

Episode 125: Kylie heard a gunshot

This episode comes with a content warning. The story includes discussion of sexual assault, addiction, and suicide.

Stephen Covey is a popular author, and he wrote the best-selling book titled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Great book, highly recommended.

In that book, Covey tells a personal story that has come back to my mind many times in the years since I first read that book. This is what he wrote:

“I remember a mini-paradigm shift I experienced one Sunday morning on a subway in New York. People were sitting quietly – some reading newspapers, some lost in thought, some resting with their eyes closed. It was a calm, peaceful scene.

Then suddenly, a man and his children entered the subway car. The children were so loud and rambunctious that instantly the whole climate changed.

The man sat down next to me and closed his eyes, apparently oblivious to the situation. The children were yelling back and forth, throwing things, even grabbing people’s papers. It was very disturbing. And yet, the man sitting next to me did nothing.

It was difficult not to feel irritated. I could not believe that he could be so insensitive as to let his children run wild like that and do nothing about it, taking no responsibility at all. It was easy to see that everyone else on the subway felt irritated, too. So finally, with what I felt like was unusual patience and restraint, I turned to him and said, “Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn’t control them a little more?”

The man lifted his gaze as if to come to a consciousness of the situation for the first time and said softly, “Oh, you’re right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don’t know what do think, and I guess they don’t know who to handle it either.”

Can you imagine what I felt at that moment? My paradigm shifted. Suddenly I saw things differently, and because I saw differently, I thought differently, I felt differently, I behaved differently. My irritation vanished. I didn’t have to worry about controlling my attitude or my behavior; my heart was filled with the man’s pain. Feelings of sympathy and compassion flowed freely. “Your wife just died? Oh I’m so sorry! Can you tell me about it? What can I do to help?” Everything changed in an instant.”

I’ve never forgotten that story. All the people we encounter while we’re just going through our day to day lives...they’re going through things that we know nothing about. It’s easy to judge someone or form an opinion based on what we observe, but there are always other factors that we can’t see. I think, in a lot of cases, if we knew what was really going on, our anger or impatience might be replaced with empathy and compassion.

My guest today is Kylie. She’s been through some trauma, and you’ll hear it in her voice as she talks with the 911 dispatcher. I think her story might help all of us to perhaps see things from a perspective other than our own.

Scott

For the story to make sense, we need to have a little bit of background on Kylie and how she first met Amber because the way they ended up together was unexpected and not typical. Kylie was 18 years old at that time. She's also bisexual. She had a group of friends, but she was starting to feel left out, sometimes.

Kylie

This was a group of - I don't know - I'd say, maybe, a core of 6-8 people. There would be people coming and going, and there was kind of growing pains with that. It sort of made the relationship between me and the core 3 struggle a lot. I started feeling like they were excluding me a lot from things, and I just sort of felt like I was being pushed out.

Scott

Kylie's best friend at that time was Jordan. Jordan's boyfriend was Sky. When Sky turned 21, they all got together to celebrate,

Kylie

It was Sky's 21st birthday party. So, of course, there was a lot of alcohol. I was underage at the time, but I was still drinking with them because they were my friends. At this party, there was the main core group. There were also a lot of people that I didn't necessarily know that the rest of the group had known for a long time. When most of the party was outside doing God knows what - smoking cigarettes or whatever - who was left inside was me and this girl who I didn't know - she introduced herself as Amber.

Scott

Kylie and Amber found that they had some things in common.

Kylie

I had never met her before, but she had known these guys since middle school. They all went to school together. She went to a different high school than us. She was a little bit older than me. She was 21 at that time. We talked a lot about, sort of, our relationships with the people that were at this party and our friends and how we both, sort of, were feeling this exclusion happening - like we were getting pushed out. That was something that we had in common with each other, so we sort of bonded over that.,

Scott

But Kylie soon discovered that the alcohol kind of turned Amber into a different person.

Kylie

She got drunker as all of us did. As I would come to find out, she had sort of an issue with alcohol and she was being really handsy with me in front of people - touching me, putting her hand under my shirt, trying to, like, take my bra off, and just being like really on me, which makes me uncomfortable because I don't know this person. I didn't really appreciate that she was doing this in front of people. I kept telling her to kind of back off and that I was really embarrassed by this. I was not really scared yet at that point because nothing super bad had happened yet at that point. A good number of people had taken their Ubers home. I had planned on crashing on the couch and she apparently had the same intention. She was quite

drunk. Jordan and Sky went to their room or to Sky's room. So we were left alone in his house in his living room.

She began getting worse with the physical contact - really rough and really painful. So, when she grabbed, it was, like, done forcefully. She would bite when kissing, so she was biting like she was trying to bite through my skin. There was no restraint. It hurts a lot. It was really painful.

When I told her to stop, she kind of backed off for a second, and then she'd go right back into it as if she forgot that I told her to stop. She was very, very belligerently drunk at this point. It was like she couldn't understand what I was saying or she was just ignoring me. I didn't really know what was going through her head, but she undressed me and bit my chest like she was going to bite through the skin. All of this was extremely, extremely painful. At one point, I started crying. So I mean, I gave her plenty of notice that this was not okay. And she kept going. Finally, I was able to get myself up off the couch and go to the bathroom. I was like, "I really have to pee. I really have to pee." That was, like, the only thing that could get me off that couch to where she would stop hurting me. I looked in the mirror in the bathroom and I just wept to myself because I realized, like, "What the hell has happened?" because it wasn't necessarily rape. It was like, "I didn't want it. It hurts a lot. I feel like I gave plenty of notice that it was not okay and she just didn't care."

Scott

Kylie figured this was her opportunity to make up an excuse to leave and just get out of the situation.

