

Episode 145: Collier testified against a murderer at age 12

You know when people are asked about what their biggest fear is, a lot of the answers are what you'd expect – fear of heights, fear of spiders, and so forth. Humans are afraid of a lot of things.

But when people are asked what their single BIGGEST fear is – the big one that usually comes out as number one is fear of public speaking. For a lot of people it even ranks higher than their fear of death.

When Jerry Seinfeld heard about that, he correctly observed that that means if that person is at a funeral, they'd rather be the dead person in the casket than the one giving the eulogy.

But there are some situations where we have to speak in public – and one of those is in a courtroom.

For me, that would be the worst place to be nervous about speaking. When I'm in an uncomfortable situation, I'll usually try to use humor to sort of ease the tension. But when you're on the witness stand answering questions, with a judge and a whole room full of people watching you, that's not really the time for a stand-up routine.

My guest today is Collier, and he knows all about that situation. He was only 12 years old when he had to testify at a murder trial, to talk about what happened at his house one night.

And the person he was testifying against was his own father.

Scott

This is kind of a sad question to ask. How old were you when you last saw your mother?

Collier

Well, I was 11 years old and it was the night of December 30th, 1989.

Scott

A night you'll never forget, for sure.

Collier

That was definitely a night I'll never forget, yeah.

Scott

Before we get into what happened that night, can you just describe your mother and maybe the relationship that you had with her?

Collier

Yeah. My mother was, like, my constant companion in my life. I mean, obviously, I was a child, so you have to have a parental figure around, but my mother was a wonderful woman who taught me - unbeknownst to me - all the values that I hold dear in my life. But also, she taught me a lot about being resilient. She taught me a lot about being truthful, honest, and standing up for what's right. I didn't know at the time that all of that was happening. It sort of all came into

play and unfolded very shortly thereafter I last saw her. But she was a wonderful woman. She was very kind, caring, wickedly intelligent, very sharp, and quick-witted. And she was a joy for everyone to be around, which is why her murder impacted so many people because, not only it was a horrific thing, but they were grieving the loss of someone that they really appreciated having around in their lives.

Scott

Your childhood life at that time, it was you, your mother, and you also had an adopted sister.

Collier

Yeah. About 6 months before my mother's murder, she adopted– or my parents adopted a child from Taiwan who was almost 3 years old. So I had a 3-year-old adopted sister, and that kind of complicated things, I suppose.

Scott

Complicated things for your dad anyway.

Collier

Yeah. Not complicated things - I think that's the wrong way to say it. I mean, I don't know if I should say it now or as we get into it. I believe that she was in the room when my mother was murdered.

Scott

Yeah, we definitely want to talk about that. So your family– you lived in a small town in Ohio and your dad was a doctor?

Collier

Yeah. My entire family was from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I grew up the first 5 years of my life in Virginia. Then, when I was 5, we moved to this small town in Ohio called Mansfield. I had grown up on a naval base because my father was in the Navy and he was a doctor in the Navy, so he was recruited to come and run a hospital in Mansfield, Ohio. So we moved to this small town where we didn't know anybody. It was obviously an odd sort of situation because we were from the east coast and then going to the Midwest into a place where you don't know anybody, and it's a very small town. It's not the most cosmopolitan place. I remember my mother would kevech a lot about that, but we embraced the community. Rather, the community embraced us. I had what I thought was a normal childhood, growing up. All of that was sort of going on around me in my household. I just kind of thought that's how people grew up.

Scott

Right. It was normal. But now, you've mentioned that he had a bad temper.

Collier

Yes.

Scott

Your dad had a bad temper. Was he ever physically violent with you?

Collier

Yeah, he was. He would strike me. He would hit me with belts and shit. He was violent towards my mother, but he wasn't that much of a domestic abuser, like, every day. It was nothing like

that. He was a rageaholic and he would just go off. I'd say probably more than the physical abuse was the verbal abuse. That would be all the time. He would just go into a rage, and when you grow up like that, as any person - I'm not alone in this as many people that deal with domestic violence issues or aggressive parents growing up are like fight, flight, or fawn - you learn to, like, appease the parent. Like, "Okay, don't set daddy off. Don't do this. Watch out for your father. Don't do that." That's how I grew up. But that's not unfamiliar to many children that grow up in households.

Scott

Right. Yeah. I'm sure a lot of people can identify with that.

Collier

Absolutely.

Scott

He often slept downstairs on the couch. Did you know why that was at the time?

Collier

The sleeping on the couch thing was always something that I was under the impression of he was doing it because he was working late. So he would come in late, his pager would go off, he would have to leave in the middle of the night or very early in the morning. That was my understanding when my father was sleeping on the couch. He was a doctor. He was on call a lot, so he was in demand, if you will. So I was always under the impression that I thought, "Okay, that's why he did it." I had no real understanding of what the dynamic was between my parents, and I think that's pretty common for most kids. I knew, like, "Don't piss my dad off, don't do anything." But I had no idea of what I would end up finding out was the truth in their relationship - the deal they sort of had.

Scott

Even with the insight that you had into his character, as you later testified, you still didn't quite have the full picture. I mean, you were a kid. You were 11 years old.

Collier

Oh yeah. I mean, I don't think I ever had the full picture. I still don't probably have the full picture, honestly. I'm still discovering things because it's been this sort of mystery that I've been unpacking for decades, really, to sort of figure out what the history is in the family and who my father was, understanding where I come from, all of it. It's very challenging and I think that - again, I'm not alone in this - there are many people that try to unpack their childhood. There are not many people who went through what I went through to such extremes, but there are. It's far more common than not that children go through this.

Scott

Yeah. Unfortunately, that's true. So, the real reason he was downstairs most of the time was because he was coming home from seeing one of his girlfriends?

Collier

Yeah. I didn't know this again at the time, but yeah, my father was having many extramarital affairs and that was something that I ended up finding out. Before my parents even got married, he was a womanizer and carried on many of these relationships outside the marriage and sometimes multiple relationships outside the marriage. He would have a girlfriend, then he

would have another, like, one on the side, and then he was married. And for the longest time, I just couldn't figure out, like, how was he able to do all this.

Scott

Right. I mean, having a career as a doctor is stressful enough, and a family and everything else, but then to have this whole other social lifestyle— yeah, it's a lot.

Collier

It's a lot. And I don't think it was romantic vacations and things like that there. That wasn't something that was going on but, I think, with anyone who's leading, like, a double life, they sneak it in when they can and then that's what that relationship becomes. I think one of the more fascinating things, when you think about someone like my father, is how he was able to sort of make all this happen within the confines of his work life and his family life. Our family wasn't together all the time. I was, most of the time, with my mother. My father would sometimes show up at school events and then he would be, like, "called away" and my mother would apparently say things to her friends at the time like, "Oh yeah, he got to go see one of his girlfriends." So everyone around me was aware of this except for me.

Scott

Obviously, the night of December 30th, 1989. Can you go through what happened that night?

Collier

So what happened is this. It was right after the Christmas holiday and my grandmother - who was my father's mother, who was extremely close with my mother - was supposed to come stay with us for Christmas but she didn't. I can't remember if she had pneumonia - because she would get pneumonia a lot - or she had a hip injury or something. I can't really remember why she didn't come for Christmas because, at that time, in late 1989, my parents were in the middle of a divorce. My mother had filed for divorce a couple of months earlier. Before that, they were separated. The cat was out of the bag because my father introduced me to his girlfriend and all this stuff and the shit really hit the fan, if you will. So she didn't come for Christmas. It was sort of a weird Christmas obviously because my father— like I said, the cat's out of the bag and I have this adopted sister from Taiwan who had arrived with us during the summer. My father came that night because my mother had made dinner and he arrived very late with my grandmother - I mean, not very late - at, like, 6, 7, 8 o'clock, something like that. This is wintertime and he showed up with my grandmother who's going to stay with us for the New Year's holiday.

Scott

And this was his mother?

