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Felonious Florida Debuts at Number One

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) April 27, 2018

“Felonious Florida,” the highly-anticipated podcast produced by the South Florida *Sun Sentinel* and presented by Wondery, premiered at No. 1 for its first week on the Apple Podcast chart nationwide.

The series, which explores the dark side of the Sunshine State, has already received nearly half a million listens. Fans are calling the series “riveting.”

Veteran *Sun Sentinel* reporters Lisa Arthur and Juan Ortega take listeners inside two of South Florida’s most horrific crimes; the notorious Casey’s Nickelodeon Murders and the Boca Raton kidnapping of a mother and daughter that has haunted police for years.

Juan says he and Lisa both love podcasts, particularly of the true crime variety. Lisa had the idea that if they like them so much, why not go ahead and do them? The team put together a proposal and were given the green light.

Lisa covered the Casey murders while at the *Miami Herald*. After that, she left Florida for a while. When she returned, she was “shocked to find the case still alive.”

She describes it as the quintessential crime. A flashy nightclub owner murdered, “an unbelievable piece of evidence” in the form of a video tape and yet, 24 years later, still no convictions.

“It was a good starting point, a lot of the audio we had already, there were tons of documents available, everything was in the records,” she says.

Juan and Lisa stress the importance of audio variation—podcasts require enough sources willing to be recorded, and original audio.

“It gives an opportunity to hear directly from the sources, it adds a lot to hear cadence in their voice and the emotion,” says Juan. “We’re trying to put the listener in that moment through sound.”

The first half of the podcast focuses on the Casey murder, while the second digs into the Boca Raton mall kidnapping—also still unsolved. While both crimes are truly fascinating, the main character is the Sunshine State.

“The real star of this podcast is Florida,” Lisa says. “There are a lot of other podcasts out there and they’re one title (like *Serial* and *Accused*), not tied to a place... Florida has got such a reputation in the country for being a crazy place.”

They began in March of last year, fitting the podcast in around the daily work of editing stories.

“There was no shortage of big news last year,” Juan says, recounting the hurricanes and 2018’s tragic Parkland school shooting.

“You’re constantly having to roll with it,” says Lisa. “This was a labor of love for us. New media landscape, everybody has to be a hybrid. You can’t just do one thing anymore.”

It was not a two-person job to get *Felonious Florida* up and running. The in-house photo and video team lent their expertise. Video editor Cindy Choi and Video Projects & Programming Editor Sean Pitts helped piece together the episodes. There are six episodes in total, with season two already greenlit.

Lisa describes the production team as a rag-tag little bunch. "None of us had done a podcast before, none of us are professionals," she says.

But audiences are devouring the show.

"I'm still shocked by the whole thing," says Lisa of the success. She originally hoped for 100,000 listeners. By episode four, they topped 780,000.

She says in the beginning, they didn't even know if they'd be able to sell any ads.

"Any newsroom that wants to try it can jump in. You don't have to have all types of high-tech equipment," she says. "You just have to have a good story. Good stories still attract interest."

Kirsten Ballard



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