

Episode 64: Monika's life was destroyed by a stranger

Do you worry about your privacy on the internet?

Do you ever think about how much someone could find out about you, if they wanted to?

Have you wondered if your life could be destroyed, over the internet, by a stranger?

Male News Anchor

The Internet helps you stay connected - you know that - but a lot of people don't think about how to protect themselves online.

Female News Anchor

Yeah, they really don't think about it. So KV joins us in the studio with how one group really wants to make that a lot easier for you.

KV

Hey, good morning, guys. From pictures to apps like Snapchat, Instagram, or Twitter, our phones really tell a lot about us. When you're checking into a location on Facebook, you may not always be thinking of who else is checking in on you. According to the US Office of Women's Health, 1 in 6 women experienced stalking and 1 in 4 stalking victims reported as cyberstalking. That can mean receiving threatening messages or emails, being harassed on social media, or someone tracking your location.

Male

You have to be careful about the wrongs that you go into and what you post just like it is in daily life. People seem to be more free and unfettered when they're online because you're not face-to-face with someone.

Scott

Monika was happy. She was a successful real estate agent. She used social media to connect with friends, and family, and clients. Just like everyone else does.

But one day, without realizing it, she made a mistake. And she had no idea what was about to happen.

Scott

Does real estate training include guidance on how to use social media?

Monika

Well, first of all, when I first got started in real estate in 1999 - it's been a while - we didn't have social media. I think, even as of today, the training we were provided in regards to social media is mostly on how to drive traffic to your social media. I think, maybe, in the last couple of years, we have had some training - very little not official training - that shows you the dangers of social media. I think everybody who is on social media today kinda- it's almost self-explanatory. You gotta be careful. But no, I don't think we have any official training about the dangers of social media - only how to sell on social media.

Scott

Well, yeah, it seems like that would make sense for the most part. They want you to know how to use social media to benefit your business. For sure, your story sure illustrates the dangers of it.

Monika

I have tried to give some classes on that since all of this happened, at least in my office. That's about the extent of it.

Scott

Can you just describe your life before this happened? What was life like for you? And where did you live?

Monika

Yeah. Actually, I was originally born and raised in Poland. I came here when I was just about 19 years old after high school. I met my husband in 1990 - it was a quick romance - and we got married, actually, about 8 months later. Now I have 2 children. My husband was in the military, so we traveled all over. We are just two and a half kids - a dog - mom and dad family. We are a very average family but we're very happy. A lot of laughter and a lot of adventures. We call ourselves Four Musketeers. We do that because when you're a military family, you only have each other. You leave places - wherever you make friends - and you move to a new place and you have to start all over trying to build new friendships. So really, who you have is just the four of us - Four Musketeers, that's what we call ourselves. Our children, at this point, have left home, like, nine years ago. So we've been empty nesters for that long. Our marriage— we just celebrated 30 years. We're still together and we're happy. I mean, just like any marriage, there's no such thing as a perfect marriage. Perfect marriage just means you go through your ups and downs, you work through it, and we still love each other. Our kids still talk to us, so that's a good thing. So it's a very happy family. We were very kinda calm and happy within the little world that we had. I've been in real estate since 1999. We moved to where I live right now - it will be almost 16 years. So I've been with RE/MAX, I think, for the last 6 years - it was a different company before that. That's been my career for 20 years now.

Scott

So everything's good. Everybody's happy. Great family. Life is good. Then, one day, you got a surprise...

Monika

Yeah, that's right. That year, we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary in August. We decided to do a huge party because when we got married in 1990, we were so poor that we couldn't even afford to do a 20-people party. Forget the 100-people "real wedding". We couldn't afford to get a nice wedding dress. We actually got married, kind of, in the back chapel of the church. It just was mom, dad, and a couple of witnesses. Just like any other little girl, you dream of having your big dress, walking down the aisle, doing the whole thing, and being surrounded by family and friends. So that year, why not do the dress? Why not walk down the aisle? Why not go ahead and renew our vows? Our children at this point were adults, so they're our witnesses. So we had this huge party. This was in August. Then, we did the honeymoon, which we never did. So we were kind of, like, right at the top. I mean, that was our high for the year. We ended up going on a trip to Peru and checking off one of those things from your bucket list of going visiting Machu Picchu. We always wanted to do it, so we did that, came home and just got back to our normal lives.

One of the mornings - at that point, we're talking at the beginning of September - I was sleeping when my phone started going off really early in the morning - it's like 6 o'clock in the morning. I'm a realtor. We stay up really late and we work really late. We can actually answer people middle of the night. But when it comes to morning- we're just not morning people. I'm definitely not a morning person, so I kind of just silenced my phone, but it just kept going off and off and off. I thought, "Sell, something's going on." So I looked at it and it was my broker. I was like, "Oh, my goodness. What could she possibly have to say to me at 6 o'clock in the morning?" I picked up the phone and I said, "What is it? Why are you calling me so early?" She went, "You have to see what has been posted on our local Facebook page. You have to see the links and what's going on." I was like, "Okay, what is it?" She says, "Look, it's really, really bad." I was like, "Okay, did somebody give me a bad review or say something bad about me?" I mean, I've been in real estate for so many years. Eventually, I was gonna get a bad review. I'm not a perfect person. I'm flawed just like everybody else.

She said, "No, I don't think you understand. I'm gonna send you the screenshots. Take a look at it." So I hung up the phone. She started sending the screenshots and I started reading them. As I was reading it, I actually, kind of, couldn't grasp what I was reading. It's some story about me on this website called, "She's A Homewrecker" and it has my picture on it. Right away, I started reading what this person wrote - the person's name was, like, Ryan Baxter or something like that. Obviously, it was a fake persona. So I right away jumped out of bed, went up to my computer night, and told her, "Did you leave this on Facebook?" She said, "No, we've deleted it, but we screenshotted just so you see what's going on. You need to take care of it." So I opened up my computer. I right away went to that link. She actually copied the link for me. I went up and I started reading this story. As the story goes, it was just a really long elaborate story.

