

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | MYSTERY AT HOBBLE CREEK CANYON

EP 47 Transcript

ASHELY STILSON: She just walked from school back to her apartment and something happened, then she was gone. There's nothing else. She's still gone and there's still no answers. And that's hard.

NARRATION:

TWENTY-SIX-YEAR-OLD ELIZABETH SALGADO MOVED FROM MEXICO TO PROVO, UTAH WITH A VERY CLEAR AMBITION. SET AGAINST THE MAJESTIC ROCKY MOUNTAINS, PROVO IS A CITY FOCUSED ON FAMILY AND FAITH. IT'S A CENTER OF THE MORMON CHURCH, AND HAS BECOME A MECCA FOR THE FAITHFUL. PEOPLE FROM AROUND THE WORLD COME TO PROVO TO LIVE ALONGSIDE FELLOW FOLLOWERS OF THE MORMON TRADITION, AS WELL AS TO FEEL SAFE IN A CITY WHERE BROTHERLY LOVE IS CENTRAL TO THE WAY OF LIFE. ELIZABETH SALGADO WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO CAME TO PURSUE THAT DREAM, BUT THEN MYSTERIOUSLY VANISHED JUST THREE WEEKS AFTER ARRIVING IN PROVO.

I'M STEVE FRENCH AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "MYSTERY AT HOBBLE CREEK CANYON."

IT'S SPRING OF 2015 WHEN ELIZABETH SALGADO MOVES FROM HER HOMETOWN IN CHIAPAS, MEXICO TO PROVO. HER UNCLE ROSEMBERG IS EXCITED FOR ELIZABETH AS SHE BEGINS A NEW ADVENTURE.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: Elizabeth heard great things about Utah and she had this beautiful dream that she wanted to find somebody with the same religion beliefs and be able to get married in the temple of Salt Lake City. She wanted to open more doors for herself and be able to progress in her life.

NARRATION:

OPTIMISTIC, AMBITIOUS, AND BEAUTIFUL, ELIZABETH HAS RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE IN MEXICO AND SHE HAS A WELL-THOUGHT-OUT PLAN — A CLEAR DIRECTION.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: She had studied to become an industrial engineer, but once she graduated, her goals changed because, first she wanted to serve a mission to our heavenly father and then she wanted to learn English, and that's why she decided to come to Utah.

NARRATION:

ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15TH, 2015, WHEN ELIZABETH FINISHES CLASSES AT THE NOMEN GLOBAL LANGUAGE SCHOOL, SHE CALLS HER FAMILY, AS SHE OFTEN DOES, JUST TO SAY HELLO. THAT'S THE LAST TIME ANYONE FROM HER FAMILY WILL EVER SPEAK TO ELIZABETH.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: She would just call me to say, "Hey, how are you doing, uncle?" or whatever, and say, "Yeah, good. I mean, I'm just getting ready to go to work," and, "Oh, okay."

Yeah. I don't want to take too much of your time," or whatever. I mean, "God bless you, and I hope you have a great day."

NARRATION:

THEN, TWO DAYS LATER, ROSEMBERG GETS A CALL FROM HIS SISTER, LIBERDAD, WHO'S EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT ELIZABETH.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: My sister called me that day and said Elizabeth is not answering her phone. I was just like, well, probably, her phone is off, I mean, you know? So, or I don't know, she might be in school. I don't know. I never thought of anything wrong would be happening. And then I said, okay, well, let me actually call the school, you know, immediately, to find out what's going on. And then when I talked to one of the members of the school, and I asked them if Elizabeth was there at the school, and then they said, "No." And then the guy said, "Don't worry about it because a lot of people, they normally go to Vegas, like, on Thursdays and then they don't come back until Monday or Tuesday." And then I said, "Yeah, but my niece wouldn't do that because she's always keeping in touch with our family." And then I called the restaurant where she was working and I asked them if, uh, my niece was there and the owner said, "No, I mean, she's not here." So, I started getting concerned, and then I called the police immediately because it just seemed weird that my niece wouldn't answer, and no one would know anything about it.

SPENCER CANNON: We get a lot of people reported missing or overdue.

NARRATION:

SERGEANT SPENCER CANNON IS WITH THE UTAH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

SPENCER CANNON: The vast majority of those missing persons get resolved within the first few hours, and certainly within the first day or two. And so, to have a missing person report, initially, is not that unusual.

