

Episode 22: Tyson was abducted

The tag line for this podcast is “real people in unreal situations”, and today’s story is about as unreal as it gets.

Imagine you’re leaving work one night. It’s dark. You’re walking through the parking lot, and suddenly an SUV with two men inside pulls up beside you, one of them jumps out and grabs you, throws you in the car, and they quickly drive away. And there was no one around to see this happen.

They drive for a while but you can’t see where they’re taking you. You end up at a house. You don’t know where you are, but you know it’s very quiet. There are no sounds of traffic. No other human activity nearby.

Then they start beating you.

This might sound like a bad dream, or the opening scene to a horror movie. But for Tyson, it was real life.

When he first told me what happened, it sounded just a little too bizarre. On this podcast I don’t cover situations that are fictional – only true stories. So I did the research, obtained police reports, verified addresses, all that, to make sure Tyson’s story is true. Unfortunately for him, it actually happened.

And before we get to that, I have a question for you. I’m thinking about doing a special episode of Frequently Asked Questions, about this podcast. Not 100% sure yet, but I’m considering it, because there are some questions I get asked all the time, like how do I find these people and these stories. So if you have a question you’d like to get answered, I’d like to hear from you. Just send me an email at Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

And now, here’s the conversation I had with Tyson.

Scott

Do you ever look back at this whole situation and think, “Did that really happen?”

Tyson

It’s one of those things that I really wish that it didn’t. Frankly, it has been very hard at times. It even got to the point where I’ve lost jobs over it, where I’ve lost relationships over it, and where I needed to simply just leave town and run away so that I can feel safe as a person. I mean, I’m the only person I know who has an emotional support closet that I can run off to and, sort of, collect my thoughts. My life would be a whole lot easier if it didn’t happen.

Scott

I can see that. There are just so many bizarre elements to the story. I’ve got lots of questions, but I’m going to let you, for the most part, tell the story. Can you talk about the first night? You were leaving work... What kind of work was it? Where did you work at?

Tyson

I was working at Circuit City in Bellevue, Washington. At that time, Circuit City started running its own version of the Geek Squad. I was the second person hired to do that work and to help figure out how to do it. So that meant that I would usually show up early, leave late, and even

close up the shop after locking away customers equipment so that it didn't accidentally get sold to someone or go missing. One night, I was leaving late from work. Roman, who was the store manager, was walking out with me. He offered to give me a ride to the bus stop because it was raining. Looking back on it, I really should have taken him up on it, but that night, I didn't. I was walking for three-quarters of a mile to hop on a bus and go home when a yellow Land Rover drove up beside me and asked if I needed help. I said 'No thanks' and kept walking. They continued keeping pace with me in the parking lot as I was leaving the mall. Before I knew it, David jumped out of the passenger side door, had a rope around my neck, punched me in the kidneys, and forcibly put me in the back of the car.

Scott

That sounds like a scene from a movie.

Tyson

Oh, yes. Part of me thinks that some of those scenes in movies happen because that's the way people can be in terms of the general sense of cruelty that ultimately creates the, sort of, villain that you can't relate to as an audience. I'd say that's what probably made things the hardest because, over time, as everything was happening, I felt like I related to Larry as though he loved me and cared for me in a way that I felt that no one else had.

Scott

Was this a classic Stockholm Syndrome?

Tyson

Maybe part of it is classic. But my psychologist sure says so.

Scott

I'm not a psychologist, but it sounds like the person who has been abducted, sort of, identifies and sympathizes with his or her captor as if they are, sort of, on the same side even though they were still being held against their will. Were you just a random target that night? Did they just happen to go through the parking lot or did they specifically pick you?

Tyson

What they said, repeatedly, is that I was at the wrong place at the wrong time. Later, I found out that Larry, who was the main guy in charge, had owned a pizza place that was in the food court in the mall. So, when I was closing up, they were closing up - no one else was around which is an opportunity for crime.

Scott

So, it's just the two of them. You get put into their car. Did you lose consciousness at all?

Tyson

I honestly don't know. I know that, by the time that I got to the house, I was being choked. I don't remember being taken inside the house from the car.