Collier

His mother. Yes. And again, she was very close with my mother because she has a daughter, but she wasn't close with that daughter necessarily. My mother was very, like, cosmopolitan and very much loved fashion and all these things. They were both very into shopping and fashion and all these fun things and cultural stuff, so they had this really strong bond. And I loved my grandmother. I loved seeing my grandmother. She was a little Italian lady and she was great. Honestly, her and my father's mother were my two favorite grandparents. But she was also, at that time, my last remaining grandparent. She came and we had dinner. I think my father then left. He just basically dropped her off and then left to go do whatever he was going to go do. I sat there and I think I showed my grandmother my Christmas presents and shared that I had

gotten a Nintendo that year, so I'm sure I played some Nintendo and did all that. And she spent time with my sister and my mother and I in the living room. Then, it was time for me to go to bed and I gave her a hug and a kiss, and I gave my mom a hug and a kiss and said, "I love you, mommy." And that's the last time I saw my mother.

Scott

And your dad was not at home at that point?

Collier

No, he wasn't. He was gone because, 6 months before that, after my father had introduced me to his girlfriend, which was on Father's Day that year, he wasn't around very much anymore. He already wasn't around a lot, but he was really, like, persona non grata in the house, obviously, because, unbeknownst to me, even though I told my father about the girlfriend, my mother had known about all the girlfriends, apparently. I never knew this of course because my mother, obviously, never alerted me to that. But also, that was their deal in their marriage. "You can go do whatever you want, Jack." My father's name is John, but he went by Jack. "Do whatever you want, Jack, but don't drag our son into it." Which makes total sense. So I was protected by my mother and I was protected by that sort of agreement that they had. Then, when my father introduced me to his girlfriend, Sherri Campbell, that was when all the shit hit the fan.

Flash forward six months, things have been very tenuous in the household for many months now. My father really isn't around. He is making himself very scarce. Other than I would spend time with him individually separate from my mother, we would randomly run into his girlfriend at Kmart or wherever. Like, "Oh, look who's here. It's Sherri," which I actually said on the witness stand. "Look who's here. It's Sherri. Oh, random circumstances of just bumping into her." During that time too, leading up to all this, my father was telling me what a wonderful life he was creating with Sherri and her children, how wonderful they are, how that's going to be his new family, and he's going to make sure that my mother and I are living poor and can't even afford McDonald's, and I'm going to go to public school and live this horrible life, never going to college. He's going to make sure he ruins my life because now he is angry because my mother had filed for divorce, which apparently is not his fault. It's her fault, my fault, and everyone else's fault.

Scott

It's never his fault.

Collier

Never his fault.

Scott

So he wasn't home. You went to bed...

Collier

I went to bed. I woke up at about 3.15 in the morning and I'm pretty sure it was a scream from my sister because I always used to sleep like a log, man. I was just out. I then heard these two loud thuds that were separated about a minute apart. It sounded like a body hitting a wall. I mean, it was really loud. I was terrified and I could hear my father muttering between those thuds because I knew what his voice sounded like. It was very slow and I was terrified. I was thinking to myself like, "What do I do? Do I get up?" Obviously, something bad is going on. All that flashback in my head was a conversation that I had with my mother probably two months

prior right around, like, I guess, thanksgiving. She had said to me she was really downtrodden and my father was just an asshole. They're in the midst of this divorce, and she said to me, "Collier, if anything ever happens to me, I want you to know that I would never leave you." And I was like, "Okay, mommy. Yeah, of course." And she said, "If anything ever happens to me, your father probably had me killed." And I never forgot that. When my mom told me that, I guess, in a lot of ways, I thought she was being very hyperbolic because she was going through a really tough time. Obviously, divorce isn't easy on a woman.

Scott

Yeah. But to hear your mom say something like that, I mean, that's got to be traumatizing in itself.

Collier

Yeah. It was very jarring. I just thought, "Okay, mommy's going through something," but I filed it in the back of my mind. So when I was hearing these noises, these thuds, I was starting to think, "Oh my God, this is really happening," but something's telling me not to, like, jump up and just stay because if that's what's going on, then there's nothing I can do about it. Look, my father's, almost 6'4", 230-240 pounds at that time, and I'm an 11-year-old kid who was chubby and asthmatic. So, I then heard these footsteps come down the hall. I had always slept with my door open. I remember I can see out of my peripheral vision, the footsteps stop in my doorway, and I could see the feet in my doorway out and I'm literally pretending to be asleep. I can see my Batman clock on the wall and it says 3.18 AM. I can see out of the corner of my eye and something's telling me, "Don't look up." As I think about that and every time I say that, I realize that if I was to look up, I wouldn't be here today because, ultimately, as we later find out, it's nothing to make the hole a little bit bigger and say she left with her kid and that's it.

Scott

And you never heard from her again?

Collier

I've never heard from her again. Yeah. The footsteps left and I somehow went back to sleep for a few hours. When I woke up, it was obviously daytime. I ran straight to my mother's room and I noticed that the bed is really disheveled and I was looking for blood stains on the bed, but I couldn't find any and my sister was laying in the bed asleep. I went downstairs. My father is sitting on the couch and he has a towel wrapped around his waist. He had just gotten out of the shower. He was watching CNN and I said, "Where is my mother?" And he hasn't said anything. And I said, "Where is my mother?" He looked at me and he went, "Well, mommy took a little vacation, Collier." Right then, I knew that he had done something to her. I don't know if I was necessarily saying in my head, like, "He murdered her. He's done something to her and it's not good." I knew that. Sometimes I wavered, "Did I know he killed her?" I mean, maybe in the back of my mind, I did, but I also didn't want to let on that thought and I also just didn't want to think that either.

Scott

Yeah. That's not something you want to believe actually happened.

Collier

Yeah. It's really not something you want to believe actually happened. So, I waver a lot on that - what I was really feeling at that moment. But my mother's gone and you're responsible for her being gone and I'm going to figure this out. My father then launches into this whole diatribe. My

grandmother came in and then he was basically explaining away. I asked him about the thuds that I heard and he's telling me that they got into a fight where she came downstairs, started screaming at him, threw her purse and her credit cards at him, left out of the back door of our house, walked down the driveway in the middle of New Year's Eve in the dead of winter in Ohio - it's freezing snow in the driveway - and got into a car that was waiting at the end of the driveway. In this whole fight, he didn't have his glasses on and then he ran to the table to put his glasses on and saw her get in a car and leave. I knew it was bullshit when he was telling me that because I knew. I didn't hear her say anything. I knew that everything had happened upstairs and it didn't happen downstairs in the living room that he was claiming. Because how do I hear all these footsteps noises come down the hallway if all of this interaction happened downstairs?

Scott

And where was your grandmother when that was happening?

Collier

So we had a guest room that she was staying in, which was on the other side of the house. The house wasn't that big, but she was in her room.

Scott

Second floor or first floor?

Collier

First floor downstairs in the back corner of the house.

Scott

Okay. So even though his story claimed that it happened downstairs, she was far enough away that she may not have heard it.

Collier

Yeah. I mean, yeah. I don't know how you wouldn't have heard it. It's not like we had a huge house. We had a smaller house. So I don't know how you wouldn't have heard it, but I think she was just as confused. A lot of people asked me and they were like, "Oh, she must have known." I don't think she knew. It's also her son and it's her firstborn. As anyone knows, Italian mothers are very protective of their sons, and I think that she believed what he was saying even though she didn't believe him. She believed him. So my father's telling this whole story, and then my father is saying to me, he launches this whole diatribe about what had happened, his story, I must have heard the purse - that's the sound that he said was hitting the wall. And then, he said, "Okay, so we're not going to call the police. We're not going to call the FBI." And when he said the "FBI", I just remember thinking, like, "What? The FBI? Why are we going there? That's quite an escalation." I just thought that was really weird. He starts strategizing, like, where my mother could have gone, but he's basically in a hurry to get out of the house. So he's going to go deal with some stuff because he's moving his practice to Erie, Pennsylvania and he's going to go see his girlfriend and all this. I waited until he left and my mother had just gotten a cordless phone. And, my grandmother was like, "Okay, we're not going to call the police. You're going to listen to your father and yada yada yada. Obey your dad." I went and grabbed the cordless phone and I ran upstairs. Something that I had done prior to all this is I had made a list. When my mother had told me this info about if something ever happened to her, my father probably had her killed, I had made a list of all my mother's friends' phone numbers, and I put this little list inside a stuffed Garfield, a Santa Claus Garfield, that I had and I saved that. I went

and I grabbed that list and I locked myself in the bathroom with the cordless phone. I just started calling everybody on that list.

