

Episode 111: Margy's dad was a hoarder

I'm really happy to bring you this episode today, but it comes with a content warning, because it includes discussion of suicide.

For a long time, I've wanted to have a story about hoarding.

This is something I personally find really interesting. We've all seen pictures or videos of the inside of the home of someone who's a hoarder. And of course, the reality TV show, Hoarders, puts it right out there. And everyone sees that and wonders, how does someone allow their environment to get to that point?

And then I discovered Margy. She works in the podcast industry. I guess you could say I knew "of" her, and then later we became more connected because she's a listener of this podcast, and I've watched what she's been doing to achieve some amazing business success. When I found out that she had dealt with hoarding first hand, I knew I wanted to have her on the show.

But what I love about this story is that it's not just about the shocking reality of dealing with the hoarding issue.

Some of the things Margy and I talk about are

- How she channeled grief into energy
- How a seemingly impossible challenge made her unstoppable
- The one unexpected thing that a lot of high achievers have in common
- And the bizarre name she came up with for her podcast

And just before you hear our conversation, here's a brief clip from the very first episode of Margy's podcast:

Margy

It's evening on a city bus in Taipei, Taiwan. I've walked less than a block to get the bus, but my bright yellow shirt is already sticking to my skin. In this humid subtropical climate, the AC is blasting year round and the air on the bus smells old and stale. It's 2015 and I'm 26 years old. I've been living in Asia as an English teacher for two years. I'm absolutely miserable. So naturally, I spend every morning on the commute to my teaching job furiously journaling about gratitude. Often, I'm writing down gratitude for things I wish would happen, especially pertaining to my family. My dad had recently been diagnosed with some mild heart issues. So, to channel my panic into positivity, I'm writing daily about how grateful I am for his amazing health. That day had been an uncharacteristically good one. As I rode the bus home that night, I did some extra gratitude writing. I felt a rare moment of optimism. I wrote with total conviction how grateful I was for the day and, of course, for my dad's health and happiness. What I didn't know at this point is that my dad is already dead.

Scott

Have you ever caught yourself deciding to keep something rather than throw it away, and thought, "Oh, wow. I'm becoming a hoarder"?

Margy

Yes, all the time. It's like one of those things that I think about so much in my life. Many of the things I do in my life are, like, the opposite of what my parents did, which I think is true for a lot of people, after having learned so much about hoarding and realizing that that's what I was experiencing in my home growing up. One of the pieces of research on hoarding is that it gets worse as you age. So, for someone who is really a severe hoarder at 70, it was probably much lighter than that at 30 or 40. I hope I haven't made your listeners too paranoid, but yes. I always think of what's this going to look like in 30 years.

Scott

That's definitely something to think about. Well, that's what you need to do. Give a little bit of background on this and what kind of led up to it. You were living in Taiwan for a couple of years as an English teacher, but you previously lived in the US. What made you decide to go and live abroad?

Margy

I fell in love with travel when I was in my junior year of college because I grew up in Rhode Island, I went to college in Rhode Island, and I just stayed in Rhode Island. I think most of my life was very stagnant up until this turning point that we're going to talk about - I felt stuck. I felt like a victim of it. I was one of those people who was like, "The decision was no decision." Like, I just kept defaulting into these situations and then kind of mentally complaining about them. There were these moments where I would feel an impulse to actually do something that was different, that would, sort of, break the script, and studying abroad was one of those things. After dragging through college - not wanting to be there and just not really participating - I don't think college is as valuable as most people think it is, but my attitude did not help. After all of that dragging, I heard about studying abroad and I was like, "I want to do this. I want to live in Italy. It'll be so great." I was an art and Latin major. So, I was like, "This is a great opportunity to become a better painter." At that point, I wanted to be a professional artist, a professional oil painter, so I was like, "This will be great!" It was just, sort of, a different moment - like, I just suddenly switched it up. That's what I really love about travel - it has the ability to shake things up.

I think when you feel stuck or you get into this routine, even if it's a good routine, you would be a different person from being able to go somewhere far away for a little bit. You're more yourself. You're more present. You're discovering things for the first time when you're out of your routine. I think you realize how much your routine kind of starts to control you, how much more there is to you, and how much more free you actually are. That's why I love to travel. Because I had fallen in love with that feeling in my junior year of college, especially living somewhere where I hadn't even visited before, I wanted to do that again. I wanted to move somewhere that I had never even visited. Then, I went down this rabbit hole of teaching English. I was looking at South America. I was looking at Asia. I narrowed it down because I learned that you can make a lot more money in Asia. You can save a lot more money than you can in South America, at least, at that time. So, that's how I picked Asia. Then, I knew nothing about Taiwan. I had just been researching the best countries to teach English and it came down to Korea and Taiwan. I was planning to go to Korea. I got the background check and all the stuff that they require. Then, I read something online and I was like, "I think I want to go to Taiwan." So, it pivoted and I ended up going to Taiwan.

Scott

Then, fast forward 2 years, you were miserable. What happened that caused all that to change?

Margy

I mean, my misery wasn't because of Taiwan - I love Taiwan! But everywhere you go, you take yourself with you. I think, when you're somewhere short term, you really do experience things as new and, like, you're this different and more open person. Once you live somewhere, no matter how exotic or cool it is, you get into a new routine. So, that's kind of what happened to me in Taiwan. People were like, "Oh, it's so cool that you live in Taiwan."

It is cool, but it's also kind of the same when you go to work or to the grocery, although it's really different. It wasn't Taiwan's fault, although it's swelteringly hot, and I didn't like that. It wasn't because of Taiwan - it was really because of my mindset. This was a mindset that I had, I think, kind of my whole life of really just kind of depressed, anxious, neurotic, negative, and one of those people who's, like, always expecting things to go wrong. When something good happens, it's like, "What's the catch?" or "When is this going to get worse?" Again, a pessimistic mindset.

Scott

When we talk about what changed, it's so difficult to lose a parent even from natural causes. Had you ever considered that your dad might be suicidal? Were there any signs?

Margy

No, not at all. It's like one of those things that you look at and you're like, "Should I have known based on this stuff" I mean, he was on antidepressants. Like, who isn't? I mean, I'm not on antidepressants, but a lot of people are on them but it doesn't mean they're suicidal. Honestly, if you had asked me, "Who in the family is going to kill themselves?", he would have been my last guess. Sorry, mom, if you're listening. He was just like this rock for the family. When we were both melting down, he was just calm, cool, and collected, breaking the tension with a joke, and making sure everyone got where they needed to be on time. He was like the rock of the family. Anytime anything happened, I'd be like, "Dad, help me". So, no, I didn't see the signs at all. I knew he was kind of quirky. Nobody, even his psychiatrist was, like, shocked. Everybody was totally blindsided. From talking to other survivors, that's more common than people think. There are people who die by suicide, who had attempted, and stuff like that, and that doesn't make it easier. He was one of those people that really was, like, totally out of left field. When I found out that he had died, I was like, "Oh, my God. Did he have a heart attack or something like that?" So, no. I had no idea. I still couldn't believe that happened.

