

Episode 123: Alice's brother went missing

Content warning – this episode includes discussion of self-harm, addiction, and suicide.

Have you ever had to deal with the problem of someone you know, like a family member or a friend, who's gone missing?

There's this weird mixture of emotions, like frustration, because you just don't know where this person is. And it's also scary, because you don't know what happened.

My mom got a little taste of what that's like years ago. And the person that was missing was me. I was 5 years old, and it was my very first day of school. Personally, I don't remember that this happened. But my mom does.

Scott's mom

So it was your first day of school, going to kindergarten. You were about five. We knew what time the bus was going to bring you back. We knew the bus driver would let you off in front of our house. So we were waiting with a camera in hand to get your picture coming off the bus. We were so excited. The bus came down the road. Of course, we were at the end of the driveway waiting. The bus driver said, "Your little boy is not on my bus."

Scott

So when the bus driver says, "Sorry, I don't know where your kid is, but I don't have him" how does a parent even react to that?

Scott's mom

We were shocked because you should have been on that bus. You had never ridden the school bus before because you were five. It was your first day of school. So we went into the house and called the principal, and the principal said that he would look into it. He would ask questions to different people. He would look into it and find out where you were. So he found that you made a friend on the first day of school, and that little boy invited you to his house after school to play with his toys at his house.

Scott

Yeah, that kind of sounds like me. Sorry mom, I'm just too busy to come home after school this afternoon! But I did catch a ride home later.

Scott's mom

The principal went over there and picked you up and brought you home.

Scott

And the next day, I made sure to get on the right bus home.

Scott's mom

On the second day, we were out at the end of the driveway watching for the bus. The bus stopped, you got off and came around in front of the bus, and we took a lot of pictures. I have those pictures to remind me of that horrible day when my 5-year-old was missing.

Scott

My mom was only 26 years old at the time, so I can imagine the stress and worry she felt during that time when she didn't know where I was. And the relief when she saw me again, just a short time later.

But not all missing person stories are resolved that quickly or that easily.

The story you're about to hear is from Alice, and it's about the time when her brother, Jake, disappeared. Their whole family was worried, and they reported Jake to the police as a missing person.

But eventually even the police gave up looking for Jake, and Alice knew it was up to her and the rest of the family to find him.

Scott

Before this happened, had you had any experience at all with searching for a missing person?

Alice

None. No experience besides what you see on the news or on TV.

Scott

Just hearing about other missing people, sometimes - right?

Alice

Yes

Scott

Okay. You grew up with Jake as your younger brother. Who else was in the family? What other siblings did you have?

Alice

I have a twin sister. We're the oldest. We have a brother, and then Jake, and then a younger sister. So, there are five of us. When our parents divorced, my twin sister and I moved in with our grandparents. The others, kind of, bounced around, initially, moving with our mom, but they kind of had a chaotic— we all had a chaotic childhood.

Scott

Where did you grow up? Where was this?

Alice

It was a very small town in Utah - very rural with no stoplights. It was a very small, religious community.

Scott

Can you talk about the time, several years ago, when Jake came to live with you and your husband?

Alice

I had been married, maybe, two years at that point, and I just had my first baby. Actually, I was talking to Jake on the phone. He was an alcoholic. He had his first drink when he was about 9 years old. He said he became hooked immediately and he chased that sense of - I don't know - I guess, trying to evade his feelings for his whole life. Anyway, he started using drugs and drinking. He was talking to me about just wanting to get clean. So, on a whim, we invited him to come and live with us. I mean, it was a big risk - we had a new little baby - but we listened and he set some goals. He wanted to get clean. We wanted to help him start his education, get a job, and find some direction in his life, and he agreed. We kind of set up, maybe, like, a rehab environment where we had strict rules. He wanted to quit smoking and quit drinking, so we require 100% abstinence from those things. God was important to him, so he wanted to establish a relationship with God. He would attend and participate in church. Anyway, we had a lot of strict rules that he had to follow. If he broke any of those rules, then it was an opportunity lost. Anyway, he excelled. He was successful. He started working for my husband - he was really happy he was. It was a really good experience for him. My baby was probably one of the most profound experiences for him during that time because- I don't know. Holding a baby- They just look at you with so much innocence and love that, I think, maybe, for the first time in his life, he just really experienced a sense of truly being loved.

Scott

Yeah, when a baby looks at you, there's no judgment at all.

Alice

No. There's no judgment. It's just pure joy looking into a little baby's eyes.

Scott

It sounds like the phrase, "Cold turkey." Would that apply here to him?

Alice

Yes. Before he came, we had established a therapist, a psychiatrist, and a doctor. In fact, I even met with those people before he moved in with me, and asked them questions and for advice. So we had some help in deciding those things. It was cold turkey, and he did it. It was impressive. I mean, I was very amazed.

Scott

He had to be kind of excited about his life turning around at that point.

Alice

He was excited about it turning around. I think he was proud of himself. I think he surprised himself. He was amazing. Drugs and alcohol just tormented him.

Scott

Was he able to maintain that?

Alice

He stayed clean for the time that he lived with me and for, I think, about 3 years afterward. He stayed clean. He ended up even doing some missionary service for the church that he was attending. So he did stay clean for about 3 years. Once he started using again, then it's just a spiral of repetitive behavior. I mean, by then, I had 2 kids, so we just, sort of- I wouldn't say cut ties because I was in constant contact with him, but I definitely didn't want any drugs around my

baby. I just felt protecting them from his choices was more important than inviting him into my home, in my life, which is a hard choice to make when you love somebody.

Scott

Right. Yeah. Your brother or your children...?

Alice

Yeah, it's just heartbreaking.

Scott

Considering the success that he had before when he came to live with you, did you think at all about saying, "Hey, come back. Let's do it again."?

Alice

No. I mean, initially, after about 3 years, he was going back to school. He completed his missionary service. When he moved back, we did offer him to come home and stay with us and go to school. We encouraged him to not go back to the previous environment where he was comfortable using drugs and hanging out with his old friends. For those who also drink or use drugs, I think it's not a good idea to go back into that environment, but he chose to do that for a couple of weeks and he just immediately reverted back to those behaviors. So it just was a quick switch.