Scott

That strikes me as really one of the most bizarre parts of the story. An 11-year-old kid, your mom tells you this, but then you take action and create this list of your mom's friends and their phone numbers. It's like your emergency kit. That's your thing. If something happens, you kick into action and start calling.

Collier

But it's interesting that you say that because - and that might be weird to some people and maybe it is an extraordinary thing to do - I don't think it's that uncommon. I think that kids that grow up in abusive homes or abusive situations, I think they do have lists like that. I think they do have call lists. I think they do know if shit really hits the fan, who am I going to call? Not Ghostbusters, I'm going to call these people. So I don't know if it's that uncommon. I mean, maybe it is. I don't know. I've never discussed that with anyone - is this uncommon or not? - but I feel like kids are pretty sharp. Kids know what's going on. I was an only child for a long time. I had this relationship with my mother my whole life and I think I was protective of her. I think that it was a preemptive sort of thing. Like, if something happens, I'm going to be able to call these people. So, I called everyone and I said, "Look, I can't call the police because my dad told me not to call the police, but you can call the police," which of course they did.

Scott

And I'm thinking also from their standpoint, getting a phone call like that from the little boy, the little son of their friend, saying, "I think my dad killed my mom." Of course, your mom probably told them the same thing, "If anything ever happens to me..."

Collier

Yeah. Especially her friends, I think a lot of them had maybe possibly feared the worst because they had all said to people - the newspapers and things - like, "This woman wouldn't just leave her kids."

Scott

So you started going down this list and making phone calls. What came of that?

Collier

My mother had a friend that lived over a couple of streets too and she had always said, "If you guys ever need to come over, here's the back door and that type of thing." I called all these people and the cops showed up at the house, like, I don't know, a few hours later - uniformed officers - and my grandmother was livid, yelling at me, "Oh, you called the police?! You didn't obey your dad, yada yada yada." I was like, "I didn't call the police."

Scott

Right. And the police could testify to that too. You didn't call them. It

Collier

That was very true. I was like, "I didn't call the police so I wasn't lying."

Scott

What did they give for their reason for showing up?

Collier

Because they had gotten a call from concerned people because my mother didn't show up for a lunch thing she was supposed to see a friend for, we were supposed to go see my mom's best friend, Shelly, or another friend we were supposed to go see for, like, a New Year's Eve thing, so they were doing a welfare check, sort of. Yeah, I guess it was sort of a welfare check, just kind of seeing what's going on. And again, this is a small town in Ohio. There's not much that goes on. It was the holidays, but they came and there were two officers. My grandmother was, like, yelling at them, "Don't come in the house" or whatever. She's just livid with me, looking at me like I've created this whole thing.

We went upstairs to show them my mother's bedroom. I was trying to talk to the officers, but my grandmother was literally hovering over me. I knew that she didn't want me to disobey. I can't disobey my father, so don't disobey your father, be a good boy. So I was very much trying to present that to them. But at the same time, also trying to get them to believe me that something has happened and it's not good. I remember I pulled one of the officers aside into, like, my sister's bedroom, which was right next to my mother's, and I said, "I don't trust my father as far as I could throw him." That's something my mother used to say, so I borrowed her euphemism, if you will. But the officer was like, "Oh, okay." I think he was just kind of a little dumbfounded, but they left.

Later that night, my father came home and, again, he was talking about the possible places my mother could have gone. We were having, like, a brainstorming session. Then his divorce attorney came over. It was just weird. The next day, a detective showed up at the house - this is New Year's Day. My father isn't there again. My father left very early in the morning and this detective showed up - his name is David Messmore. Unbeknownst to me - because I had called my mother's friends again, like, snuck the phone in and tried to see what's going on - they're like, "Well, we filed a missing person's case," and I'm like, "Well, okay. She's not missing. Something's happened to her. She's either dead or he's got her held somewhere or something. Meanwhile, my father is gone too." I'm looking around the house for, like, clues. I think I'm going to go outside and look around. I'm trying to figure out what happened. I'm in the basement looking around, stooping around. Even my grandmother was saying things like, "Why are you snooping around the house?" And I'm trying to figure out, like, "Oh, I think I have a toy down here," and stuff like that.

But this detective showed up at the house and my grandmother, again, is just apoplectic. He charms his way in because I was like, "Oh, come on in." And she went to go call my father. She's like, "My son is going to sue you guys for coming here. This is harassment and yada yada yada." And my grandmother left and one of the things that my mother had always told me growing up as a child was grab the brass ring in life. So I knew at that moment - my mother would always tell me stories of, like, you go on the carousel horse, grab the brass ring, and you win a prize. So I remember thinking that when my grandmother was on the phone trying to get ahold of my father, and I realized that was a brass-ringing moment. I'm alone with this detective at my house and I said to him, "My mother would never leave me. Something happened to her. Give me your card. I'm going to school tomorrow. Give me your card." He gave me his card. My grandmother came back and he was looking around. She was like, "You need to get out of here." And he's like, "Oh, okay." He was asking a few questions and she's like, "No." He's like, "Well, when will the doctor be back?" because he wants to talk to my dad. And she's like, "He'll be back this evening. You can come to talk to him then." And he's like, "Okay. So he left."

That night, again, my father came back home, but my father's girlfriend also showed up with a roast pork roast, sauerkraut, and whatever traditional thing because it was New Year's Day. My mother was an amazing cook, but I just remember she was in my house with my grandmother. My dad's like, "Oh look, Sherri came to bring us food because your mother—" The sort of narrative that my father is using is that my mother had left us, she made the choice to leave us, had abandoned the family. It was this sort of victim mentality thing with him of, "Your mother made the choice to leave us, left me high and dry with you kids." And I'm just thinking to myself, "You're out of it, man. Like, you're responsible for her leaving us."

Scott

But his mother was buying that whole story.

Collier

I mean, at least, to me, she was buying that story, but I don't know if she ever really bought it. I think that my grandmother was in a very difficult position. Again, that night, Sherri's there, and then my father's divorce lawyer is over again. Then, because David Messmore showed up at the house again and wanted to question my father, the lawyer won't let him in and said, "He's not going to talk to you." And he goes, "Okay, I just want to ask him a few questions." I could see David and I was making eye contact with him at the door. I was just thinking to myself, "I'm going to spill it all to you tomorrow, man."

So the next day, I get picked up for school - because my mother would normally drive me to school. A family friend picked me up to go to school and the first thing I did is I went right into my principal's office and I gave her that business card for Lieutenant Messmore, and I said, "You need to call the Mansfield Police Department. I want to talk to this guy." And Lieutenant Messmore came down to my school. This is something that is so key to all of this because there are so many times - I think more often than not in these types of cases - where children are maybe witnesses or there's the opportunity to sort of get a handle on it for law enforcement of the actual scope of what's going on. The fact that I was able to go to school and that I was able to be free of my grandmother and my father and all those external pressures and have a safe place to talk to law enforcement was absolutely key in all of this.

