

Episode 154: Daughters

This is a special episode. Most of the time here on What Was That Like, I talk to a regular person who has been through some type of extremely unusual situation. If you've just discovered this podcast, you can just scroll through the episode titles and see that we've heard a lot of REALLY big and unusual stories – and all of them are told first-hand, by the person who went through it.

But a lot of times a listener will contact me and say, “Scott – I've just binged ALL of your past episodes and I need more! What's another podcast where I can hear more stories like this?”. And my recommendation is this: The Secret Room.

The tag line for The Secret Room is “a podcast about the stories no one ever tells”. If you like really interesting and unusual stories – and I know you do, because you're listening to this show – you'll definitely want to check out The Secret Room. The host is my friend Ben, and I think he and I have a lot in common. He has a lot of empathy for his guests, and he has a knack for finding stories that just make you sit back and think. And then you go and binge all the past episodes.

So today, I'm playing for you one of my favorite episodes of The Secret Room. It's called Daughters. I really liked this story for a bunch of different reasons, and I think you'll enjoy it too. And this one is ad-free for everyone. And of course at the end we'll have a new Listener Story like we do on every episode here.

You can find The Secret Room on the podcast app you're using right now, or you can learn more about the show at the website – TheSecretRoomPodcast.com.

And now, please enjoy The Secret Room episode – Daughters.

Susie

Can you tell me a secret?

Anonymous

Yeah, I'll tell you about the time that I exploded a toner cartridge in the work printer. I was trying to clear a jam and I was way ahead of myself. I was like, “Oh, I can fix this. No problem.” I was ripping the parts out. I grabbed the toner cartridge and I yanked it and all this black toner just spilled everywhere. Luckily, there were no cameras in this building at the time, so I just slowly shoved it back. Luckily, I had to be careful getting up because I magically somehow did not get any toner on me, but the toner was all over the fucking place.

Susie

Who found it?

Anonymous

I don't know because I fucking bolted. It was, like, 4 AM in the morning when I used to work really early. I walked away and I was like, “I'm not coming back. Nope. I'm avoiding this printer. I will print on a different floor and go way out of my way and avoid this.” When they come back later, they're like, “Yeah, don't use the printer on this floor. Somebody tried to fix it and they

broke it.” And I was like, “I had to keep a straight face.” I was like, “Oh really? Damn. They should have called me to help them fix it.”

Susie

It sounds crazy. It sounds like a lifetime movie.

Ben

I mean, it's just amazing.

Susie

Goodness.

Ben

Kay joins me in the secret room today with a secret she's been holding for five years.

Kay

2015-ish is when I started to tell the lie.

Ben

Okay, how many people know your secret?

Kay

There's not many people that know my secret.

Ben

It's a story of family and blood.

Kay

Hi, my name is Kay and my secret is that my answer to a common question people ask when they're getting to know you is a complete lie. If people knew I was lying about this fact, they would simply not understand. Some would even hold me in great disdain. I've got to tell someone.

Ben

How old were you when the secret happened?

Kay

I was 24-25 when it began.

Ben

And as you'll see, Kay's story snuck up on her.

Kay

She said, “How are you?” And I'm like, “I'm fine.” She's like, “Really? I thought I'd give you a little bit of time since it happened.” And I'm like, “What happened?” And she's like, “Oh, you don't know?” I'm like, “No.”

Ben

It involves a man whose character literally changed before her eyes.

Kay

He would just whip out this wad of money.

Ben

How did he react when you told him how you felt?

Kay

Started screaming and yelling. The mediator had to say, "I'm going to have to throw you out if you're not going to calm down."

Ben

And as you take this journey with Kay, you'll experience the very same turns that she did not see coming.

Kay

This is actually coming up, probably a secret within a secret, so a little bonus, because probably only two people know this.

Ben

Did Jeff know all this was going on?

Kay

Oh yeah, he was part of it. He would go back into the office of the bar with these people.

Ben

This is the secret room, a podcast about the stories no one ever tells. I'm Ben Hamm.

Kay

Ben, it was so funny. It's not funny but, looking back, it is. I was hysterically laughing and hysterically crying at the same time.

Ben

Okay. Perfect. I think we're ready to go.

Kay

All right. Sounds good.

Ben

Terrific. Just looking for my questions. Hi, Welcome to the secret room.

Kay

Hi, Ben. How are you? Thank you for having me.

Ben

Well, you're welcome. I'm doing fine and It's great to have you here with me.

Kay

It's surreal that I'm actually going to be part of it. So neat.

Ben

I'm so grateful that you reached out to share this amazing story.

Kay

I'm honored that you thought it worthy of sharing.

Ben

For sure. The way that you phrased your secret really touched me, and I'm just so interested to get to what it is you feel that you just can't tell people. To understand that, I think we need to go back to a former relationship you had.

Kay

Oh yeah, that's where it all started.

Ben

Can you tell me how you met this man?

Kay

I was actually at the end of a relationship. To get out of being confronted with this person, I would go out with a friend. She kept bugging me, "Come to the bar, come to the bar, come to this bar." It was at the bar that I met Jeff. Jeff was actually the owner of the bar. I went several times and met Jeff, the owner of the bar and we hit it off. We hit it off quite famously. At the time, I was planning on moving to Atlanta where my parents were. I wasn't leaving for, I think, several weeks to a couple of months. So I built a relationship with him while I was finishing my time in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

When it came time for me to go, he was begging me not to go. He wanted me to stay with him. I was like, "I'm going. I want to be with my parents." So I left for Pennsylvania. It was in the early spring of 2000, I believe, when I left. This is actually probably a secret within a secret, so a little bonus because probably only two people in my life, maybe three, know this. I left for Atlanta. I drove down and took my car. I don't even remember what kind of car I had, but it was very old and kind of beat up. There were these fumes that would come into the car when I drove it. On my way, I was like a day out of Atlanta. I took, I think, two days to get there.

