

Episode 127: Bonus – the Listener Stories from 2022

If you subscribe to the show , you might be saying, “Hey, this is not a regular new episode Friday!”. But that’s okay, because this is not a regular new episode. This is a BONUS episode.

If you’re a regular listener to What Was That Like, and you listen to each episode all the way to the end, you probably know that we end every episode with a Listener Story. I started doing this about a year and half, maybe two years ago, and it’s become a really popular segment.

The Listener Stories are just short stories, like 3-5 minutes or maybe a little longer, that have been sent in by a listener. Everyone has a story they could send in, and that includes you – yeah, I’m talking to you right now. You have a story that would qualify as a Listener Story. Because the Listener Stories aren’t the big crazy ones that we do a whole episode about, like getting attacked by a monkey or winning prizes on Wheel of Fortune.

No, the Listener Stories are more like a little interesting slice of life. It could be really happy, or really sad, or really funny. Just something interesting that you can record on your phone, and just email it to me at Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

So what we’re doing today is, we’re going to hear all of the Listener Stories that came at the end of each episode for all of 2022. That means that just in this episode, you’re gonna have like 2 hours of stories.

So let me know what you think of this. If it’s a popular thing, I’ll probably do the same thing at the end of 2023. Maybe it will become a tradition.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this episode with all the Listener Stories from 2022.

My workplace had a gym with it. The gym costs a lot of money. It was like \$60 a month. Well, I’m cheap. I don’t pay for stuff like that. I’m just, “Nah, that ain’t for me.” Well, one week, they were like, “Hey, we need some more members, so we’re going to make it free for anyone who works at this company.” I’m like, “Okay, but because I like working out, trying to stay in shape, and stuff.” So, this gym is nice. They’ve got a pool. They’ve got a whole decked-out weight room with dumbbells that I can’t even wait to pick up. They had a punching bag area. They had a track. It was dope. So, I was getting my workout, getting my pump, working up a sweat, and getting a sore. I know that this gym has a steam room and I’m like, “Oh boy, this is gonna be nice. I’m gonna go chill in the Steam Room.” I was going to, kind of, just cool down which I find is hilariously ironic because it’s a steam room. So, I went into the locker, I’ve stayed in my shorts because I’m not a weirdo, and I’m like, “Alright, cool. We’re gonna hit this steam room.” So I hit up in the steam room and I’m by myself, which is even better because that means that I don’t have to make any awkward conversation with people. Then, lo and behold, a guy decides to join. I’m like, “Alright, that’s fine, whatever.” This dude comes in with nothing but, essentially, a loincloth of a towel around him. This is like a big old swole dude - like, the dude’s got muscles on muscles - and I’m like, “Okay!” Then, that guy gave a little head nod and sat on the other side. I didn’t know what day this guy was having, but this guy was just fuming and throwing random swear words. I’m like, “Okay, that’s a little crazy but that’s fine. You stay on your end, I

stay on mine, and we're gonna be good." This homeboy - out of whatever pocket he had - pulled out shake weights and I'm like, "Bro... what?!" Ooookay then." Then, he's getting all the poses - he's hitting it from the back, he's hitting it from the front. If he wasn't in a steam room, this dude would be looking like Opal Silhouette. It felt like an eternity up in there and I was sitting there like, "Oh, this is kind of weird because he's grunting. This is really weird..." Eventually, he slams the shake weight down, drops a major F-bomb, grabs his shake weight, grabs his towel, and walks out stark naked. I'm like, "Bro, what just happened? Was that a mating ritual?! Does this guy want me to go home with him? Is he the alpha now?" I don't know how to feel about this. So, the next day rolls around and I'm like, "Alright, man, that was a statistical anomaly. Worst case scenario, I'm gonna hit these weights and I'm gonna hit the steam room. I might have some weird old guy with the saggy everything hanging out, and it's gonna be a good time. It'd be fine. It's gonna be fine. That ain't gonna happen. Again, that is just a statistical anomaly." So, I'm in the locker room getting ready, again, and wearing shorts because I'm not a weirdo. I opened up the door to the Steam Room and it was like putting cheese on a mousetrap. The shake weight was sitting there by itself catching all of that steam. Then I said, "No. Nah, fam. It's a trap right there. That ain't happening." So, I never went into that steam room again.

This is a story of my first experience calling 911. It was frightening. It was a beautiful day in New England. The colors of fall had just started to turn to a gentle shade of gold throughout the backfield of my parents' home up in Massachusetts. It was a day when the idea of making cookies just sparked into my head and it was something that I actually love doing. The night before, Mom had made a beautiful broiled steak for dinner. It was one of her favorite go-to recipes. I guess in those days, the broiler was, sort of, like, the microwave today in our household. It is fast and easy to use to produce a decent meal. As habit prevailed, nobody typically took out the broiler to actually clean the pan because it was a job that all of us hated. So, that night, the pan stayed in the oven. The next day, as I had finished making all the dough for the cookies, I turned on the oven to preheat it to a nice warm temperature of about 375°F. Within minutes, I noticed a smell that was just not quite right. As I turned around and looked into the window of the oven, I saw an amber glow which is definitely something unexpected when you're preheating the oven for cookies.

Panic struck and I knew that those were flames shooting up inside the oven. It was something that I didn't expect that day. Within seconds I had called mom and said, "Please help me! Something's wrong! Call 911!" She came running into the kitchen and immediately dialed our local emergency fire department. Our 911 team was a local volunteer group which is very typical of New England rural communities. The dispatcher was good enough to explain what to do and what not to do. We followed her instructions to a tee and waited outside for the fire department to arrive. When they came, we followed them into the kitchen and flames had started to come out of the back of the oven. Within seconds, they had quickly put out the fire and calmed us down.

Honestly, our nerves were rattled as we sat in the cool air on the back step of the kitchen door, just thinking what might have happened. Our dogs were in hand, our hearts were calmed, and our fears were put at ease. Thankfully, the oven remained intact and in good shape, as did the rest of our house. Thank you 911 team in Rochester, Massachusetts! You taught me a lot that day. Mom, you always taught me to always clean the broiler when I'm done with it.

PS. the cookies were great.

Hello, this is Nancy May the author of "How to Survive 911 Medical Emergencies: Step-by-Step Before, During, After!" This book is available on amazon.com. In addition, I'm the host of the podcast 'Doing It Best with Eldercare Success' where we bring more joy and love in the times that we spend taking care of our elderly parents or perhaps a frail spouse or loved one. So, come on over to 'Doing It Best with Eldercare Success' or search for 'Eldercare Success' on any of the major podcast platforms including Spotify, Apple, iTunes, and Castbox. Thanks, we'll see you soon!

This is Mary from Southern California. I'm fairly new to your podcast. I find that first-person accounts are so interesting. It gives dimension to the stories - some of which made headlines. Your recent episode of Karen Runge's encounter with poachers and their dogs in South Africa made my heart race because of an experience I had with my dog. This happened in March of 2020. My dog, Mila, was 11 at the time. She's a rescued mixed breed - she's black and caramel in color - and our best guess is, maybe, she's a mix of Doberman, Beagle, Shepherd, or Boxer. She has short hair, ears that flop at the tips, and she can smile. She has 40 pounds of energy, athleticism and curiosity. She's super smart and friendly. She and I walk daily about 4 miles on a fairly consistent route through our suburban quasi rural neighborhood. It's not unusual to encounter other dogs and even horses on our walks. Most of my neighborhood doesn't have sidewalks so we typically walk in the street or on the horse trails.

On this particular march morning, Mila and I had set out on our usual 7 o'clock walk. Our route took us by a number of houses where dogs would bark as we walk pass them. Being mindful of the early hour, I would do my best to walk on the opposite side of the street so as to keep the barking to a minimum. We were in the last half of our walk heading south down at the side street that wasn't heavily traveled. The only people who uses that particular street live in one of the dozen or so houses on the street. For that reason, I usually walk down the middle of the street and occasionally check behind me for any improbability of a car approaching.

We had just turned down this street when I caught movement out of the corner of my eye. When I looked behind me, I spotted two Rottweilers approaching at a slow trot. I held up my hand and said "stay", which they did. Instead of looking curious like most dogs we've encountered, I can only describe them as being watchful. To go directly home, I would have to walk in their direction. I decided to pull Mila closer to me and continue walking away at a leisurely pace, so as not to encourage them to chase us. I said "stay" one more time, and turned to walk away. In no time, they were right up next to me. My dog didn't seem alarmed. I was hoping that they would all just sniff and move on. But before I could even comprehend what was happening, the larger one of the two dogs clamped his mouth down on the back of my dog's neck and dragged her to a front yard that we were in front of. He proceeded to press her down with his mouth off of her neck. The most ungodly screaming was coming from her. I was screaming for help too.

The second Rottweiler was standing next to my dog. I was afraid that if the larger dog was able to flip me over, the second dog would go for her belly. A friend who has many dogs once told me, "If two dogs are fighting, you don't grab them by the collar because you don't want your

hands that close to their mouth. Instead, you should grab their back legs and pull them apart.” I grabbed the dog's back legs in an attempt to do just that. He shifted position in such a sudden jerky motion that it knocked me down on my back. I tried again to grab anything that I could get ahold of to get him off my dog, but he was so muscular - there was just nothing to grab. I remember realizing that these dogs were killing my dog right in front of me and that I couldn't stop them. The home I was in front of was occupied by an older resident who was likely reluctant to come outside even if she heard me. The house to my left was unoccupied as it was for sale. The house behind me was newly remodeled and I doubted that I could be heard through their new windows. Plus, in March, not many people were leaving windows open, so the chances of anyone hearing me screaming were minimal.

