Episode 171: Annie shouldn't have opened the door

This episode contains discussion of graphic sexual violence. Listener discretion is advised.

When I was a kid, I don't think I knew anyone who had an actual security system in their home.

It just wasn't heard of. I'm sure they existed, but really, for most typical middle-class families, you just didn't think a lot about someone breaking into your home.

And we certainly never had the concept of a home invasion – you know, someone coming right through the front door, while you're home and awake, with plans of theft or even violence.

But these days, if there's a knock on the door, everyone's suddenly on high alert. Who's at the door? In our house, we have the doorbell camera and we also have cameras all around the house. Because answering the door – literally opening the door to your house, to a stranger – can be a really dangerous thing to do.

Annie knows this. As a young woman, she was home alone in her new place, and she heard someone knocking.

She opened the door, and immediately regretted it.

Scott
When this happened, you were working as an actor in a children's theater company. Was that? Was that your plan for a career at that time?

Annie
Yes and no. I think my plan at that time was simply to work as an actress anywhere that would have me. That was a particularly fortuitous meeting though and I say that because it was what enabled me to get my equity card so that I could join the Actor's Equity Union, which was the big stage actors union, so it was a very well-known and very well-respected company. But yeah, it was for kids. I had not anticipated that but it was a really interesting gig for a year.

Scott
It is interesting. I mean, it's not like a typical job that you think about. How old were you at this time?

Annie
I was 23. I had actually worked for a year prior to this year as an intern for this company. So I had two years with it, and I was bumped up to full company member a couple of months before the attack happened.

Scott
I understand you met your boyfriend. He was also an actor.

Annie
He was. We actually played the parents of Abraham Lincoln in an outdoor drama in Indiana one summer and we formed a relationship. Then, I moved with him to Louisville, Kentucky where he got a job at this children's theater. I was able to get work there the following year. It was a bad relationship if I'm being honest. It was not a relationship of equals. It was kind of emotionally

centered and not rewarding, I'd imagine, for either of us by the end there, but I was really young and it was very difficult for me to see my way through to separating myself from this relationship. It took a lot to get there.

Scott
But you did eventually.

Annie
I did eventually, and I did it because my mother, bless her heart, went in for emergency heart surgery. I actually took a few days off of the company, which was an unusual thing, and I flew back to North Carolina where my mother was in the hospital. I remember walking in the night before her surgery. She looked up at me, didn't even say hello or anything, just looked at me and said, "Are you leaving Matthew?" I opened my mouth and the word "Yes" came out, and I thought, "Oh, okay, well, I guess I am." I really had not thought that that was the case until that moment, but then she came through with flying colors. To me, it sort of took on this mystical quality of a promise to God. "My mom came through okay. She's going to be alright. I have to leave Matthew now. I have to go out on my own. I have to do this." I knew it was the right thing to do but it was difficult.

Scott
That is so interesting though - when you kind of have the self-talk and you give yourself an answer that you weren't expecting. But then, you think, "Wow, I guess that's the right answer."

Annie
And it was the right answer. Despite what happened, I want to make that clear - it was absolutely the right answer. But yeah, it would take a lot to get me there. So when my mouth opened and the word "Yes" came out, I don't think anybody was as stunned as I was.

Scott
So you broke up and then you found yourself your own place.

Annie
I did, and I felt very fortunate. This place was gorgeous. It was built for young professionals and artists and it was in the downtown area. It was a former factory of some sort, I think, or warehouse, and they had reconfigured it to be a lot of apartments on the perimeter of a square courtyard. It was close to the theater complex and other members of that company also stayed there, so it felt like an ideal location for me.

Scott
So you had your own place, but you weren't really completely alone because the other actors lived in the same complex.

Annie
Exactly. And a couple of members of the administrative staff as well. In fact, the guy to my right was one of the assistant directors, so I felt. I felt very young in a lot of ways. 23 is very young, especially when you've never been out on your own before. So it was important to me to feel like I had a support network or at least a few people that I could turn to.

Scott
But yet still with your independence.

Annie
Exactly.

Scott
Let's talk about what happened. We need to talk about the week before it happened. You were doing laundry on a Friday afternoon.

Annie
I was expecting another friend to come down and visit me from Chicago. So of course, I spent the afternoon scrubbing and cleaning and doing laundry. Our laundry was actually a separate room closer to the front of the building, so I had to cross the courtyard to get to and from my apartment. I was sort of near the last load, I think, and I ran back to my apartment. I thought I closed the door. I'm fairly sure I didn't lock it though. Well, I know I didn't because I heard it open when I was in the bathroom and I remember calling out “Hello” and I didn't hear anything. I talked myself into believing that I hadn't closed the door all the way and the wind had blown it open a little bit, but I didn't think much more of it because I was running to get the laundry done. By the time I came back, I think my friend was pulling up at that moment. I didn't have a lot of space or time to think about what had happened.

However, when I came out of my apartment to get that last load, after I'd heard the door, I saw this man across in front of me, several feet away, but I saw him in profile. I remember it was striking because he was so tall. He was very tall. He looked like he was wearing the quintessential downtown Louisville waiter uniform, black pants, white shirt. It looked like he had one of those black waiters' aprons tied around his waist - I could be wrong. I might be making that up but, in my head, that's what I associated him with. So I remembered him.

Scott
When you saw him, were you concerned or suspicious or anything?

