

Episode 101: Garrett was held hostage at knifepoint

Deral Dean Ritter. Probably not a name you've heard before.

In 1986, Ritter was 34 years old, and he was living in Waurika, Oklahoma. In fact, he was living in the Jefferson County jail. He was serving a 7-month sentence. The crime that landed him there sounds kind of silly, by today's standards. He was convicted of possession of marijuana. Medical cannabis is now legal in Oklahoma, and there's currently a strong push for the legalization of recreational marijuana as well, so that's probably going to happen at some point. But back in 1986, getting caught with a baggie of weed in your pocket meant you were going to spend some time in jail.

Well, Deral Dean Ritter was not happy about that, and he decided he was not going to stay. So he came up with an escape plan.

At the Jefferson County jail, the cell doors were electronic. At night, a guard could flip one centrally-located switch, and all the doors would lock automatically. Well, one night, before the cell doors were all locked for the night, Ritter jammed a wad of paper in his door, which prevented it from being locked. He also made up his bunk to make it look like someone was sleeping there, so the guards wouldn't suspect anything when they made their rounds overnight. I know, this sounds like a plot to a really low-budget movie.

But Ritter's plan actually worked. He was able to sneak out of his cell, and escape from the jail. Chances are he had been there a few times before this, so it helped that he knew the layout of the place. The next morning, he was discovered missing. Assistant District Attorney Glen Hammonds made a public statement to announce that they had an escapee, and that authorities were on the hunt for him.

Of course, he was soon captured and brought back to the jail to finish his sentence, with some more time added because of the escape. And you'd think that maybe after that he'd get things figured out and start making some smarter decisions about his life.

But 11 years later, he was back in the news. My guest today, Garrett, had an unexpected encounter with Deral Dean Ritter. And neither of them could have predicted how it would end.

Scott

What kind of store did you work in? Was it a restaurant or a grocery store?

Garrett

Braum's an ice cream store. It's also a fast-food restaurant that sells burgers, fries, and shakes. They're also a bit of a grocery store, where you could come in and pick up some small-produce items. They had their own farm in Oklahoma, so you could get their milk or ice cream in the produce section as well. They had things like ground beef, potatoes, bread, and that sort of thing in addition to it being an ice cream parlor.

Scott

So, it's kind of a one-stop-shop for whatever you need.

Garrettt

Yeah. It's a nice little community thing because they would hand out coupons and things for children who read a certain amount of books. They could cash it in and get a free ice cream cone - they had a lot of nice flavors and things. It's a nice place, I think, for families to go. They had a kid's playground section in the front so you could go to the swings, go down the slide, and things like that.

Scott

What was your job there?

Garrett

I got my job there at the age of 17, I think. I worked there for about a year up until the event - that was my second job - and I worked as a grill cook, I did the dishes, and I also would dip ice cream. So, I would work in the front with the dippers and ask people what they wanted. I would make the shakes, freezes, sundaes, and these sorts of things. My shift was always in the evening because I was still in school, but I also work during the weekends. I'd probably work 15 to 20 hours a week.

Scott

Take us through what happened. This happened in the evening, right? Take us through what went on that night.

Garrett

As far as I knew, it was an ordinary shift. I normally did the grilling, cooked the patties, made the buns, kept track of the orders on the screen, put them in a bag, and give them to someone else who handles the money. This night, I was doing the dishes. The grill section was, maybe, 15 feet away from the dish sink, which is a large sink with the spray handle, deep wells, and all that. So, I went in on my regular shift. I remember getting in trouble a few times for wearing earbuds with a wire that would go down. I had it clipped to my waist. It was called an iPod Nano.

Scott

I remember those.

Garrett

Yeah, it was about the size of a large postage stamp. It has no screen, just the buttons for left, right, and all that. I remember I was listening to music in my headphones while, sort of, jamming and doing the dishes. At that time, I was listening to metal music and I was into a band called Dir En Grey - they were a Japanese metal band. I didn't understand the lyrics, obviously, but they had good energy and they were good for getting through the shift of washing dishes. I was washing the dishes. I remember working with my favorite crew, with all of my favorite co-workers. We had a lot of chats and things. I remember working in the dish pit. I sort of forgot everything else up to this point because it was so ordinary. I was doing dishes and it was midway through the shift.

Scott

What time was it at this point?