Scott

So you must have lost consciousness then - unless they drugged you or something.

Tyson

I don't know. I would assume so.

Scott

Take us from that point when you were in the house. What happened next?

Tyson

The first thing I remember when I was there is I was sitting on a wooden chair with my hands and feet tied up. I got punched in the gut, literally and figuratively. Larry was completely silent at first. Then, he began beating me with his hands. After a while, he pulled out a wooden paddle and hit me in the face, the gut, and the side. The first thing that I remember him saying is, "Grab his hand." It was pulled out and he just, full-on, hit it with a paddle. After that, I was thrown to the ground - I had somebody standing on my neck. Then, he told me to do what I was told or else things would get bad.

Scott

It sounds like things were already pretty bad.

Tyson

Yeah, the whole thing felt unbelievable. It felt like I would do and say anything to simply get away. After that, I was dragged by a rope that I had around my neck into a room down the hall, thrown on top of a bunch of empty boxes, and left in there for the whole day.

Scott

As I'm picturing this and trying to put myself in your position, obviously, you feel pain, but the biggest thing would be confusion - like, "What's the motive? Why would they grab me? Are they just going to kill me?" Did they say anything about what the plan was or why any of this was happening?

Tyson

Not for the first couple of days. That was probably the hardest part - I didn't know what was going on. I was left alone with my thoughts. I was not able to sleep. I was trying to figure out, "Why me? What is going on? Is this even real? What can I do to change this?"

Scott

But there was nothing you could do, right? I mean, you were completely powerless. If you were restrained completely, what could you do?

Tyson

Right. I was powerless in that situation. The best thing that happened was, a couple of days later, David came in to clean me up, put me in the shower, and gave me something to drink and eat. He told me what was going on, how I was taken, that they weren't going to let me go, and that I needed to accept what was going on. If I was told something, I should obey it completely. If I don't, then I wouldn't like what happens next. At that moment, I truly believed that David was close to an ally or a friend that I could have in that situation - like, he cared about me in a way that, Larry, the leader of this whole thing, did not - and he wanted me to be okay.

Scott

But he didn't have any choice in being able to let you go since Larry was, like, the leader here.

Tyson

No. In fact, this whole thing took a turn for the weird when David told me that Larry believes himself to be a god, but he just doesn't know that. He's afraid of him, so he would do as he is told as well.

Scott

So, David didn't have the option of leaving either.

Tyson

No, he was Larry's brother. At times, he said that he was trying to protect him, to help him, and to make sure that he would be okay, but it always seemed like David was just as much on my side of the room as he was on Larry's.

Scott

After a couple of days, he got you out of that room. What happened after that?

Tyson

I was given food and water. I was even allowed to listen to him watching TV - I didn't get to watch it myself. I was told to stay and I did - I sat right there where I was told and remained there until Larry got home.

Scott

So Larry had to leave each day because he had to go to work but David was with you all the time.

Tyson

Yeah. I can't think of a single time that David left. Well, actually, that's not true. I can't think of a time that he left when he wasn't told and accompanied. Larry was a real estate agent, which meant that he had quite a bit of flexibility over his time and schedule although he still needed to leave sometimes. At that time, David was left in charge.

Scott

Did you ever consider, "Okay, I'm gonna wait till David goes to the bathroom or to the other room." Were the doors locked that you couldn't leave? Did you ever contemplate some kind of escape during this time?

Tyson

Constantly. Escape was always on my mind. The doors were locked - that was one of the things I tried earlier on. I knew from the very first night that things were dead silent - the only thing that I could hear was the sound of leaves rustling. One night, a couple of weeks later, I did get out. I broke a window - the one in the bathroom - and started running on a gravel road. I was running barefooted which was difficult, but that was the furthest thing from my mind. The only thing I could think is, "This is a road, it must go somewhere." 5 minutes later, the yellow Land Rover drove right after me. Then, I was grabbed and brought back at gunpoint, which makes it pretty clear that this sort of thing wasn't allowed and that trying to run is not going to work out.

Scott

So did you know where you were, as far as what part of town or what street you were on or anything like that?