Kylie

After I left the bathroom, I just made a beeline for my bag and my keys. At this point, it had been at least a couple of hours of just this awful treatment, so the time had sobered me up and, surely, the adrenaline had sobered me up to where I felt comfortable trying to drive home. As it was Christmas Eve, I didn't have a family to get back to - it was actually going to be my parents. My parents and I spent last Christmas together. Because we were going to separate pretty much in the next few months, that would be our last Christmas together. So, I told her, like, "Hey, I really have to get home." That was enough for her to, kind of, back off, let me get in my car, and leave the situation.

Scott

So their first interaction was obviously not a pleasant one. Kylie told some of their mutual friends what happened and they were kind of shocked by it. Some of them wanted to all get together as a group and talk about what happened, but Kylie wasn't really on board with that. She decided she could handle this on her own as an adult, so she messaged Amber and asked about getting together to discuss what happened.

Kylie

I said, "Hey, would you be willing to talk about what happened? I just want to understand what was going through your head." At first, she was like, "Well, what the hell? What do you mean? You want to come over? You said that I raped you. Why would you feel safe coming over?" So I said, "Well, I definitely didn't say that you raped me because that didn't happen." I explained to her that people are twisting my words around that, I didn't say that, and that I felt pretty confident that the trouble that this had caused her would prevent her from doing anything to harm me. She agreed and said, "Yeah, this has caused quite a bit of an issue."

Scott

So Kylie went over to Amber's place, and they talked but, this time, with no alcohol.

Kylie

Oh, yeah, she was sober. We were very sober during this. We actually talked about it for only about an hour. I basically just explained, "Hey, this is how I perceived what happened. This is how it affected me. I don't think you're a horrible, awful person for it. I just think that you should really be careful when you're drinking because you did this." She didn't blame the alcohol. She did actually take accountability, like, "Hey, I'm really sorry that I hurt you. This is really going to change - like, how I interact with people in the future." She apologized. I let her know, "Hey, if anybody gives you any shift for this, going forward, there's really no reason for it because it happened to me, it happened to us, and if the two people who are involved in this situation have resolved it, then there's really no reason why anybody else should get a say.

Scott

so they worked it out and got that issue resolved. But the conversation continued and they were both enjoying getting to know each other. Kylie was there for another 4 hours.

Kylie

We were just hanging out and getting to know each other, like, before she got too drunk. She told me about her family, what music she likes, our dating history, job history, and the "meeting somebody" types of conversation. We watched a movie together - we watched "Wonder Woman". We really just hung out. It was incredible because I never thought that it would end up like this. I mean, she felt horrible after the first time we met as if I would never come back from it. Somehow, I mustered up the courage to forgive this person and she ended up kind of becoming somebody who I look forward to talking to more.

Scott

So, in spite of that bad first encounter, Kylie and Amber's connection grew stronger pretty quickly. That brings us to Kylie's story of what happened.

Kylie

We only knew each other for such a short amount of time, but we really sort of became each other's little world. We were texting each other every day. We texted when I was at work. It sort of took on a flirtatious direction, and we sort of began going into that avenue again with each other, but in a healthier and consensual way, which is even more surprising that we would even go down that route. I was going over there every day, just hanging out at her house.

Scott

You guys are now pretty special to each other.

Kylie

Yeah, we were very insulated with each other. We weren't really doing, seeing, or anything, really, that wasn't involving the other person in those few weeks,

Scott

Then, there was the night of January 13th. What happened that night?

Kylie

That night, I had to work and picked up rice to eat. I didn't plan on going over there because she hadn't invited me at that point. I have a habit of feeling like I need to give people their distance because I don't want to be around somebody too much and make them feel sick of me. So I was just giving her power to invite me if she wanted me there, or not to have me there if she didn't want me there. So I wasn't going to try to force myself into going over there because I didn't want to be overbearing. So I planned on just being home that night eating my rice and sleeping in my bed at home.

She texted me. I knew that she had been at a bar that night because I saw her Instagram story. She was at some sports bar in Smyrna. She was a big football fan - a big football, specifically, of the Falcons, which is the Atlanta football team here. There was a football game that night that she was watching at that sports bar in Smyrna - it was Falcons versus Philadelphia. Philadelphia fans are very passionate. They, sort of, have a reputation here starting fights and just, sort of, being a lot.

Scott

So Amber had gotten into something with one of those people?

Kylie

Yeah, she had gotten into— I don't really know what the extent of the fight was - whether it got physical or whether they were just yelling at each other - but she had described a situation in the bathroom that it had gotten intense and she thought about the fact that she carried a gun with her and she thought about pulling the gun out during this fight. Of course, she didn't pull out the gun, but the thought came through her head. She was drunk as well. I'm sure that she was also thinking about, "Well, I hurt someone when I was drunk before." So I think that thought really freaked her out. She managed to get herself home. She Ubered home. So she got home and she was quite upset. She texted me, "Come get back in my bed, so I don't kill anyone. I told her, "I'm having rice right now. Do you mean you want me to come back over tonight or tomorrow?" She just said, "Now." I said, "Let me finish up my din-din and then get changed and head out." She said, "KK. I'll try to not hurt anyone till then." Then, I told her I was leaving.

Scott

The thing that comes to my mind right now is "Why in the world does she have a gun?"

Kylie

Yeah, I had thought about that a few times before that. Like I said, when we were first getting to know each other, she told me about her job history. She used to work, I believe, in the shipping department of the Glock factory.

Scott

and Glock of course is a major manufacturer of handguns.

Kylie

It was a few years prior when she worked there, so I assumed— because I don't know much about guns, I didn't really know the brand of gun that she had. I'd seen her gun before but I didn't know that it wasn't a Glock. I assumed it was a Glock because she worked at the Glock and I assumed that she had it for a few years at that point. My rationale there was like, "Oh, well, she seems knowledgeable enough about it. If she had it all these years and hasn't hurt herself up to this point, maybe she won't hurt herself or anyone." But, definitely, the thought crossed my mind that this is not somebody stable, certainly.