On my first-night drive, I was feeling quite strange in a hotel by myself. Lo and behold, I took a pregnancy test and I was pregnant, and here I am going to Atlanta. So I was like, Oh my gosh, what do I do? I have no idea. I think I actually ended up calling him and telling him. He was wonderful. He's like, "I'll support you. I'll be there for you. Maybe you should come back." I was like, "Well, I just have to see." So I continued to go down to Atlanta and talk to my mom about it and he wanted to be there. I was very early. I believe I had to wait about two months for my first doctor's appointment, and he insisted, "I'm going to come down for this. I want to be there for the very first appointment." So he did. He flew down. We were kind of happy and he got to meet my parents.

We went to the first appointment to find out there was no heartbeat. The physician— she wanted to do a round of blood work and, sure enough, I was pregnant, but the baby didn't survive. So they asked me, "Do you want to go in and have a procedure in the hospital to take care of this? Or do you want your body to naturally go through it?" I was like, "No, please, I'll do the procedure." He stayed with me the whole time. He extended his stay for another week so that

he could be there when I had the procedure in the hospital and be there for me for the next couple of days. He actually blamed it on my jalopy of a car and breathing in the fumes and stuff. So when he flew back, he sent me money so that I could get another car.

Ben

You must have had a lot of emotions. I mean, certainly, you must have felt a terrible sense of loss about the child.

Kay

Oh yeah, it was hard. It was very difficult.

Ben

Can't imagine. And then I would think you also probably have a lot of emotions wrapped up in the relationship with this man that you've moved away from. Then, for a moment, it looked like, "Wow, maybe you will have a life relationship, one way or another, with this man." Then, that dashed and, again, you're sort of not sure where you stand.

Kay

Oh my gosh, it was a flood of emotion because I didn't know this man for a long time either. But he swooped in like a superhero and I was taken off my feet. I told my parents, "I'm going to go back to Pennsylvania and be with him."

Ben

I can completely understand that, Kay, because he just came in and was just the man. He just did it for you and was there, and now you're thinking, "Well, gee, maybe I shouldn't have let him go."

Kay

Right. This is the one. This is the one I need to be with. Look at everything that he did for me in this rough time.

Ben

And he wanted you to come back to Pennsylvania.

Kay

Oh, very much, yes.

Ben

So you packed up...

Kay

I did.

Ben

And how long had you been in Atlanta before you decided to turn around and head back?

Kay

I went down in the spring and, by the end of summer, by maybe August, I was back in Pennsylvania.

Ben

What did your parents think about that? Were they on board?

Kay

They were very supportive. My mom and my stepdad are very supportive of me.

Ben

So you packed up and headed back to Pennsylvania.

Kay

I did, yep. And thus, began the next 10 years of craziness. Well, 15, I guess.

Ben

So you moved in with him...

Kay

I did. He got us this nice little apartment. He owned this bar in this town, and it was a family-run bar business. His dad had it and passed it down to him. When I got back, he had a little apartment ready for us - a really nice little place with a lock and key on the outside. I didn't even have to work and we did the bar.

Ben

Leading up to that, how was your relationship with him in that first year?

Kay

It was wonderful. We had a little tiny kitchen when I lived in this apartment with him. One day, he had gone out and came home and I was just on my hands and knees with a sponge cleaning the kitchen floor because it was not very big, so I was like, "I don't need a mop." He came rushing over and said, "You stand up. No woman of mine is going to be on her hands and knees cleaning the floor."

Ben

In that first year, one of the first questions in front of you guys must have been, "Are we going to have another child?"

Kay

It was something we actually never talked about. I went back and we got into the bar life. I didn't know the ins-and-outs of it, and I'm not a materialistic person at all. Money's not a huge concern to me, but he would put himself out there like he just had a ton of money. At one time, he came down to Georgia and just whipped out this wad of money, and there were bigger bills that you could see on the end of it. I came to find out in our relationship that the majority of that were ones. He'd wrap it with a couple of higher bills to make it look like, "Ooh, I have this great big wad of money." Always set money on the nightstand when he would go off to do things for the bar or whatnot and, "Get yourself something. Take care of yourself. Go buy something, go shopping."

Ben

So he wasn't as wealthy as he led on?

Kay

Not at all. When he found out that I was coming back from Georgia, he took a \$30,000 loan out in his mother's name. I stumbled across it. He used the loan to pay the loan payments and then eventually that ran out. I think that's when we had to start paying it and I was like, "You did not tell me that you took a loan to do this."

Ben

"In your mother's name." No less.

Kay

Yes. In his mother's name. I can't believe she did it for him.

Ben

And what did he say?

Kay

"It was for us and to provide for us and have everything that we needed right at the touch of our fingertips so that we wouldn't have to want for anything and it would be an easy situation" is basically how he portrayed it.

Ben

And is this the moment when you started to feel that things weren't as great as you thought?

Kay

Not particularly. So we lived the bar life. We'd go to the bar in the evening and be there till, sometimes, 3, 4, 5, 6 o'clock in the morning partying. We'd always do the after-parties and everything. Again, this was from somebody who had no idea about this kind of lifestyle. So it was a party for me and I thought it was really neat. Lots of times, he'd go into the back office with his friends or people from the bar and just leave me sit out there and then they reemerge within 5 or 10 minutes - sometimes less than that - or 2 of them would go to the bathroom or the restroom at the same time and come out. It had to be, like, 6-8 months in when I realized that they are doing cocaine. Again, something I have never been confronted with in my life.

Ben

Did Jeff know all this was going on?

Kay

Oh yeah, he was part of it. He would go back into the office of the bar with these people and they'd disappear. I just thought, "This is the bar life. He's having a conversation with these individuals that needs to be had or whatever." No, I realized that they were doing drugs in the back room.

Ben

Gosh, is Jeff dealing?

Kay

Not at that time. He wasn't really a dealer. He would get an occasional "eight ball" - that's what they call them - and split it up or whatever, and sell it for a little extra cash every now and then, but that was much later on when I was kind of in over my head. I don't remember exactly how or when I realized, "Oh my gosh, this is what they're doing back there and it's just this occasional thing? They're just doing this for partying in the bar or whatever." Of course, eventually, I get

invited along. "Do you want to try one? Do you want to do one?" And I held out for a while. Maybe, it was about 6 months. Eventually, I started to partake and share in that partying and that part of the lifestyle.

