

Jessica Pfohl - Analyst Gone Wild

Mindy: [00:00:00] Welcome to Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. It's like coffee with an analyst, or it could be whiskey with an analyst reading a spreadsheet, linking crime events, identifying a series, and getting the latest scoop on association news and training. So please don't be that analyst and join us as we define the law enforcement analysis profession one episode at a time.

Jason: Thank you for joining me. I hope many aspects of your life are progressing. My name is Jason Elder and today our guest has 15 years of law enforcement analysis experience. She spent time as a records clerk, juvenile probation officer, and fingerprint technician with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. She is currently the Crime Intelligence Analyst Supervisor with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

She holds a Master's in Administration of Justice. Here to talk about flying squirrels. Please welcome Jessica Fole. Jessica, how we doing?

Jessica: I'm doing good. Thanks for having me. How are you doing today?

Jason: I am doing [00:01:00] well. So we are fellow Tallahasseean. I guess that's, that's the word for us is we're in the same city.

We're a couple miles apart, but it sounds like it's going to storm here.

Jessica: Yes, it does. It looks cloudy out there today.

Jason: Oh, but it seems like it cooled off, right? Which is always nice because this, this summer seems like it's been brutal. In terms of the heat. I don't I don't know if I have bad memory. I'm just have maybe recency bias.

Jessica: It's been a miserable summer. That's for sure. I don't I don't remember it ever and being this hot. Not even in Mississippi. I think my parents are going on 20. Eight days of no rain and over 95 degree heat. So, they've been having wildfires over there. It's, it's been a crazy summer for sure.

, where is that? They live in Waveland, Mississippi. It's Hancock County on the, on the Gulf Coast. Look, alright. Yeah. And the humidity. So, you got to factor that in [00:02:00] too. It's right over there by the swamps. That's

Jason: true. Well, hey, a couple of months, it'll be October and hopefully it'll be a little better and then holiday season, right?

And then, then it'll be what do we call that? Outdoor eating season for us Floridians. Yep. All right, Jessica, how did you discover the law enforcement analysis profession?

Jessica: Well, I just kind of stumbled into it. So I had had to move to Jacksonville. I'd always wanted to be in law enforcement my entire life since I was a little kid.

And obviously I went to college board. I got a bachelor's in criminal justice and a master's in administration justice. As you talked about earlier, and after I graduated my master's at the time I was married and we got stationed in Pensacola. That's where I was a juvenile probation officer for the Department of Juvenile Justice in the state of Florida.

And then we got transferred over to Jacksonville, and that's where I got a [00:03:00] job at the Sheriff's office as a fingerprint technician to get my foot in the door. And I spent about a year doing that when my captain at the time got transferred over to the crime and intel unit. And he said, is that something you'd be interested in?

And I interviewed for it, got the position and that's all she wrote after that.

Jason: Nice. So when you think back at your days as a juvenile probation officer, what comes to mind? Oh,

Jessica: it was, it was definitely crazy. I, it was in Pensacola. I actually had all the, in college, I had done a dissertation on juvenile sex offenders.

So they gave me all the juvenile sex offenders at the time. And. It was on intensive probation, what they call that, and you had to see them three, at least three times a week. So I stayed busy. Obviously had high caseloads. But it was, it was a very [00:04:00] interesting time. Also, it's kind of difficult for me because I wanted to save all of them.

I had had a good home life growing up with parents that were involved and came to every sporting event, everything I ever did. And you look at some of these kids life and, and it's, you know, sad and you want to take care of them instead of, you know, having to enforce. So that's why I decided about three or

four years of doing that and not having the success stories that you necessarily want.

I decided that I Didn't want to do that career path down that. When I got to Jacksonville,

Jason: now, did you have you followed up with any of the ones that you were supervising or to see how they turned

Jessica: out? I do have 1 kid that I do keep in touch with on Facebook. He was the 1 that touched my heart the most and he's, doing great. He's successful. They actually named a scholarship after him. So [00:05:00] if I've had one success story, I said, it's always, it's, it's him. And he said, he's still doing good and succeeded finally because he just had really been dealt a bad hand. So I'm glad to see that he succeeded. I had several that ended up in prison for life for homicides.

So, you know, it's just, it's just, it was a sad job for me. Fulfilling, but overall, I just didn't think I could do that for the rest of my life.

Jason: Yeah. Yeah. So you go from, you know, that chaos to then, you know, as a fingerprint technician. I would think that it was probably a little bit more stable. Oh,

Jessica: absolutely.

There was we had to work the radio at the time. So we had to work all the N C I C F C I C hits. So if someone was out stopped with somebody, we would have to then send the teletype, confirm who they were, things like that, because obviously you don't want them to arrest the wrong person. So at times it could [00:06:00] be stressful when our radio was really hopping.

We had officers all over, you know, Jacksonville stopping. people and if they had warrants, you know, we had to respond. And when you work to teletype, you only have a certain amount of time to respond. I can't even remember because that was more than 15 years ago. I think it was five or 10 minutes and you had to like respond.

You had to run back and get a file, make sure that this was the same person. And then obviously when they would arrest them, then their fingerprints would come through and we'd have to compare fingerprints. With their jacket, as we called it, so there was times that it could be stressful, but it wasn't nearly as

heartbreaking as being a probation officer was when you just couldn't fix the problems, you know, for these kids.

Jason: How did being a fingerprint technician help you later when you became an analyst? I

Jessica: would say you had to really be pay attention to detail because when someone was newly arrested, it [00:07:00] was our job as a fingerprint technician to classify those fingerprints. So, you had to be really meticulous and counting the, the fingerprint classifications and, you know, whether it was a loop or a world, things like that.

