as his friend walked away, Rod roughly grabbed my arm and forced all 80 pounds of me, shocked and protesting, to the deserted back loading dock area of the club.

I remember his changed and angry face and how terrifying that was. I remember the pain of his grip and how my feet barely got a chance to touch the ground. I remember nothing more until I woke up with a massive headache pinned behind an industrial dumpster. I was fully clothed. My mouth was bleeding, and I had a huge lump on my heavily bleeding head.

After pushing off the heavy dumpster pinning me to the wall, and cautiously assuring myself Rod was no longer there, I ran to the owner of the now open club and spilled my story.

His wife took me into the bathroom, gently asked some frightening questions, and told me I hadn't been raped, then cleaned me up and assured me that Rod would be banned from the club for life. No police were called. I didn't want them to. I never told my parents in fear I wouldn't be allowed to go back there again. A swollen cut lip was all that showed, but I carried the bruise of his fingerprints on my arm and the huge knot on my head hidden for weeks.

I figured lesson learned, don't tease boys. I only caught glimpses of Rod over the next years and always steered clear and immediately left the area. He scared me, of course, but everyone else was quite comfortable around his good looks and charm, and they liked him.

One more warning on what is to come—my purpose is not to upset anyone.

A few years later, I was now 16 and leaving California to move to New York with my family in five days. I was spending my last few nights with my friends up on Sunset Strip when Rod, now maybe 26, appeared in the crowd and kept following me, saying, "he was sorry—had been a stupid 'kid'.. didn't want me to leave hating him", etc.

I eventually accepted his apology just to get rid of him and went my separate way. But there was no way I was leaving this area this night. I only had five more nights in California.

Rod disappeared into the crowd, and I forgot all about him. I was much more upset about saying goodbye to my friends and the Hollywood nights that I loved.

Much later, someone said, "Come on, we're going to I-Hop, "and we all jumped happily into a car. I was in the back wedged between two friends, and the driver jumped in and started the car—it was Rod.

Too late to get out as the car moved into traffic, and my friends were not sympathetic to my fears. "Come on, he said he was sorry—it was long ago, nothing really happened, they reasoned" –so I was stuck.

Rod constantly looked up in the rear-view mirror with a strange half-smile on his face, and I felt chills run up and down my spine.

We went to I-Hop and sat across from each other, too close for comfort at the table.

But I was surrounded by my friends, so it was bearable. I ignored my cold sweat and shaking hands and managed to keep my head down and eat a few bites. Rod seemed

thankfully to not pay much attention to me there, and I convinced myself that the creepy stares in the car were just my imagination.

After excusing myself to the restroom, I stood staring at the payphone with a coin in my shaking hand, wanting to call my father, but I put the dime back into my pocket and resisted the urge because I only had a few nights left with friends.

That unused dime and those seconds would soon change my life.

As we got back in the car and headed back to The Strip, I was feeling more calm and happy to be done with this and anxious to be out of his car.

Then suddenly, Rod turned a corner and drove to a house on De Longpre Ave., a block or so off Sunset. It turned out to be his house. He said to my friends in the car—"Come in, I've got pot"—and they all went happily into his house.

There was already a bit of a party going on with some people before we got there. I sat shivering outside, hoping it wouldn't be long, and my friend, Mike, came out and said, "Are you really any safer sitting alone out here in the dark?"

So I went in. Loud music, a bunch of people, lots of commotion—pot party. I stayed standing, shifting, and pacing because I just wanted to leave.

After we had been there a while, Rod suddenly appeared, grabbed my arm, and pulled me to a door not too far from where I had been standing, his too-tight grip bruising my arm once again.

He picked a moment that my friends didn't see. It happened in the blink of an eye. He threw me headfirst into the room, and as I staggered to my feet and turned back towards him, I could see that on the back of his bedroom door was a metal bar that dropped down to secure the entire door beyond what anyone would ever need for privacy. I knew with a sinking heart that I was in ugly trouble.

