

## **Episode 133: Ashley's daughter fell in the pool**

Probably the most difficult thing for a parent to experience is losing a child.

It's often been said that the English language fails us in this area. A woman who loses her spouse is called a widow. If a man is the one who survives his spouse, he's a widower. A child who has lost their parents is called an orphan.

But why isn't there a word for a parent whose child has died? Well, it turns out there actually is a word for that.

"Vilomah" is a Sanskrit word that's been used in Hindu philosophy for centuries. It's a compound word made up of two words – "vi" which means "against", and "loma" which means "hair". The word "vilomah" is often translated as "against the hair" or "against the grain" or "against the natural order of things".

In recent years, the word "vilomah" has gained popularity outside of Hindu philosophy, and it's now used to describe a parent whose child has passed away. The term "vilomah parent" refers to a parent who has experienced the loss of a child, which is considered to be a violation of the natural order of things.

Ashley lives in Florida, and she knows about that experience. And she's using her story to help other people avoid what she's been through.

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### **Scott**

You were actually living here in Florida when this happened, right? Can you just kind of describe what your life was like at that time?

### **Ashley**

I'm a born and raised Floridian. I've been here all my life in South Florida. At that time, I was 27 years old with three children, so I was a very young mom. I had my first at 17 and then married her father. We had our son. We were just too young. We wound up divorcing very early. That was Maya and Joshua, my two oldest. Then, after that, I did get into another relationship where I then had my third child, which is Gabriela.

### **Scott**

Or Gabby, right?

### **Ashley**

Or Gabby, yeah. We called her a lot of different nicknames, but yep. I was a single mom of three children, 27 years old out there doing it on my own.

### **Scott**

For me, that's incredible. Maya was 10 years old, Joshua was 4, and Gabby was just 21 months old - not even two years old. You were working full-time. You've got three kids. How were you making that work?

### **Ashley**

Oh, man. I'd say that I was doing it alone, but I really wasn't. I mean, I have an extremely supportive community. My family is incredibly supportive. Without them, I don't know what I would've done. So it all came down to the amazing support that I had and still have today.

**Scott**

You were in a small 2-bedroom apartment at that time...

**Ashley**

Right, yeah. On the third floor, mind you, so that was always a hassle when I had to, like, bring in the groceries. I mean, there were nights that I just got upstairs and cried because it was so difficult just to do the regular things with three small children. It was very, very hard.

**Scott**

Yeah. With three flights of stairs, you'd get your cardio in every day.

**Ashley**

I guess that's a good way to look at it.

**Scott**

This was in April. Maya and Joshua's paternal grandfather died unexpectedly, which meant you had to travel. Can you just tell us about that?

**Ashley**

Yeah. I think it's really important to kind of make that distinction of how close I was to Maya and Joshua's father and his family. Even after our separation and even after I had Gabby, they were just so supportive. They treated Gabby as if she was their own grandchild, so I remained very close with the family. My kid's grandfather, Edgar, had passed away suddenly, which was just such a blow to the family. I mean, we were devastated. He was like a second father to me. So we drove— it was 2 hours away and we took the drive up there for the funeral. I remember Gabby was running around just being her wild 1.5-year-old self at the funeral. It was a hard time, but we were just in it together.

I'll try to be clear about the names of the people. It can get a little confusing. Tina was Edgar's wife - she and I had formed such a bond. Our children were about the same age. We really relied on each other when things got tough. She was going through the loss of her husband, so we wanted to be there for her and for the kids even after the funeral.

**Scott**

And you spent some time there, right? How long were you visiting with them?

**Ashley**

The funeral was in April. Then, a month later, we decided to go back up. It was Memorial Weekend, and I said to the kids, "Let's just go over there and spend time with Tina and the kids." My kids were so excited about that because it meant a lot of fun. Despite what we were going through, being together was just the best thing for our hearts. So we made the trip up to Lake Placid and planned to just be home and spend time with Tina and with the kids barbecuing, swimming, and all the stuff you do on a holiday weekend in the US.

