

Episode 152: Kami ran from a mass shooting

On the night of October 1, 2017, 64 year old Stephen Paddock opened fire from his room on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel in Las Vegas.

He was able to fire over 1100 rounds in just 10 minutes time, from 10:05 pm to 10:15 pm. His target was the crowd of 22,000 people in the open field below his room. These people were attending the final night of the 3-day Route 91 Harvest Music festival. Country singer Jason Aldean was performing when the shooting began.

In the end, 851 people were injured, and 58 people died. This incident is the deadliest mass shooting committed by an individual in the history of the country. The shooter also shot and killed himself, so the motive for the killing will probably never be known.

But this story isn't about the cowardly killer. It's about a young lady named Kami. Kami lives in California, about 4 hours away from Las Vegas, and she was at the Harvest Festival with her parents, and her husband Eli. She was there when the shooting began. She saw the terror on people's faces as they ran for safety, and she saw the unfortunate ones that didn't make it.

And here's another critical fact that will be an important part of Kami's story. She was at the festival for all three days. Day 3 is when the shooting took place. On day 1, she learned that she was pregnant.

This episode is the first one in a new series called Flashback episodes. Kami first came on the podcast and told this story 5 years ago. And I get requests from listeners sometimes to follow up with the past guests and see how they're doing now. So today you'll hear Kami's story about escaping from the Las Vegas shooting, and after that, a brief conversation I had with her just recently about what's new in her life and her family.

My goal is to always bring you the content and stories you tell me you want to hear, and the Flashback episodes are a part of that. We'll probably do one of these each month, in between the regular new episodes, so please, let me know what you think.

Scott

Kami, thanks for coming on the show!

Kami

Thanks for having me!

Scott

When you were escaping from that concert area, what was going through your mind? Were you thinking that, perhaps, you could just be shot at any moment?

Kami

When we were escaping - it wasn't until afterward that I realized that they were gunshots - my mom got separated from my dad, my husband, and me. We were just worried about getting to her. My dad's goal was just to get us out. I didn't realize that those gunshots were happening until we met up with my mom.

Scott

That's just incredible. To really put things in perspective about the story that we're about to hear from you, we need a little bit of background. One of the critical factors of the story is your pregnancy. You were pregnant at the time, but this was not your first pregnancy. Can you just give us some background about what had happened previously before this?

Kami

Sure. I met my husband when I was in high school. We dated for 4 years before we got engaged. Shortly after we got married, we decided to start our family. Right after I got my bachelor's degree from Cal State, we started trying to get me pregnant - that was in June of 2016. Then, on 11 September 2016, I was at a baseball game when I realized that I was pregnant. I took a test the next day and confirmed it. A couple of days later, on September 16, I ended up in the emergency room because we found out that it was an ectopic pregnancy. The doctors explained to me that a woman's fallopian tube normally is the width of a piece of uncooked spaghetti, and our first baby, at that time, was the size of a chocolate chip. Because it was implanted in that tube, the tube exploded and I was bleeding internally. So, I ended up having emergency surgery - they had to remove one side of my fallopian tube - and lost the pregnancy at that time.

Scott

That's a really good analogy with the spaghetti and chocolate chip.

Kami

That's how they kind of explained it to me because I didn't understand how it was like and how it was a problem because, of course, I was trying to hold on to the pregnancy.

Scott

Yeah. So, you found out that you were pregnant on September 29 last year - that was the first day of the music festival.

Kami

It was. We were leaving for Vegas that morning.

Scott

How did that all work out?

Kami

Basically, what happened was my husband and I had set up an appointment to do infertility treatments because it had been a year since we had gotten pregnant. The day before we left for Route 91, I called and canceled the appointments because we just couldn't afford them at the time. That next morning, after we had gotten up and ready to go to Vegas, I realized that I was pregnant. I mean, it wasn't unplanned, but we didn't know anything about it until we were leaving for Route 91. When we were on our way, we were in the car when I finally told my parents, like, "By the way, I'm pregnant." I didn't have a pregnancy test to confirm it yet, but I knew I was.

Scott

So, that was kind of a surprise at that time?

Kami

Yeah.

Scott

Okay. Were you a little bit nervous about how this one might turn out because of what happened to the previous one?

Kami

Completely. I was so worried about everything I was doing. When we were in Vegas, prior to the day of the shooting, I didn't want to be in a casino for too long because there's smoke and I didn't want to be around the smoking that happened at Route 91 where people were, like, smoking cigars, cigarettes, and stuff. So, I just tried to be as far away from it as possible. Although I couldn't prevent what happened with my first pregnancy, I didn't want to take the chance of losing this pregnancy because I didn't do something that could have prevented the loss.

Scott

Right. Those are things within your control, obviously. Those were at the front of your mind all the time.

Kami

Yes.

Scott

Especially, when you found out at that time, "Oh, wow! I'm pregnant. I gotta be really careful."

Kami

Yeah, definitely.

Scott

Now, you live in California. This music festival was in Las Vegas. How far how long of a drive is that?