So you had to really. You know, pay attention. You couldn't just guesstimate because fingerprints me. We all have unique fingerprints. Not all of us have the same one. So even even twins. So I would say that that probably helped me for that as well as, you know, I already had familiarity with criminal histories, you know, being a probation officer.

But, you know, as the records clerk's fingerprint technician, we also looked at criminal histories. You have to confirm that this was the same person. So you're looking at date of birth, you're looking at addresses, you know, you're having to go to different databases and look at this stuff because you don't want them to arrest the wrong person based on your information.

We also had to confirm[00:08:00] you know, for For petty theft at one point, it's a felony if they have so many prior convictions. So you were in charge of that. We also were in charge of doing all the convicted felon status checks. So when they called me and they said, okay, is this person a convicted felon? And then they take your ID.

number down and they put you in a report as, hey, you confirmed, you know, this person confirmed this person was a convicted felon. So you had to make sure that you were 100 percent accurate because you don't want to be the reason that they arrest somebody on a charge based on them being a convicted felon when they're not a convicted felon or charging with felony when they didn't have, you know, three prior convictions for petty theft.

So I think that really helped me With becoming an analyst and doing a good job at it, because you had to really pay attention to detail, , because your job was on the line doing those kind of things. Just as as with analysts, , we can't make the wrong [00:09:00] choice. We can't give them bad information.

All right,

Jason: and then so when you first become an analyst with Jacksonville Sheriff's office. What are you focusing on? What's, your goals?

Jessica: So I started out as a public safety analyst one, and they had me to start with be a troll analyst. And I was assigned to zone 2. There's 6 zones and Jacksonville.

And so basically you're working on patrol related. Things you're looking at burglaries and things like that overall as a zone. And then from there, I progressed on to becoming the analyst for the beaches. So there was a federal grant that allowed each beach agency. So Jacksonville is consolidated, but there's also.

3 beach agencies, Jackson beach, Neptune beach and Atlantic beach. And so they got a federal grant to send an analyst out there 1 day per week at each beach. And then I was also [00:10:00] at the headquarters for 2 days out of the week and out there. It's kind of the same as like patrol, but you're also doing, like, all the investigations.

So if they have a sex battery, robberies, homicides, any of that, you're working as well. And I did that a couple of years. And after that, I went to a burglary and economic crimes. And then after that, I went to the robbery unit and was assigned there.

Jason: Now, does Jacksonville have crimes that you found to be unique that you didn't, you don't hear anybody, any other analysts, maybe around the country talk

Jessica: about?

No, none that I could think of. I mean, it's, it's a large metropolis, I would call it. So you saw everything there from gangs to homicide, robbery, you know, sexual assaults, just like I think you'd see probably in any of these major metropolises. Not really, probably a small town. I grew up in a real small town.

Everybody knows everybody. So it was a little eye opening for me, just the amount of [00:11:00] crime that was occurring. I think at one point it was the murder Capital Florida. We I think we even have more than Miami at the time. So that was real eye opening. But other than that, I didn't really see anything that was like, super unique that you wouldn't really find everywhere.

It's the same same crime. Yeah, that's '

Jason: cause you stayed on the beaches the whole time. .

Jessica: Yeah. Right. Yeah. . Yeah. We were just worried about people taking people's wallets when they were out at the beach. Yeah.

Jason: Yeah. That's right. That's right. . Well, this brings us to your analyst badge story then.

. For those that may be new to the show, the analyst badge story is the career defining case or project that an analyst works. And for you, the 1st 1 that we have here, it's a 2011. We're at the sheriff's office and we're dealing with a homicide. And so

Jessica: this was at the time where I was assigned out to the beaches.

So I was working at Jack's beach and it was late October. I think it was about October 28th [00:12:00] and it was the 4th homicide of the year and it was a. Father who had been shot and left for dead near a dumpster. So we went out there to the scene. I want to say we worked like, I want to say it was 72 to 96 hours straight.

Just following lead after lead, trying to identify potential suspects. And we were ultimately able to connect the homicide to a crime ring out of California. So it was, obviously it was, it ended up being a a drug deal where they tried to then rob the guy. And it just, it went south pretty quick and it ended up shooting the individual.

So. I had to work on linking cell phone records together, text messages we ended up having a link chart of over 30 individuals. And the only information we had about the suspect was that he was a white male, he went by the nickname Pest, and he was possibly from California. So within two weeks, we [00:13:00] were able to identify everybody. I was able to identify pest actually used a program called links to identify a potential pest nickname out of California, reached out to, he was supposedly on probation, reached out to the juvenile probation officer back there in California and was ultimately able to determine that his real name and everything like that.

So on November 11th, Two weeks after the homicide, they arrested one individual in California for murder and two locals for armed robbery. And I believe the two armed robbery guys got off, but the one that committed the

murder, he's doing 35 years. In prison, but the crazy thing about this bad story is that this was 2011 and this came full circle because in 2020, I'm sitting here at FWC and I get a request.

It was an illegal commercial fishing and people illegally selling fish when they didn't have [00:14:00] the proper licenses and. Come to find out it was one of those suspects for armed robbery. He was one of the investigators here in Jacksonville. He was also her suspect. So I was actually able to give her a call and say, Hey, I know this guy.

I know his criminal history. I know his mama, his daddy, his baby mamas. I know where he likes to fish. I know he always rides his bicycle. Like I was able to give her all kind of information because I had worked that case. In depth, you know, we listen to jail hundreds of thousands of jail calls. It felt like, and that was back before they had all these cool, you know, analytical saviors is what I call them, is I would have to listen to the jail call and hand type it all out, transcribe it that way.

So and now

Jason: it's, it's now it's voice to text.

Jessica: Oh, yeah. And well, now we actually have this program here, PLX that actually will transcribe the jail calls for you. You upload it into [00:15:00] the program and it uses I don't know how it does it, but it spits it right out. It spits a whole transcript out in like literally less than a minute, whereas it probably took me three hours to type every single word of a hour jail call.