Scott

Can you just describe the experience of getting that news?

Margy

Yes, I can. I left school in the evening. I was teaching a few different classes. One of them was this really rowdy class of first-grade boys. They were just kind of rough because they are boys. One of them was joking about, like, killing a cat or something - he wouldn't have actually done it. It was just, like, being crazy. I was like, "Actually, that's not funny. Let's talk about compassion towards animals." Then, I went to the Taiwan SPCA, where I was fostering cats through, and I said, "Hey, can I get you all in here to talk to these kids about being kind to animals so that we can have an impact here?" They'll think differently - because they do think a little bit differently in Taiwan - about animals than they do in the US. I raised money from all the teachers who wanted them and paid them to come to speak. They brought a dog and it was great. The kids prepared questions. They were really engaged. They were really interested in the dog. As I was

walking out of the school to go catch my bus, I was feeling amazing because I just pulled off the thing that had been months in the making. I was like, "Wow, I really had an impact here. These kids are going to be more compassionate towards animals. That was amazing!"

Then, I looked at my phone - it wasn't a smartphone because it's really hard to get a smartphone in Asia as an immigrant. It was like a really old-school regular phone. I had a text from my partner at that time that just said, "I love you" with no punctuation which is, like, one of those things that are not a great sign if you know someone who always uses exclamation points and stuff like that. So, I was like, "That's weird. I hope something didn't happen." Then, I had the thought of - this is terrible, but this is what I actually thought - "Well, I hope that, if something did happen, it happens to his family and not to mine". This thought happened in a second, and then it was gone. I didn't ruminate on it or anything. It was just there and then it was gone. Then, I got on the bus and reflected on the day and all this stuff. I really didn't think anything was going on. So, I got off the bus. I walked to our apartment. I went up. We're on like the ninth floor. I went up the elevator. I opened the door. I've got, like, my big bag with my books and stuff. I walked in. It was a tiny - like, the smallest - studio apartment you've ever seen in your life. I walked in with my bag and walked across to hang up my bag. I looked at my partner - he was someone who has like an olive skin tone. He was white - he looked like a ghost. I've never seen him like that. When you see somebody that you know really well and they're just like that, I could feel it in my body. I could feel my cheeks tingling. I was starting to feel cold and clammy, and it happened so fast.

So, I hung up my bag - I was in the closet where I kept my bag - and I was like, "What's up?" He was like, "You need to call your mom". My parents were still together. So, when people say, "Call your parents when your parents are together", I was like, "Huh?" So, I was starting to panic. There were two things going on because I've got this rising panic and I was starting to feel - I can feel it now - sick to my stomach. Then, there's also this part of me that's like, "Well, maybe it's not as bad as it could be." I was trying to almost negotiate with reality. I was trying to get hints from him because I don't like surprises - everybody knows this. I always demand information from people trying to do surprises for me. So, I was like, "What happened?" He was just like, "You just need to call your mom". I was like, "How bad is this?" thinking that if it's not the worst-case scenario, there'll be some reassurance. If nobody's dead at that point, you'll say nobody's dead, but he didn't say that. I was like, "Okay..." But still, there's a big part of me that's like, "No way. No way. Is this happening to me?" I remember saying, "Is it the worst thing that could possibly happen?" He just said, "You need to call your mom." So, I was like, "Oh, shit!"

So, I put my bag down. It was 5 AM in the US and he was saying, "Call your mom right now." He's not saying anything to reassure me. It doesn't look good, but there's still an analytical part of my brain that's like, "Okay, he had an accident. He's in the hospital, but he's going to be fine. It's really serious, but he's going to be fine." It's just like happening so fast. I remember walking across - and it wasn't a lot of feet across because it was such a small apartment - from my closet to this desk that was, like, a computer desk, a dining room table, and a catch-all of all the things. If you've ever seen someone try and bring a horse somewhere the horse doesn't want to go, they're leaving it by the face and it's just, kind of, pulling back - I felt that. That's what it felt like. I knew I was walking toward a totally different life and I was like, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no", but there was this inevitability. I didn't want to get on Skype and find out because, once I found out what was going on, I knew there would be no going back. I was like, "No, I'm not ready for whatever it is. Like, no." I sat down at the computer. I called my mom. Of course, Skype was like "Beep boop beep", which is not for the right mood.

Scott

Right. It was very upbeat.

Margy

Yeah, exactly. So, My hands were very, very cold at that point and my stomach was very tight. I felt this tingling sensation on my face. My nervous system was just kicking off. My mom answered on Skype. It was 5 AM her time. She's not a morning person. She's up. My mom has blue hair - the color changes all the time, but it was blue at that time. It was clipped back. She had no makeup on. I can see that she's somewhere different - the background is not our house. I was taking all this in very quickly without being super conscious of it. So, I was like, "Hey, Mom. What's going on?" Never one to mince words, she said, "Dad's dead. He killed himself."

Keep in mind that he was not a suicide risk in my mind. For someone like me who had been so neurotic and spent so much time ruminating on possible bad things that could happen, I had never even thought of this - I thought of every unlikely bad scenario. So, I was sitting there with her. My hands started shaking really hard and violently, which is, like, how the nervous system goes into fight-or-flight. So, I was like, "What happened?!" She was like, "We don't know. They need to look into it. There were some propane cans, but we don't know what happened." Then, it was this wild thing. I was shaking and freaking out, but I immediately go in to comfort her because there was the survival part of my brain that was like, "He's gone. Protect the one you've got left." Because I was very nervous. If he would do that, is she okay? So I was just like, "Everything's gonna be okay. We're gonna get through this together." I just started reassuring, which was kind of surprising to me as a response.

The rest of the conversation is kind of a blur. She told me that she's staying at her friend, Caroline's house. We had a lot of pets at that point because I took a lot of stray animals home. So, they had my 2 cats plus some other pets. They had 5 cats and a dog in the house. She was staying with her friends. She said that people are going to the house and helping us to take care of the pets. Then, we got off the phone. I picked up my phone. I called my boss who was, like, a good friend of mine at my teaching job, and I said, "Hey, Michelle. I'm not going to come to work anymore because my dad is dead. He killed himself." She was just like, "Oh my God! Are you okay?" I was just like, "I don't know. Okay, bye." She was just like, "What?!" So, it was crazy. Then, I felt like I was going to throw up. The stomach pain from that type of trauma was, like, a big part of it for me.