NARRATION:

BUT THE SHERIFF'S INVESTIGATORS SOON RECOGNIZE THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING ELIZABETH SALGADO'S DISAPPEARANCE ARE NOT TYPICAL.

SPENCER CANNON: It was unusual because she, from all reports, had very close contact with family. Her uncle's here, uh, a sister here as well as, uh, family in Mexico. And so, it was unusual that they wouldn't have heard from her and wouldn't have been able to reach her, and so, obviously you start to worry a lot more.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: I guess they heard my desperation that, "Hey," I mean, you know, "please help me out to find my niece," that they started looking immediately.

NARRATION:

POLICE CREATE A TIMELINE OF ELIZABETH'S MOVEMENTS, STARTING WITH THE LAST DAY SHE WAS SEEN — THURSDAY, APRIL 16TH.

SPENCER CANNON: We know that she attended school that more morning. Went there, which was normal. She left the school about one o'clock, and from everybody they've talked to, that's the last anybody knows that she was seen. Nobody has reported to us that they saw her walking with somebody, or getting into a car with somebody, or anything like that. The only thing we know with certainty is that she was at the Nomen Global language school and left there about one o'clock, presumably to head toward her apartment.

NARRATION:

THE SEARCH FOR ELIZABETH FOCUSES ON STATE STREET, THE ROAD BETWEEN THE LANGUAGE SCHOOL AND HER APARTMENT WHERE SHE WAS HEADED.

ASHELY STILSON: My name is Ashely Stilson and my position at the Daily Herald was the crime and court reporter. Elizabeth was walking home in the middle of the afternoon in downtown Provo. It's a busy street. There's lots of businesses. There's lots of houses. It's the middle of the afternoon in a family-friendly college town in America. It shouldn't have been dangerous. But she never made it to her apartment in the Branbury apartments complex. It was like she was there walking along, and then she disappeared.

NARRATION:

POLICE INTERVIEW ELIZABETH'S CLASSMATES, ROOMMATES AND FRIENDS AT THE CHURCH. NO ONE HAS ANY IDEA WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED, OR WHO MIGHT WANT TO HARM HER. BUT THERE'S ONE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT THAT THE FAMILY FINDS SIGNIFICANT.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: We actually found out that, that day, she was in the bathroom crying. Somebody told us that. That she was crying. We thought that that was actually strange. We thought, why would she be crying? I mean, you know, did you guys find out? Did you guys even ask her why she was crying or...? And no one could tell us.

NARRATION:

AFTER DAYS OF INVESTIGATION, THE BEST THEORY ANYONE CAN COME UP WITH IS THAT ELIZABETH WAS ON HER WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL WHEN SOMEONE OFFERED HER A RIDE — AND IT WAS LIKELY SOMEONE SHE KNEW.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: She was a very gullible person. But I don't think she would actually get into the car with a stranger. I don't think so. That would seem weird. So that is the reason why I'm saying that, whoever did this, it was probably somebody that she knew. Somebody from school, work or church.

SPENCER CANNON: The circumstances certainly lend credibility to the idea that she was, initially at least, abducted against her will. And so, when you think of somebody who has been abducted against their will, you assume that if somebody took them, they went fighting and

kicking and screaming. Well, we don't know that. It's entirely possible that somebody was driving along and perhaps Elizabeth was walking along on a sidewalk, and maybe somebody pulled up to the side of the road and rolled a window down and called out to her and she looked over, and maybe she recognized the person, and maybe she got in the car and it looked like a perfectly normal interaction between two people.

NARRATION:

ELIZABETH'S FAMILY CONTACTS EVERY PERSON THAT ELIZABETH KNEW DURING HER SHORT TIME IN PROVO, AND THEY BEGIN TO SUSPECT THAT AN ACQUAINTANCE AT HER JOB MIGHT KNOW MORE THAN HE'S SAYING.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: Elizabeth was working in a Mexican restaurant as a waiter, and she told me that there was one guy that wanted her to be his girlfriend. She said that the guy said she was so beautiful and that he, "wants to buy me everything." But, she just didn't find him attractive and she said no. And I remember that she said that the guy was just, like, upset because she didn't want to have anything to do with him. Could it be that that guy has my niece and is not letting her to go out, or something like that?