Jason: I was really hoping that you were going to say that he was trying to sell pest and that's how I got on your radar there.

Jessica: Nope. Fish, but yeah.

Jason: , did you find out like where he got that nickname

Jessica: past? I don't, I don't remember if they ever asked him when they interviewed him. I know they flew out to the investigators flew out to California.

I don't know if, if the guys in juvie gave it to him or if his dad gave it to him. The kid had had a rough life as well. So there's no telling. He could have just

been an annoying pest to his dad, who knows? But it was, it was an, it was an interesting nickname.

Jason: You mentioned work in consecutive hours, , when you discovered the homicide, [00:16:00] are you on the scene?

Are you still back in the office doing all

Jessica: this work? No, they actually let me go out on the scene with them. I had worked there for a while. You know, we had all got pretty close, so I actually got to go in a Bearcat with them when we hit the house. They actually let me Yeah. Give the speech over the speaker saying it.

This is Jack speech police. We have a warrant open up so that that was pretty cool. And then I got to go in the house with him while while they were searching the house. I have my laptop. We were looking at evidence. I was, you know. Okay. Here's this note. It's got this person's name, this person's phone number.

I'm doing it. I remember it was, it was funny because my laptop died and there was this JSO officer there because it actually was in the house was in JSO jurisdiction. And I was like, Officer, I need your laptop. I need your laptop. I gotta keep working. I gotta keep looking this up And the guy didn't tell me but he was supposed he was already off duty and was supposed to be [00:17:00] home to pick up his kid or something and he was like you were just like on fire and I was just like I gotta help this girl Finally the chief was like let's let the dude go home We'll go back to the office and we'll look it up and we'll plug your computer in so but yeah, I was out.

I was out there with him Yeah,

Jason: That is fascinating to be on the same and to have the access to have the remote access actually there of being able to run so many different queries and databases. On the road

Jessica: . No, absolutely. It's it's time time savings and you don't have to be out there.

You can do it real time. And I think that that's what what made a big difference in this case is that we could, I could look up stuff real time and it wasn't delayed getting back to me and having to wait till they fed me the information. I was right there with him.

Jason: So then you went [00:18:00] over , some of the things that, you did while they're at the sheriff's office. Is there anything else that comes to mind as you look back at your time with the sheriff's office?

Jessica: I just really gave me a good foundation a good training basis to know how to be an analyst.

And I'm grateful for the time that I had there, because I think it really helped me prepare for my new role when I became the crime and trial supervisor here at FWC.

Jason: All right, so let's talk about that transition then. How did that get on your radar in transferring from the Sheriff's Office to the Fish and Wildlife?

So

Jessica: after the Sheriff's Office I did a couple years at Atlantic Beach Police Department, which was one of the agencies that I was the analyst at when I was at the Sheriff's Office. And they needed an accreditation manager because they wanted to get accredited and a lot of analysts are really good at accreditation because we're meticulous to detail.

[00:19:00] So I decided I would go give that a try to see You know, try something different. I didn't really, it really wasn't my cup of tea, so I actually, it's crazy, I actually did the accreditation assessment here at Florida Fish and Wildlife. And, The accreditation manager was my friend. So when they were looking for a Crime Intel Analyst Supervisor, she gave me a call and she said, you should apply.

It was also closer to Mississippi where my parents live and, you know, they're, they were aging. So I was trying to get back closer than, you know, nine, nine and a half hours away in Jacksonville. So I applied for it. And I got it. And the crazy thing was, is that my one of the guys on my interview board who ended up being my captain, he's still currently my captain, was one of the guys that I had to interview for the accreditation when I came to do their [00:20:00] accreditation assessment.

And he said, I remember you, you asked me all these tough questions. I'm so sorry. I was just doing my job.

Jason: Now, , did he ask you any tough questions?

Jessica: Of course, they were all tough, but I, like I tell people today, I don't even know what they asked me. The air conditioning was broke.

I was in a A pantsuit. It was the summertime. I was trying not to pass out. So I said, I came back out and I, I told my husband, I said, I don't remember what they asked me. I don't remember what they said, but let's just hope I got it. And I did. So,

Jason: yeah, , this whole idea of analysis inside this Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

So I guess first let's, let's talk about , the idea of a commission to begin with. Cause I, that is different from the normal concept, I think of either a state department. Or a

Jessica: city department, right? So we're actually run [00:21:00] by a commission. There's 7 commissioners and they meet 5 times a year.

And what they do there is they hear staff reports. They consider rule proposals and any other type commission business. It's built into the Florida constitution. So the commissioners are appointed by the governor Okay. And then there is obviously a, a chairman. And so they're able to vote on rule changes and regulations to whereas we don't have to go to the Senate and things like that when they're really trying to do some things.

That's why they made the commission. So they're able to change some rule proposals and regulations like that by voting. So we have commission meetings. Each 5 times a year, and they're open to the public and the public can come in and have public comment about any of the topics they'll they'll put on an agenda.

So, obviously, with that, you know, we sometimes [00:22:00] have contentious topics obviously have people that are for it. You have people that are against some of the things, but they're able to come and speak freely about it because we are a commission. And they basically called it state. They call it stakeholder input.

So they want to get the input from the stakeholders. And then they'll have a vote. Sometimes I've seen them postpone the vote multiple times. So they get more information. It's actually pretty interesting. And they're actually. Published televised live on a Florida, Florida channel and you can just Google it.

If anybody ever wants to to watch them, they're pretty interesting.

Jason: So now, in your role, did you support this? So, if you mentioned that they needed more research or they needed additional information was 1 of your duties to supply that information.

Jessica: So, it depends on what it is, but sometimes we do have to supply them stats and things like that [00:23:00] so if they want to know, okay, well, how many people actually have a venomous reptile license and then how, how many people are actually receiving violations for those licenses?

