

Episode 52: These three people died

If this is your first time listening to this podcast, you need to know this is not a typical episode. Usually, each episode is a conversation with someone who has been through some type of extremely unusual situation, and that person comes on the show and tells what happened, firsthand.

Not this week.

This is June of 2020, and right now our country is in turmoil because a black man in Minneapolis died at the hands of the police. The video of that happening in broad daylight has – again – shown that racism in America is still very much alive. So I have to do something different here on this podcast, for this episode.

Some people run for office to get elected and try to bring change from the inside. Some people hold signs and protest. Some go through the police academy and become skilled police officers. I know that because they are my close family members. Some people riot in the streets. I'm not here to comment on any of those things. For me, what I have is this podcast. It reaches a lot of people. So this is how I'm using it for this particular episode.

When something like this happens, you see it on your TV or your computer or your phone and you read the story. But those are just words on the screen. There's **distance** between you and what happened.

With this episode, I want to PUT YOU at the scene.

I'm going to present you with three true stories today. In each one of these stories, a person of color died at the hands of the police. What puts us at the scene is the phone call that was made when it happened.

My hope today is that what you hear makes it more real. These are not just names in the newspaper or on the evening news. These are people, and what happened to them needs to be known. We need to be aware of this reality, and we need to find a solution to this problem. Because what we've been doing so far isn't working.

I'm Scott Johnson, and you're listening to What Was That Like.

Scott

Atatiana Jefferson was a 28-year-old black woman who lived in Fort Worth, Texas. She was a pre-med graduate that lived at home, taking care of her mother and her 8-year-old nephew. On the morning of 12 October 2019, her neighbor, James Smith, noticed that the front door to Atatiana's house was open. He saw this at 2.30 am. What he didn't know was that Atatiana and her nephew, were up late playing video games. So, being a good neighbor, he was concerned. He made a phone call to the non-emergency number of the Fort Worth police and asked them to do a welfare check to make sure everything was okay.

Police Operator

Fort Worth police operator M873. What's the address?

James

I'm calling about my neighbor.

Police Operator

Okay, what's the address? What's going on there?

James

Well, the front doors have been open since 10 o'clock and I haven't seen anybody moving around. It's not normal for them to have both of the doors open at this time of night.

Police Operator

Okay, do you know if anyone is inside?

James

No. I'm not sure. Both of their cars are there.

Police Operator

In there as in the driveway?

James

Most of the cars in the driveway. Yes.

Police Operator

Okay. Can you give me a description like the color of the vehicle?

James

Well, one's white and one's green.

Police Operator

The white one, is it a sedan or an SUV?

James

They're both sedans.

Police Operator

Okay, and what's your name?

James

James Smith.

Police Operator

What's your telephone number?

James

(Hidden information)

Police Operator

Are they usually home at this time?

James

They're usually home but they never have both of their front doors open with the lights on - like I can see straight through the house. Well, my sister woke me up. My sister stayed across the street from them. I live on the opposite side of my sister.

Police Operator

Okay. The address that you gave me is their address, correct?

James

Yes.

Police Operator

Okay. We'll have an officer come by. They're already being dispatched now.

James

Okay, I appreciate it. I mean, it's not normal for them to have both the doors open this late for that long.

Police Operator

Okay. Thank you so much.

James

Thank you.

Police Operator

Bye bye.

Scott

Officer Aaron Dean and another officer arrived at the residence within a few minutes. They walked around the side of the house and Officer Dean walked into the backyard. According to the nephew, while they were playing video games, they heard some noise from outside the window. Atatiana got her legally owned handgun from her purse and went to the window. Officer Dean saw her and yelled for her to put her hands up, then fired a single shot through the window. Atatiana Jefferson was pronounced dead at the scene at 3.05 am. Officer Aaron Dean, a white man, resigned from the department two days later - to avoid being fired. He did not cooperate with investigators. On 20 December 2019, he was indicted by a grand jury on a charge of murder. He's currently awaiting trial.

Scott

Botham Jean was a 26-year-old black man who lived in Dallas, Texas. He was an accountant. On the evening of 6 September 2018, he was at home in his fourth-floor apartment, eating a bowl of ice cream. The door to his apartment was unlocked. Dallas police officer, Amber Guyger, lived in the same apartment building and her apartment was directly below Mr. Jean's apartment on the third floor. At 10 PM, after ending her 13-hour shift, she mistakenly entered his apartment, thinking it was her own. She saw Mr. Jean, thought he was a burglar, and shot him in the chest. That's when she realized her mistake and made this phone call.

Police Operator

Dallas 911. This is Carla. What's your emergency?

Amber

Hi. I need an EMF. I'm in apartment number--

Police Operator

Do you need police support or just EMF?

Amber

Yes, I need both.

Police Operator

Okay. What's the address?

Amber

I'm at apartment number--

Police Operator

What's the address there?

Amber

I'm an off-duty officer. I thought it was in my apartment and I shot a guy thinking he was in my apartment.

Police Operator

You shot someone?

Amber

Yes. I thought it was my apartment. I'm fucked. Oh my god. I'm sorry.

Police Operator

Where are you at right now?

Amber

What do you mean? I'm inside the apartment with him. Hey. Come on.

Police Operator

What's your name?