Then, I realized that a car had approached. The driver stopped and came running over. I heard him say, “What are you guys doing out?” as he proceeded to kick the larger dog. As soon as my dog was freed, I asked if he would, please, drive me home. He said, “Yes.” So, I managed to get my dog into his car. Her eyes were wide with terror and she was trembling uncontrollably. It took him a few minutes to return to his car which he used to drive us home. I managed to get his first name - Andrew. I learned later that he recognized the dogs - they belong to his neighbor. He had called the neighbor, whose wife came out and got the dogs. Once we got home, I took Mila into the bathroom where I could wipe her off. Her neck was wet with what I had thought was slobber, but the washcloth turned out to be bloody. So, I knew that she was more seriously injured than I originally thought.

I took her to our vet who irrigated and cleaned her wounds. They said that they generally didn't do deep cleaning as the tissue was already so damaged and they didn't want to do further damage. They sent her home with antibiotics and cautioned me to watch for infection. As it turned out, the wounds became infected and she had to undergo another surgery with stitches and drains. To give you an idea of how large the Rottweiler was in relation to Mila, the wounds stretched from punctures next to her right ear across to her left shoulder. She was a pretty pitiful sight.

I was able to track down our guardian angel, Andrew, who said that he had left for work a little later than usual that morning. If he left for work in his normal time, it's unlikely that any other cars would have driven past. I was able to track down the owner of the Rottweilers as well. He admitted that it was his fault that his dogs were out. His automatic gate closer had bumped into his truck bumper as he had left for work. Unbeknownst to him, the gate had reopened, allowing his dogs to get out. He took full responsibility for the attack - covering all of our vet bills which were quite extensive. Mila's fully recovered. She's more wary of loose dogs than she used to be. She'll be 13 next month. We still walk every day - not always - for miles. She determines our route and duration these days. She has severe arthritis in her back legs, but she's still game for walks every day. In so many of your guests' stories, there's a turning point when something just happens at the right time. If I had been able to get the larger dog off my dog, I'm not sure how that would have unfolded. I can't imagine those dogs allowing my dog and I to just retreat. In my case, a guardian angel named Andrew arrived at just the right time.

We don't remember the fact-checkers, but we remember the storytellers. Just look around. Think about the people that you quote. Think about what you can't wait to tell your friend. Think

about when you go to an event. I don't come back and say here are the stats that I learned. Here's the order in which they presented it, I'd say, "Check out this story that I heard. There are facts and lessons within those stories." So many people get this backward. Storytelling is how you stand out and storytelling is how you're remembered. I'm going to wrap this up with a story from my career that allowed us to stand out and expand our reach, our influence, and our income. It's not only about being able to tell stories but bringing stories together, and knowing when to do it. Photography stories are not part of my career because there's so much meaning to it - so many hard lessons were learned during those times. The two things I did were shooting sports and shooting weddings.

My wife and I Elizabeth did the weddings together, but I did sports on my own. They don't sound much different except they're both, kind of, action-packed. You would think that someone that shoots the brutal blood-spitting, hard-hitting, and board-crunching game of hockey would have little connection to the pristine world of weddings. Weddings are what little girls have dreamed of - that perfect romantic day - since they were seven. You would also think that the brides want to see nothing but the beautiful details of their perfect wedding day reflected back at them by the photographer that they chose. Deep into our wedding photography career, I met with a bride and her dad about our upcoming nuptials. Our approach to meeting with the bride was, kind of, simple. I brought two briefcases - both of them were beautiful, modern, and custom-designed wedding albums. Those albums allow us to show 2 full weddings from start to finish, displaying not only our storytelling abilities but the way we capture moments, the way that we saw light, and the quality of our albums.

One evening, before I was to meet with a potential client, I picked up a copy of a magazine that I had been impatiently waiting for a few days. It was an issue of Sports Illustrated, but not just any issue of Sports Illustrated. It was the issue that, after years of trying, I had one of my images prominently displayed. A few months earlier, I shot a picture of Pittsburgh Penguins' Superstar, Sidney Crosby. That picture was selected by their editors to be the main photograph for the 2-page wide feature story that they wrote about him. I couldn't even contain my excitement because Sports Illustrated was one of my favorite magazines growing up. It was probably the most favorite magazine of mine. As a photographer, it was one of my biggest dreams to get a prominent spot in that magazine. When I got that copy in my hand, I stared at it way longer than I should have.

I thought back about all the years when I made no money in the industry. I made a grand total of \$20,000 in my first 6 years of shooting - including my time at school. So many emotions flooded my head as I stared at that paper. I wanted to show this to my friend later on. I put 1 of the copies in 1 of the briefcases that held our albums. So, I was at this meeting that night with the bride and her family. Her parents were there, and she seemed to really enjoy our work. The conversation was good but I didn't get the vibe that they would absolutely book me. Sometimes, we can tell this by their language. They just need to meet us in person just to make sure that we're not total lunatics before they sign the check and the contract. This meeting wasn't the case. She made it clear that they've met with a handful of photographers, and they would make their decision once they evaluated all the options.

At the end of the meeting, as I was putting the album back into the case, I saw the Sports Illustrated at the bottom, then I had an idea that was completely unscripted. I said, "Hey, would you like to see something cool?" They all agreed. I reached in, pulled out the magazine, and showed them my image. The bride asked, "You shot that?" I went into full storytelling mode. I told him the entire story, including how I had such a bad back problem that I almost didn't even

make it to that game. I could hardly walk and was awaiting a possible surgery, but I couldn't turn down this assignment because it was for a new agency, and I wouldn't get future work if I said 'No'. Then, I told the story, "Because there's back pain. I got no sleep the night before. I showed up at the arena realizing that not only did I forget to bring my camera batteries, but also 1 of the 2 cameras that I brought was a broken 1 that was supposed to be sent into the shop. The entire afternoon was a comedy of errors on my part and it kept leading down a darker, more painful path.

There was a period of time when I didn't think I was gonna be able to shoot anything. I had to go back to this agency and tell them this embarrassing story and, obviously, never work again for them. Even though the picture turned out right, they were hanging on every word that I was saying. I made sure I took my time and let them feel what I was feeling. They couldn't get enough. I've described the end of the game when that image was made. Usually, if I'm in good health, I would leave my spot to rush back with the photo, transmit the images as quickly as possible, get out of there, and beat the traffic, but I was in so much pain that I just sat there, so I let the crowd fall out and I just waited. While I was sitting there, the team announced that 3 stars - it's when they say who the 3 top players in the game are - and the players come back on the ice. The house lights were shut off and there was nothing but a spotlight on them. It's a pretty cool visual. Sidney Crosby was awarded the top star for the game with nothing but a spotlight on him. He skated on through the ice, spun around, and waved his stick towards the crowd. He happened to look right at me when I fired one frame.

A month later, Crosby got hit in the mouth, had a tooth knocked out, and went out of commission. But after that, he came back better than ever. Sports Illustrated did a cover story about Sidney Crosby. My picture was a 2-page picture inside for that story. Also, that night, when I went to transmit, I didn't even think that much of the image. I was contracted to send 20 images to the agency and I had sent 19. I chose that one for the 20th and that was the photo they selected. The bride and her parents sat with their mouths wide open. They looked at each other. Then, they looked at me. Then, they looked at the photograph again. "We want you for our wedding," she declared. Not surprisingly. I kept that image and that magazine in the briefcase. It became a routine that, near the end of the meeting, I would say, "Do you want to see something cool?"

One night, during a meeting with the bride and her dad on the second floor of the Galleria Mall, I asked the same question again. By now, I had this story down and I knew all the details. I figured out what made people gasp and what words to emphasize - it was almost like it was part of a show. The dad is a highly successful attorney who was really hard to impress. He looked towards his daughter and gave a mafia-like nod. "If you're good enough for the Penguins, you're good enough for my daughter," he declared while reaching into his pocket and pulling out his checkbook, then he handed me a \$6,000 check. It took me 6 years to make \$20,000 in photography. It took me less than 2 weeks to make more than \$20,000 with one photograph! That's the power of storytelling - to convey a feeling that allows you to stand out in a sea of sameness.

When we went into those meetings, our company was just one of many. After hearing that story, we immediately formed a connection that won them over in a way that they were so excited to not only have us as a wedding photographer but also someone who used the same camera to photograph their sports heroes. Those were the words that one bride used to her parents, literally, moments before they walk down the aisle. They wouldn't have known that without these stories - we would have been just like everyone else. So as we end this, I want you to think

about that for yourself: What are the stories that make you stand out? Not facts, not figures, not numbers. What are the stories that you can tell even if it's just one that shows why you're different than everybody else? If you can convey and connect with that, you can open up worlds that you never thought is possible. Thank you as always for listening to the "Total Life Freedom" podcast. We are here to make you better every day because this is your life on freedom.

This is about a time I felt the most scared in my life. It was 2019 when I had booked a work trip to Istanbul with a director friend. We wanted to film this documentary about the most historic monumental places related to the Turkish Ottoman Empire. One of our filming spots in our list was this historic landmark called the Galata Tower, which was the tallest building during the Ottoman Empire - it also showed a bird's eye view of the whole city of Istanbul. When we arrived at our location to film - we were quite late - the queue of tourists surrounding the tower was insanely long, so we decided to call it off.