So we do a lot of the stat work for us. So, I mean, is it, is it just a few people? Is it a few thousand people? Because that can make the difference and their decision making process. Another way it affects us is that we have to monitor social media for the commission meetings, because we do have some contentious topics like aquatic spraying captive wildlife regulation, rule changes, things like that, where you have You know, bear hunts.

You have people for it. You have people against it. And you have people that are very passionate on both sides. And sometimes that passion, you know, can flow out on social media. And not so positive, a light where sometimes it can You know, be perceived as threatening. So we have to monitor social media [00:24:00] and then obviously, you know, conduct workups and and things on those individuals just to make sure that they're not actually going to, you know, be a be a threat to any of our commissioners.

Jason: Yeah, because I mean, obviously, if somebody if the commission makes a decision to. Restrict the hunt or the catch for lack of better term , a lot of these folks, that's their livelihood. That's how they put food on the table, literally. So for them, it's a big deal when these rule changes come down and then they have to adjust what they're doing when they could be struggling to begin with.

So it's certainly, it's not just about, , fishing with your son this Saturday. I mean, this is what people do for, their livelihood.

Jessica: Absolutely. And they, and they will come to the meeting and say that, and they'll come in droves sometimes to talk about [00:25:00] that. And the commissioners do listen to them.

And that's why they like to, a lot of times they have working groups. So I know with all these captive wildlife rule changes we have, because that is how a lot of people make their money, that is their livelihood, it's some of their passion. So

what they'll do is they'll actually have working groups with the stakeholders, so that they can get their stakeholder input as well.

Because you obviously don't want to cut out People because it is their livelihood, so they work with people to try to make the best decisions. But sometimes, you know, those decisions have to be made because you know, we don't want certain animals, animals to become extinct. So, sometimes you have to put those limits on animals.

The same with like, and I didn't know any of this stuff before I came to work, but it's the same with like, like fisheries, you know, sometimes they have to. They have to stop the harvest of certain fish because they're getting depleted and you have to have time for them to you know, for the numbers to rise back up to [00:26:00] where you can then go catch them.

I mean, it's just, it just happens that way. So, and that's what we have to commission there, you know, our agency's about conservation and we're trying to conserve the wildlife for our future generations. And if we just have a free for all. There won't be anything in 20 years for anybody to enjoy.

Jason: Yeah, well, I had sent you this morning the, the video I found on the red snapper restriction, and I'll put that in for the listeners.

I'll put that link in the, in the show notes. It's a two minute video, but it was showing both sides. The one fisherman was like, If you're restricting the red snapper, what people will do is they'll catch a red snapper and then they don't think it's big enough. So they'll throw it back.

And then like a shark or something else will come and eat it and then. And then on the other side is it's talking about the conservation and talking about the quality, you know, keeping the red [00:27:00] snapper population healthy. So in that two minute video, it was interesting to hear both sides of the argument.

And

Jessica: there's definitely always both sides to the argument.

This is Michelle Snow. I just want you to remember to build trust with integrity.

Kyle: Hi, I'm Kyle Stoker and I'm encouraging you to vote in the IACAA elections. Between August and September, you have the opportunity to vote for your candidate. So make sure you go to the IACAA website and vote because

our membership has a voice in who leads the organization and you want to make sure that your voice is heard.

Jessica: Thank you very much.

Jamie: Hey, this is Jamie Roush. Have you ever noticed that some people just text you, Hi, how are you? Can you go get drinks? Six different text messages. Don't be that person. [00:28:00] Tell me what you need to tell me in one text message. I'm busy.

Jason: So what are some day to day types of tasks , that you're doing, because what I imagine is in one aspect of it, there's going to be a lot of similarities, similarities?

Actually to a law enforcement analyst that works at a police department, but obviously you're dealing with something totally different in terms of that it is dealing with fish and wildlife. So, I imagine that there's going to be a lot of differences

Jessica: as well.

Absolutely. So there's, there's a lot of similarities and differences and, and I can go into that. So basically, when I started, it was just me and as a supervisor, and then I had 1 analyst and an OPS, and then it got down to where it was just. Me by myself. And now we've grown our intelligence unit to five [00:29:00] analysts.

We have an internship program and we have to GIS mappers. And there's almost 900 officers and investigators. So what we do as analyst is every day we're processing the tips that come into the agency. So those are Tackle the , people reporting somebody you know, messing with a gopher tortoise burrows or somebody catching sharks, somebody catching a Goliath grouper and taking them out of water, things like that.

So we process those tips, identify who the subjects are. We also process all the field Intel reports. So that's another thing that. It's similar to sheriff's offices and police departments is field intel report. So we're processing those field intel reports, sending them out to where they need to go.

We obviously still do all the workups on, you know, suspects. Workups, you know, consist of who they are, their phone numbers, email addresses, who their parents are, siblings, baby mamas. criminal history, where they work,

businesses [00:30:00] they own, properties they own, all their social media police reports they've been in.

So, it runs the gamut, but that's, that's a bulk of what our work is, is doing workups. We do threat assessments, link charts, we do all the officer safety bulletins, attempt to identify. We do financial analysis. We do analysis of all the social media returns, cell phone returns, things like that. So there's no data that's like the day before.

It's, it's always, something different. So, you know, sometimes when you're working in these police departments or sheriff's offices, you're assigned to like a unit and then that's how you work. For instance, robbery, I just worked all the robberies. Here, you're, you don't get really bored or, fixated on, like, 1 thing, because you're just doing all kinds of stuff. Social media monitors. Another thing we do. And then in my role as a supervisor, I also do all our covert operations. And I work the covert undercover operations and [00:31:00] also. Assist getting them undercover credentials and, and things like that.