He outweighed me probably 80 or more pounds. He came toward me while reaching for the leather belt on his pants, and I started to back away and plead and beg.

I couldn't seem to find the air in my lungs to scream. I doubt anyone would have heard me anyway. I still believed he would listen to reason if I could just find the right words as I backed up far enough that I could go no farther.

My back was now against the wall, and my arms were in front of me like I could somehow hold him away from me. He stopped just a few steps from me, and without a word, he braced his stance and punched me straight between my eyes.

I felt my head jerk and slam against the wall with the recoil of his fist, and I saw stars and tasted blood and fell to my knees in shock, holding my swimming head. I had most certainly never been punched before.

He wrapped my long hair around his wrist, leaving me helpless, and tied my hands behind my back with my own scarf while the room still spun around me. I fought back, but his hold on my hair wrapped tight around his left wrist kept me where he wanted me—doubled over on my knees.

With my hands now bound, he folded his leather belt and stuffed it deep into my mouth—so deep that I couldn't breathe. I kicked and fought for breath, so he lifted me by my hair and punched me hard in the stomach a few times to quiet me, and I felt the sickening pop of my ribs breaking.

Blood and bile surged up into my mouth, and I began to choke and drown in fluids with the belt wedged tightly deep in my mouth. I was certain I was going to die and alternated between fighting to breathe as my lungs filled with blood and accepting my fate and praying to God to take me quick as the room blurred and spun.

I was a virgin. It wasn't easy for him, and I still had some fight in me. This angered him more. He punched me repeatedly against my broken ribs to stop me from fighting.

A searing pain and a flash of silver as my jeans were roughly cut off of me. The pain from being punched and the terror of fighting for air eclipsed every other pain and violation of the rape I suffered that night, but his angry face so close to mine and his hot breath and burning eyes so full of hate and evil scorched into my nightmares for a lifetime. A lifetime I was then sure that I would never have.

My friends were so close that without a wall and a barricaded door, I could have thrown something and hit them. The loud music masked everything from their side. I believe he would have killed me there, witnesses in the next room and all. He had crossed a line outside of reality, and he was of a single violent focus, and he was just so violently angry his face was bright crimson. It just wasn't enough to satisfy him, and his hands now tightened around my neck as his rage took him over.

Evie noticed I was missing and instinctively knew I didn't go willingly. I was in trouble. Someone pointed out his room. My friends began to yell and pound on the door. He ignored them, swearing and muttering to himself in anger.

Then the voices and pounding stopped, and in that silence, a terrible weight of abandonment seemed to press me further under his weight into the wooden floor.

My glimmer of hope drifting away with my breath like sands through an hourglass, and I fell very still and resigned myself to my fate. I felt nothing more of his violation, and I was no longer fighting—I was drifting now somewhere far away—falling in an endless dark void.

Then glass breaking and voices shouting, and I was startled back into the light.

Mike had broken through the window to his room. Rod got off of me then, stood up, and opened the bolted door.

I was frozen in time—my reality was gone.

I didn't even try to move; I just choked and gasped on the hard wooden floor.

Mike and Evie ran into his room and stopped frozen in total shock. In front of my speechless friends, Rod stood there naked from the waist down with my blood all over his shirt and spat out, "Take her." Just that—like he owned me, "take her."

Mike ran to my side, pulled out the horrible, suffocating belt, and lifted me, gasping and choking to my feet. On my wobbly feet now, air burning into my lungs, I ran frantic from that nightmare house wearing just a ripped and bloody blouse.

Mike caught up with me and hid me in an alley a block from Rod's house. Evie was not far behind. The three of us hid in the alley in fear of being followed.

Finding myself behind a dumpster again was no small irony. Mike covered me with his shirt and tried to quiet my violent shaking as Evie worked on untying the knotted, bloody scarf holding my wrists.

I was throwing up blood and choking and still felt like I might die there half-naked, doubled over in that cold and dirty place.

