

Stolen, burned out car adds questions

Theft of John Markovich's Subaru may be part of the puzzle of his daughter's disappearance

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(Editor's note: This is the last part of a series about the 1987 disappearance of 15-year-old Alicia Markovich.)

The billboard seeking tips on the Alicia Markovich case was less than 100 yards from the home, partially obscuring the downhill view to Route 22.

Along Dunn Avenue in Burrell Township, Indiana County, is the longtime residence of John Markovich. The house is where his daughter Alicia was last reportedly seen before allegedly walking off and vanishing at the age of 15 in 1987.

It's also the scene of a crime reported almost exactly one year later.

Subaru station wagon

The report earned just a few inches of ink in a Friday edition of the Indiana Gazette.

In the newspaper brief, state police in Kiski Valley are cited as stating that a Subaru valued at \$9,500 had been found along a Loyalhanna Township roadway at approximately 6:50 a.m. May 5, 1988. It had been burned to a shell.

J. Markovich of Dunn Avenue, Blairsville, was listed as the owner.

Pennsylvania State Police Trooper Cliff Greenfield confirmed that the "J. Markovich" referenced in the report was



John Markovich's torched Subaru was found along Tunnelton Road near Saltsburg in May 1988. A portion of the road is shown. ERIC KIETA/DAILY AMERICAN



An age-progressed rendering of what Alicia Markovich could look like today. PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

John Markovich. He also acknowledged that the incident remains part of their file on the disappearance of Markovich's daughter.

"However, investigators did not discover any evidence that would establish a connection between the theft and arson of Mr. Markovich's vehicle and Alicia's disappearance," he said.

According to the newspaper account, police said the vehicle had been stolen from near John Markovich's home sometime between 1 a.m. and the time it was discovered.

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The road where the vehicle had been dumped was listed as Township Route 939, better known as Tunnelton Road. Greenfield said the spot was eight-tenths of a mile east of Route 981.

This location is approximately 13 miles from John Markovich's house, an 18-minute drive. It's just a few miles from both a portal of Marion Mine No. 2 and from the town of Saltsburg.

Greenfield said that police had never searched the vehicles of either of Alicia's parents prior to this incident.

Asked whether he could share any additional information or details about the theft and destruction of the Subaru, Greenfield responded, flatly, "No."

The Daily American made several attempts to interview John Markovich about his daughter's case. A woman who answered the phone at his home in November said she would tell him to return the call. He did not.

Greenfield said police don't have any suspects in Alicia's case.

"That's why it is still classified as a missing person investigation. Because we we don't have evidence to indicate foul play," he said.

"No one has ever been considered or listed as a suspect in the investigation. And so that's where that stands."

Using DNA to find missing people

In spite of the time that's passed, the seemingly false confessions and multitude of frustratingly unanswered questions, Alicia's advocates remain hopeful that someday they'll find the truth.

"As far as police work, there are things now that we know that we didn't know in the '80s," said Leah Altemus, a friend of Alicia's mother. "And that has to do with forensics and DNA."

Marcie Vitko, Alicia's mother, said she doesn't know how police could have her daughter's DNA because she still has all of her baby teeth in storage.

A look at the Alicia Markovich billboard from the roadway along her father's home in Burrell Township. ERIC KIETA/DAILY AMERICAN

But Greenfield said authorities have obtained and submitted Alicia's DNA. This occurred in 2011, according to police.

"We were able to provide her DNA to the FBI. So the FBI currently has Alicia's DNA ... in their database. And her case has also been submitted to the FBI's (Criminal Apprehension Program) CAP program," he said.

"So far, there have been no matches to our DNA. So that's what we're hoping for, you know, if something would turn up that we would have a match."

Where is Alicia Markovich?

The theft and arson of John Markovich's car, coupled with the cryptic letters, have given police and amateurs plenty to ponder about Alicia's case. But unless a DNA match is discovered, or new leads develop, theories on Alicia's disappearance will remain nothing more than speculation.

"She left in a huff and I didn't press her about where she was going," John Markovich told the Tribune-Review in 1990.

"I figured she was going to visit some girlfriends and tell about what a (expletive) her old man is. I figured it would be good for her to blow off steam, get it out of her system."

Whether Alicia ran away to work that anger out of her system is impossible to prove at this point. It seems clear, however, that she isn't working her way out of the memories of those who loved and knew her best — even decades later.

"What I've learned is that (after) 34 years secrets can still be kept," Altemus said. "And if you don't start putting pressure on the situation, or individuals that are involved, to assist, it's going to stay a secret."