So, David Messmore came down to my school and I talked to him for probably, like, I guess, 2-3 hours, and I laid out the entire history of my family as I know it, my parent's marriage, the girlfriend, his history of abuse with us, his violent temper, everything that I had experienced, everything that I knew of that I learned from my mother because, obviously, growing up, I didn't know all these things about my father. But then, as he introduces me to the girlfriend and there's this divorce and all these things happening, I'm starting to find out more and more from my mother and my father too about everything that was going on. I was sort of uncovering this past that I didn't know existed. So I just gave him the whole thing and I said to him, "Look, I'm going to go home and when my grandmother's downstairs dealing with my sister, I'm going to go upstairs and she's making dinner or whatever. I'm going to sneak around upstairs and I'm going to go to the crawl space and I'm going to pull the bookshelf out of the wall to look and see if I could find my mother's body. Then, I'm going to search around for other clues. I'm going to look to see if her purse is stashed somewhere because my father claims that she had thrown this purse at him. I know that she would never leave the house without this purse with her stuff in it." I was just looking for clues.

I remember him just kind of looking at me like, "Who is this kid?" But I was full-on into this detective mode. I'm going to find out what happened to my mother. My father's not going to get

away with this. I know many people cast out on what I did and how I was involved in all this because "Oh, a kid couldn't do that." It happened this way. Like, it has been well documented in court. It has been well-documented in conversations with the investigator that this became my mission. I went on this little crusade because I'm going to find out what happened to my mother. Every night, my father is "moving his practice to Erie". He would come home every night and my father would have these, like, brainstorming sessions of where could mommy have gone. "Oh, maybe she went to Toronto, Collier, because you guys always wanted to go to Toronto. Maybe she's shopping and she went to visit," and just all this weirdness that I was just like, "Oh yeah, sure, dad. Okay."

All I can think of is, like, I'm watching this man like a hawk and I start to notice things. My father always had very well-manicured hands. My father always has cuts and scratches on his hands, and I noticed that. Then, one night, he had come home and he asked me to rub Bengay, which is, like, icy hot on his shoulders - like an ointment - because he was really sore from moving boxes. I was making, and filing all these mental notes. So every time I would go to school, I would literally go into the principal's office and either say, "Get David Messmore down here, or let's call him at the police department," I would tell him what I learned that last night because, every time my father would come home, I would be watching him like a hawk. Like, that was my mission. Screw homework, screw all this. My mission is to watch this man like a hawk and just make mental notes of what he's doing. So, every night he would be coming home and his divorce attorney would come over and they'd be having these little secret meetings in our dining room, and it was just weird. It was weird.

I started to notice this pattern in my father's behavior and one of the things is, again- so my father, as I was saying, had a very violent temper and was very into violent movies and things like that. My father would get angry and call me words. He would call me, like, a little faggot or a pussy or I wasn't man enough. My mother was turning me into a faggot and I was going to grow up and not be a man or whatever - all these just really hateful things, growing up. He would verbally abuse me. Even things such as playing catch in the backyard- he would find ways to throw the ball at my crotch or at my head and tell me I was a wussie and all the things abusive fathers did. And my father was very much into that my mother had gone to Taiwan to go meet my sister or meet the family and stuff for the adoption process, and I was supposed to go with her, but I ended up getting sick with asthma, so I had to stay here in the States.

So she was gone for two weeks and I was with my father alone. My father terrorized me almost the entire time that she was gone. He would go on these rages and then he would apologize. It was like this Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Like, that's how he always was. He would go into these massive rages and then he would apologize and be like, "Oh, I don't mean it." I mean, the classic abuser thing, right? "Oh, I didn't mean to do it." I mean, it's the same cycle of abuse.

One of the things that my father would always do is he would watch violent movies on television. I was always this little kid. I would cover my eyes. I know it sounds stupid nowadays, but I wasn't allowed to watch violent movies as a kid. My mom wouldn't let me do that. Like, there would have to be, like, adult supervision. My mom was very old-fashioned like that. So I would cover my eyes and I didn't want to see anything bad, and my father would be yelling at me like, "Take your hands off over your eyes. You need to watch this."

My father always had these, like, Vietnam stories where he was in Vietnam. My father was a malignant narcissist in a lot of ways. I don't need to diagnose him, but he clearly suffers from narcissistic personality disorder. He would tell these massive lies about being a fighter pilot in

Vietnam. I remember, many years later, people confronted me and said, like, "Hey, we all went out to dinner and your father was telling the story of how his F-14 Tomcat got shot down over the South China Sea and Vietnam, and his ejection seat wouldn't work - his lever to eject the airplane. So the plane went down and then he cut himself out of the cockpit with his trusty government-issued bowie knife and then swam two miles to shore." Just absolutely craziness.

And my father wasn't even in Vietnam. My father would have these photos in his office of him in his navy whites with all these medals, all these stripes, and everything, as if he had more medals than the members of the joint chiefs of staff. My father would go down to these— unbeknownst to me, I had gone to surplus stores with him and he would buy these fake medals to make himself out to be this navy hero. So he would have all these photographs of him, this naval uniform, and all of these accolades that he didn't have, and that was a sort of allure for the girlfriends. He was this decorated Navy guy. Top Gun was a big movie that had come out in the late eighties, so he would ride that wave and he was always telling me about his fighter pilot stories, which are all just bullshit. So, all this played into this very machismo character that my father had.

So the flip side, we're here in January, 1990, my mother is gone and I'm playing a video game and it's a violent— not a violent game, but it's, like, shooting and it's like fighting, like, double dragon. My father saw me play this video game. He went, "I wouldn't have bought this video game for you if I knew that it was violent like this." And I'm literally looking at him going, "Who is this man?" Like, what? He totally had this flip. My father, in the absence of my mother, had become a little more docile and sensitive and just all this weird stuff that, that I'm like, "This doesn't make any sense the way my father is." I was telling all of these to David Messmore. His behavior is becoming so bizarre.

What happened is, in the middle of January, 1990, my mother had been missing for about two weeks now. My father said, "Hey, I'm going to go to the office. Come with me. I'm going to pick up some paperwork from the office." And I was like, "Oh, yeah, I'm coming with you so I can watch him." We went to the office. He picked up some paperwork. On the way back home, we stopped at a gas station and my father went into the gas station, and I can see him through the windshield, so I knew that this is like my moment - again, brass ring. I started rummaging through his car and opened up in his truck. I opened up the center console and I found two photographs - one is of a house that I've never seen before, and the second one is of his girlfriend, Sherri Campbell and her two children sitting in front of a fireplace - wrapped in plastic. And they were both Polaroids. I remember saying to myself, "These two are tied together. This is a new house and she's involved." So, the next day, I went to school, I told David Messmore about what I found, and that, I guess, opened up more doors to, like, "Okay, there's a house somewhere."

Scott

You're kind of in a unique position here because David Messmore may not have had enough probable cause for a search warrant or anything, but you could certainly go rummaging around wherever you wanted and come up with stuff.

Collier

Exactly. And I didn't know that was unique. I was just on this mission. Like, I'm going to find out what happened to my mother. There was no, like, "Oh, I'm going to be an investigator, or I'm going to be this little sleuth." I wasn't thinking about any of that. I was just like, "This is what I can do to help this situation. I'm going to make sure that this guy does not get away with

whatever he's done," which is what I feared the worst in my heart is that he's murdered my mother. But at best, he's done something to her.

Scott

But you were really driving this investigation though, it sounds like.

Collier

Yeah, and the thing is that, unbeknownst to me, on the same side, David Messmore is investigating this, but his captain at the Mansfield Police Department is like, "You're not going after this man. He's a doctor. They can sue." Cause obviously all the concerns of, "He's a doctor, he can sue us, you don't have any information, you don't have any probable cause." And he's just saying, "I've got this kid who believes that he's done something to his mother." The police captain has basically threatened him in a way of, like, "If you don't find anything, man, you're going to be fired. You're going to be out of a job. Like, the department's going down, etc.

So I told him about these photographs and then I noticed that my father has been— this is, like I said, mid-January, 1990, and I notice, again, my father is coming home every night, and he's meeting with his attorney and I can tell that he's becoming not violent now, he's not angry. He's not going into these rage fits. It's almost the opposite. He's very passive and he is talking. Every night, we're like, "Oh, I wonder what mommy is doing right now." He's saying things like, "You know what mommy is doing right there?" You know that she's not breathing. But he's coming up with these scenarios and hypotheses of where she could be, what has happened to her, and always with this narrative of, "She left us. She made this choice to leave us," which is just nonsense.