Scott

You were reading this on this website called "She's A Homewrecker"...

Monika

Shesahomewrecker.com.

Scott

Can you describe what is that website about?

Monika

Back then, I was just shocked because I never ever thought that side of the internet existed. I might be naive, but I didn't know. The website is basically a slot-shaming website. They make money from basically having people post stories about other people. It doesn't matter really if it's true or not. You just click the little checkbox that says, "Hey, you're definitely saying this story is true." This way, they're not responsible for it. So it's a slot-shaming - it's mostly women shaming. They actually have the whole thing organized per state and per country. There are tens of thousands of people on that website. At that point, I became that unfortunate member.

Scott

There's a category of websites called Revenge sites.

Monika

Right.

Scott

And it sounds like it's one of them. Like, a woman whose husband has an affair goes on this website and tells all about the woman that he supposedly had an affair with, correct?

Monika

That is exactly the kind of website that is. The story that they wrote about me - well, obviously, let's just go ahead and get this out of the way - is not true. She wrote the story about how she was supposedly a client of mine. She retained me and we were looking at houses. I showed her 8-10 houses. She loved the job I was doing for her. One of the days, she said she couldn't make it to the appointment we made to take a look at a house. So, instead of her going with me herself, she sent her husband with me. So, I went and supposedly met her husband. While we were looking at the house, she ended up canceling whatever appointment she had. So she was like, "Well, I'm just gonna jump in the car and I'm gonna drive out there and meet them both." So she told the story. She pulled up in the front of the house and she saw my car and his car. She walked into the house, looked at everything, and was loving it. She couldn't find us, so she went upstairs and walked in on me and her husband having sex on the floor - as she put it - on the plush white carpet which was, right away, a red flag to me. I mean, who in the world has plush white carpet in our area with red clay? First red flag.

Scott

That is so funny. As a realtor, that's the part of the story that you're-

Monika

Yeah. As I was reading, I was like, "What house that I sell has white carpet?" Your mind really does tricks on you as you're reading it and you know it's not true, and you're like, "Did I forget something?" It's just weird how your mind gets twisted. To continue the story, she said that we were butt naked. The story she wrote gets really graphic. In any case, she said that, right away, she pulled out her phone and took pictures of us both scrambling to get dressed. She wrote some stuff about how he had ejaculated on me and just really awful stuff. Then, at the end of it, she said that ever since then, she has gotten divorced, that due to the picture she took, she got everything in a divorce, and that she wants to warn all the women out there to not use this woman as a realtor. She's the enemy of all decent women out there. There was my picture and all my contact information.

When I got down to it, I know there are people out there that have gone into shock. It's a funny thing that happens. It's like the room gets really small and your hearing, kind of, starts buzzing in your ears and your hearing feels like you're underwater. It's a weird reaction that your body does. I was completely in shock. Not only was I shocked that, first of all, because the story was false, I just couldn't understand why anybody would write that. It's weird how you are shamed for something that you know you didn't do. All these feelings right away went through your mind and started racing 1000 miles an hour. So I jumped out and I woke up my husband. I said, "You have got to come here and take a look at this! You have to look at this!" So he came out, he read it, and he got mad right away. He just lost his mind. He was like, "Whoever that is, I'm gonna kill him!" But I thought, "Well, it's really early in the morning. Most people are still sleeping. They probably haven't seen that." How naive is that, right?

I always thought that if something is not true - I know a lot of your listeners will probably roll their eyes because I was that naive - I could write to the website or call them up. Although I know now that there's no phone number, I'm just gonna message them. If it's not true, they must take this down. Right? Well, I had no clue that those websites are protected. That day, I right away contacted an attorney and said, "I think what I need is, like, a cease and desist letter or

something.” So I called an attorney. They generated that letter. I went ahead and sent it over to the website. Nothing. I contacted them on Facebook. Nothing.

In the meantime, during the day, people started finding out - my kids and a couple of my friends - because I was crying. I mean, I just didn't know, I don't think I stopped crying for a whole week, at least at first. I realized, by the end of the day, that there is nothing I can do by myself. I was completely lost. I didn't know how I'm going to take care of it. In the meantime, what was happening is, for the first time, I plugged my name into Google and I noticed that there were pages and pages of Google search engine results that showed this story about me, and it was syndicated to all different websites. So, even if I, for example, took care of this one website, it has already spent off to different stories, by different similar websites, and it was like a wildfire. There was no way for me to somehow fix this.

Scott

That's what really gets me about this. When you were first hit with this, maybe not even the first few minutes, but the first few hours or that day or two— it wasn't just posted on the RE/MAX Facebook page, they also sent it to your family and your friends and your professional contact. So it wasn't a secret at all. Everybody knew about that. I gotta think, in your head, “Where do you even start in trying to fix this?” I mean, obviously, you wanted to get it removed but have you tried to contact everyone and explain it or did you want to find out who actually posted this thing? I mean, how did you decide what to do first?

Monika

Very early in the morning, I didn't know that this person actually sent it. First of all, I had no clue that my Facebook was open, so that person had access to my friend's list. They sent it basically to everybody. By the time people started waking up, I started getting this wave of messages from people saying, “What is this?” Of course, my daughter and my son got it. They were completely petrified, like, “Mom, what is this?” So yes, I was answering. Most of my closest friends were all like, “Who the hell is this person? How do I kill him?” because they know us. I don't mean really kill him, but they were all very upset. But where do I start? I think my first thought was to go to the source. Where did that story come from? It was on shesahomewrecker.com. So I thought if I get rid of that story, then maybe I can start, kind of, putting out fires wherever that went. I didn't know how huge this was gonna be and it took me just a couple of days to realize that this is not gonna go away. It's not gonna go and I won't be able to stop it from continuing to syndicate to other websites.