Annie
Not at all. I mean, I knew that I hadn't seen him before but that wasn't relevant really because I'd only been there for a week and a half. So clearly, I hadn't seen everybody who lived there and it did not strike me as odd at all. Just the fact of his height and the way he was dressed - I noted it. That's it. That moment was gone and the night went on. So the next morning, my friend and I were getting ready to leave to go get some breakfast. I had an early morning rehearsal. We were rehearsing a Christmas play. Our call times were kind of strange. This was an early morning for me.

So, I walked out. But as I was walking out, there was a woman actually, she was knocking on my door as I was opening it, and I'd never seen this woman before. She was dressed like she'd been out - like a heavy coat. It didn't look like she was running from one apartment to the next. It looked like she was on her way somewhere. She handed me my wallet and I recognized it immediately as my wallet. I was stunned because I didn't even know my wallet wasn't in my purse. I hadn't had any reason to get into it and it just didn't occur to me. She said, “Is this yours? I found it down here on the ground in the bushes.” She sort of thrust it in my hand and took off really quickly before I could ask her anything and it seemed strange to me. I just couldn't figure out what could have happened.

Then, I thought back to the day before– I don't know if I thought about it that day or maybe it was a little bit later but, eventually, I put it together. When that door opened and I was in the bathroom, this guy was rummaging through my purse. I had less than $10 in there - I was still a struggling actor - but that money was gone, but nothing else was gone. I just thought, “Okay. Well, all right, chalk this up to a city experience for the young kid. Always lock your door. Even if you're inside, always lock your door.” And I sort of let it go. I thought, “All right, well, big deal.” I didn't even call the police over it. It just seemed like one of those rites of passage that a young person goes through and a hard experience teaches you not to leave your door unlocked in the future.

Scott
And even if you did call the police, you don't have any proof. You didn't see anybody take anything.

Annie
No, there's nothing I could have done and nothing they could have done. That was assuming that the man that I saw was the person who took the wallet. I didn't even know that. That's the only piece of information I could have given them, so I just felt like that's pointless and I didn't do anything about it. The following Friday was December 7th. I was expecting a friend to come see me, and she was one who lived across the courtyard from me in one of the other apartments.

I had made dinner for myself and I was eating. I was watching something on TV. I had this tiny little colored set but it was, like, from the theater shop department. Basically, my entire apartment was furnished with cast-off set pieces from the theater shop department - things that they weren't using in the set design that year. It wasn't a lot. It was just enough to make it a little homier.

I remember thinking,” I don't know if my friend's going to come by or not, so maybe I should just go to bed.” There was a knock on the door. It was about 9 o'clock at night, I think. I went to the door and it was one of those doors with a wooden frame and the middle part of it is all glass. The lighting outside wasn't terrific but I think there were blinds. I pulled the blinds back and I saw somebody - whoever it was - wearing jeans. For some reason, that suggested to me that it was my friend. I opened the door and there was this man before me, and he said, “Is Mr. Charles Stuart in?” Almost immediately, the thoughts hit my brain, like this tsunami of “What the heck! This guy does not mean you well. He is dangerous. You need to close the door.” Somewhere in there, I thought, “I wonder if this is the guy that I saw last week. Isn't this the guy? I don't know. “

I started to slam the door shut and he pushed his way in and I screamed very loudly. I was banging on the door next to me. I was hoping that my friend in the apartment next to me would hear it but he very quickly subdued me. I mean, he was very quick about it. I don't know if he had done this before. If he hadn't, then he was a natural because I couldn't even process what was going on. All of a sudden, my scarf was tied around my mouth really tightly and my neck, almost choking me. He had my arms pinned and he said, “If you don't shut up, I will cut you.” I felt something like poking into my middle back and I thought, “That's a knife. He's got a knife and he will kill me.”

I decided just to try to be calm and sort of talk my way out of whatever was going on, maybe talk him down at the same time, but he was very worked up, very angry. I remember he went straight to my purse. I had $5 in there. He grabbed that out of my wallet again. He stuffed that

into his pants pocket and then he kind of frog marched me to the back of the apartment where there was one of the two bedrooms and it was completely empty. There was no furniture or anything in it. He made me take off my pants and lie down on the floor and he began to sexually assault me. He started by trying to perform oral sex on me. The anger still seemed to be the thing that was driving him the most. I was very confused as to why he was doing this for a minute. I was talking, like, “If you want money, I can get you money. I know a friend.” I was just trying to come up with anything to get him off of me and get him out of the way so I could slam the door and be safe, but I wasn't thinking things through very clearly at the time because nothing I said would have made any difference to this man at all.

Scott
You can't be expected to be thinking clearly at a time like this anyway.

Annie
You really can't. I mean, the things that go through your head will kind of surprise you later on. But I think the body and the mind both have a way of protecting you and you've got, like, these coping mechanisms that help try to keep you safe. I could tell from the way this guy was with me that, if I fought back, I would get injured. So if I was going to fight back, I needed the opportune moment, the perfect moment and I needed to commit and do it quickly. That opportunity presented itself to me. While he was concentrating elsewhere, I was able to get the scarf out from around my neck and I had it in my hands. I remember thinking, “I can wrap this around his neck. I can loop it around his neck, and I can pull but I will have to kill him. He's not going to stop unless I do that.” That thought made me hesitate, “Can I really take a person's life?”