Tyson

Not for the first 6 months. I was being held in Maple Valley, which is...

Scott

This was in Washington?

Tyson

Yes. It was at the other side of a canyon where the only road through there was a highway that wasn't really well-traveled - even that was probably a good 2-miles walk away. You certainly couldn't hear it.

Scott

I'm just trying to imagine going for 6 months without knowing where I am geographically. What about, like, your friends and colleagues? Did they not report you for not coming in? Did your friends report you missing? I mean, obviously, you wouldn't have known it at that time, but now that you're out, did anyone do anything like that?

Tyson

Roman checked up on me a couple of times a day - he left me voicemails on my phone until my phone was turned off because I wasn't paying it anymore.

Scott

Is Roman your boss?

Tyson

Yes.

Scott

I would think that he would somehow think, "Okay, this is not right. People don't just disappear." Did he feel that you just quit?

Tyson

I talked with him after I got away. It was obvious that he felt very bad about what happened. He tried to get ahold of me for a couple of weeks but, at a certain point, when you leave dozens of messages as a boss and a friend, you just got to realize that, "Okay, fine. This person must not care or respect me as much as I thought he did. He's ghosting me or he probably found something that he thinks is way better than what I could have for him."

Scott

Did you have an emergency contact person that he could call and check on?

Tyson

No, which was probably my fault there.

Scott

Well, we'll blame that on human resources. Yeah. So, he could have gone to the police but all he knows is that you're just not returning his calls. So, maybe, there's not a lot that he could have done, I guess.

Tyson

Thinking back on it. I don't know if I would have thought anything different than "This guy just got another job. He probably feels self-conscious and just wants to walk away because this is some bullshit retail job. Who really sticks around and who cares about a two-weeks notice?"

Scott

Right. It's retail. None of that matters. The next, kind of, event that happened in this whole scenario is they abducted someone else, right?

Tyson

Yeah. So after I ran away, it seemed obvious that I wasn't listening, that I wasn't cooperating, that the beatings and being locked in a room weren't breaking me, so they ended up going out one night - I was handcuffed to the radiator - and they brought back someone else - her name is Anastassia. She came back with them that night. They did the same thing they did to me that first night. They were beating her and she was screaming. Then, David came in and brought me out. I was told that I could make that stop, that I could end her pain, that if I listen and do as I was told, things would get a lot better for the both of us. So, I did what they told me to do. I walked over, punched her at the side as they told me to do, removed her clothes, sat back, and watched as they took advantage of her.

Scott

There was so much mental manipulation going on here to make you feel like you're responsible to stop or discontinue her pain and abuse.

Tyson

Absolutely. I was told, repeatedly, that she was there to punish me and keep me in line. That was the start of how things would continue for a very long time - I was responsible for her and it frankly brought us closer together as friends. We both knew that if it hadn't been us, it would have been someone else. The only thing that we have control over is what we have inside of our own heads. The best thing that we could do was try to be okay with where we found ourselves and find light in the good times - yes, there were good times. A whole lot of good times happened after she was there. It seemed as though Larry softened as a person. It felt like he cared for us that he wanted us to be okay. He knew something that we didn't and was trying to make sure that we would be strong enough for whatever else that would happen in our lives.

Scott

It almost sounds like he pictured the two of you as pets for his own amusement.

Tyson

Oh, without question. He openly called me his 'Little stray' which carries all kinds of imagery with it. So much of what happened was around controlling, dehumanizing, and trying to make us believe that the only thing that should be on our minds was pleasing him.

Scott

So did you see your position here as Anastassia's protector or you were just another person caught just like she was?

Tyson

It would alternate. I wanted to make sure that she was okay. Sometimes, our friendship was used against us - Larry knew that holding her well-being would control me, and the same was true for her. Around six months after we were taken, Larry even started to have us go and run

errands. I mean, there was a grocery store that was a couple of miles away. One of us would be given a list and exact change for what something would cost. We would go there, get whatever he told us to get, and bring it back.

Scott

Did you walk there?

Tyson

Yes. If I was late, if he thought that I wasn't doing as I was told, if they didn't have good bananas, then something would happen to Anastassia. It meant that I had to just flat out run there and run back just so that he wouldn't think that I was late or doing something wrong.