Ben

Wow. Was it easy for you to get into once you made the decision?

Kay

Very much through the years. We never had to go out and look for anything as far as drugs. They always came to us. Majority of the time, we didn't even pay for a lot of it. It was the exchange of alcohol for the drugs and the drug of choice was cocaine.

Ben

Can you tell me what it was like taking cocaine?

Kay

Like I said, it took me a while before I would try it because I was scared. I remember asking everybody, "What's it going to do to me? How's it going to make me feel?" And they're like, "Just try it. It makes you feel awake. When you first do it, you take that first line and you feel very awake and very alert and colors are a little brighter and your hearing is a little sharper, so it just kind of heightens your senses." The hard part is coming down from it. You get really shaky and really jonesy for another fix and stuff. So that's the difficult part when you're doing a drug like that.

Ben

Did you realize that you were having a problem or did that not dawn on you till later?

Kay

Initially, you just play it off as, "This is part of the lifestyle. He owns a bar and this is our life now. I'm part of the bar lifestyle." And really, in the beginning, that's where it just kind of stayed - the party lifestyle in the bar whenever we would open 9 o'clock at night till 2 o'clock in the morning. Occasionally, we'd have to stay later and stuff. It wasn't something where I needed to get through my days, sit there, and do it all day. Not like that. It was just part of the party lifestyle.

Ben

How was he treating you those days? After you started taking drugs, is that when his behavior towards you changed?

Kay

No, he was an alcoholic. I mean, drugs are not great. Whatever you do with them is abuse. His problem was alcohol. Obviously, we had a continuous stream of it when we had a bar downstairs. Like I said, when I got pregnant with my first child, we moved to the apartment above the bar, so we didn't even have to go anywhere for anything. Everything was right downstairs.

Ben

Did either of you have any concerns that you were bringing a child into this world of drugs and cocaine?

Kay

No, in the back of my head, it was there. It was just an irresponsible lifestyle in every way, shape, and form. I'm not proud of it, but it happened.

Ben

It sounds like you weren't married...

Kay

No, never been married.

Ben

You never decided to tie the knot. What was behind that?

Kay

That was one thing that I did that was smart in all those years was to never marry him because I can't even imagine the heap of problems had I married that man beyond what I already had. He wanted to but—

Ben

Why did you tell him, "No"?

Kay

No, I told him that I would marry him if he got rid of the bar. If he got rid of the bar and we did something else, that would be the day that I would marry him.

Ben

So on some level, you did know that this was a problem.

Kay

I did. And you know what? I kind of forgot that too. In the beginning, when I was coming back from Georgia, he actually promised me. The promise was always, "I will get rid of the bar. I will sell the bar." Several times, he even went as far as to put for sale signs on it to get rid of it and then just never did.

Ben

So it was never really going to happen?

Kay

No, it wasn't. It really wasn't.

Ben

And were you drinking and taking drugs when you were pregnant with your first child?

Kay

No. When I found out I was pregnant, I went to the OBGYN and immediately stopped.

Ben

And Kay, you had three children, right?

Kay

I did.

Ben

With Jeff?

Kay

Mm-hmm.

Ben

At any point when you were having children with him, did you ever think or hope that would help change things and make things better?

Kay

I did.

Ben

I guess I would also ask, did any of the children have a positive impact on your relationship?

Kay

No. And again, there's the empty promises because every time a pregnancy would pop up, every single time, I got the promises of "I'm going to get better. I'm not going to drink anymore. I'll stop drinking. I'll stop doing drugs. I'll sell the bar. We'll get out of this and we'll be a nice family somewhere else." And no, I can't even tell you that anything changed for a period of time. It just didn't change.

Ben

So part of you was like, "This is our lifestyle. This is how we live." And there's another part of you that knows that this is not healthy.

Kay

Oh yeah. There really was.

Ben

Were your pregnancies planned?

Kay

No, none of my kids were planned.

Ben

So how was it having kids born into this lifestyle?

Kay

I was exhausted.

Ben

I bet. I mean, three kids alone.

Kay

I look back on it and I don't even know how I physically maintained it. I mean, just being a young, healthy woman had to be it. There were some times in a week that I would get maybe 4 or 5 hours of sleep between the bar, between the kids, between him, and between everything that I took care of everything. He didn't help. I always called him my fourth kid and he was the most difficult one to take care of.

Ben

How did he treat you?

Kay

He had an insatiable appetite for sex. That got much more depraved as the years went on.

Ben

What do you mean by depraved? Kay's answer after the break. Stay with me.

Kay's pregnant by a man who's using drugs and has made unfulfilled promises to sell his bar. And now, she tells us that his demands in the bedroom have become more and more...

Kay

Demented. Like, he did more and more disgusting things. In the beginning, it was basically fun but, like I said, it just got more depraved over the years. One of the things that he liked in the last couple of years was he wanted me to pretend like I was trying to get away from him. Basically, he wanted to pretend like he was raping me. I mean, jokes on him. That's what I felt like. It was horrible. I mean, I would cry. It was horrible. I would cry during it, but he was like, "Good show." It really wasn't a show. And he wanted to use different objects and stuff that I would have never imagined that I would have done. I did satisfy him. In that time period, when I used cocaine, most of the time, it was to get through those times because those were the hardest. He was a very happy kind of annoying drunker when he was high but, from the hangover the next day, he was miserable, angry, and hateful.

Ben

Okay, at some point, you must have reached a breaking point. You probably figured there was something you just had to do to resolve the situation, right?

Kay

There was.

Ben

What did you do?

Kay

This was a time when he was bingeing and drinking for days. He would be up for, like, two or three days of drinking, partying, and straight drinking, and then he'd pass out for a day and get up and start right in. I'd have to bring him a shot so he could get out of bed and just segue into the next binge. My mother— we kind of hatched a plan - very poorly laid. In hindsight, it's 2020 and I probably could have done it a million different ways.