We had supper at this nearby cafe where we came to learn that right next to the Galata Tower is supposed to be this beautiful remote hotel, which was a 400-year-old rickety building and was supposedly the most haunted building in the area. Tourists would avoid spending the night at this hotel, so it immediately caught our attention. We went inside this haunted hotel with my director friend and we went to the front desk to inquire further. There, we came across this rather beautiful concierge in his early 20s - a very timidly, shallow look alike if anything - and there is a reason I'm mentioning his appearance. Anyway, we told him that we didn't want to stay at this hotel, but if he can tell and confirm with us about the hauntings, which he did, that it indeed was a haunted building, supposedly - the third floor of this hotel is especially the one that scares people away. He kept insisting that he will give us a very good discount if we booked a stay in this hotel with his quite charming smile. Obviously, we were not into this. My director friend wasn't keen to talk about this, but I was very keen to film this 3rd floor because, obviously, it caught my attention.

So the following day, I decided to go ahead - my director called it off. I mean, I always had a thing for the haunted McCobb places so I went ahead solo. I thought I could film it on my iPhone and edit it in a documentary somehow. It was around sunset when I checked in at the front desk with a new concierge acquaintance. He offered me the high tea menu which came with a booking. So I had that high tea. I mean, obviously, it was dark outside now when I asked this concierge to guide me to the dreaded 3rd-floor suite that I was there for. The floor itself looked like an ordinary restored old hotel. I mean, the big suite bedroom, which was supposedly the most haunted bedroom - this building was already ajar with a very beautiful ambient lights on and everything. I mean, I was definitely nervous but the concierge had this warm, charming smile and I wasn't alone. So I went inside, immersed myself in filming everything I could about this room, and took selfies. It took me about 10 minutes to realize that the concierge man wasn't there so I had a mini heart attack, obviously. I mean, I didn't know when the hell did he took off, so I decided to take my leave as well. I mean, obviously, I didn't want to be alone in this room. At that point, I realized that the door of the room was locked. I tried to push the door open with all my force. I mean, I was having a mini heart attack. I naturally started shouting and hammering at this door.

At the very far end of this room, the bathroom door opened, and out there came the concierge. I mean, I started laughing rather relieved because, I mean, obviously, I wasn't alone. I had assumed that he had run off and locked me inside as some joke. When he came out to the bathroom, he wasn't laughing anymore. I mean, he had a poker face or, rather, a stern expression. In a way, he had quite a strange expression on his face - it was, sort of, robotic. He came to me and quickly took my phone away from my hand. Then, he forcibly thrust me towards the bed. It was this insane blur. I mean, it was this mental lapse of things as my brain was unable to acknowledge what was happening at that moment. So, I wasn't even fighting back. I mean, he was on top of me on this bed and was trying to untie both his and my clothes. So, I was frozen, both mentally and physically. I mean, I don't think that this sort of fear can be categorized. I mean, I lost my voice. Obviously, my attempts to push him away weren't working on his violent physical force on me. All I could muster was, "Please, please, please, stop, stop, stop."

In a passing moment of trying to think my way out, I stopped struggling when he was on top of me and started getting him back which, kind of, took him by surprise. I mean, my minor cooperation shocked him and his strong physical force on me relaxed. He looked into my face with, like, a surprised look, like, "Okay, so this girl is into this assault. She's like consenting to it." I mean, obviously, I had already planned this mentally. So, I asked him if I can go to the bathroom and he was fine. He gestured 'Okay'. So, when I had locked myself in the bathroom and started shouting like a maniac, he realized my getaway plan. I think it probably took him 10-15 seconds to make a run for it out of the room before anyone came to my rescue. Thus, I saved myself from this horrible incident. I mean, in hindsight, I kind of realized that the devils who are malevolent are mostly in human forms rather than 400-year-old specters of the haunted building.

I was stationed in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii on the island of Oahu. On the morning of January 13, 2018, my son and I got up for what we thought was gonna be a normal morning. We had some breakfast. He wanted to play some video games with me, so we played. My wife and kids just happened to be on a vacation back in the states in Florida, so it was gonna be a nice, quiet morning. So I got up, made breakfast, ate, and then got on the Xbox to play some video games. I looked over saw and my phone next to me. I was sitting on the island in the kitchen looking into the living room when I saw a bunch of messages on my phone, so I unlocked it. The first thing that pops up isn't even those missed calls or messages. What is it? It's an emergency alert. I've never received any of those. The first thing it said was, "A ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill." Being an active-duty military member, you see "This is not a drill", it sets off a little alarm in you because, obviously, that means they're not playing, this is real.

So, I called my wife, ran outside, looked towards the western side of the island - being where we are in the Pacific - that's where you would make an assumption that this is where this is going to be coming from. I didn't know what I was going to see obviously, but you're not really thinking at that point. All my senses were heightened. I was, kind of, freaking out. So, I called my wife and asked her if this is real. I was asking what she heard. I was freaking out, grabbed my son, and hopped into the car. I'm like, "Alright, where can I go? Do I need to go over to my unit? Do I need to just seek shelter? What am I going to do? On post, we have shopping areas and

grocery stores that we call commissaries, and the PX is that shopping area. Like, let's go into one of those big buildings." So, we started driving towards the PX. On the way there, we saw MPs passing us with megaphones saying, "Seek shelter. This is not a drill. Get to safety."

So, we finally parked, ran inside, found a place behind one of the portable ATMs, and started calling my family. Nobody was picking up. I got a hold of my brother and said goodbye. I got to talk to my wife and, again, I said goodbye. It was just one of those times in my life when I felt like I was never going to see my wife and kids again. It was real because there was something that was telling me this is not a drill. This is real. There is a missile inbound. There are not that many military locations that are in our area so, obviously, it's going to be us if they're aiming for a military central to the island. We're freaking out. So, making our phone calls and making all of our plans to say our goodbyes. About 38 minutes from the original text, we got one that said "Emergency alert. There is no missile threat or danger to the state of Hawaii. False alarm." So, a bunch of people was walking around inside the store going, "It's a false alarm! Everybody, it's a false alarm!" By this point, it doesn't really matter who was saying that it's a false alarm. You've already, kind of, thrown your emotions for a loop. That was probably one of the worst scares that I've been through in my life - having to sit there, holding my son, and wondering if I'm going to be able to make it through the rest of the day to see tomorrow.

My story happened on August 19, 2009. I was living in Minneapolis. On that day, I was driving home from a friend's house in a rainstorm that very quickly turned into a severe thunderstorm with high winds and very bad visibility. I was driving southbound on 35W. All of the sudden, I saw this gigantic tree sailing sideways hundreds of feet through the air along with all of this other debris. I realized that, "This is very dangerous. I need to get off the highway. I need to get pulled over." So, I found an exit and pulled into the off-ramp. As I was pulling off, another tree branch had slammed into my windshield and cracked the full width of the windshield. So, I slammed on my brakes. I was still at the exit and not on the other road that I was trying to merge on. It's not the best place to stop, but I didn't really know what else to do. Then, maybe, just a second later, I felt my car begin to lift up off the ground - just lurching upward like in a vacuum. For the next second, that just stood still for an eternity. I was terrified... There were no more thoughts, no more words - just the feeling that I'm about to die. Suddenly, it was over as quickly as it had come. My car was on the ground. There were debris and tree branches everywhere. All of the windows in all the shops around me had been shattered. I was just screaming my head off, "What the fuck!" I was screaming to myself as I continued to drive home. Then, as I got home, the tornado sirens started, and I hadn't really put everything together yet. I thought, "Oh, well. The storm was already so crazy. There must be something worse coming." So, I took shelter in my bathroom for hours and just watched the news. Then, I finally figured out that the tornado had already passed. When I saw the path of where the storm had gone, I realized, "Oh, it went right through where I had been driving - that moment that I felt the car had been lifted up."

I attended a Christmas party at the White House. I received an invitation in the mail - there was calligraphy on the outside. The return address said "1600 Pennsylvania Avenue" and I immediately thought that someone was playing a prank. Inside was an invitation that directed me to call the Social Secretary. I had to leave some personal information there for me and my guest so that they could vet us beforehand and make sure that we weren't a security risk. I told my girlfriend, "Last month, I brought you to Olive Garden. Next month, I'm bringing you to the White House." At the East Wing entrance, it's a lot like the TSA checkpoint at an airport. There were tons of Secret Service agents - some were in uniform, some were not. There's a long list of things that you can't bring in. The people who had accidentally left a lighter, car keys, or whatever in their pocket, they still allowed them in because we were reminded that we were guests, and that was pretty cool.

Once inside, we walked up some stairs. Then, we were on the first floor of the White House. Immediately, you start recognizing things that you've seen on TV - like, the long hallway where I remember Reagan walking down to a podium to address the nation, or the East Room where they've held concerts, press events, and even funerals there. We took a million pictures and it really didn't seem like there was much security. There was a guard or two that was stationed at the staircase, which led up to the President's living quarters - the bedrooms and stuff - but other than that, we had, kind of, run of the place, at least on that floor. Every president gets to decorate the White House as they choose. At that time, the President had a dog named Bo. So, there were little Portuguese Water Dog figurines of Bo everywhere. There were pictures, stuffed doggies, and stuff that's all mingled in with portraits of Abe Lincoln and John F. Kennedy on the walls. They were 2 buffets filled with shrimps, finger sandwiches, champagne, and stuff to munch on. I learned later that these types of parties are paid for by the president himself - not the government - because a Christmas party isn't considered official business. Our favorite room was the red room. It's a small parlor area that was painted in such a rich deep maroon color. I googled it later and found out that it was Nancy Reagan's favorite room too. That's also where my girlfriend spilled red wine on an antique couch.