Amber

I'm Amber Guyger. I need you to get me-- I'm in--

Police Operator

Okay, we have help on the way.

Amber

I know but I'm with my dog. I thought it was my apartment.

Police Operator

Okay. I understand. Hold on.

Amber

Hey, man. Fuck.

Police Operator

Okay. Stay with me. Okay?

Amber

I'm gonna need you to provide me— Hey, bud. Come on. Oh fuck. I thought it was my apartment.

Police Operator

I understand. We have help on the way. Okay?

Amber

I thought it was my apartment. Hurry, please.

Police Operator

They're on their way.

Amber

I thought it was my apartment. I thought it was my apartment. I could've sworn I parked on the third floor.

Police Operator

Okay. I understand.

Amber

No. I thought it was my apartment. I thought it was my apartment. I thought it was my apartment. I thought it was my apartment.

Police Operator

What's the gate code there?

Amber

I don't know. I don't know.

Police Operator

You don't know? Okay.

Amber

I thought it was my apartment.

Police Operator

They're trying to get in there. We have an officer there. You don't know the gate code?

Amber

No. I thought it was my apartment. I thought it was my apartment. (Crying)

Police Operator

Okay, and what floor are you on right now?

Amber

The fourth floor. Hey, bud. They're coming. I'm sorry, man.

Police Operator

Okay. Where was he shot?

Amber

On the top left.

Police Operator

Okay. You're with Dallas PD, right?

Amber

Yes. Oh my god. I didn't mean to. I didn't mean to. I didn't mean to. I'm so sorry.

Police Operator

They're trying to get there to you, okay?

Amber

I know.

Police Operator

They're almost there. They're already there. They're trying to get to you.

Amber

Holy fuck. I thought it was my apartment. I thought it was my apartment. Holy fuck. I thought it was my apartment. Oh my god. Fuck.

Police Operator

Do you hear them? Do you see them?

Amber

No. No. How the fuck do I get out of this? I'm so tired. Hurry. Over here.

Police Operator

Okay. Go ahead and talk to them.

Amber

No, it's me. I'm off duty. I'm off duty. I thought they were in my apartment. I thought this was my floor--

(Hung up on phone)

Scott

Botham Jean was transported to a nearby hospital, where he died. Guyger was arrested 3 days later and charged with manslaughter. That charge was later changed to murder. Her trial took

place a year after the killing and the jurors spent 6 hours deliberating the evidence. They found her guilty of murder. The next day, Guyger was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Her legal team is appealing for a new trial.

Scott

Breonna Taylor was a 26-year-old black woman who lived in Louisville, Kentucky. She was an emergency room technician with career plans to become a nurse. In March of this year, a judge issued a search warrant for a house that was not close to Breonna's house. However, this also included a warrant to search her house because police believed a man had used her residence to receive some drugs. The warrant issued was a so-called "No-knock Warrant", which means that police are allowed to enter without warning and without identifying themselves as police officers. Just after midnight on 13 March 2020, Briana and her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, were at home, in bed. The Louisville police used a battering ram to bust down the door and enter the apartment. Kenneth - not knowing it was the police and thinking it was a criminal home invasion - fired his handgun in defense, wounding one of the officers. 3 police officers returned fire and Breonna Taylor was shot at least 8 times. Then, Kenneth made this phone call to 911.

Police Operator

911, Operator Harris. Where's your emergency?

Kenneth

I don't know what's happening. Somebody kicked in the door inside my girlfriend's house.

Police Operator

Okay, where are you located?

Kenneth

I'm at (hidden information). My God.

Police Operator

Okay, how old is your girlfriend?

Kenneth

She's 26. Bre...

Police Operator

You said 26. Where was she shot at?

Kenneth

I don't know. She's on the ground right now. I don't know.

Police Operator

Okay. You said she's 26. Is she alert and able to talk to you?

Kenneth

No, she's not. Bre...

Police Operator

Okay. What did you say your apartment number was?

Kenneth

Help! Oh my God.

Police Operator

What's your name, sir?

Kenneth

My name is Kenneth Walker. Help!

Police Operator

Did you say Kenneth? You said she's 26? Okay.

Kenneth

Yeah.

Police Operator

Okay. Can you see where she's been shot at?

Kenneth

I can't. I don't know. The stomach?

Police Operator

Okay. Is she alert and able to talk to you?

Kenneth

No. Bre...

Police Operator

Okay.

Kenneth

Oh my God.

Police Operator

Can you get her turned over on her back?

Kenneth

Okay.

Police Operator

Kenneth, can you hear me?

Scott

Breonna was pronounced dead at the scene. The police were not wearing any body cameras to document what happened. No drugs were found in the apartment. Initially, Kenneth Walker was charged with first-degree assault and attempted murder of a police officer. Those charges were

later dropped. The Louisville Police Department has revised its policy to now require body cameras to be worn by all sworn officers and has changed how it carries out search warrants. The family of Breonna Taylor has filed a wrongful death lawsuit.

Scott

Your feedback about this episode is welcome. You can contact me by email, Twitter, or through the website, whatwasthatlike.com What was that like is produced by me, Scott Johnson. Music for this episode was provided by Kevin MacLeod of Incompetech. Stay safe and I'll see you again in 2 weeks.