He said to me around, like, January 20th, he went, "Collier, I know that it has been really hard on you and on the family since mommy decided to leave us. So I'm thinking that maybe— I have a medical convention coming up in Florida, and I think that we should take a father and son trip to Florida - like a bonding trip - so you'll feel better about mommy. I think you need a little break from Mansfield, etc." And I knew right then and there that I wasn't coming back from Florida because, again, I could see my father's behavior. He was becoming more and more stressed out. The police are literally coming to our house every night, knocking on the door to talk to him. He's meeting with his lawyer every night at the house. I could tell that the walls were starting to close around him and he was probably going in his mind, "How are the walls closing around me? I've covered my tracks. I've done all this."

I think he's starting to maybe put two and two together that I'm talking to the police because I'm not saying anything to him. I'm not telling my grandmother anything. I'm only doing this at school, which I felt was my safe place to do all this. So I called David Messmore the next day and I told him, I said, "My father said he wants to take me to Florida." And I knew at the time he was fishy too because, every year we would go to Florida, we would go to Clearwater Beach, Florida, we would go to these medical conferences, but they were always in the spring because it's spring break. Families are on vacation for spring break and it's Florida. You can go to Busch Gardens, you can do all these things. It's outside Tampa. So there are all these things that can happen there for families, so I know that it's very weird that you wouldn't really have this big medical conference right after Christmas. So it's all fishy. It's all bad from Jump Street. So I said to David Messmore, "My father wants to take me to Florida. I'm not coming back from Florida. I've been able to swim since I was four years old. I'm going to drown in the Gulf of Mexico. I'm not coming back from Florida." And he realizes that too, but I don't hear from him for a couple of days.

Then, I woke up on the morning of January 24th and there were two agents from Child Protective Services. They're in my room. They said, "We're getting out of here in 20 minutes. Pack a bag. Pack a bag for your sister. You're getting out of here." I heard all this commotion downstairs and I started packing this bag. I asked them if I could take my dog, but they said, "No, you can't take your dog. We'll come back and get your dog. We're not going to take him right now. We'll come back and get your dog." I never saw my dog again. I packed whatever I could in 20 minutes and stuff and I left with Child Protective Services. As I'm coming downstairs, the entire house is flooded with police officers, men and women in white lab coats. All these contraptions were going on. David Messmore was there. They're serving a search warrant. My grandmother's apoplectic. They search warrants the whole thing, and then they escort me out of the house. Cops everywhere, vans. I mean, it's just wild.

They told me, "Oh, you're not going to school today?" And I'm like, "Oh, yeah." So I went to, I believe, the principal of my school's house and I knew at that moment that my life was never going to be the same. I mean, I already kind of realized that my life was never going to be the same leading up to that moment for the last 24-25 days, but that was really when things were starting to sink in. Everything that I've ever known has been completely just eviscerated. So I went to the principal of my school's house and this woman came and met me. She's a caseworker and she introduced herself and said that she's my caseworker. I didn't know what a caseworker is, but I know it was not good. So that night, I got out of there in such a hurry that I didn't have all my asthma stuff, and I had the worst asthma attack in my life that night and I actually thought I was going to die because I was having such trouble breathing. I was just in such a bad place because I knew my whole world was turning upside down and I was allergic to something in the house and it was just bad, but I somehow survived through the night. I was, like, sleeping in a chair to prop myself up so I can breathe. That morning, we went to the hospital and I remember going in, there were a bunch of people in the lobby of the hospital and there were, like, the newspaper honor boxes and I remember them grabbing me and sort of drifting me away from the honor box. Then, I went into this little patient room or whatever.

Scott

They were taking you to the hospital because of your asthma?

Collier

Yeah, they were taking me to the hospital because of my asthma. A friend of the family who was a doctor, he was a cardiologist, he was in the room and he gave me a shot for steroids to reduce the inflammation in my lungs. He gave me a breathing treatment and I was stabilized and I could breathe. Then, he said to me, "Lieutenant Messmore found your mother." And it was, like, this long drawn-out pause. I mean, it probably only lasted a second or two. This is what I wanted to hear.

And she said, "Lieutenant Messmore found your mother and she was dead." It's really hard to articulate to people what that really feels like because, at that moment, you have been thinking and fearing the worst for so long for 25-26 days now, and you know in your heart how it was going to play out, but you never really want to accept that. So this overwhelming sort of relief comes over that you're not crazy, that what you thought really happened did happen and you were right. Then, on the flip side, the overwhelming sadness and grief that you went through because what you thought was true and what you believed in your heart had happened would really happen. That is something that I'll never forget because you don't want to be right. I badly wanted them to say, "Yeah. They found her at a shopping mall in Toronto, Ontario, or she was

in California, or she was in Paris.” That’s what I wanted to really hear, but I already knew it. I knew, when I heard everything that happened that night of December 31st, 1989, that she was never coming back. But, part of you holds out hope that that’s not true. Even though you think it and you know it to be true, you don’t really want it to be true. No one really wants to be like, “Oh, my father murdered my mother. My mother was murdered.” Nobody really wants that. Like, I don’t really want to accept that.

They found her buried beneath the basement floor of the house that I found the photographs of in Erie, Pennsylvania. My father had rented a jackhammer which I had seen at the house by the way. My father had rented a jackhammer. My father had dug a hole, covered it in concrete, covered it, repainted everything, and covered the floor with green AstroTurf, indoor-outdoor carpeting that was on our patio as well at the house for months prior to that. He had shelves built over top of it in this basement and that’s where they found her body buried - underneath the basement floor.

Scott

So they only knew about that house because of the picture that you had found. I guess they could search real estate purchase records

Collier

I’m sure they did, but I found that house and that was a clue. That house in the photo that I found with my father’s girlfriend, like, that also put that whole thing together as well. Like, oh, she’s in this house. I mean, I’m not privy to what their police work was on the other side, but it all just came together after I found that.

Scott

So he was charged with her murder?

Collier

Yeah, he wasn’t charged straight away. So there was obviously an arraignment here - not an arraignment hearing, but a grand jury. I testified at the grand jury to secure his indictment. Then, he was arraigned on what they call aggravated murder, which is premeditated murder because the murder was premeditated. I think a lot of people don’t understand that my father just didn’t kill my mother in a crime of passion. My father planned this out for months and months, bought the house, rented the jackhammer, bought all the stuff, and bought the tarp that he wrapped my mother’s body in. Like, all of it was premeditated. So it was aggravated murder, which is premeditated murder. He was charged with abuse of a corpse and it was a fiasco.

And I guess having heard that my mother was indeed dead and all of that and then going through that and then testifying at the grand jury, I remember my mother’s sister came out. I believe she had to come out to identify the body. And my mother’s sister was my godmother. We had, like, a little memorial service at the Catholic church in town and it was weird. It was all very surreal. I was just out of it. But I testified at the grand jury and then what happened was my mother’s sister told me on the phone that they could not take me in because I looked like my father. They were not willing to do that.

Scott

You were in temporary foster care at the moment, right?

Collier

I was just staying at a friend's house for a couple of days. I thought I was going to go with my family or whatever. My father's side of the family was basically like, "You are putting your— you didn't hear what you heard." They're gaslighting me, like, "You've put your father in jail. Your father's arrested because of you. You're going to rescind your testimony," and that type of thing. So they're disowning me too. So yeah, I was abandoned by both sides of my family and I went into the foster care system and I stayed there till I was adopted.

Scott

So in spite of all of this evidence, he still pleads not guilty?

Collier

He pleads not guilty. And so, I testified, I was in foster care for 5 months before the trial and I was pretty much isolated because I couldn't watch television, I couldn't read the newspaper, I couldn't really talk to any friends or anything outside of school. I wasn't supposed to talk about the case, but I was, like, the chief witness against my father pretty much. I mean, there were other people, but I was the one who was the insider when all of this is going on and was able to lead the jury into, like, the history of his abuse, who he was, who my mother was, and what all of this looked like in his behavior over this time. I testified for 2 days at his trial. His trial was almost a month long.