Scott

So you knew immediately that you had to go home.

Margy

Yes. I had been planning. I was coming to the end of my second year teaching anyway. This was January. He died on January 12. I found out on January 13, which was insane - having no idea that someone's dead and just going about your normal life. But I was planning to come home in a few months. My teaching contract was about to end, maybe, in a month. Then, I was planning to spend 2 months backpacking around Asia. Then, I was going to come home and find a real job. At first, it was like, "What do we even do?" because I had to go home, but it was this big international move and you were really not in a headspace to be making big plans like that when you're grieving at that early stage, but you also usually don't have a choice if you're an adult. They cremated him. We did a viewing that I was Skyped into, which was absolutely insane. Then, I decided - because I had been planning this backpacking trip for 2 months - to modify it to be one month. So, I would still go and travel around Asia for a month, and then

come home. I don't know why I made that decision. I just felt like it was something that I needed to do.

Scott

Wow, I didn't know that there was a month in between before you actually got back home.

Margy

Yes. There was more than that because I needed to like do some stuff in Taiwan with my taxes. I had to close out all my bank accounts - there was just all this logistic stuff - and then plan this trip. Then, we went traveling for a month to Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand, which was a bizarre trip. I spent a lot of money. I was like, "Why did I do this?" I just felt that I just didn't feel ready to go home. Everything was handled. The pets were all set for a month. There was nothing really urgent. So, I knew that once I went home, I would be dealing with this and there would be no going back, and I think I wanted to put that off a little bit.

Scott

When you tell the story, do you ever get the impression that people are thinking, "Okay, her dad died. Then, she went on vacation and then went home. That just seems kind of odd." I mean, do you have to explain to people what the reasoning was behind that or, maybe, they don't even ask?

Margy

I mean, no one has ever asked that. I feel like they must be thinking it because I would be thinking it. I don't have an explanation. I know it's weird, but the whole situation was weird. Before he died, I had been planning to come home and clean the hoarded house. I was like, "I'm finally going to deal with this. They're gonna get on board. We're doing this. They were not happy to hear that and they just kept being, like, "Whatever." I was like, "Nope, we're gonna do it. It's gonna be great." I was researching cleaners who are in Rhode Island to help. I was writing manifestation, affirmations, and gratitude, literally, every day, like a psychopath - "I love my parents. Beautiful home. I had lost my mind. Of course, I'm so grateful for my dad's health and happiness." It was just like this manic gratitude practice. So, when he died, we had these plans to go on this trip and, then, clean the house. I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna go on this trip for a month. Then, I'm going to come home and I'm going to clean the house." I was helping to plan the memorial service virtually from the Philippines via email with the funeral director and my mom. It was bizarre. Then, I got home. By the time I got home, it was March. He died on January 12. I got home at the beginning of March. It was not good. It was the winter of 2015. For anyone who lives in New England, it was memorably brutal. There were 4 feet of snow on the ground, which is not typical. It was brutally cold. People said that it had been one of the most depressing winters for a while, which I was like, "I wonder if that contributed." So, I got home. That's when the journey of cleaning the house, working with my mom, and trying to rebuild began

Scott

So, once you were done backpacking, you thought, "Okay, now is the time to go home." and you got on that plane ride. How long was the plane ride?

Margy

It was longer than it should have been. I flew from Taiwan to Korea, which is quick. Then, I flew from Korea to Dallas, which I think was about 11 hours. Dallas got a snowstorm. In Dallas, it was one inch of snow, but they weren't equipped to deal with one inch of snow, so the entire city

and all the airports were shut down. So, I got stuck in Dallas for 48 hours - I mean, a long time. I couldn't get my bags back because they had already checked and moved on. So, I was stuck in the Dallas airport with no toothbrush, no change of clothes - nothing - and going through the worst experience of my life, sleeping on the ground, eating vending machine food, calling my mom, crying, like, "Mom, what do I do? How do I get home?" She was just like, "I don't know." It was just crazy.

Scott

Then, the flight from Dallas to Rhode Island is probably what? Five hours, maybe?

Margy

We couldn't get a flight to Rhode Island. It was one of those situations where you just keep booking and booking and booking flights and they just keep canceling. We were trying different airlines. We were trying different airports. We eventually got a flight to New York because my partner's family lived on Long Island. So, we flew to New York City because it was the only flight that we could get after 2 days in the airport. It was from a different airport in Dallas, so we drove to a new airport without any bags, and then took this flight from that other airport to New York, because that was the only thing that we could do to get close to home. Then, we were with his family for a day or two. Then, we took the ferry to New London and, then, drove from New London to Providence.

Scott

That kind of sounds like "Planes, Trains and Automobiles" - the international version.

Margy

Yeah. It would have been a stressful travel experience even if my dad hadn't just killed himself. With that in the mix, it was one of those things where I was, like, "This cannot be happening. There's no way that this many bad things could happen in a row. This seems made up." I kept feeling like, "Am I on a movie or TV show? This cannot be real."

Scott

Somebody's gonna jump out and say you've been punked...

Margy

I really thought that!

Scott

So when you had all these hours - including the first 11-hour flight to get to Dallas - just to sit and think, what are the thoughts that were going through your head about what you're about to get into?

Margy

I mean, some of it is a blank in those early days. After a few months later, new realizations just keep hitting you. I remember this moment on the flight - I don't know if it was the flight to Korea or the flight from Korea to Dallas - I was just sitting there holding my passport because we just had to show them. I just mindlessly open my passport and my dad was my emergency contact. I was like, "What do you do if your emergency contact is dead?" All those little things that you don't think of at first just keep hitting you, like, "Oh my god."

Scott

Well, let's talk about when you finally got back home. First of all, was this the house you grew up in?

Margy

Yes, basically, we moved into that house when I was in fourth grade. It is a 6-bedroom Dutch colonial, built in 1900. It's a big house.

Scott

I have to ask you this. As far as the hoarding, was it mostly your dad, or was your mom also a hoarder? I mean, hoarding, from what I know, is a mental health disorder. So, it would seem kind of odd that they would both have it.