Scott

Because if you did something wrong, she would be punished - that's the point of it.

Tyson

Yes, exactly.

Scott

When you tell that story about going to the store, to me, that's like your opportunity - you were out by yourself and you could go to the cops. What kept you from doing that?

Tyson

I believed him. At that point. I even trusted him. I knew that if I went off, he would find me again, and if I didn't do as I was told, she would be beaten. I even started to believe that maybe he was a god, that maybe he saw everything that was going on, and that maybe he was really looking out for our well-being. Even if I got away, even if I didn't care about Anastassia, even if I could just pretend like none of that happened, he would still find me. I mean, that went on even after I finally got away for years - I simply couldn't go out alone. When I go to a restaurant or a coffee shop, I would always need to have my back against a wall so that I could see everything that was going on. I was always paying attention to who would come in, where people were, and where the doors were. I knew that he just wouldn't care if he made a scene - even if people were looking - just to take me again, and there is nothing that anyone can do to stop him.

Scott

It's so terrifying to feel that helpless.

Tyson

Yeah. There were so many mind games that happen daily that were designed so that the only thing we could trust was him above all else. Even when he lied, it felt like he was honest and telling the truth.

Scott

Anastassia became pregnant...

Tyson

Yes.

Scott

How long into the ordeal did that happen?

Tyson

I can't really remember for sure. It was, like, 8-9 months.

Scott

So you've been held against your will at this place for several months. What did a typical day look like? What did you do during the day?

Tyson

We would wake up at about 5.30 in the morning so that we could prepare breakfast for Larry, sat down at his feet while he was eating it, and told him that we really appreciated everything that he did for us and that he cared for us. Then, when he left for work, we were allowed to have a nap. After that, we would wake up and clean the whole house - scrubbing the baseboards, the walls, the ceilings, bathrooms, and everything - to make sure that things were exactly as he wanted them to be so that he would be happy and wouldn't be able to use any of those things to justify punishment.

Scott

And David supervised all of you during the day?

Tyson

Yes. He would usually be sitting in the living room, watching a movie, and keeping an eye on us. If he thought something was up, he would just call out and ask where we were and we would just say, like, "I'm in the bathroom," or "I'm in the hall." Then, we would get everything ready, cook dinner, had it ready on the table, and wait for Larry to get home. At that point, we were allowed to sit down with him on the couch - that was the only time during the day when we were allowed to really be at his level - watching TV or a movie or listening to one of us reading a book.

Scott

Family time, so to speak.

Tyson

Yes. That's what it felt like.

Scott

At a certain time, somewhere along the line, another person is abducted. Like I said in the beginning, there are so many elements to the story that is just so unreal. Tell us about Paulina.

Tyson

Around 10 months in, it seemed like Larry was getting bored. It seemed like he was falling into too much routine and that angered him. He started going in and having a regular sleeping schedule with the both of us whenever he wanted and that's when we were allowed to stay with him - that's the only time we were allowed to sleep on a bed too. He seemed increasingly bored and upset day after day. Then, he disappeared for several days. When Anastassia and I were cooking food, waking up, and trying to do our routine, he wasn't there, so we didn't know what to do. Then, he came back with Paulina. Immediately, after bringing her in, he instructed me to tie her up and show her what was expected. So, I tied her up, put my hands around her throat, whispered to her that it was all going to be okay. Then, he told me to rape her. So, that kindness that I thought I was showing her by saying that she didn't need to worry about what was going

on... that trust was immediately destroyed. I knew that he must have heard me, so this whole thing was a plan to show that I was not on her side, that I was just as cruel and heartless as they could be, that I couldn't be trusted, that Anastassia and I were an extension of them, and that we were expected to follow his instructions. After that point, Paulina hated all of us. We explained what was going on, what the rules were, how to keep Larry happy, how to keep bad things from happening, and she'd pretend to follow along. Then, 15 minutes before Larry gets home, she would throw something across the room, made a huge mess, tried to make him upset, and tried to make us afraid - she even said that we were acting out and that it was our fault that things were not as he wanted them.