Scott

Right. I read that on one of those other websites called Bad biz report. It had already gotten viewed, like, 95,000 times.

Monika

It did.

Scott

Actually, it was a popular post on that site. Obviously, when somebody's looking around, maybe trying to choose a real estate agent, I guess one of the first things people would do is just type your name in Google and, maybe, get some testimonials.

Monika

That's exactly right.

Scott

That's not the testimonial you wanted to get coming up in Google.

Monika

That's exactly right. As a matter of fact, within that week, if you typed in my name into Google or any search engine, what you would get was about three pages only of that story. There was nothing else. I mean, who goes to the fourth page of search results, right? Nobody does. Especially if a story like this pops up, a customer or client right away goes, "Okay, I'm not gonna go in any further. I just saw what this woman is all about." That's what started happening. Back then, She's A Homewrecker actually had different owners, so it was a little bit of a different format where you could see comments. People still can come in there, but it was more user-friendly, I think, at that time. That's where my family and friends went, "You need to take this down."

I also got to see what people were saying under this story - the comments were quite awful. I always knew that there are people out there that are just mean to other people, but I just didn't know the amount of bad people out there hiding behind their computer screens. I know that there are some people that have issues in their life, and they'll go and they'll be mean online, but I just didn't realize the amount of people that are doing that. The comments were so nasty. My daughter chimed in and said, "This is my mother. No way." Family, friends, and some people were like, "Hey, listen. Even if most of the story is not true, if there's smoke, there must be fire." and I'm like, "No, there's no smoke, there's no fire. This never happened." I knew it was going to start hitting my business. This happened on a Friday, so I had Saturday and Sunday to try to take care of it. By the end of the weekend, I had no clue where to go with it.

Scott

When all this was happening in the beginning, did you have any suspicions at all about who might actually have done this?

Monika

We saw this happened on Friday. So we spent the whole Friday, as I told you, kind of, trying to figure out how we can stop this firestorm that just started. The next couple of days were really just trying to figure out who that could be. My first very first guess was that it was probably somebody in my industry. In real estate, usually, on the opposite sides of a transaction, sometimes there are issues and you end up fighting for your clients. As much as we might get in conflict with somebody, at the end of it, when that closes, everybody's happy and "It was very nice working with you. Hopefully, we'll do it again," but not everybody can let go of a conflict or understand that this is really a job you do for your client. It's not personal. So my biggest guess was, "Okay, I must have really pissed somebody off, like, really bad." So I ended up looking.

I'm one of those people that hoards the emails for, like, ever. I have every email ever written. So I thought, "Well, that's a great opportunity for me to look through the emails and try to match up the timeline." When I potentially had a conflict - something that actually pops into my mind - maybe I got in a fight with somebody. There was one example I had where I was just really better at writing contracts than the other person and that cost commission to the agent, but my job was to protect my clients and get their money back. So I thought, "Well, if he had to pay that up and it was quite a few thousand dollars." I looked at the timeline of it when that happened and I was going, "It just doesn't match up." So we looked at everybody around us. When I say

"Everybody", I remember sitting out on the deck and going, "You don't think kids did it, do you?" It's funny how your mind works.

I was like, "Well, my daughter's a pretty strong-headed person. She's very opinionated." I thought maybe she just wrote something that she thought she could take down, but then she couldn't, and we would be, like, "Nahhh, so that's not gonna happen." But if there was ever a case, then we probably would have dealt with it within our family. Obviously, we wouldn't sue our kid - there was really no reason for it. Our children very much love coming home and spending time with us, and we really don't have conflicts. I mean, we'll argue just like any other family, but we know they love us. So we went through the emails and I thought, "Okay. Not family. Not friends." At that point, everybody got the message on Facebook and there were a couple of people that would call more often than others being concerned saying, "Okay, where are you at? What's happening?" and I was going, "Maybe they're not really concerned for me. They're just trying to find out where I'm at in the process or do I suspect." Then all of a sudden, your mind is suspicious of everything. I was pretty much sure that it must be related to my job in the real estate world.

My husband sometimes has conflicts at work as well and he would, maybe, have one person he was suspicious of. The whole idea behind it is you don't know who did it. You can take a guess, but you're just walking around, looking at everybody walking into the office, looking at all your colleagues, and going, "Was it you? Maybe it's not because of conflict. Maybe it's because somebody was jealous." We had this huge party that year and everybody celebrated with us. We had a great family. At that point, I was successful in real estate and my husband is successful in his career. Maybe some people just do it because they're jealous." So since we can't take this down ourselves, I think we need to find out, "How do we go after this website? How do we find out who did that? Who wrote that? Was it a website that just picked me randomly? Maybe it's not even somebody. Maybe those websites just generate content."

Scott

So at that point, you have to find an attorney, but that seems like it would be, kind of, a specialized area of law. How do you decide who to use to represent you to solve this thing?

Monika

We actually didn't know who to use. If you actually go and search for attorneys to clean your reputation, slander, or any of that sort, and taking on a huge website like that, there wasn't such a thing, at least in our area. We talked to a couple of attorneys and they were like, "Yeah, not touching it." This is how we found out about Section 230 of Communication Act of 1996 that protects those websites. They said, "How the hell am I gonna steal this website? It's impossible." I said, "Well, can you at least tell me who did it? I gotta figure out who did this. What if I'm talking to this person every day and I don't know?" We finally got this guy and met him in my office. He said, "Okay, fine." He was a patent attorney. He, like, did cases for patents. I say, "Will you take us on?" He went, "I'm just crazy enough to try to do this."

Scott

That doesn't sound like it inspires a lot of confidence. "Sure, let's give it a try. What do we got to lose?"