Kami

It's about 3.5 - 4 hours depending on traffic or who's driving.

Scott

How far in advance had you planned to attend this?

Kami

We've been going to country night at a casino in San Bernardino - for months and K-FROG was giving away tickets to Route 91 there. So, it was about a month or so, I would say, before Route 91 was scheduled to happen. My dad had won tickets, but he and my mom had already purchased their own tickets. Because we had been going and trying to win but hadn't won, my dad said, "Oh, you and you and Eli can have the tickets." So, it was about a month before Route 91 when we realized that we were going.

Scott

So, your parents had already gotten tickets. They were planning to go and you guys were still trying to win tickets on the local radio station. They actually won the tickets. Did all 4 of you go over in the same vehicle?

Kami

Yeah. My dad drove and we all just went there with him.

Scott

Alright. The concert was a 3-day event, from September 29 to October 1, which is a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I'm not sure how familiar everyone is with this festival, but the actual name of the festival is the Route 91 Harvest Festival and it's held on Las Vegas Boulevard. It is called Las Vegas Boulevard now. Before, it used to be called Route 91.

Kami

Correct.

Scott

So you got there on Friday?

Kami

Right. We were there all 3 nights of the festival.

Scott

How does that work? Was there music during the day or was it only at night? How often do people perform?

Kami

I think the earliest anyone started performing was about 2-3 PM in the afternoon, but they're just smaller names who were, kind of, trying to get their names out there. As the night progressed, the bigger names started coming out. They usually ended the night around 9-10 PM. They ended the night with whoever their headliner was for that night. So, in all 3 nights, we would get there at about 5-6 PM because we weren't super interested in seeing the smaller stages or the smaller names on the big stage. They had two different stages. They had the big main stage and a smaller stage that was in a more covered area.

Scott

Was there music going on at both stages at the same time?

Kami

Yes.

Scott

So, that's how big this place was - you can have music on both those stages and they wouldn't interfere with each other.

Kami

I think the last performer at the smaller stage stopped around 8 PM so that it doesn't interfere with the big stage because everyone wanted to be at the big stage. I mean, I would assume it would probably be, kind of, pointless to have somebody at the smaller stage because everyone was interested in seeing the big performers like Jason Aldean.

Scott

All right. Let's talk about Sunday night. You got there sometime in the afternoon, hanging out, and listening to music. Was it just an open field with general seating or could you bring chairs in if you wanted to? How was the setup?

Kami

It was pretty general. They had an area - I think they called it 'Corral seating' or something similar to that - like what they have at the California Stagecoach Festival. There was the big stage and the general standing area for a couple of hundred yards in front of the stage, I guess. At the sides of the stage where everybody was standing far back right before you started hitting all the vendors, there was a place where you could set up your own chairs or purchase, like - I don't know - preferred seating that you had to have a special ticket for. I don't know how long was the purchase valid for. You could have general admission tickets. The more expensive ones actually include a seat.

Scott

So, they would give you, like, a wristband or something to show that?

Kami

Yeah. The general admission ones are purple. I actually still have mine. I keep it and wear it. It just says, "GA. 3 day." That was the general admission for anybody at the standing area only.

Scott

So, as long as you had that, you could just come and go whenever you wanted?

Kami

Pretty much, yeah.

Scott

Alright. On Sunday night, where were you in relation to the main stage?

Kami

On Sunday night, when we first got there, we started off, probably, 200 yards from the stage. After certain performers finished performing, people would leave and we would move up. If someone left, we would move up. By the time Jason Aldean started, we were probably 40-50 yards from the stage. Like, we were really close.

Scott

Pretty close. Yeah. There were, like, 22,000 people attending that night, from what I've read. How crowded did you feel it was? Were you like shoulder-to-shoulder with people or did you have a little bit of space? What was it like?

Kami

The closer we got to the stage, the more shoulder-to-shoulder there would be. There would be room at the back if, like, you wanted to dance, pile around, and push. As we got closer and closer to the stage, as the night went on, there were lots of shoulder-to-shoulder and also people right on top of you because everyone's trying to get closer to the stage.

Scott

Okay. Somebody who's claustrophobic might have not been too comfortable.

Kami

Yeah. Someone who doesn't like to be touched like my husband wouldn't feel comfortable too. He had a hard time. He's like, "There's all these people and they keep touching me." I'm like, "That's the way the concert goes."

Scott

That's part of the game. Did you, your husband, Eli, and your parents all stay together when you were there?

Kami

We did. We all stayed in the same place.

Scott

All right. Now at some point, you decided to not get closer to the stage - you actually got away from the stage. What was your thought behind that?