Scott

You got a text message from Jake on a Friday...

Alice

Yes. On a Friday, I got a bizarre text from Jake where he said something along the lines of praying for him, he lost his leg. He can't live without his leg. To me, it was nonsense. I just thought, "Oh, here we go. Again, another spiral. I am not getting involved." I quickly deleted the text. It was this history of - I don't know - bizarre behavior in and out of jail. At some point, over the years, I just decided to stop getting involved and ignored it all. It was too much drama for me and my life. On that Friday, I deleted the text, although I do remember thinking, "I wonder what he feels the next day or whatever when he sobers up, checks his phone, and nobody responds to him." Everybody has just written him off. I wonder if he's embarrassed. I wonder if it makes him feel sad or if he thinks, "Good. Everyone just ignored me." I wonder if I just told him, "I love him," what would that do? It wouldn't cause any harm, I'm sure. But ultimately, I just decided, "No, I'm not getting involved." So I just deleted the text and moved on with my life.

Mother's Day was coming up. I was a mother, so it was a day about me and I did not want his drama. So on Mother's Day, my mom - I can't remember if she called me or if she just texted me - I talked to her and she said, "Your brother is missing. Nobody has heard from him since Friday." They were a little concerned. Jake was, like I said, in and out of rehabs and jail. He often would even call the police on himself, so they would come, pick him up, and put him in jail to give him time to sober up, but he always got in touch with somebody the next day. He was really good about checking in, especially with my mom. They had a very codependent relationship. He did good at not disappearing, so a couple of days was a little bizarre to not be heard from him. He was also actually posting on Facebook. He was constantly sharing things on his social media. There was no activity either on Facebook, which was a little disconcerting to everybody because he's an addict who can't resist putting their phone down for even 10 or 20

minutes and constantly posting. Going off 2 days would take a whole lot of self-control that maybe he didn't have.

Scott

When was the last time anyone communicated with him?

Alice

On that Friday when I got a text that I deleted, he had an explosive phone conversation with my dad. Jake had been working. He got a job as a farmhand. So, he'd been working on this farm fairly regularly. I think he had an agreement with our dad that my dad would supply, every day, a dose of methadone - I think it's called - so that he could- he was trying to get off of opiates, from my understanding.

Scott

Methadone is, kind of, what you take when you're trying to get off of actual methamphetamine...

Alice

Yeah, meth was definitely his drug of choice, although he used anything and everything he could. But yes, he was taking methadone to try to keep his job and live a stable life. So, my dad, I believe, was supplying him with his dose of methadone every day because Jake couldn't handle it on his own. They had an explosive argument that same day and Jake said to my dad- I can't remember exactly what the argument was about. I don't think I really ever knew all of the details. At some point, Jake said, "You know what this means, don't you?" My dad said, "Yes, I know what this means, and that scares me for you." And the call abruptly ended. He hung up angry. Jake had made threats like that before, so my dad really just left it alone. It was just another kind of threat of self-harm, but that was something Jake used often to manipulate us - well, at least what we judged him to be - to get what he needed and wanted. That was the last time anyone had spoken to him as far as I knew. My dad didn't call anybody or report it. The farmer that Jake was working for called the police because Jake didn't show up to work - I believe it was on Friday evening. By Saturday morning, a red 4-wheeler was missing. Jake was also not at work. So the farmer was furious. He thought Jake took off with his 4-wheeler and ditched him to meet his druggie friends...

Scott

Which was not an unreasonable assumption, right?

Alice

No. So he reported that as stolen. That's how the police got involved and found out about the conversation with my dad. Otherwise, nobody had seen when he last turned.

Scott

When he said to your dad, "You know what this means?" Your dad knew what it meant?

Alice

Yes.

Scott

The implication there was suicide?

Alice

Yes, I believe the implication there was suicide. Jake had struggled with self-harm. He cut himself often. So, yes, he threatened suicide. Often, in fact, I always remember believing that, someday, Jake was going to end up hurting himself. My siblings and I had conversations where we would just hope Jake ended up in jail or prison or he was going to end up dead.

Scott

You mentioned that you, kind of, saw this as part of what you called "The cycle."

Alice

Yes.

Scott

Has this happened before? What are you referring to as "The cycle"?

Alice

The cycle, I think, is manipulation. Jake was angry. He. I think he was hurting inside. He had a difficult life. So he just tried to avoid his feelings. He would start using again. Then, when he was using, I guess he would manipulate or threaten to hurt himself - anything he could - to get away with whatever he needed to feed his addiction. I think he needed more methadone. I think he wanted money. Sometimes, I think he even wanted attention. So, I guess the cycle was just destructive behavior and manipulative communication. It just always made me feel tricked like we were gonna get involved in feeding his addiction - nobody wanted to be responsible for that. He would get stuck in his choices. He would be so hooked on drugs that he needed a way out. So I guess that part of the cycle is either he would end up just wanting to hurt or kill himself or get locked up.

Scott

I've heard that people who are sometimes suicidal don't really want to die - they just want the pain to go away.

Alice

Yes, I've heard that too. I think that must have been true for Jake because he did threaten suicide often. He also hurt himself. Often, he cut himself. I think he wanted the pain to go away. He had threatened so many times, but he didn't die. So I think that was absolutely true for him.

Scott

At what point did you realize Something's definitely wrong?

Alice

Sunday - that was Mother's Day. In the back of my mind, I knew. I don't know, I just had a feeling that something was different this time. I was annoyed because it was interfering with my day, which makes me feel very selfish. That day, I guess I was just being selfish. I just thought, "Something's wrong. The fact that he wasn't posting on Facebook is really what made me think, 'He didn't have enough self-control to just step away like that.'" By Monday, my sister and I - we were split - started talking about it immediately. She must have felt too that something was not right. So, by Monday, we hadn't heard anything. The police posted a missing person, kind of, announcement on their Facebook, asking if anyone has seen him to call. At that point, I thought, "Okay, this may be serious." So, by Monday, I knew something was very wrong.