Garrett

Right. So I got in at about 4.30 or 5.00 PM, so it's probably about 7.00 PM. Something caught my eye. When I turned to the right, I saw a man with a broom. Instinctively I just turned back to where I was and then turned back again and did a double-take. He was probably 10-15 feet away when I first saw him. When I looked back again, he was much closer. He had a broom and

he also had a knife. He had, like, blood on his face. He was a middle-aged man with gray hair and a stubby beard. From a distance I saw his eyes glaring at me - I remember them being ice blue because that's one of the things that stuck with me. As he got close, I was frozen. The first thing he said was, "Do what I say and nobody gets hurt." He used his arm to reach me and grasp me around my neck in his elbow and his blade - this is his right hand - near my ear in my throat. He dragged me towards an opening in the kitchen. From the lobby at the front, you would see ice cream, the wells where they dip out the ice cream, and behind the worker would be the little shake machines and things like that. In this kitchen, you could peer even past that and you see the grill cooks. So, he dragged me to that space where the whole lobby could see me and shouted out, "This boy is gonna die tonight!" He just shout it out to nobody in particular. At that point, I didn't know what he was saying because I was wearing headphones, but he had already caused a commotion. Apparently, he had stolen a vehicle from another county where he was residing and he had been driving in a high-speed chase away from the police. I remember being told by the police or somebody else that he was leaving that county, going into my county, and that the police were going to catch him there because they didn't want to cause a commotion, I guess, chasing someone down the highway when they could get him in our county. Duncan is a town with a big highway - it's not really a big highway, but it's big for the area. It's pretty congested because it's the major highway in the area that goes right through the center of town. There, it quickly de-escalates - with speed from 65 mph down to 30 mph - until the front of a Walmart where there's an intersection with a stoplight. To the west of this intersection is Walmart, and to the east is Braum's where my store is. He must have had a car wreck with someone who was turning out from Walmart. He got out of this car and went across the intersection straight into Braum's. Behind Braum's was a golf course. Sometimes, I wondered why he didn't go out and just try to run away. Instead, he went inside the store. When he came inside, he immediately went behind the bar - that's what I was told - and grabbed ice cream dippers. He was shaking, screaming, and shouting things to people. so everybody ran away.

Scott

It sounds like this is somebody that suffers from mental illness.

Garrett

Yeah, that's what it sounds like to me. Seen him being shaky and hearing him slur his speech and things reminded me of someone who was drunk and distraught. From there, he definitely must have been struggling with something. I remember being told also that he was not taking a certain medication, but this could have been rumors or something.

Scott

Right. When he came into the store, there were customers and other workers. Why do you think he targeted you?

Garrett

I think it's because all the people working in the front were teenagers and high-school students except for the managers who were in the little office doing the numbers. So, when he was shaking the ice cream dippers in there, they ran away. There were several double doors, sort of, accesses to the ice cream space, so it was easy for people to run away. I was assuming that he was going to assault somebody. He must have been intent on assaulting somebody because he grabbed a knife. The knife is, sort of, like, a steak knife. The bread or steak knife got a black handle. I hesitated to call it a bread knife because it has serrated edges, but it's not a steak knife because it's not big but it's still very sharp and it's made for sawing because of the serrated edges. When I was at the dish pit and looked over once, I saw him with the broom. When I look back, I saw a broom in his left hand and the knife in his right hand. He said, "Do what I say."

Nobody's gonna get hurt." He wrapped me up and dragged me to this open space so that people can see through the lobby. He was holding me pretty tight. I could hear him shouting right by my left ear, "This boy is gonna die tonight!" Everybody screamed. People started running. I could see my co-workers, Ashley running to the right and April running to the left. Immediately, he shouted out, "Get on the ground!" He pointed at April and said, "Get on the ground!" She screamed. She got a really high-pitched voice - almost like a baby voice - the highest voice of anybody I've ever known. She looks like a chihuahua that's about to pee. She was bouncing up and down. He shouted at her repeatedly that even the co-workers chimed in to say, "April, get down!" She ran out of the front door. I remember feeling embarrassed that my co-worker didn't follow his commands. I felt sympathy for her knowing that she was about to put me in a dangerous place. I felt very awkward and weird trying to, like, get her to do what he said. I still wasn't really afraid for myself at this point.

Scott

Well, that's the weird thing. With somebody like that who's so unstable, if somebody doesn't do what he wants, that could mean your life.