The President had an event in North Carolina that day. Halfway through the party, he landed on the South Lawn. I was looking out the window as he left the helicopter, walked into the White House, and gave us a short speech in the foyer right behind the front door that you see on TV, which you never see open. It was just really informal - it's his home after all. The First Lady said, "Hello", told us to clean up before we left - which was a joke - I thought that was kind of cute. The President mingled with us for a bit and then said, "I gotta get back to work." So, we wound up staying for another hour - just 200 folks all meandering throughout the people's house, the White House. We felt like the luckiest people in the world for just a little bit. Shortly afterward, I married my girlfriend. I think the White House Trip really sealed the deal.

I got pregnant with my husband who is 6'5" and built like a linebacker - he's really, really thick and strong. So, we knew we were gonna have a big baby. I am 5'7". I was a little overweight, so I tried to do exercise. I had pregestational diabetes. I had an amazing pregnancy with no depression or anxiety, which is what I live with on a daily basis. During my pregnancy, everything stabilized and I was like, "Oh my God, I need to be pregnant for the rest of my life. It was absolutely amazing!" So, we got to the end of the pregnancy. I passed my due date which was on the 28th of August, 2007. I was with the doctor at my regular appointment. There was a

long weekend coming, so I asked the doctor if he could induce me on Friday, so that I didn't have to stay pregnant during the long weekend because I was, like, big - the baby was big. My stomach did get hard, but I wasn't feeling any pain - that was going on for about a week. So, when he checked me, apparently, I was in active labor but I was fine - my water hadn't broken. So, we just stayed there.

On my father's birthday on Friday, the 31st of August, we went in for an induction. They broke my water at 1.30 o'clock. The pain I didn't feel before - I felt that now. I've never felt pain like that before. It was really bad. I was hungry, so my husband went and got me a wrap. I ate it. Then, it was time for the epidural to come. While they were putting it in, apparently, it looked like he had to try 2-3 times. My husband was looking at the doctor. I was leaning onto my husband. Every time he lifted his fingers up, there would be blood on them. My husband was like, "Oh my gosh, just get it done." While he was doing this in my back, I threw up. So, my husband ran and got a little pail. Then, I threw up in the pail. He was so good. He ran to the bathroom to rinse it in the sink but then realized that there was a grid in the sinkhole, so he had to scoop up the chunks and then flushed them into the toilet. Once I had the epidural, I felt great.

Then, I started pushing at 7 PM. As I was pushing, everything was going really well. My mom was on one side while my husband was on the other. They were holding my legs to help me push. Sometimes, they forget to put my legs down after because they were chatting with each other. Then, the head came out. Right before the head came out, the doctor saw hair and was like, "Oh my gosh, the baby has a lot of hair!" My ex-husband - who was my husband at that time - was born the same way, so we kind of knew that the baby was going to have hair. We didn't know if it was going to be a boy and a girl - we wanted to keep it a surprise. Then, what happened is that the doctor had actually told me to stop pushing because he needed to work the baby's shoulder out of my canal, but I didn't listen. I just want to get the damn thing out, so I pushed and it ripped to the fourth degree. So, I had to have surgery after.

When the baby came out, I started hemorrhaging and lost about a liter and a half of blood. We have about 6 liters of blood in our body. So, I was hemorrhaging was really bad. I could feel liquid running down my leg. Apparently, there was just blood gushing out of me - it was pretty dramatic. They put the baby on me but I was losing blood, so I was kind of out of it. They took pictures. Thank goodness. They were going to stitch me up right there and then but, first, they had to get the bleeding to stop. They had to get my uterus to contract again. So, I had one nurse pressing down on my stomach and I had the doctor with his arm - all the way up to his elbow - inside of me trying to contract the uterus. It was so painful - it was worse than having the baby. I guess, when they stopped the bleeding, they were going to stitch me up, but I'm like, "No, I don't want any more pain." They were like, "It's not going to hurt." "Everything hurts!" They were going to take me into surgery anyway to make sure everything was okay - they ended up doing the stitching there. So, I didn't get to see my daughter - like, truly see her - because while I was gushing blood, they lost me for about 10 minutes. I was unconscious. I didn't die there, but I was unconscious. I woke up and I've got my parents who were divorced for a long time - one on one side and one on the other. I woke up and I didn't know if it was, like, real-life because it was weird to see them together. They've whisked me off to surgery.

My ex-husband was taking care of the baby. We came to find out later that he had to feed the baby with a tube with his pinky finger because they didn't know if I wanted to breastfeed. When the baby came out, my husband was looking and realized that the absence of a penis meant that it was a vagina. So, we were all excited. It was a girl and we named her Mia.

I was in surgery, and I didn't get out till 11.30. So, I didn't have the baby in my arms until 11.30. The whole family had been there. So, I came in, held her, and tried to breastfeed her. My ex-in-laws were sitting there and I'm like, "They're not getting the hint to get the hell out of the room so that I can, like, pop my boob out." Anyways, we tried that and it didn't work. So, we decided not to breastfeed. I had a breast reduction, so we knew that this could be a possibility. He gave me Mia and put her in my arms. I have pictures of it and it shows how yellow I am because I was anemic and it was pretty bad.

For a whole day and a half, I did not connect with Mia. I was, like, crying to my mom in the middle of the night, "Give her back. I don't want her. Take her away." I got it all out. My mom is a tough mom. She's a nurse and an amazing woman. She looked at me and said, "Okay, that's enough. Suck it up. You got this. She's your baby!" So, after that, I started connecting with Mia. Before that, I didn't have any energy. So, I got out of bed, took a walk with her, and really bonded with her during that walk - it was absolutely amazing. The morning after I gave birth, my husband came back - he couldn't sleep at the hospital. He still has the bloody jeans and the bloody shoes on. He just wanted to get back there - he's a very loving father - so he came back and we have a beautiful girl.

Now, she's 14 years old and she's 5'11" - much taller than her mama. She's built like her dad. She plays hockey. That thick hair never went away. A lot of people would comment on her hair when she was a baby. She was just a really happy and funny baby - big smiles, always giggling, and always smiling. Watching her grow those first 3 years was absolutely amazing. We got a divorce after 3 years, so it changed the dynamic, but it was just amazing to watch her grow. I know people say this all the time, "Oh, it goes so fast." It used to annoy me and I was like, "Yeah, yeah." Well, it does. She's 14 and in grade 9 in high school. It's just unbelievable. It really is a miracle that we can form these little creatures in our tummies. I forgot to say that she came out as a 9-pound 1-ounce and a 21-inch baby - she was very long and very big. Thank you for listening. And Scott, I love your show.

This incident happened at the west coast of Canada where I was being held captive by human traffickers who also traded weapons and drugs. The traffickers had taken my shoes, my ID, and my jacket and, most of the time, kept me confined to a single room. In trying to gain my compliance, the traffickers used food deprivation, sleep deprivation, sexual assault, and other violence. There was always someone directly guarding me and, usually, 4 or more traffickers in the residence at any given time. When there are people around to witness psychological sexual or physical violence, those people did nothing to stop or object to the infliction of harm. That makes that mistreatment even more intimidating and brainwashing. I had 3 things that helped me navigate through that situation. I knew how to disassociate from pain in my body. I was determined to do whatever it took to survive. I had escaped human trafficking before.

On the night of this particular incident, no amount of disassociation or determination could save me. One moment, I was being tossed around the room and beaten. The next, I was being strangled on the floor. Fighting back was inefficient. My limbs became sluggish and, then, lost function. I watched my arms fall to the floor and thought, "Oh, my arms aren't working. I couldn't move my legs." I knew what that meant, but couldn't do anything about it. My head rolled to the side. I saw a piece of lint on the carpet - just a wee fluff of carpet lint - and thought, "I'm going to

die looking at this carpet and no one will know what happened to me. Mom's gonna be so disappointed." I felt more sad than I was scared. My vision went red and, then, Black. The last thing I remember feeling was that sadness and his hands around my neck. I woke up on that same carpet with the culprit watching me to find out if I was dead.

Waking up, I was very disoriented. I didn't know where I was or have any recollection of what happened. I remember looking around the room and trying to remember who had brought me into this strange place and if I was on drugs because my body felt so strange - it wasn't moving properly. My thoughts were mushy. When I could finally move, everything hurt. Then, I remembered. That was when I realized that resistance wasn't going to build my escape, that I had to feign subservience until the traffickers got sloppy. So, that's what I did. Luckily, the plan worked. After I escaped, I started studying martial arts and learned how to defend myself and how to avoid being in that kind of situation again. But I warn you this - it can happen to anyone. Human traffickers are scum.