Scott

What did you do at that point? I mean, you think he's missing, but what was your plan of action?

Alice

Well, yeah. I mean, when somebody goes missing, like I said, you see it on the news and on TV, but where do you even start? I mean, the world is a big place. I mean, we just really started. We were frantic. I guess we started sharing the post that the police put up for a missing person, and we printed it into posters. We just really started guessing and doing everything we can, which really started with the missing person posters. My husband and I decided, "Well, let's drive to that little town where he went missing. Maybe we can talk to the police. Maybe we can drive to the farm and talk to the farmer." We had so many questions. At that point, I didn't know about the conversation he had with my dad or anything. All I knew was I had a bizarre text, my mom said he was missing and then the police were apparently involved. My husband was not really on board - he thought it was just drama and that I was just getting myself into a mess again - but I did convince him to drive. It took us about 4 hours to drive to that town.

Scott

Oh, so it wasn't, like, the next town over. It was a drive.

Alice

Oh, yeah. We didn't live there where he was living. So we had to drive to the farm. The farmers showed us the little cabin that Jake was staying in the night before, at least, Jake had been angry. He tipped the fridge over. He had thrown food and things all over the wall. The whole little cabin was just destroyed. It was a mess.

Scott

It's no wonder he was mad then.

Alice

Yeah, he was very angry.

Scott

All of that, on top of the stolen 4-wheeler.

Alice

Yes, yeah. The farmer was very upset.

Scott

So logistically, this seems kind of difficult. I mean, he was 4 hours away from you. You can't just move there and continue to look for him.

Alice

No. I mean, Jake was kind of transient. He didn't live anywhere. This farm that he was working on— he would stay in a cabin that was an Airbnb. If nobody had it reserved, then he would stay there. Otherwise, I think he would just sleep in the mountains. He would just take a sleeping bag and find somewhere to sleep for the night. The 4-wheeler was missing, but nobody even knew what direction he went in. I think my brother thought he went to Oregon for some reason or that he was going to make his way to his house to visit him. He wasn't worried. So, logistically, yeah, it was hard to know where to start. We thought, "Do we just go look for him? Where do we go look? We went to the farm. Where do we go from there? There are mountains in the West.

There are mountains on the east side. So, as far as logistics, I mean, it was just like throwing a dart in the dark - we had no idea where to begin.

Scott

And were the police actively searching for him as well?

Alice

The police said that, initially, in the first few days, they found places where Jake was known to frequent in the mountain. So, they just kind of drove on the main road heading into a canyon and looked around. They did tell us that they spent about 200 man-hours looking around for him, but there was no trace, no evidence that led to anything. After a couple of days, there was nothing else they really felt they could do, so they quit searching for him. That's when we decided we'll search for him on our own. The police weren't really supportive - they did not think it was a good idea for us to be doing it on our own for several reasons.

Scott

Why would they think that it's not good for you to search on your own?

Alice

I think liability. There was private property. I mean, these mountains were very rugged and we were inexperienced. We had never even spent time in those mountains. So they didn't want any other injuries or anybody else going missing, or they would have to go in and rescue them. So I think it was just them not feeling comfortable with our abilities. Of course, if something else had happened, if there was a crime, I mean, you don't want people stumbling onto a crime scene and corrupting any kind of evidence.

Scott

But from your standpoint, I would feel like there's an increased sense of urgency.

Alice

Yes, we started to feel a sense of urgency. In the beginning, after just a few days, by the next weekend, we had driven to the town where he went missing. I mean, the urgency just built. My husband finally realized that this is a bigger deal than he was thinking, so he was on board. When we were driving to the town— it's a small town. My mom had tried talking to the police, but they weren't very receptive to her. I felt like they wouldn't be very receptive to me. I think, maybe, because I'm female in that small town - it's a boys club - I wanted my husband to call and talk to them, but he was uncomfortable, so I just took my phone, dialed the number, gave it to my husband, and said, "Just say hello." I just made him make this phone call. After he talked to them, he realized that it is up to us. My sister lives in Colorado, so she wasn't there at that time, but she was also feeling, like, "Yes, we need to go look for him. I mean, is he injured?" We had no idea what happened. We didn't know. I mean, like I said, he had threatened to hurt himself before, but he had never really followed through with it. So, we just had no idea what happened. The police weren't gonna find Him. If we didn't do something, then nothing was gonna happen - we weren't gonna find him. He would just disappear. So yes, the urgency was building. We weren't sleeping. Ideas were coming to us. Do we just walk into the mountains? I mean, we don't even know how. I mean, we don't have hiking shoes to go on a hike in the mountains. We really had no idea what to do.

Scott

When you say “We”, who is the group that's actively involved in this? Is it you, your husband, and your mom and dad?

Alice

When I say “We”, honestly, I think that's my twin sister. I just kind of speak as if we are one person. So when I say “We”, it's mostly her and I that are talking and deciding what course of action we are going to take. Yes, my husband, too, was involved. He became part of the “We”. I didn't really have a super strong relationship with my parents. Like I said, my sister, and I ended up living with our grandparents - they raised us. I mean, we would communicate occasionally with them, but they lived their own lives. So really, the only thing we had in common at that point was “Jake was missing”. My mom decided on the side of the police that it wasn't worth the liability to go out and search for him - that was asking too much. My dad had surgery, so he wasn't feeling very well. In fact, I think he was pretty sick. He was on crutches and he couldn't get around. Again, he had dealt with this with Jake before so, I think, to him, maybe it wasn't seeming quite as urgent at that point, or he just knew there was nothing he could do. It was in Jake's hands.

Scott

I can imagine from his perspective - having been through this kind of drama before - that “We're gonna go through all this trouble,” and then find out that he's fine somewhere. “Now we all look like fools because we were so worried about him again.”

Alice

Yes. And we got caught up in it all over again. Yeah. I definitely can't judge him for that either because I think he was trying with Jake. But again, he did maybe everything he felt he could do. So our next step is, my husband got on board. He's very logical. Logistically he got out a pen and a paper and he wrote down— I mean, he mapped out. I guess the next step is we decided to search. We were going to start where the police started and left off, and we would branch out from there.