Scott

In most places - I don't know about Georgia but- here in Florida, even if people have concealed weapons permit to carry concealed, you still can't carry concealed in a bar. That's where this altercation happened where she thought about pulling it, right?

Kylie

Oh, yeah. Like I said, I am not very knowledgeable about guns at all, so I actually didn't know that that was something that she wasn't allowed to do. I do know that she did break a lot of laws. In general, she was actually a drug dealer, as well. The reason she had the gun is because she lived in Austell - not Smyrna - in a neighborhood that is a little bit more dangerous for a woman to be living in, I guess. So, she had it for protection. Also, she was involved in drug dealing and things like that, so she felt like she needed something to protect herself in situations like that. She did carry the gun into the bar. I didn't even think about the legality of that. I didn't realize how serious she was about how upset she was, I thought she was just like, "Oh, tee-heh, my team lost."

I had no idea what I was gonna be walking into when I got to her apartment. When I walked in, she was taking more shots of Jack Daniels and watching another football game on her phone - Patriots versus I-don't-know-who. She was pacing and was a little belligerent. She would change subjects a lot and have really bad mood swings. She kept telling me that she needed me to stop her from hitting anything or head-butting anything. She was just really worked up about this. Of course, the whole time, she has the gun.

We're sitting and talking. Now, I just kept trying to get her off of what is troubling her, "Tell me about something, about this thing, or tell me about that thing." So I kept trying to change the subject - anything that I can to make her not feel upset anymore. It would work sometimes. She'd get off of the subject but then something would bring her back to something upsetting - whether it was a football game, whether it was her situation with being currently unemployed, her legal troubles, medical troubles, or her family troubles. She was pouring out to me all these things that were really just not going well for her and the life that she was stressed out about. I would try to get her away from those things and she would always find her way back.

At some point, she brought up the gun and asked me how I felt about her having a gun and did it make me uncomfortable. I told her, "It kind of did make me uncomfortable, but I trust her." She started going into this whole thing about gun safety. She showed me how to tell if there are bullets in the chamber. She took the whole thing apart, basically, and showed me everything in it. The whole time she's doing this, I was thinking to myself, "She's knowledgeable. It seems like she's experienced. It seems like she knows all these things." So it sort of put the thought out of my head - not that it completely left my head that she would ever do something bad with the gun. It just took my mind off of it a little bit. She even handed me the gun and had me, like, practice turning the safety on, taking the safety off, cocking it, loading it, and all this stuff. She had me touching the gun and she would say, "The most important thing about guns is that you never touch the trigger unless you are 100% ready to face the repercussions of what pulling the trigger means." So it sort of put my mind at ease somewhat when she was telling me all of this. Of course, she knows this, so she's not gonna go do something because she knows she's gonna face repercussions for it, as she was saying,

Landon, her roommate, came back home. He worked a job where he had to take the train to Atlanta. It was a restaurant with a bar and stuff, so it was open quite late. So he got back pretty late. We were talking and, at that point, the mood had sort of lightened a bit. We were laughing.

Scott

So you were able to calm her down a little bit...

Kylie

Yeah. Okay. It seemed like we were good. It seemed like we were in the clear. We went to bed. I didn't really know how much time exactly had passed before we were woken up by Landon, her roommate, but I do know that we were sleeping and he woke us up - or he woke her up specifically and he wanted to borrow her gun. He had a guy coming over that he was going to sell some weed to.

Scott

So Landon was a dealer too?

Kylie

Well, he was helping her. He wasn't really a dealer in his own right but, I guess, he had a friend or somebody that he knew that wanted to buy some. He was going to sell it on her behalf, basically. So he came into the room to borrow the gun or try to borrow the gun. Because it was pretty late at night and he just sort of felt paranoid - like something fell off to him - he thought he might need the gun for protection. She said, "Hell no." She referred to him as "Baby boy" a lot, which I think is pretty funny.

Scott

Meaning he wasn't quite as street-smart as she was - is that what that meant?

Kylie

Something to that effect. It was like she just viewed him as somebody that was precious and needed to be protected or something. She called him "Baby boy" a lot and it was, like, a term of endearment. But she was like, "No, baby boy. You can't. You're not ready for that, for what that means if you have to use it. I mean, like, I don't want to put you in that situation. I'll compromise with you. I'll go with you with the gun on me. If something happens, I can be the one to take care of it or whatever." I don't know what they thought was gonna happen exactly. I don't know exactly what the problem was, why he felt it was sketchy, and why he felt like he needed the gun. I don't know why he woke her up. There are a lot of like hindsight issues there. If we had just slept, everything would have been fine, maybe.

So she went out with him with the gun. But before she left, she told me, "Tell everybody to wear a tie dye to my funeral." I kind of chuckled at her because I thought it was a joke. I fell back asleep while they were taking care of that and was awoken by the door swinging open and the two of them arguing. I could really hear her screaming at him. She was really upset, really distraught. I could hear her say something to the effect of, like, "Why would you do that? Why would you put me in a car on a night like this with a guy like that with a gun in my hand?" So something had happened with this guy that really pissed her off and she was really mad at Landon for putting her in a stressful situation when she already had so much stress that night. I didn't really hear him say anything back to that.

She sort of rushed back to the room where I was still laying in bed. She was, sort of, wrestling stuff around and slamming stuff. She was, like, in a really agitated state. She laid down, started crying, and said, "I think I said something I can't take back." I tried to comfort her and tell her, like, "You're really drunk. I'm sure that situation was really bad, but nobody's gonna be mad at you in the morning. It'll be fine. I wouldn't worry about it. I don't think he's gonna hold it against you. We're good." So she got up and wrestled more things around. I wasn't looking at what she was doing - I had my back sort of turned - but I just heard, like, a lot of agitation happening - stuff slamming, stuff falling over.