This story is true. It happened about 2 years ago when I bought a new house and got, kind of, lucky because the market dipped during the pandemic. The house was a total wreck. I don't know for sure, but I suspect the woman who lived here before was an alcoholic and she lived alone. There were plates and silverware on the front lawn. The grass was growing up to my shoulders, almost. It took months of cleaning and repair to get it livable. I'm pretty lucky that my dad is a contractor and he was trained as a carpenter. So, one of the things we did together was remodel the kitchen. We tore out all the old cabinets, and the tiles, and put in a new sink. It was a couple of months of putting in 40-50 hours every week, but it paid off - the kitchen looks great now. I want to tell you about what happened when we were right in the middle of the kitchen remodel. I rent the house out now to a couple other roommates to help pay the mortgage. But at the time, I was living here alone. When I woke up and opened my bedroom door on the second floor, I heard the sound of someone taking a shower downstairs - that's impossible because I was the only one there. As I walked down the stairs in, kind of, a half-awake state, I noticed that the living room looked like a sauna or a steam room - there were water droplets pulling on the ceiling and dripping down, and all the walls were also covered in water, and there was thick fog. So, you could almost not see 5-6 feet ahead of you. When I turn the corner at the bottom of the stairs and looked into the entryway to the kitchen, what I saw absolutely shocked me.

We had taken out the sink and all the cabinets and we had the new cabinets ready to place where the kitchen sink was. The 2 water lines - hot and cold - were sticking straight up. When we had left our work for the day the previous night, the knobs were turned firmly off but, on this morning, when I looked into the kitchen, the hot water line was fully opened and spraying a fairly thick stream of water directly into the ceiling, about 10 feet overhead, which was then cascading down like a fountain. It looked like something you'd see at a waterpark. The floor was flooded with water. Since it was hot water, it was putting off massive amounts of steam. I immediately panicked. I don't know anything about plumbing. So, I called my dad right away - I'm sure I sounded, kind of, insane - and told them what was going on. I hung up the phone and went over to the waterline to see if there was anything I could do to shut it off. All I did was turn the knob, then the water turned off - I probably turned it, maybe, 2 good rotations.

Over the next 24 hours or so, with a wet vac in the basement, we vacuumed up, probably, over 100 gallons of water. It was a good way to clean the basement floor. Luckily, only a couple of the cabinets were ruined, so we weren't out that much money. It actually could have been much, much worse. The thing that I can't figure out is how the waterline got opened in the first place. I know I didn't do it. I have been known to sleepwalk, but I would say that the chances of me doing this is, maybe, 1 in 1000 or 100,000, I guess - it's possible. I know no one else was living in the house. I know that my 2 cats don't have the necessary dexterity in their paws to turn a handle like that. There were no signs of anybody breaking in. Plus, it was an empty house with nothing to steal, unless it was a kid playing an elaborate prank with basically no motivation. To this day, we have no idea who did it. As I said, my dad works in construction and came up as a carpenter. I asked him, "In your 40 or so years of practice in the trade, have you ever had a situation like that or something similar?" He said, "Never." He's never seen a waterline just open.

Well, that next weekend, I got some sage from my sister in even though I don't necessarily believe in ghosts. I saged every room of the house and also prayed whatever kind of prayers I could think of. Knock on wood, to this day, about 2 years later, we haven't had anything except a few noises in the attic - nothing like that has happened again. So, if you enjoyed this story, if you enjoyed my voice, maybe you would like my podcast where I tell true crime stories. I mainly stick to ones you haven't heard before - the more fringe bizarre ones. If you do want to check us out, go to tapesfromthedarkside.com or just search for "Tapes from the Darkside" in your pod player, including Spotify and Apple. Maybe, I'll see you guys on my feed.

Last year, I went out climbing with a friend - just her and I. I was going climbing with her and another friend - never just the 2 of us. She's been spacey. She warned me that she wanted to do a climb that had this hard part that I will potentially have to extend my rope to get through, especially if I fall away from the wall, dangling mid-air, and unable to reach the wall again. Well, that happened. I found myself with some gear on my harness 200 feet off the ground. I tried to figure it out. This was right in the middle of COVID quarantine, so I was about 20 pounds heavier than I usually am, hence why I fell off the climb. It was August, so I was in direct sunlight well above the tree line baking in the sun. I had no idea how to ascend my rope. I didn't have my phone on me because I didn't have pockets, naturally, but I did have my watch on. So, I paid attention to the passage of time and how long I was in my harness. I couldn't hear my belayer and she couldn't hear me. We were screaming each other's names the entire time but we couldn't hear each other because there was a sound barrier.

So, I was dangling for a long time before that was addressed. Until then, I was trying to set up a self-rescue system and I was, like, most of the way there, but I didn't have a way to capture my progress. So, when I took slack out of the climbing rope, I would just stand up and there was slack. I wasn't actually, like, making the rope tight where my new position on the climb was. I didn't know what I was doing. I was really just flying by the seat of my hands and making up a way to self-rescue myself out of this. A climber came up the route next to me. I was able to get his attention. He was trying to help me set up my rescue system. At that point, I've been dangling for over an hour in direct sunlight. My hip flexors were definitely starting to get damaged at that point. There's something called harness trauma that can kill you after 20

minutes of dangling on a harness. I had made it this far an hour and a half still trying to rescue myself.

I ultimately couldn't get myself to ascend the rope because I was just so busted from dangling in the sun. We had some other friends that were at the cliff that day that did have their phones on them. So, my belayer called them over and I was yelling to them. They were on the phone with my belayer, so they were able to communicate to lower me to the belay ledge where those other climbers were - which was only about 10 feet away from me - and I repelled down with that party.

So, I got to the ground safely after about 2 hours. My hip flexors were really, really messed up for 2 weeks after that. I couldn't climb. I couldn't work out. I was walking kind of funny. I could have died in a fraction of the time when I was dangling there. The weird part about this whole story is that it ends with sirens. There were sirens that we heard when we got to the base of the cliff. My friend eerily said, "We don't like to hear that around here because that usually means a climber died, which unfortunately happens at the Gunks a lot because of its proximity to New York City - there's just a lot of climbers that go up there. Like myself, a lot of them don't know what they were doing, but they'll go on and climb. I was just following someone. I was on the top rope, which is generally much safer and less scary, generally.

So, we heard sirens when we got to the ground. You don't like to hear that around here. It turned out to be another climber - a female climber my age - whose gear had ripped out of the wall. She fell while trying to set an anchor. She was guiding the group. She was a well-known member of the community. She fell to her death on a day that I almost died as well. So, I have a lot of survivor's guilt after that. It definitely got me in the mindset to improve myself as a climber to learn rescue, get my strength back, and lose that quarantine weight. Now, I go back to the Gunks myself and do the routes that I want to do and won't get my followers stuck on. So, if you ever go out climbing, make sure you cover everything that could go wrong with your partner - wasps, snakes, falling rocks, dangling in midair, you name it. Cover that, please.

Hey, this is Scott.

Since we're talking about weddings today, I figured I'd tell you about when my wife, Jeanne, and I got married. And what went wrong.

Actually, it started before the wedding. At some point, Jeanne happened to look at her engagement ring, and she was quite surprised to see that the stone was gone. It just wasn't there. It turns out this was due to it being improperly mounted. So we took it back to the jeweler and explained what happened. They put another stone in. But of course now she's kind of paranoid, always looking at it, wondering if this one's gonna fall out too.

So we get to the day of the wedding. The actual ceremony was scheduled for the afternoon.

Jeanne had made prior arrangements with a local beautician to have her hair done that morning. It was all set up - the hairstyle she wanted, the appointment time, all of that was

arranged in advance. So she goes to the salon that morning, and the stylist is not there. The manager calls her, and the girl's response was, "Why would I be there today? It's my day off!"

So Jeanne is kind of upset and she tells the manager, it HAS to be today, because of the wedding. And the manager is like, "Oh, you're in the wedding party?" and Jeanne says, "I'm the bride!". Fortunately, one of the other stylists there stepped up and did a great job. But it was kind of a stressful start to the wedding day.

For the men in the wedding, which was my dad, my two younger brothers, and my best friend Tim, we spent the morning getting fitted because the tuxes were all late in arriving. So we had to go and try them on, and have some alterations because there were some things that just didn't fit right. The worst of that was the tux for my youngest brother, Shawn, who was about 13 at the time. He ended up with a shirt that had sleeves that were WAY too long. But of course, no time to order another shirt. So the fix was, the shirt sleeves were actually just sewn to the jacket sleeves, with just a little bit of shirtsleeve showing. So it kind of looked normal. The downside is that he couldn't ever take off the jacket, which itself was too small. That comes into play a little later.

My wife's family is from Maine, and we're getting married in Florida. So they all flew down, and one of her sisters came in with her husband, and they rented a car while they were here. Well, traffic and driving here in Florida is very different than the country roads of rural Maine. On the way to the church, her sister was driving the rental car and crashed into the back of another car. No one was injured, but the car did sustain some damage. Her sister still visits Florida every year, but has not driven a car here since then.

Anyway, we all made it to the church, and the ceremony begins. All of the groomsmen and bridesmaids are at the front, and Jeanne and I are saying our wedding vows.

Now the funny thing to keep in mind is that this was a small country church, and the air conditioning just wasn't powerful enough to keep the room cool. This is Florida in July, and it was terribly hot outside, and uncomfortably warm inside.

So while we're saying our vows, my little brother – the one with the poorly fitting shirt, and the jacket that he can't remove – well, he's getting overheated and he's standing there for that extended period of time with his knees locked. And he passed out. Just dropped like a rock.

The videographer at that moment had his video camera focused on Jeanne and I so in the video you don't see Shawn fall – you just see the expression on our faces when we realize what happened. You do hear the fall though, because he hit a bench on the way down. He wasn't out for long, and he wasn't injured, just embarrassed.

But the ceremony went on, and we got married, and we headed off to Daytona Beach for our honeymoon. And while we were there, the stone actually DID fall out of her engagement ring again. And this time the jeweler wouldn't replace it because it looks like we're just trying to scam them for more diamonds.