**Scott**

It almost seems like that trip would be more important than the trip to the funeral because, when something happens, you're making funeral arrangements and people are bringing food and all. There's a lot of activity and things but, after all of that stops, then she's left there alone. When you come a month later, it seems like that would be really important.

### **Ashley**

Yeah, that's really true. That's absolutely true, yeah. We went up there. I guess it was maybe a Thursday or Friday when we drove up. The whole weekend was great. We were surrounded by each other. We had a lot of fun. I think we played— I don't remember if it was a ping pong table that she had in the back. They made their house so welcoming, so we had so much to do over the weekend. It was just a beautiful weekend. We spent the time cooking, swimming, all that fun stuff and. Then, when Monday, the actual Memorial Day rolled around, we had done the same things throughout the day. Being in the pool - that's the best way to tire the kids out.

We wrapped up the day. It was towards the evening. It wasn't quite dark yet, but it was getting there. It was time to start packing up the kids' stuff and make that 2-hour drive back. That day, my oldest daughter, Maya, had been really sick. Like, she was just vomiting profusely. I mean, she was really, really sick. I was trying to keep Joshua and Gabby entertained with the other kids while also making sure that Maya had the bucket by her. She had fluids. I was kind of torn between the two tasks.

I remember that Tina had told me that she had a camera and that photography is a hobby that she does. She was telling me about some extra equipment that she had or something along those lines. So all the kids had come inside for the day and I was thinking, "Okay, while I'm packing up, Tina's going to show me this camera equipment that I can take home with me." So we were in the garage looking through some stuff and trying to find it. When I came out, Maya said to me, "Mom, where's Gabby?" I remember how my heart dropped because anyone who has toddlers knows that when you haven't seen them, even for just a minute, they could really be getting into some trouble, but I didn't think anything too crazy right away. I just felt, like, a short sense of panic because I had not seen her for a few minutes. So in my mind, she's probably in the room with the kids. Maybe she's quiet because she got some toys or is making a little bit of a mess. I didn't go to the room to check which I don't know why to this day, but I did instinctively go to the back door.

So I went to the back door not really thinking that I would find Gabby back there. It was locked, which gave me even more reason to think, "Okay, she's probably in the room," but I still unlocked the door and went out into the patio area. I probably would've stopped in that patio area if I had not noticed that the pool gate was down in one corner. I still didn't panic at the moment, but I cautiously kind of just walked over to that part where the pool gate was down and stepped over it. I started scanning the pool. It doesn't make sense to me how this happened because of the position of the pool gate, but I started scanning with my eyes from the shallow end to the deep end of the pool. The gate was open at the area where the deep end of the pool is, and it was dark. It was not dark - it was kind of dusk. The sun was setting, but it was not dark just yet.

I scanned the pool. This was all in slow motion for me when I remember it. When my eyes reached the deep end, I saw her floating. It's so vivid to me because I remember dressing her that day after her bath and brushing her hair because she had big, beautiful black curls. I remember putting on the pink skirt and her pretty little top and brushing her hair into a ponytail, and I told her in Spanish, "Oh Gab, you're so pretty," because she loved to hear that. I just

vividly remember seeing her in that pink skirt just floating there. She looked like she was asleep, but her face and her lips were really blue.

I let out this guttural cry that any mom or maybe even a spouse that happened to be their loved one in that kind of estate— it sounds animalistic. It's the only way I can describe it. I let out that cry, scooped her out of the water, and laid her down next to the pool. At that time, Tina heard my cry and ran out, and I was frozen. I did not try to do CPR because I was screaming and frozen. I didn't know what to do. I started praying and begging God to do something. So Tina jumped in to try to do CPR. I don't even know how long that happened. I know I picked up the phone to call 911, but when they asked me the address, I blanked. I don't know. I just couldn't think of it, and I knew it very well.

