

**EXCLUSIVE**

# THE MONSTER'S

HE so trusted smiling, mild-mannered Alejandro Avila with her children that she gave him the run of her home and happily let him baby-sit her precious girl.

Now, Avila is an accused child-killer the mortified mom tells GLOBE in an exclusive interview how he charmed her into allowing her daughter into his arms.

Alex could be incredibly sweet, charming and personable," says the woman, who is speaking on the condition of anonymity, of her former neighbor, who's charged with abducting, sexually abusing

and then murdering her 5-year-old Samantha Runnion. "He totally broke my trust, as well as the love and trust of my 5-year-old daughter. He was a working baby sitter, Alex and when I needed him immediately. He was a friend and he lived upstairs, it was convenient. Plus, his daughter was so close to mine."

How did I know that I had a monster into my life and into the life of my baby girl?

Now, my head is constantly swirling with all the unthinkable that might have happened between Alex and my daughter. This is a nightmare I will have to live with for the rest of my life."

The devastated mom met Avila when she moved in with her best friend, Beth Veglahn, in the apartment upstairs from her in Lake Elsinore, Calif., a small community 80 miles southeast of Los Angeles. Veglahn is the woman who called off police that her 27-year-old fiance might be responsible for Samantha's abduction. She and Avila lived together from 1996 to 1999.

"My daughter, son and I were very close to Beth and her daughter, nieces and nephews," says the woman. "Alex was always around, whether it was a family gathering or just hanging out in the pool. We often swam together and Alex

was very playful with the kids. He was patient and affectionate, and always willing to play games with them."

GLOBE's exclusive photos show the alleged murderer romping with various children in the swimming pool at their apartment complex.

What neither Veglahn nor the woman telling us this chilling tale knew is that his disarming smile and manner masked a sick, sinister mind, bent on molesting little kids, according to cops.

"I just never, ever - not in a hundred million years - would have thought Alex was capable of sexually abusing children, much less murder," says the woman. "I've worked for the department of corrections for almost 25 years and I've dealt with sex offenders."

"He seemed like a nice, normal, friendly, trustworthy kind of guy."

But the shocking reality now haunting her is that cops say Avila is a wily predator. And police claim that he not only killed little Samantha, he also left her body obscenely displayed.

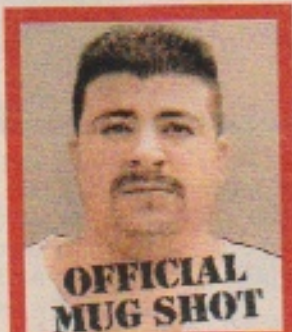
Still, even after she moved away, the doting mom let Avila visit her family for a year or so, before she fell out of touch. Then in 1999, Veglahn, who had since split from Avila, called to tell her friend that he'd been arrested and charged with molesting her daughter, niece and two other

little girls. The woman was absolutely horrified, fearing her own daughter might have been a victim, too! Avila was acquitted of those charges in 2001, but he's now back behind bars, charged with kidnapping, two counts of forcible lewd acts on a child and murder in the Samantha Runnion case.

And the woman who befriended him and took him in as a baby sitter is speaking out to warn other mothers.

"Take every precaution to shield your children from a sexual predator," she says. "Don't be fooled by men who seem nice. Alex was fun, gentle. He never drank and he seemed great with kids. I now know that you can never tell when someone's a sex offender."

- ROBIN MIZRAHI



Alejandro Avila is in jail charged with the murder of 5-year-old Samantha