In the long run, it all worked out. On July 7, just a few days from now, we'll celebrate 38 years.

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

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

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

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

I have in there is my wallet which doesn't have much money in it, and my keys". He was like, "Do it slowly". I was like, "I'm being interrogated like I'm a criminal. This is crazy!" Guns were still pointed at me.

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

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

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

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

Hi, my name is Alex. This is how shoveling snow as a kid got me a job later in life when I needed it the most. During snow days and weekends, when we would get a lot of snow in upstate New York, I would go around and shovel people's driveways and walkways, and shovel their cars out. But instead of asking for money first, I would just do the job. I had a little business card that I would take to their door with how much they owed me if they wanted to pay. Some people didn't. Most people did - I'd find it in my mailbox or they would call and have me come pick it up. I did this when I was about 10 or 11. I grew up super poor with not a lot of money. I just had to find things myself. That's how I bought my PS2 in, I think, the year 2000. Years and years later, I experienced a long bout of homelessness, which is what it is. It was an experience that I now know gives me strength and you something I always look back on knowing where I came from.

After years of homelessness, I finally got the strength and be like, "I need to find a better job". So what I did is-- I had a gym membership to Planet Fitness at the time. I took the best clothes I had, washed them in the sink as best as I could - I used hand sanitizing soap to wash them to make them as clean as I could - and hung them outside, and they dried after a day or so. Then, I went and applied to a big box hardware store. The day came for my interview and I was so nervous. I assumed that they would know I was homeless because I was scraggly. I sat down in the interview. A guy walked in, sat down, and looked at me strangely. I first thought, "Oh, he knows immediately. I gotta leave" but I stayed because I really wanted the job.

After maybe 10-20 minutes of interview, he said, "Did you used to live on the road that I used to live on?" I went, "Oh yeah. I lived down there when I was a kid." He was like, "Did you use to shovel my driveway?" I was like, "I've shoveled lots of driveways. I assume that I did." and his face lit up and he said, "I always wondered who did it. I always wondered what happened. I love the drive." He wanted to say that he was so busy working and he didn't get to see his kids as much as he wanted to, me shoveling gave him just that little time to spend with his children before they went to school. So I was like, "Oh, that's really great!" The emotion in his face-- He didn't even interview me anymore. He just gave me the job on the spot. He was like, "If that is the same worth ethic you have now, then you're gonna be perfect for this job." I'll never forget that man and what he did for me because, now, I'm married with children and I have a home of my own - that all started from that. I can just think back that it all started from that one day of when I started shoveling snow to where I ended up today.

My name is Kathy and this is a story about the time when I got lost in the Mojave Desert as a little girl. I grew up in Southern California. My family spent a lot of time camping in the Mojave. On one trip, when I was about 11 years old, I wanted to tag along with my dad, my brother and a friend of my dad's while they went out to hunt rabbits. I had a hard time keeping up with them. I tried to take a shortcut to catch up. When doing so, my foot slipped off a rock and it was punctured by the thick sharp point of a century plant. Since I was only wearing canvas sneakers, the point went through the side of my foot and I was bleeding quite a bit. My dad came back to find me. When I showed him my foot, he told me to go back to camp. I guess he assumed I knew how to get back. Well, I didn't. Before I knew it, I was hopelessly lost as I kept walking and found myself atop some huge boulders - some as big as a car. I started climbing down. This time, I was getting worried but not too much. I found myself on a boulder that was too big to jump off to the next one, so I laid on my belly and started sliding down. I thought I was

touching the next boulder, so I let go. Well, I wasn't touching and I fell hard under that rock. That was it. I started crying and screaming, "Mom! Mom!" I had no idea if she could hear me, but she did. After a few minutes, she kept calling my name so I could find my way back to camp. Needless to say, my mom was fuming mad. She called my dad an SOB, and said, "I hope he doesn't get any rabbits." I was just relieved to be safely back at camp

I always love to play soccer as a kid. When I was 13, I started to notice that running was a lot harder than it used to be. One day, I could run the mile at practice with no problem. The next, I was short of breath, lightheaded, and on the verge of passing out. That year, I was diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy or HCM. Living with HCM just kind of became my new normal. As crazy as it sounds, one of the primary risks for people with HCM is sudden cardiac arrest. While no cure exists, a preventative treatment option for this is something called an implantable cardioverter defibrillator - or ICD for short - and it does exactly what an external defibrillator can do. It administers life-saving shocks to a heart in the event of a cardiac arrest. As you might imagine, if my heart ever needed a shock from the ICD, chances are I would be out cold unconscious and wouldn't feel a thing. But just in case I ever received what the medical community calls an "inappropriate shock", I was given a magnet to carry with me at all times. These aren't ordinary fridge magnets - they're heavy doughnut-shaped magnets powerful enough to turn ICDs off simply by placing one on your chest over the device.

In 2010, I was 18 years old living at home and pregnant. One night, in early January, I was laying on my parent's bed talking to my mom. Out of nowhere, I was hit by a wave of pain so intense - it felt like an invisible force had exploded inside my body accompanied by a loud bang that only thing I could hear. I instinctively cried out as my body twisted in pain. Before my mom and I could figure out what was going on, it happened again and I let out another blood-curdling scream. My whole body felt nothing but crippling searing pain. Whatever was happening only lasted a second but it was coming from an unseen and unknown source. I was terrified. That's when I realized that my ICD was firing and I was receiving inappropriate shocks. This wasn't supposed to happen. I was awake and conscious. I wasn't in cardiac arrest. I felt fine. There's no reason why my ICD should be firing.

I frantically yelled for someone to grab my magnet off the kitchen fridge. Relief washed over me when I placed it over my chest - I thought the nightmare was over - but my sense of relief was abandoned seconds later when I was shocked again. At that point, most of my family was in the room trying to figure out what the hell was going on.

We only lived a few blocks from the hospital, so they lifted me up from the bed to help me get dressed before leaving. As I went to put on my coat, I was shocked again. At that point, I had placed 2-3 magnets over my chest but something was wrong and the magnets weren't working. I knew this probably wasn't going to stop and we needed help. My siblings watched in horror as my parents walked me down our sidewalk to the truck. Each time the ICD went off, I let out a toe-curling scream and my body would crumble. I remember trying to step into the backseat, but the sheer force of another shock pushed me face-forward on my stomach. The pain was so intense that I started to black out. I was shocked a few more times on the way to the hospital and almost lost consciousness with each one. My dad drove like a madman to the emergency room where we were greeted by two nurses with a gurney.

As they rushed me inside, I was begging for relief, saying, "Please just put me to sleep." But a nurse turned to me and said, "I'm sorry. We can't do that because you're pregnant." However, it didn't take long for the staff to realize I needed something to make me drowsy - something to help with the pain. Then, they called the only defibrillator technician within a 50-mile radius who had the ability to turn the damn thing off. While we waited for him to arrive, the shocks continued every few minutes - each time, I would cry in pain and my body would bend and flex out of shape. I bit my tongue several times and remember tasting the blood in my mouth. I had never felt pain like that in my entire life. I just wanted relief so so badly.

When the ICD tech arrived, he opened what I call the "suitcase". They used that system since I was 13 to read the data on my device, adjust settings, turn it on and off, check battery life, etc, but even the tech couldn't seem to get a reading on it. By the time he gained control of my ICD, the battery was nearly depleted and I had been electrocuted dozens and dozens of times. After the ICD was shut off, I was taken by ambulance to a different hospital.

The next morning, I woke up confused and disoriented. Panic set in when I looked to my left and saw this purple log attached to my body - it was my arm swollen and discolored as a result of the electrical shocks. I could barely move it. I couldn't even clench my fist. I suddenly realized it wasn't just my arm that could be injured. What about my baby? I called for the nurse anxiously to know if my daughter was okay. I had just been shocked by a defibrillator inside my body and I had no idea what that might do to an unborn child. The nurse let me listen to her heartbeat, reassuring me that she was alive and well.

Soon afterward, the cardiac team came to speak with me about what had happened and how that was even possible. They disclosed that had I not been pregnant, I would likely not have survived the incident - my heart would have been irreversibly damaged by the electrical shocks. However, because I was pregnant, I had a nice protective cushion of water weight surrounding my nerves and organs. This tiny badass had, in a way, saved my life. They still didn't know why my ICD did what it did, but there was a recall on my particular model and the damn thing needed to come out, which meant a new one had to go back in. So, that was incredibly difficult. I lived in fear every day of something like this happening again. I'm glad I didn't refuse a new ICD simply because, later in life, I would experience cardiac arrest more than once and the ICD save me each time.

I was discharged from the hospital a day or two later. I wanted to be home so badly. As soon as my dad pulled into our driveway, my body started to shake. I felt dizzy and I choked back tears at that time. I didn't understand why this was happening. Later, I learned that this was PTSD. When the front door opened, I saw my mom and sister standing there, which pushed my emotions over the edge. I let go of everything I had been holding in and melted into my mom's arms.

Over the next several months, my body was recovering beautifully. However, it didn't take long for me to realize I was letting fear keep me from living my life. I didn't want my trauma to have control over my happiness. So, I started EMDR therapy. After a handful of sessions, I was already doing much better. I felt guilty because I knew that night had left my family traumatized as well. They were all affected by what they saw and felt. I will never really know what it was like for them, but I do know they're incredibly strong, resilient people and I've been privileged to hear their experiences anytime they've been willing to share. I don't necessarily know if I believe that everything happens for a reason, but I do believe in the strength and resilience of the human

spirit. By telling this story, I hope it helps my family further process what took place, I hope it helps those listening who may have suffered trauma and are considering EMDR therapy and, lastly, I hope it reminds people that trauma doesn't deserve to control our happiness and it most certainly doesn't have to.