### **Scott**

It wasn't your address anyway. Some people can't think of their own address in a situation like that, but you weren't even home.

### **Ashley**

Right. So I handed the phone to Tina's oldest daughter who gave the operator the address. Tina was still trying to do CPR. Maya was inside and Joshua had been playing with the neighbors, I think, in the backyard next door. So, at that point, everyone's coming to the patio, to the backyard area, to see what all the screaming was. Thinking back on what my children witnessed at that time - seeing their sister in that state - is really tough, let alone having my own recollection of what happened. But to think about what my children were feeling, and Tina's children and Tina herself— I mean, it's extremely traumatic for everyone involved.

After some time - it always seems like forever when something like this is going on - the ambulance did arrive. I remember the EMT running in. I believe he grabbed Gabby up and ran outside with her. I don't think he tried to perform CPR right there by the pool, but I do remember him stopping in the front of the house, laying her down on the sidewalk, and trying to do CPR there. I'm not sure why that was. Maybe he noticed she wasn't responsive and wanted to take quick action. I don't know. But he did try for a minute or so to perform CPR on the sidewalk in front of the house before taking her into the ambulance. I was not placed in the ambulance with her. I don't remember if they told me I couldn't. I can't recall why that happened.

They had shut the ambulance door and were just stationed there, not moving and not driving away. I think they were working on her in the ambulance. I just dropped to my knees in the street and prayed and prayed. I mean, I had scratch marks on my knees in the following days because of how hard I hit the floor. I think someone came behind me and was trying to console me. I don't even remember who it was and I don't remember how long I was there waiting and praying.

### **Scott**

Time becomes irrelevant. It's such a tunnel vision that you've got one thing you're thinking about. It makes sense that they may have refused to have you come in the ambulance because they're trying to work on her and you would be a distraction even though you would really want to be there with her. She stood a better chance without you there, probably as harsh as that sounds.

### **Ashley**

Yeah I think it makes sense now. I don't think I was banging down the door or anything. All I could do was just sit there and wait. So, again, I cannot tell you how long that was. It was probably a lot quicker than it felt, but there was another ambulance that came and put me in the front seat. That's when we started driving to the hospital, and that drive— my recollection can be wrong in some cases, but what I remember is that it didn't seem like we were in a rush. I don't remember if there were sirens. I think they probably had the lights on but, at one point, as the ambulance that I was in was following the other one down a winding road - because this is kind of a country area - I turned to the driver and I said, "Why aren't we going faster?" I don't remember if he answered me at all, to be honest. We were directly behind the other ambulance. So, to me, it just didn't feel like we were going fast enough.

A regular car ride from Tina's house to the hospital would probably only be 5 minutes. It's not a far drive at all. So we made it to the hospital. They rushed her in. I was just frantically pacing the hall of the ER. I remember a lot of buzzing going around and staff running back and forth. At some point, I did finally hear a code blue being called over the intercom, and I think that was the point where I had to accept that this was really happening and that she had passed away, and that there was nothing I could do about it. At that moment, I remember this. I wished so hard at that moment that I could just rewind time for just, like, an hour - something simple. I just so badly wanted to do the impossible and rewind time, but I couldn't. I sank against the wall and just sat on the floor and accepted. I tried to accept it. I never went in to see her after that because I think I just didn't want to remember her. I didn't want to see her laying on the table, not responding. I didn't want that picture. Sometimes, I regret it but, at other times, I'm like, "I think it's probably best that I didn't."

**Scott**

Do you remember your last interaction with her?

**Ashley**

I remember. I'm sure that I interacted with her in another way, but the most vivid memory that sticks is my last hug with her, which we have a picture of. It's one that I hold onto because babies just have that smell about them. Even when they're a little bit stinky, as a mom, you just want to grab your kid and just eat them up. So, in this picture, I was hugging her. I think you can tell - I know what I was doing - I was smelling her and just squeezing her really tight, and just remembering that makes me happy. It's bittersweet, but it makes me happy. She was very loved.