I paused just long enough that he looked up and saw what I was doing. I guess he figured out what I was about to do, at which point, this man rammed his fist inside of me. I cannot express to you enough how absolutely painful that is just on a physical level, first of all. But then, he's yelling at me, “I WILL RIP YOUR WOMB OUT! I WILL RIP YOUR WOMB OUT!” over and over again. And I was like, “I believe you can do it. I believe you would do it.” Through my tears and screams, I was trying to reassure him that I wouldn't try anything, and I didn't. I just wanted to survive it and get through with it at that point, and it did last much longer.

After that, he did try to rape me vaginally and I thought that he wasn't successful because it didn't last long at all. The next thing I know, he's off of me, he's pulling up his pants, and he said, “You need to stay there. I will be watching. Don't come out.” I think it's, like, for 10 minutes or something like that. “Don't call anybody.” And I thought, “You’re an idiot if you think I'm not calling somebody after that.” A few minutes after he left, I heard nothing, so I got dressed and I sort of tentatively peeked out and I was looking for him. My front door was wide open.

I just got my courage together and I ran out the door and I ran next door and I started banging on my friend's door trying to get some help. He finally opened it and he hadn't heard anything. The soundproofing on these apartments was top-notch because he had not heard a thing. I called 911 from his apartment and he gave me some water and was trying to calm me down a little bit. I was completely vibrating with fear and just the adrenaline, I guess, was dissipating. It was such an odd experience not to be in control of your body really, and it was painful. I hurt everywhere and I just wanted this to be over but I knew I had to talk to the police. I never even questioned that.

They came in, shining their very bright flashlights, and asking very pointed questions, and I felt like they didn't believe me. I felt like they came to me from a perspective of disbelief. I found out

later that's not the case but their training at that time, I think, was so ridiculously centered in suspicion and proof that they treated sexual assault victims as if they were not telling the truth until they found proof that they were. It was very difficult. It was difficult to be around and to be subjected to that after having endured that kind of trauma. But they took me to the ER and I had to wait for hours to get a sexual assault evidence kit performed on me.

Scott
Did the hospital have those kits? Did they keep those or did the police give you those?

Annie
I think the hospital even back then kept the kits on hand, but they have to have a police officer there to take custody of it immediately and reserve chain of custody. I was sitting there with one detective. I think the detective left at one point and there was a uniformed guy there. I had to go to the bathroom so badly. Finally, somewhere around midnight, I said, “I just have to go.” I don't know if it was the nurse or the officers– one of them shrugged and said, “Well, yeah, you can go, but if you go, you might be getting rid of evidence. Your call.” And I thought, “This is ridiculous. I have to go. I can't not go.” So I was as careful as I could be but I didn't think at that point that there was any evidence to gather because I didn't think that he had ejaculated or finished the rape at all because it just seemed to me very quickly, abruptly ended.

So they finally came in sometime after midnight and they took that kit or did all the collection. And if you're not familiar with it, it's just such an incredibly invasive procedure. They have to visually inspect the area. They perform, like, a pelvic exam. They're looking for scrapes and contusions and all kinds of stuff. They're collecting samples. They have you stand up and they have to pull hairs out of your body, like off your head, your pubic hair– they're collecting, like, 10 hairs from each location.

Scott
And it sounds like that would be even more pain on top of what you were already experiencing.

Annie
It was absolutely so degrading even though I knew they had to do it. I understood why they had to do it. It was just, “Oh, if there were any better way, this is just such a terrible thing to have to endure, especially after a sexual assault.” I don't know how she would get that evidence. In my case, it was a really good thing they did. The neighbor who was supposed to come over and see me - the one I had been expecting - actually accompanied me to the ER, so it was very sweet of her and I really appreciate her to this day for her kindness.

She let me sleep on her couch. She had a futon couch. She had a smaller, like, studio apartment but I wasn't about to sleep in that room in that place at all. So yeah, I went over and slept with her. Then, the next day, my ex-boyfriend came and collected me and took me to a friend's house in Elizabethtown, Kentucky just for the weekend so I could get away. I appreciate that concern. I appreciated that act of kindness, but it was not a good place for me to be because they'd also given me the morning-after pill to prevent pregnancy and one of the side effects of that is just severe nausea. I was sick to my stomach for pretty much the entire weekend. Then, Monday came around and I went back to work, and things started to sort of slowly regain some normalcy, except with this overlay of now I am the complaining victim in this sexual assault case and they're looking for the guy and he's out there somewhere. He knows where I live and he's apparently familiar with where I live. So that was kind of terrifying.

Scott
Did you consider moving?

Annie
I did, but it didn't really make a whole lot of sense for me, and that's because of what was going on in January of next year. This was December. So, in January, the company that I was a member of split in two and there was a home company and a road company. I was in the road company and we were going out on this national tour of a play for six and seven year olds about Paddington Bear of all things, so that was actually good. The play was, like, the best choice if I had to do this but, then, I was out on the road for 5 months until May. It didn't make a whole lot of sense for me to move before then.

Scott
You want to go ahead and talk about the piece of mail that showed up?

Annie
It was so weird. The night it happened, when I opened the door, the rapist, said, “Os Mr. Charles Stuart in?” or “Is Mr. Charles Stuart here?” or something like that, about a week and a half or two weeks later, I went to the mailbox to get my mail and I had one piece of a bill or something - there were some other pieces directed to the occupant or whatever. There was also an envelope - an official-looking one - directed to my apartment number, but addressed to Mr. Charles Stuart. Every hair on the back of my neck went straight up, and I thought, “Oh, holy cow, this is significant. I don't know how, but it has to be, right?”