Scott

Let's listen to some of that courtroom testimony.

Male 1

Will you tell us who you are?

Collier

I'm Collier Landry Boyle.

Male 1

Just to make you a little familiar with the courtroom, we have the microphones there. You can just speak up right at the microphone. So you told us who you are. Could you tell us how old you are now?

Collier

I am 12 years old.

Male 1

So first of all, can you tell us what you did with your mom?

Collier

Usually, we like to go shopping together and just go out. We watch a lot of movies and we go to the grocery store together and rent movies and stuff like that. We just have a lot of fun. We go to all kinds of different places.

Male 1

Okay. Now, also drawing your attention here to your father, Dr. John Boyle, did he spend time with you?

Collier

Not very much at all.

Male 1

But compared to the time you spent with your mom, would you say maybe how much percent you spent with your dad and how much percent with your mother?

Collier

99% with my mother and 1% with my father.

Male 1

You said you went to bed about 9 o'clock on December 30th. Did anything happen during the course of that night that woke you up?

Collier

I awoke at around 3.00 - 3.15 AM.

Male 1

Okay. Now, how do you know it was that time?

Collier

Because, as I awoke, I looked at the clock and it said it was between 3.00 and 3.15 AM.

Male 1

Okay. You woke up at that time. Is there any reason why you woke up rather than just stay there and sleep?

Collier

Because I heard a scream coming from my sister. The immediate thought I had was something was wrong with my mother. About a little while later, maybe about three minutes, I heard a little thud.

Male 1

Okay. Could you describe this sound for us?

Collier

Okay. It was about this loud. Then, about a minute and a half later, or I mean half a minute later, I heard an even louder thud and, at that time I was petrified. I mean, I was just scared.

Male 1

All right. Now, did you get up at that time to investigate what had happened?

Collier

No, I did not.

Male 1

And could you tell the jury why you didn't?

Collier

Because I was extremely afraid of my father, and I always have.

Male 1

Okay. Did there come a time that you got up the next morning and looked for your mother?

Collier

Yes. It was around 8.30 in the morning. I got up and I ran immediately to my mother's room and I noticed the covers were pulled back, like a body had been taken out. That's not the normal way my mother would get out of bed, so I went downstairs and I said, "Where's my mother?" to my father. And he said, "Well, mommy took a little vacation, Collier." Then, I just didn't know what to say. I just panicked. And he said, "She'll be back in a few days and then she just left."

Male 1

When was the last time you spoke with your mother?

Collier

It was around the night of December 30th.

Male 1

Right before you went to bed?

Collier

Yes.

Male 1

And that was the last time you really saw your mother, is that correct?

Collier

Yes.

Scott

When I first watched that, I thought, "This is not a 12-year-old kid." I mean, you were talking like you were confident, you were composed, very convincing. Did the lawyers tell you how to do that?

Collier

No. I mean, here's the thing. As my story gets more and more public, so many people say, "Oh he's lying. He's making this up. He didn't know. He didn't hear anything. He didn't do that. They told him what to say." My father for years still says that I was coached through my testimony and they told me what to say and all this. The thing that people don't understand is when you're telling the truth, it is very easy to remember. The truth is the easiest thing to remember. So of course, it sounds confident because I'm telling the truth. I'm not making anything up. If I was making it up, first of all, for anyone that's ever testified at a trial, let alone the trial of your father murdering your mother, let alone testifying at a trial when you were a minor in front of a courtroom full of people, it's pretty scary.

Scott

And TV cameras as well.

Collier

And TV cameras, exactly. It's pretty intimidating. It's pretty scary. So the fact that I could remember some sort of rehearsed story is utterly fanciful. I was angry at my father because he did the unspeakable thing. He had no reason to kill my mother. He had no reason. He could have gone and lived his life with his girlfriend and that would've been it, which is what he was telling me he was going to do for the last six months because he found this better family than we are and he's going to go and make sure that our lives are a living hell and all of that. He had no reason to do what he would do. He was going to make money. He was making money. He was all these things.

Scott

And when I was watching this, your dad in court, in hearing you testify, he seemed to have no emotion or response to anything. He was taking notes, but no response to what you were saying.

Collier

None whatsoever. In fact, he wouldn't even look me in the eye. He knows what he did. He's not stupid. My father's a very intelligent man. There's obviously narcissistic personality disorder. There's psychopathy involved in this because I think a lot of people don't understand it. Look, I'm not a clinician. I'm not a doctor. I don't diagnose. I just know what it's like to interact with him and confront him. He very firmly believed that he could lie his way through this. He'd been lying his entire life.

Scott

And he underestimated your loyalty to your mother, it sounds like.

Collier

That's for sure. He definitely underestimated my loyalty to my mother. Absolutely. So he was convicted. He was convicted by a jury of his peers. He got 21.5 years potential of parole, but my father is still incarcerated to this day. In fact, he just turned 80 a few weeks ago.

Scott

How long has he been in now?

Collier

33 years. Almost 33 years.

Scott

How long did you say his sentence was?

Collier

21.5 years. But you have to be eligible for parole. So the first time he was up for parole, he was denied. Then, he was up for parole again in 2021 or 2020 and also got denied parole.

Scott

I'm not sure I understand this. If he was sentenced to 21.5 years, even if he's not eligible for parole, doesn't he get out when that sentence is over?

Collier

No, because you have to be paroled to be let out.

Scott

So it's really a life sentence with possibility of parole.

Collier

It's really a life sentence. So, yeah, in a lot of ways, it is because he is on what's called— and he explained this to me years ago, but he's on what's called old law, which you have to appear before a parole board, and they have to deem you fit to rejoin society in new law. Like, nowadays, if you get convicted of something like that, it's either, “Okay, we're giving you a life sentence, we're giving you 25 years.” So let's say they give you 25 years, one day past 25 years, you're out. Have a nice day. So, it's very odd. The justice system has evolved a lot since my father's incarceration.

Scott

Does Ohio have capital punishment?

Collier

They did have capital punishment. I don't think they did at the time, or I don't think that they were going to seek capital punishment against my father.

Scott

I mean, because of being premeditated and everything, it seems like that would be a case that would qualify if it was in effect.

Collier

I would think so. I mean, I think that the reason why they didn't pursue the death penalty is because I have a half-sister that was born 12 days before my father was arrested. His girlfriend, unbeknownst to me, was pregnant at the time. So I have a half-sister. So, obviously, there are two natural children that he has. Then, there's an adopted child six months before the murder. So you have these other extenuating circumstances that surround this whole thing. So yeah, I would think that he didn't get the death penalty because of that.

Scott

In spite of all of that evidence and the fact that he was convicted and that he went to all this trouble to bury her, does your grandmother still think that he's innocent or has she stated anything publicly about what she thinks really happened?

Collier

No, my grandmother stood by him till the end. I became very estranged from my family because they didn't want anything to do with me, and all of it was so weird. I had no relationship with my family at all. And a relationship with my father as well— I mean, I maintained a relationship with my father for decades, but I saw my grandmother before she passed away because I would go visit her. She lived up in, like, Youngstown, Ohio, and I would drive up there and see her. I remember she said something to me one time. She was older and she was in and out of, like— right before she passed away and we were making things in her kitchen. She said to me, “My Jacky, what a waste of talent.” So when she told me that, I knew that she knew what he did. Even my father's and my mother's family don't want to do anything with me. Like, they had their own trauma. My father had molested their two daughters a year before all of this happened under the guise of giving them physicals. He was supposed to be arrested for that in Baltimore and they couldn't get anything to stick on him. So there was a lot of stuff that had happened and there were a lot of dynamics in my family that I didn't realize existed until many years later, well

after the trial until I was an adult that I started finding these things out. I still find things out, which is crazy to me.