She eventually came up one time. We were going to wait for his next bender. She picked a week when she flew up and stayed with a neighbor. In a week, he's definitely going to go on a binge. I want to say, the day she flew up, he started a bender. So she didn't even have to wait

long. I think we waited two days. He partied, stayed up, drank for two days, and passed out. My mom came over and we scooped up just the necessity. I think I got, like, three garbage bags full of stuff and I went back to Georgia with her back to Atlanta.

Ben

You took your kids?

Kay

I did. With the girls.

Ben

Are there any laws against that?

Kay

Well, we weren't married, so there really wasn't. This is the stuff that I didn't know. The week I went down, I had an appointment at some point in, like, the first week when I was there with a lawyer, but I didn't get to the lawyer in time. Jeff got to the lawyer in Pennsylvania before me and I got served with a summons that I had to bring the children back, and he was taking me for full custody of the children. Had I gotten to it first, had we had that appointment with a lawyer. Had I done it first, he would have had to come down to Georgia to go through all the court proceedings, but he did it first. Again, we weren't married. There was no custody agreement that I had ever gone through a court system before. It was all about who did it first, and he ended up doing it first. So I ended up having to go back with the kids because he did it first. I had nowhere to stay. There was a neighbor lady that I was friends with that was right next to the bar and she ended up letting me stay there.

Ben

Did you see him during the day or at night?

Kay

They gave a temporary order. There was a 50-41 split with the temporary order. So he would take them, three days out of the week, I think. His mother lived a few blocks away. So, the majority of the time, the girls would be with the grandmother. We had to go through a custody dispute. I got public assistance and that's when I went back to school so that I could get an education.

Just prior to graduation, they changed the laws to maintain the benefits I was getting, which was very minimal. My parents were sending me money every month so that I could pay the rent where I was staying but, to maintain what I was getting, since I was a full-time student, I would have had to have done community service on top of being a full-time student of 20 hours a week. I would have had to come home, find more daycare actually, go to community service each night for a couple of hours five days a week, and not be able to be home just in time to put my kids to bed to get up the next day and do it over. It was impossible. They were cutting my financial assistance, so I had to go back to their dad because I had nowhere else to go.

Ben

You mean you went and moved back in with him?

Kay

I did. And he treated it like it was a party. He had a party at the bar with anybody that would come. "Look who's back. Look who came back to me. Oh, how exciting. Here's a party. Have a free shot.

Ben

How'd you feel?"

Kay

I was miserable.

Ben

And what did your parents say?

Kay

My heart breaks for them and I can never pay my parents back for everything that they went through and did for me because, during that first custody battle, they must have dropped probably \$20,000 and all I ended up getting was the 51-49 split and I had to move back in with him anyway. So I believe it rendered it nil and void because we were living together.

Ben

Gosh. So Jeff was putting on a show that he was happy that you were back. Did you feel that he was, in his heart, happy?

Kay

I truly believe he was. I feel like I was more of a property to him. So it was like, "I got my property back. I won. I won." Even with the custody dispute, it was about winning.

Ben

Did it just pick up right where you left off with the abuse?

Kay

Yeah. Ben, when I told you it got worse— he had always said to me, "I know that you're going back to school so that you could leave me. You're only doing it so that you can better yourself so that you can leave me and take the kids with you." Yeah, absolutely. That's why I was doing it. So when I was forced to move back in with him, I had graduated. I was working at a hospital. He took all my paychecks. The pay stub had to be attached to them so that he could make sure that I wasn't stashing money away.

My parents had gotten me a cell phone, but I wasn't allowed to keep the cell phone on me. He would sit at night, going through my phone, seeing who I talked to, and at one point said, "I'll just get us phones." He got us each a cell phone because I think he ruined it to the point I couldn't use it anymore.

Ben

And how did he ruin it?

Kay

Cause he'd sit at night and go through the settings and change settings. Maybe he broke it one night when he was drunk in his stupor and stuff like that. So he got both of us cell phones that lasted two weeks. He said that I talked to my mom and my sister too much, so he wasn't going

to let me have one. When it got closer to the hearing to finalize the custody papers, he stopped letting the kids stay in the apartment with me above the bar. They stayed at his mother's house several blocks away, and he would bring them to see me, maybe one at a time or two at a time, never all three of them because he knew I wouldn't leave with just one or two. I'd have to have all three.

We did have a van, but he kept the keys for it, so I couldn't go. Then, maybe a month before the hearing, there was a door from the apartment with a stairwell down to the bar - that's how we would get from the apartment to the bar from the inside. There was a door to our back porch that we had out of the kitchen of the apartment to get outside. It was a huge cinder block building. He took all the keys and I was locked up there every day, so I couldn't leave. He would go down to tend bar or he would let me down there to tend bar at nighttime.

Then, when we were done, it was back upstairs and he would— there were keys on both knobs on the doors, so he would have the key to the doors and lock. Like, he'd go down the bar and lock the door and I couldn't get out.

Ben

So you're an actual prisoner.

Kay

Yeah. Sounds crazy. I'm sorry. I haven't really told the full story like this in quite a while and it sounds crazy. It sounds like a lifetime movie.

Ben

I mean, it's just amazing.

Kay

Oh my goodness. I mean, that's what he did to me.

Ben

Could you get out a window or anything?

Kay

It was a cinder block building from top to bottom. There was just no other way. The doors— I mean, I'm sure if I had tried, but where was I going to go?

Ben

Just besides being delusional, what was his justification for locking you up? He thought you were going to run away?

Kay

I think so, yeah.

Ben

With the kids, maybe?