Garrett

Yeah. She was really bothered by it. She didn't know how to handle it, obviously. She felt really bad later - we talked about it later. As soon as he shouted these things, she squealed and ran away. Other co-workers immediately shouted, like, "Stop, let him go." Past that, I saw a man stand up from the seat in the lobby and he came forward. He's an off-duty cop and he looked like one too. He's got his wraparound shades on the top of his head. He's got, like, a Hawaiian shirt and khaki shorts, all the way down to some Birkenstocks, kind of, sandals. He just looked like an off-duty cop. He immediately puts his hands up and started negotiating right away, saying, "Let him go. You don't have to do this." I don't remember the specific words. He was shouting back but it was a lot of, "Fuck you! He's gonna die! Do what I say! Get on the ground!" He was tugging at my arm and neck with his right arm and I could feel the blade's serrated edge poking me at, like, all the particular spots on my neck. At some point though, he decided to start backing down towards the corridor at the back of the store. I should explain the layout of the store here - it's a bit like the number 7, where the tall part would be the grill, the drive-thru window would be at the front, the back would have another drive-thru window, a mop sink, and then the L part of the seven is the freezer where you store the milk, produce items, eggs, and things like that. There's an exit behind the mop sink that you can't see from where he was dragging me from. There's also an entrance into the frozen section from the lobby, which would then be able to exit right into where we were - which you can't see either. So he grabbed me and started marching to the back of the store which he had never been in. I remember it being very difficult to march backward on a greasy floor while he was dragging me. I was afraid that he would think that I'm resisting - I don't want him to think that I'm resisting. He was dragging me and not really talking to me. I think he was saying, "Come on!" That sort of thing. He dragged me past the dish sink, past the stock racks where we have, like, cans of chili, pickled jalapenos, and buns. Then, there's the first window in the drive-thru and there's nobody there - I can see that as he dragged me past that. We got back to the very back of the store and it's the mop sink. He said, "We're getting down on the ground." He told me to lay exactly on top of him. This part seemed really strange to me. I don't really know how we got down on the ground with him gripping me in this way, but I wasn't resisting anything. So as he laid down on the ground, he laid flat on his back and told me to put my legs on his legs and my body on his body. Obviously, I would be his cover as a body shield.

Scott

Were you on top of him face up or face down?

Garrett

Face up. He hasn't changed his position with his grip. It was shaky and I can smell his breath. It feels like he's drunk. I don't know if I smell him drunk, but he's warm. I can feel his grip and his knife. He seemed like he was in a desperate state. He was shouting because the other police officer began to follow us back. As you go back down the store, one side of the stock rack faces - near the grill, on the other side is another corridor - one big hallway. The stack of the rack is, like, 15 feet tall, so you can't really see behind it on one side or the other - it's just this large rack, but you can pierce through it a bit through the different missing items. As we were laying down, I can see the police officers come in closer. He got into the hallway, his hands were up, and he said, "You don't have to do this. Just let the boy go. What do you want? What can we do?" The man started shouting to get a certain judge on the line. I don't remember the judge's name, but he was shouting, "Get this judge! I need to talk to this judge!" The cop said, "All right! We're gonna get him. Just don't do anything crazy." He's like, "I'm gonna go do it" and he leaves. The man was there holding me. He told me to shout and call out for help. It was humiliating and embarrassing, so I didn't want to. He kept saying, "Scream!" So, I just said, "Help." He told me to scream so I screamed louder. I emphasize a quake that wasn't really there because it's shocking and horrifying, but I'm not really afraid. It's awkward. It's humiliating. He made me shout out for help. After a moment or two, I think the cops must have shown back up. Maybe, they were even more off-duty police officers in the lobby because it didn't take long for some people to show up. I see there's more than one after 10 minutes or so.

Scott

Right. By this time, somebody would have called 911 to let them know. So, cops would be on the way.

Garrett

Certainly. People were calling for help before he ever came to me because he was showing some disorderly behavior of shaking dippers and causing a scene. After he got me to call out for help - his hands were wrapped around my neck - he puts up his left hand, puts his finger in my mouth, and tried to pull on my cheek towards the right - as if he was fish-hooking me. It was gross and weird. I don't know what was the point of that. He wasn't hurting me but, I guess, he wanted to look like he was extremely dangerous. From my mouth, his hand dragged my spit onto my face, rubbed his hand on my eyeball, and tried to scrape it off my eye socket. I was assuming that he did this to look especially dangerous. He was trying to fish hook me in and claw at my eye. The police were there and they were shouting suddenly, "Don't do that! Stop! Let him go!" After these 3 things happen - he laid me down, he made me call out for help, and then he also did the fish hook and eye gouge - at that point, I can peer through the cans and I can see armored men with big guns. I don't know if he can see them, but I can see them aiming through the cans. I saw one with, at least, like, a shotgun and another one with another gun to the right, and they're both coming straight at me. They're probably 25-30 feet away down the hall while the man with the off-duty cop outfit was standing there with his hands up and trying to negotiate. He's still shouting about getting the judges and things like that. I remember being on my back while I was on top of him. I saw these officers in the back - the SWAT team - and I realized that he can't see. The room we're in is a little mop sink room - about a 5x6 or 6x6 room - and it's just wall on three sides. On the other side of the wall is the back door. If I can see people in front of me then they're right there too. Somebody must have told the police that there's a back entrance. So, if they had a moment, they would bust around that door and be right in front of us. I know that there were cops there. I know that they must have entered through the frozen section as well because there's more than one way to get to this spot. As this was happening, he shouted out to them, "I can see the police are all getting closer." He was