Memorial Day was coming up. By Memorial Day, he would have been missing for almost three weeks. So we thought, “Well, this weekend is perfect. We will have hung posters up. There will be people in the mountains because it's warming up enough for them to get further into the mountain, so people will know to look for him.” So my husband decided. He talked to the police and he found out the areas where they started and left off, and then he just created a plan to branch off from there. Really, my sister and I would talk on the phone and we would decide, “We need to probably have, like, a registration table if we're going to have other people joining us for this search. Or is it just going to be us? If other people come, we're going to have to make sure we have their names, phone numbers, what they're driving, or some information in case they go missing or get injured so that we can keep track of people. It really just unfolded by the hour. I mean, I didn't know anyone who had ever searched for somebody like this before.

Scott

But it sounds like your husband had the sense of organization to put structure to the search.

Alice

Yeah, he was a little more emotionally removed. He stepped in and he was very structured. He's an engineer and he just came together with this plan as far as what to do next and where to start. He found the coordinates for the canyons we were going to start in. He created a post asking for volunteers. But the police did not want us to have very many people going into those

mountains again because of private property and the terrain was very rugged. So yes, Casey was very logical. He laid out the plan. He went to the farm and set up an area where people could come and park their cars. He was clear that the police were not going to be helping us - they weren't supporting our search or participating or providing any resources. He had just all of their rules ready and laid out for us.

The morning of the search, my husband, like I said, went early. He took a camping trailer to that farm and parked it there. Then, the morning of the search, I think there were maybe 30 people who showed up. There weren't too many. We were hoping initially to just have as many as possible - hundreds if we could - because it was such a big area. I don't know how much time you've spent in the mountains in Utah, but it's overwhelmingly big. You look out into this area of just trees, and think, "We have to look behind every one of those trees." And it's impossible. It's huge. It's overwhelming. We had about 30 people show up - I mean, random people who knew Jake or maybe my mom, or some of our friends.

A few of Jake's friends showed up. One of them was a sheep herder. Oh, no, he was a hunter. He came with a spotting scope. He and his wife went to the very top of a mountain and they were going to just use that spotting scope and search through that just as much area as they could cover. So they had coordinates that they were marking off. What we were looking for, really, was a red 4-wheeler - we thought maybe that would be a place to start to find that. So there were also people showing up with horses. They took their horses into the canyons. My husband had 3 designated canyons that we were going to start in, and they would go to the top of that canyon and just work their way down. We had hiking teams. We had horse teams. We had a drone team - they volunteered their technology. They came. There were a lot of just really random people which was very surprising to show up and show how important Jake was to them because, at that point, we just felt like, "Jake was just kind of a forgotten soul. He's in and out of jail. He was a drug addict. He wasn't important enough to even the police to be out there using their resources, although they did do everything that they could."

Scott

That had to be encouraging to have that group of people all wanting to come together.

Alice

It was incredible, yes. We had ATVs and side-by-side 4-wheelers. Everybody just took whatever resource they had and coming together as a combination was just beautiful. I mean, we didn't have any hiking experience or anything, really. We even had to borrow a 4-wheeler to take with us so that we could participate and get into the mountains. Anyway, everyone just took whatever they had. Maybe, as a whole - we couldn't have done it on our own - every person with whatever little resource they had as a combination just turned out to be a beautiful sight. I mean, we all opened up on the first day of the hike, all circled together to get instructions from my husband, and it was just amazing. It was urgent, it was scary, and it was emotional, but it was exciting, too.

Scott

Did you have a sense that, "Wow, this is the day we're gonna find him"?

Alice

Yes. I woke up that morning on the first day of the search. The instant I woke up, I just felt overwhelmed with the idea that, "Today is the day we're going to find Jake." I even felt like I needed to do whatever I could to get up into those mountains because I would find him - if I was

willing to do that. I just knew today was going to be the day, even though we had about 4 days of searching planned. I just knew it was going to be that day. So I felt the urgency. We had one canyon that was missing a hiking team, so my sisters and I decided, "Well, we'll be that hiking team." Then, we just decided to go and get dropped off at the top of the canyon. There were no trails. I mean, we got dropped off at the top of a ravine and we just climbed steep walls. It was muddy and there were giant boulders, and we just had to work our way down the mountain without any real hiking gear. I told my husband, "My sisters and I are going to be on a hiking team." He said, "No, you're not. You can't do that. It's too dangerous." I said, "Well, we are going. You can join us or you can stay here. Either way, we are going to do this." So he told me to get a backpack and get ready to go, and he would join us. I mean, I'm not outdoorsy at all. So I grabbed a backpack, but I didn't put anything in - I just grabbed the backpack. So we showed up at the top.

Scott

Well, you did what he said to do, right?

Alice

Yes. Because he was just thinking, "Well, no."

Scott

It's no wonder he didn't want you to go out there. So you were in a group of 4?

Alice

Yes, my two sisters, myself, and my husband were in a group of four. We took the last, the third Canyon - can't even remember what it's called. We drove our 4-wheeler that we had borrowed to the very top of the canyon, and left it there, and we just started climbing. We got our first step on the ground and our feet just sunk into the mud, and we thought, "Oh, no. This is gonna be a wild day."

Scott

So you started at the top, and you were climbing downhill the whole time. Is that right?

Alice

We were climbing downhill, but we also had to climb up just steep rock walls to get up and around the boulders. It was a deep ravine. We wanted to climb down into it to see if we could see anything. I mean, there were cliffs. Jake could have rolled the 4-wheeler and fallen into the ravine. I mean, yeah, he could have been anywhere. So yes, we started at the top, and we worked our way up and down. The terrain was incredible. It was beautiful, but it was by far one of the hardest things I've ever done - I mean, not only hiking but searching for Jake, too.

Scott

It's not like there was a path for tourists that wanted to hike through here.

Alice

No, there was no trail. The police had kind of already taken the typical trails that they could just drive a truck on to.