Scott

And you've kept in touch with him. You've written him letters over these decades while he's been incarcerated?

Collier

Yeah. I would write letters to him. I would talk to him on the phone. I would go visit him. I probably visited my father hundreds of times in prison. I wanted to always do something with this story because I didn't want it to be something that defines me. It's weird because now I talk about it so much and I have the podcast and I made the film and things like that, and I continued to do this work. It becomes, like, something else. I left my small town of Mansfield, Ohio. I moved to Los Angeles. I became a filmmaker. I learned music videos, feature films, short films, and all these things and commercials and yada yada. I worked as a cinematographer, filmmaker, and then I got into a place where I was like, "Okay, I really want to tell the story because it was always something I wanted to do." But I learned the craft of filmmaking because I wanted to be able to tell the story and I wanted to do something that would honor my mother, that would bring some sort of closure to this. I also really wanted to find out why my father murdered my mother because that was a lingering question for me. It's like, "Why would he do this?" So I ended up making a film called "A Murder in Mansfield," directed by 2-time Oscar one, or Barbara Kopple. I actually was in the film - I wasn't necessarily supposed to be from the start. It was really going to be a pilot for a television series about the consequences of violence and that whole thing, and it ended up becoming this whole thing. Then, I started a podcast after that because I traveled around the world with the film and I did a TED Talk and speaking and all these wonderful things. I left this small town to get away from all of this and then I sort of came full circle back into it.

Scott

Do you see that as kind of a part of your healing process?

Collier

Yes. Well, I feel that nobody really knew my story out here in Los Angeles. Like, nobody knew who I was because I wanted to leave this town and make a life for myself. I spent 15 years doing that until I finally got ready to really tell this story. So, I was confident in that. But it was this nagging thing that I always wanted to put to bed. I was like, "I need to do something positive with this experience and then share this experience with the world." Yeah.

Scott

I just recently watched that documentary and it's amazing. Anybody can watch it and see 12-year-old Collier on the witness stand and we'll have a link to that so they can watch that. I wanted to ask you one question about a scene in that film. You went back to visit your childhood home where all this happened and, obviously, someone else was living there now. Did they know the history of that house when they bought it?

Collier

Oh yeah. Well, somebody else had bought it. They were renting it. But yeah, they do. I mean, everyone knows and I didn't even want to go up there and ask them that, but they're, "Just go up there and knock on the door, and just be your charming self, Collier, and talk to them." And we did. They were very gracious with us.

Scott

They were lovely people to talk with you.

Collier

Lovely people. They filled such a home with love and it was really wonderful. It was really a nice moment. It was also very surreal. Going through the house at the time, I thought it just seemed so small to me. When you're a kid it feels like, oh, everything's so big and this, that, and the other. It felt very small to me. But it was a really nice moment to see somebody filling that space with love because there was so much love in that house. There were a lot of good memories. It just didn't end so well.

Scott

And there are a lot more details in that film, which people can watch and see all of, including your modern-day confrontation with your father when you visited him in prison and asked him point blank about the murder. That was a very interesting conversation.

Collier

Which, again, I had never ever asked him that. That was a point blank because my father participated in the film because he thought I was making a film to help him get out of prison.

Scott

Again, all about him. Right?

Collier

All about him. And I never told him that.

Scott

But he's got hours all day, every day to think maybe that's what's going to happen.

Collier

Yeah. And a lot of people also say to me— I remember traveling and speaking with the film, and somebody came up to me at the end. They'll meet and greet in line and they said, "God, Collier, I'm so glad your father was able to tell you what really happened. Now you can have closure. You know that he told you the truth about what happened." Because he essentially said the murder was an accident. He was a fan of my father's. He had worked at the prison and I'm just looking at him going, "No, that's not what happened. My father's not telling you the truth."

Scott

Even after all that's happened, he's still able to convince some people

Collier

100%. He's that good. That's the thing with psychopathy and with people who have narcissistic personality disorder. Like, this is how these people are. They think they're really believable and people do believe them and defend them too, which is just wild to me.

Scott

Well, talk about what you're doing today. You mentioned a podcast and you actually started a new podcast recently.

Collier

Yeah. So I host a podcast and a YouTube channel. My podcast is called Moving Past Trauma - about 80-90 episodes out now. It was originally called Moving Past Murder. I changed it to Trauma because it's a little easier for people to digest. It tells my story of who I am and where I came from. I also talk about other true crime cases. I also interview a lot of people in true crime and also people that are not in the true crime world that have gone through extraordinary circumstances and come out the other side like myself. I share a lot of things and also my journey of interviewing people that were involved in the case. I read letters from my father to show what psychopathy and narcissism and these things look like to people. I mean, I have over 400 letters from my father and. I share some of them in the podcast. Then, I do this also on YouTube. I have a YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/@collierlandry.

I have a new podcast. I started with Terra Newell, who your audience may or may not know from the show and podcast, Dirty John. She's the girl that took the life of Dirty John Meehan in self-defense. We do a podcast together called Survivor Squad, which just launched a couple of weeks ago. So you can check that out wherever you get your podcast from - Apple, Spotify. Moving Past Trauma is on those platforms as well and it's also on YouTube, like I said. You can get my film through my store, collierlandry.com/store. You can get the film, Murder in Mansfield. You can also find it on Hulu. It's on Discovery Plus. It's on Amazon Prime Video. You can buy it there too or you can purchase it through my store, which helps support myself in the program. And you can find me on Patreon too. I got a lot of content on Patreon and all these things, and letters from my father and things that I share.

Scott

And you're on Instagram, of course. You've got a huge following on TikTok and you've got a big YouTube channel.

Collier

Yeah, I do.

Scott

You're everywhere.

Collier

Yeah. YouTube's growing. I'm really trying to grow the channel. I love all the subscribers and everybody checks me out. I do get live episodes.

Scott

All right. And we'll have links to all that in the show notes. I have to ask this question. Do you know what happened to your dog?

Collier

So that's an interesting thing.

Scott

If it's a bad ending, I'm going to have to edit this out because my listeners are huge dog lovers.

Collier

No. So it's actually not. I'm going to try not to cry because this is really emotional for me. I never saw my dog again and I always wondered what happened to him. When I was screening the

film, I traveled around the world with the film, with all these film festivals, and we were in, like, almost 60 film festivals. I did screenings back home in Ohio and Mansfield in the same theater my mother would take me to as a child, where she would volunteer behind the soda stand and all this stuff. We did two back-to-back, two screenings over two days and, on the second day, it was, like, a hundred-some degrees outside. It was the middle of summer.

I remember, before the show started, there was this woman who I could see on the other side of the theater and she looked like she was trying to get my attention, but then she didn't come up and talk to me. Everybody's flooding me, asking me questions. So we're watching the film and, in the middle of the film, halfway through, the projector stopped. The film just cuts out and I flew upstairs and I was like, oh, the ball blew. It's so hot there in the projector room. Eventually, the projector overheated, so we stopped down.

During that forced intermission, this woman who was never going to talk to me came up to me and she went, "Hi, Collier. I'm so-and-so." And I said, "Oh, hey, how are you?" And she's like, "I was trying to get your attention earlier, but you had a lot of people around you." And I said, "No problem. What's going on?" She goes, "Did you have a Wire Haired Fox Terrier?" And I started to get a little emotional. I said, "Yeah, why?" And she went, "I think we had your dog because there was a woman who helped your mom clean the house that had taken the dog temporarily. She brought the dog to us. That's what she said, but we weren't 100% sure that it was your dog." And I was just, like, getting a little teary-eyed. And she said, "I grew up on a farm in the middle of the country and we had horses, we had pigs. That dog had the best life. He lived a long life. He lived till he was, we think, 14, 15. He would sleep with the pigs in the little stall. They were, like, best friends. He always would run around and everyone loved him. He was such a sweet dog. We loved him so much and I want you to know that we gave him the best life." I was just crying and just, ugh. It's one of those things that, when you think about doing this and getting your story out and talking about this and you're processing your journey of healing and what that looks like, that's one of those moments that you go, "That was worth it - getting that closure" because I think everybody thinks that, "Oh, you make a movie, you make a documentary, you make all this money." No, you don't get anything. Making a documentary is not a money-making thing that happens. You're just doing something for yourself.