I glanced back and she was standing to my left at the corner of the bed facing the wall. I saw her hand or her arm go up, and that's kind of all I saw. I heard a pop sound, but it wasn't, like, the sound of what you would think a gun would sound like in a closed room. It was pretty quiet. It wasn't, like, a gun sound. Like I said, I'm pretty dumb when it comes to guns. I don't know a lot about what they're supposed to sound like. It wasn't like the movies. She flew to the ground. So now, her body was lying parallel to the foot of the bed. Her head is on my side of the bed - I'm lying on the right side of the bed and the opposite corner from where she was standing before.

The room smelled like gunpowder, so I knew that the gun had gone off, but there wasn't blood that I could see right away and I didn't really understand what was going on because I didn't think that she would hurt herself. I know that sounds stupid, but it wasn't immediately apparent to me what had happened. She was laying there and I was calling her name, "Amber! Amber!" thinking that she was just, like, screwing with me because she would jump scare me a lot. She would just be sitting there on the couch and would go "Whoop!" - like, shake me and scare the shit out of me. So I thought she was gonna do that because, when you're in these situations, you're not thinking, like, bad things. "It's never a bad thing - that can't happen."

So I crawled on the bed to the foot of the bed to where she was on the floor, and I still didn't see anything. I thought, "Well, I know the gun went off, but I didn't think that she'd, like, hurt herself. Maybe, she got her leg or something." So I was looking at her legs. Then, I got to the upper part of her body where I started to shake her to try to, like, wake her up or make her do her prank or whatever because I thought that was what was gonna happen. When I shook her body a little bit, that was when I saw blood in her head coming from her right temple. I was just shocked. Shocked doesn't even begin to describe what that felt like. I knew she was depressed. I knew she had all these things going on. I knew she had a gun. I knew she wasn't stable. I knew she was an alcoholic. I knew that all these things are sort of, like, a recipe for disaster waiting to happen, but I just didn't think it was possible. Why the hell would she do that? Why would she do that? I just couldn't fathom it.

She wasn't breathing at that point. I didn't hear her breathe anything. So, I ran out to go to Landon and get him aware of the situation. I didn't even say anything to him. I just looked at him and pointed at the room. Then, he went into the room and he understood immediately what happened - she committed suicide. She shot herself in the head. We're looking at each other, getting through the shock of what just happened, grabbing the phone, and making the call. Landon was the one that got his phone out and made the call.

911 Operator

South County. How are you doing? What's the location of your emergency?

Landon

(Sobbing) My friend just committed suicide. She's not breathing.

911 Operator

Okay. What's the address there, sir?

Landon

(Hidden information)

911 Operator

What type of method?

Landon

It was a gun. The gun is still under her, though.

911 Operator

I need you to get out of those rooms, sir. Or do you think we need to start CPR?

Landon

She's still breathing.

911 Operator

Okay, just stay on the line. What's your name?

Landon

Landon

911 Operator

All right. I have a call in now so I need you to stay on the line. I need to ask you some additional questions, okay?

Landon

(Sobbing) Yeah.

911 Operator

Are you with your friend now?

Landon

Yes.

911 Operator

How old is she? How old is your friend, sir?

Landon

How old is she?

Kylie

(In the background) 22.

Landon

22.

911 Operator

Okay, sir. Are you right by her now?

Landon

No. You said to leave the room.

911 Operator

And you said that you feel like she's still breathing.

Landon

Yes, she was still breathing when I left.

911 Operator

Okay, do you want to start CPR? Can we get you back in there and start CPR?

Landon

(Sobbing) She's still breathing...

911 Operator

Okay, if it's safe for you to do so, sir, Let's try to get CPR started, okay?

Landon

(Sobbing)

911 Operator

Sir, is it safe to do so? Because we don't want you to discharge the gun while you're doing CPR.

Landon

(Sobbing)

911 Operator

Hello, sir? Hello, sir?

Scott

Landon was too upset to speak, so he handed the phone to Kylie.

Kylie

Yeah, hello?

911 Operator

Yes, do you feel like it's safe for you to do CPR?

Kylie

I've never done CPR in my life.

911 Operator

Okay, can someone go and unlock the door now?

Kylie

Unlock the door?

911 Operator

Can someone unlock the door so we can get paramedics in as soon as they get there? And I want to know is it safe for you all to do CPR?

Kylie

I'm not sure if it's safe for us to do CPR because we've never done this before. Nobody's ever shot themselves in front of us before.

911 Operator

Okay, well Ma'am, if you don't feel like you can do it, I need you to step out of the room, okay?

Kylie

Okay, I don't think either of us can do CPR, so you need to help with this.

911 Operator

We have them coming as fast as they can, ma'am. Okay?

Kylie

Okay, that's fine. Are they close?

911 Operator

Yes, ma'am. They're coming as fast as they can. If you feel like you can do CPR if I give you directions, we can get started, ma'am.

Kylie

Okay. It's a gated community.

911 Operator

Okay, ma'am, don't worry about them getting in. The paramedics will get in. Where is the gun? I don't want it to discharge while we administer CPR.

Kylie

Trust me. She is not conscious enough to do that shit. I don't know where it is. I think it's underneath my girlfriend's, but I'm not prepared to move my girlfriend's bloody body to get the fucking gun. Okay?

911 Operator

Okay. Well ma'am, step out of the room.

Kylie

I'm really sorry

911 Operator

Ma'am, what's the name of the apartment complex?

Kylie

(Hidden information) She is still breathing.

(Silence)

Are you still on the phone?

911 Operator

Yes, ma'am. I'm asking you if it is safe for you to remove the gun to the side so we can start CPR on your friend? Are you able to drag the body away from the gun?

Kylie

Remove the gun? Okay, she's not conscious. She's not going to shoot me.