Kay

Yeah, absolutely. That's, again, why he wouldn't let me have all three of them in the house, because that was a way of him keeping me there, because he knew I would never leave without

all three of my children. Well, you'd done it before. I know. And that's probably why too - because I had done it before. So he's going to make it impossible for me to leave. So we had a landline phone. The majority of the time, he would unplug it, so I couldn't call. But if he was in a stupor and passed out, I could plug it in and call my family. So I know, around that time, I called my sister and she was going to come for the hearing. She's like, "I'm not going to let you go to that hearing alone. I'm going to be there for you." So I knew my sister was coming. When it got to the week before the hearing, he turned the electricity off.

Ben

To what end? Why?

Kay

I don't know. I mean, this is how convoluted he got because, for maybe four or five days, I went without electricity. In the last two days, he turned the water off upstairs. I don't know. And he wouldn't even stay there. He would leave the bar, make sure I was up there, and go to his mom's.

Ben

You're just locked up there. He sleeps at his mom's house?

Kay

Yeah. And thinking back, I think to myself, "My God, I'm such a logical person. Why?" I don't know, but I'm so defeated at that point. I was just, "Okay, this is it. This is life. What am I going to do? It'll get better." I know he would tell me that he's doing this for our own good, so I don't do anything rash. As soon as this hearing is over and this decision is made, we get to go back to the hearing and tell him that you're living with me, so it'll be fine. We'll be back to normal. And so he wanted the hearing to be over and done with so that he could say, "I have a legal custody agreement."

Ben

So during this period of what is essentially incarceration and all the utilities were turned off, how did you eat?

Kay

Yeah, he turned the water off there.

Ben

Was it cold? Was it hot? What time of year was it?

Kay

I want to say we had gas for the water heater and boiler. It was springtime, so it wasn't too unbearable. He brought food. His mother would make pasta or whatever. I don't even know what I was eating off of— again, this is another instance where these two months— I'm going to say the majority of this was just a blur. I mean, I remember sleeping a lot. I think I just slept on the couch and kind of lived on the couch. I was just so depressed and defeated. Again, he didn't let me starve and I had food and the necessities or whatnot. He just wanted to get to this hearing and then it would all go back to normal.

The day of the hearing came. I was all locked up. My sister was coming the day before the hearing and she wasn't due to arrive till about 8 o'clock in the evening. At 7.30, magically, all the

doors were open, the keys were hung back on the nails, and the doors were all open. He kept the bar closed that night. Nobody was there in the bar. That was, like, maybe 15 minutes to a half hour before my sister arrived. He wasn't there and the children weren't there. He kept them at his mom's. My sister came. When I let her in, she just started crying. She said I looked terrible. She said I didn't even look like me. It just didn't even look like me. I looked like a shell of a person.

Ben

Did she know that you had been imprisoned and what your conditions were?

Kay

I think I probably didn't tell my family a lot of the things that were going on because they're so far away, and what are they going to do? And why am I going to bother them? I'll just deal with it on my own. There's no sense in making them worry or making them hurt more than they have to - so I think. My sister had an idea that things were rough prior to showing up that evening, but not the extent of it. Like I said, I didn't even have to say the extent of it.

When she opened that door, she just broke down and cried and held me. We both did. She's like, "Let's go. You can't stay here." We went to a hotel. I remember she had bought Chinese food and I was sitting on the bed, and I just couldn't even eat. I couldn't even eat. I said, "I'm going home with you tomorrow. I can't do this anymore. I just can't do it." She was living in Ohio and she was like, "What? How?" I was like, "I don't know. I just have to." So we stayed in this hotel and got up in the morning.

I think the hearing was, like, 9 o'clock in the morning. We went to the courthouse. I couldn't afford a lawyer at this point, so I just went myself. Beforehand, his lawyer was there and I said, "Am I able to speak with her?" And I went into a private room with his lawyer. I don't even know why that was probably not even the right thing to do. I said, I think I'm going to go back to Ohio with my sister. I'm not abandoning my children, but I can't live like this. So she's like, "Okay, well, we'll deal with that. But you just tell the mediator when we go in there what you are going to do."

We went into the room with the mediator and he was sitting in a chair on the left and his lawyer was next to him, and I was next to her. I said, "I'm going to go back to Ohio with my sister." He stood up and knocked his chair over. He's like, "What are you talking about? What are you doing? You're going to leave your children" and started screaming and yelling. The mediator had to say, "I'm going to have to throw you out if you're not going to calm down." Because I totally took him by surprise, he thought we were just going to get the court order of 50-50 split or whatever it would be.

Actually, because we were living together, I don't think they would have done a custody agreement because we were living together, but I didn't even give the opportunity for that to be worked out. I said, "Well, whatever we need to do, I'm not abandoning my children, but I can't live this way anymore." And so they gave a custody agreement of, like, three weeks of visitation for the summer coming up and then it would go beyond that - I can't remember what it was. I think we would have had to come back in the fall or something to get it worked out. That's when I came to Ohio.

Ben

How many times did you go back to Pennsylvania to fight for your kids?

Kay

Oh my gosh, I don't remember, but I was there for everyone. It was just a heartbreaking process to go through. My experience with it— there was no help. I had no help. I couldn't afford a lawyer, so I always went on my own. I was treated like a deadbeat parent.

Ben

And how was it that he was able to keep the kids?

Kay

He had a lawyer. Again, I think he took out another loan somewhere through the grapevine. He took out another loan in his mother's name, so it made it much easier. So I feel like because I showed up just by myself without any legal representation there, you're just labeled as a deadbeat parent. You didn't have legal representation. A majority of the time, I wasn't even able to talk.

Ben

So you're living with your sister, trying to get custody of your kids who you are 450 miles apart from. What is Jeff doing?

Kay

He ended up dying from a drug and alcohol overdose in October of 2013.

Ben

Oh my gosh. And what this means for Kay and her kids, as *The Secret Room* continues?

Straight ahead, a stranger reaches out to Kay with an unexpected offer. But first, Jeff is dead, thanks to the lifestyle that he led, the same lifestyle that Kay left behind.

Kay

I'm still alive, I'm still here, and I'm living my best life at the moment, set aside from not having my children. If I had stayed, I very well could have ended up in the same spot he's at.

Ben

And who has custody of your kids?