So, that was a really neat thing I started to do and I really liked that. The differences in wildlife analysis is really the intelligence led policing part. That was probably the most difficult hurdle that I had to overcome, was trying to figure out Prediction they wanted like crime prediction.

Well, it's easy with robberies or auto burglaries or things like that because you can look at the patterns. You can look at, you know, a map. So I remember a robbery. We worked where he was hitting banks that were off the interstate. By motel sixes, so you could pretty much tell officer they're going to do a robbery deployment.

Hey, these are the ones he hasn't hit, but this is around his pattern. So they could, you know, set up and do surveillance. [00:32:00] Well, we don't really have crimes like robberies and auto burglaries and things like that here. After we see, I mean, we do at the state parks we actually are working some convertor thefts right now, which is something I used to do at the sheriff's office.

So some things do come full circle. But so how we implemented that was, we started we, we do do heat maps for certain things like. Be wise where their hotspots are night hunting, because they do want us to still do surveillance and things like that. It's just you had to had to change my mindset of, okay, this is going to be really easy to, I got to figure out how to help them.

Be able to predict more crime when there's not really like a robbery, burglary, things like that. Our crimes are wildlife trafficking, things like that, where, you know, you can't really predict that as well. Ours are based on, you know, seasons, mini lobster season, deer season, turkey [00:33:00] season, things like that.

So that that's where the differences lie, I think. from traditional policing analyst.

Jason: So do you feel that you maybe get better public support with these type of cases? Because I'm thinking, with the tips that you might get from the public, if they see somebody doing one of these things that you get , there'll be more willing to get involved.

Whereas I think a lot of times people might see some, you know, might see something and in the city, they might might not want to get involved type thing. But because of because of the passion of. Fish and wildlife. I would imagine that your tip line is pretty active as

Jessica: well. Absolutely. We probably process close to a thousand tips a year.

I mean, people are very passionate about wildlife. And we get tips all the time and, and people, [00:34:00] they just send their information. They'll be like, call me, here's my email. And I'm like, wow, this is crazy because you, you go on some places. And you're trying to find witnesses to a homicide. People are not as willing as these people who, , see somebody who's put push pins through a Muscovy duck.

We've we've had some crazy, crazy stuff. Happening and people get people get out down right outraged. About and we'll sometimes we'll probably see receive 20 30 tips on the same thing because it just makes people mad and they will send it in and they want the person caught And and burned at the stake pretty much Sometimes i've seen people make those comments And i'm like wow, they are really getting mad about you know a shark or a Duck, let's get, let's get that mad about people, but yeah, that's, that's been an eye opening thing, too.

I just didn't realize the amount of people who are seriously [00:35:00] passionate about wildlife, which, you know, they can't really speak for themselves, but or defend themselves. Some of the animals, so I guess I can see it, but that was nice that people are more willing to help us. Obviously, the criminals are not, but for most part, the public is is pretty supportive of and the conservation that it does.

All right,

Jason: Let's get a better idea of some of the cases that you work. So, this brings us to your other analyst badge story. And this is as I did with the intro deals with flying squirrels.

Jessica: Yes, have you, do you know what they look like? Did you, did you look them up? I did

Jason: look them up. So that was part of my homework.

So I did look up and read a little bit about the case.

Jessica: Yeah, they're cute little, they're cute little squirrels there. I mean, they don't look like regular squirrels. So that was a operation that we worked for several years and that actually came in. I think it was January of 2019 [00:36:00] as a tip, you know, one of these tips that just came in from a citizen that he said that he had seen people illegally trapping flying squirrels in Marion County and flying squirrels are protected.

In Florida, so we worked a case for about 19 months. They ended up arresting 7 people after over 3, 600 flying squirrels have been trafficked. And it was, it was for international pet trade. So we found that these flying squirrels were being caught by. The poachers and multiple counties, and then they were being sold to a wildlife dealer in Bushnell who actually did have a license.

But obviously that license doesn't include flying squirrels being that they are protected. So what he was doing was he was laundering those through his license business. And he was actually saying that they were captive bred and that wild caught. So after the case we identified seven people and, and they arrested, [00:37:00] arrested all of them, but there was over 10, 000 traps where they had caught these over 3, 000 flying squirrels in over three years.

Then they were taking because there's such a hot commodity overseas, all these little squirrels were then taken Driven to Chicago, where they were exported over to North Korea. But this, this wildlife dealer was also doing protective freshwater turtles as well as alligator. So, and he was making a lot of money like over.

200, 000 in profits. And so because I worked a lot of turtle cases, you know, I just assumed that they were either using these for pets or maybe, the turtles, they eat them and I believe they have medicinal value. So, but they was actually

using these in little videos. He was dressing the little flying squirrels up in little videos.

He had like little helmets on it, had a little motorcycle jacket on one of them, and he was making like a kid's [00:38:00] show for kids to watch with these flying squirrels.

Jason: Was that here or was that over

Jessica: in North Korea? North Korea. All right. I don't know that anybody over here is watching it, but I, I watched a little bit of it and I said, well, that's interesting.

Jason: That was my question of what in particular about North Korea would want to have flying

Jessica: squirrels? Like I said, it was that they use them in the pet, the pet trade. People like them as pets. So you think about North Korea, they have little tiny apartments and things like that.

So they need animals that are very small. So they were used for. Pets as well as, like I said, he was making a TV show that was, I would have never even guessed that when somebody said, Oh, they're taking flying squirrels. I mean, this many of them. And then he was making little kids show with dressing up to find squirrels.

So that was, that was, that was definitely an interesting

Jason: case. Hmm. So the local dealer, did you say if he raised them himself, it would've been okay, but he wasn't [00:39:00] allowed to actually trap and then obviously export them out of the country. But so if, but he, he could have had these, these squirrels.

On his own, if he if he would erase them, is that my understanding?