I called the police. I told the detective what I found. He sent over a uniformed person to collect the envelope, which happened very quickly. I guess about a week before we left, I got a phone call back from that detective and he said, “I found him.” I said, “You found who?” He said, “I found Charles Stuart.” I thought, “Oh yeah, I'd almost forgotten.” He said, “Yeah, you're not going to believe it but he's serving a 30-year prison sentence for rape in Virginia.”

Scott
That's way more than a coincidence.

Annie
It's got to be! This guy knew enough to know that man, Charles Stuart, lived here. They're both apparently involved in the same criminal activities. That's bizarre. But yeah, that happened. And I thought, “Well, okay, at least that gives them something to pursue while I'm out on the road, I guess.” Because I really didn't think there was much evidence.

Scott
So you didn't really have a lot of hope that this was even going to be resolved.

Annie
I don't know if I had any. After the first few weeks, I started thinking about all of the obstacles that are in their way - like every little challenge to finding out who this person is. I mean, how would you figure that out unless there were fingerprints on file unless there was some kind of something? And of course, this was pre DNA days. This was a couple of years before DNA became widely used in criminal investigations. I mean, I thought, “Well, okay, maybe they can get a blood type, but I don't think the guy ejaculated. So how would they even know that?” I felt

very, I won't say depressed about it then, but I just felt kind of resigned to it. “This was how it was going to be.”

So I went home for Christmas for a couple of weeks before we went out on tour. Two days after Christmas, I realized that I was late on my period and my mother was just as sweet and supportive as she could possibly be. She bought me, like, 2-3 different kinds of pregnancy tests, and all of them were positive. By the next day, she said, “Okay, what do you want to do?” I said, “I can't have this baby. I can't bear my rapist child. I can't.” She said, “Absolutely. Okay.”

By the end of that day, she'd arranged an abortion for me. We'd gone to the clinic. We had to wait 24 hours, even back then. Of course, now, I probably would be denied an abortion given the state that we were in but I was able to secure it and I have never regretted it not one minute, not one second since then. That was the right decision. What I regret and what I resent is being put in that position. That should not have happened to me or anybody. Nobody should have to make that choice, but I did. I made it. I'm glad that I did and it's the choice that I would support any woman making in that situation. So that was another little awful thing.

There are so many consequences to this and I was the one bearing them all. I kept thinking, “When is it his turn? When does he get to bear some of these consequences?” And through the years, I thought, “How would I know him? He could come up to me.” That was the other thing - I couldn't pull up his face in my memory. I couldn't sit here and think, “Okay, I remember certain things about his appearance and I could physically or verbally describe him.” I could not pull up the face.

So, about six months after the assault, I moved back home with my mother and I was sort of taking some time to collect myself. I was working in this retail job. I just wanted to be as low-key as possible and focus on my own healing, whatever that meant. But one of the uniformed officers in Louisville called me while I was in my new home, several states away, and he said, “I've been working on this in my spare time and I think I know who raped you. I would like to send a photo lineup to your local police department for you to look at. Are you okay with that?” I said, “I'm happy to. But you should know, I don't know that I remember his face all that well.” And he said, “That's fine. Not a problem. The person might be there or might not be there. Just do your best.”

Those officers brought the six photos to my workplace and I remember taking them into the back office because I didn't want to do this out in front of the customers, obviously. I looked at them and I thought, “There's no emotional reaction to any of them. There's no clinching in my gut. I don't think he's here, but if he is, I don't recognize him.” So that just further reinforced in my mind that I don't recognize this person. I would not recognize him. I said, “I'm so sorry. I don't recognize him.” They took the photos and that was that. It was so strange because I remember I kept thinking, “Why am I not falling apart? Why am I not having more PTSD symptoms? I seem okay. What is that about? Can I possibly really be that okay?” And I thought, “Well, you know what, if I am okay, then I should help others. And if I'm not okay, then I should be around people who understand.” To me, that meant our local rape crisis center.

Scott
The fact that you recognized that you shouldn't be okay was really smart. What triggered that, do you think? I mean, a lot of people would think, “Well, I guess it must not have been that bad because I don't feel like I'm traumatized like I would expect to be.” But you knew that didn't make sense.

Annie
Yeah. It was like a little small part of me that was sitting in observation of all this. I think that's something that maybe possibly came from yoga. I don't know. I practiced yoga for many years and one of the things that I think every teacher sort of said in some way or another was, “You don't have to react. You can step outside yourself and sort of observe what's going on.” That was sort of the precursor to mindfulness, I guess. So I was thinking in terms of, “Okay, what is going on? How am I feeling? Observe that, record that, put words to that.” But what I was observing was normal pulse. I don't seem to be overly fearful. I feel a little twitchy sometimes. Like, I've got a little too much energy but, I don't know, that might just be me being in my mid-20s in a rockin party town and I thought maybe that's what I need. I mean, I just need to go out and cut loose a little bit and I tried that for a few months, but that didn't work.

Scott
You worked as a volunteer as a rape crisis counselor.