**Scott**

I can't imagine the value that you place on having that picture of your last hug. That's got to be just the most important thing in the world to you.

**Ashley**

It's framed. I think I might have it framed twice. That's a very sweet picture.

**Scott**

We'll have it in the show notes so people can see that picture. Who actually came and formally told you the news?

**Ashley**

Sometime after the code was called, I was taken into a small room. My mother, father, and sisters had arrived. Maya and Joshua's father had called my parents to say, "This is what's

happening. You need to get over here.” So my whole family jumped into the car and sped for 2 hours. I mean, they actually got pulled over and got a speeding ticket. For some reason, the cop did not have any empathy, so they got a speeding ticket, but they got there as fast as they could.

They took us all into a small room and asked me what I think. I already knew that they had done everything that they could and she had passed away. My father and one of my sisters did go in to see her, but I think it was actually in that room that I began rocking. I did not stop rocking for probably 2 or 3 days. I also didn't sleep for, I think, at least 2 full nights. I rocked to the point that my neck was sore and my body was just so stiff, but I could not stop rocking. That was my physical reaction.

**Scott**

When you say rocking, you're talking about sitting on the floor and just moving your torso back and forth?

**Ashley**

Yep. If I was sitting in a chair, I was rocking. That was most of it. I don't think it was, kind of, like, standing. I think I just spent a lot of time sitting and rocking. I didn't know what else to do to console myself.

**Scott**

Have you since learned what the psychological reason is behind that or what caused your body to react that way?

**Ashley**

I don't know. I have spoken to at least one other parent who has experienced a similar situation, and they gave me the same recollection. They said, “Yeah, I rocked back and forth for a while too. Sometimes, I don't know what it is.” I don't know if it's just moms but, sometimes, you'll see someone waiting in the store in line to check out and we just kind of rock. I think I've heard it called, like, the Mama's Rock or something like that. The way you cradle an infant - it may have been something to do with that. That's the best way that I can connect why that happened - the way a mom rocks her baby.

**Scott**

A maternal thing...

**Ashley**

Right, yeah.

**Scott**

Were you the one to tell Joshua and Maya that their little sister was gone or did somebody else?

**Ashley**

I can't remember. I can't remember if they were in the room. It may have been my parents. So much of that day is a blur. I do remember going into the bathroom because when something like this happens, they do have to do an investigation to make sure that it wasn't intentional or due to negligence. So I did have to submit a urine test to make sure that I was not on any type of drugs or alcohol. I remember, after doing that, a relative came into the bathroom. She wasn't

even someone I was very close with, but she just stood there and looked at me, and I said, "What kind of mother am I?" and I broke down because the guilt was just overwhelming and it was hard not to blame myself for everything that happened. That was very difficult to get through.

**Scott**

Oh, I would imagine it took some time to work through that.

**Ashley**

It did. I had a lot of support but, at the same time, I was still just not feeling like this was real. It was very difficult to get through the next few days. I actually never slept at my apartment again. I paid the rent for another two months until my lease was up. Then, I was staying at my parents' house the whole time. I was never able to sleep in that house without her again. I would go and start packing things up because I knew that we were not going to stay there anymore. I just remember grabbing her clothes, trying to smell her in her clothes, and holding onto whatever I had left. I laid in her bed and just sobbed for probably hours - I don't know.

Then, when the funeral came, I remember having to go and pick out a dress for her. My pastor's wife had said to me, "You just make her the most beautiful that you can. You buy her the prettiest dress and the prettiest hairpiece." That's exactly what I did. While walking through a bridal shop where women were shopping for flower girls' dresses, I was shopping for what my daughter would be buried in. As we were planning the funeral, there was a time when the funeral director asked me, "Do you have any other questions about what's going to happen?" I was still rocking when I asked, "Can I brush her hair one more time?" They had to set some kind of boundaries because of the way the autopsy works and the way they cut to examine where they did not allow me to really go in and brush her hair, but I was allowed to place a pin in it. I bought a really beautiful headpiece and placed it on her when she was in the casket and I cut off a piece of her hair to keep. I still hold onto one of her little curls.