Scott

Right. The easy ones.

Alice

Yeah. There was no path. We were really just going dependent on hope and determination to find our brother. We were just willing to do anything and everything. I believe in God, so I really just depended on Him for direction. Even in the 3 weeks leading up to this search, I just really prayed hard for the right ideas to know the right place to look and the places to begin. So we've really just hoped God was really out there and He would direct us where to go.

Scott

Did you set a particular time to call it off for that day and meet up? How long did you plan to be out?

Alice

We didn't want to be out past dark, so we asked everyone to be back before the sunset. So for that day, that was all we had planned. I mean, whether it took 6 hours, 8 hours, 12 hours, however much daylight we had, that's what we were going to do that day. If we didn't find anything, we would get up and do it again the next morning.

Scott

So you had to kind of build into that the fact that you had to get back to the 4-wheeler and then get back to the original meeting point before dark?

Alice

Yes, I think, in my mind, personally, "I was not coming home without my brother. I was going into those mountains and I was going to find him. I was going to come back with him." That's really all I even considered. I think the plan was to go and be back before dark, but I was just not going to go back without my brother.

Scott

Did you still feel that confident at the end of the day?

Alice

I did, for some reason. We made it all the way to the bottom of this canyon and we had found nothing. We had cell phone service through the mountains, which was a little unexpected. We heard other teams had finished their areas, and were coming out. Everyone was checking in at our little registration areas and checking out for the day. Nobody saw anything or found anything. We had called somebody to come to us and pick us up so that they could drive us back to the top to get our 4-wheeler. My husband said to my sisters and I to get in with another person, and they would take us back to the cabin where we started. I said, "No, I can't go back. We didn't find him." I know today's the day we're going to find him. So my sisters got it and they went back to the cabin so that they could eat. I stayed with my husband. I even told him, "I need you to stay with me because I need you to be there when we find him." So he let me get in and we started driving back up to the top of the mountain.

When he got a phone call from that old deer hunter - the deer hunter called my husband's phone - he said he saw something through his spotting scope that was red. Of course, we were hopeful it was the red 4-wheeler, but it was so far away that he couldn't tell what it was. It just was something red. The 4-wheeler that my husband and I left at the top of that canyon was also red, so this deer hunter said, "It's probably just yours, but I'll stay on the phone with you just to make sure." So we just raced to get to our 4-wheeler and we said, "Okay, we're here." He said,

“You're not there.” So it wasn't our red 4-wheeler that he was looking at. So I knew at that point. I thought, “Okay, this is it. We're going to find Jake.”

So my husband jumped on the 4-wheeler. I took the phone and this deer hunter would just say, “Go a little more east, or a little more south, a little more West that way.” He just used his spotting scope. He kept one on my yellow shirt and one on this red spot that he had seen, and he just directed us. We were just racing. It was starting to rain. We were driving so fast. We felt the urgency to just get there. It was so rugged that we ended up getting a flat tire on our 4-wheeler, so we jumped off that 4-wheeler and just started running. We were racing. At one point, the deer hunter who was still on top of the mountain said “I lost you”, so I had to climb up on top of this big boulder until he could find my yellow shirt. Then, he led us.

We walked right up to a red 4-wheeler and it was obviously wrecked. It also had a flat tire. It had some broken pieces off of it. It was in bad shape, but it was a red 4-wheeler. I looked at my husband and my husband's face was just relieved. He said, “He's not here. That means that's great news. We'll call the police and say, ‘We found the red 4-wheeler’. He's not here, which means there's still hope he's alive.” I just remember seeing the relief on his face and this urgent sense of calm came over me and I thought, “Just keep going. Keep walking.” So I started walking ahead while my husband was making a phone call.

I walked - I don't know for how long. I walked and walked, maybe, 200 yards, and I walked directly to my brother. Jake was there. His body was laying just underneath, tucked into like a little— it was a big giant boulder. He was laying on his back and he was obviously not alive. He didn't even look— I mean, it took me a minute to think this has to be my brother, but it didn't even look human. I recognized his shirt - he was wearing an orange shirt. I thought I knew that shirt. In one of his last Facebook posts, Jake had a picture of a whole bunch of T-shirts that somebody had given him as a hand-me-down, and he was so grateful and excited to have fancy clothes. One of them was an orange shirt that was in this picture. I thought he was wearing that shirt that I had just seen not long ago, so I knew it was my brother. I mean, the condition he was in was awful, but we found him.

Scott

And the condition that he was in— was it just from decomposition - being out in the elements for three weeks?

Alice

Yeah. He died, likely, the night he went missing, so it had been almost 3 weeks at that point. The deep state of decomposition was horrifying. I mean nothing on TV or in movies even compared to what he looked like. It was awful. It's something that will haunt me for the rest of my life. I have nightmares about it. At first, I noticed his hands. I noticed he was very bloated. So I noticed his clothes were just tight on his body and he was wearing a baseball cap. I couldn't really tell how he died, but his face was partially gone. So I walked up to this side where it was missing. I mean, I assumed he shot himself in the head. His head was so swollen and big, and he had this baseball cap on and it just looked tiny. I mean, it just looked like he was wearing a tiny little Mr. Potatohead hat, kind of, on his head. I can still picture his feet - his legs were spread out. I knew it was him, but it did not look like him. It was awful.

It was just awful, but also incredible. I just thought I knew he was here. I knew we were going to find him. I hoped so much that we would find him alive, but I also am very grateful that we found him. There are so many families whose loved ones went missing, especially in the mountains,

and they never found them, so we felt very blessed to find him. I was just so thankful that my sisters had left and they weren't there to see it. I mean, I was thankful that nobody else had to see it. In fact, I called out to my husband once I established what I was looking at and that I found him. I just said, "Casey, he's here. I found him. He's here." So he came running, and I said, "Stop. You don't want to see this."