Annie
I did. Weirdly, I saw a flyer somewhere that they were looking for volunteers, and I thought, “Okay, I'll give them a call. I don't know if I'm what they're looking for, but maybe this will help me too. And in helping others, I can sort of recover my own from my own trauma.” So I went through their training. It was three days of several hours worth of workshops, practice, and consultations. We had to practice listening to each other non-reactively, how to be supportive without feeding fear, and how to talk to police officers because a lot of the officers were maybe not the most attuned to a victim's suffering, let's say. Some of them were pretty much like I had thought those first officers responding to my rape had been. They come across as very suspicious and “You've got to prove to me that something happened to you.”

Being a counselor, my role was completely different. My role was, “I absolutely believe you. I'm here to advocate and support you.” I did that for a couple of years and I have to say that was one of the best things I could have done. It was one of the hardest things I could do. You get called at two in the morning to get to the local ER because a woman's been brought in by her roommate and she's bleeding and crying. She can't tell anybody what happened but everybody knows.

That's difficult. That will trigger all kinds of stuff if you're also a survivor. But for me, it also triggered really deep empathy, and I was able to use that at least to stand beside these people and say, “Look, I've been where you are. I have been where you are. You can come through this. I'm here for you. What do you need right now?” Because everybody else that the victim meets the night of a sexual assault wants something from her. My only focus was on her - “What do you need?” - and I found a real empowering spirit in that. I felt a little bit like an avenging warrior, like, I was going to go - not like I was going to go - chop down whoever did it although, sometimes, I probably could have quite easily, that I was there to protect a sister who had also been raped. They were usually sisters - they were predominantly women - although it's absolutely true that men can be sexually assaulted, and we all went to special training for that too.

Scott
At this point, a couple of years had gone by. Your memory of his face was fading. You really had no information about him and he seemed to have just disappeared. I can imagine, at that point, you're thinking, “Well, that's it. There's nothing more that can be done.”

Annie
That's exactly what happened. I just concluded that was a part of my life that sucked, that probably did some damage, and that I might see some results of that damage later in my life, but I hadn't yet and there was nothing else to be done. So, I sort of compartmentalized it and stuck it in a drawer and put it up on the shelf, so to speak, and I went on with life. I didn't think that it was affecting me. I see now that it was. I see now how it affected me. But at the time, even self-awareness was not enough, or at least the amount that I had wasn't sufficient. I look back now and I see it almost immediately, like, my world started to contract.

I stopped going out. I stopped doing a lot of things. Somehow, by the time we got to 2019-2020 when the pandemic hit, how everybody had to learn to live that March, I'd been living like that for years. My groceries are delivered. I hardly go out anymore. I'm like a hermit, and I do blame him and what happened to me. I blamed the rape and I blamed the rapist for making me feel like I can't leave my home, but it's not an agoraphobic thing. It's more like there is nothing out there that interests me. I'm working on that now. I'm still trying to overcome that now but that's how it was for, like, 29 years.

Scott
And that was not the end of the story. You were doing some research with the idea of writing a novel. So over this time period, 29 years, you had gone into a career of writing. Is that what you were doing at that time?

Annie
Yes, I transferred over to writing or started writing when I was, I guess, somewhere around 2008-2009. I began doing online digital writing like blogging, copywriting for websites, that kind of thing. I was working on novels or a novel, but it just wasn't coming together and I thought I just needed to put that aside and try something else. I had seen a couple of books that had been turned into movies or TV shows that were based on the author's experiences - like fictionalized accounts. They call it autofiction when it's written. I thought, “I could probably do something like that. Maybe that might suit my experiences in theater and in Louisville.”

So I started researching that and it almost occurred to me immediately, “Why have I not searched for people who have been right with the same circumstances or the same MO?” I thought I could search for the area for Louisville and I could search for late 80s, early 90s. I think he's done this before and he probably did it again after. So there are probably others out there like that who were also hurt by him and maybe we could, I don't know, compare notes and maybe come up with something that the police haven't thought of. So I did this very simple Google search and I think it was something for, like, serial rapist, 1990s Louisville, Kentucky.

The first result for me back then was a picture and a news article about a man who pleaded guilty to several counts of rape. One of the survivors was telling the story of her assault and there were a few things in there that were really similar to my assault like the way he was so angry and the fact that he had her take off her pants and lie down on the ground, and I thought, “This could be him.” I don't know what to do with this, so I went to my Facebook page and I asked all my friends on Facebook, “I think I found my rapist. What do I do?” And everyone was like, you got to call, you got to call the police department because they need to know this, “That is him. If it's not, then maybe it will help them find the person who did this to you.” I thought, “Well, that's never going to happen, but okay, fine.”

So the next day, I called the Louisville Metro Police Department and I was directed to a wonderful detective. He was trained in trauma-informed detective skills - investigative skills that took into account the victim's trauma. I told him what I had found and I said, “I don't know that you can do anything. I don't even know what you could do, but here's the information I found.” And he said, “Okay, Annie. I need to know what you want to happen with this. What's your ideal outcome?” Nobody had ever asked me that. Just like all those victims that I had served before when I was a crisis counselor, everybody wanted something from me but nobody ever asked me, “What do you want to have happen?” Well, except my mom right before the abortion, she asked me– but nobody else. And I thought, “Wow, I've waited 29 years to hear that from a police officer.”