**Scott**

I've seen the pictures. She had a head of hair. It's amazing.

**Ashley**

She did, and it matched her personality. I always like to say that she was very rambunctious. I mean, what 18-month-old or 21-month-old is not rambunctious? But it really matched her personality. She got so much attention when we would go out because people couldn't believe how much hair she had from birth. She had just a head full of hair.

**Scott**

It's great that they let you do that though. What did you do with the lock of hair?

**Ashley**

I just have it in an airtight bag and kind of placed it with some other little items in a box that I keep. I also have a box of the favorite clothes that I had for her that I swear, one day, I am going to get a quilt made. So there are some keepsakes that we hold onto.

**Scott**

In the time that followed, did you find that grief tends to come in waves?

Ashley

Yeah, I've heard that said before - that grief comes in waves. Actually, it's more like tsunamis because it's almost like you're walking through a landmine. You never know when you're going to hit something that triggers you. I distinctly remember that the holidays of that year were the hardest when you experience a significant loss. I mean, you kind of pointed out earlier that as time goes on, it gets harder because everyone's life has to return to normal and the person that has lost someone has to find a normal that just doesn't feel right. In this case, it never will. I'm always unsure how to answer the question when people ask, like, "How many kids do you have?" I'm like, "Do you want the short answer or the long answer?" because it's very difficult to tell someone that you've lost a child, especially in this way. They don't know how to react. Then, I'd feel bad for making them uncomfortable, but I don't want her to be forgotten either.

**Scott**

Yeah, that would be an awkward question that people don't even know they're asking when they do that. Were the other children open to talking about it to work through it? How did they handle it?

**Ashley**

I don't know if this is a personality thing or an age thing, but my son is a bit more open with his emotions. He's a lot like me and he cried a lot. He was very open about how he felt. My daughter, Maya— I still worry for her. She's about to be 18 years old now, but I still worry for her because I think she's kind of bottled those things up. For a while, when I was taking them to therapy, my biggest concern was that she blamed herself because she was sick and she required a lot of attention from me because of how sick she was. So, I've always had that concern for her.

**Scott**

Has she verbalized that?

**Ashley**

No, she has not. I think it could just be the way that she manages emotions, but we do openly talk about Gabby. My kids always remember her so fondly and we laugh about her personality and all the funny things that she did. We'd watch videos of her and say, "Oh, remember that time?" I've got beautiful pictures too of the three of them together. So those are the kind of things that we hold onto. I think it's something that really kind of shaped them because they were so young that these types of things mold us into who we're going to become.

So, it's been a journey. This happened a while ago, but it's still something that affects all of us to this day. It's a little more— I want to say, I don't know if positive is the right word, but it was a lot harder on us the first couple of years versus now. When I share about Gabby - I want to share about her although it still hurts - I feel like it's a lot more purposeful now than in the beginning. I was just hemorrhaging with pain and trying to understand and cope.

**Scott**

And part of this journey is— like you mentioned, you have a purpose now. What are you doing now that gives this story more purpose?