Margy

Hoarding is a spectrum. I believe in all things, so I also believe that there are a lot of different types of hoarders. I mean, the research on this is emerging, but hoarding can result from a lot of different things. For some people associated with people who have types of OCD, there's a lot of correlation between trauma and hoarding. So, that is not necessarily a chemical issue. It's that all this unprocessed trauma can lead to this disorder or this attachment. They've also done the research, showing that people who are hoarders or who have a tendency towards hoarding - which a lot of us probably have - but don't act upon it because we're feeling good and we're taking care of ourselves. But they did experiments where they scan people's brains, and the part of the brain that's associated with really strong emotion lit up over minor objects, whereas that didn't happen for someone who's more average or average in that area. So, they did experiments where they had junk mail. They let the people sort the mail and say, "This is junk." and then they shredded the junk mail in front of them and scan their brains. There really was this heightened emotion from people who were hoarders. So, there's a lot of complexity to hoarding. I took a DNA test and there's a genetic marker that I have, that possibly shows difficulty parting with objects that are no longer needed. There's like this complex web of things that create this situation, I believe. I think trauma plays a big part in whether or not that tendency gets flipped on or not, which I believe that both my parents, most people who have gone through trauma, and their generation were not as vocal about it. As you know, they didn't understand it as much. So, it wasn't the type of thing that you would try to get help for - you would walk it off.

So were they both hoarders? Yes. Like, it wasn't always so bad. My mom is very, very ATD. So, she has a lot of trouble with organization and spaces and stuff like that. My dad's hoarding was more of indifference. It seemed like it just lacks care - he just didn't care about the mess. He sort of lived like 19-year-olds. There were just trash and bottles. If he couldn't find something, he'll just buy a new one. It was less attachment to the objects and more of an indifference that I think stemmed from a lot of unprocessed trauma, depression, not caring about himself, and feeling overwhelmed. Whereas my mom, I think, has more of the typical attachment to objects, being overwhelmed and trying to understand how to organize things. So, there is a spectrum. The combination of the 2 of them together with the pets with them, both working long hours, not having a lot of time, and not having learned the skills to manage a house, which is a skill. I think people think that it's a thing that you should just know how to do, but it's not. So, that was sort of the perfect storm. So, I would say that's a very long way of saying, "It's both of them." but it's complicated.

Scott

Can you describe walking through the door the first time when you came back home?

Margy

Yes, it was freezing cold. I got out of the car. My mom was, frantically, trying to shovel the steps. I walked over to her and she doesn't even look up or acknowledge me. She was just frantically shoveling - I said this with no judgment because she had just been through insane trauma. I was like, "I haven't seen you in two years." I was like, "Hey mom." She was like, "Hey" and just really focused and stressed about the stairs. I was like, "Okay, this is going well." I walked in the door. I unstrapped my bag and dugged into my arm but, of course, there was nowhere to put my stuff down. It was freezing in the house. There was stuff everywhere. There were no clear surfaces. The smell of cat urine is so strong that it burns even in cold weather. This was, I think, the beginning of March. It was, like, a really long winter. It was still freezing.

Scott

So you were planning to stay in that house, right? While you were doing the cleaning, was there even a place for you to stay? Was there a room that had space for you?

Margy

Not really. I used to live on the third floor, which was a really nice setup. Since fourth grade, I had that space, which my wife said, "It's why I'm so spoiled now." There are 2 bedrooms and a full bathroom up there - that was, like, my space for me and my cats, but my dad had taken over that space while I had been away, so it had been trashed. There was just one twin bed that was like a really hard mattress. My partner and I were both there, and it was not in a condition that you could stay up there. So, there was this spare room. The whole house was just like spare rooms that were full of stuff because it's like a big house full of bedrooms that are unused. So, the rooms are just labeled by the color that the room is, not by the function, because there is no function. So, there's a room called the blue room that had a big desk in it, had all these papers, clothes and piles of stuff. My mom had bought a new mattress - which to her credit, thank you. There was a new memory foam full mattress in the middle of this room that was full of junk, but there was nowhere for my stuff. So, we just slept on the mattress on the floor in this random room full of stuff. I just remember waking up in the morning when it was laid out, realizing that a cat had either thrown up or pooped right next to the bed, and I was just like, "Great. This is lovely."

Scott

Well, I guess that helped you decide which room to clean first, right?

Margy

Yes. Cleaning was such a process - it was such a phased process because, first, we had to get it to the point where I could, like, live. Then, when my partner went back to be with his family in Long Island for a little bit, I would just sleep in my mom's bed with her because it took a long time to carve out a space for me.

Scott

Can you just describe what was in all these piles of stuff? What was it?

Margy

Nothing really noteworthy. It wasn't like tons of newspapers or anything - it was just stuff like clothes, fans, papers, extension cords, and all the objects that you would expect to see in a house, but at a huge volume and everywhere. The thing that made it really challenging was the pets because, when you have pets, you can't have piles of stuff, especially if you have cats. I

love cats but, if you have a cat, you probably know that cats love to pee on piles of clothes. It's like a rare delicacy for them, so they can't help but treat themselves. When you don't clean up a pet's mess right away, they will continue to mark - the rugs, the clothes, the furniture under the clothes. There were piles of shirts and New Balance sneakers of my dad's in a closet. It had been peed on so many times that the rubber on the shoe had melted to the hardwood. I was like, "How does this chemically even happen? There are so many layers, right?" Because when you get the stuff off, the thing under this stuff is so damaged, so it was just layers and layers and layers.

Scott

You seem like a really organized person. You would look at a project and plan it out like this is how we're going to do it. Did you come up with some kind of a plan to tackle this? I mean, it seems overwhelming to start with.

Margy

Yes, I am pretty organized. I like to just tackle things. I had spent 2 years in Taiwan thinking about how I was going to tackle it and researching, which was helpful. When I got there, it was really overwhelming. Because my dad had just died, I might have given up with enough pushback if my dad had still been there and just be like, "Okay, it's your life." Knowing that I was going to leave my mom to live in this house alone as a widow to rebuild her life, I was like, "I can't. This has to be dealt with." So, if I had felt like I had any choice, I probably wouldn't have taken this on or I would have quit, but that feeling of not having a choice was helpful. This was such a great experience. I mean, it was the worst experience but, in terms of business, this was the best experience, because I came into a seemingly impossible situation with none of the skills, experience, or team that I needed to deal with it, and I had to just figure it out. Everybody told me at the beginning that I couldn't do it. They were like, "No way! It's too much! Don't take this on. You've been through enough. There's no way you can do this." I had cleaners come in who told me that the house was going to be condemned, that I should just give up. They told me there's no way I could even do anything with the house." I mean, I would cry like I was affected by it. But then, I'd keep Googling and find somebody else.