Monika

"Let's figure this out." So for the next couple of months, we really worked hard on trying to figure out what is there in the law that we can actually file a lawsuit just to say that this website

slandered me, they're protected by Section 230, and that doesn't get us anywhere. Think about it this way - the website's server is actually in a different state. If I go to a state court and we send an order to them or subpoena in a different state, they don't have to comply, so we figured out that our only option would be to go to federal court. The blessing in disguise, when you look back at it, is that person used my professional photo - I own the copyright to that file - because she used something out of Facebook. So she actually use my professional photo. Because I own the copyright, we're able to basically sue, at that point, John Doe or Jane Doe - because we didn't know who that was for copyright infringement. So there are a few things we filed a lawsuit with - copyright infringement, slander, interference with business, and emotional distress - we'll talk about it but there was a lot of emotional distress with this whole case.

As soon as we filed, we found out we were blazing a trail here. When we first talked to that attorney, I said, "Okay, give me the worst case scenario. How much is this gonna cost me?" He said, "It's gonna be somewhere between \$35,000 to \$95,000 depending how quickly we can go through it." I was like, "\$35,000 is bad enough. \$95,000 is like a house for some people." And I cried. I thought, "Okay, let's just hope it's somewhere closer to the 35 than the 95. Let's just be hopeful." I gotta find out. There is value to your sanity. I think I'm a person that always had a very kind of an underlying ongoing little bit of depression. I had some mental illnesses in my family. I think I always had that low grade depression throughout my whole life, but I was always okay with it - not bad enough to take pills - but that thing put me in this downward spiral.

After we filed the lawsuit and tried dealing with comments online, as soon as the lawsuit was filed, the news started calling. I didn't know if I want it to be on the news because I was like, "Oh my God. Now everybody is gonna point a finger at me." But realizing how bad my reputation was online, I thought, "Well, maybe now, I get to speak. Maybe now, my voice will be heard." So I was like, "Okay, let's just do it" Because it was the first case of its kind filed over here, I thought, "Okay, maybe somebody will know something. Maybe this person who wrote it told somebody and that person will turn them in. Maybe this is gonna be positive. Maybe now there's gonna be something that is contrary to the story online - something that tells people this is not true." So we decided to do an interview with a local news station, and that was the first story that ran and it started to kind of push the content on the search results down, but not enough - it was still there. We went from there.

In the meantime, I was struggling emotionally and financially at that point because my business went down. It was just immediate. I had a lot of listings - they dropped off - and people were always like, "Well, we just decided not to sell right now." I live in an area that is very conservative and this is a huge NO. People don't know if it's true or not. They just go, "Well, just in case, I don't want to have anything to do with a person like that." Emotionally, I was not doing well at all, so I ended up actually reaching out for some help. I was like, "Okay, now I'm really depressed. This is never gonna go away." I think my biggest surprise was fixing this takes so long. You filed a lawsuit in the courthouse and in court and you think they're gonna take immediate action, but they don't. You wait months and months and months for one word from the court. Finally, it was almost a year since this happened when I decided, "I need to go get some help. I'm just not handling this well any longer." I had many days where I probably drank way too much wine, but I feel good afterwards. I was experiencing not just shame and depression, but also anger. I was becoming a really angry person. When you get angry, who do you bite at? You bite at the people who are closest to you.

(Sad pause)

I'm sorry, I know it's been a long time. When I look back at my behavior, at that point, of biting back at anything that's close to me and not being a nice person, I feel bad because I feel like it's not just me who's hurt in this - it's my whole family that's hurt. We stuck together - don't get me wrong. I mean, my husband supported me throughout the whole ordeal but, somehow, I have too much to drink and bite back. That was really a downtrend for me, so I decided to reach out for some help for my depression at that point. Actually, I was in the psychiatrist's office because, obviously, I needed medication to just, kind of, get out of this hole I was in.

I was actually at his office in the waiting room when I received a phone call from the news anchor, saying, "The person that wrote this about me - I just called her." I said, "What??" She said, "I know her name." I thought I was gonna just pass out. I was like, "Are you serious? Do I know her?" She gave me the name and I was like, "I don't know who that is. Who is this person?" I was flabbergasted. There I was sitting finally at the psychiatrist's office trying to get some help, and that's the day I get the answer to my question.

That opened up a whole new set of questions. "What happened? Why?" Well, I found out why. Her name was Mollie Rosenblum. At the time when she wrote that about me, Mollie Rosenblum was a meth addict and drug dealer. She was charged with kidnapping and assault. She was facing 20 years in prison. What happened was that there was an article. This article hits online in 2015, but she actually wrote that in 2014. It just sat in a deleted post folder on that website that whole year because the original owner of the website did not believe her story. So, she puts it in a "Natural" folder or "Don't believe it", or whatever she named it. Then, in 2015, that website changed ownership and they did a full release on all those files. That's how that story hit.

Scott

So when you saw that story went live on the She's A Homewrecker website, Mollie Rosenblum had actually submitted that story to the website a whole year before.

Monika

That's right. She actually called the news anchor and said, "Oh, my god. Yeah, I wrote that about that lady. I completely forgot about her." Once we actually subpoenaed that website and saw the timeline, we knew she submitted that in, I think, July of 2014. That story didn't hit until September 2015. That's because of the ownership change.

Scott

This all started because of a post that a local news station had on their Facebook page about a teenage girl visiting Auschwitz.

Monika

Yes.

Scott

What was that?

Monika

They actually had a news article - it was a big story - about a teenager in Alabama that went to visit Auschwitz. She took a selfie and she was smiling in the selfie. As everybody knows, there are a bunch of keyboard warriors out there. They don't look at the surrounding story or the content of the picture. They just went, "Oh my gosh. She's at Auschwitz and she's smiling." As I've said before, I'm originally from Poland. I've been to Auschwitz, I think, 5-6 times now with

my kids, my husband, and friends. I know exactly where she's standing - it's almost like a reception area. The background story was that her father was a huge World War 2 buff - they both were. They always wanted to go visit all the significant places. Well, her father died from cancer, so she completed the trip herself. My understanding was she was standing there taking selfies and saying, "Hey, Dad. I made it."