So then, again, he called the police and said, "We found him. He's here." My husband said I was shaking, getting so emotional and shocked. My husband said, "You need to sit down." So I climbed onto the 4-wheeler and sat down. Then, I realized, "This is not my 4-wheeler." The police told us, "If you find anything, don't touch anything. Just call us." And I'm sitting on his 4-wheeler. I'm like, "My fingerprints are on the 4-wheeler now." So, things just started going fast.

I thought I needed to call my sisters, my mom, my dad, and my brother - they need to know. I need to tell them first. So I just immediately called my twin sister and I said, "He's here. I found him. You need to come here." She said, "Okay, where are you?" I mean, I had no idea where I was. The sheep or the deer hunter had told me, "Just go west, go north, go a little more south," so I had no idea where I was. I said, "Just come" and I hung up on her. She called me 2 or 3 more times, saying, "Alice, you need to tell me where you are." I just told her, "I need you to come here." Eventually, she found me. But yes, I called my mom and I called my brother who did not come for the search. He still wasn't really sure that it was even a good idea to be out there searching for him. He thought Jake was going to show up in a rehab or something somewhere. So those were difficult phone calls to make.

Scott

He had likely been there. Do you think that's where he sent you that text message from?

Alice

I'm assuming he sent the text possibly from there. I don't really know. We tried to find his phone and we couldn't ever find it. It wasn't with his belongings. Later we did. The police, I believe, tried to trace his phone coordinates and where his last text messages and things were sent, but we never found the phone. So we think he just threw it in his anger. He obviously had rolled the 4-wheeler, so he could have lost it. When I saw his body laying there, I thought, "Was he injured? When he wrecked his 4-wheeler, did he get hurt? Did he die out here all alone because he was hurt?" I mean, nothing made sense. Even though I knew the answers, my brain was just kind of lagging trying to fill in all of these holes that just my mind could not comprehend.

Scott

Way too much to process.

Alice

There was a lot to process, yes. Anyway, We know he died either late that Friday night or early Saturday morning. It was a really beautiful view where he was at. Standing where he was laying down underneath that boulder was a really beautiful view. So he knew where he was going.

Scott

Was an autopsy done to rule out foul play or anything like that?

Alice

Yes. The police came and we waited until they got his body out. It was such difficult terrain. They had a 4-wheeler and a trailer. So they just put his body in a body bag, tied it to a trailer,

drove him out, and they took all of his belongings that they could out of there to a medical examiner for the autopsy. I think we all assumed he was - I hoped that he was - high or so intoxicated that he just didn't know what he was doing. I didn't want to imagine him being sober and sad all alone in the dark mountains to die just all alone where we just all ignored him - me especially. I just ignored the text and deleted it. It just hurt my heart too much. I had hoped he was high. The autopsy results came back that he had alcohol in his system, but he didn't have any drugs, so he was not high. I think he had a little bit of cold syrup. Otherwise, there were no drugs in his system. It did turn out that he shot himself, I believe, through his mouth. The sight that I came up on was where the bullet came out of. So it was messy and it was sad. My dad had actually given him this gun. When I found Jake, my husband told me, "You need to go sit down." I thought, "No, I have to go back to see" because the police asked us, "Is there a weapon? We need to make sure we know where it is. It's secured." So I went back and looked for it. It was tucked under one of his - he was left-handed - body a little bit. So I had to go back and look at it again.

Scott

Do you think, maybe, he shot himself and then fell on it? Or how would it get under his body after he pulled the trigger?

Alice

I think his arms - I mean, with the way his body had swelled up while decomposing - just eventually kind of fell under him. His arms were, like, straight out and lifted a little bit, and I'm sure the recoil kind of bounced it around.

Scott

Since that time, you've experienced feelings of guilt.

Alice

Yeah, I had to question all of my choices in regard to how involved he was in my life, especially with my children. I mean, we had this beautiful experience when he lived with me. I got to see him be really happy and healthy. My daughter, my baby, was a large part of that joy for him, but I had chosen to not allow him to be a part of their lives anymore. I felt really guilty for taking that from him because of his choices. I mean, I thought what I was doing at the time was the right thing. I didn't know what he was capable of doing. When it comes to getting drugs, really, I was scared. I didn't know what he was capable of doing. If you can become violent from being high using drugs like meth, I didn't know what to expect from him. So I felt very guilty about that.

And then the text that I ignored. I went back to that moment where I thought, "Just tell him you love him. That's not going to hurt anything - what damage can it do when he sobers up?" I thought about him being sad and feeling all alone, and I knew at that moment, I should have listened to that. I felt like maybe that was God giving me an opportunity to know what was coming for me later. I felt like it was maybe an opportunity that I ignored and that definitely has brought a lot of guilt, but also taught me how to manage my relationships. Now, I do take those opportunities to tell people that I do love them. When my kids go to school, I have a 14-year-old. She's a girl, so she's angry a lot. I always make sure she knows I love her even if she is going to school mad at me for one reason or another. I want her to know the last thing she ever hears from me is that she is so loved, and I wanted Jake to know that too.

When I stood there with his body and waited for the police and even my husband to get there in those moments, it was awful and it was so sad, but it was almost like a tender moment with him

where I just told him that I loved him. I just felt overwhelmed with love for him. As I was seeing this dead body laying there, I was seeing this person as that annoying little energetic brother, as a little kid, as that happy man who came to live with me, get cleaned, and worked so hard. I'm just seeing this whole life right in front of me that's ended. It was just such a tragedy, a loss, that didn't have to happen. I don't know if it would have changed anything if I told him I loved him when I replied to that text. I don't know if my dad would have reported him missing after that phone call or reached out for someone to go and intervene when he threatened to hurt himself. Maybe not. But I think it would have done something for me. I mean, it would have been peace of mind for me to know I did all I could for him.

Scott

Just his lifestyle— he spent so much time on his own alone with his own thoughts. I think he had to know that he was loved.