So, the first thing I did was try to find someone to help me, which - I think is true for business, too - is the smartest thing you can possibly do: Find someone who does the seemingly impossible thing all the time and knows how to do it. So, I was looking for an expert in cleaning and hoarding. After talking to some truly horrible people who just said terrible things to me or about the house and just made me feel hopeless, I found this woman, Nicole. This is what she does. She had this kind of crappy Comic Sans font-like website, but when I read her website, she talked about why she does this and why she feels compelled and moved to help hoarders. I was so touched because she was the first person who approached it with compassion. I had her and her husband come over. They looked around the whole house. After so many people telling me, "Give up. The house is gonna get condemned. You can't do it.", Nicole looked at me - I love this woman - and she said, "You're so strong. You've been through so much. I'm so sorry for your loss." which no one had said. Then, about the house, she was like, "This isn't even that bad. We can totally do this." So, I was like, "Finally..." So, that first massive breakthrough came from finding the right person.

Scott

How did your mom handle that process? I mean, was she able to help or was it just all you? Or did she kind of say, "No, we gotta keep that one thing."? How involved was she?

Margy

Yeah, my mom is scary. Mom, if you're listening, I say that with love. She was a federal prosecutor. She was the first female United States Attorney in the state of Rhode Island. She's a scary lady. So - I say that with respect - she was not on board, and it added a big layer of complication to be working with someone who wanted to block me at first, and it wasn't her fault. If you come into anybody's life and you're like, "We're going to change everything.", no matter who they are, they're probably going to be, like, "Get lost!" On top of that, they've just lost their husband to suicide and you're like, "Hey, I'm gonna need you to go through this box real quick." She was like, "Get away from me!" So, she was not happy, but there was a part of her I could tell that was more willing to work with me than ever before. I don't know if her resistance had been broken down by the loss. I suspect it had more to do with the fact that she felt really sorry for me because me and my dad were really close. So, the fact that I had lost my dad to suicide, I think, made her more willing to work with me out of pity, which is fine - I'll take whatever I could get to get the job done.

So, she was really resistant at first and it was just fights after fights. In the beginning, it took her days to go through a single box. She would be mad at me, being really grumpy and negative, and kind of make mean comments. I was just like, "This is gonna be a long time. If it takes this many days to go through one box, this does not look good." But bringing in Nicole was really helpful. Having a third-party come in is really helpful to get people on better behavior. So, there are things that if your family tells you, you're like, "Shut up", but if a really compassionate expert comes in, you're kind of, like, "Okay." They're saying the same thing, but it hits different because it's a different relationship context. So, Nicole was really helpful in getting my mom to cooperate. Then, we did hit this point - it was like pushing a boulder up a hill for a long time, like months of, basically, fighting against my mom when she was trying to block this. Then, we hit our stride. We started hitting this momentum. She started getting pretty good at going through stuff. she started working with me. She just gave in to the inevitability that this was going to happen and I wasn't going to back down. I don't know if the momentum just made it easier or both, but we did get better and better at working together once we got that initial momentum.

Scott

How long did it take? You just use the term "month"... How long did this whole process take?

Margy

It took exactly 5 months because I moved to Colorado on the day that we finished. It took exactly 5 months. I took one single day off. I'm not a grinder - I don't work like that. I'm not one of those entrepreneurs who work at 5 AM and am the last person who stopped working. No, I am not a grinder - I don't work well that way - but this project required that to hit this deadline. So, every single day, I woke up at, like, 5 AM and I would start cleaning around like 6 or 7. I would finish around 8. I would fall into bed, make my to-do list for the next day, go to sleep, and wake up again, for five months, every single day. It was amazing that we were able to get it done in 5 months.

Scott

It must have been difficult to do that every day, not just because of the hard work involved and such an overwhelming project, but you were also still mourning your dad at that time. That must have been a mental strain.

Margy

Yeah. Well, it was and it wasn't. I think that having a project like that helped me to channel a lot of energy into something. I think it somewhat served as a distraction. Also, I think, because it was a suicide, because I was out of the country, not only did I not get to see him before he died like you would if he died from cancer or something, I didn't see his body afterward. When I saw him, I hugged him goodbye at Logan Airport in 2013. The next time I saw him, he was in an urn. So, there's not a lot of closure there. So being able to physically process his stuff, go through and touch every single thing that he owned, and make a decision about throwing it out or donating it was really powerful. Honestly, what I felt most was I felt that it was an honor. My dad was an amazing person. He was the funniest person I've ever met. I'm not just saying that because he was my dad. He was really funny. He was so smart. He loved animals. He was just such a wonderful person. It was an honor to be able to do that for him.

Scott

Can you talk about the moth infestation?

Margy

Yes. This was one of many things that happened where I was like, "This cannot be real. This is insane!" I was going through room by room and we're doing pretty well. I opened the door of the orange room - like I said, they're named after colors because they have no function. I just kind of, looked around, took stock of the different piles, and started making a game plan for the room in my head. Then, I was like, "Oh, a little moth. Isn't that nice?" I saw a single little one of those small moths fluttering and I was like, "Oh, so beautiful!" Then, I saw another moth and I was like, "Huh..." Then, I realize that there are just hundreds of moths in the room and I was like, "This is a horror movie." If I look closely, they're eating the drapes. They're swarmed over this one part of the carpet eating it. They're in all the boxes. I was just like, "Oh my God." So, I closed the door. I was horrified, but I was also laughing because my dad had this really irreverent sense of humor. I just thought of all the people I've heard who said, "My loved one visited me as a beautiful butterfly." Of course, my dad visited me as a swarm of moths because he thought it would be so funny. So, I was like, "Okay, well, this is why exterminators exist." So, I started calling exterminators and they didn't believe me. They were like, "No, that doesn't happen. That doesn't happen with that type of moth." I was like, "I'm telling you, it's happening." Every exterminator I called wouldn't help me. They were like, "Sorry, we don't do that" which, again, was one of those things where I was like, "How is this possible?"

Scott

It seems like it should be an easy job. You've one of those cans where you would bomb the room with some fumes or something and just kill all of them.

Margy

Right. I was like, "Why can't an exterminator do this for me?" There is such a thing - going to professionals and being like, "This is what's going on" and them being, like, "No way." and I'm like, "Yeah, of course." So, I eventually went that DIY route of setting off a bug bomb, but the house is full of pets, so there was a lot of logistics because I had to find a place for all the cats and stuff to safely be while I did the bug bomb, and then enough time pass. There were many more steps than I thought it would be, but we did the bug bomb and everybody's safe. The pets were in their locations. I cleaned up all the little moth corpses. That room was full of cedar - there was just cedar in random places because I just can't take a chance again. So, we did overcome the moth infestation, but it was just one of those things that you would wake up thinking that you're tackling one problem, and then you end up spending days on this thing that you're like, "This shouldn't even be happening..."