She was a teenager. She was 18 years old. I've raised teenagers. Yes, this should have never actually gone public, but I understood what she did at the same time. The fact that she posted on social media at 18 and did not think through - not many teenagers think about a lot of things, so I know they do really stupid stuff— obviously, in the comment section under the story, Mollie was commenting saying, "This is a somber place." Then she was calling her every name in the book and I was going, "She's 18 years old!" So I wrote and I said, "Hey, listen. Teenagers do really stupid stuff. There's no need to be calling her all these names." Then, of course, she said, "It's not like you have Jewish descent. You have no clue." I'm like, "Auschwitz doesn't belong just to Jewish people. It belongs to everybody who died there. I've been there. There's the saying about 'Let's not forget about what this is - to remember so that it can never be repeated.' It's written in 17 languages. Auschwitz belongs to the whole world so that nobody can ever forget. This is history of my country. Nobody ever thinks that this is a somber place." So, in many ways, I argued with her.

Well, she didn't take that very well. She said, "Oh, yeah. That bitch. I'm gonna let her have it." That night, she went and researched. It's not that hard to find me online. I mean, I'm a realtor. My business depends on me being visible online. She found out where I work, pulled up my pictures, and all my contact information. She said that night, she wrote it in a couple of hours and she forgot all about it. That's how she started all of this.

Scott

A conflict in some comments about a Facebook picture.

Monika

Exactly.

Scott

That's just incredible. This part of the story is kind of amazing to me. The person that posted it on the RE/MAX Facebook page was Ryan Baxter.

Monika

Correct.

Scott

Obviously, he's not Mollie Rosenblum. I didn't realize this but this is kind of a hobby for some people to find these stories that destroy people and then exacerbate them. Ryan Baxter is the one that posted on RE/MAX page, sent it to all your friends, and did a lot really a lot more damage than what the original post did.

Monika

Yes. Ryan Baxter actually is Hannah Lupian. At that time, I think she was a 23 or 24 year old girl in California. I don't know if she's been scorned, but let's just go ahead and call her Ryan Baxter. We noticed the pattern because, obviously, I was spending hours and hours and hours on the computer trying to figure this whole thing out and see this part of the internet and what I

noticed was when I started searching the name, I could see every single post that Ryan Baxter did and that seemed to be the hobby. Ryan Baxter would take that story, go tell family and friends, and send that to their work trying to destroy their lives and their livelihoods. Yeah, there was a repeated pattern for that kind of person, and there's a lot of them on there.

Scott

This Ryan Baxter is someone who wasn't even involved or never even had a conflict with you...

Monika

Never crossed paths with me at all. I've never crossed paths with Mollie Rosenblum - she's a completely separate third person. She's a complete vigilante and there are a lot of them out there. Later on, I wanted to see how She's A Homewrecker works, so I would actually go there under a false name just to, kind of, see and follow what this person is writing, and there was a repeated pattern. He went after a judge in another state. Maybe that judge has some money to fight such a thing, but this is impossible to fight for little people. But yeah, definitely an online vigilante. He literally wrote to my husband. The message said, "Lookie loo, see what your wife is doing." And he sent the link. We've never had infidelity in our life and in our marriage, but what if we did? What if we went through a really bad time in our lives, got over it, and we're happy family now? Something like this might have my husband question, like, "Oh, my God. Did she do it again?" and it can completely break up a family.

Scott

So you're in your psychiatrist's office when you got the name. Where did you go from there?

Monika

Because her last name is Rosenblum - we actually have a real estate company here with that name - I knew it's a realtor. But as I was talking to the news anchor, she said, "Not related." So I was like, "Okay, so who is this person?" I guess she said, "You wrote something about her or to her on Facebook." and I actually didn't know what it was at that time. Thankfully, Facebook keeps that all. So, as I scrolled back to when that happened, all of a sudden the name pops up. I saw that article by the local news and all the exchange I had with her, and I was like "Son of a gun! Are you serious?! That's what this is about?!" So, now that we had the name, they were trying to depose her and we were basically suing for damages. When we calculated my loss and business, at that point, it was like \$235,000. It was just enormous, maybe even bigger - I can't even remember the figure at this point, but it was quite an amount - we're talking a year.

In any case, my attorneys contacted her right away. At that point, I actually had a second attorney and an attorney that had dealt with something like that in a different state. So I had two attorneys. He was such a pitbull. He was not nice. When he wrote to her, "Okay, that's it. This is what you're getting sued for," and she got served, she completely freaked out. So, at that point, she wrote him an email and said, "If you're gonna sue me— unless you drop this lawsuit, I'm gonna double down and I'm gonna do even more damage to her." So she did. She actually went online under one of the articles about this whole lawsuit and wrote, "Okay, fine. I lied about Monika being a homewrecker. But I gotta tell you, people, she's a neo-Nazi. She's the worst neo-Nazi in our area." I was like, "You gotta be kidding. She hates Jewish people." I thought I was gonna have a heart attack. I was like, "That's even worse!" So she doubled down. No matter what we did, she was just mean.

Scott

Well, the little that you know about this woman at that time is that she doesn't make good decisions.

Monika

Right. Especially being high. Yeah. I didn't know if she said that she was drugged up to the news anchor. She did say that she was drugged up when she wrote it. I did read a few articles about her charges of kidnapping. I guess it was just the drug war - I guess that's what you can call it. Somebody steal drug money from her. She called the guy, tightened him up to a chair, and beat him for 8 hours. He ended up escaping and running around bloody in town half naked. So she got charged with assault. She was facing 20 years in prison. So I was like, "Okay, well, that's a really scary person." To me, that was very scary. So we went for months and months back and forth. She promised she's gonna come to deposition, but she never showed up and cost me a bunch of money, more money.

