

CALIFORNIA

The high-tech tools used to track down Nick Reiner after his parents' slayings



Nick Reiner (Richard Shotwell / Invision / Associated Press)

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- Police used geotracking, cellphone data and surveillance cameras to locate Nick Reiner hours after his parents were

found fatally stabbed Sunday morning in Brentwood.

- The suspect, who struggled with substance abuse and had argued with his parents at a holiday party, was arrested in South Los Angeles that night.

It didn't take long for police to focus on Nick Reiner after his parents were found fatally stabbed in the master bedroom of their Brentwood home Sunday afternoon.

The challenge became finding him.

Reiner lived in Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner's guesthouse but was not there when police arrived around 3:30 p.m. Prosecutors now allege he killed his parents sometime early Sunday.

Detectives got a break in the case when they determined Reiner had [checked into the Pierside Santa Monica hotel](#) sometime after 4 a.m. Sunday. But when they arrived in the afternoon, according to sources familiar with the investigation, he was gone.

So authorities turned to digital geolocation to determine his whereabouts, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment to the media.

Police began looking at Reiner's movements across Los Angeles around 7 p.m. Sunday using location data from his cellphone, along with other electronic devices, app footprints and a network of cameras.

The sources said Reiner moved quickly across the city during that period, eventually ending up in the Exposition Park area near USC, and [was arrested](#) around 9:15 p.m. by L.A. police gang and narcotics detectives as part of a fugitive task force. Officers filmed the arrest, which was also captured on gas station cameras.



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It is unclear whether Reiner used public transportation that day or why he traveled to South Los Angeles. But both the hotel and the area where he was arrested are easily accessible from the Metro Expo rail line.

Law enforcement officials and prosecutors have offered scant information about the crime itself and how authorities came to focus on the Reiners' child as a suspect. The full scope of the technology and information used to track down Reiner hasn't been made public. Los Angeles Police Department Chief Jim McDonnell said during a news

conference this week that Reiner was “found with good, solid police work and investigative tools.”

Experts say it’s not unusual for law enforcement to use geotracking in these cases, particularly when searching for a suspect accused of two homicides.

Geotracking has become a powerful tool for police in an era when cellphones are ubiquitous and warrants for accessing such data can be obtained quickly, said Justin Kelley, the vice president of global operations at Allied Universal Enhanced Protection Services and a former commanding officer with the Connecticut State Police.

Generally, a cellphone registers its location with the nearest cellular tower about every seven seconds. The greater the number of cell towers in the area, the greater the accuracy, enabling officials to monitor movements more closely with data from the cellphone carrier.

“The raw data will actually give you a triangulation,” Kelley said, “and they’ll actually narrow it down to real-time landmarks and streets. It’s not as real time as, you know, someone just walked across the parking lot. It buffers a little bit.”

But with search warrants, police can get even greater detail, Kelley said, noting that “they can actually ping that phone in real time for you, which is extremely helpful.”

Members of law enforcement also can use sensor technology from fitness apps, along with maps and other applications on phones to get data that will help them locate a suspect, experts say.

“You can have your phone in sleep mode, airplane mode and you’re going to get a signal,” Kelley said. “If they don’t power their phone down all the way and they have several apps open, police are going to be able to get their location.”

Surveillance footage shows Reiner purchasing a sports drink with cash at a gas station in South L.A. around 8:20 p.m., roughly an hour before he was arrested. In the video, Reiner has a red backpack slung over his shoulder and is wearing a black and green jacket with white stripes and a dark baseball cap.

An employee at the Arco gas station said that Reiner was hanging out in the area for close to an hour before his arrest. The employee declined to provide his name to The Times because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

“He was just standing up there,” the employee said. “I don’t know if he was waiting for somebody, but he spent at least one hour just standing there.”

At one point, the employee said, Reiner lingered inside the gas station after he saw an off-duty security guard in the parking lot outside.

“He was nervous,” the employee said.



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Video from outside the gas station shows Reiner standing on a street corner as three unmarked police vehicles drive into the intersection, turning their lights on as they move toward him, blocking his path. Reiner throws his hands up as officers exit the cars.

Reiner had a [long history of substance abuse problems](#) and gave numerous interviews about his attempts at rehab and stints of homelessness. He said he was in recovery at age 22, when he and his father [produced a film based on his struggles](#), but at age 24 he said in a [podcast interview](#) that he had since relapsed.

Reiner's mother had become increasingly concerned about his mental health in recent weeks, a family friend said. But little is known about how he has spent his time in the last seven years.

On Saturday night, Nick and his parents were at the same holiday event at talk show host Conan O'Brien's house. That night, they got into an argument, the Reiners' friends told The Times, adding that Reiner had been acting strangely at the party. But it remains unclear what specifically they were arguing about.

Prosecutors [filed two counts of first-degree murder](#) with special circumstances against Reiner on Tuesday. Reiner also faces a special allegation that he used a deadly weapon, a knife, in the crime, L.A. County Dist. Atty. Nathan Hochman said during a news conference.

"Prosecuting these cases involving family members are some of the most challenging and heart-wrenching cases that this office faces because of the intimate and often brutal nature of the crimes involved," Hochman said.

Reiner appeared [briefly in court Wednesday](#) but did not enter a plea. His attorney, Alan Jackson, told reporters outside the courthouse after the hearing that "there are very, very complex, serious issues associated with this case" that need to be analyzed.

He urged the public not to rush to judgment or jump to conclusions.

"We ask that during this process you allow the system to move forward in the way it was designed," he said.

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