Scott

Can you just describe seeing the truck haul away that last bit of stuff?

Margy

Yeah, when the truck took the dumpster, it was crazy. That was, like, either the day I was moving or the day before - like, it was at the very end. It was incredible. First of all, I had become attached to the dumpster because throwing things in a dumpster is really fun. I was, like, dumpster-crazy - I lost myself at that dumpster. Then, I got really crazy about people not throwing their garbage in it. If I saw them, I'd go outside and be like, "That's not your dumpster!" I really lost myself. I had a very small world.

Scott

Dumpster territoriality - that's kind of odd.

Margy

I know. My mom still calls me the dumpster queen because I was obsessed with this dumpster. Yeah, the truck came and covered it over. Then, they drove it away. I guess I couldn't believe the amount of stuff that was gone. When you're coming to the end of a project like that, you are so in it in the day-to-day that you don't pick your head up that often. So, to finally pick my head up and have it be done-- People said the house looked like it was staged for sale - empty. I had managed to get all the cat urine smell out of the hardwood floors with a variety of aggressive home remedies. It was incredible.

Scott

This essentially was an impossible project that you took on, and you did it - you won! How did that change your outlook on your life?

Margy

The change wasn't immediate, but it totally changed my understanding of my own abilities and my understanding of what's possible. The interesting thing is, I feel, in books and movies, this huge breakthrough happens and then that's it. Like, things are great, but that's not really what life is like because it's just this never-ending thing. So, there was this huge high and victory with finishing the house. Then, immediately, we started driving with the U-Haul and my cats to live in Colorado. I probably should have known that was a bad idea to go somewhere where I had no job, no friends, and no support right after my losing my dad, but I was just like, "Well, we gotta keep going, go with the plan, and carry on." He had gotten into a Ph.D. program, so I was like, "Well, we're going." As I left and drove to Colorado, the grief and pain that I had been avoiding/channeling into the house project started to really catch up with me. So, when we got to Colorado, things went downhill very, very fast with my mental health, with how my relationship was going - it was very bad. I hit a series of rock bottoms. Then, it was through coming back from that, that I reached my full capability as a leader, along with the lessons I had gotten from the house clean. I really had to go down further to go up.

Scott

Since then, you've done some pretty amazing stuff. I know that you started as a \$15 an hour employee at the company that you're with now. Now, you're the CEO of that company. We could probably talk for an hour just about that process, but can you kind of summarize how did that happen?

Margy

Yeah. So much of how that became possible was because of what I got out of that house clean - the attitude and the things I learned about tackling seemingly messy, impossible problems, which is so true for business, especially early business. Then, there's also the personal growth work I had to do. I had to eventually get into trauma processing therapy - process losing my dad and process all this stuff that I hadn't processed before. I got kicked up by that loss, so I did so much work on myself as a person. Then, also, the combination of that and taking on this huge project and succeeded. When I came into this situation, I knew I wanted to work from home, and I wanted to start my own business. I was trying to start a business in the fitness industry, but it was not going well. I really thought that what I wanted was a fitness business. So, I had been connected with just my business partner now because we worked together. We actually didn't know each other that well. We were just vaguely connected on social media. We reconnected because she adopted my dad's cat when he died. So, she went from this person who had been a colleague who I didn't know very well to someone who was really on my radar because, now, she's sending me pictures of kittens and that was such a bonding moment. So, all these things came together.

I wanted a remote job. I saw on Facebook that she was hiring part-time contractors at \$15 an hour to book people on podcasts. I truly had no idea how I would financially survive with a contractor position with no benefits, paying self-employment tax, while earning \$15 an hour, but I wanted to work from home. I was tired of driving in the snow in Colorado with no 4-wheel drive. So, I interviewed. I got that. Then, things started happening very quickly. From there, I started listening to my clients' podcasts, really getting to know them, listening to their interviews, and I was like, "Oh, I want to be a business owner. This is amazing. I've already been trying to start a business. As I got to see all these success stories in different industries, I started learning and Googling, "What is SEO? What is content marketing?" and all these things I was hearing in the episodes - this was 2016. This wasn't that long ago. I didn't know any of these terms.

So, actually, working with Interview Connections is going great. The rest of my life was not great. I don't really have close friends in Colorado. I didn't want to leave the house. I just wanted to be home with my cats. My relationship was going very badly, so we ended up breaking up almost exactly a year after arriving in Colorado. I left Colorado to go home and live with my mom, which felt like a new rock bottom, but there was space for me because I had just cleaned out the house. So, that was a silver lining. I was 27 and I'm going back to live with my mom. I started going to therapy and taking therapy incredibly seriously.

At the end of 2016, I was a contractor that whole year and I had just started taking on leadership responsibilities like looking for ways to improve the company and my client experience because I really wanted to do a good job. She asked me to become the first employee of the business at the end of 2016. So, I said yes. I went home. I cried my eyes out to my best friend because I don't want to be an employee. I want to be a business owner. But she was like, "This is gonna be a great opportunity." So, I showed up in January 2017 as the first employee. Then, we have the rest of the team as contractors besides me and Jess. Almost immediately, we just heard an HR person speaking about contractors versus employees, and was like, "We need employees, not contractors for what we're doing." So, in a very short time, we got rid of all of our overtime contractors and hired local in-state Rhode Island employees, and I was in charge of this.

I had no experience. I was way over my head with this. I had just come out of this house clean, so it was like all of this stuff that kept coming up. I was like, "I'll figure it out. No problem." because I had this new confidence that I wouldn't have had before, that I can basically figure

anything out. So, it was a very steep learning curve - mistakes were made - but bringing that "We can do this. No problem." attitude that I had developed, if anything hit us, I was like, "No worries, we can deal with it." There was definitely crying in those moments, but I had processed so much in therapy that I was just, like, so resilient. Jess and I started a podcast, "Womensplaining", that I wanted to start because I wanted a podcast where we could just talk about anything. We did talk about death on show two. We were partners on that project. We would work on it on Sundays.