You have to understand that when you get into a lawsuit, people think, "Okay, it's just filed. It just sits there and doesn't cost you money," but it does. For example, every subpoena cost me \$495. Just now imagine how many subpoenas you have to write. So you would write to this website and say, "Okay, I want a subpoena for this. I want to know the IP address of this person but, first, I'll have to pay so you have to give me information on that person." So you subpoena that. Then, from there, you go to the service provider - another subpoena. It's just multitudes of subpoenas. Then you did the same for Ryan Baxter. Then, you get a subpoena for this website or subpoena for that website, for Facebook.

We were actually provided with her actual submission - what she submitted to She's A Homewrecker. They only posted one picture and it happen to be the professional picture which got me into court. She actually pulled stuff off of my Facebook, so I could see the other 3 pictures she had ready to go over there. Then, they gave me the IP address and the date. That's how I knew this was way back in July of 2014. So, they actually captured all of that. On a side note, this is why they do it. For example - and I tested this myself, believe it or not - they say that you're anonymous on that website. Well, if you're anonymous, how does this website prove to you that they didn't write it? They have to be capturing something, right? So I tested that. I said, "Okay, I can bet you they're capturing the IP addresses. They have to say, 'Okay, this came from this place'." So I went ahead and got one of those Tor browsers which hides your IP address. I went on the website through the Tor browser and they wouldn't let me in because it couldn't capture the IP address. So I called my attorney. I said, "They lied. They have it. They have it because they trying not to give us any information."

Scott

You're kind of a hacker.

Monika

I was like figuring this out.

Scott

Yeah, not many people know about the Tor Browser. It's interesting.

Monika

I've read all about how would people hide it and would the website do it. I think I probably read it somewhere, so I tested it myself. Sure enough, they didn't let me in. If you go on the regular browser, it captures your IP address and boom, they can prove that they have not provided that

content because that's what it is with Section 230 of Communication Act. If you are not the author of that piece then you are not responsible. So we knew that had all the information. I was actually seeing what's happening. No matter what we do, no matter which way we go, which court, or how much money I'm spending, I was not getting anywhere. I mean, eventually, I'm gonna get somewhere, right? I mean, there has to be a decision from the court. But at that point, we're going on almost two years and we just keep on bleeding money, and there's only so much money. I mean, we had been there for 25 years at that point, so we had some savings, but now we're depleting everything.

That's another guilt trip that I had. I knew that I caused that. I made that comment. I put it on Facebook. It's my fault. I put my family through this. Now I'm depleting our savings. It's my fault. You go through all kinds of range of emotions. It's just really difficult. I got to the point where I thought, "They're not getting anywhere" because that's the attorney's job, right? I mean, they're gonna pound that person, "You hurt my clients. So I'm not gonna be nice to you, obviously." I thought, "Well, they're not getting anywhere. I'm just beating them up." So I just said, "I'm gonna contact her. Maybe she'll talk to me. Maybe she can explain to me." So I contacted her through Facebook Messenger and I said, "Hey, Mollie. I don't know what it is that you want for me. Now you're doubling down and writing more lies about me. Why don't we meet? Ask me anything you want to ask me because you actually don't know me." And she agreed. So we ended up meeting.

Scott

How did you arrange that?

Monika

Well, I definitely said that I wanted it in a public place and she actually wanted it in public place. It's funny how you have two people on opposite ends - she's afraid of me and I'm afraid of her. I guess she doesn't like to drive, so I had to go to the town where she lives, which is about 45 minutes from my house. We ended up meeting in a restaurant. It was, like, 10 o'clock in the morning. Of course, my husband parked his car across the street just in case something goes wrong. I guess she had her boyfriend or somebody waiting on the opposite end somewhere. Anyway, I walked in. I already knew what she looks like because I looked her up on Facebook. You couldn't put, I guess, two opposite-looking people across a table, but that doesn't matter - people have different looks, so that doesn't bother me. I guess what bothered me was she had a hammer and sickle tattoo on her forearm. I grew up in a communist country and I was like, "Errrr." But hey, that's what you believe. As far as I was concerned, you can believe anything you want as long as you're not hurting other people.

Scott

When you first saw her at that restaurant - you walked up to each other - what was that exchange like?

Monika

She kind of looked at me with her eyes down. I said, "Hi," and she says, "Hi." Then, we just sat down. We, kind of, sat there for a second in silence. She just looked at me and said, "So you're Nazi?" I said, "No, I'm not. Why would you ever say that?" She said, "Because you grew up in Poland. Y'all killed Jews." I was like, "What?? I grew up in Poland. Polish people hid Jewish people and died for Jewish people. Polish people died in concentration camp. You do know that, right? You do know that Auschwitz was actually created for political and religious Polish leaders." That's how I should start it and they just worked really well. So they moved on to all the

other stuff they did. There was an exchange. I started telling her how I grew up. I saw her tattoo, so I said, "I can say you are communist because you have this tattoo. Why do you believe in that system?" Then, I started telling her what communism really looks like because I grew up and experienced 15 years of it.

So, we started, kind of, an exchange. Then, we started talking about history and the mood, kind of, settled. It's kinda like just talking and getting to know each other. She's actually a really articulate person, very well-spoken, and has an enormous amount of knowledge. She reads a lot of books. I actually felt really bad for the way her life— what kind of turn it took. She grew up in an abusive home. Even for her, I don't know if I want to disclose all the details that happened to her that she told me because that's her business, but she had a quite tough, tough life. Then, she had a husband who basically blew his brains out in front of her and committed suicide in front of her. Then, she turned to drugs and took such a wrong, wrong turn that put her on that path. I feel this weird sense. I feel bad for her. There I was sitting in deep crap right now but I was feeling sorry for her. I think, if anything, it softened me. I started getting my answers to why. A person who's high doesn't remember half of what she did. It's not an excuse, but at least it shows me that this was not somebody who's just a sober, normal person that comes out with a smile on your face and then jabs you in the back.

Scott

Yeah, exactly. I should mention that I reached out to Mollie Rosenblum to get comments to see if she had any input for the story, and I have not heard anything back from her. That's because Mollie's in prison. She's still in prison now.