Kami

As we got closer and closer to the stage, because of my fear of losing the pregnancy like I lost my last pregnancy - my mom said she could see on my face that I just wasn't comfortable - I was worried that we were close to a lot of people who were smoking. As you got closer to the stage, there were people who were drinking pretty heavily, there were lots of pushing, shoving, cat fights, and stuff which I didn't want to be around at. When my mom looked at me, she said, "Do you want to leave?" I said, "I just don't want to be this close." She said, "Okay, that's fine." She brought some snacks, desserts, and cookies that we were going to eat. She said, "Let's move to the back and get some ice cream at one of the vendors. We'll just enjoy the rest of the concert from there." There was this - it wasn't grass - like, AstroTurf or fake grass. If you sat there, you could see the big screens that they had put up. It was super far from the stage, but you could still see the screens and see what was going on at the concert. Just because I was so uncomfortable and worried about the pregnancy, we decided to move.

Scott

Your mother looked at your face and figured out what you were thinking. That was very nice of them. I mean, obviously, in general, you'd want to be as close to the performer as possible in any concert, but she put your comfort ahead of that and all 4 of you, kind of, went to the back of the crowd.

Kami

We did. We weren't even near where the crowd had started for Jason Aldean because it was super, super condensed. As you got further back, there was less and less people. We were actually sitting on the AstroTurf in between the vendors - there were vendors at each side and this AstroTurf or fake grass was in the middle. It was really far from the stage. Almost everybody was at the stage because they wanted to watch Jason Aldean, but we were in the back where everyone was sitting to eat.

Scott

Alright, the shooting started at 10:05 PM. I know some people initially thought that it was just fireworks because most people have not heard the sound of an automatic weapon firing continuously. If you listened to some of the videos just to hear that sound, it does kind of sound

like fireworks. In a concert like this, you'd kind of expect people to have set off firecrackers, firecrackers, and stuff like that. How long did it take for you to realize that it wasn't fireworks?

Kami

Before the shooting started, my mom went to where the entrance was to get these cookies that we were going to have with this ice cream, so it was my dad, my husband, and I sitting in this area. My feet were hurting from my boots, and I remember not wanting to get up. I remember looking around past my dad to see what I thought were fireworks because, I figured, Jason Aldean would go all out and have some fireworks on the last night of the festival. My dad looked at me and said, "You need to get up!" I didn't understand why until I heard the shots, but I still didn't know that those were shots at that point. So, I got up, my husband grabbed my hand, my dad's already a couple of yards in front of us running towards where my mom was.

Scott

So your dad knew what it was right off the bat?

Kami

Yes, my dad is an emergency personnel. He's been a firefighter for about 15 years, I think - I'm not 100% sure how long he's been a firefighter. He's been a paramedic since I was born. So, he dealt with situations like that for 25 years. So, he knew exactly what it was right off the bat, which I had no idea of.

Scott

So he immediately knew and took off heading for your mom who was, kind of, separated from the rest of you at that time. Can you describe what happened around you then?

Kami

Well, as he got up and started running, from where I was looking at towards the stage, he started running to my right to go towards these lockers at my mom's. As I got up - my husband tried to help me up - I saw everyone running at us and was trying to figure out, like, "Why is everybody running? What's happening?" I didn't get why everybody had this look, like, total fear on their face. Like, no amount of Hollywood actors would be able to recreate the absolute terror that people had on their faces. It was disturbing to see people so worried and I still didn't get why people were running, what's the problem, and what happened. As we got up and started running, I accidentally ran into this girl and helped her up. She went on running in the same direction. My husband came back, got me, and we ended up meeting up with my mom at the lockers. We were there for, like, 2-3 minutes but it felt like we were there for 15 minutes waiting for the bullets to stop before my dad wanted us to start running for the exits.

Scott

Did you call 911?

Kami

I didn't.

Scott

Okay. It turned out, I think, that over 500 people did call 911.

Jennifer

Hello?!

911 Operator

This is Metro Police.

Jennifer

There's been a shooting at the Route 91 festival.

911 Operator

Where exactly are you located?

Jennifer

I'm located right at front of the main stage. My friend has been shot. I think we can't really move further.

911 Operator

Where exactly are you located?

Jennifer

We're at the— Oh, my god! They're still shooting!

911 Operator

Do you see the shooter?

Jennifer

No, I think he's on that on the Strip side. Oh, my God!

911 Operator

Where exactly are you?

Jennifer

I'm at the village - it's right across the Strip from the bookstore.

911 Operator

What do you see in front of you?

Jennifer

I'm looking at the left door. I'm in front of the main stage. I don't know how else to describe it! There's a big sound tower.

911 Operator

You see a sound tower in front of you?

Jennifer

Right. I'm in between the sound tower and the main stage. They're still shooting! They're still shooting!

911 Operator

And your friend has been shot?

Jennifer
(Screaming)

911 Operator
Stay on the phone with me. Are you there?

Jennifer
I'm here.

911 Operator
Okay. Your friend has been shot?

Jennifer
Yes, I believe so.

911 Operator
You're near the main stage?

Jennifer
Yes. Everybody is running.

911 Operator
Are you able to see the shooter at all?

Jennifer
No, no.

911 Operator
Where is your friend who was injured?

Jennifer
Right next to me.

911 Operator
How extensive are her injuries?

Jennifer
I can't see. She can't move. (Gunshots) Oh my God! They're still shooting! Oh my god! I'm sorry!