telling them to stop getting closer, but they keep getting closer, and that bothered me because I was thinking that this guy was unstable. He was saying, "Stop!" But they're getting closer and I don't really see how it's going to resolve itself because they're all closing in a narrow space. Now, the cops were probably 15-20 feet away when I could see all the guns and all these sorts of things. My hands were cupped around his wrist. He hadn't changed position this whole time. I didn't want him to think that I was resisting, but my grip is tight and I was pulling him back so that he was not choking me. His blade was still touching my throat on the left side, basically, across my jugular. At some point, while I was holding him and the cops got closer, I felt him loosen his grip from the knife to grab it with his left hand. Then, a series of quick thoughts passed through my mind. I suddenly thought that I can get away if I grabbed the blade. I had all these thoughts of him not wanting to cut my throat if I resist because I'm a singer for a band. My main thought was, if he cuts me, I'll be disfigured. Maybe, he'll cut my throat and I can't sing. Actually, I already have a scar on my throat. I have a prominent scar from a tracheostomy when I was an infant. So, one of my thoughts was, "I don't want to be ugly with a second scar on my throat because that'd be crazy!" Then, I remember feeling I don't want to get cut on my throat because I sing. I don't sing that well, but it'd be even worse if he cut my throat.

Scott

Right now, I'm thinking that I don't sing but I still do not want to get cut.

Garrett

Yeah. For whatever reason, I wasn't particularly terrified or humiliated, and I definitely couldn't see a way out. At that point, once he switched the blade from his right hand around my throat to his left hand - which I know is bent at a tight acute angle - I realized that he has no leverage on my arm or with the knife. So, in a quick moment, I released my right hand, grabbed the blade, and was trying to free myself. As soon as I grabbed the blade, time stopped and I was like, "I should let go. I shouldn't have done this. He's going to cut me. Can I let go and go back to where I was? Will things just go the way they were?" I don't know why I didn't but, obviously, that would have been the worst thing I could have done. Instead, at that moment, I grabbed and squeezed the blade by the metal, I turned my wrist and broke his lock - because he's got no leverage - I grabbed and turned the blade, then I spun over to my belly. I must have had my left hand able to reach past his torso and touch the floor, then I kicked back and threw the blade down right on the floor, and I slid back. I must have slid on this greasy floor in between the two legs of a SWAT team officer - I could tell that there were 3-4 of them now. As I got there, the man sort of propped himself up and he got shot right in the heart, the chest, and the stomach - three shots, instantly. They all yelled at me, "Go! Go! Get out!" So, I stood up and I started running. As I started turning at the corner to get out behind the stock shelf, I remember feeling this really strange elation for being able to escape. There's an odd humor in it, because as I ran - I mentioned the greasy floor - my feet slipped, sort of, like a cartoon character. I must have been just immature to think that as I run away to my own safety, it's over. I wanted to slip and slide. I don't know why that happened, but I always remember that.

Scott

That is so interesting.

Garrett

It's a strange, bizarre point. As I sprinted out into the lobby, there were these automatic doors that are pinned open. When I ran through the threshold, a man with another gun outside, basically, swung his gun at me, just barely stopped from hitting me, and said, "Get on the ground! Get on the ground!" So I got on the ground. The police had me on the ground and they

helped me put my arms behind my back. Then, they shouted into the radio, "He's out." Then, somebody must have said, "That's the hostage." Then, he said, "Okay, get up."

Scott

Because they wouldn't know if they didn't have a description of you or the other guy.

Garrett

Yeah. Immediately after the shots, I think somebody must have shouted out, "He's running out. He's getting out." Something like that. They just said 'It' or 'He', and nobody knows who 'It' or 'He' is. So, I ran out of the door and was told to get on the ground. Then, I get told to get up. It was dark outside. It was maybe, like, 7.45 or 8.00 PM, something like that. The parking lot was full of police, ambulance, and fire trucks. The police officer marches me over to my co-workers at the edge of the parking lot - I didn't go back to the building now. As we were going over there, I was still on this weird mindset of, "I escaped. I'm good." I'm in a somewhat chipper mood. I was excited to be free, but my voice was shaking and it was bizarre. Everybody's gonna talk to me. Ashley gave me a cigarette - I don't smoke. I smoked that menthol and then I smoked for 10 more years, actually. I just quit a couple of years ago. So, I've been not smoking for about three years.

Scott

Wow. Congratulations on that! What a way to start, though.