Kay

There was nothing that went through the court system. I feel like it was an accident that I found out.

Ben

How old were your kids at the time he died?

Kay

12, 10, and 8. Very young.

Ben

So did they go to his mother?

Kay

They did. Nobody called me. Nobody told me. And about three weeks to a month after, I get a phone call from somebody who's absolutely nobody who has nothing to do with anything. I truly believe it was just somebody calling to nib about the situation and get the "gossip" about it. She called me and I answered. I was like, "Hey, how are you? I hadn't heard from this person in a while."

She said, "How are you?"

I'm like, "I'm fine."

She's like, "Really? I thought I'd give you a little bit of time since it happened."

I'm like, "What happened?"

And she's like, "Oh, you don't know?"

I'm like, "No, what are you talking about? I don't know."

She's like, "Oh, I don't know if I should be the one to tell you."

I'm like, "Oh my gosh, you have to tell me what is going on."

She's like, "Well, Jeff died."

And I was like, "What???"

And she's like, "Yeah, it happened almost a month ago."

And I was like, "What???"

I had to sit. I was standing.

Ben

What went through your mind?

Kay

Ben, it was so funny. It's not funny, but it is looking back. I was hysterically laughing and hysterically crying at the same time. I couldn't stop myself. I can't imagine the release.

Ben

I mean, you must have felt horrible on one hand and, on the other hand, just so relieved.

Kay

That's why I was like, "Oh my gosh. Now what do I do? What should I do? Because now I can have my girls". So I hung up with this person. I was like, "Oh my gosh, now I can have my girls." This is amazing. So that day, I left. I was dating a person. We drove back to Pennsylvania and I was thinking I'm going to get my kids. I showed up and I had to fill out all this paperwork. Then, they gave me an emergency date and we went in. They said, "We think the girls are doing just fine where they are. So we're going to leave them there for now."

Ben

Who said that?

Kay

The mediator. I was like, "But I'm their mother, why?" "Well, they're fine." There was a question of going between state and stuff, so we're just going to leave them right where they are. I had to wait. We had to stay around. That was, I think, Thursday or Friday. They made an emergency temporary court hearing for Monday. Again, they granted temporary custody to the grandparent, and that was that. I was like, "Are you kidding me?"

Ben

Were you able to see your kids?

Kay

I had to come back for another mediated hearing. They deemed that I had to do a reunification process. So had I been living there. This would be something where you go, like, three times a week, but I live 450 miles away, so we had to do it one day a month. I was working two jobs and I worked another job at the town I lived in. So I was working, like, six days a week. Then, over time, this counselor would do these reunification meetings and, after so many meetings, submit it to the court to say, "Yes, I think this parent and child can be reunited and back together. This parent should have custody of the child." I showed up every month. I would work my 12-hour shifts - Friday, Saturday, and Sunday - and leave on Sunday right when I got out of work because we'd make the appointments for Monday at 9 AM. So once a month, I'd go to this appointment, leave right after work, and drive back. It was almost a nine-hour drive. I slept in my car for, like, an hour, got up, and went to have this one-hour meeting with the girls in front of this counselor, and drove back home so that I could be back for work on Tuesday.

Ben

Gosh, what a schedule.

Kay

Oh, it was exhausting.

Ben

Was it good? I mean, I know it was good to see your girls, but they were happy to see you and spend time with you?

Kay

No.

Ben

They were not?

Kay

The very first meeting that I had with them, all three of them walked into the room heads down, and made no eye contact with me. So they were coached. They were told how a horrible person I was. I left them. I didn't want them. When he died, I thought, "Oh my gosh, this is going to be like the veil will be lifted from his family's eyes and we can move forward finally." They basically picked up where he left off. They didn't try to promote any kind of relationship - actually quite the opposite. I think I did it about once a month, but there was nothing. There was, like, zero sign of progress, of a glimmer in their eye. So it was in 2015 when I just was like, "I can't do this anymore." Every time I jump in that car and drive back to Pennsylvania, I was like, "I'm living my life to do this with nothing coming out of it." So it came a time where I decided that I have to live the life that was in front of me that did not include the children.

Ben

So Kay, at this point, you've decided to let your kids go.

Kay

Yeah, I did. I did.

Ben

Did it happen in just a moment when you realized that was what you had to do?

Kay

I think so. I want to say, probably, the last time I went to one of these meetings and I'd just go in and it's the same thing and the same angry, jaw-clenched faces looking at me and the same dark eyes and just the glares and the daggers, I'm like, "Nothing has changed," I think that's when I realized after that last meeting where I just can't do this anymore. I can't live for this anymore. If there was some kind of glimmer of hope and some kind of positive in it at all, I wouldn't be able to turn my back on it, but there just wasn't.

Ben

Did you say goodbye to your kids?

Kay

No.

Ben

How did it feel for you once you'd made that decision?

Kay

I did feel a little free, like a freeing type of feeling. I don't have to live like this anymore.

Ben

I can't imagine how it feels, of course. But, Kay, that leads me to a question, and that is one of the things that people ask often when you are getting to know somebody. Do you have any kids?

Kay

No. That's just easier.

Ben

And that is your secret.

Kay

That is my secret.

Ben

So how does it feel every time that you say you don't have kids when, of course, you do?

Kay

There's a twang there on the inside, but I don't want to go into it because if you say yes, people are going to start asking about them. Well, I have to say, "I don't have a relationship with them. They don't live with me. They're in Northeastern Pennsylvania and here I am in Ohio." Well, why is that? And I just have to tell everything that I told you so that people can understand. I don't want to just leave it at that.

Ben

Do you feel that people would judge you if they knew that you had kids, but had to essentially abandon them?

Kay

I don't think so. If people hear the story behind it, how can somebody be negative and judge me harshly? I do go to bed at night. I know I did the best I could and everything in my power to try to get my children and then got to the point where it's not even like I'm trying to get custody, it's just wanting a relationship with them.

Ben

You've tried to reach out.