911 Operator

Ma'am, I'm not worried about her shooting you. I'm worried about you punching on her chest and the gun discharging. I'm trying to keep you all from being shot as well.

Kylie

We haven't touched her. We have not touched her.

911 Operator

What I'm saying is, "Are you able to move the gun so we can administer CPR now?"

Kylie

I want to say yes, but there's a person bleeding to death in that room, and we love her so much. It's really difficult to get the image that I have in my head out of my head.

911 Operator

Okay, ma'am, I'm going to ask you two to step out of the room until we can get the paramedics in there.

Kylie

We're currently in the kitchen. She's still in the bedroom. We're currently in the kitchen. We're not in the room with her.

911 Operator

Okay, just stay exactly where you are, ma'am. Help is coming as fast as they can.

Kylie

Thank you.

911 Operator

What's your name, ma'am?

Kylie

My name is Kylie.

911 Operator

Okay, and were you all there? Or did you all just come and find her that way?

Kylie

I was in the same room with her when she did it. I didn't realize that she was going to do that.

911 Operator

Okay, so you were in the same room with her.

Kylie

I was laying in bed. She came in. She was upset and I didn't realize—

911 Operator

Okay, ma'am. So what was said or what was being done in the time when she got the gun and shot herself?

Kylie

She came into the room. She was upset, slamming the door, and trying to see where I was laying down.

911 Operator

Had you all been in an argument?

Kylie

No, no. Not me.

911 Operator

This is your friend or your girlfriend?

Kylie

We've been, like, talking. We're not, like, girlfriends. We talk.

911 Operator

So who was she arguing with when she was upset, ma'am?

Kylie

Her roommate. But honestly, she's been drinking tonight. She's 22. She's been drinking tonight because of the Falcons' game. I know it sounds like shit, but she's drunk.

911 Operator

Does she have a history of threats of suicide?

Kylie

Yeah.

911 Operator

Okay. Has she ever tried attempted to commit suicide?

Kylie

I haven't known her for that long. She told me that she's been suicidal. I can still hear her breathing. She's not dead.

911 Operator

Okay, you can still hear the breathing.

Kylie

I can still hear her breathing. She's not conscious. It sounds like she's snoring.

911 Operator

Okay, it sounds like she's snoring...

Kylie

She's in her room. She's in her room.

911 Operator

Alright, ma'am. I'll go ahead and disconnect with you. Speak with the police.

Kylie

There's a gun underneath her somewhere. Can I get up and open the door?

911 Operator

Yes, ma'am. Bye bye.

Kylie

All right, thank you.

Kylie

A few seconds into the call, we heard her breathe. We can hear her gasping for breath. Then, the situation becomes, "Oh, shit, she has a chance!" So we're thinking, "Get here now and save her!" Before, we thought that she was dead at that point. So, partway through the call, you can hear us realizing that she's still breathing, that she's still alive, and that they need to send, like, an ambulance and stuff - not just cops.

Scott

So neither of you knew how to do CPR.

Kylie

No, I am pissed at myself to this day for not knowing. I have since gotten certified though. I did pull the instructor aside and, sort of, ask like, "What difference it would have made. I don't think much of any." The 911 operator was being very confusing with us because she was telling us to leave the room. Then, she would say, "Start CPR." And we're like, "Okay, but we left the room because he told us to leave the room." "We don't know CPR. So what do we do? Can you, like, teach us? Can you tell us?" I was just so powerless.

Scott

So the ambulance got there and brought her to the hospital. Did you go to the hospital with her?

Kylie

They wouldn't let us go to the hospital with her. When you make a 911 call for somebody who has a bullet in them, they treat it like a homicide first. After they rule out homicide, that's when they will say suicide. So we were under investigation right away. I mean, they were very gentle with us. They weren't being, like, accusatory towards us, but they just had to make sure that they were doing their due diligence and ruling everything out. So, we were brought out of the room, sat down on the couches, and we had a bunch of officers standing in the house. Her apartment was carpeted. She had a rule about no shoes. I just kept seeing these cops with their big boots. I believe it was raining that night and they were just tracking their nasty boots all over the floor, and I was, like, shaking my head because I just knew that she would be pissed. We weren't even allowed to go outside on, like, the porch and smoke cigarettes. Landon ended up smoking a cigarette inside the living room. It was just chaotic as hell while we were waiting for this detective to get there and interview us. They have to collect stuff from her room and take pictures. It's a whole thing before they'll let anybody out.

Scott

Did they determine right then that it was not a homicide - that it was a suicide?

Kylie

Yeah. They were able to make that determination enough that night/morning to where we could go home the next morning when we were ready. So that would have been Sunday, 14th. When we were allowed to leave, we had to wait, of course, for the detectives and stuff to get there. I had texted Jordan what had happened. She called, so I had a phone call with her just trying to explain because she didn't know I was there at all, that I was going over there, and that we were talking beyond anything. So not only do I have this insane, terrible, fucked up news, but also - "What the hell were you doing there?" - just trying to try to explain that.

Landon had called this guy, Nate. I found out that Nate was the one who gave her the gun. The gun was under his name. He bought it for her as a birthday gift. As her birthday was January 5 that year, she only had this gun for a few days - not a few years like I thought. He didn't know the extent of what she had going on in her personal life because she did not open up to him the way that she opened up with some people. So he didn't know the risk that he was really taking when he bought her that for her birthday. We're now able to leave. I wrote her a note on a napkin,

"Amber, I haven't known you for long at all, but I feel so grateful for every second even though what we've been through should have been the last time. We even contacted. I am so extremely glad it was not. You have shown me so much love, appreciation, and dedication even though our paths would have never allowed you to. I think I'm cursed, to be honest. But I hope - with every last drop of luck that I may have - that you live. I don't want this to be the end.

Kylie."