**Ashley**

There are 2 real reasons that I share the story aside from just showing off my beautiful daughter. One of those reasons is to spread awareness. I wouldn't say that I'm like an activist but, anytime that I meet people or anyone that I know that has a toddler, I do try to find the right



time to say to them, "Hey, have you ever considered getting your child into infant swimming classes?" I actually had a woman reach out to me after Gabby passed away, and she's got a foundation out here because her son drowned, and she's just such a champion of spreading awareness and teaching people how to prevent it. The truth is that Gabby's death was preventable. There are layers of protection that made me think, "Man, if only I had really understood that, I could have prevented her death." So there are a lot of foundations and parents that I have connected with and part of their story is to get out there and spread awareness. For me, it's to do that and hope that people can learn from this. That's a terrible way to put it, but I have had friends and family say, "Hey, because of what happened to Gabby, my child is in swimming classes." I mean, as young as 10-11 months old, these babies are learning to self-rescue, and that always makes me feel like, "Man, I still wish I could have Gabby back, but look at all the lives that are possibly being saved because of her story." So that's one reason.

The second reason would be to spread hope and encouragement to people because, I think, as parents, our one job or our main priority is keeping our children safe and loved. It's really easy for me to say I failed at that but, after some time looking back, I can gracefully say, "It was an accident and this happens to good parents." I would hate for other parents who lose children to just tear themselves apart because I've seen it. I hope to encourage other parents to say, "We can only do the best that we can do. If you gave your child a loving environment, you loved that child as much as possible, then you really did do a good job. You didn't fail, but accidents happen." I think that's really important to know.

In the state of Florida, a lot of car deaths happen. Before I lost Gabby, I would've been pretty quick to judge and say, "What kind of a parent forgets their child?" Now I can say, "It can happen to anyone. It really can." There are layers of protection. When it comes to pools and water safety with children, the first one is supervision, but sometimes that fails. I think, actually, statistically, it's true that drownings happen a lot when there are pool parties because everyone thinks that someone else is watching the child. But that's one layer of protection. The other is to have pool gates. Another one is to get that child into self-rescue infant swimming classes.

**Scott**

It's almost a sure thing that someone is hearing this story right now and thinking, "I got to go check the fence at the pool or get a fence even if I don't have kids living in the house because relatives or friends might come over anytime. It's so important."

**Ashley**

It is. This is something that, I think, is also important to say. I had been a fan of water wings and puddle jumpers. I think most parents think, "Okay, this is a great thing to keep our child safe when they're near the water," but there's been research done that it's may be more harmful than it is good for a child to be taught that they can get into the water because I believe that Gabby had the puddle jumper on that day.

**Scott**

We have a picture of that, right?

**Ashley**

That was that day, yeah.

**Scott**

Yeah. She was getting in. It's, like, lime green - the wings on her arms. That's what you call them, right?

**Ashley**

Yep. Puddle jumpers or water wings.

**Scott**

Water wings. Okay.

**Ashley**

A lot of people don't realize that it can be very dangerous to teach your child that instead of spending the time or money to get them into self-rescue classes

**Scott**

Because by wearing those, they would feel like, "I don't have to do anything. I'm just going to float."

**Ashley**

Right. It teaches them a false sense of confidence with water, which is something that— if you look at these infant swimming websites and programs, they will warn against it. If you don't know, you think that you're doing the right thing by putting your child in these devices. They're actually probably not the best thing.

**Scott**

I had never heard that before, but it makes perfect sense. Getting through this whole experience, what have you found has helped the most?

**Ashley**

That's a good question. I think it depends. I think, sometimes, what works in one season doesn't necessarily work in the others. But I would say what's been consistent for me— I am a person of faith, so I do truly believe that I will be reunited with Gabby again one day - that is my personal belief and just having that hope is really what keeps me going. But if you want something maybe a little bit more tangible, like having that community, having that support, making sure that I was ready to share this story so that I could see the little glimmers of hope when other kids get into swimming and finding a purpose in all of the pain. Those are the things that help me get through it because, even to this day, I am always wondering, "What would Gabby look like? She'd be so big now. How would she sound?" I mean, my sisters and I have even kicked around the idea of getting, like, an age progression illustration done. I'll never stop wondering what she would've been. At the same time, I hope for a day that I'll see her again. So it's a day-by-day kind of thing. Sometimes, it gets a little bit easier over time, but it never fully leaves you. Grief is the friend that nobody wants to have around - it'll always be with you. It's a journey

**Scott**

For someone hearing this, maybe they've gone through it or maybe they have questions. Can people reach out to you? How should they contact you?