Garrett

Yeah, yeah. She gave me a cigarette, and I appreciated it. Thank you. But it cost me a lot of money since then. So, she gave me that cigarette. I talked to my managers who were apologizing as if they did something. We all got together and they all said, "Are you okay?" Then, April looked at me and burst into tears because she was very distraught about not being able to manage her own fear when it was crucial earlier. I told her, "It's okay. Everybody was afraid." So, we're about to leave the area now. I got into the cop's car, they drove me to the police station, and then they had me sit in a room. I don't remember what happened in between, but I remember getting to the police station and they left me alone with 4-6 other people who were working that night. I remember that Ashley, April, Darrell, and a few other people were there and everybody was staring at me. They were all asking me questions and I was being light-hearted, jovial, and making, sort of, quips, being clever. Eventually, someone told me to go to the bathroom. When I got into the bathroom, I looked into the mirror. I was covered in blood, but I haven't been cut. So, he was bleeding all over me. Then, I realized how those jokes must have felt to other people after being traumatized by knowing that their friend and co-worker was trapped. Then, when they saw me, I was joking and covered in blood. I bet that was awfully bizarre. I'm sure they remember that.

Scott

How was he bleeding? Was that from the car crash?

Garrett

He was bleeding from the car crash. It was a pretty serious wreck, from what I remember. I don't remember hearing that anybody else was hurt, but that part might have got lost. He was going, I think, like, 70-80 miles an hour and smashed into another car. So, he was bleeding all over from his own face - that's where he was bleeding on me from

Scott

When you were sitting there with your co-workers and, kind of, joking around, I'm wondering if you were really okay and, kind of, back to normal or if you were still, kind of, in a state of shock. and the humor was just a coping mechanism. What do you think about that?

Garrett

I don't think it was a coping mechanism. I think I was reveling in attention because I was never particularly afraid. Honestly, I was, mostly, sympathetic and embarrassed. The reason why I didn't want to fight back was not only because I didn't want to get hurt, but also because he felt so desperate. So, I didn't want to put him in a position where he'd be, "Gosh!" He was already somewhere really humiliating and I felt, like, if I fought back, that would be worse for us - not just for him, but for me as well. I thought if I let him have the control, then we would be able to get through this because, maybe, in his wisdom, holding me hostage was the right way to not hurt me, because he's already in so deep. I don't remember being particularly concerned after I got free. I wasn't spooked. I wasn't afraid to sleep. He didn't have me scared of shadows or anything like that. When he grabbed and held me, I didn't want to resist, I didn't want to make him think I was fighting. When he dragged me backward, I wanted to stay in steps so that I didn't lag behind. When he had me on the ground, I didn't talk to him. When he told me to shout, I shouted. He made me put my legs on him. Eventually, I somehow decided that this isn't going anywhere. I need to be free because it's dangerous. I was afraid for my hand, my throat, and those things then, but I wasn't horrified - I was petrified, though. Moving would have been scary, doing something outside of the ordinary would have been scary, but doing what he said felt like the way to avoid any real trouble.

Scott

That's really interesting. I mean, you were in this position where your life is, literally, in danger, but part of your concern was for him. I mean, you're a truly empathetic person.

Garrett

Yeah. I remember feeling those sorts of thoughts and it made me question why I would defer from the authorities. Why would I be willing to let a crazed madman grab me up? Many co-workers - when trying to bond with me - said, "Why didn't you run? I would have hit him! I would have beat him up!" I was like, "Alright, tough guy." When he grabbed me, he consoled me by saying, "Do what I say and nobody's gonna get hurt." But that was a lie because, within five seconds, he then said, "This boy is gonna die!" I kind of made that mistake of trusting him. Looking back, the reason I felt sympathetic was that he was so desperate. Maybe, in my heart, I felt like I was trapped in his suicide attempt by the cop. I didn't know if I could get in the way of it. If I did, I didn't know what would happen. Ultimately, he was shot - that's, sort of, how it plays out when you do something violent, I guess. I was thinking that this is his desperate, downward spiral and I was stuck in it. He wasn't there to hurt me. He was hurting himself.

Scott

Did he die on the scene?

Garrett

Yeah. I remember seeing him get shot and died from the first shot. He felt dead. Part of what stuck with me is I took the knife away. I know that when I got away, he was disarmed, and they shot him. That always stuck with me and bothered me a bit, because they didn't need to shoot him - at least, that's what I thought. I remember being told that they were afraid he'd cut me. Well, shooting him doesn't save the bleeding boy, so I never understood that. I did learn later, at some point, that the man who pulled the trigger had also shot a dog in the past. Maybe, he was

traumatized by the actions of his job or he was ready to do his job. So, in some way, I always felt like he didn't need to be shot because I took his knife away.

Scott

Yeah. On the other hand, it's easy to look back in hindsight and view all that not being in that moment.