911 Operator
It's okay. Did you see them or did you just hear the shot?

Jennifer
We just hear them - it sound like machine guns. It's on the other side of the venue. They're like shooting from Las Vegas Boulevard.

911 Operator

What is your name?

Jennifer

Yeah. My name is Jennifer.

911 Operator

Is your friend able to speak?

Jennifer

No.

911 Operator

Okay. What do you see near you? Where exactly are you located?

Jennifer

We're faced down on the lawn right now.

911 Operator

You're faced down the lawn near the main stage?

Jennifer

Yes, but everybody is running. I don't know if we can get her up.

911 Operator

She's not able to move?

Jennifer

Oh my God... No.

911 Operator

Is she conscious?

Jennifer

Yes, she's conscious.

911 Operator

What is her name?

Jennifer

Carrie. (Gunshots) Oh my God! Why have they not come in yet?

911 Operator

We got help on the way, okay?

Jennifer

Yeah. (Sobbing) Okay. She's passing out. She's passed out.

911 Operator

Where is she bleeding at?

Jennifer

I saw it, like, at the right side of her breast.

911 Operator

We have help on the way, okay? They're gonna get there soon.

Jennifer

Okay, thanks.

911 Operator

You're welcome. Bye.

911 Operator

Hi, this is 911 emergency.

Tracy

Hi. Please, I think we need the police at that Route 91 Harvest Festival. I think there's been a lot of shots been fired. Does everybody know that?

911 Operator

Are you at the Mandalay Bay?

Tracy

We are. We're actually hiding near the Porta Potty area.

911 Operator

Hey, ma'am. Are you at the harvest festival?

Tracy

Yes! We're at the harvest festival!

911 Operator

Ma'am, did you see the shooter?

Tracy

No!

911 Operator

Okay, ma'am. What's your name?

Tracy

Tracy.

911 Operator

Where are you at Mandalay Bay?

Tracy

We're closer to Mandalay Bay. We're in the parking area but we're hiding in--

911 Operator

Okay. You're the parking area?

Tracy

No, no, we're hiding at the porta-potty area. We keep hearing the shots getting closer and there are tons of people down out there, I think. Oh my God!

911 Operator

Are you saying that the shots are coming closer?

Tracy

I feel like they're coming closer to us.

911 Operator

Where's the Porta Potty?

Tracy

We're on the street side across to the left door. There are a bunch of porta-potties there. People are still running, but we hid back here.

911 Operator

Okay. They sound closer - is that correct, ma'am?

Tracy

Yes!

911 Operator

Did you see the shooter?

Tracy

No. (Gunshots) Can you hear it?

911 Operator

Yes, ma'am.

Tracy

It's like someone has a machine gun or something.

911 Operator

Are you safe? Are you super safe?

Tracy

I don't know. We feel like we're safe but we don't know what's gonna come around. We need the police. (Sobbing)

911 Operator

Okay, ma'am. We're on our way. Just stay with me. You're doing a good job, okay?

Tracy

Okay. My daughter and I are so scared. (Sobbing)

911 Operator

Ma'am, you didn't see the shooter, though - right?

Tracy

No, I don't want to look.

911 Operator

Okay. No, I don't want you to look. Stay where you're safe. Are you able to safely move or do you feel safer there?

Tracy

We're with a group of people and we have an air us here. There are probably about 15 of us out here. (Chattering) The shooters are on the Strip.

911 Operator

The shooters are on the Strip?

Tracy

They think they're on the Strip.

911 Operator

Where on the Strip? How many are there? Did anyone see the shooter?

Tracy

They said they're on the top of the Mandalay.

911 Operator

Who is?

Tracy

The shooters are on top of the Mandalay!

911 Operator

Where?

Tracy

I don't know. Somebody just came by, told us that he opened the gates for us to get out.

911 Operator

Okay. So are you leaving? I mean, I want to make sure you're safe. Is there a guy there that I can talk to?

Tracy

They told us to not go all at once. They said every 5 people every 30 seconds.

911 Operator

Okay. Who's talking? Is the police with you? Who's telling you?

Tracy

Um, a security guard came by and said, "Hey, we've opened the gate."

911 Operator

Okay. Is security helping you, ma'am?

Tracy

Not now. They're just opening the gate for us and letting a few people out at a time.

911 Operator

Ma'am, do you know where the shooter is on top?

Tracy

No, I can't see.

911 Operator

Where's the person that said they saw the shooter? Where's the person at?

Tracy

He's gone. He just came by and told us how to get out of here. (Chattering) But we can't get out.

911 Operator

Okay, just stay where you feel safe at.

Tracy

She said to stay where we are. Okay, I'll let you go.

911 Operator

Okay. We're around the area, ma'am.

911 Operator

Hi. 911 Emergency.

Esmeralda

Hi. There have been shots fired at Route 91 concert.

911 Operator

Where at?

Esmeralda

It's at the Strip.

911 Operator

Where at the Strip?

Esmeralda

Right across the street at Mandalay Bay.

911 Operator

Okay. Just a moment. Did you see who's shooting?