Jessica: That's pretty much what happens in most of these you know, any type of animals, unless they're completely prohibited you have captive bred, which those are the people that are breeding turtles and snakes and any kind of animal like that versus wild caught.

And that's, other crocodiles. And which wild caught is him just taking it out of the wild. So, a lot of times with this wildlife trafficking, that's what we see is

these people will have legitimate businesses where they are breeding certain animals, just for instance, turtles, but then they're also, because they can't breed them fast enough, they're going out and having people catch them in the wild, and then they're laundering through their business and mixing them with the captive bred.

Jason: [00:40:00] And that makes it difficult to identify and figure out, because I'm guessing that's their defense. When they do get caught, they're probably saying, Oh, I, I've raised all of these, none of these are from the wild.

Jessica: And that's why we have biologists who can tell the difference, like you can tell the difference between a captive bred and a wild caught turtle.

I mean, there's, I don't know this differences. I'm not a biologist, but we bring the biologists out on those cases because they're able to identify those that are wild caught. You know, a lot of people probably don't know, but wildlife trafficking is one of the most. profitable crimes because it's a high reward at a low risk.

Unfortunately, a lot of our wildlife crimes are misdemeanors at best. And they get a, you know, fine, which if you're making 40, 000 off of flying squirrel and we hit you with 100 fine, they're going to keep doing it because 40, 000 versus 100. But. [00:41:00] Wildlife trafficking is the fourth most profitable transnational crime, only behind the drug trade, arms trade, and human trafficking.

So they estimate it's a multi billion dollar activity, and that's why I think it's so prevalent here in, in Florida. Because we just have, you know, especially for turtles we just got wrapped up probably last year, and it might have been 2021 and in 2009, FWC had banned the commercialization the commercial catch of turtles in the wild.

So you couldn't, you couldn't catch them anymore. And, and if, if there were, there was only so. certain ones that could be caught in the wild, and then you had a limit. You know, most of the possession limit for, I'm pretty sure, all the turtles that are allowed to be caught is two. So when people are going out there and catching 100 or 200 of them you know, that's that's not good because it, when you catch these and [00:42:00] exploit these turtles, you know, we risk them being extinct Habitat loss, pollution, things like that you don't even think about but Florida happens to be ideal for illegal trafficking of a lot of animals especially turtles because of our diversity, accessibility, and in the year you know, our year round temperature, I mean, it's just, you know, we don't really

have, you know, cold, cold, snow, winter, so there, we have a lot of animals and, the state of Florida, including animals that are not indigenous to Florida. So the 1 case we worked was against strictly reptiles. And he's, he's the infamous lizard king. He actually wrote a book. People can go back and look at that if they're interested, but he was illegal, illegally harvesting turtles from the wild and smuggling them out of the US to sell overseas.

And was falsely labeling. Okay. The turtles when they were going overseas as having been bred in captivity on, they were going over to China and [00:43:00] Japan and elsewhere, because over there, they're very popular for pets as well as food and medicinal value, but sometimes these turtles were going for as much as 10, 000 each at auctions.

And we actually worked out in conjunction with U. S. Fish and Wildlife, and he ended up getting seven months in federal prison. Yeah, but

Jason: again, you know, again, seven months, and, you know, I guess it is federal time, but still, if you're making, , thousands of dollars per turtle, it still , makes it.

Jessica: Exactly. So it's not, you're not looking at 35 years to life. You're looking at less than a year in in federal prison. And that impacts our job as analysts because, you know, when FWC bans these type things, then that just creates a black market. So we've worked a lot of these turtle cases because, because people are just taking them from the wild because there's such a high demand for them that they can't, like I said, breed them in captivity fast enough and then they [00:44:00] launder them through there.

So we've actually started focusing on financial crimes and following the money, several of us analysts as well as investigators just became a cams certified which is anti money laundering. And I'm a certified economic crimes forensic examiner because we want to be able to, to really make an impact on the, these wildlife crimes and we're going to have to go after, you know, stiffer Type crime.

So actually we were pretty proud of it. We actually were able to get wildlife trafficking as a predicate for the Florida RICO Act. So any violation of Title 68, which is the Illegal Sale, Purchase, Collection, Harvest, Capture or possession of wild animal life. So I think it's freshwater, aquatic, or marine life is now, can be now a RICO, a predicate.

So whereas before we had to have some kind of other predicate to be able to charge these guys with [00:45:00] RICO or anything like that, because it, it is a business, you know, they are racketeering. So that was, that's really a cool thing that just happened within the last year or so. Nice.

Jason: Hmm. You know, listen to you describe this.

And you mentioned yesterday in the prep call, you know, there's five analysts there to GIS specialist and you're, you are working supporting 900 officers. You're dealing with the thousands of tips you get a year. You're talking about the commission meetings that happen handful of times a year. I don't know how you do it with like seven or eight people.

, how do you pick which ones that you're going to run with?

Jessica: Oh, we run with them. We run with them all. We everything that comes in we work, we work it as fast as we can. Some of these long term cases like the flying squirrel and the, the lizard king case, obviously those were . 2 to 3 year operations. [00:46:00] So it does take a lot of my time because I normally work those cases where you're, you know, looking through the social media returns the cell phone returns, building your case, all that kind of stuff. So we, we pretty much work.

Everything that comes in, but for these long term covert operations they pick the most exploit, they try to pick the most exploited animal at the time and, and work that and try, try to make a dent. Another good one we just got finished wrapping up in January was Operation Vopper. And again, you can Google that and, and see about it and look at all the, the snakes, but it was multi year operation.

And, and we had received tips and Intel reports probably for about a year indicating that there was a black market for the sale of highly dangerous venomous reptiles. So, you know, you, you take that time to try to build it up, figure out who your targets are and things like that. And then [00:47:00] we, you know, we got somebody in undercover.