Garrett

Definitely. Especially when I acted fast and slid out of the way instantly. Maybe they couldn't tell that he didn't have a knife, or maybe he began to stand up and reach for the knife because I was doing my spin maneuver. Maybe, I didn't have a great view like he did. Maybe, he was coming after me. I recall that I slid away and he was instantly shot.

Scott

This happened in a pretty small town. This must have been the big news of the day.

Garrett

It was on everybody's mind, I think, because the town has about 25,000 people - so, not very big - and Braum's is right in the middle of it. Also, I'm a high school student. I went to school the next day. I had a cut on my finger and some scratches on my neck because he had the blade up against my neck and it left some abrasions and marks. I remember going to school and everybody would tell me to look to my right so that they could see my neck. I remember going to the office and saying, "I'm going to take a couple of days off from school." I was with my parents. Actually, that part's interesting. Someone from the police station went and took me back to my house, and I was alone - there was nobody there. So, I had to call my dad - because I lived with my father - just to tell him, "Hey, something happened tonight. I got held hostage in this violent situation, but I'm okay now." I don't know how to respond to that as a father, but he eventually showed back up. When I called my mother and told her too - since I didn't live with her and it was so traumatic - she wanted to come and pick me up for a few days. So, I didn't go to work or school for 3 days. Then, I decided that's enough because I wasn't particularly bothered. So, I went back to work. The store was still running. The store was still open. Everything continued at school. Sometimes, people would ask me questions because it was the thing that people might be talking or might know me for. I was never contacted by anybody - families, lawyers, or anything like that - but I did have a class with one of his family members. I didn't know that until I talked to her about what was happening this coming week. She mentioned that she was going to her uncle's funeral. Somehow, I knew it was him. I don't remember what she might have said his first name or something was, but we didn't go on to talk about, "Hey, that was the guy that was shot. I felt sympathetic for them and things like that.

Scott

Did she ever know that you were the hostage?

Garrett

I think everybody knew because I had the cuts on my neck and people wanted to talk to me about it. I had friends who were loud. So, I'm sure that she must have known and just sat awkwardly on the other side of the class.

Scott

Yeah. Well, I'm sure it was probably a little bit embarrassing for her too.

Garrett

Yeah, I bet so.

Scott

Because it was her family that did this.

Garrett

At that time, I wanted to go to the funeral because I felt sympathetic, but I chose not to because it's probably not my place and I didn't want anybody to make any scene or anything.

Scott

That's probably a good idea. So, you haven't had any recurring trauma or anything from this experience?

Garrett

The one moment that specifically stuck out was related to the event. I was mostly unbothered, but I did feel some shock for a while when seeing people who looked just like him - middle-aged men, rough skin from working, and blue eyes. The super-light blue eyes is what stuck out. I remember being in the driver's seat of my car on 81 - the same highway that runs through Duncan - and pulling up to a stoplight. When another car pulled up to my left, and a man who looked similar had his eyes locked with mine, I would think that he's gonna yell at me. I would think that he's gonna get out and walk over. I remember staying still in the car. It would just be like before, honestly. If he would have done anything, then I would have been captive. Then, the light turned green and they drove away. He wasn't gonna shout at me. He's just a man looking out. That was the one moment when I had been struck most by the trauma. I also went on to take his name - I used his last name - in a small project with a musician friend. We had a little banda and we went by the name of 'Ritter' just because it has a story built into it, and I liked the way it sounded. I guess, it must have been on my mind more than I wanted to admit, at that time.

Scott

On that day, while you were working - as you said, it's just a routine shift - if you did not have the earbud on, you would have heard him talking and yelling prior to when he came to you, I wonder how this whole thing would have turned out differently.

Garrett

Yeah. I'm pretty sure I was the only one not paying attention because everybody else was out there looking in. I assumed that everybody heard the commotion, but I was the only one listening to heavy metal.

Scott

Key takeaway: Be aware of your surroundings.

Garrett

Yeah.

Scott

At least you came out. Okay. You've already mentioned that you're a musician and some of your music is online. How can people listen to that?

Garrett

Yes, thank you. I am just a hobby musician, but I do put my music up on SoundCloud, and I used the name “GMRadioX.” My music is mostly beats, Lo-fi, and vaporwave with a country twist. So, if you want a little country twist on your vaporwave, you can check it out there.

Scott

Sounds good! We'll put a link for that in the show notes for this episode as well so that people can go there and listen if they like to.

Garrett

Thank you for listening. Thank you for having me.

Scott

At the time of this incident, Deral Dean Ritter was a 3-time convicted felon with a long history of violence, including police standoffs. His last conviction, for assault and battery with a deadly weapon, resulted in him spending seven years in prison. He had only been out for less than a year. The car he was driving that night, the one he crashed in front of Garrett's store while being chased by police, was stolen.