We were just down the street from his house. Rod must have regretted his decision to let me go and got in his car and drove slowly around the area—his headlights appearing like ghosts skimming across the walls of the alley again and again. Each time the lights appeared, Evie put her hand over my mouth to mask the sounds of my choking, and raw terror washed over me once again. There was nowhere I could imagine to feel safe.

I felt frozen to my core, violently shivering so hard I chipped teeth and wondered if I would ever feel safe again. Eventually, Rod gave up looking, parked, and went back into his house, and I literally walked in front of a stranger's moving car battered, bleeding, and half-naked and begged the people to take us away from there.

Things were so different in the sixties. It was often framed to be the victim's fault.

The police officer I talked to curled up in a ball on the couch in Evie's borrowed clothes and wrapped shivering in a blanket had little sympathy for what appeared to him to be a tug of war between a couple of hippie freaks.

He could see the black eyes forming and the torn lips, but he could not see anything else, nor did he seem to care to ask about injuries that he couldn't see.

He didn't even try to call my parents. He made me feel more dirty and wretched than I already had. I chose not to seek charges because—one, the officer saw me as a little hippie girl in the days of free love, and obviously, no one official seemed to care. Two—he said it wasn't a crime because I had gone willingly kind of into the house, and three, my father had been transferred, and we were leaving California in five days.

My family would be torn apart by court proceedings on the opposite coast, and for what, I felt they would never convict him. The officer never even asked his name. There was no DNA then and just his word against mine. I just wanted to feel safe again. I was not capable of thinking beyond my fear.

Mike was still trying to wrap his mind around what had happened in that house. He was overwhelmed with feelings of guilt for bringing me into the house and determined now to protect me.

I just couldn't face my parents. I vowed to never bring this pain upon them. I was afraid I couldn't bear the pain in their eyes.

I had done this to myself, and I would not drag them to hell with me—for hell is most certainly where I was now.

Mike took me to his tiny apartment on Venice beach. His neighbor, a nurse, wrapped my broken ribs with tape and helped me clear my lungs of blood. They encouraged me to go to ER, but you have to want to live to go there, and I wasn't sure I had that in me yet.

Mike never left my side. He was careful not to startle me and was very gentle when he touched me.

That first night was just a blur of pain and confusion. I just wanted to escape in sleep, but my mind wouldn't rest.

Mike bundled me warm in blankets, and we sat on the beach waiting for the sun to rise over the ocean on a day I didn't want to see come.

He rocked me like a baby each night in his arms while I shook violently from fear and pain from my broken ribs. Nights were the worst. The darkness seemed to swallow me. I could see the stars over the ocean through his window as I laid in Mike's arms with his tears falling softly on my face, and I prayed each night to just go to live on. I don't remember even speaking at all for those days. He bathed my wounds, tried to feed me, and rocked me to sleep when I could. We just held each other and cried. Mike truly saved my life.

When we could wait no longer, he took me home, and I told my parents as we were about to leave California that the visible black eye and bruises were from a car that stopped short....no seat belts then, and in the confusion of the move, they believed me.

A scarf covered the blue fingerprints on my neck, and it took sheer willpower and tears to tie it around my neck each day. We drove six long days across the country with my ribs secretly taped and in pain with every bump in the road. I had my own motel room each night and never once used a bed. I cowered in the corner of the room, hugging myself and shaking all night.

I felt no one could grab me from behind with my back to a corner. I could still feel Rod's hot breath on my skin. I could still feel his spit and sweat fall on my face. I could still see the evil that burned red hot in his eyes. I feared he could somehow burst open the door any moment. I longed for the solace of my own bed in my familiar room, but it was gone. It seemed all my peace was gone now, but I was determined to leave the horror behind and remember instead the beauty of the love generation. I chose to remember Mike's loving touch and not Rod's hateful one.

I was in New York a few weeks now, feeling safer with the distance and trying to rebuild my strength and adapt.

Evie sent me a letter and a newspaper clipping fell to the floor.

Rod had raped and savagely beat an 8-year-old girl in that very same house.

Someone saw him talk the little girl into his car and followed him to his house and reported it. He had beat her in the head with a lead pipe and raped her right there in that same place just weeks after what he had done to me.