Esmeralda

No, we don't know. We just hear gunshots.

911 Operator

Okay. How many people were there?

Esmeralda

Thousands of people.

911 Operator

Okay. If you can stay on the line, please stay on the line.

Esmeralda

Okay.

911 Operator

Can you please tell me what are you seeing? (Gunshots)

Esmeralda

I'm on top of the House of Blues. We're trying to stay down.

911 Operator

Okay. Where did the shooting start?

Esmeralda

It sounds like it's coming from the west. (Sobbing)

911 Operator

Ma'am, what do you see?

Esmeralda

I'm not seeing anything. Everyone's just running away.

911 Operator

Which way are you running to?

Esmeralda

I'm running to the north.

911 Operator

Okay. You said you're on the House of Blues but, now, you've left the house? Did you see anyone injured?

Esmeralda

No.

911 Operator

Are you still hearing the gunshot right now?

Esmeralda

Yes, I am.

911 Operator

Ma'am, what's your name?

Esmeralda

My name is Esmeralda.

911 Operator

Where are you right now, Esmeralda?

Esmeralda

I'm on the House of Blues.

911 Operator

I understand. Are you guys on the roof?

Esmeralda

Yes, we're on the roof.

911 Operator

Okay. Are you up there with everyone? Does everyone seem safe or are they still running?

Esmeralda

There's no way to get down where we're at.

911 Operator

Okay, ma'am. We have officers en route.

Esmeralda

Okay. Bye.

Scott

So you took cover behind, like, a wall of lockers where people could put their stuff while they're at the concert and come back and get it later?

Kami

Yes. It was very similar. It was kind of like a 'U' with a line of lockers in between that faced outwards. That morning, we just decided to rent - we didn't know that they had them - one of these lockers. You could bring in food. Everybody could bring in a gallon-sized Ziploc bag worth of whatever. There were 4 of us. We brought in sandwiches, snacks, and cookies and that's where my mom had stored everything. She was the one with the combination key, which was why she had gone to the lockers to get all this stuff.

Scott

Got it. So you took cover behind the lockers for a while. Could you tell which direction the shooting was coming from?

Kami

From where we were at the lockers, it sounded like it was coming from the stage. It was close to us, but it didn't sound like it was coming from across the street, I think, where the Luxor was or the exit where the Tropicana was. I could tell that it was coming from behind us over by the main stage. I mean, it was loud enough that it was obvious but it wasn't, like, so deafening that you couldn't tell where it was coming from.

Scott

Once you left the locker area, how far away were you from the car? Was it a car or truck?

Kami

It is a pickup truck.

Scott

So, you guys wanted to get to the pickup truck to get out of there. How far away was that? How far did you have to walk?

Kami

I'm terrible as far as measurements go, so I wouldn't be able to tell you 100%. I would guess that it'd be, like, 200 yards. We were at the edge of the street where the venue was. Basically, we crossed the street and ran about halfway into Tropicana's parking lot. We parked pretty close that day, so we were closer to the venue than we were every other night, luckily.

Scott

As you were walking or running, did you see other people that had gotten injured or shot?

Kami

We didn't. There were some people who were just lying down. It was hard to know if they were dead or injured. Later, my dad told me that he wanted to stop because his instinct as a first responder was to stop and help people. But he was also worried because my mom and I just aren't used to that kind of stuff, so he needed to take care of us first. Every time we got to somebody, thankfully, there was already some kind of first responder or a nurse or another person like my dad who was able to help whoever was injured. I remember that we were at the edge of the Tropicana parking lot where there was, like, a tour bus. I don't remember whose was it. There was a guy behind there who had been shot through the knee and he was sitting there. So, we stayed with him for, like, a minute before some first responders were able to get to him. Then, from there, we just kept going until we hit the car or the truck.

Scott

It seems like it would be a little scary thinking 'Okay, I'm running toward safety' but still running past people who had already been shot. Did it seem like, maybe, you were running into more danger?

Kami

I didn't feel like I was running into more danger. I mean, we were just trying to get to the truck. There was no sense of safety because we didn't know where the shooting was coming from, how many shooters were there, or what kind of an angle they had. So we were running to our truck without any kind of assurances that we were running towards anywhere safe.

Scott

At that point, all 4 of you were back together - right? Based on where you were parked, when you got into the truck, did you feel safe in there?

Kami

It felt safer than being on the grounds of Route 91. There was chaos happening around us - like, I don't know if people understand that there was a shooting happening. We were trying to get out onto the street from the Tropicana parking lot, but nobody would move - it was just trafficking. I don't know if it was because they didn't realize that all of this was happening around them. So the further we got away from the venue, the safer it felt. As I said, we didn't know where the shooting was coming from - it could have been from anywhere - it still felt uneasy even when we were in the truck.

Scott

Mm, definitely. Before you got in the truck, as you were heading to the truck, did you hear other people talking? What were people saying as they were fleeing?

