

CNN.U.S NEWS

The harrowing journey of the girl who called herself Tika Cortez

By **Ed Lavandera**, CNN Correspondent
updated 6:07 AM EST, Sat January 7, 2012



Jakadrien Turner is back in the United States, eight months after she was mistakenly deported to Colombia,

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Jakadrien Turner told police that she was from Colombia after being arrested
- She created an alter ego and didn't fight her deportation, a U.S. official says
- In fact, she was a 15-year-old runaway teenager from Dallas

(CNN) -- Jakadrien Turner's lies last year to authorities in Texas -- including adopting an alter ego and claiming she was from Colombia -- set off a harrowing journey that, according to posts on a Facebook page featuring photographs of her, she seemed to later regret.

By Friday, the troubled teenager was finally back in the United States, after being arrested and then deported to a country that she'd never been in before. It was a months-long escapade that has her family asking questions about how she got to the South American nation and what happened to her while there.

Jakadrien's journey began April 2, 2011, in a Houston, Texas, shopping mall where the 15-year-old was arrested for shoplifting a white shirt, black vest and jeans. It was a petty crime that turned out to be the first step in her changing her identity.

Houston police, according to documents obtained by CNN, show that Turner told authorities that her name was 21-year-old Tika Lanay Cortez and that she was a citizen of Colombia. She listed her address as a home just north of downtown Houston.

A judge assigned Houston attorney William McLellan to represent the woman then known as Tika Cortez on the misdemeanor theft charge. The case was resolved in one day, after she pleaded guilty and was sentenced to time served. She was then handed over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.



Deported teen returns



Deported runaway to return to U.S.



Teen mistakenly deported

[Deported Texas teen arrives back in U.S.](#)

McLellan said he never saw any signs that his client was a teenage runaway from Dallas, and not from Colombia as she indicated.

"She didn't make any attempts and cry out that I'm not an illegal immigrant or anything like that," McLellan told CNN. "You would remember someone saying that's not me."

The lawyer said, eight months later, he now believes "she knew what she was doing" -- even if he is hard-pressed to explain why.

Whatever her thinking, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents say Jakadrien Turner continued to play the role of "Tika Cortez" during the next two months.

Federal immigration officials say they're "still investigating this matter in order to expeditiously determine the facts of this case."

The attorney representing the Turner family said that the U.S. government is to blame, not the girl, for her deportation.

"I don't buy that she had the wherewithal to be able to bamboozle the government," Ray Jackson says. "You know, kids are scared when they get around authorities. ... To think that you could bamboozle them to create a new identity, it just doesn't make sense."

A U.S. immigration official -- who was not able to speak for attribution, because the investigation is ongoing -- said that that the girl then known as Tika Cortez waived her right to an immigration attorney and did not fight deportation proceedings.

According to U.S. immigration officials, they'd never come across anyone by the name Tika Cortez. Her fingerprints did not match anyone in law enforcement databases, nor was there a match for the name Jakadrien Turner. And the background check "revealed no information to invalidate her claims," the officials said.

Colombian government officials then interviewed Jakadrien and issued her the needed travel documents and "full Colombian citizenship," according to the U.S. immigration officials. That meant that, six months after running away from her Dallas home, the 15-year-old girl was on her way to Colombia -- for the first time in her life.

She arrived in Bogota on May 23, according to the Colombian government.

What exactly happened, once she arrived in the South American nation, is unclear.

Dana Ames has been advising the Turner family in the search for Jakadrien for almost a year in her capacity as the director of the United Response Search and Rescue Team, a non-profit agency that helps families find missing loved ones.

She and members of Jakadrien's family say that various internet postings they discovered show that two Colombian men befriended the runaway teenager and they spent a lot of time together during her time in Houston.

"So you think it's a coincidence she came up with a Colombian name and said she was from Colombia?" said Ames. "Otherwise she is absolutely the smartest, most creative 15-year-old child I know of. I can't wrap my brain around the idea that she did this all on her own."

After arriving in Colombia, a Facebook page and Twitter feed arose tied to someone using her adopted moniker, Tika Cortez. If the postings were indeed written by the runaway teen, they offer a glimpse into the tormented troubles of a lost teenager.

The writer claims to be from Bridgetown, Barbados, and studied at Texas Southern University, neither of which are true of Jakadrien Turner. The writings also indicate that their author spent some time working in a telephone call center and as a maid in Bogota.

But the most dominant theme of the Facebook posts, which went up between June and November of last year, is that the person identified as Tika Cortez is "BORED AS HELL." The writer also talks about smoking marijuana and being part of tortured and volatile relationships.

A couple of times, the writer references her life back in the United States including:

-- On May 25: "back home in Colombia got deported. .. really missed everyone in Houston..."

-- On August 12: "well was in jail, now I'm free man am still feel like I'm loke up in this country..."

-- And on June 30: "I'm having to many problems in mi life, just found out I can't even go bak to the states in another 5 years..."

Only once does the writer appear to cryptically allude to the journey that landed her in Colombia.

That came on a July 28 Facebook post that reads, "I'm f**king tired I just want a f**king time machine, and rewind all the bull**it I did wrong man OMG.. I'm never going to be happy here."

The tone is far different in a more recent post from October, one month before Colombian authorities took Jakadrien into custody. It includes a series of pictures uploaded under the banner, "familia, me happy 4 once in the mountains."

For Jakadrien Turner's grandmother, who spent months monitoring these Facebook postings, this was difficult to read. Still, she told CNN that, despite it all, she is grateful that her granddaughter is alive.

"I always feared she would be killed," Lorene Turner said.

Now, the teenage girl is back home in Texas -- alive in a place she hasn't been in over a year, near her family