So I told him I'd like to know who did it. I'd like to know a name. I would love for him to be put in jail but, if I can't have that, at least I'd like to know that he exists, I'd like to know his name, I'd really like to know who Charles Stuart is, and I'd like to know why he picked me, and, and, and–

Scott
Well, he asked, right?

Annie
He asked, and he said, “Okay. I think I can probably help you with some of that. I don't know if I can help you with all of it but I will do whatever I can.” He was absolutely 100% true to his word. He went above and beyond to help me out. He immediately pulled the file. When he pulled the written file, he was calling me daily to update me on what he had found, which I really, truly appreciated because I had never before really been kept in the loop at all. What he told me would just astonish me because these detectives from the original round had not ignored me. They did believe me. They did try their best to find this guy.

They had 12 suspects identified at one point and they ruled them out with DNA. In July 2019, that was the first time I learned that he had left behind DNA. They had samples. I thought that was amazing. That's huge. But they had ruled out all the other guys. So none of the ones that were in that original photo lineup that I looked at earlier– all of them had been ruled out. So we're basically starting from square one with a bunch of people ruled out and a few leads. But his DNA would be great if we could find somebody and match it to you. So, to get it into CODIS which did not exist at the time– it came around a few years after that.

Scott
Is that, like, the DNA database?

Annie
That is the Combined Offender DNA something– I can't remember the rest of it. Yes. That's what most law enforcement agencies now have access to. So they could put in a DNA profile and see if that person has been apprehended or incarcerated before. If they've been given any kind of DNA sample or if their DNA was collected at a different crime scene, that would be in the system.

Scott
So kind of like a 23andMe for bad guys.

Annie

Exactly. So I thought, “All right, well, we'll see.” And he's like, “It's going to take two to three months.” And I said, “That's fine. I waited 29 years. I can wait a couple of months.” So he went and he found my kit in this huge warehouse. The warehouse had moved– like, all the databases and all the kits had been moved physically in the intervening years. So I thought the fact that they still have my kit and my file was nothing short of amazing to me. The fact that he could find it was incredible. He looked inside and he went, “There's a couple of pieces of evidence here that have not been tested yet.” And I thought, “Okay, what does that mean?” And he's like, “Well, if we can find DNA on these pieces of evidence, then we have a clean sample we can put into CODIS and see if he's been entered in there before, see if we know who he is.” And I thought, “Oh, okay.” All of a sudden, after 29 years of nothing, things were moving so fast. All of this took place in just a couple of weeks, really.

Scott
But were you thinking at the time, “It sounds like this is really good, but I don't want to get my hopes up”?

Annie
Oh, gosh, absolutely. Yes. Even at that point, I really did not think the detective would be able to finally resolve this or solve the case. I really didn't think that was going to happen because I thought, if it were going to happen, then it wouldn't have already happened. He had 30 years to commit crimes and be arrested and if he's not already in there, then– well, it turns out he was.

Sometime, I think, in August, the detective called me and said, “They found DNA on the evidence that I submitted - the new evidence that has not been tested yet. They found a DNA profile. It's not yours. It's male. They're going to enter that into CODIS and see.” A couple of months after that, he called me back and said, “We got him. We know who he is.” The kicker is, if I had done this a year before, he would not have been in the CODIS database. It was an assault that he committed and pleaded guilty to, and part of his plea was he had to submit his DNA, and that was done a year before I called. That's the only reason that they could find him.

So they found him and he had a name. I didn't know the name. I didn't get any of that information. The detectives said, “Well, my job now is to go make contact with him and I just want to get him to commit to a couple of facts and be put on record as saying this. That way, I can use that information against him later if it plays out the way I think it's going to.” So he found a couple of photos of me at my younger age and he went to this person's apartment. He asked him very clearly about what I'm here for. I guess he took, like, kind of this sort of self-deprecating, “I've got to follow these things up, you know how it is. I don't really expect anything and I don't know that I necessarily believe anything happened.”

Scott
Just a formality.

Annie
Just a formality. Have you met her? Do you know her? And he said, “No, I've never seen her before in my life. I've never met her.” And he said, “Okay, so you haven't been in her apartment.” And he gave the address and he kind of paused. “No, I don't remember ever being in that apartment.” He kind of stuttered a little bit, I guess, but he was very clear, “No, not him. He didn't do it.” So the detective said, “All right, well, would you be willing to do a DNA test just to rule yourself out?” And he kind of pulled back. He went, “I'd have to talk to a lawyer about that” or something like that. And I thought, “Okay, well, I trust the DNA. I'm not sure I would trust

my perception of it but I trust the DNA. I trust the science." So the next thing the detective wanted me to do was another photo lineup. So he sent the six photos to my local police department. On December 6, 2019, I went to see if I could identify any of them. This was the second experience I'd had with the photo lineup and the first one was not good.

Scott
You didn't even remember the face then, right?

Annie
No, it was just such a hit to my self-esteem too that I couldn't figure it out, I didn't know who this was or recognize him. But the reason I couldn't recognize him is he wasn't in it because, as soon as this detective, she laid out the photos in front of me and she was going over, "Okay, here's what I want you to do. Pick one." My eyes just went immediately to this one picture and I just said, "That's him. That's him." I was so sure. Everything in my body reacted like, "That's him. That is him." My hands were shaking and I looked up at her and she said, "Honey, are you okay? Do you need a tissue?" That was the moment when I realized I was crying. I didn't know I was crying but there were tears coming out of my eyes looking at this man who attacked me and I knew that was him. I recognized it. That was a very big moment for me.