Then, we started to talk about partnering for other businesses and potentially starting a media company. She knew that I really wanted to be a business owner. So, we were talking about all this stuff. Then, we started talking about potential equity in Interview Connections. So, throughout the end of my first full year as an employee, I was in these kinds of negotiations. I asked for 50% equity and, then, there was, like, a counter offer. I was like, "Look, I'm not going to take less than 50% equity. I'm not being a diva, but I want to have equal risk and equal reward, and I don't want to feel like 'anyone's my boss'. If there's uneven equity, it's going to feel like there's an imbalance of power." So, it wasn't a negotiation tactic. I just stuck to my guns. I had the vision to bring the business from \$400,000 to \$1,000,000 in a year. I was like, "We can do this. Here's how. Here are all the things that we can do. We can do this." and ended up getting the equity and was co-owner at the beginning of 2018.

Scott

So your kind of optimism, maybe, was a little bit contagious with her, thinking, "Wow, this could be a really big forward step for the company." Obviously, as I've seen - and a lot of people have seen what happened since then - it has skyrocketed. One of the things that you talked about on your podcast was the stuff that you discovered that Malcolm Gladwell wrote about. Well, just explain that - it's just fascinating to me. What did you find?

Margy

Yeah, this was so fascinating to me too. So I started down this rabbit hole because I was looking to create content. I was working with a great coach, Jacqueline Nagel, who helps people with messaging and content. I was looking to create more content around my lived experience and was struggling to, sort of, explain what happened because I was, like, this kind of negative, miserable person. Then, my life fell apart and I lost my favorite person in the world. Then, I was so much more successful and happier. I wasn't really sure how to explain that. So, I did research as I was creating content and seeking to better understand this, and I started stumbling on - the primary one being by Malcolm Gladwell - these studies about the connection between grief and high performance. As soon as I saw it, I was like, "Yes, this is it!"

He coined the term "Eminent orphans" and did studies of these highly influential people like presidents and all this stuff, and found that these people who had been presidents who were super influential, who had more than one paragraph in the encyclopedia, had a much higher percentage of having lost a parent than you would find in the general population at that time, which I thought was really interesting. A lot of it is focused on people who lost parents young. When my dad died, I was 26, so I wasn't, like, super young. Although I felt young, I think I was, sort of, floating around, not taking responsibility, and killing time by being an English teacher, but there were some older ones. I just found this correlation between loss and high achievement so interesting - why is it that some people fall apart because of loss and, for some people, it seems to be a catalyst for this expansion? So, my interest in that is what led me down this rabbit hole of starting my podcast, "We Get It, Your Dad Died", where I interview high performers and high achievers who have gone through a substantial loss. I talked to them about not just what

happened with the loss - usually, it's the death of someone very close to them - but I also had some people talk about sexual assault and some other things. So, we talked about the loss. Then, they also shared about these really incredible unexpected gifts that they got out of this experience, that God helped them have a much bigger impact and showed up in a more powerful way. Just hearing these stories has been so incredible and, really, in an anecdotal way, supports what I learned from Malcolm Gladwell about this connection between high performance and loss.

Scott

Yeah. When I heard you talk about that, I never would have guessed that. Obviously, you have kind of lived that out. You and I are friends on Facebook. I subscribed to your podcast, so a lot of the content that you create, I consume. I have to say that you're honestly one of the most insightful people I know. You have a gift for figuring something out and then explaining it, and I'm like, "Yeah, I can use that." So I hope you keep doing that. Let's talk about your podcast. It's called, "We Get It, Your Dad Died". When I first saw that title, I thought that is so odd. Where did that come from?

Margy

Yeah. Well, first of all, thank you so much for all that nice stuff you said. That means so much to me. I'm so honored to hear that and happy. Yeah, "We Get It, Your Dad Died" is a weird title, and I think it had to be, sort of, weird for it to feel on-brand with me. My dad had a very irreverent sense of humor that he had passed on to me, so I came up with that title as a joke. It was not going to be the actual title. My business books people on podcasts. I am a client of my business, so I got out there on podcasts all the time. That's a big part of how my messaging and storytelling have evolved - by getting interviewed on so many podcasts every single month. I just kept telling the same story, like, because it just kept coming up. Because the loss of my father is such a pivotal piece of my leadership and business journey, in some way, I ended up talking about it on every show. So, it just got to the point where it just felt like I was talking about it so much. So, I just made the joke to someone I was working with, like, "Let's just call it, 'We Get It, Your Dad Died'." Then, I was like, "I'm gonna keep that." I'm always worried that guests are going to be super offended, especially if they lost their dad, but everyone's been very cool about it. It is a respectful show, but I like the irreverent title.

Scott

It is. You can be respectful and still have some humor - even awkward humor. I mean, a lot of times, if you go to a funeral, not everybody would be sad. Somebody would be telling a story about the person that died and everybody would laugh because something is funny.

Margy

Yeah, there's a lot more comedy in death than I would have imagined like the aftermath of my dad dying. Those dark moments were so dark, but there were moments where we laughed so hard because there would be something that was so, like ridiculous or so him. Especially when you're in a dark place where there's so much tension, you just laugh that much harder. As I said, my dad was so funny. He was, like, the funniest person in the world. So, as sad as we were, and as hard as it was, there were a lot of moments where we would just lose our minds belly-laughing.

Scott

How can people find your podcast? You do a blog as well. How can people find all that? How can they contact you? Give us all your contact stuff.

Margy

Yes. My podcast, "We Get It, Your Dad Died" and my blog both live on my website, which is margywithahardg.com. Obviously, the show is on Spotify and iTunes, and it links out from the website there too. Then, if you want to just connect, if you heard something that you want to chat about or you have a shared experience, the best way to do that is probably to DM me on Instagram. My Instagram is [@heimargy](https://www.instagram.com/heimargy).

Scott

In addition to being really smart, Margy is just a really likable person. Which makes sense, because she's an animal lover like I am. You can get all of her socials and contact info, AND see a picture of the amazing rainbow-colored stairs in her home, at WhatWasThatLike.com/111.

And right now I just want to take a moment and thank YOU for being a listener of this podcast. There are over 2 million podcasts in existence right now, so you have a lot of choices on what you listen to. Admittedly, a lot of those podcasts really suck. But a lot of them are really good! And here you are listening to What Was That Like. I do really appreciate that, and my mission is to keep making new episodes, and to try to keep making the show better and better.

If you get value or entertainment from this podcast, I invite you to consider becoming a patron. You get the new episodes ad free, and you get extra bonus episodes, and you get a personal audio message from me, and you get a What Was That Like sticker, all kinds of great stuff. But the best thing really is that you get to be a part of helping the show continue. You can sign up at WhatWasThatLike.com/support.

And here we are at this week's Listener Story. If you have an interesting story you can tell in about 5 minutes, more or less, call it in to the Podcast Voice Mail line at 727-386-9468 and you just might hear it on a future episode!