And over the course of the investigation at nearly 200 snakes 24 species from 7 different regions of the globe were trafficked. And I mean, if we're talking about snakes like the green mamba and a, and puff adder and gaboon vipers and, snakes like that, which are highly, highly venomous and dangerous, and some of these snakes that they were selling on the black market because they didn't have a license to sell them, they don't even have venom.

There's some places where this venom's only located in, like, Miami. So, these, these snakes get loose and they bite somebody, I mean, they could kill someone.

Jason: And wow. Is there an animal that you feel that people don't care about? Like, is there, you know, I'm thinking, I'm thinking maybe like a pigeon or like rats.

You're probably not going after them because no one really, [00:48:00] cares about those particular

Jessica: animals. Well, we work a lot of seagull cases.

Jason: Oh, seagulls. Yeah. Yeah, and

Jessica: I'm just like that. Yeah, they're protected. And we don't really, yeah, we probably don't really get a lot of... I haven't seen a lot of pigeon ones come through and you know, normally when we get the dog one We we do get dog ones.

But you know, that's a domestic animal. So don't we don't really work that so I normally send that to the sheriff's office

Jason: interesting stuff, All right, and for those that are familiar with the tiger king You had some , work with Carol

Jessica: Baskins.

Oh yeah, we're, we're familiar with Carol Baskins. So obviously FWC is responsible also for captive wildlife. So if you have captive wildlife, you're supposed to have a license. There's all different kind of license from, you know, ESC to ESB to VRC, which is venomous reptiles. So obviously Carol Baskins had her facility and she was licensed [00:49:00] So the Tiger King really blew up around here and people were sending us, you know, tips on Carol Baskins and it was, it was just a crazy time after Tiger King, but it was definitely, definitely interesting to watch that and see some of the people.

On there, Mario Tabrio, he, he was in a Tiger King and obviously he has a licensed facility. So it's, it's crazy to see people that you're familiar with just in, you know, your daily job on a TV screen. Yeah.

Jason: Now, was there anything. That you know that they didn't show about Carol on

Jessica: the show now, not, not that I'm aware of, but I don't actually go out to her facility and have any really dealings with her.

Like our captive wildlife investigators would now

Jason: I did not watch the show, but , it was during that pandemic, but that thing premiered and it was. What everybody was talking about at the time.

Jessica: Yeah, we actually had a [00:50:00] during COVID, I remember one of the tips that came in was this guy was selling baby Bengal tigers on OfferUp.

So we had to identify the guy, use facial recognition to identify him and sent the investigators. Out there and he had just seen Tiger King and it was COVID and he thought he just put something cute out there and just make people laugh by saying he was selling baby Bengal Tigers. But unfortunately you can't do that, dude.

So they shut him, shut him down, shut his offer up down.

Jason: Jeez, it is fascinating that you seem to be using all the law enforcement analysis tools, right? You talk about facial recognition. You talked about the financial aspects and it is an investigation. So all those tools are going to come in

Jessica: handy. Absolutely. And we use Penlink for our social media cell phone returns. We also have a tech ops [00:51:00] unit so they, and digital forensics, so they're using Cellbrite and Axion and GrayKey and all those kind of things with LPRs Flock and Vigilance, so.

You know, we, we use, we utilize all the tools that, that a regular analyst does. We just do it for wildlife related crimes.

Jason: So what's next for your office? Do you have any big changes coming up? Well,

Jessica: we're trying to build A small little real time crime center for specifically, you know, wildlife.

We're looking at a couple of products to where we can monitor cameras, and things like that. We're hoping to eventually my vision is to have a fusion center for wildlife agencies. So every every state has a wildlife agency. There's only currently four states that even have analysts. California just got one.

Texas has one. Georgia has [00:52:00] one. And then US Fish and Wildlife has a small little team as well. And then it's just us. So we provide a lot of services to you. Other wildlife agencies as well, because they don't have the luxury of having an Intel unit or is Intel unit as big as ours, even though five analysts and me and two mappers is, is not as big as some agencies who actually have less, you know, investigators and officers.

So, you know, we obviously want to keep growing. We've grown it in five years. And like I said, in five years from now, I'd like to, you know, have a fusion center. Or at least have a 24 7 availability for our officers right now at 24 7 availability is me. So I answer it at night and on the weekends, but it would be nice to have that availability to where they don't have to reach out to a fusion center or one of these real time crime centers that's open 24 7.

So that's, that's where we want to [00:53:00] go. Cause you always want to keep moving forward and build your team and just never, never stay, stay

Jason: stagnant. Good. I just thought of the, you know, the, the mappers that you talked about and it made me think of I almost wish I could work there. So my career could come full circle because when I first started as an analyst, I was dealing with.

I think it was ArcMap 3. 2, maybe it was 3. 1, but we used the animal movements extension. , so it would be, interesting to have it come full circle. It has like, oh, I'm sure they have animal extension things now that you could use in mapping,

Jessica: so.

Oh, I'll tell you what. It's, it's really changed a lot since I used ArcMap at the Sheriff's Office. ArcMap doesn't, I think it's being phased out completely next year and they're using ArcGIS Pro. But you can come on down, I'll, I'll hire you. You can, you can [00:54:00] map some wildlife patterns for us.

Jason: Yeah, well maybe do, get some undercover work too.

So that would be all right. Let's talk about some advice now. So, , what advice do you have for our listeners, whether there a new analyst or an experienced

Jessica: analyst? I just, I, I tell all my new people that start in. To be like a dog with a bone, like you gotta have a passion for it.

I had a passion for it since I started and I still have a passion for it. Sometimes I don't even notice the time of day because I get on something and like, it's like people have told me that I'm like a dog with a bone. I just, I will not stop till I figure something out. And that's that's one thing I would give people advice and what I tell my people is we're going to turn over every stone and if there's a way to find the answer if there's a way to identify the suspect, we're going to do it.