So, of course, I wrote that, thinking that there may have been a possibility that she would live to read it.

Scott

So you left that there at her place.

Kylie

Yeah, I left it at her place. She had this coffee table with a glass top where people had written her, like, poems, notes, and stuff like that. When I saw the notes written under the glass table, it gave me the idea to write her note that, maybe, would end up there with the rest of the notes at some point - I don't know what I was thinking. I just needed some way to get out what I was thinking. I felt like what had happened was somehow a result of me feeling cursed, like I'm not worthy of friends, I'm not worthy of relationships, I'm not worthy of her, and this is just the universe taking her away from me - that's kind of what I felt like. I was hoping that she would pull through.

Scott

At this point, she's at the hospital?

Kylie

Yeah, she's at the trauma unit at Grady. We were able to leave the apartment and I was going to head to Jordan's apartment at that time. I made that drive to her house, pretty much, every day at that point. I knew the way. My phone was dead and I, obviously, had just been through something really fucked up and my brain did not work at all. I got lost on the way home to her house - a drive that I had made several times, very recently, at that point. I should have been able to make the drive again without the GPS. I kept pulling over, asking for directions, looking like a crazy person crying, and they would tell me, like, "This way, this way, and this way." I would forget immediately after. Then, I'd be pulling away and was like, "Oh, well, I don't want to turn around and ask them again, so I'll find somebody else." A 20-minute drive tops took me an hour overnight, but I somehow made it. Right away, I walked in and just, sort of, explained what happened. I hugged Sky and apologized because I felt like I had squandered something like this responsibility - like, "I'm sorry that I let this happen to your friend because you've known her for so long. Of course, we were hoping that it would be fine." It's not fine because, obviously, it's a head injury - we're hoping that she wouldn't die.

Scott

Even if she came through, still, this was a suicide attempt. This is something that's a big thing that you'd have to deal with.

Kylie

For sure. I had to make a few calls at the request of friends of hers that wanted to know what happened or whatever, and I told them what happened. It's pretty tough having to tell that story the first couple of times. I would just break down. It's been a few years now, so I'm able to sort of tell it without just being a mess, but it's tough.

Scott

When did you go to the hospital?

Kylie

We were able to go to the hospital the next day, Monday. A big group of people - friends - all drove over there and got to the hospital. We pretty quickly found out that 2 of us were not welcome there - the 2 of us were, of course, myself and Landon, her roommate. Amber's mom came to the waiting area to, sort of, bring us in. We had to go in groups of two and we were not allowed to touch her or stand next to her. We're only allowed 5 minutes which, honestly, I don't think I was even given the full 5 minutes - I think she cut it short.

Scott

So it was Amber's mom that was making these rules about your access to her?

Kylie

Yeah, it was not the hospital. It wasn't her condition that was preventing us from visiting how we ought to be visiting. It was her mom. Her mom was very disconnected from the fact that this was a suicide. I believe it had already been cleared at that point obviously enough to where we could leave and we weren't criminals. She didn't seem to know that her daughter had depression. She didn't seem to know that anything would cause this at all. She had no idea. I guess - I don't know - maybe, Amber just didn't talk to her mom about these things. Or maybe she knew, but she was just really in denial at that point. She was convinced that somebody had killed her daughter, or somebody had shot her daughter. She was yelling accusations mostly at Landon because he's a man and, I guess, her mom figured it more likely that the man in the situation would have hurt her. But I mean, she just wasn't believing anything we were saying. Her dad paced the hallways of the hospital and said, "You get in there and take a good look at what you could have prevented."

Scott

They don't know you or Landon very well but, as a parent in that kind of situation, it's almost understandable that they would just lash out.

Kylie

Yeah. I mean, I do get it to some extent. I mean, that hospital visit was traumatizing in and of itself - being treated like that. I just wish that they could have stepped back and understood, like, "These are 2 people that had to deal with this, like, on the front line, so to say. How could they have just thought that we were in any sort of emotional position to take what they were throwing at us?"

Landon and I didn't get to go on together. They separated us. They put Landon and our other friend, Alex, together in a group and then myself and this girl, Sarah, together. When we got into the hospital room, I didn't really know what I was expecting. She was hooked up to breathing tubes and wasn't responsive although she was making, like, squeaking noises as if she kind of understood that somebody was in the room. Maybe, she might have been trying to say something. Her face was very swollen. I could see how swollen everything was with respect to her nose because her nose stayed the same size while everything else just, sort of, ballooned out beyond her nose and discolored. She was really in rough shape. To my understanding, the swelling was internal as well - she was having brain swelling. Her mom kept saying that the detectives think that something is fishy going on and they're gonna investigate this to the full extent. They're gonna get to the bottom of this.

Scott

But none of that was true.

Kylie

No, it wasn't. The detectives did not think anything at all was going on. I mean, looking back, I got the police report after the fact because I had some questions in my mind as to whether it was a press contact or, maybe, a ricochet or something. As I said, her arm went forward, so I thought, maybe, she shot something on the floor out of anger and it bounced - I don't know. There are records of all the detectives' inner thoughts about this and, every step of the way, they're like, "This is a suicide." Like, it's obvious. They found text messages of hers where she

was talking about having depression, thinking about suicide, and being out of medication. They found empty pill bottles of depression medications - some with her name, some without her name - like, with a different person's name. So she was taking other people's medication to substitute the medication that she no longer had access to, which is another factor that led to what happened because of being off of antidepressants, taking an abnormal dose, skipping days, and mixing it with alcohol. All these things are extremely dangerous and can very much lead you to suicide. But her mom was not having any of it and it was really tough to endure that. I mean, in my ideal world, I would have sat by her, held her hand, cried next to her, and told her to pull through, but I just wasn't allowed to do any of that. I was treated like a criminal - like it was all my fault. After our group had left, her parents decided they had enough. They didn't want anybody else to go in. So, in our carpool of people, it was only 4 of us that were allowed to go in. So, Jordan and Sky weren't allowed to go in at all because the parents were distraught and had enough of visitors.