My knees buckled. I felt physically sick. I fell to my knees and begged God and that child to forgive me. I had let this happen.

A policeman intervened and stopped him from killing the little girl, but in the effort to save her life, Rod got away.

Years later, he was caught and sent to prison. I felt safe again. But he served less than two years for that awful crime against that child because she was unable to testify. My offered testimony was useless, and there was no evidence—his name wasn't even on any police report.

After his release, he stalked young girls and women, telling them he was a photographer and could make them famous. He roamed free for more than 20 years. He is currently on death row in California for seven murders, but they suspect he has killed more than 100 women and girls. The judge, overwhelmed for the victims, cried in the courtroom as she sentenced him.

It all seems like a book I read or something.

It doesn't seem like it happened to me until about 15 years ago when Rod's face appeared suddenly on the local news, and I had a panic attack so severe that I had to go to the hospital for treatment.

I guess the reality is still there somewhere, but I think I did a fair job of not letting it control my life. I had kept it to myself for so many years because I didn't want to cause my parents pain, but they were gone now, and it all flooded out with that face on the newscast.

I just wish I could have stopped him long ago before he hurt anyone else. I never thought at the time about him hurting someone else. I thought his anger was just directed at me. I should have tried harder and found a way to stop him. The guilt over the 8-year-old girl hurt worse than the experience.

But I learned over time that I had done all I could with what I had. You either learn and grow from your experiences, or you suffer them for a lifetime—or maybe a little of both

Update--

It's been 50 years now, and recently, through the miracle of the internet, the worst of the pain has found a way to heal.

A friend connected me to the little eight-year-old girl that I felt so guilty about—now a grown woman, of course.

I wrote her a letter and poured my heart out. I told her how wrong I had been to not try harder to prosecute him. I told her I should have saved her, done something. I should have gone back to that house and killed the bastard. I asked her to forgive me. She wrote back words that washed over me like sunshine.

The only person responsible for what that man did to us was him, she said. He's pure evil. There is nothing to forgive.

We are planning to meet soon. I am overwhelmed by her kindness.

SKH NOTE:

Morgan's extremely detailed telling of the crime left no doubt in my mind that it occurred precisely as she has told it.

However, I was concerned about the description of the actions, or rather inactions taken by the police officer, and asked that she provide additional details on what the officer said to her?

My email to her with my questions reproduced below:

Morgan:

Thanks. Do you have or can you get a current photo of you taken in the present?

Also, can you tell me more about your report to the police officer?

How did that go down? Was he a uniformed officer from the Hollywood Division? Did you call, and he responded, and you told him what happened? Was he made aware of your physical injuries?

This is all way out of "procedure" as he would have been obligated to 1) Take a written report and 2) Get you to ER for Medical Treatment.

I realize it was the Sixties and understand what you are saying about cops' "attitudes and skepticism," but he was way off base in not even taking a report, etc. I assume you've lost all contact with "Mike" now? Be nice if he could be found/contacted today, but assuming he went on with his own life and...?

Steve

Here are Morgan's email responses and clarifications on those points.

I never kept contact with Mike after I left California. I was in really fragile shape and needed to leave it behind and not speak of it.

Evie gave the news clipping to a friend I did keep contact with. My friend thought she was just sending me a clipping about a guy we knew.

I didn't know these people well.... just kids I hung out with. I don't even know their last names.

Mike lived in an apt. above a store in Venice right on the beach.

When I stopped a car on the street, I think it was on Sunset ...the driver was Mexican and spoke little English. He was kind of in shock. His wife was there too. She got in the back seat with me, and I think she was praying.

My friends got in the front seat with the driver and told him where to go. I had my head on the woman's lap, and I have no idea where we went. It seemed far. I just assumed Evie's house, but since no adults, probably not.

I stood in the shower to wash off the blood. I put someone's clothes on and wrapped myself in a big blanket. I was cold, sweat and cold, shivering still.