SPENCER CANNON: We know that she had some people, at least one who wanted to date her, but she wasn't interested. We followed up with every one of those, but just nothing has led anywhere that gives us solid information about her disappearance.

NARRATION:

AS POLICE INVESTIGATE, THE FAMILY REACHES OUT TO THE PROVO COMMUNITY, ASKING FOR THEIR HELP.

ASHELY STILSON: Her family was immediately active. They printed out t-shirts with her photo on it. They went door to door around the entire neighborhood and put up flyers and held vigils and did everything that they could to try and find her.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: We were always very optimistic, you know, like, yes, we're going to find her and, at any time, I mean, you know, she will appear. But then as the days, they would go by and they would go by, then we were, like, getting more concerned, more concerned. Like, this doesn't feel, I mean, you know, like, right. I don't know what's going on, so it was very stressful, that situation, you know, like, we couldn't sleep. We couldn't eat. We couldn't be enjoying life because knowing that one of your family members is missing.

NARRATION:

JUST DAYS INTO THE INVESTIGATION, ANYONE WHO KNOWS ELIZABETH HAS BEEN QUESTIONED AND TIP LINES HAVE GENERATED NO LEADS.

SPENCER CANNON: You know, in a case like this, the longer it goes on and the more frustrating it gets, you take tips from wherever they come. We even have psychics who call in and, and

share information with us. And we take those seriously, but, uh, it was just a real frustrating thing that nothing really led anywhere.

NARRATION:

THEN, TWO WEEKS AFTER ELIZABETH VANISHES, ON APRIL 30TH, AUTHORITIES ARE NOTIFIED ABOUT THE REMAINS OF A YOUNG WOMAN THAT HAVE BEEN FOUND. POLICE CONTACT THE SALGADO FAMILY WITH THE HEARTBREAKING NEWS.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: One day, they notify us that they find a suitcase with a body inside of the suitcase. I was just like, no. This cannot be happening. I mean, I was just like, I don't know. No, no, I don't think my niece is gone, I mean, you know? It was terrible that day, because we were crying and we were like, "No, this could not be happening."

NARRATION:

BUT THEN, DENTAL RECORDS DETERMINE THAT THE BODY IS THAT OF ANOTHER MISSING YOUNG WOMAN — NOT ELIZABETH. THE SALGADO FAMILY IS OVERCOME WITH RELIEF AND HOPE.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: We basically were shocked, to be honest. And we were just now thinking, you know, like, yes, we're going to find her in, at any time. I mean, you know, she will appear.

NARRATION:

BUT YEARS PASS, AND WITHOUT ANY LEADS, THE CASE GROWS COLD.

NEWS CLIP: The family of Elizabeth Salgado is making a plea once again for any information that might help find her. This weekend marks the two-year anniversary of her disappearance.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: Every time I would see my sister and she would cry, it will always break my heart. And, we were asking our heavenly father, please help us to know where Elizabeth is.

NARRATION:

BY THE SPRING OF 2018, IT'S BEEN THREE LONG AND PAINFUL YEARS SINCE ELIZABETH SALGADO DISAPPEARED. THEN ON MAY 28TH, 2018 ELIZABETH'S FAMILY'S PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED — BUT IT'S NOT THE ANSWER THEY WERE HOPING FOR.

ASHELY STILSON: There was a gentleman who was driving through the canyon. It's called Hobble Creek, and it's a very popular recreation area. It's a gravel road, so you get the sense of, "you're going into the mountains. You're having an adventure." But it's a very well traversed area.

SPENCER CANNON: This individual had been up there, just out for a drive. And he said that he'd, uh, stopped to relieve himself, to answer nature's call. And as he was going about doing that, he found these remains.

ASHELY STILSON: He called in saying that he possibly found human remains, and the Sheriff's office gets a lot of calls about that, particularly from hikers, and usually it's a false alarm. It's usually animal bones. And so, when the man called in to report, the Sheriff's office asked him, you know, what is leading you to think these are human remains? And he said, "Well, there's a skull."

NARRATION:

THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE RESPONDS IMMEDIATELY TO THE LOCATION AND DEPUTIES BEGIN TO INVESTIGATE. THEY FIND SOME CLOTHING AND MOST OF A HUMAN SKELETON. IT'S APPARENT THAT THE REMAINS ARE THAT OF A YOUNG WOMAN.