For my entire childhood, I was the only child of a single mother growing up in Birmingham, Alabama. At the age of 16, my mother found my father's family in Orlando, Florida, but discovered that he had died of testicular cancer four years earlier. Nonetheless, I got to know cousins and aunts and uncles. Through them, I got to know what my father, Joe, was like - kind of vague ideas of what life could have been like had he met me and been a part of my life. So, for the next 30 years, sometimes, with large gaps in between, this was my extended family down in Florida.

Fast forward to Christmas 2018, which was the first holidays I had with my new husband, his mother had given us both the gift of an AncestryDNA kit. This was so we can find out our ethnic national heritages, particularly for my husband, to see how Native American fit into his ancestry. Now, after my first test failed, I tried it again. Finally, I got my results back in April of 2019. One of the features of AncestryDNA is the ability to see genetic matches and reach out to people who could be family members. Well, I started receiving messages from a particular woman down in South Alabama, whose name I didn't recognize at all. I brought this up to my mother, who went silent. She recognized that last name. Back in 1972, she had dated two men - one named Joe, and the other named Leroy. In her own mind and timeline, Joe seemed like the correct pick when it came to being my father. However, this DNA results indicated it was Leroy instead. I came to find out that both men had actually visited me as a baby but at separate times, but neither wanting to take on the role of a father at that time.

One of the most surprising stories my mother told me was that a favorite panda bear doll that I had as a kid actually came from Leroy's toy shop. The woman who had messaged me on AncestryDNA turns out to be one of 3 half sisters I now have on my father's side. Now, he is alive and well. It's been quite the adjustment to no longer have a dead father or the need to worry about testicular cancer. But as of yet, Leroy has no interest in meeting me. So we'll see where that goes.

Hi, Scott. My name is Samantha. I was just listening to your bonus episode of childbirth stories, and one thing was missing - my story. My second child, my son, was extremely healthy throughout the pregnancy. There were no indications of any health issues at all. The labor was fairly quick - I wouldn't say easy, but he came out with no problem at all. I looked down at him and I said, "Oh, he has Down syndrome." I remember very vividly the midwife shushing me. I looked back at her and said, "Look at him. Look at his eyes. They're all in shape. They're beautiful. But he has Down syndrome." I have to say that, at that moment, it was probably the most frightened and unsure I've ever been. I had so many questions about what this child would be like, "Would I be able to take care of him? Would he love me? Would he be able to speak?"

So many ridiculous thoughts came through my mind. Today, he is 9 years old and the greatest blessing of my life. I have grown so much as a person just being able to be his mother. He is smart. He is funny. He is mischievous. My favorite part of his birth story is when I asked him, "When you were born, what was the first word that you said to mommy?" And he said, "Surprise!!!"

My name is Caroline. I was listening to podcast number 110 - Jen is a professional bridesmaid - which was really a fun lesson. That shows that there's a niche for everyone. My attention was drawn to the listener story at the end of the podcast, which was about Scott's own wedding. My husband and I share the same anniversary date - July 7. It brought up some memories for sure. We were married by the Justice of the Peace in Maine on July 7, 1977, which makes our anniversary date very easy to remember 7/7/77. The truth is we really didn't pick that date.

We had arrived in Maine on a vacation in early July. At that point, we had been together for two years and we had been talking about getting married. So, we thought, "Wouldn't it be great to get married in the quaint beautiful town of Bar Harbor, Maine?" So, we went to the town hall to get our license and figured that we would get married that day - July 6. However, Maine has this quirky law that a couple must wait a day after getting a license to actually get married. I guess it gives couples a chance to change their minds. So, the next day was July 7. Obviously, we didn't change our minds - we did get married - but that wasn't the end of the story.

On the way back home, we stopped by my new in-law's cottage in New Hampshire. Out of the blue, my husband's father blurted out, "Isn't it about time you two get married?" My poor husband was taken off guard and stammered, "Well, yeah. That's a good idea." So right off the bat, again, the family's plans for a wedding. We didn't have the heart to tell him that we were already married. They wanted a full church wedding and all that goes with it. One problem was I didn't have a family. I grew up in foster homes and there was no one to help me. I was on my own. I had to make decisions the best I could and be my own support system. I knew nothing about the protocol and planning a wedding. Also, we didn't have much money and I had schools to pay off. So, finally, I spoke up and insisted on a simple wedding. I found a pretty dress off the rack and the reception was in my husband's family's backyard. Fortunately, the wedding went well and his family was happy. We were happy. It costs us only \$2,500.

So, that wedding date is September 3, 1977, which was two months from our first marriage date. I can't believe that it actually took us only two months to plan this wedding. Anyway, we have two marriage certificates and 2 dates. Later, we heard through the grapevine that there were some who thought our marriage would never last, probably, because I'm 13 years older than my husband, but they were wrong, of course. 45 years later, our marriage is still alive, well, and going strong. We're truly suited for each other. What we do know for sure is that we have each other and a soft place to land when things get tough. It's been a wild 45-year adventure. I say good luck to all those who are planning a wedding. I know, for sure, that plans don't always go as planned. So, be flexible and accept that change of plans and go with the flow.

Hi, Scott. I'd love an opportunity to tell you about my pregnancy in 2018. It was our first wedding anniversary when my husband and I found out that we were pregnant. We were thrilled. Unfortunately, our excitement didn't last. At our 18-week anatomy scan, we learned that we were having a boy and that something was wrong. Our baby was measuring, like, way too small. At 21 weeks, I developed a potentially life-threatening maternal complication. So in order to continue the pregnancy, I would have to remain hospitalized until delivery.

A few days into my hospitalization, a resident doctor walked into my room with the paperwork necessary to obtain an abortion. She explained to me that, in our state, there was a 24-hour waiting period between filing this paperwork and obtaining the abortion. Due to the nature of my condition, I could go from stable to unstable very quickly. My doctor didn't want any red tape delaying my treatment, so it was best to have this paperwork on hand in the event that we needed it. Of course, I did not want an abortion. I wanted a baby. But I also knew that it was important for my doctor to practice medicine within the confines of the law. So I begrudgingly signed the paperwork in tears. The resident then told me that she was also required by law to show me a booklet meant to educate me on normal fetal development. Of course, the baby in my body was not developing normally. She very mercifully held the booklet out in front of me, flipped through it as quickly as one of those animated flipbooks, said "There. I showed it to you", threw the booklet in the trash, and walked out of the room.

One morning, about 5 weeks into my hospitalization. I was taken from my room for an ultrasound, which I had been doing bi-weekly throughout my hospitalization. This ultrasound was different. In the middle of it, the ultrasound tech put down her wand and said, "I'm gonna go call your doctor. I'll be right back." I knew that couldn't be good. I still had no idea what was going on when the door to my hospital room opened and my husband walked in after less than an hour. My husband was in his first year of an internal medicine residency at a hospital across town, so I hardly saw him at all. Nonetheless, at 9 AM on a weekday, just a few minutes later, the door opened again, and a pack of about 10 people walked in - many of whom I had never seen before. One of them was my maternal fetal medicine (MFM) doctor. She told us that our baby had developed an additional complication in utero. This complication was exceedingly dangerous for the pregnant person and it was no longer reasonable to continue the pregnancy. It was time for the pregnancy to end.

A man from the group then introduced himself to us as the hospital's neonatologist. He explained that, because our son was so growth-restricted and so small, they didn't have instruments small enough to perform the procedures on him that would be necessary in order to save his life. They didn't have breathing tools that are small enough for his windpipe. They didn't have IVs small enough for his blood vessels. Trying and shove a tube down his throat that was too big for his throat would be akin to torture. Due to this new complication, his chances of survival were very slim even in the best of circumstances. With him being so small, he stood no chance. He would not and could not resuscitate the baby. The NICU team then left the room and we were left to absorb the information that all hope for our son was lost.

My MFM then explained to us that my baby was likely too weak to survive labor. So, in order to avoid an "abortion", she would need to deliver the baby via cesarean. That way, she could pull the baby out alive. After the baby came out alive, they would give the baby comfort care and allow the baby to die on the outside while I was being sewn up on the operating table. This plan was appalling to me. It was incredibly invasive and unnecessarily dramatic for both me and my son, but I thought I had no choice. I was 26 weeks pregnant in a state where, at that time, my

choice has ended a few weeks earlier. Now, it's much earlier. So I took a shower and washed with a special soap intended to disinfect my belly before a planned cesarean.

As I stepped out of the shower, I decided that there was no way that this was how it was going to go down. I wanted to be induced. Well, obviously, what I wanted was a healthy baby and a healthy pregnancy. Given my circumstances, I wanted to be induced and deliver my baby vaginally even if that meant he came out dead, even if that was against the law, even if it meant putting my very wonderful MFM medical license at risk. I wanted my son to have as peaceful of a death as possible. I wanted him to be warm, to hear my beating heart, and to be held inside of me as his little life slipped away. He was my son and I was his mother. If this was my one and only chance to protect him, so be it.