[00:55:00] And that reminds me of a case. We like to joke about here. Of an individual she was a lady of the night. I guess is the nicest way to Put it being that we're here on a podcast and she had a monkey and Facial recognition would not work on her. Because she had a lot of makeup and Work done to her face So it was just coming back with her social media returns.

So it took me about Six months. And when I had time, I'd pick it back up and I'd be like this. I'm not gonna let this lady best me. If it's the last thing I do, I'm gonna figure out who she is. So I'd go down a rabbit hole. I'd find a relative. I'd strike out. So I remember it was a Thanksgiving and it was about probably two o'clock in the morning.

And I Woke up and I said, I'm gonna find this lady and I just think it was about four or five hours later. I [00:56:00] had gone back to 2014 to a comment somebody had made on a one of her post And the girl said she was her cousin and so then I went down that rabbit trail and lo and behold I found her But that's I feel like that's what You really got to have, to be able to be a really good and successful analyst.

Most of the analysts I know, like, we have a passion for it. , we don't want that suspect to best us. We want to find out everything we can about him. Identify them, you know, and see that, you got to pay attention to detail. And, you know, don't give up.

So, like I said, it took me 6 months. That's probably the longest it's ever taken me. But I was finally able to find her. They were able to go to the hotel where she was staying and we're able to seize the monkey and get him out of her care. So, that was that was cool, but [00:57:00] that's what I like to tell people, just be like a dog with a bone and and don't don't give up and give all you got to to each case.

Jason: Nice. I like the tenacity. I just remembered that we forgot to talk about your internship. So. Backing up way, way, way to the beginning of the interview in school, you got summer of 2004, you got an internship with the FBI. So how did you get that

Jessica: internship? Individual from each state, it's the honors internship.

They pick one person from each state every year to come do the internship. So I was selected as the individual to go and represent the state of Mississippi. Wow. Yeah, a great, great opportunity. A great accomplishment. And I got to work in the major crimes unit, got to see how they pick the top 10 most wanted.

It was pretty, pretty neat. Obviously some of the other stuff I [00:58:00] did, you can't really talk about. So but it was cool being a little small town girl from Mississippi and literally working at Headquarters at the J. Edgar Hoover building right down from the White House was just mind blowing to me because, you know, it's it's like, wow.

Wow. That is impressive. I remember when the, the motorcade came by for the first time, cause it's not very far from the white house. I mean, I was screaming at the top of my lungs, the president's coming, the president's coming and all of them are just, all the agents are just sitting there and I'm like, yo, the president's coming. They're like, yeah, he comes by every day.

I'm like, well, it's just amazing for me. So I put

Jason: you that scene in elf. Would he yell at Santa and he's screaming at the top of his lungs and everybody else is like looking like, what's wrong with

Jessica: you? [00:59:00] Yeah, I know. They're like, plus I didn't wear shoes. I mean, I grew up in backwoods, Mississippi. So they're like and apparently to them, I spoke with an accent.

I don't think I have an accent, but they did. So I'm sure they probably thought what this girl is just. Just some poor girl from Mississippi who apparently ain't never been outside of anywhere. And it really, I really hadn't. So it was, it was a neat, neat experience. But by the end of the summer, I was like, Oh yeah, it's the president.

He's coming by again.

Jason: Yeah. So it's, it's interesting as I think back about it, cause that, I would have been working just north of DC in Greenbelt. Maryland, and it makes me wonder if we ever would have passed each other, right? Because we were in basically the same, the same general area. We could have passed each other at one point in time.

We would

Jessica: have never known. No. Yeah, because I had to take the Metro and I lived in Virginia. [01:00:00] So that is, that's neat. .

Jason: All right. Let's finish up with personal interest then. And. I guess it shouldn't be a surprise, but you like to visit all the national parks.

Jessica: Absolutely.

Jason: How many have you visited?

I know

Jessica: it's been over 10. I think it's like 13 or 14. And then my husband and I are getting ready to go to Glacier. Which is one we haven't been to before in September for his 50th birthday. So that's going to be neat, but I've been to Hawaii to the volcanoes, National Park, Grand Canyon Zion, the Everglades, the Rocky Mountains.

Smoky mountains the arches, all kind of several other ones. But then the neat thing with, with my current job is we get to travel a lot. And go to different conferences and things like that. So I've been able to go to like Vegas and Utah and Nebraska, D. C. So [01:01:00] it's, it's really neat. And I get to take time because.

Obviously, we're in the conservation business and a lot of these conferences we go to are focused around conservation and meeting with other conservation agencies and, you know, seeing what they're doing and how we all can improve and things like that. So they usually tie in some kind of, trip to, see the outdoors and, and Yellowstone things like that.

So it's, it's pretty neat. Nice. So, all

Jason: right. And then if somebody wants to contact you, what's the best way for them to

Jessica: contact you? Probably just by email or my work cell phone.

Jason: Okay. All right. And we'll put that into the show notes. And so our last segment to the show is words to the world.

This is where I give the guests the last word. Jessica, you can promote any idea that you wish. What are your words to the world? Be

Jessica: like a dog with a

Jason: bone. Nice. Well, I leave every guest with, you've given me just enough to talk bad about you later. But I do appreciate you being [01:02:00] on the show, Jessica.

Thank you so much. And you be safe.

Mindy: Thank you. And thanks for having me. Thank you for making it to the end of another episode of Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. You can show your support by sharing this and other episodes found on our website at www.leapodcasts.com. If you have a topic you would like us to cover or have a suggestion for our next guest, Please send us an email at le8podcasts@gmail.com.

Jessica: [com](http://www.leapodcasts.com). Till next time analysts, keep talking.