SPENCER CANNON: It appeared that her body was just left there. There was no evidence to suggest that there was an effort to bury her, even in a shallow grave. And it was clear that the remains had been there for an extended period of time, based on their condition and the condition of the surrounding area. We considered it could have been Elizabeth, but we didn't know that at the time.

NARRATION:

CONCERNED THIS COULD AGAIN BE A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY, POLICE TAKE A FEW DAYS FOR DENTAL RECORDS TO CONFIRM THE SALGADO FAMILY'S WORST NIGHTMARE.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: I was just like, no. This cannot be happening. Basically, I was just, like, hoping that it was a mistake again, but then they say, "We already investigated very well." And we just couldn't process the thought that Elizabeth was gone from this life. It just, I mean, it's terrible to think. I mean, you know, that this happened to my niece, just when she was beautiful girl, a very innocent, very, very close to her heavenly father. And for her to be gone, I still cannot believe this.

NARRATION:

THE FACT THAT ELIZABETH SALGADO'S BODY WAS ACTUALLY FOUND IS DESCRIBED BY MANY AS "INCREDIBLE LUCK." HER FAMILY BELIEVES IT WAS DIVINE INTERVENTION.

ASHELY STILSON: The distance from downtown Provo to where her body was found in Hobble Creek is more than an hour away, and it's not an area that is particularly noticeable.

SPENCER CANNON: She was, oh, 20 or 30 yards off the road, up a hill, in an area that had thick Scrub Oak, and so it seems apparent that whoever did this put her body in that location, at least in part, because they thought the likelihood of her remains being discovered was very slim. And when you think about it, if he'd have stopped 10 yards further down the road, or before he actually did stop, she would probably still just be missing.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: Yeah, it was God that wanted to help us, you know, because what are the odds that somebody is going to have to go to the bathroom in the place where my niece was? I mean, you know, so it, we feel like it was a miracle.

NARRATION:

THE INVESTIGATORS SEARCH THE AREA WHERE ELIZABETH'S REMAINS ARE FOUND, LOOKING FOR ANY CLUE OR PIECE OF EVIDENCE THAT MIGHT HELP WITH THE INVESTIGATION INTO HER DEATH.

SPENCER CANNON: We began the arduous process of investigating the scene itself where the remains were found. But, uh, when you have something like that, it's not just the immediate spot where most of the bones were found. It's a broad area around that that we searched and processed in an effort to make sure that we collected any evidence that was there.

ASHELY STILSON: They had everybody from their department as well as wildland firefighters come up and stand literally shoulder to shoulder, searching for anything — a weapon, clothing, a cell phone, anything that could possibly help. Because, at the time, the police didn't have a cause of death, and they had no idea how she died. She was found with her clothing on and there were no bullets found in the area, so she wasn't shot. There was some damage to the bone, but it was insect related. There were no knife or hatchet marks. And so, they know that it was homicide, but as far as whether she was shot, or strangled, or stabbed, the exact cause of death is still under investigation.

SPENCER CANNON: Based on the condition of her remains, because there was no sign of injury, there was no sign of gunshot, no sign indication of a stab wound, no indication of strangulation, it's entirely possible, maybe even likely, that she did experience a moment where she realized, "This is going to be the end of my life." And that must have been absolutely terrifying for her, and it breaks my heart that she, or anybody, would go for through that.

NARRATION:

INVESTIGATORS FIND ONE MYSTERIOUS CLUE IN THE AREA WHERE ELIZABETH IS FOUND — A SET OF INITIALS CARVED INTO THE BARK OF AN OAK TREE.

ASHELY STILSON: There was one from July 2015, just a few months after her disappearance, and within the time that investigators think that her body was left in the area, and they are kind of baffled that nobody found her, because there would've been smell. There would've been nothing hiding where she was. It was just a few yards away, and she still wasn't found for three years.