The police officer just showed up. I don't know who called. It was kind of a disheveled hippie pad, and he was very aloof. I don't know what my friends told him. He stood over me and said something like, "that's going to be a real shiner you got there. I guess your friend wasn't so nice."

I couldn't talk...just kind of rocked and gave one word or no answers. "Did you know this guy? Was there a party? You guys all have sex with each other, right? I can go talk to him, but you went in his house."...

I don't remember much. He asked the address...we didn't know it. We weren't even sure we could find it again. The last I remember was him saying, "put some ice on that."

Yes, he was in uniform. That is all I remember.

Then Mike's friend showed up and drove us out to Venice. Mike's neighbor was a nurse. He butterflyed a few superficial cuts ...pounded on my back to help cough up the blood, and taped my ribs.

He said the whole time ...you need to go to ER, but I refused. I never wanted to go home. I blamed myself ... I hadn't listened to all my parent's advice. I shouldn't have been there. I let them down. My mother will never be the same if she hears this. My father will kill him and go to prison. I wanted my mistake to just go away.

After 4 days, I went home, and my parents were panicked. The moving van was gone ...our car was packed, and I wasn't there. They were pacing in front of an empty apartment. When I did show, all they could see was my bruised face and black eye.

I told them a car ...hit brakes hard...I hit the dashboard. I'm fine. I crawled into the back seat with a pillow and blanket, and we left for New York. They just chalked up my mental state to my sadness for leaving California.

I will send you a current picture. It took a lot of seriously messed up years, but I've never let that bastard win. He's powerful. Evil is powerful. I'm sure you know that.

Morgan

And my email response back to Morgan:

Evil is powerful. I DO KNOW THAT FOR SURE.

OK, it makes a little more sense now as far as the officer.

As I understand it, you didn't call the police, someone unknown did.

Sounds like you didn't want to make any report and likely told him that, yes?

Though he should have done it, anyway, knowing the times back then and the "attitudes" of most police re. "crash pads" and "hippies," I can see him "kissing it off" with no report.

It gets my blood up, but things were much different fifty-plus years ago for sure.

Another question. At that same time period 67-68, I was working uniform patrol in HWD and focused my time on trying to pick up teen "runaways" to try and get them off the mean streets of HWD.

As you know, many would split from homes in Small Town USA come out to HWD, and next thing they knew, they were living in a crash pad, with a pimp and a needle in their arm and hooking on Sunset Blvd.

Maybe at age 14-15. Both boys and girls. I felt if I could get them off the street, which would at least force them to be sent home "temporarily," it might just save a few lives?

So, I was bringing in 3-5 runaways per shift. Juvenile Detectives hated me, as I was creating a lot of work for them, so they eventually decided to get me out of uniform and into detectives to lessen their workload. (Joke, but half true.)

What was your status? Runaway? Or just out and about for a few days then home?

Did your parents make a "Missing" report on you from time to time? Ever picked up for runaway and returned home?

Morgan's further email response to my questions:

My parents may have called in those 4 days because they knew I was a runaway risk leaving for New York. I did call and tell them I wouldn't be home for a few days. I didn't just disappear. I didn't call on the night it happened, and they most probably made a report then. I was not a runaway.

Actually, couldn't have been. My father worked on the Corona Project ... a top-secret government project that created cameras for the U2 spy plane and the moon landing.

If I went missing ...they would find me fast. The project was ending, and we were returning to Rochester, NY. I was a good kid ...straight As... never missed school. I just hung out in Hollywood and found my way into trouble. I was very innocent in a crazy world.

That's so cool that you helped the runaways. I knew so many of them. As I try to find them now, so many have died. I'm sure at the time I wouldn't have thought you were helping!

But you are right; so many of them fell into drug addiction, death, or prison.

I did get picked up one night hitchhiking, and they were going to take me in, but when I told them my name ...Carol Rowan...the officer said like Martin and Rowan, and I said yes, that's my father's name. It was...lol...Martin Rowan. He misunderstood and thought my dad was Dan Rowan, so he let me go with a ..." Be careful, or I will tell your father next time I see him." Huh? OK.