Following the incident, there was an investigation by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, and it was determined that the shooting was justified. District Attorney made that announcement public, stating that the officers were well prepared by their training, and that they did everything exactly as they should have.

Okay, I've got a few things we need to talk about before we get to the Listener Story.

First up – I'll be at a couple of podcasting conferences in the next couple of months. I'll be attending Podcast Movement Evolutions in Los Angeles, which is March 23 to 27, so that's just coming up in just a few weeks. Then in May I'll be at Podfest Expo here in Florida, in Orlando – that's gonna be May 26 to 29. I love going to these conferences, especially since we've not been able to for the past couple of years. It's just so great to be around lots of like-minded and creative people. I highly recommend it. So if by chance you'll be at either of those events, let me know so we can connect.

And aside from the big annual conferences, we have the local meetup here in the Tampa Bay area every month, on the second Tuesday of each month. That's the Florida Podcasters Association monthly meetup, so if you're in Florida, message me and I'll get you the details for that too.

And we have a voice mail from a listener who's originally from Haiti, then moved to Denver -

“Bon jour Scott, I love you so much. This year has been extremely difficult, but your voice and podcast helped me get through it. I live in Haiti and also Denver. In Haiti, I have a lot of my family members who have passed away due to Covid and also the political unrest in the city. Whenever I went back home to Haiti, I downloaded all of your podcasts and it was all that I listened to on the plane and while I was there. So, thank you so much for helping me get through things. It has been very encouraging. I will continue to listen and send your podcast to others as well. Thank you so much. Au revoir Scott. Oh, and my name is Je Nee.”

And if you'd like to call in your comments, that would be awesome! You can just call the Podcast Voice mail line at 727-386-9468, and that line is always voice mail, and you can call it anytime day or night.

And guess what – if you want to, you can send me a text message at that same number. Either way, I always love to hear from you.

AND – I'd love to have you on the Zoom chat this coming Sunday. If you're a supporter of the show, you'll get the invitation, and we always have a great time so I'm looking forward to that. You can be a part of that by supporting the show at WhatWasThatLike.com/support.

And now we have this week's Listener Story. This one is from my friend Vincent. He does a daily podcast called The Total Life Freedom podcast. And yes, I said DAILY – each episode is less than 10 minutes, and it's usually the first thing I hear when I head out for my morning bike ride. And he's also a listener to my podcast of course. So when I heard this story, about his professional photography business, I thought, hey – that's a really good listener story. Because it talks about the value of storytelling, which you and I love. So this is from Vincent's podcast, at TotalLifeFreedom.com, and I hope you enjoy it.

Stay safe – and I'll see you in two weeks.

(Listener Story)

We don't remember the fact-checkers, but we remember the storytellers. Just look around. Think about the people that you quote. Think about what you can't wait to tell your friend. Think about when you go to an event. I don't come back and say here are the stats that I learned. Here's the order in which they presented it, I'd say, "Check out this story that I heard. There are facts and lessons within those stories." So many people get this backward. Storytelling is how you stand out and storytelling is how you're remembered. I'm going to wrap this up with a story from my career that allowed us to stand out and expand our reach, our influence, and our income. It's not only about being able to tell stories but bringing stories together, and knowing when to do it. Photography stories are not part of my career because there's so much meaning to it - so many hard lessons were learned during those times. The two things I did were shooting sports and shooting weddings.

My wife and I Elizabeth did the weddings together, but I did sports on my own. They don't sound much different except they're both, kind of, action-packed. You would think that someone that shoots the brutal blood-spitting, hard-hitting, and board-crunching game of hockey would have little connection to the pristine world of weddings. Weddings are what little girls have dreamed of - that perfect romantic day - since they were seven. You would also think that the brides want to see nothing but the beautiful details of their perfect wedding day reflected back at them by the photographer that they chose. Deep into our wedding photography career, I met with a bride and her dad about our upcoming nuptials. Our approach to meeting with the bride was, kind of, simple. I brought two briefcases - both of them were beautiful, modern, and custom-designed wedding albums. Those albums allow us to show 2 full weddings from start to finish, displaying not only our storytelling abilities but the way we capture moments, the way that we saw light, and the quality of our albums.

One evening, before I was to meet with a potential client, I picked up a copy of a magazine that I had been impatiently waiting for a few days. It was an issue of Sports Illustrated, but not just any issue of Sports Illustrated. It was the issue that, after years of trying, I had one of my images prominently displayed. A few months earlier, I shot a picture of Pittsburgh Penguins' Superstar, Sidney Crosby. That picture was selected by their editors to be the main photograph for the 2-page wide feature story that they wrote about him. I couldn't even contain my excitement

because Sports Illustrated was one of my favorite magazines growing up. It was probably the most favorite magazine of mine. As a photographer, it was one of my biggest dreams to get a prominent spot in that magazine. When I got that copy in my hand, I stared at it way longer than I should have.