NARRATION:

POLICE TRY, BUT FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO TRACK DOWN THE PERSON WHO CARVED THEIR INITIALS IN THE TREE. BUT THERE'S AN INTRIGUING CONNECTION BETWEEN WHERE ELIZABETH'S REMAINS WERE FOUND AND A CHURCH OUTING NEAR HOBBLE CREEK CANYON THAT SHE ATTENDED JUST BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: When they actually, um, told us that they found the remains on Hobble Creek Canyon, we were shocked to be honest, because Elizabeth just mentioned that there was going to be an activity at Hobble Creek Canyon with the members of the church. And we thought, well, wait a minute, so the activity was in the Hobble Creek Canyon, and the remains that were found there. Could it be possible that somebody that went to the activity just, like, when they did this to her, they just killed her and then they just decided to leave the remains of my niece there? Or I don't know. So, it was something that we are still wondering, what happened?

SPENCER CANNON: We know that there was a church group had gone up there and she went with them, but the area where Kelly's Grove is, where she had attended, was more than 10 miles from where her body was found. And so, we reinterviewed some people. We developed some new leads. We got a lot more tips that came in again. We followed up on every one of those, and then eventually those started to dry up again. So, whether there's a connection with somebody who was at that gathering or not, we haven't been able to determine.

NARRATION:

IT'S BEEN SEVEN YEARS SINCE ELIZABETH SALGADO'S MURDER AND POLICE STILL HAVE NO SOLID LEADS OR SUSPECTS, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY'VE GIVEN UP ON THE CASE.

SPENCER CANNON: Our detectives are one hundred percent committed to wanting to do this, and in our profession, we're fixers. When we encounter a problem, we look for solutions and we do the very best that we can to solve whatever problem it is we're facing. And so, it's incredibly frustrating that, despite our best efforts, we haven't been able to come up with a solution to this case. But it's still active based on a couple of things that we are doing follow up on, but we're inches away from it being a cold case. In our experience, most of the time when somebody commits a crime like this, there's something about it that they share with somebody else. There's some clue that's given, either their ego is piqued because something we've released to the public isn't exactly how it went down and they wanna set the record straight, or maybe somebody has a change of heart and they, maybe they found God, or maybe they are afraid of going to hell or they have a case of the guilts and they tell somebody or they report it. So, it may be something like that that we can hold out a lot of hope on that's gonna give us a solid direction to go in.

NARRATION:

IN THE MEANTIME, ELIZABETH SALGADO'S MEMORY LINGERS IN THE HEART OF THE PROVO COMMUNITY AS THEY WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO COME FORWARD WHO CAN HELP CAPTURE HER KILLER.

ASHELY STILSON: Elizabeth's case got very personal to me because she was around my age. She had hopes and dreams, and came to the United States looking for everything that I was looking for — friends and community and a safe place to be while you figure out who you are and what you want from your life. And she was on her way, and then she was gone. She was murdered, and there's no answers to that.

NARRATION:

OF COURSE, THOSE HURTING THE MOST ARE ELIZABETH'S LOVING FAMILY, WHO, TO THIS DAY, CONTINUE TO MOURN HER LOSS.

ROSEMBERG SALGADO: Every time that my sister starts remembering her daughter, it just, there is no words that you can tell her to be able to comfort for her. And we are praying that we will be able to find whoever killed her, and we keep always thinking, who did this? You know, we want to have that closure, that, like, basically knowing that justice was served here on Earth. So, whoever did this, they don't actually do it to another innocent girl. So another family, they don't have to go through what we went through, because this is the worst thing that a family can go through.

NARRATION:

ELIZABETH SALGADO DISAPPEARED FROM STATE STREET IN PROVO, UTAH ON APRIL 16TH, 2015. SHE WAS FIVE FEET, FIVE INCHES TALL, AND WEIGHED ABOUT 120 POUNDS. SHE HAD BROWN EYES AND BLACK HAIR. IF ANYONE SAW HER WITH SOMEONE THAT AFTERNOON, OR RECALLS SEEING ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS, PLEASE CONTACT THE UTAH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE AT 801-851-4010 OR GO TO [UNSOLVED.COM](https://www.unsigned.com).

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

DYLAN WINWARD: I don't think that there was two ghosts there. I don't think there was two entities. I think it was one. I think it was a demon, possibly taking on the form of a girl.

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Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13, an Audacy company.

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From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil and Andy Jaskiewicz.

Production support by Sean Cherry, Ian Mandt, and Ava Feneberger.

Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 47 of Unsolved Mysteries.