Scott

Would she not get punished for those things as well?

Tyson

Oh, she absolutely would, especially, for those first few times. She would be taken and beaten. His favorite thing to do with her was to throw a rope around her neck and hang her. It became clear that she would be punished for our mistakes, so she started to make mistakes of her own. At that point, Anastassia and I needed to watch her every moment of the day to try and make sure that she did as she was told - that she wouldn't sabotage us - to avoid anything happening to her or us just to make things feel normal again.

Scott

Normal may not be the appropriate word in this scenario here.

Tyson

No, it's really all perspective. Over time, anything can start to feel normal - it's just a question of what the routine is, having some sense of accomplishment in what you're doing, and knowing that what you're doing is appreciated.

Scott

What happened when Larry's car got stolen? Tell us about that.

Tyson

The front door was left unlocked again. She started off the night by trying to seduce Larry, get close to him, has sex with him, and have him let his guard down, which he did. After he went to sleep, she took his car keys, snuck out, and went out as quietly as she could when everyone else was asleep. Then, there was the sound of the car starting. David, Anastassia, and I woke up and ran outside to stop her. We saw the brake lights off in the distance. David was looking around for the keys to the Land Rover in order to try and go after her. Paulina tried to take the Lexus just right up the hill in order to get to the highway but she got it stuck. So, we tried to rock it, pushed it down the hill, and got it all cleaned up and back into the driveway. David took her back to the house, grabbed some rope, and tied her naked to a tree.

Scott

And this was in the middle of the night?

Tyson

Yeah, she was cursing us a lot of the time.

Scott

How long was she tied to the tree?

Tyson

A couple of days, at least. We would bring food and water to her. She would yell, spit at us, scream, and say, "It was all your fault. You're all just a bunch of fucking pussies to listen to all of Larry's bullshit and not try to get away. If you have any self-respect at all, you would have been gone a long time ago."

Scott

So if she hadn't gotten the car stuck, she may have escaped that night.

Tyson

Yeah.

Scott

At some point, eventually, both girls became pregnant.

Tyson

Yes.

Scott

That must have introduced lots of complications to the scene.

Tyson

Yes, it really did. It definitely made Larry seem a lot kinder, as though he didn't want anything bad to happen to them. The beatings stopped at that point for all of us, but it became much more common for him to go out drinking and bringing Mike back every couple of weeks.

Scott

Mike is a name we haven't heard yet. How did he come into the picture?

Tyson

Mike was Larry's best friend. He viewed himself as a big deal in the BDSM scene. The only way that he could be turned on was by seeing someone hurt. So, he would come over to scratch that itch and try whatever entered his mind. He started coming by a whole lot more often. He used to be there, maybe, once every other month. Then, he started to come pretty regularly to the point where he would join us for dinner on some nights. Then, he would choose someone and take them out to the shed off to the side of the house.

Scott

Like the stuff of nightmares.

Tyson

Yeah. Whenever he showed up, both Anastassia and I would be in tears. We were so afraid of what would happen. We knew that Mike was the sort who crosses lines and, maybe, didn't even see them. Larry was the sort who would throw a noose around her neck and leave her there to dangle for a little bit. Mike was the sort who would tie someone to the wall, beat their ass until they bleed, and choke them. The kinds of stuff that he did scare me. The stuff that Larry did felt tame, as if it came from love.

Scott

Anastassia actually had the baby, right?

Tyson

Yes, she did. She had the baby.

Scott

Did she have to go to a hospital or anything for that?

Tyson

Yeah, Larry took her over to the hospital. He told her that we were going to be back at the house, that Mike was going to come by in order to keep an eye on us, and that he'd be calling to check in on us throughout the evening. She went off with him, had the baby, stayed there for a couple of days, came back, and told us that she kept her mouth shut. Afterward, Larry had manipulated her and all those sorts of things. He told her that she would need to marry him, that he would take her baby if she even thought of running off or doing anything, that she would either find her baby dead or deported, that she would never ever see any one of them again, and that she would never feel happiness again.

Scott

What was her status as a resident in the US? Was she here illegally?