Kami

People were just saying, "What the hell happened? I can't believe that this is happening! Is everybody okay? Where's so and so?" There was so much uncertainty. I mean, everybody just wanted to get out. Some people were saying, like, "I'm leaving Vegas tonight! Fuck this place!" Like, they were super upset, obviously. People were just ready to leave.

Scott

Especially when you see people who had been shot as you're going past them. I mean, it's literally like a war zone. I mean, people aren't used to seeing anything like that.

Kami

Yeah. There's so much that you hope nobody would ever see in their life. I'm sure nobody expected to see that kind of stuff happening at a concert.

Scott

I'm sure you must have been scared for the baby as much as you were scared for yourself.

Kami

Yeah. My number one goal was just to do what I could for the baby.

Scott

That's a mother's instinct right there. As you got into the truck and left-- I mean, the city would have just been in total chaos then.

Kami

As we were driving, we took one of the side streets that run parallel with Las Vegas Boulevard - I forget the name of the street - and we were heading towards a condo where we were staying, which was really close to the Rio. As we turned left to the street that takes us to Rio, you could already see that the cars on the freeway are completely stopped. Like, nobody was allowed on it. They had cones and flashers. They had shut down the freeway right there so that nobody could leave.

Scott

Of course, by that time, the shooting had probably stopped because the actual shooting only took about 10 minutes - he shot, like, over 1,000 rounds at that time. They didn't know where he was, maybe. Maybe, they did by that time. I'm not sure what the timeline was. Did you just drive back home that night? What did you do that night? You said you went back to your condo?

Kami

We did. When we were leaving the Tropicana, we actually had 3 couples that jumped into the bed of the truck because they were trying to get away from everything. When we had gotten to a stoplight, one of the couples had gotten out to try and call some family that they had there who were local. The other 2 couples asked if they could come back to the condo with us because they were staying on the Strip - one couple was staying at the Luxor and the other couple, I think, was staying at Mandalay Bay. Obviously, they couldn't get back to their hotel, so we all just went to the condo, turned on the news, stayed up, and just kind of watched it until the couples were ready to go back.

Scott

Wow. These are obviously people who you didn't even know. In the midst of a disaster like that, everybody just helps everybody.

Kami

Pretty much, yeah. We had no idea who they were. I know one of the couples was from Canada - they traveled all the way from Canada to go to this festival - they are both police officers. Another couple was also from California and they worked at Disneyland.

Scott

You're all country music fans. That was the bond that held you together, sort of, pretty much. After you got back to the condo that night with these other people, you were all watching the news. Obviously, there would probably be live coverage all night long. I can't imagine the sense of relief you had, knowing that you escaped that but so many people didn't.

Kami

Yeah. When we were watching the news, they seem so unsure about what was happening. I mean, we were far enough from it that we were safe. That was probably one of the biggest reliefs that we had because we could, at least, make it out of Vegas when there were over 50 people who died and many more who were injured.

Scott

Right. Wasn't it, like, 500 people who were injured?

Kami

That's what I read.

Scott

Unbelievable. Well, this story has a happy ending not just because you escaped that night. Tell us what's happened since then.

Kami

When we came home, we went and saw the doctor. They told us everything was fine. Then, 9 months later, I gave birth to our daughter on my 25th birthday.

Scott

Oh, wow! She has the same birthday as you!

Kami

She does. That was actually her due date, too. When we came back from Route 91, they said, "Oh, your due date's June 14." My husband said, "Oh, that's amazing!" The nurse was, like, "Why?" I said, "Oh, that's my birthday." She went, "Well, not every baby's born on their due date. It's not going to be likely that she'll be born on hers." Lo and behold, she was.

Scott

That's incredible. So you had little baby Rosalie on June 14.

Kami

I did. Yes.

Scott

And you are now a happy, happy mother!

Kami

I am. It kind of feels like everything came full circle. We're finally able to, kind of, close the door on what happened there because our biggest worry was getting home and getting the baby inside of me home. Now, she's the baby who's outside of me. So, we can kind of share the protection now - it's not just me who's physically responsible for her.

Scott

And you actually credit Rosalie for saving your life?

Kami

I do. Yeah. We definitely would have hung in there and just, kind of, dealt with the smoke, the weed, the drinking, and the rowdiness if I didn't have this little life inside me. Because Rosalie was inside of me, I was trying to protect her in any way that I could to prevent another loss - that's why we moved. If I didn't have Rosalie inside of me or, at least, know that she was inside me, we would have stayed and just partied.

Scott

Right. Yeah. Do you ever think about the fact that you're a survivor of the deadliest mass shooting in American history?

Kami

Sometimes, I think about it. Like, people asked me about Route 91 all the time because they saw me as a survivor - I know that I am - but I guess I just don't see myself, first and foremost, as a survivor. Like, there are so many identities that I have - a wife, a mother, and a daughter - so, the survivor isn't one that I'm accustomed to and, I guess, I'll need to get used to that.

Scott

Does this experience give you any kind of different outlook or perspective on life?