Scott

And they're in control.

Kylie

Yeah. And they're in control. We had to leave.

Scott

How long did Amber last?

Kylie

She passed away at 8.11 PM on January 16 - the next day, Tuesday. Basically, the swelling was just too much. They weren't gonna be able to do anything. There wasn't anything that they could do. I was so deep in denial when she passed. When she actually passed, I was still talking about her in present tense. I was really horrified and worried that, maybe, I wouldn't be allowed to go to her funeral. So that was making me really upset. Thinking about her parents acting like that in the hospital, there's no way that they're going to let me and Landon go. At that point, Landon was staying with my mom and I was in my dad's old room. I had mentioned how that Christmas would be our last Christmas together. My dad had already left the state at that point. He left to live in South Carolina, where he's still at. So we had an empty room. My parents had separate bedrooms, pretty much, my whole life growing up. I had a very odd relationship - if you can call it that. So we had a spare bedroom. Landon was staying with us because his name was not on the lease at that apartment. Not only was it just too much for him to bear being there anymore, but he would not be allowed to be there anymore. Her parents had made it very clear that nobody was supposed to be living there regardless of any arrangements they had made.

Scott

It seems so unusual. I mean, Landon isn't someone that you had known for a long time, either.

Kylie

We were trauma-bonded. We went through this awful thing together. We were the only people that understood what we were going through. Yeah, I mean, we're complete strangers. The only way that I know this person is that he was her roommate and we had been through this awful thing together. Now, he was staying with us in my dad's old bedroom. I mean, we really helped each other through a lot of that.

Scott

So were you allowed to attend the funeral?

Kylie

Thankfully, we were. I don't know how they came to the conclusion that they were going to let us come, but they did. There were actually two separate things. There was a "viewing" which was not a viewing because she was cremated. It was a visitation-type thing. It was at a funeral home. But it wasn't a funeral. It was sort of casual. We were just milling around, sharing stories, and stuff like that. I wore tie dye into that, as she instructed. I did tell people that was what she said. I said, "Hey, as hard as it is to believe and as ridiculous as it sounds right now, she did actually tell me this. So if you want to do that, you can." Some people did wear tie dye.

Scott

You don't often see that at a funeral.

Kylie

Yeah, you don't. She was a big fan of tie dye. She liked colors and happy things despite being not very internally happy. She always had the biggest smile. Most of her pictures of her have this big grin on her face.

Scott

How did you deal with this? I mean, typically, counseling is what would help get through something like this, right? Did you do that?

Kylie

I called my Papi - he's my grandpa on my dad's side. I called my Papi and I asked him for help. I said, "Hey, do you know any counselors or anything?" Because I know that he's a kind of a community staple - he knows a lot of people. I just figured, maybe, he knows a friend or somebody who's a counselor who would be able to help me out. I told him what happened minus the drugs and the gay parts. Of course, if somebody does hear this podcast and finds out about this, I'm sorry that I didn't tell you.

Scott

Now you're out.

Kylie

Yeah, it'd be like that. It's somehow easier to tell a podcast with thousands of listeners than it is to tell your own family. So yeah, my Papi was a big help with this whole thing. He is, surprisingly, very understanding of mental health as an elderly person because he has his own mental health struggles with being a war veteran with PTSD. So he was very helpful with helping me get a counselor. He paid for 6 sessions for me to go talk to the counselor and try to work out some initial things, which definitely helped. I'm not cured, obviously. It didn't, like, take everything away, but I do think that it made those first couple of months possible because what I found after this is that the pain somebody feels when they commit suicide does not go away, it spreads to other people. So I was pretty depressed before this happened. Then, of course, the assault added to that. Then, of course, the trauma from her doing this in front of me and from losing her - the grief and the guilt...

Scott

That's a whole lot of things piled on top of each other.

Kylie

Yeah, losing my entire friend group, my entire support system— everybody that I knew hated me. So I kind of referred to it as, like, a poison. It's like a poisonous, suicidal feeling. It goes away sometimes, and then it comes back. The pain doesn't leave, it spreads.

Scott

This was a few years ago.

Kylie

Yeah, this happened five years from now.

Scott

How are you doing now?

Kylie

Two years after this happened, I got diagnosed with PTSD because I was working a job where I was doing, like, woodworking. So I was working with loud tools in a very loud environment. I started noticing that when I would use certain tools, I would get really upset and, like, cry and stuff. I would just sit there and be working on putting together wooden frames and things like that with a nail gun, and I just wouldn't be able to stop seeing the image of her and her blood. The feelings and imagery of everything associated with that would come back to me with the sounds of these nail guns because the nail gun - like I said, the gunshot didn't sound too much like a gunshot - sounds like a loud pop - almost like a nail gun. So I noticed that I was getting really distraught at work and crying every day at work. Obviously, I had after-effects besides that. I had gone through some issues with self-harm, some issues with alcoholism, some issues with self-medicating with Valium, Xanax, and things like that. So I've gone through some after-effects, for sure, before the two years.

When I realized, like, "This was two years ago", I didn't think it was going to go away. I also didn't think that I would be crying at work every single day because of the nail gun. So I knew that I needed help again and that 6 six counseling sessions after this happened weren't going to fix me. So I started looking online for - I don't know - like, group therapy because I heard that you don't have to pay money for group therapy, usually. So I just wanted to find something that I could do for free because I couldn't really afford therapy or counseling at that time. I had moved out on my own. I was paying my own bills. I didn't live with Landon anymore. So, I had a lot of bills and a lot of responsibilities. I couldn't afford counseling. I looked up this group and I found what's called "Survivors of suicide." It's a group that meets up usually once a month. Just everybody in the group has lost somebody to suicide in some form or fashion. I found that going to those is really helpful.