Tyson

I honestly don't know. I know that she wasn't born here. I think she probably came on a green card, but I don't know any of that stuff.

Scott

Right. She wasn't a citizen, obviously, so the deportation would have been a threat. Tell us about the night or day - I don't know what time it happened - when you were actually able to escape.

Tyson

Larry came home from work. He had dinner. He told me to go to my room, which I did, and I laid down to sleep. He stormed in - it was dark outside - with a gun in his hand and told me that I was going to die, that I could either make him happy one last time so that he would make it easy for me or he could do something that would make me beg for him to end it. He grabbed me and threw me to the ground. So, I knocked over everything that was on there - I had a chessboard on my nightstand that shattered and I fell right on top of it. He grabbed me and pulled me to my knees. Then, I took one of those pieces, shoved it straight into his stomach, got up, and started running.

Scott

Was this broken glass? What was the chessboard made of?

Tyson

Marble. As I got up and started running, a couple of gunshots missed me. I ran to the front door - it was unlocked again - and I just kept running. Rather than before where I followed the road, I went to the right into the forest in order to take a shortcut to where the grocery store would be and try to make sure that I wouldn't be seen if he was on the road looking for me. I kept running, found my way to the highway, ran up there, and tried to flag down people for what felt like

forever. A cop finally stopped for me. He seemed angry that I was standing in the middle of the road and that I was trying to get me killed. He didn't seem like he believed a single word I said. First, he puts me in his car and took me out to the bus station at the other end of the canyon. This whole time I was worried about what was going on with Larry and if Larry was going to be okay.

Scott

You were worried if he was going to be okay from where you stabbed him?

Tyson

Yeah. Those were the sorts of things that went through my mind - I was worried about him, I was wondering if he'd be okay, and thinking about what would happen to Anastassia and Paulina. The cop did none of the stuff, like, saying "It is going to be okay." While I was in the car, this guy seemed like he wouldn't even listen to a damn thing that I was saying as though I was inconveniencing him, as though he would rather be doing absolutely something else.

Scott

The story you were telling him was so outlandish - I could, kind of, understand why he couldn't believe it. But on the other hand, his job is to protect the citizens of the town there and you are one of them. It seems like he would need to, at least, investigate and see if what you were saying is true.

Tyson

I can't help but feel that, if I had been a woman, he would have cared, he would have done something rather than thinking that I was just nuts, he would have done something like taking a statement or doing something other than leaving me at god damn bus stop - anything at all. I mean, I was in the car going in the wrong direction. I thought we were not going back there to check on them. I knew nothing of what was happening. Maybe, Larry was so angry that he already killed both of them.

(Breaths heavily)

I was in tears. I was horrified. I even kept thinking that I just need to get back there to make sure that everyone, including him, is okay, that I made this horrible mistake, that I should have stayed there, that I shouldn't have left, that I shouldn't have stabbed him, that this was maybe one of his games in order to play out a fantasy, or thousands of different things - I don't know.

Scott

And how far away is the bus station from the house?

Tyson

Maybe 20-30 miles off to the northwest.

Scott

Oh, so it was too far for you to walk back then.

Tyson

Yeah.

Scott

So what did you do at the bus station?

Tyson

I slept there overnight. Then, I tried to call a couple of friends who would pick up the phone from some random number or whatever. They couldn't call me back because I was at a payphone using change that I found on the ground. At that point, I started walking back to try to get myself back there. This woman with a silver Dodge stopped for me and drove me to the exit. I pretended like everything was okay and that I was just stuck and needed to get home. So I got back there. I found out that Larry and David had left after everything that happened. Anastassia and Paulina thought that they were at the hospital and they didn't know what to do.

Scott

So it's just you and the girls there at the house?

Tyson

Yeah. Then, we left. We all just, kind of, took off. Paulina told me just how much she hated me. After everything that happened, Anastassia said that she needed to get back to him, to care for him, and to make sure that he and their sons would be okay - she knew that it was something that she needed to do. I went over to the police station to file a report covered in bruises.

Scott

Let me stop here for a second. From the time you were first abducted until you went to the police station to make a report that night, how much time had passed overall?