Kami

It does. I think everybody has this idea that life is precious and that everything happens at the right time. Rosalie is living proof to me that God had a plan for my life. If I had gone to Route 91 and had not been pregnant, if I had kept my first pregnancy and had that baby, I would have gone to Route 91 without being pregnant. There's no telling what could have happened to me, my husband, and my parents if I didn't lose the pregnancy at that time. I didn't know, at that time, that this loss was going to be better for me in the future. I mean, as soon as Rosalie came to be, I knew that was why. She was given to us at that time to save us - there's no better testimony that God has this plan for everybody's life - and I truly see that and believe it now more than I ever did.

Scott

Sometimes, things can happen in our lives that make us take a different direction and we can't see where it'll lead us, but when you look back at the history and see what events led to another, it's pretty amazing to see where it led us to.

Kami

Yeah, we spent so many months being angry that we lost that pregnancy. We couldn't understand that there was so much more to be gained than what we lost.

Scott

Well, Kami, it's a wonderful story. I'm so glad it has a happy ending. I love stories like this. I appreciate your time. Thanks so much for sharing it with us!

Kami

Of course! Thanks again so much for having us. We appreciate it.

(change to modern day discussion):

Scott:

Kami, thanks for coming back on the show.

Kami:

Thanks for having me.

Scott:

It's been a while. It's been five years.

Kami:

It's been five years. Yeah. We're coming up on that anniversary here in a couple of weeks of the shooting event. So it's been a while.

Scott:

Now, when we last spoke, you had had a baby. Tell us, how is baby Rosalie doing now?

What's she up to?

Kami:

Oh, she's always doing something new. Um, she just started kindergarten this year. So she's actually, she just turned five in the summer. So she's in kindergarten. She goes to school full time. She is in soccer. So she keeps us very busy.

Scott:

Yeah, typical five year old sounds like.

Kami:

Yep, pretty much.

And she's, she's not your only child now, right?

Kami:

She's not. So in the last, um, five years since you and I spoke, she has become a big sister twice. Um, I have another daughter. Um, her name is Addie. She's three. And then we just had our son. Um, he'll be eight months on. Friday, our son EJ. So on top of her keeping us busy, our new little ones keep us busy.

And she's very, um, really kind of like how I was as a kid. She just loves being a big sister. She likes being very involved. You know, she's, she's motherly. Some people say bossy. I'm going to say motherly.

Scott:

That's great. Well, you guys are growing your family for sure.

Kami:

We are, yeah, I think we're done. You know, three's a lot.

They all have such fun, different personalities, that we're like, okay, I think we got a little bit of a, you know, good mix between me and my husband, Eli, and, and, you know, we might be done. We'll see. We'll see. You know, where the world takes us.

Scott:

There are surprises sometimes, you never know.

Kami:

That's what I'm, I'm like, okay, so let me not say we're done, because then the universe might have a different idea for us, but...

Scott:

Have you had any lingering trauma from being involved or surviving that shooting?

Kami:

Sometimes. Um, I still have trouble with fireworks, like 4th of July. Sometimes they can trigger some of the, you know, like it takes me a couple minutes or a little longer of a time to recover, like, um, the, the pops and everything just if, especially if I'm not expecting them, like, if we're driving home and I hear the pops, but I can't see them. It's, um, it's just different. And like, um, in my office where I work, we have a door that when it comes on to the worker side of things, if you don't use your badge to basically disable the alarm and you open the door, the alarm goes off. And just yesterday I was in there for a meeting.

Someone went out and forgot to use their badge and the alarm went off and I jumped and everyone's like, are you okay? I'm like, Oh yeah, I'm, I'm fine. You know, trying to downplay cause it's hard to explain like, you know, why you, I don't know. Why you struggle with these things.

Scott:

yeah, it's kind of a long story to explain to people.

Kami: Right. Like, especially when you don't know everybody, like on that personal level, it's not like the person you want to talk to. Like, Hi, my name is Kami and I survived a mass shooting. Like, you know, it's like, and that's why I got, you know, this PTSD or why I jump so frequently or, but you learn to cope and we, uh, we do what we can.

I think I've come a long way, but there's still some, some work to be done.

Scott:

And that was part of the trauma of it, was everyone could hear the shooting, but it took a while to figure out where is it coming from, which direction should we run to get away from it?

Kami:

Yeah. And that kind of, not in a bad way, but makes me question when I hear something, I'm like, okay, last time, you know, when we were at the shooting, I thought it was fireworks.

I thought it was, you know, part of the show and realizing that it wasn't, I'm like, okay, so now every time I hear something, I kind of second guess myself, like, is that, you know, fireworks or is it gunshots or, you know, like working in the city that I work in. I'm just overly cautious, I think, compared to some of the other like workers in my office.

I'm overly cautious and it's hard to explain to them why, but it's, I just second guess myself now that like, I don't know, I guess hindsight's 20, 20. I wish I would have realized then exactly what it was, but I didn't. And so I'm trying to learn from that. And Hopefully not have myself be in a horrid situation like that again.

Scott:

Yeah, almost nobody realized it right away, right. It was a lot of confusion in the, uh, at the beginning. Have you gone back to any more music festivals?