I thought back about all the years when I made no money in the industry. I made a grand total of \$20,000 in my first 6 years of shooting - including my time at school. So many emotions flooded my head as I stared at that paper. I wanted to show this to my friend later on. I put 1 of the copies in 1 of the briefcases that held our albums. So, I was at this meeting that night with the bride and her family. Her parents were there, and she seemed to really enjoy our work. The conversation was good but I didn't get the vibe that they would absolutely book me. Sometimes, we can tell this by their language. They just need to meet us in person just to make sure that we're not total lunatics before they sign the check and the contract. This meeting wasn't the case. She made it clear that they've met with a handful of photographers, and they would make their decision once they evaluated all the options.

At the end of the meeting, as I was putting the album back into the case, I saw the Sports Illustrated at the bottom, then I had an idea that was completely unscripted. I said, "Hey, would you like to see something cool?" They all agreed. I reached in, pulled out the magazine, and showed them my image. The bride asked, "You shot that?" I went into full storytelling mode. I told him the entire story, including how I had such a bad back problem that I almost didn't even make it to that game. I could hardly walk and was awaiting a possible surgery, but I couldn't turn down this assignment because it was for a new agency, and I wouldn't get future work if I said 'No'. Then, I told the story, "Because there's back pain. I got no sleep the night before. I showed up at the arena realizing that not only did I forget to bring my camera batteries, but also 1 of the 2 cameras that I brought was a broken 1 that was supposed to be sent into the shop. The entire afternoon was a comedy of errors on my part and it kept leading down a darker, more painful path.

There was a period of time when I didn't think I was gonna be able to shoot anything. I had to go back to this agency and tell them this embarrassing story and, obviously, never work again for them. Even though the picture turned out right, they were hanging on every word that I was saying. I made sure I took my time and let them feel what I was feeling. They couldn't get enough. I've described the end of the game when that image was made. Usually, if I'm in good health, I would leave my spot to rush back with the photo, transmit the images as quickly as possible, get out of there, and beat the traffic, but I was in so much pain that I just sat there, so I let the crowd fell out and I just waited. While I was sitting there, the team announced that 3 stars - it's when they say who the 3 top players in the game are - and the players come back on the ice. The house lights were shut off and there was nothing but a spotlight on them. It's a pretty cool visual. Sidney Crosby was awarded the top star for the game with nothing but a spotlight on him. He skated on through the ice, spun around, and waved his stick towards the crowd. He happened to look right at me when I fired one frame.

A month later, Crosby got hit in the mouth, had a tooth knocked out, and went out of commission. But after that, he came back better than ever. Sports Illustrated did a cover story about Sidney Crosby. My picture was a 2-page picture inside for that story. Also, that night, when I went to transmit, I didn't even think that much of the image. I was contracted to send 20 images to the agency and I had sent 19. I chose that one for the 20th and that was the photo they selected. The bride and her parents sat with their mouths wide open. They looked at each other. Then, they looked at me. Then, they looked at the photograph again. "We want you for our wedding," she declared. Not surprisingly. I kept that image and that magazine in the

briefcase. It became a routine that, near the end of the meeting, I would say, "Do you want to see something cool?"

One night, during a meeting with the bride and her dad on the second floor of the Galleria Mall, I asked the same question again. By now, I had this story down and I knew all the details. I figured out what made people gasp and what words to emphasize - it was almost like it was part of a show. The dad is a highly successful attorney who was really hard to impress. He looked towards his daughter and gave a mafia-like nod. "If you're good enough for the Penguins, you're good enough for my daughter," he declared while reaching into his pocket and pulling out his checkbook, then he handed me a \$6,000 check. It took me 6 years to make \$20,000 in photography. It took me less than 2 weeks to make more than \$20,000 with one photograph! That's the power of storytelling - to convey a feeling that allows you to stand out in a sea of sameness.

When we went into those meetings, our company was just one of many. After hearing that story, we immediately formed a connection that won them over in a way that they were so excited to not only have us as a wedding photographer but also someone who used the same camera to photograph their sports heroes. Those were the words that one bride used to her parents, literally, moments before they walk down the aisle. They wouldn't have known that without these stories - we would have been just like everyone else. So as we end this, I want you to think about that for yourself: What are the stories that make you stand out? Not facts, not figures, not numbers. What are the stories that you can tell even if it's just one that shows why you're different than everybody else? If you can convey and connect with that, you can open up worlds that you never thought is possible. Thank you as always for listening to the "Total Life Freedom" podcast. We are here to make you better every day because this is your life on freedom.