Tyson

About a year and a half.

Scott

So the report that you were going to make was that you were kidnapped and held against your will for a year and a half?

Tyson

Yeah. I reported that I was there, that these other girls had been taken, and that all this stuff had happened. What I was told was that I had no proof that any of it was really a kidnapping, that I wasn't there involuntarily, that I was just a roommate, that people have all sorts of relationships just because this guy was being intimate with a couple of different girls, and that there is not really anything against the law there. I openly said that I stabbed him in order to get away and that seemed like the only thing that was actually a crime. So, if he pressed charges on that, I would be arrested.

Scott

That's just really such an oddball turn in this whole thing. The way it comes out is, like, "Oh, it's just a domestic squabble." And you're the one that could be arrested...

Tyson

Yeah. Because I went ahead and stabbed someone - that is aggravated assault or, maybe, attempted murder. At that point, it was really just his words. If he went in and said anything, he would, again, have complete control over me and that - at least, for quite some time - really cemented the whole "He is still very much in control" thing. So, I ran away and left the state. I went to a friend of mine who was living in Edmonds and told him that I really needed money,

that I needed to get away, that I was going to die if I didn't - I believe it - and he seemed like he believed it.

Scott

This is a friend whom you haven't been in contact with it for at least a year and a half?

Tyson

Yeah. I met Dieter - that friend - in middle school. We had been talking and spending time together ever since. I went to concerts with him. I stayed at his house so many times.

Scott

So he was the obvious one to call, then.

Tyson

Yeah. He jokingly even said that his parents loved me a whole lot more than they loved him. I mean, I was really close with all of them.

Scott

Did you tell him the whole story?

Tyson

No, not for years.

Scott

So, when you called him, you were just in a bad spot and you need some quick help...

Tyson

Yeah, in my mind, if I told anyone else what happened, Larry would come after them, hurt them, and do what he did to me to them.

Scott

So you were able to go and stay with this friend?

Tyson

Oh, no. I didn't stay with him. He bought me a ticket to hop onto the Amtrak and go to Denver for a little while - I had a few hundred bucks there. I had tried to go to the house where my family used to live, but it was up for sale and no one was there. Dieter didn't have any idea where they were. I guess they moved.

Scott

So you didn't know where your parents were, then.

Tyson

No. When I finally got in touch with them, I told them what happened and the only thing that my mom seemed to hear was that I was in a homosexual relationship with this guy and that I allowed him to beat me. She was like, "I didn't raise someone to be gay. I didn't raise someone to be abused. I didn't raise someone to do this. Do you have any idea what this means to me, what this means for me, how this makes me look?" So, it was all about what people would think of her. If this all came out, they would disown me, they wouldn't want anything to do with me,

they wouldn't take my phone calls, and my sister would even go around telling people that she was an only child. So yeah, I didn't have that to turn to.

Scott

I can't imagine the feeling of being alone. I mean, typically, if something happens - you break off from friends or whatever - you would, at least, have a family to go back to, but that wasn't even an option.

Tyson

Right. I kept feeling that I shouldn't have left, that things were going to be okay, that maybe I could even go back, and that maybe he'd forgive me. I didn't have any friends. I got another job to support myself. I stayed as far away from everyone as I could, basically. I work longer and harder than anyone else to feel that I was irreplaceable so that I would have some, sort of, safety net, so that someone would remember me, so that I just couldn't be taken again - the complete contrary of being completely forgettable and not just someone's friend or this really, really good guy at work. It took years to be able to just find enough trust to call someone a friend, even though I view them more as acquaintances and kept them off in the distance. "I'm there for you, but I am not going to tell you shit. You're not gonna know anything about me. I'm going to keep it all really superficial and sound incredibly boring to the point that none of you would feel bad, self-conscious, or whatever." Somewhere in that process, they would be someone that I could get close to overtime and they would view me as a friend - that had to count for something, even though I wouldn't even begin to trust them.

Scott

Have you gotten any counseling or therapy?

Tyson

I think it has been six years at this point. It feels like it's been helpful. I mean, it's now at the point that I can talk to people. I have some friends and I am even married

Scott

That's getting close to someone...