Kay

I do - every holiday, every birthday - like, for a long time. I would call. They just hang up on me. They'd pick up the phone and hang up. They wouldn't even answer. They turn off the answering machine. So I couldn't even leave a message if I did get the rare instance where I'd get to talk to them on the phone. Somebody would inevitably pick up the other line and start a screaming and yelling match, so you just couldn't get through. So phone calls just weren't a good thing. So, over the years, I always send flowers on birthdays, holidays, and special occasions, and always make sure my contact information is on the card because, again, I don't even know if they're getting the things that I send.

Ben

So painful. How often do you think of them?

Kay

Oh, every day. I mean, it's just not a day that goes by where I don't think of them.

Ben

You told me in our discussions leading up to our interview today, if people dig through your Facebook page, they might find some pictures of you and your kids.

Kay

Oh yeah, early on.

Ben

You leave those up there. Is that so that somebody might find them one day? Or why do you leave those up there if you deny you have kids?

Kay

Because they're there. I mean, that's early on. So the last pictures I have were from 2011.

Ben

Are you married now?

Kay

I am. And you know what, Ben? There's another little bonus secret. Only one other person knows that.

Ben

Only one other person knows what?

Kay

That I'm married.

Ben

Wait, what? People know you're in a relationship?

Kay

They do.

Ben

But you're secretly married?

Kay

We are.

Ben

Why is that?

Kay

We have a wedding scheduled for October 3rd this year. And if you want to come, it might be more than awesome to have you there. We're doing it at the Renaissance Festival here in Ohio.

Ben

Wait, you're having a wedding, but you're married? You're going to have a celebration.

Kay

Right. We did. We are going to celebrate, but I haven't told anybody. We did get to go to the Justice of the Peace in December and got married because he can put me on his health insurance and that's one less payment. It's cheaper for me to be on his own than to have my own insurance.

Ben

So why didn't you want to tell anybody that you guys got married?

Kay

Because I want people to think that they're sharing in our marriage. It's the first time I'll ever be married. It means something.

Ben

And the last.

Kay

Yes. Very much. Right. It took me 43 years to find the right one.

Ben

Well, congratulations.

Kay

Thank you.

Ben

That's great. As long as we're kind of on the upswing here and pulling ourselves out of this really very tragic story, since the time that you sent in your secret and the time that we're talking now, which has been a few months, you sent me an email and said that you've got a really happy update.

Kay

I do. Imagine my surprise... probably about a month ago...

Ben

Oh my gosh, what could have happened? I'll give you a clue. A stranger reached out to Kay with an offer. Find out what it is. Stay with me.

Kay's secretly married to the man of her dreams, and she's going to make it public soon. But something most unexpected happens first.

Kay

I was at work. I got this text message that said, "Hello, are you this girl's mother?" And I was like, "Wow, where did this come from?" At first, in my head, I was like, "Is this some kind of joke?" Like, I don't even know how to process this right now, and here I'm at work. I texted the person back and said, "Who is this?" They said, "I am a good friend of your daughter's. She's been wanting to reach out to you for a long time, but she feels like the people in her circle will not appreciate it, not like it, but I'm facilitating it." And I was like, "Oh my gosh!"

Ben

You must have just exploded with joy.

Kay

Oh, I couldn't even imagine this was right before Christmas. I was like, "Oh, this is like the best Christmas present ever."

Ben

So you got this call about a month ago.

Kay

Yes.

Ben

And so what's happened in the meantime? No. What's going to happen? Tell me.

Kay

She feels like she has to keep it from her siblings and the family that she's with because they would be very angry at her for reaching out. She might suffer some repercussions from that. So she's using her friend's phone when she sees this friend whom she doesn't see often.

Ben

Okay. How old is she?

Kay

Fourteen. My youngest.

Ben

Just a young girl. And so how often are you communicating with her?

Kay

We have only talked through text messaging once when she and this friend were together. She didn't have a lot of time. She was in close proximity to the family and the siblings. So it was just quick. After that conversation, the friend and her had a falling out. So the friend got a hold of me. I think I screwed up and we kind of argued and I don't know what's happening. Two weeks ago, the friend said that I think I'm going to be with her next Sunday in two weeks, which would have been this past Sunday. So I was waiting and I didn't hear anything.

Ben

I'm sorry. She'll find another way to get you.

Kay

That's what I said. I mean, at least I know she has my contact information. She definitely reached out. Probably, the third text she said to me was, "Mom, let me take a sip of water." This one's a little— she said, "Mom, I forgive you. I forgive you for everything. Oh.

Ben

Aww.

Kay

(Sniffing) Sorry.

Ben

That's okay. I'm so excited for you to actually talk to her.

Kay

Yeah. That was the third text she sent me, so that was really exciting. Then she did ask me, "Can you tell me what happened?" I said, "I don't really want to get into that over text messaging. We've got a long way to go from where we are right now. We're two very different people than the last time we saw each other. We can take this really slow. I think it's positive if we take it slow." And she seemed to be okay with that. It's there and the line of communication was opened and I can't be any more blessed than that at this moment in time. That's nothing that I ever expected.

Ben

So excited for you.

Kay

Thank you.

Ben

Why did you want to tell your secret today?

Kay

Again, this might be silly because I know you always ask that. I want to be on the secret room podcast. Initially, I was thinking, before my daughter reached out, that maybe the right person would hear this and it would cause a domino effect of me being reunited with them. That was thinking, put it out there in the world.

Ben

I hope you'll keep us up to date.

Kay

Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Ben

Wow, what a story.

Kay

Kind of just unloaded, huh?

Ben

I just feel so overcome with emotion for you and everything you've been through.

Kay

Oh, thank you.

Ben

Kay, thank you so much for sharing your story.

Kay

I appreciate it. I appreciate it for allowing it to be on your program.

Ben

Of course.

Ben

We leave Kay with her secret and she's full of hope for the future. You can tell it just means everything to Kay, can't you? And wouldn't it be great to kick off married life to be reconciled with her daughters? Kay showed me some pictures of precious memories where she's enjoying the outdoors with her daughters. Two of them are from behind, so you don't even have to worry about blurring anything out.