For me, it was about this journey of closure and finding answers, coming to terms with what I'm doing, what my life looks like, and things of that nature, and doing something with the story. That was one of those moments that's like, "Oh, this is what I needed." I knew that my mother's spirit had shut that projector down at that moment. So that moment could happen because I never would've known what had happened to my dog because I always fear the worst. Just to know that he had such a great life and was adopted by a family that really loved him and took care of him made me really happy. That's like, "Oh, this is why you do this." This is great.

Scott

Collier and I are in a podcast mastermind group together so I've gotten to know him over the past several months. He's a great guy, and the film he made about his story is really incredible. You can find links to all of his stuff in the show notes for this episode, at WhatWasThatLike.com/145.

Now you already know you're my favorite podcast listener. And if you ever question whether or not I'm looking out for you – how about that question about his dog at the end of our conversation. I knew you'd be wondering about that part of the story. You know I've got your back.

If you liked this episode, there's another one you might enjoy where I talked to my guest Jami. She was in a courtroom for a murder trial as well – except her story is about what it's like to be on the jury.

Jami

When the prosecutor started asking more in-depth questions to find out if they want to keep you on the jury or not, that's when we, kind of, had a clue as to what this trial would be about. She started asking, "Have you or anybody in your immediate family struggled with alcoholism? Have you ever been a victim of domestic abuse? Have you ever been accused or charged with domestic abuse?" So, you could sense that something to do with alcohol and domestic violence would come out in this trial.

Scott

That episode is #104, titled Jami was a juror in a murder trial.

And you probably already know this, but I'm always on the lookout for guests with stories to feature here on the podcast. It doesn't have to be as tragic as your father murdering your mother, just something really unusual that happened to you. We even do happy stories here sometimes, you know. Sometimes someone will send me a story, and they'll include a message like "I've been listening to the podcast for a long time, and I've thought about sending in my story, but I wasn't sure if it would work for the podcast", or "I didn't know if it's really unusual enough". And in some cases, their story was PERFECT for the podcast. So if you're not sure, send it in and let me evaluate it.

And what happens sometimes is that someone will send in their story, and even though it might not work as a full episode, it might be a perfect fit as a Listener Story. But we really can never know until you take that first step and tell me what happened. And you can do that right from the website – just go to WhatWasThatLike.com and click where it says "Your story". Just fill out that form, and I'll check it out and see about making it happen.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai. If you need those services, contact me and I'll put you in touch with either one of them because they do great work.

And speaking of Listener Stories, here we are with this one. This is how we end every episode, with a 5-10 minute story sent in by a listener. The Listener Stories are a popular segment of each episode, and you know why? Because everyone loves hearing a good story.

This one is about a scary situation – on a mountain.

Stay safe – and I'll see you back here in 2 weeks.

(Listener Story)

Hi, I'm Christi and this is my family's experience. In the summer of 2006, my husband and I and two of our three daughters went to a family ranch resort, which was adjacent to Zion National Park in southern Utah. Our middle daughter was 20 and our youngest daughter was 11. My husband was a cowboy, a team roper, and had lived on a ranch, so this was right up his alley.

We stayed in one of the rustic cabins, ate cowboy meals, and signed ourselves up for horseback riding, zip lining, shooting, etc. My husband had been shooting guns most of his life, and he was particularly excited about this excursion because, now, his family members would have the chance to shoot. At that point in time, we climbed into a big van along with another family that we did not know. Our driver was a young man about the age of 19 who went by his camp name of Potato. There was a lot of chatter amongst riders in the van as we headed up a narrow road along the side of a mountain with a steep canyon below.

It was sunny and warm, and all of us were dressed for a hot summer day. Potato pulled into a cleared area where there was a small outbuilding, and we all got out of the van. He grabbed the loaded shotguns and handed them out. There wasn't a thing said about safety where anyone should stand or not walk. There were some young kids and nothing was mentioned about how to fold the shotgun and where not to point it. It made me terribly nervous. I made certain that our 11-year-old was either with me or my husband.

We were shooting skeet and, before long, a sudden storm hit and the rain began. This is not necessarily unusual for Southern Utah, but we had not been forewarned and were not prepared for a downpour. After about 5 or 10 minutes when the rain was then coming down in buckets, Potato told us to go wait it out in the little outbuilding, so the two families piled in there with massive amounts of heavy mud on our shoes.

After a while, when it appeared that the storm was not going to let up, Potato instructed us to get back in the van for the trip down the mountain. My husband sat in the front passenger seat. The other family - adults - were in the next row. I was seated between each of my daughters on the next row and the children from the other family were on the back row.

As Potato started to turn the van toward the road, it was sliding all over the place. This soil had a very high clay content and, when wet, was extremely heavy and slick. As Potato drove, the van slid everywhere - worse than my experiences of driving in snow - and he continued to pick up speed. We would slide right next to the edge of the cliff and, at one point, the van spun 180 degrees coming to a stop headfirst into a tree on the very edge of the cliff. The other adults were telling him to slow down but, instead, he went faster and faster. There was a lot of talking, yelling, and singing going on as we tried to cope with the fear. We felt that we might very well go off the side of this mountain. My daughter to my left was praying aloud. My younger daughter to my right was crying. When I feel that kind of fear, I get very quiet so I can focus and concentrate on keeping myself together. The kids behind us were very loudly singing a church hymn, "The spirit of God, a fire is burning." It was fearful chaos in that van.

I finally yelled up to Potato to slow down saying that if he didn't, I was going to get out. I made eye contact with my husband and he seemed to be just as calm and relaxed as could be. With all the sliding and near misses of going over the edge, we arrived back at the resort. Potato explained that because of the type of soil on the road, the only way he could keep the van moving was to speed up so that the mud would fly off the tires. Otherwise, they would cause the van to be completely stuck in the mud. I was so frightened and so angry that I really didn't care about his explanation. He had put me and my family and another family in danger and I was determined to let someone know about it. You don't go to a family resort thinking that you're going to fly off a cliff and die. I asked my husband why he was so calm during all of it, and he replied, "I knew everything was going to be okay."

We were signed up for another activity upon our return, but we were all covered in that thick and heavy mud. I was in no mood to just walk off and have fun. I was still shaking with fear and anger. I eventually calmed down enough to watch the girls on the Zipline, but I was going to have a very hard time enjoying myself for the rest of our stay. I later ran into the family that had been in the van with us and they told me that they had taken their quad up the mountain road and they showed me pictures of the van's tracks stopping right at the edge of the cliff. It was horrifying proof of us nearly flying off the edge to our deaths.

Then, later in the evening, we were in the pool. When the lightning struck near us, out we came. We were actually looking forward to our trip home. Upon our return, I wrote a long detailed letter to both the resort manager and the owner. I wanted them to understand not only how dangerous it was as we slid down that mountain, but why hadn't there been any safety rules surrounding the shooting excursion? I let them know just how frightened we had all been and felt like they needed to make some changes, that this was going to be a safe and pleasant experience for others.

Rather than call or email me about it, they actually drove to our home which was four hours away. They sat in my living room and apologized for what had happened, and then proceeded to outline the changes that they had already made and the changes that were in the works. They had made safety rules regarding the shooting excursion and had plans for putting rocks on the road up the mountain. But in the meantime, the minute the rain starts, the van drivers are to get everyone in the van and down the mountain before it gets dangerous. They invited us to come stay again at their expense.

I honestly feel a little shaky even recounting this. Other than some pretty harrowing medical experiences, this was the closest I'd ever come to losing my life. The thought of that van filled with 11 people careening off the side of the mountain and smashing hundreds of feet in the canyon below was just too much to consider. We never did make a return visit, not because we didn't want to, but because it just never worked in our schedules.