**Ashley**

Yeah, absolutely. I love to hear from people - not that I'm ever happy to hear that someone is hurting, but my heart just really wants to talk to people or just listen when someone has something to share that they're going through. I'm happy to receive emails and respond that

way. I'm very on top of all of my emails. As a matter of fact, after Gabby passed away, I was receiving a lot of messages on social media - I want to say hundreds and hundreds of messages - from people that were offering their sympathy, but also that had gone through the same thing. So I'm absolutely open to hearing from people.

**Scott**

We'll have your email address in the show notes for this episode along with pictures so people can go see how beautiful Gabby was. Is there any part of this that we haven't talked about that you want to mention?

**Ashley**

Sometime - maybe within a week or two - after Gabby passed away, my daughter, Maya, had a school performance that she wanted to be a part of. So I sat there in the cafeteria while she was dancing on the stage, completely shattered, but trying my best to give Maya some kind of normalcy.

I was speaking with her teacher - I think it was earlier that day - who was such a sweet lady, very caring. We went out into the hallway and I think she said she had lost someone in the same way, so she really connected with me, but she told me something that I didn't realize, and that was- I was telling her, "Yeah, I found her floating." And she said to me, "Oh yeah, I know. That happens after they sink for a while and then they float up," which brought so much pain and things that I didn't realize because, in my mind, I had only been away from Gabby for maybe 5 minutes, but the possibility that she'd been in the water for a prolonged amount of time just racked me with guilt. I mean, that was very hard for me to get over. The teacher - God bless her - was not trying to be mean or mean-hearted or anything like that. She was just conversing with me about her experience and that was a blow to my knees. That was so hard to hear.

**Scott**

Yeah. Nobody would intend to bring more pain like that but, sometimes, when you don't know what to say, you just say something and then it's not a good thing.

**Ashley**

Yeah. There were a lot of little instances like that. Grief will really teach you how to have grace for other people.

**Scott**

That's a way to look at it. Thanks for sharing your story.

**Ashley**

Thank you for giving me and so many others the space to do that.

**Scott**

If you'd like to see the full transcript of this episode, or if you want to see pictures of Ashley and her children, you can get all of that in the show notes for this episode, at [WhatWasThatLike.com/133](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/133).

After our conversation, Ashley and I were just chatting a bit. To record for the podcast, I don't use Zoom but it's a similar setup - the guest and I can see each other, but we only record the audio. And I could see on the wall behind Ashley was a hand-drawn sketch of little Gabby, sitting on the lap of Jesus. I asked her about it, and she said that after Gabby passed, someone

heard about the story and drew that picture – then they passed it along to Ashley through a mutual friend. But the person who created the sketch wanted to remain anonymous. Ashley still does not know who drew it, but she is grateful to have it. That picture is in the show notes as well.

Okay – I have to explain a couple of things about a recent episode. This is about the one titled “Jacqueline was attacked by dogs” – which was episode 131. I’ve had several listeners contact me and ask, “What happened to the dogs? What about the people who owned the dogs? Was there a lawsuit?” and of course those are all valid questions. However, we deliberately did not talk about those things for legal reasons. That’s all I can say.

The other thing about that episode is this – you may remember that Jacqueline said she has benefited from EMDR therapy. I mentioned that several of my previous guests have also had a great experience with it, which is true, but I also said that anyone who has been through some type of trauma should check it out. Well, as it turns out, I’m not a doctor. Usually when I say something like that, I include a disclaimer, something like “I’m not a doctor, everyone’s results may not be the same, so consult your own doctor to see if it might be something that makes sense in your situation.” This time I forgot to include that, so there it is. Always check with your doctor first.