Scott
You were looking at a picture of him having aged 30 years also, right? Or was it a younger picture of him?

Annie
It was slightly younger but he was older than he had been at the time. Everybody in the photo lineup looked about the same age - like 40 to 60, somewhere in that range - so I identified the person. I wrote down my name, my initials, I did all that stuff. She sent it off to the detective in Louisville and I went back home and just waited. Then, I started second-guessing myself again, "Oh, maybe I was wrong. I don't know." But I got a phone call from the detective that afternoon and he said, "You did it. That's him. That's the guy." And I said, "Okay, what now?" She said, "Well, tomorrow is the 29th anniversary, isn't it?" I said, "Yeah, it is December 7th." He was, "I'm going to give you an early Christmas present. I'm going to go arrest this guy." And he did.

Scott
Everybody listening right now is saying, "Yes!!!"

Annie
Me too. I mean, he downplayed it a lot when he was telling me the story. What I heard was he was in there with, like, his boss and a captain or something and they were in the car and they were staking the guy out. I mean, it was literally like Law and Order Louisville SVU. His brother came and drove up behind or into the driveway or whatever. The brother saw the detective's car and noted that it was the detective. He knew who I was so I thought I was going to have to go– I have to go now. I cannot wait for this. So when his brother pulled back in, Roscoe literally ran to the guy - the rapist ran down the stairs to get into his brother's car, I guess, and the detective sort of hopped over the end of the car. I imagine it was like one of those slide-on-the-trunk moves like Starsky and Hutch or it might not have been. But in my head, that's what it was.

And he's like, "Hey, you going anywhere?" And the guy said, "Oh, I'm going out of town to see my daughter." And he goes, "No, I'm afraid not. Step out of the car, please." So he arrested him and they did a second DNA test and it matched the evidence again, completely. So he was

charged and arraigned. He was given a bail of - God bless Kentucky - $250,000. And that kept him in jail until his case was disposed of in 2022.

Scott
So he was in jail for how long before the trial started?

Annie
Well, for December 7th, 2019 until October 2022 - like the first week of October.

Scott
Almost three years.

Annie
He eventually accepted a plea deal and it was not a terribly long sentence, but he had already been in jail for three years too. So I thought, “You know what, I'm okay with this. I just want this over. Through the attorney, I was the victim's applicant, I guess. I said, “I would like to do a plea deal. I'm happy to do a plea deal, but I want him to sit down with me and I want him to answer these questions that I have.” And they posed that to him. Although they were not in favor of it - none of them were really - they said, “Okay, we'll ask.” And his response was, “How can I admit to something that I don't remember doing?” The wording of that just struck me - not “I can't talk about something I didn't do, but something I don't remember doing.” I thought, “I don't believe you, I think you do remember it. I think you don't want to, but I think you do remember it.” He had a very long rap sheet, none of which were sexual assaults as far as I know, so mine seems to have been an anomaly in his career, but he was a criminal. He had a long, lengthy history with law enforcement.

Scott
Or he had sexual assaults and just never got caught for them.

Annie
That's entirely possible. There's going to be a lot of things out there that he never got identified. I don't know if there's DNA in those other cases or not, if they even exist but, hopefully, now that he's in there and he has this charge on this record, then maybe they can find them.

Scott
He had to be thinking after 29 years, “I'm free. I got away with that one.”

Annie
You've got to think that he would. I mean, that is a long time and you'd think you're scot-free. Then, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, this Louisville detective comes up and says, “Hey, by the way, remember this woman?”

Scott
So he's currently in prison, right?

Annie
He is, yes. He pleaded guilty to second-degree rape, sodomy, and burglary and he was sentenced to 6 years or so and three of his time served. So yeah, I mean, he could get out as early as next year but I am firmly connected to Kentucky's Victims Notification System. I will get

a phone call. I will get an email if anything changes with respect to his incarceration or release date but I also go and check the website every couple of weeks just to be sure.

Scott
And the other thing too is he's going to turn 76 years old later this year. Did you ever get any answers about why he targeted you? Have you tried to contact him at all?

Annie
I have not tried to contact him. The detective also asked as the victim's advocate, I think. If I could pose those questions, the answer that we got back every time was, “I don't remember. I don't remember doing it.” In fact, he even tried to assert that at the plea hearing. I'm pretty sure I was listening in. I was participating via phone and the judge gave me time to make my statement. I read a statement of impact and I got to the end of it and I was shaking. I was just like, “I can't believe this is over.” I was sort of, again, filled with that adrenaline dump and trying to process all that.

But I heard him start to speak over the judge. The next thing I heard, I heard him say something like, “But I– but I–” and his lawyers just said, “Shh. Shh.” I literally heard them hush him. I definitely heard the judge say, “Mr. Smith, I would strongly advise you not to say another word right now.” And he didn't. He took the hint and he was silent from that point on. But I would love to know, did he just see me while he was prowling around looking for his old friend?

Scott
Yeah, was it a crime of opportunity?

Annie
That turned into a target? I don't know. Probably. I think that's probably the case. But I knew it was him. Here's the other thing that was very reassuring to me because when this happens to you, and it's a stranger, and you have to recount all of these details, you feel this incredible pressure to be accurate and not to get anything wrong, not to claim knowledge of something that isn't right, or at least I did.