Scott

These are your people.

Kylie

Yeah. I thought that, maybe, I would be the only person there who had witnessed one. But actually, the group leader had witnessed her loved one suicide as well - the same method. Then, I discovered that this feeling that I had when I'm alone and, like, I'm the only person going through this is not true. There are other people who have had the misfortune of witnessing or finding— and I listened to that episode that you did with the woman who found her husband. There are other people going through this. So I would encourage, like, if there are any listeners

out there who are going through any sort of suicide loss, there's a website - maybe you can link it in the description. So find a support group - a free support group - to talk to other people who have lost people to suicide.

Scott

Yeah, we can do that. It's remarkable that someone that you only knew for, like, a couple of weeks could have such a profound and long effect on your life.

Kylie

I've thought about that a lot - what it means to know somebody, what it means to love somebody, what it means to be hurt by somebody's loss and to miss someone. I don't think time has anything to do with it. I mean, it certainly can. We had a very intense time together. I miss her. Certainly, for a while, after she passed away, I would get these feelings of, like, wanting to text her and wanting to send her some funny memes. When I meet somebody, I would think, like, "Oh, this would be somebody that Amber would have liked." It sucks. She was only 22 years old. I've only just turned 22. I mean, I'm 23 now. I had to turn 22 as well and think about it like, "I haven't lived enough life at 22." I think it's important to tell the story and to let people hear it because I had certainly never thought about the people who find someone or witness someone committing suicide. Obviously, it's a tragedy, we miss the person, and we feel sad for the person's loss, but the other thing people often don't consider is that they're leaving people hurting because of it, that we're left to pick up the pieces and deal with it, and then the guilt and the shame that comes with it, feeling responsible, feeling like you could have done something or said something. I mean, in my situation, I didn't have time, I didn't even know that she had the gun in her hand, that she was planning. There wasn't, like, an opportunity for me to talk her down. I think people just expect that "Oh, well, if somebody is there, then they could have done something about it. They could have been the ones to save the day." Unfortunately, I'm not the one who saved the day. Nobody could save the day. So, I just want to encourage people to have empathy for the people who are there or are there shortly afterward because it's a really hard position to be in with the guilt and, certainly, the survivor's guilt.

Scott

You heard Kylie mention that she lost a lot of her friends over this incident. For a while, even her best friend Jordan was part of that. But since then, Kylie and Jordan have rekindled their friendship – and in fact they are now roommates.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts about suicide or self harm, please be aware that you can call and talk to someone anytime of the day or night by dialing 988. This used to be called the National Suicide Hotline, but now it's the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Someone is always available, and it's always free and confidential.

Also, you can see the website that Kylie used to find support for those who have survived loss. That information, as well as pictures of Kylie and Amber, are in the show notes for this episode, at WhatWasThatLike.com/125.

I also wanted to mention that Kylie is in our Facebook group, so if there's a question that I didn't ask that you're wondering about, you can ask her in the discussion about this episode. We've had about 200 new people join the group just in the last couple of weeks – and many of them are long-time listeners of the podcast, who finally joined the Facebook group just because they wanted to comment on the LAST episode about Josh being struck by lightning. And boy, were

there some comments about that one! If you're wondering what all the fuss is about, come on over! [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook).

And before we get to this week's Listener Story, I want to tell you about a podcast that I'm pretty sure you're going to love. Obviously, because I'm not going to promote a show that I don't think you'll like. Anyway, this is a fairly new show, called Beastie Bonds. I'm subscribed to it because I'm a big animal lover, and I know you are too. On this podcast, you'll hear first-hand stories of people talking about their remarkable experiences and situations where the bond between animals and humans made all the difference. It's hosted by my friend AJ, and even though she's new to podcasting, you wouldn't know it by listening to this show – she has a great voice and the podcast is very well produced. And the stories are great! For a first episode, I recommend the one titled "194 days". You can subscribe anywhere, or listen at the website at BeastieBonds.com.

And now, this week's Listener Story. This is how we end every episode – a story sent in by a listener. If you have a story that you can tell in about 5 minutes, record it on your phone and email it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com. You just might hear yourself on a future episode!

In this story, we get a snippet of what it can be like to be a baseball team mascot.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks, because I'm already working on the first episode for 2023.

(Listener story)

Mark

Hi, my name is Mark from Shorewood, Illinois. I worked in minor-league baseball for 5 years. My assigned job was the marketing department but, in the minors, everyone wears a lot of hats and pitches in wherever they can. This meant I spent a good amount of time in a mascot suit. The majority of my time in a suit was with a team in South Florida called the Stone Crabs. You can imagine the heat of being in a thick furry suit at noon on a July day in Florida. If you can get through the sweat though, being a mascot can be a pretty magical job. People constantly call your name, want to take pictures with you, and even have you sign things - cards, baseballs, and programs. I even had a kid give me his shoe and another give me his bare arm to sign. I also got to dance in the dugout in front of a sellout crowd of 4,000 roaring fans.

The one story that captures the true power of a mascot, however, is this. One night, I did my laps around the park. A few kids started following me. I turned around, gave them high fives, posed for pictures, did all my usual routine, and then turned to walk elsewhere. The kids kept following me. I noticed that there were more kids than there were last time. I decided to see how far they would go with this, so I started marching and swinging my arms dramatically at my sides. They copied it. I began marching my way around the entire stadium, and they followed. As we approached the third base feeding section, fans were starting to clap in time with our march. We continued on through the bowl. I led, the kids followed, and the clapping grew. Here was this mascot leading a band of children around the ballpark which is really quite incredible. We must have made 2 or 3 laps before the kids finally grew tired and went back to their families, but not before a few group photos were taken by grateful parents. It's amazing how much power a shag carpet with a funny nose can have.