Kami: Not festivals. Um, and not necessarily because I'm, like, I don't feel like I have fear in going to festivals. I just have three young kids.

Scott:

You don't have time to do anything these days.

Kami:

Right. I have time to coordinate the chaos of my everyday life. But, um, I've gone to a couple concerts. It took me a while to go to my first concert. And the first one that I went to was really, like it was at a bar, it was really low key, really small, and I've since gone to bigger ones at like stadiums and arenas and stuff to where it feels less, um, like I have less anxiety about going, but I was never really a huge music festival goer, um, Route 91 was my first one, and so far it's been my last one, but, you know, hopefully once my kids are older and I'm less anxious about leaving them, or, you know, I just feel like it's going to be fine because I feel bad saddling someone with watching three kids for any amount of time.

Eventually, I think it's something I want to try, but I'm sticking to my nightly concerts for now.

Scott: Kami, thanks for the update. And congratulations on your growing family and I wish you continued success and happiness.

Kami: Oh, thank you so much. I appreciate it. Thanks for having me back.

Well, that was fun! I'm really happy for Kami and Eli and the life they're building together with their kids. If you'd like to see a recent picture of their family, it's in the episode notes at WhatWasThatLike.com/152.

We'll have another Flashback episode next month. These will always come in between the regular new-episode days, so we'll still always have a new episode every other Friday.

And I wanted to give you an update about our food service worker project. Thanks to you, my amazing listeners, it was a huge success. If you're new to the show and you're not sure what I'm talking about, here's what this is.

A few months ago I had this idea that we should do something nice for a service worker – more specifically, someone in food service. They have a tough job, and they deserve something extra. So I talked about it here on the podcast, and I set up a GoFundMe so that people could

donate whatever they wanted, and everyone could see the total. I didn't really know what to expect, but in the back of my mind I really wanted it to be at least \$500. Well, it got to \$542 and that's when I disabled it for any more donations. If you didn't get a chance to participate, don't worry – we'll be doing it again sometime.

So now I just had to present the cash to a food server. And I came up with someone who I knew would be a great recipient. Each month, the Florida Podcasters Association meets at an IHOP restaurant here in Tampa. We take a whole separate room off to the side, and there's one server that handles all of us in that room. Her name is Jojo. She does a great job, and she's always smiling.

So, at the podcasters meetup in September, I called her up to the front of the room and presented her with the money. She was very surprised and very grateful. And I got that presentation on video, and posted it in the Facebook group. So if you'd like to see it and you haven't yet joined our amazing group of listeners, get over to [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WhatWasThatLike.com).

I absolutely love doing this kind of thing, so we'll definitely do it again. Of course I'll let you know when that happens.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

And now – it's this week's Listener Story! And this is a fun one. We do this every episode. Do you have a 5-10 minute story that's funny, interesting, sad, or just entertaining? Send it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com. The world is waiting to hear it!

This week's story is from a listener who was a babysitter for a future major celebrity. And you can see a picture of that celebrity as a child in the episode notes.

Stay safe! I'll see you soon.

Listener Story:

Hi, Scott. My name is Erica McDonald. I love your show. And I thought I'd send in a listener tale. I grew up in Seattle city, New Jersey, which is a beach town in Cape May County. And my father had a real estate company called Frida real estate. So he sold homes and he was also the commissioner of our town for many years.

One day, when I was working in our family store, it's a five and dime called Sam's Department Store, a man and his daughter walked in. He had recently bought a house from my father, and he needed to get keys duplicated for his new home. And we had a key cutting machine in my dad's store. So, he walked in with his daughter on his hip, and I said to him, That is just the most adorable little girl I've ever seen.

What is her name? And he said, Her name is Taylor. And I said, well, if you ever need a babysitter, I also babysit. He said, well, actually this weekend we do need a babysitter. So I started babysitting for Scott and Andrea and their two children, Taylor and Austin. Every summer from the time Taylor was probably about three till she was maybe six years old.

And then they moved to a different shore town. But we still kept in touch with the family because Scott was also a financial advisor and he was helping my family out with their finances. So throughout the years we kept in touch with this family and Scott would keep us updated on the kids and what they were up to and his daughter loved to sing and he would tell us, you know, Taylor's going to be singing the national anthem at the local sports arena and she's going to be singing the National Anthem at our local community, and we just thought that was so sweet, and we were so excited for them. And then one day he called and told us that they were going to move to Nashville, Tennessee. And we thought, why in the world would you move to Nashville, Tennessee? Your daughter is, you know, just a karaoke kind of singer.

And it turns out, she wasn't. She became the biggest pop star in history, and it is Taylor Swift. So, that's my... Listener Tale, what was it like to babysit the biggest pop star in the entire world? Well, they paid \$5.25 an hour, and the kids were pretty good. But I never did get a ticket to any of her shows. I never got a backstage pass, and I certainly never got front row seats.

And I actually couldn't even get a ticket in the Philadelphia show. That's my story. I hope you enjoy it.