Monika

Mollie's release date is 2032.

Scott

Oh, boy. Okay.

Monika

What happened was Molly was actually, during that time - we were talking in our last three years - she was working out a deal with us. At the time I met her, she was actually off of meth. She was on methadone. She was trying to clean her life up. She knew she was, at least, facing some time, but she was cutting a really good deal with the prosecutor. She was facing 20. At that point, they're cutting her deal, like, down to 4 years or something like that. She knew that she couldn't do cold turkey in prison, so she decided to get clean herself first with methadone - with help - before she faces the short time in prison. Then, what ended up happening is she lapsed, got on meth, actually stabbed somebody - her boyfriend, I believe - and she was high again. Then, that deal just went poof and she got the 20.

Scott

So what was the outcome of your meeting with her?

Monika

We talked for 4 hours, actually - a really long time. My husband was like, "Are you alive in there?" At the end of it, she actually apologized to me. She said, "If I knew what kind of person you were at that time when I had this exchange with you, I would have never written that." I think that's a really great lesson for people. There's no emotion attached to the written words. You actually don't exactly know what that person means. So she apologized to me. She said she

was very, very sorry not only for what she put me through but also my family and my kids. She mostly felt horrible about the fact that I had to lay off a couple of people - I just had to let them go because I just didn't have that income. She said, "Is there anything I can do? I'm gonna take all of this off from online. I'm gonna delete every single thing I wrote." She said to me that she's going to take everything - every single comment she made, every story she wrote - offline. I was standing there and saying, "Thank you." I already knew she can't. Even though you're the author of the story, you can't take it down. I think that's another thing that should change. If the story is not valid anymore or if you really truly lie, you should be able to say, "Listen, I lied. Can I please take this down?" But you can't do it. I already knew she couldn't, but I did tell her, "Mollie, here's what you can do for me. Instead of continuously paying attorneys and the court and going back and forth, if you provide me with an affidavit actually telling the court that you lied, he will probably cut out nine months of legal battle for me and that will save me money, and she agreed to do so. My attorneys prepared the affidavit. I have to tell you- when I told them that I'm going to meet with her, oh my gosh, all hell broke loose.

Scott

They didn't want you to do that, huh?

Monika

"No, why would you do that? Don't do that." I was like, "No, you've tried everything you can do. Maybe if she just gets to know me - I'm a really nice person - maybe she'll like me or maybe she'll hate me. I don't know. But I might as well give it a try." They were "Oh my gosh!" I got yelled at. It's like, "If you mess this up, I'm gonna fire you." I was like, "Okay." So she actually ended up meeting with me. I think, a few days later, once I had the affidavit where she admitted to everything, I actually went to the bank with her because of notary public - we headed to notary public - and she signed it all off. I remember driving back from the bank when she did it all and I think that was the first time that I could see the light at the end of the tunnel not only because she signed off on it, but because now she knew me. Now, I knew that I don't have to fear as much that she's gonna write something and that she understood who I was. I'm not saying that if she doesn't get high, she's not gonna remember, get angry at me, and do it all over again. I don't know. I was kind of hoping this is gonna be the end of it, at least from her side. So I started to see the end of the tunnel. So we did that and then submitted it all to court. That took another 9 months before we got the the answer from court. I went on every single count. The actual opinion of the judge - it was a female judge - kind of made me feel really good because she did say how much I suffered, how outrageous this was, so it's a confirmation for me. At that point, once the lawsuit went through, some other people from the news contacted me and they did the update on that, including the local news people. I wanted people to know this confirmation. Yes, it took me over 3 years to do it, but I was innocent. So there was no smoke and there was no fire.

Scott

Of course, you want all of that to be public because every news report is another entry in Google for when somebody does a search.

Monika

Right, yeah. One of the reasons that is also so important is because here we go to another stage of it. Now, I have this federal court order that says not only I've been awarded damages but now I have this court order that says, "Hey, Google and all search engines, de-index this." The answer from Google was - in so many words, I'm paraphrasing - "Well, we're gonna take a look at it and see if we accept this federal court order or not. We had too many fake ones come

through, so we can't promise we're gonna do it." So I was still at standstill. This has not been acknowledged by Google yet. They're literally listening. They're powerful enough. They're not listening to court orders. So at that point, that story still lives online. It's still out there. If you search enough, you'll find it. Some people still look at it. She's A Homewrecker– the story on the actual website is not there anymore. Instead, there's a legal notice from my attorney that's been replaced. They took that down, but it didn't matter because it's syndicated to such nasty websites and– Oh my god, there's this one story out there, I think, in something like dontdatemyex.com or some weird website like that where somebody wrote a whole new story about how this was the person that I supposedly had sex with and I'm gonna prove to you that I really did have sex with her. She has this mark on here and talking about genitalia and all. I got to about 1/3 of it. I looked at my husband and I said, "I can't even read it. It's just awful. Very, very graphic." So those stories are out there, but I think a lot of positive contents have pushed all of them down and I'm really grateful for that especially when you have these huge search engine corporations like Google that are just not helpful. They're just way too powerful.

Scott

I know there was one site where it was viewed so many times called Bad Biz Report. They kind of they ignored the court order as well, but it looks like - when I did some research - that whole site is down now, apparently.

Monika?

It is?

Scott

I couldn't find it.

Monika

Oh, I'll have to look. I mean, it's been a few months since I looked. The little introduction to that website said, "American lawyers make us laugh. We were never gonna take this down. Good luck to you." That's pretty much an attitude of the majority of these websites, but if they're down, I'd be very happy. I know that they had that website for sale for a while. I know their servers are outside the United States, so there's no even way for me to do anything about it. I knew they said that they would accept an offer to purchase them. I was like, "Man, if I can just raise enough money to purchase it and shut it down, that would be really helpful." Hopefully, the word is spreading and people start canceling them with cancel culture these days. They're literally parasites because they feed and make money from ruining people's lives.