This Listener Story comes from my friend Ken, who owns his own cleaning business, but he also has a podcast called Smart Cleaning School, where he helps cleaning business owners learn how to run their business more efficiently, and make more money – and some of them have reached 7 figures! I wonder if he's done any hoarding cleanups. Anyway, here's Ken talking about a time he was surprised while working.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in 2 weeks.

(Listener story)

Ken

For some stories, you just have to experience them to believe that they actually happened. This is definitely one of those stories. I was at a favorite client's house of mine. This family used to be home every time I visit. Now, they're traveling the country with the husband's new role as a consultant. So, I cleaned an empty big house - 3,000 square feet - at a very nice suburbia. It has a 3-car garage. I would park my vehicle just outside the garage on the driveway. Then, I would go and grab the key from the front because they would leave it in a little dish for me. Then, I would go into the garage, open the back door with the key, type in the combo on the padlock in the kitchen to turn the alarm off, and then I would commence my cleaning. Normally, I would bring all my gears in and do that process. Well, on this one particular visit, I did not get

all my gear in - I forgot a few things, but I got most of my stuff in. Obviously, I got the key from the front porch. I walked around the back. I let myself in, opened up the back kitchen door, turned off the alarm, and started to work.

I realized I forgot some paper towels, a filter back from a vacuum, and a couple of cleaning supplies. So, I wanted to go back outside to grab the pieces that I needed to clean the house. If you can imagine this large kitchen with an Eden, there's a side door that goes into the garage - the family uses this door. Most households don't use their front door - let's be honest. They use their side door and this side door opened up into the garage, which was the main entrance in and out of the house for the family - it's the one that I used. When I opened that door, I walked down the steps. As I was walking down, I pressed the button on the garage door and the door started to open. I was walking down the steps across the concrete. I looked out the side windows. I noticed there was a squad car sitting in the driveway. I was thinking, "Well, that's interesting. What's a cop doing there?" My first thought was, "Oh gee. I've had half a dozen times where, maybe, I've tripped the alarm." There are all different ways that you can trip alarms and the cops would show up, ask me for ID, and make sure that I was supposed to be there. I've been through this before, so my first thought was, "Oh look. A squad car. I must have tripped something."

I didn't realize where the cops were and I didn't know the background of what was going on, so I'll just take you from my angle. So, I proceeded to walk in, like, "The Matrix" slow-motion. The garage door was opening. There were my footsteps. I saw the squad car. I got closer to the garage. The garage door was opening 10 feet away. I saw a pair of black boots at the bottom of this garage door. It keeps going up. Then, that reveals a pair of grey pants with a blue stripe on the side. I immediately recognized, "Oh, that's a policeman, I suppose". So, I walked closer to the door. The door got to waist level. I saw his bottom end. I saw the side arm being pulled up. At that moment when I saw that, the nice man in blue said, "Get on your knees!" I'm like, "Yeah, yes sir! Hell, yes sir!" I got down on my knees as quickly as I could. The door kept going up and revealing the rest of the cop and the patrolman that was with him - his partner.

Both of them had guns pointing at the cleaner in the garage. Why? I don't know what I did wrong. Did I not flush the toilet last time when I was there? I don't know what did I do wrong. I was just on my knees waiting for my instructions. He said, "What are you doing here?" "I'm just the cleaner, sir." He looked at me. He saw that I have a cleaning shirt on. He said, "Is that your vehicle?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Don't move". He sent that partner over, "Hey, go check out his car." He went over, looked at the car, and then I heard back, "Yup, he's a cleaner. I see a vacuum cleaner stuff. I see some other things. Unless he got a really good ruse or he's a con man, I think it really is a cleaner." "All right let me see what you got in your pocket. I said, "Sir, all I have in there is my wallet which doesn't have much money in it, and my keys". He was like, "Do it slowly". I was like, "I'm being interrogated like I'm a criminal. This is crazy!" Guns were still pointed at me.

Eventually, he lets off of the tension and he said, "Okay, you can stand up now. It looks like you're good. I need to see your license and your ID". I said, "Yes, sir". I got my wallet. I gave my ID and he did a check. I just kind of stood there at that point. The partner was running a full-scale background check on me to make sure I am who I say I am. Of course, my name probably showed up as a cleaner. I've been background-checked 5 times in the past year for tripping other alarms. So, I finally talked to the officer who had cooled down and his gun back in his holster.

Only moments before, my heartbeat was fluttering like a butterfly and freaking out. Now, I just started joking around. I don't know where the jokes came from. I really don't know. "Why do you think this was funny?" "I don't know. I guess I spent too much time alone cleaning houses, but I did think it was funny." So, here's what I asked him, "Officer, why did you point a gun at me? I'm just a cleaner." He says, "We had reason to believe that this house was being burglarized". I said, "Okay, that makes sense. I can understand that. Sir, why would you think that I was burglarizing the house?" "We got a tip". "Okay, what kind of tip did you get?" They said, "Well, one of the neighbors called and saw suspicious activity". I said, "Suspicious activity like vacuuming and cleaning a bathroom? Was that suspicious to them?" He was like, "Alright, wise guy". Like, I need to shut up sometimes - I really do. He said, "No, they said that they saw an unidentified man go to the front of the house looking all around trying to break in. Then, they saw him disappear to the back of the house looking around and trying to break in. Then, suddenly, he wasn't in the back of the house or the front of the house. Somehow, he was in the house with the lights on, so they immediately called the cops to report it".

So, of course, I explained my situation. "Let me explain this, officer. I went to the front of the house because that's where the homeowner leaves the key for me. Then, I went to the back of the house because that's where the door that the key works for. Then, I went into the house to clean. So, I am very sorry for any misunderstanding. May I go now?" He said, "Let me just check a few more things out here". After a few more moments, at that point, I was, kind of, goofing around with the partner and asking him if he did this before - if he's ever pointed a gun at a cleaner or a roofer a plumber". Of course, I was just being a "wise guy". Then, I finally got let go. They took off and wrote the report. I went back in to clean.

I called the homeowners and let them know what happened. I said, "Mister, Missus so-and-so, I just wanna let you know what happened". They were freaking out. They're not happy with the situation. They went as far as to call the police station and the neighbor to report everything and to let them know that, in the future, there is a gentleman that comes to our house once a month. "He has this car. He cleans for us. He is not a burglar." That's a crazy thing that happened. I've never had a gun pointed at me. In my days of growing up in the Philadelphia suburbs, doing dumb things as a teenager never had a gun pulled on me until I was cleaning a house in suburbia.