Ben

And I wonder, do you also have maybe a picture of the bar or the apartment?

Kay

I can look. I might be able to wrangle up something when I get off with you.

Ben

Oh, and she found pictures, in full glory, of the bar's exterior and interior. And of course, you'll see the second floor.

Susie

And with breaking news, I'm Susie Lark, on the next Secret Room Unlocked, I'll have an update from Dina on what's happened with her daughters in the eight months that have passed since she sat down for today's interview with Ben. Dina recorded her update just three days ago.

Ben

Hear it on the bonus edition of the podcast, which we call the Secret Room Unlocked. In it, we look deeper into each interview, revealing story details and production notes you're not going to hear anywhere else. It's available when you support at patreon.com/secretroom.

Dina

I got to get the behind-the-scenes.

Ben

Oh yeah. Unlocked.

Dina

Yes. Yes.

Ben

[Patreon.com/secretroom](https://patreon.com/secretroom). Do you have an unusual secret to share? Send it to me at our website, secretroompod.com. Click the "Share a secret" button when you get there. Thanks to Susie Lark, Lefty Marcucci, Alessandra Nigro, The Street Secret Team, Chet the Sound Engineer, and Breakmaster Cylinder for our theme and music. This indie podcast that could deliver fresh secrets directly to your phone every other Tuesday night. So see you in two extremely short weeks when someone new steps forward to share yet another amazing story.

Susie

This is The Secret Room, a podcast about the stories that no one ever tells.

Ben

Pod on Kay.

Kay

Pod on Ben.

Ben

I'm Ben Ham.

Scott

You can see pictures related to this story – including the interior and exterior of the bar, and Kay and her daughters when they were younger – in the episode notes at WhatWasThatLike.com/154. And go check out The Secret Room, and see if you enjoy it as much as I do.

Male 1

Hey Scott, I was just listening to the Deb Suddenly Stopped Skiing episode. She was talking about being airlifted out of Vail Valley Medical Center to St. Anthony's Hospital. I just happened to be listening while working in St. Anthony's Hospital today. I actually helped renovate almost

all of the operating rooms on that campus. So I just wanted to let you know that kind of a cool thing. Thank you.

Scott

And I wanted to let you know, if you have any comments about any episode, or anything else really, you can call the Podcast Voice Mail line anytime 24/7. That line is never answered by a human being – it's always voice mail and you can leave a message up to 3 minutes long. So you can leave a comment, a question, or you can call in your own Listener Story – the number is 727-386-9468.

And I wanted to let you know about a review that someone left recently. But I'm doing it in a different way. Rather than ME reading the review, it's going to be an AI voice. I might keep doing it this way depending on what you think. Anyway, here's the review from Aaron –

Aaron Murdoch

This is a five-star review from Aaron Murdoch. Even though true crime is usually my favorite genre, if I were told that I can only listen to one podcast for the rest of my life, I would choose this one. It's diverse with people, jobs, experiences, life stories, etc.

Scott

The kind words are nice, but I don't know – I think that voice is just a little bit over-dramatic. I mean, almost to the point of being funny. It's like I want to say, come on man – you're not doing a voiceover for a World War II documentary. It's just a podcast review. But maybe that's just me. What do you think? Might be a fun little segment we can do sometimes.

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

And now, this week's Listener Story! I can tell you that the Listener Stories are NEVER AI voices – they are always read by the listener. And that could be you! If you have a good story, like 5-10 minutes long, record it on your phone and email it to me at Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

This week's story is from Jen, the host of the Multispective podcast, about a time when music unexpectedly changed things.

Stay safe, and I'll see you soon.

(Listener Story)

Jen

I thought I'd share a simple yet heartfelt moment that happened to me about a year ago that stuck with me till today. It's a story where the universe and nature came together to create this perfect picture that changed what should have been a regular moment to such a beautiful one. I was traveling in Yunnan, China on a tour group with a good friend and travel buddy.

It was a hot summer's day. We were walking up a hill, sweating, and really quite uncomfortable. It had been a long day. I turned out to spend that walk in silence. I had my music plugged in, trying hard to ignore the discomfort I was feeling at that moment. I remember thinking on repeat, "You're supposed to enjoy this, Jen. Why is it so difficult? Get out of your head and feel the

moment.” My friend was right next to me shuffling around with his heavy backpack. Something must have pressed up against the speakers in his bag because it suddenly turned on and immediately disconnected my earphones and played my music on blast on these speakers. Right there, the whole mood and vibe of this hike changed.

Picture this. We're hiking up a cobblestone road, pretty high up, with views of a little colorful town far out, mountains, clear blue skies, and a local old man riding up on a horse. Its tail was moving to the beat of this happy tune. The man, aged from poverty, exhaustion, and sheer hard farm work, in his big straw hat looked at us with a big smile of joy on his face, bobbing and jiggling to the music, and everyone else around just stopped what they were doing to be in sync with the moment. It was like a scene from a movie. At that very moment, a few minutes at most, that changed the trajectory of the entire day and trip.

I've tried really hard to recreate moments like this and learned one thing. When you try hard to look and create moments, you skip the ones right in front of you. We get stuck in the race of trying to be richer, smarter, funnier, happier, more successful, more powerful, more popular, that we lose sight of the beauty that is all around us every day in attempts to find the very thing - happiness. Sometimes, all it takes is just being in the moment and noticing what you have now, and you will simply see that you already have it all. If you just shift your mindset and attitude to see the beauty in everything around you, you will bring about even more of it.

These are some of the messages that are reinforced to me in my podcast, Multispective. There, I interview people from everywhere to share some of the most challenging and darkest moments, how they overcame them, and what they learned from their personal experiences. So many of my guests have shared this message to me, “Live in the moment, ignore the other noises, and choose every day to see the wonders. The universe will give it right back to you if you just accept it.”

For those of you, if you're interested in listening to my podcast, it's called Multispective and you can find us on any podcast platform or our website, which is www.multispective.org.