Alice

Yeah, I hope he knows he is loved. I hope he knew he was loved. He was okay alone, but I think he craved belonging somewhere to belong his whole life. He was bullied as a kid. I mean, he was different. As a kid, we would fight over the princess dresses to wear when we were dressing up and playing as little kids. So when he went to school, he got called derogatory names for his sexual orientation. Later in his life, he came out as a gay man. At that time, it was hard for him to find any amount of acceptance in a small community like we were in now, though I think he knew he was accepted by our family, which I'm thankful for. God was always very important to him. I think he had this internal struggle for pleasing God and disappointing him. So that was difficult for him. Anyway, yes, he was accustomed to being alone. He spent the majority of his adult life alone. I hope he felt loved. But he was sad enough to end his life. So he could have felt more loved...

Scott

Well, your intuition about what would happen that day turned out to be correct.

Alice

Yeah, I was. I mean, that was a really interesting experience for me. I've always believed in God and in a higher power. I do believe that He is a loving God. I believe He's interested in our lives, and we can find him in the details of our lives. I don't think he takes away the hard things from us, but he'll help us through them. That morning, I was very dependent on Him getting us through that day, and I just knew we were going to find him. I knew I had to do everything I could do. I mean, I had to be willing to do whatever He asked me to do, so we could find him.

Scott

Sometimes, I feel like the word "Closure" is kind of overrated. I mean, it's nice that you found him, you were able to bring him home, and give him a proper funeral, but it's still a tragic loss of someone you love.

Alice

It was such a tragic loss. I don't even know what closure would mean. I don't think there is closure though. I do think finding your missing person is a huge part of maybe closure - at least it's an answer. We did have a funeral for him, but our dad who was sick had an infection that had been growing and a medical crisis, so we didn't even have the funeral. We didn't get to do any kind of ceremony. We had Jake cremated, so we didn't even get to do anything with his ashes. It ended abruptly to get to the hospital and then spent the next several weeks and

months with my dad on full life support. So that was scary. We almost lost him. He ended up living, but that was also very scary and difficult. I mean, I'm not as close to my dad as maybe I would like to be, but my heart feels for him because that last conversation he had with my brother is something that's probably very difficult to live with.

Scott

What's the best memory you have with Jake?

Alice

That's a good question. I have so many memories with him. When he lived with me, toward the end, he was getting ready to do some missionary service. One day, when we were shopping, he saw a ring that had, like, a chain in the middle that you could spin - kind of, like, a fidget ring that people like to have for anxiety. Anyway, he liked it, so I bought it for him and gave it to him. I mean, it's not even fancy or anything. I gave it to him and he was so grateful. Jake was so humble. He never had anything. When he died, everything he owned, he carried in a backpack. He wasn't very worldly. So after they took Jake's body out the next week, we had the funeral. My brother had flown in for the funeral. Just before it, I took him up to the location where we found Jake so he could see it. I was giving him a minute there and I was wandering around the area. I don't know how far away I walked. I couldn't even turn around and see where my other brother was.

I was just walking and I saw this silver ring, just sitting in the dirt, not anywhere near the 4-wheeler - it was just kind of in the middle of nowhere. It has a "CTR" on it, which means "Choose the right." It was the same ring that I had bought for Jake 15 years ago, and it brought back such a special memory of a time when Jake was so happy. Then, I got to have time with him. It was just such a random find in the great outdoors in the mountains to look down and, first of all, see that he still had it all these years later. So I stared at it and I have that ring again. It's something that reminds me of a happy time in his life, which is something I needed in coming to terms with all the things that I saw. Seeing his body like that is traumatic and gives me nightmares. I've had to do a lot of therapy and try to live with those images. Anyway, that ring is something that is a good reminder of happy memories and a happier time.

Scott

Who would have thought just a random impulse purchase now holds so much for you?

Alice

Yes. I mean, back then, it was fairly meaningless because it wasn't expensive or anything, but it was important to him, and it just told me that— I don't know. I think the fact that he still had it was because of sentimental value only, which means that I felt loved by him and I hoped it reminded him that I also loved him. So that was special.

Scott

If you or someone you know here in the US is struggling with suicidal thoughts, you can call the US National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-8255 any time day or night. The Crisis Text Line also provides free, 24/7 confidential support by text message, when you send a message to 741741.

If you want to see pictures related to this episode, or really any past episode, you can see them by looking at the show notes. You've probably heard me mention the show notes in a lot of the previous episodes, but I wanted to let you know that when you click on the episode on your

phone, what you're seeing is a text description of that episode. The full show notes – with pictures – is at the podcast website. You can always find it by going to the name of the show, then a slash, and the episode number. So for example, this week's episode show notes with pictures can be seen at WhatWasThatLike.com/123 because this is episode number 123.

I only recently realized that I should clarify that, because I was visiting with some family and I was talking to my nephew, Scott, who listens to the podcast. He was clicking and viewing what he THOUGHT were the show notes, but he always wondered, where are the pictures? So thanks, Scott, for letting me know that I need to clear up that confusion.

All right, a couple more things before we get to another great story –

First, I just released the newest Raw Audio. The Raw Audio episodes are bonus episodes, where you hear actual 911 emergency phone calls and the stories that go with them. Usually there are 3 of them in each episode. In this newest one, you'll hear a man calling about a carjacking, on the interstate –

Male 1

She's in the bed of my truck right now. She's got a machete and an automatic pistol. The car has been abandoned in the middle of Interstate 40.

Scott

A man calls because he has just accidentally driven his SUV into a pond –

Male 2

Hurry up.

911 Operator

There on the way. Are you in the car?

Male 2

Yeah, I'm in the car.

Scott

And several people call to report an active shooter at the local mall –

911 Operator

What's going on?

Female 1

There were shots. A kid came running up to our car and he said, "Open!" He was covered in blood and there are shots being fired!

Scott

This Raw Audio episode is #28, so when you sign up as a supporter for \$5/month, you can binge all 28 episodes. You also get all the new What Was That Like episodes ad-free, and you get a sticker and a handwritten note from me, AND a personal audio message from me. You can get all of that by becoming a supporter at WhatWasThatLike.com/support. Not to mention, you'll be helping to support the show, which I greatly appreciate.

And about those handwritten notes – sometimes people ask me, do you really write those yourself? And the answer is yes, I do. In fact, you can see me writing one of them on my TikTok channel at [WhatWasThatLike](https://www.tiktok.com/@WhatWasThatLike) (no spaces).

