

In the weeks and months—even years—that followed, Shannon regularly paid me visits in my dreams. In many, I would replay our last chance encounter, which took place just a couple of weeks before Shannon disappeared.

A complete fluke, I had spotted Shannon among a sea of Spring Breakers in Daytona Beach, a rare place for either of us to visit. I walked in her direction until she came into clear focus. Yes, it was Shannon. For a few fleeting minutes, we laughed and reminisced. We caught up on where our college lives were taking us. We made plans to see each other a few weeks later when she would be back in Miami visiting her family. Then we hugged and went our separate ways.

It was the last time I saw Shannon. I didn't know it at the time, but it was my chance to say goodbye. She would be gone before the month came to a close.

FIGHTING THE MONSTER

As the years went by without word of what became of Shannon, my dreams began to reflect the anger I bottled deep inside.

In one recurring dream, it's late in the evening in some unnamed town in the middle of America. I walk into a restaurant for a bite. The room is dark and bustling with customers. I take a seat in a booth and see Shannon sitting across from her captor. Her hands are not tied, but she's not moving, not trying to escape. She's scared or drugged or both, I reason. I approach their table, see a spark of hope in Shannon's eyes and quickly find others who help me hold down the man who had stolen Shannon from her family. We pummel him. Shannon returns home.

My anger also manifested itself in other ways.

I made decisions determined not to cede power to the monster. I fought the fear that evil could lurk behind any corner.

I jumped at the chance to intern at The Boston Globe rather than spend the summer at a local paper. I walked to and from my apartment many late evenings holding a stun gun wrapped in a newspaper. Years later, as a reporter for The Miami Herald, I'd live and work in Sao Paulo, Brazil, for several months, riding the subway and making my way in another language in an unknown city five times the size of New York City.

I moved across the country to Northern California, where I worked and lived for seven years. A visit to Yosemite, on assignment in Mexico or vacationing in Vancouver, I'd imagine crossing paths with Shannon and putting an end to the tragic mystery.

ANGER TURNS INTO FEAR

Then I became a mother and the anger gave way to fear.

My firstborn was just shy of two years old when Colvin "Butch" Hinton III, a man with a history of harming young girls, confessed to kidnapping and murdering Shannon. Hinton, an umpire at the softball field where Shannon kept score, said he had set out to commit murder on March 26, 1994. He had targeted another woman but changed his plans when he spotted Shannon.

Hinton said he held Shannon at knifepoint, tied her up in his home, repeatedly raped her—in between catching a movie at a local theater in an effort to create an alibi—and ultimately strangled her in the early morning hours of March 27.

The unspeakable details resurfaced my dormant pain.

As my son's independence blossomed—and with that his ability to walk away from me at a department store or at a park—I found myself fighting a constant unease. I wanted—needed—to know where he was at every moment.

Most parents take their children to the park to relax, sit back and let their kids play. That will never be me.

I'll never forget spending one afternoon at a local water park with several of my son's friends. The other mothers positioned their chairs in the shallow water to chat and sunbathe. They didn't fuss, completely confident that their kids were safe. I stood the entire time, sloshing through the knee-high water to make sure my son emerged from the labyrinth of slides.

Dealing with my vigilant watch is a reality my children have learned to accept: My 9-year-old son understands why last summer I had him skip a field trip to the water park. My 4-year-old daughter recites to me how I shouldn't speak to strangers. I live in constant battle with myself, wrestling with a deep-seated desire to fuel my children's independence while also fighting a fear that harm may come their way.

Both of my children know, to varying degrees, Shannon's story. They know the world can be cruel, but they also exude a spirit of boundless optimism. They see themselves as the superheroes who can change the world.

I hope they do.

TIMELINE: THE SHANNON MELENDI MURDER

March 26, 1994: Shannon Melendi, a South Florida native and 19-year-old Emory University sophomore, vanishes on a Saturday afternoon from her part-time job as a scorekeeper at a softball field in suburban Atlanta.

March 27, 1994: Shannon's parents, Luis and Yvonne Melendi, get word that Shannon has been missing for more than 24 hours. They make arrangements to fly to Atlanta. In the ensuing weeks, volunteers and friends plaster streets with "MISSING" posters bearing Shannon's photo. Print and TV media in South Florida and Atlanta follow the story closely.

April 6, 1994: A caller to an Emory University hot line claims he is holding Shannon captive. As proof, the caller leaves a ring belonging to Shannon, enclosed in a bag, inside the pay phone where the call was made.

April 12, 1994: Police search the home of Colvin "Butch" Hinton III, an umpire at the softball field the day Shannon was last seen. Hinton has a criminal record of sexual assaults.

September 1994: A fire damages Hinton's home.

October 20, 1994: The Melendi family and friends of Shannon attend a vigil and press conference at Emory University on what would have been Shannon's 20th birthday. Luis and Yvonne Melendi keep Shannon's story alive in the local and national media for years to come.

March 26, 1995: Southwest 48th Street in Miami-Dade County is renamed Shannon Melendi Drive. The street runs in front of Southwest Miami Senior High School, where Shannon was class president and a prominent student.

June 1995: A federal grand jury indicts Hinton for arson, suggesting Hinton set fire to his home to collect insurance money.

January 1996: Hinton is convicted of arson and sent to federal prison.

December 2003: Hinton is released from federal prison.

August 2004: Authorities arrest Hinton, using a grand jury indictment that accuses Hinton of murdering Shannon Melendi.

September 2005: A jury convicts Hinton of murder. He is sentenced to life in prison.

June 2006: The Georgia Supreme Court upholds Hinton's conviction.

July 17, 2006: Hinton confesses to kidnapping, raping and murdering Shannon, after his appeal was denied.

RECOGNIZING NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 15, 2014

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, this is a National Small Business Week and I rise to recognize the contributions of small businesses in my congressional district and across the country.

With more than half of Americans either owning or working for a small business, it is clear these companies are a vital part of our nation's fabric.

Every day, small firms and their employees across every sector and industry are working to grow and become stronger.

When they do, we all benefit from their innovations, their job-creating power, and their ability to make the U.S. more competitive globally.

That why I support the Democratic agenda to help small businesses and entrepreneurs startup, grow, and create jobs.

"This includes supporting tax credits to help small businesses hire new employees; immigration reform, which will provided a solution for those businesses facing a maze of problems when hiring immigrant workers: and expanding financing options for entrepreneurs, especially in low- and moderate-income communities.

We must also oppose cuts to job training programs that help meet American businesses' workforce needs. Lastly, we must include working on a long-term extension of the Highway Trust Fund, which is critical for small construction firms across the nation.

Mr. Speaker, small businesses and entrepreneurs impact our lives ever day and it is fitting that we recognize their contributions to the economy and our country during National Small Business Week.

Whether it is opening a new storefront, training workers, or sponsoring activities in our cities and towns, we have many reasons to thank small businesses.

This week we do so, and recognize these entrepreneurs not only for the contributions that they have already made, but also for their future work to strengthen our local communities.

In recognition of all that small businesses do for our communities, from providing conveniently located goods and services to sponsoring local events and organizations, I urge all Americans to take this opportunity to patronize the diverse businesses in their communities to demonstrate to them our continued appreciation and support.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 18TH ANNUAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING WEEK IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

HON. ERIC SWALWELL

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 15, 2014

Mr. SWALWELL of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 18th Annual Affordable Housing Week in Alameda County. Organized by East Bay Housing Organizations, a group of community leaders and affordable housing advocates, this period lasts