It really was a very different world.

morgan

Morgan also sent me a couple of poems she wrote, and I want to share one of them, her **DIME** poem with my readers.

(Morgan's below poem graphic was created by my good friend and true crime author and retired Dallas police officer, [Robert Sadler](#).)

Dime

10 cents
one little dime
taped inside my shoe
by my dad...
so I could always call home
always be safe

safe

in a big world
where I dared to roam
so much to experience
such joy in discovery

fearless
reckless
joyous...
innocent

a dime to keep me safe
placed with loving hands
10 cents to call home
for rescue
for love
for protection

I held it in my hand
palms sweating
shaking a bit
knowing danger lurked
feeling it's icy stare

but I shoved it in my pocket
the folly of youth
and sealed with it my fate

I'm brave
don't need my dad
can take care of myself
might miss something...

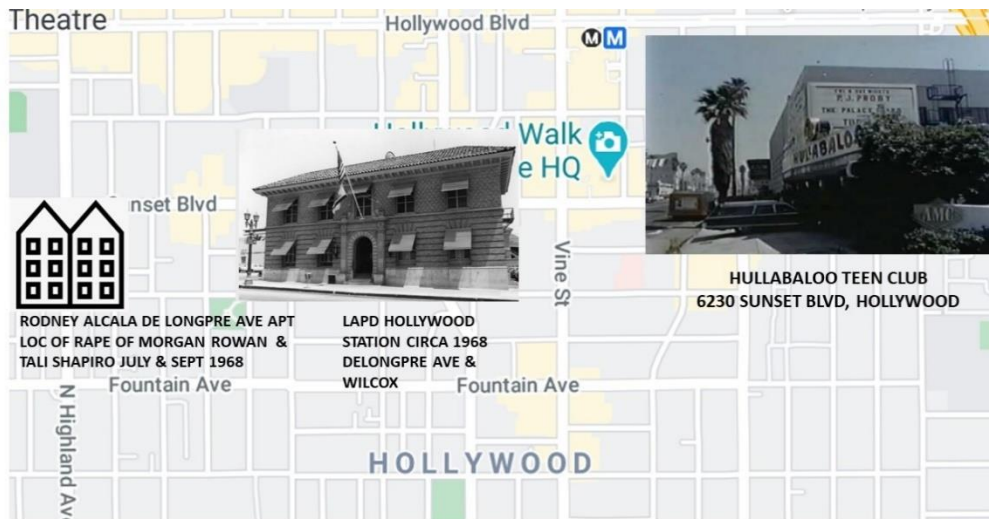
oh, if only I had...
if only

the night returns
in strobe light horrors
innocence loss
nightmares born
and shattered dreams

evil lived
and faith died
as a tiny dime
flew hard against the wall
and rolled unspent
in a frantic spinning dance
until it's energy was no more
and it fell silent on the wooden floor

no longer tucked away
where dad had taped it
with love
to keep me safe
inside my shoe

Additional Graphics:



Hollywood Map shows closeness of Hullabaloo Teen Club to Hollywood Police Station to the then De Longpre Avenue residence of Rodney Alcala.



Morgan on stage at Hullabaloo Teen Club circa 1967

[Link to Steve Hodel CBS Video describing his Alcala investigation and arrest.](#)

A personal THANK YOU to victim Morgan Rowan.

In closing this blog post I just want to express my own personal appreciation along with those of my readers who I know share my thoughts on acknowledging the COURAGE and HONESTY it took for you to disclose this five decades old pain and trauma.

I have tremendous respect for what is your clear and present motive: TO WARN OTHERS IN HOPES OF PROTECTING AND PREVENTING A FUTURE POTENTIAL VICTIM OF FALLING PREY TO A PREDATOR, A MONSTER, LIKE RODNEY JAMES ALCALA.

Blessings to you and yours.

LAPD Detective III Steve Hodel #11394, Hollywood Homicide (Ret.)