And I have to tell you, we're having some great conversations in the What Was That Like listener Facebook group. We talk about the newest podcast episodes when they come out, but lots of other stuff too. In fact, I recently posted a question for the roughly 3500 people in that group – I asked, "How did you find out you were being cheated on?" And as you can imagine, that generated some truly interesting stories! If you want to join me and the other listeners there, we'd love to have you! And for a limited time, you can join that group for free! Just kidding, it's always free. [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook)

All right, now we have come to this week's Listener Story. This one is from Bill, and you'll probably be able to tell by his voice, he's a podcaster. His show is called *When Dating Hurts*, and he talks to guests who tell their stories of dating and domestic violence. Bill shared his own story on What Was That Like about a year ago, when he told the story of his daughter Kristin being murdered by her boyfriend. You can find out more about his story and his work at [WhenDatingHurts.com](https://www.WhenDatingHurts.com).

In this Listener Story, Bill tells about the time he met one of his idols.

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

(Listener Story)

Bill

Hi, I'm Bill Mitchell. Back in 1972, I was an art student at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Today, they call that school "MICA". It's in Baltimore, Maryland. I was a graphic designer - at least, I was working my way into becoming one. Way before I went to art school, I was very much into the work of the paintings of Norman Rockwell. Some people would refer to Rockwell as an illustrator. Fine artists didn't see him as a fine artist or even an artist. He was an illustrator, which was their way of saying, "He got paid for what he did." I was very much into him.

In the summer of 1972, I was 21 and I had to go to pick up some things at a store. There was a rack of paperbacks there, and I saw a book called, "My adventures as an illustrator" by Norman Rockwell. So, I picked it up because I was curious to see the backstory on Norman Rockwell - I just couldn't put it down - his story all the way back to being a little scrawny boy growing up in New England. It kind of takes you through his time working as the top art person at "Boys' Life" doing paintings and drawings for them. Later, there are his work with *The Saturday Evening Post* and the paintings he did for World War 2 and on and on and on. I mean, just thousands of paintings, I guess

I thought, "Well, wait a minute. How old is this man?" I found out that he was 78. When you're 21 or 22, somebody who's 78 seems like, "That guy could leave us at any moment." I thought, "Well, wow. I'd really love to meet this man." I didn't know where he lives precisely, so I sent out some letters and I tried to find out through the library. Of course, in 1972, you had no access to the internet - you didn't have Google. I found out that he lived in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. I thought, "I got to meet this guy. I got to shake his hand. I need to make contact with him."

All I knew was that he lived in Stockbridge. On a map, of course, I could see it's going to take me a while to get there, and I thought, "I'm doing this." Around the corner lives my girlfriend who is currently my wife all these years. Anyway, the deal was I'd pick her up at about 3 AM and we would just go to Stockbridge. I didn't have an address. I didn't have an invitation. We're going to meet this guy. So, off we went in my little Volkswagen and got up there somewhere around, I'd say, 9 o'clock in the morning,

I didn't have an address, so I thought I would just meet people and ask, "Where does Norman Rockwell live?" Well, they didn't really want to tell me. They looked at him as, kind of, this treasure of theirs, and they're not going to have some guy from out of town just go and bother this man. I actually stopped, saw some guys getting ready to tee off on a golf course, and ran up to them. They looked at each other and said, "Well, we really don't want to say." I couldn't get it out of anyone until I bumped into some guy who was mowing a lawn. I walked up to this young kid and asked if he knew where Norman Rockwell lives. He said, "He lives around the corner here. Just go down the end of the street and make a right. Take a look down a gray gravel driveway, and you'll see his studio."

I've seen pictures of the studio. I've read his book. We kind of drove down that way. My wife and I got out. I was very nervous. I started walking up this short driveway and could see through the side window, which was like the northern window because artists or illustrators know to have the northern light coming in through the window because it doesn't change much during the course of a day, so their paintings won't change colors as much because of the light. I could see this white-haired man inside and I just said, "That's got to be him!" So we started to go up the driveway a little bit.

Then, a door opened. I thought it was him, but it wasn't - it was some man who looked like he was probably more than 50 years old, who walked up and intercepted us. He's kind of a big guy. He walked up and he said, "What's this all about?"

I told him who I was, "I was an art student." I introduced my wife-to-be, and I said, "I just wanted to come up and meet this great man. He has influenced me so much." He said, "Look, I really appreciate the fact that you came up here, but Mr. Rockwell has been traveling. He just got back yesterday. He has things to do in the studio today. So I'm just sorry. It's so nice for you to come up, but I can't." I thought about the book "My Adventure" and asked, "Are you Louie Lamone?" He said, "Well, yeah, I am." I turned to my wife. I said, "Wow, this man is Louie Lamone!"

Back in 1954, Mr. Rockwell had projects to do and he needed photos taken as reference for his paintings. Then, as it turned out, he found out about Louie Lamone here. He was an amateur photographer - darn, if they didn't strike up this relationship. I turned to him, and I said, "I guess it's still going strong." He said, "Well, yes, it is." This man was pretty impressed that I had done my homework and I was really into this. I wasn't just some pesky tourist. So he said, "I can't really make any promises, but I can go and talk with him. I'll let you know what happens." The next thing you know, he went into the studio, came back, and said, "Well, it turns out Mr. Rockwell said, 'You can come in for a few minutes.' You can meet him."

We must have spent the better part of an hour in that studio with Norman Rockwell with Louie Lamone. I didn't even ask, but he started to give me a tour of his studio. He showed me where he kept his brushes and where he cleaned them. He showed me his easel which was set up there. That was it. That was our meeting with Norman Rockwell and it was just this perfect day.

It was August of '72. I'll never forget it. To me, I usually use that story as one of these things where if you really have your heart set on something, you should pursue it. I didn't really think that I would meet him and have that happen like it did. It was just a perfect meeting - just long enough, just great enough. Anyway, I just wanted to share that. Thank you for listening.