I told my OB that I refused a cesarean. She agreed that a caesarian was not medically necessary and that, ultimately, the outcome for my son would be the same. Many hours of brainstorming, pleading and phone calls followed. I was on my hospital bed. Eventually, the hospital agreed that if my case was reviewed by another MFM from a separate practice - I was interviewed by another doctor - and the doctors agreed, I could be permitted the induction. 14 hours after that morning's ultrasound, the induction began. I quickly had to change my mindset, from fighting with the bureaucracy to preparing myself mentally and emotionally to do what I was about to do. I just prayed and prayed and prayed that I would be brave enough to do it. I labored for 26 hours and he came out dead. He was so incredible to look at. I was just overwhelmed with this duality of meeting my baby for the first time he was finally here but he was also gone.

I kept his body in my hospital room with me for 2 nights. On the third day, when the funeral director came to pick him up, I had to hand him over to him. It was honestly one of the most painful experiences of my life. Much of what happened to me and to my son was nobody's fault. God's will is a mystery and Mother Nature can be cruel, but it was made so much worse by the politics that surround pregnancy. My son's name was Alex. He was so wanted and so loved. Being his mother is one of the greatest honors of my life, and I will mourn him until the day I die.

In the year 2000 - which sounds like the future, but it's really the past - I was a young kid who had no money but wanted to travel around all the time, of course, like many young kids. So I went to Israel and there was an uprising. My parents were freaking out every day, so I went backpacking in Egypt for a while and they freaked out even more because I couldn't go back. I finally left in the middle of a college semester. I couldn't just rejoin my university, so I headed down to Mexico to take some Spanish classes to kill some time until the following semester. Of course, I had nowhere to stay, so I found a place through friends of friends of friends, literally, on the roof of these old people's house in Mexico City. This wasn't in a normal neighborhood. A lot of the houses were unfinished cinderblocks. There wasn't a whole lot of public transport around. There were these buses that would take you somewhere for a buck. Occasionally but very rarely, a taxi would drive by.

One day, about 7-8 PM, I was going to meet a friend of mine down in the center of Mexico City. I decided, "I'm dressed nice. I'm going to take a taxi. I don't want to take the bus and walk and be all dirty." So I flagged down a taxi. It took me a while but I got kind of lucky when one drove

by. I didn't have any cash, so I told the driver, "Hey, I need to go to the ATM. I only have a credit card." He said, "No problem. No problem." This is Mexico City, I wanted to go directly to the center, right near the presidential palace - it's called the Zócalo. Every driver knows what this is. Well, the taxi driver was driving further and further away from this, and that was weird to me. Mexico City is shaped like a bowl. If you go up, you're going further away from the center. If you're going down, you're going towards the center. Essentially, the whole city is sinking, so it's really easy to navigate by sight when you're going to the center anyway.

I knew we were going the wrong way so, finally, I asked him, "Where are we going?" I thought maybe there's traffic, maybe there's an accident. He said, "I'm going to ask my friend for directions." This was a major red flag because this is, like, a cabbie in Washington DC saying that he's going to ask for directions when you want to go to the White House or a New York cabbie having to ask for directions to take you to Times Square - it just didn't add up. It didn't make any sense. This is before mobile phones, so I wasn't scrolling Instagram or social media and distracting myself. I was looking out the window and worrying if I was about to get kidnapped. My brain was thinking, "Well, you've never been kidnapped before, so why would you get kidnapped now?" I realized that was a logical fallacy and I started to think, "What if I am getting kidnapped? What if this guy has taken me to the proverbial place where nobody can hear you scream? I don't really want to do that to myself. I got a whole life ahead of me. What is going to happen?"

I told him to just let me out. He said, "No." I told him to drive me back to where I was and I would pay him. He said, "Hey, I thought you said you didn't have any cash on you." I was like, "Damn, of course. I should have played that one closer to the vest." That's when I realized that I'm either going to get robbed - people are gonna get in the car and take me around - or I'm gonna get chopped up into little pieces or something like that in the basement. I don't want to find out which one of these it is. I tried to get out but the door locks actually sunk below flush with the door handle, and I couldn't get the door open. I thought this is actually a kidnap mobile, intentionally or not. The doors won't open. I can't get the door open at all. I can't unlock it myself. The driver kept going. I kept trying to finagle and figure out ways to get out. He kept sort of acting friendly, but a little agitated because he knew I was agitated, and I knew something was up because if somebody wants to get out of your car that bad and you're not up to something, you'll let the creep out of your car, but he would not go for it.

Finally, he stopped in front of this cinderblock house and it's really looking bad. This is a really rough area. There's no street lighting. The roads are really awful. I was thinking that this was sort of a bad neighborhood. This is not a place where happy, productive people live and work and play. I was sitting behind him. He didn't really notice that I slid from behind the passenger seat to behind the driver's side. I put my arm between him and the door quietly and I said, "Don't get out of the car. Keep driving. I don't want to get out here. Go back to a place that has better lighting." He said, "This is my friend's house. Relax. I'm just going to ask for directions." Remember, again, pre-mobile phones. He couldn't call anyone to ask for directions. He couldn't get directions online. He also couldn't warn anyone that he was coming in advance. So, I figured he's going to run out, go to the house, get a couple of thugs to get into the car with me - that's the best-case scenario. The worst case is they drag me out of the car and nobody ever hears from me again. So I told him again in no uncertain terms to get out of here.

We are leaving. We are not getting out here. Instead, he made a fast one for the door. Again, remember I had my arm between him and the door. He didn't make it out of the car. I was 20 years old. I worked out twice a day and I ate carne asada nonstop. He was 50-something years

old or even older and he sat in a cab all day, maybe, eating the occasional burrito or rice bowl - he was not in good shape. There was a physical altercation. He ended up losing that physical altercation. He got choked out basically by me from the backseat and still couldn't get the car door open. I pushed him out of his driver's side door and tried to drive the 1968 stick shift. Not only can you not drive that if you don't know the trick with the clutch and the shifter and all that stuff, it's an old car. Even if you can drive a stick, you're freaking out. You're vibrating at about 1000 RPM or whatever your wrists and hands are doing at that point with all that adrenaline. No way was I going to figure that out at that moment, so I took the keys, threw them - 2020, in hindsight, I should have kept the keys so nothing ever came of it - and ran until I couldn't run anymore.

I got to the main road and a couple stopped and picked me up. They didn't want to pick me up - I looked like a crazy person - but I was wearing Banana Republic chinos and a nice blue dress shirt that I had soaked through with sweat. I had fake blonde hair. I was 20. I had fake blonde hair. Finally, someone stopped and said, "What's going on?" I said, "I got kidnapped." They said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Get me out of here." They're like, "We're not letting you in the car, you sweaty gringo." Finally, I offered to ride in the trunk of a car, but they didn't make me do that. They let me sit in the backseat and offered to take me somewhere. I said, "Take me to the police," which was when I got a nice, sort of, tongue-lashing about how the police are probably in on any kidnapping scheme that's going on in the area. "Also, where's that cabbie? Is he still alive? If he's not, you could be in deeper trouble than you think." I thought these are all very valid points. So, the guy wouldn't take me home. He didn't want to know where I lived, so he took me to a metro station. That night, I packed up all my crap in the middle of the night and got the first bus really, really early. I spent most of the time at the bus station, moved to a different city, and never went back.

This is interesting and traumatic, but I love it - anything traumatic that's happened. I recently moved. I know that you're actually located in Florida, and I just moved to a small town called Dunedin - a really small, cute, quaint, safe town right outside of Clearwater. I had gotten into an argument with my boyfriend. We were at a brewery. We lived about a mile down the road. I said I was gonna walk home, which is something that I normally do. I have a dog. Less than a mile down the street, it got a little dark than I had anticipated. I was just walking down a couple of blocks.

Then, this guy pulled up, jumped out of his car, and shoved me into his car. It was terrifying. The guy kept trying to touch me - my legs - and I was just pushing them off me. Eventually, we got to a parking lot - I guess it was some bar. Clearly, he was trying to assault me. I was able to get out of the car. I said that I needed to pee, so he actually took my shorts off of me, which is just absolutely insane. I hid behind a dumpster and I was able to text my boyfriend where I was. My boyfriend came and saw a strange man. He even hit me behind a dumpster. I didn't even have my pants on. I was terrified. I was crying. My boyfriend stopped the guy, got me, and really begged me to call the cops. Unfortunately, I've been a victim of sexual assault in the past and it has not turned out very well - it's just more traumatizing. Since I wasn't actually hurt, I would say "Attempted abduction and attempted assault," but nothing actually happened to me. I felt like, "It's fine. I'll just continue with my therapy." The interesting part is that I lost my phone. After I realized that, I canceled it. My phone was taken. The next day, it was inbound to Louisiana. So,

I think I dodged a trafficking attempt - not really sure. I'm very lucky to be here. Just to put things in perspective, that's kind of what happens even in the safest town. So, be safe.

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.

Hi, Scott. When I was an emergency dispatcher back in the early 2000s, I was working on Christmas Eve. My officers were out searching for a parolee at large who was armed and dangerous. They had the helicopters out shining lights on the streets and neighborhoods where he was last seen. The search lasted for hours and he got away. The next night was Christmas. I was also working when I received a call from a young mother thanking me for the helicopter and the lights in her neighborhood the night before the commotion woke her toddler up. When she saw the lights out her window, she started pointing, jumping up and down, and screaming, "Santa Claus! Santa Claus!" The mom was so happy that we helped her child believe. I love it. I love your podcast. Thanks so much.

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.