And now I have big announcement, which at one point I thought I might never say – I’m back on Instagram. Couple of years ago I was on Instagram, and they decided to just shut down my account, because they said I violated a rule. I don’t know what rule, and they never told me, and no one ever responded to any of my appeals. So that was that. But I’m back now, with a new account, and actually a bunch of listeners have already found me there. Really, I think the biggest value in having that Instagram is that you can scroll and see each of the beautiful graphics for every past episode, all in chronological order. I really love the way it looks, and you can check it out and follow me if you want to, at [WhatWasThatLike.com/Instagram](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/Instagram).

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz, and he also did all the posts on the new Instagram account. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai. And I highly recommend both of them if you need those services.

And now we have our Listener Story. If you’re not familiar with Listener Stories, it’s how we end every episode. And if you want to hear a bunch of them, just listen to the last episode – that’s where I put together ALL the Listener Stories from 2021.

This time our story is about a scary encounter on the way to work.

Stay safe – and I’ll see you in two weeks.

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### **(Listener story)**

In 1981, I was a high school student with a part-time job working at McDonald's. I didn't have a car, so I had to walk 2 kilometers, which is 1.5 miles. If I worked later than 11:00 PM, the managers were required to give rides to anyone not driving to get home safely. But if I worked in the mornings, I didn't have that luxury. So one weekend, I was scheduled for the morning shift - 6:00 AM to 11:00 AM. This meant that I'd have to get up around 5:00 AM, get ready and take that 2-kilometer walk to work.

The walk to work was pretty isolated. I was walking by the backyards of houses and the last leg of the walk was nothing but high fences on one side and a huge open field on the other. I was on that last leg of my trip around 5:30 AM - it was still dark. Then, a dark Camaro drove by, slowed down, and then idled. The man driving the car looked older than me - maybe in his twenties or early thirties - and I was suddenly mindful of how alone and exposed I was.

Back in that stage, I was a very nonconfrontational person. I went along with whatever was asked of me. I didn't know how to say no, which is why I was stuck doing that shift. I had low self-esteem and very low self-worth. I was a prime target for what happened next. The driver leaned out the window and said, "Hey, how are you doing?" "Fine." I smiled back meekly. He said, "Where are you going? Where are you headed? Can I give you a ride?" And I said, "No, thank you. I'm just rolling up a little further." He started to control me. He was like, "Come on, I don't bite. I can get you there faster." And I said, "No thanks. I'm going to be too early and then I'll be standing outside waiting to get in."

I don't know why I felt the need to tell this perfect stranger that - I guess it was part of my placating personality. He said, "That's okay. We can stop somewhere and go for coffee." So my inner radar was, like, ding loudly, almost definite. And I started walking faster and I said, "No thanks" a little more forcefully. He wouldn't stop asking. Now, I was scared. Suddenly, I blurted out, "No! Now F off!" He stopped the car, opened up the door, had one foot outside the car, and said to me, "You can do this the easy way or the hard way. Get in the effing car!" Do you know how fear focuses you in a second, as if a heavy wet, dark blanket just drops out of the sky onto you, buckling your knees, that metallic taste that fills your mouth and you stop breathing? This all happened to me in a nanosecond. Part of me - the meek people pleaser - almost took a step forward. I don't know where or how I got the courage, but a loud, confident kickass voice came out of my mouth and said, "If you take one more step out of your car, I will scream so loud that the entire city will hear me."

The guy stopped advancing, looked at me, and made one more "Get in the car" comment, but I said, "No." Then, he got back in the car and drove off. So, the next 5 minutes to work were the longest 5 minutes of my life. I practically flew across the parking lot of the mall and tried to open the doors, but they were locked, so I started beating them frantically. My supervisor let me in and I collapsed crying hysterically. We had the police come in and file a report, but nothing came of it. Needless to say, I never had to work the morning shift ever again. I wonder who that voice was that spoke up that day because it wasn't the "me" I thought I was, but I thank her for everything.