Scott

It looks like there's no way. There's no solution.

Monika

That's right. Because it's so overwhelming. I mean, let's say you have mental issues or emotional issues, it puts you in that hall - I can bet you that - of suicides. I mean, at that point, I have heard from so many people not just from United States but from all over the world. For example, one young lady has two children and she was exposed. She was a teacher and she was exposed on the website like, "Watch out for the pedophile or something like that." She was named that she was a teacher and she was a pedophile so, of course, you have vigilantes that then send this to her work place, which is school. And you tell me if the school is trying to figure out whether or not she actually did it. No, they're gonna protect the kids. They just fired her. She couldn't find a job. She said, "I think the world is better off without me. I am on the verge of just

ending it all. I just can't do it anymore." Then, now, think about how is a teacher on a teacher's salary is going to go ahead and spend that amount of money. Justice, again, is not equal. In this case, since this is not a criminal offense, there's only justice for those who have the money to go through a lawsuit. We wiped ourselves out, but we had it to begin with. For a teacher or single mom who has been slapped, shamed and slandered online, that was not true. There is no way you can even get started in this loss. You might as well— I mean, like I said, 1 subpoena is \$495. Now, you have an attorney and each is, like, \$300 an hour. When people have no funds, there's no path for them to get their justice.

Scott

At that point, I would think that some people would say, "Well, I'm just going to change my name and be a new person."

Monika

I thought about that, actually, but then I got angry. I was like, "Oh my god, it's mine. It's my name. I'm not changing my name. Y'all might as well just kill my business altogether. It went down 50% but I might as well just kill it all because if I change my name, I just have to start over. Then, I thought, "This is my name. How many Monika's are out there?" At the very end of it, like I said, we ended up winning. I believe we got awarded \$219,000. My case did not qualify to get my attorney fees back or anything else that I spent - it was only the amount I lost in my business, which was that \$219,000. But like you said, to begin with, if they have zero money, then you're not getting any money. I mean, I have the judgment and federal judgment you can't go bankrupt on, so this will hang over her head forever. Maybe someday she will win that lotto, but not until 2032. But in any case, I'm never gonna see a penny from it since this happened. It has been five years. I have rebuilt my business at this point. I think that those online positive stories definitely help that content goes down. I've had instances where I have a new client, and we'll start laughing about something and then they go, "Hey, how are you dealing with social media? I've heard that you had some case going on." I said, "Oh, you googled my name." It comes up now, but because there's another story that they can refer to and say, "Oh, this lady won. This is untrue." I don't want to say it's positive because it's probably the wrong word to use to say, "Now, it's more positive." because that was a negative thing that happened to me. But because there's something to offset it, people look at it in a more positive way.

Scott

They see the whole story rather than just that one.

Monika

Yeah, exactly.

Scott

Do you still comment on controversial Facebook posts?

Monika

I kind of go back and forth not controversial subjects. I definitely think twice and think very hard about what I'm writing. On the opposite end, I get angry that I have to do that. Why can't I express my opinion? I have just as much right to First Amendment as anybody else out there. But because of my lawsuit, I also understand the First Amendment comes - if you decide to use it - with consequences. I definitely don't want to find myself again in the situation. Would I do something different? Yes, I would not comment. I mean, that's all I can say. That comment? Do I regret it? Yes, I regret it. I do still want to be able to express my opinion. I do want to make

comments under some new stories especially in this environment today where everybody's on the edge. I'm like, "Just stay away from that."

Scott

It's definitely worse now than it was a few years ago.

Monika

Yes. I still talk about it. Yes, I want to protect everybody's First Amendment right but please be careful. Please be careful because what happened to me happens more often. The only reason you know about me is because I fought it and I had the means to fight it, but 99% of people have no means to fight it. They are silent victims that you'll never hear about, and there are tens of thousands of them.

Scott

One thing that What Was That Like listeners like to do is talk about the podcast – with other listeners. And that's what happens in our private Facebook group! In fact, some of the guests who have told their story on this podcast are in that group as well. You can join in those discussions, or you can just be a lurker if you want. Either way is okay. It's at WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

And – Raw Audio episode 7 is now live. The Raw Audio episodes are BONUS episodes that include actual 911 audio, and the story about what happened on that call. In this episode –

A live shooter at a restaurant

Woman 1

He's still shooting. I'm hearing shots over the phone.

Scott

A worker at a recycling plant gets into trouble with a baler machine

911 Operator

Are you there by yourself, sir?

Recycling plant worker

No, sir, I'm not, but no one's hearing me. I'm really losing blood, sir. I'm gonna die.

Scott

And a crowd of people try to move a car that's stuck on the railroad track.

Man

He's trapped in the vehicle.

911 Operator

Okay, then everybody else needs to get away from it. There's a train coming.

Scott

You can get access to Raw Audio 7 – and all of the previous and future bonus episodes – by becoming a supporter of this podcast for just \$5 a month. Sign up at WhatWasThatLike.com/support.

And I want to say thanks to all of you who completed the 2020 What Was That Like Listener Survey. You gave me a TON of great information, suggestions and a lot of compliments, which I really appreciate. In fact, one of the suggestions was to change the opener for the show, and maybe you noticed – this episode has a whole new opening sequence. Let me know what you think of that. And congratulations to Maria, she was one of the ones who completed the survey, and she won the drawing for the \$50 Amazon gift card.

And now, I'll leave you with true crime podcast host Nina Innsted, as she tells you about her show, called *Already Gone*. And I'll see you again in 2 weeks!

Nina

Murder, missing persons, unsolved Mysteries– *Already Gone* explores lesser-known cases from Michigan and the Great Lakes region. I'm Nina Innsted, the voice behind the “*Already Gone*” podcast. Join me for an in depth look at stories that will have you looking over your shoulder and locking the doors at night. Find “*Already Gone*” on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, or your favorite podcatcher.