Tyson

Yeah, that is true. It was really hard for quite a long time to open up to someone, to be okay with me being myself, to be okay being around them, to be okay having them in the same room as me, to not be afraid every time that I hear someone making noise or floor creak, and to say something that I didn't expect.

Scott

Hearing this, what I can feel from you is respect - you were able to talk about this and recount this incredibly horrible situation that happened. I mean, obviously, you made a lot of progress to be able to do this, although it took a while.

Tyson

Without question. For quite some time, it was very hard for me to try to forget it or try to pretend that it didn't exist to the point that I needed to bring my own blankets with me when staying overnight somewhere else so that I could feel some sense of normalcy, that I could be able to clutch to them while being there in the dark, and that I didn't wake up from some fantasy and find myself back there.

Scott

You want to know that everything is still okay...

Tyson

Yeah.

Scott

Have you had any contact with the girls since then?

Tyson

Yeah, I have. I've been speaking with Anastassia, maybe, once or twice a year since then - that's how I know that she ended up getting her citizenship a couple of years ago and finally leaving Larry. She was able to, basically, destroy any trust or credibility that he had as a person - getting him fired from his job and ostracized by his friends. Now, she feels like her life is finally back on track where she's putting herself into creative things like Etsy clothing style stuff and caring for her son. She didn't even think for a moment that she's theirs, so she can, kind of, get on with her life and be okay - I've been trying to do the same too.

Scott

I'm imagining the day when her son is old enough to say, "Tell me about Dad. What was he like?" That's gonna be a very difficult conversation.

Tyson

I'm sure it is - without question. I haven't even thought about that.

Scott

What about Paulina? Did you hear from her at all?

Tyson

Oh, no.

Scott

She didn't like you, so she's not gonna contact you...

Tyson

Yeah, I've maybe spoken with her twice since this all happened. She basically just cut us completely out of her life.

Scott

What is your life like today?

Tyson

I'm married. I try to be someone who people can trust, who people can look up to, who really does a good job at work, and who is irreplaceable. I would go in, make some friends, spend time with them every once in a while, and try to do game nights. I have some poodles now that are a huge part of my life.

Scott

Dogs are incredible therapy.

Tyson

Yeah.

Scott

And you have your emergency contact information on file?

Tyson

Yeah, I've made sure of that for the past few years.

Scott

Well, it seems like you've obviously made a whole lot of progress.

Tyson

Yeah, I mean, there's still time that I need to run off and collect my thoughts in my closet where I can make the world a little smaller and easier to tackle. I don't know if I'm ever going to be able to break away from that. I don't know if I'm ever going to be able to go somewhere and spend the night without my blanket. I mean, even as I'm talking to you and everything, I have it right here - it's some sort of miscellaneous item to remind myself of where I am and that I'm okay.

Scott

There's something about a blanket - I mean, obviously, that's especially very common with kids - in terms of the sense of security. I mean, that's why it's called a security blanket.

Tyson

Yes, absolutely. I feel that it's important for people to know that when in abusive situations - this was definitely that - it's okay to question things and feel like it's okay to have a say in these situations. I kept wondering so many times, "If I would have been there now, would I have done anything differently?" I want to believe that I would because I've grown from it. The only thing I really know for sure is that I know how much I need to trust and respect myself and that remembering to trust yourself is probably the most important part of being able to let go of the past and to even be just okay with making plans for the future.

Scott

And the future is where your hope is. It sounds like you've got a future to look forward to now.

Tyson

Yeah, I mean, the future isn't just about where I want to be in 5 years, it's about being okay, expressing that I want to go out for sushi and I want to do that tomorrow, and knowing that tomorrow is good enough to plan for. No matter what happens today, it's really not that bad and I shouldn't spend all my time worrying about it because I've been through so much and accomplished so many things here. No matter how bad today is, I've already been through a whole lot worse, so this can't really be all that bad. You're able to handle it. Just smile and figure it out.

Scott

That's a good outlook, Tyson. I appreciate you sharing your story. I hope you continue to do well.

Tyson

Me too. And thanks.

Scott

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