I knew certain facts and I was trying to communicate those facts. I remember saying very clearly, “He's six foot three.” And they were like, “How do you know he's six foot three?” And I said, “Because last week, my friend from Chicago drove down to see me and he spent the weekend with me and he is six foot three and I know what he feels like standing next to me. I know where his head comes and where my head comes to him. This was exactly that.” I was very insistent on that. I found out through the reopening of the case that everybody who saw it, there were three other people who saw him that night who described him the same way. I didn't even know that the other eyewitnesses existed but they saw him and they all said, “Yeah, he's very tall around 6'3, 6'5, somewhere around there. In fact, he was 6'3 exactly.”

Scott
He's going to be eligible for release in the next year or two. Do you have a plan of action for when he gets out? I mean, you're several states away, so that's a good thing.

Annie
It is.

Scott

But what have you thought about when that happens?

Annie
I mean, realistically, I don't think that he has the resources to come after me. If he does– I mean, that's a good question. I've got certain things that I do for my protection that I've always done since this happened and maybe I'll beef that up a little bit, but I will be prepared. Better believe it. And if it happens again, I'm not going to hesitate this time. You should know that.

Scott
What's your incentive for wanting to get this story out to people?

Annie
Well, there's a couple of things. One is that sexual assault is such a common experience, especially for women and I want other women to know they're not alone. If this happens to them, they can survive it and they can come through the other side with some kind of justice. I want them to know that, first of all. Second, and might even be more important, there are so many rape kits out there in police warehouses all across this country. Some of them may not even be viable anymore because they haven't been preserved well. The ones that are there need to be tested. Every single kit needs to be looked at and needs to be tested. In my case, he would never have been found if the detective hadn't gone and physically pulled the kit and found two pieces of clothing that had not been tested and sent those into the state lab in Kentucky for testing. We would not be here. I wouldn't be talking to you today.

Scott
And that's only because you called.

Annie
Well, yeah, that's true too. I mean, you've got to call and you've got to be a little in-your-face about it sometimes. I would wish that everybody would get an astonishingly caring and competent detective like I did. A lot of them aren't, probably most, and that's unfortunate, but okay, whatever. Do what you can with what you've got. Finally, I guess, to police departments everywhere, I would say, you all need to start training your detectives in trauma-informed techniques for investigation and for hailing witness interviews because that made all the difference to me. He made me feel like I was, if not driving the train, then at least in the area. I was being consulted and that is so empowering and helpful, and it's really crucial. It's been crucial to my healing, to be honest with you.

Rape is a crime of– it's not a crime of sex. It's about power and control. As long as you're in your rapist's presence, you don't have that control. It's something that we all take for granted. I can move my body. I can get away from you. I can say, “Not now, you can't be in my space.” But what if you can't? And you are subjected to somebody else's vile, cruel impulses. Well, you've lost control for that little bit of time and the only way to heal - and I believe this firmly - is to get it back, to be in control, to be given the authority to be in control of your case, to say, “I want you to go after this guy. I want to pursue this. What do you need from me?” But that takes a lot of guts sometimes. It really does.

Scott
You had a lot of guts. You did it.

Annie

I don't know if I did or if I just moved so fast that I sort of didn't realize that. But either way, it worked out.

Scott
I think, for detectives that get a cold case like this resolved, they should get a bonus or something.

Annie
I absolutely 1,000% agree. This guy took a 30-year-old case and ran with it and nailed it shut within four months, and he did it on the anniversary of the crime. I can't tell you how meaningful that was to me. Like, he gave me back that day.

Three years later, after Smith had pleaded guilty, I remember posting on Facebook, “Wow. For the first time in 30-plus years, today is only Pearl Harbor day.” That's all it is. I mean, that's a big day, obviously, but it's not what it was for me. It wasn't like my personal Armageddon day. So that was a huge gift that he gave me and I really appreciated it.

Scott
I think Annie is amazing. It takes a lot of courage to talk about the details of the trauma she went through. But she wants other victims to know that they’re not alone.

If you’re in a situation where you’re being abused sexually, help is available. You can contact RAINN – that’s R A I N N, which stands for the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network. You can call their hotline any day, any time. That number is 800-656-4673. You can also chat with them directly on their website, which is at R A I N N dot org. I’ll have that information in the episode notes.

Also in the episode notes, you can get Annie’s full Victim Impact Statement that she read as part of the sentencing process. And you can see pictures of Annie! The episode notes are at WhatWasThatLike.com/171.

A few episodes back, my guest was Julie, who talked about what it was like to be a hospice worker. That prompted Heather to send in this voice mail –

Heather
Hi Scott, my name is Heather and I was just listening to your podcast about Julie, the hospice nurse. I have a little story for you from when my mother passed away back in 1992. She was in a palliative care hospital receiving hospice care, I guess, you could say. There were four siblings. We had all been called in because she was supposed to pass away that evening. She was exhibiting symptoms. She had been kind of in an unresponsive state for a few days - maybe four or five days. Before that, she was exhibiting strange behaviors like eating things that weren't really there and that kind of thing. They called us all in and they said you might want to come in tonight because this could be her last night. So, we all went down and we sat there for several hours. Then, the nurse came in and checked her, and she said, “Well, she seems to have rallied, so it's not going to be this evening, so you might as well go home.” So we all went home.

The next day, I went in. I came around the corner and my mother was sitting up in bed talking to her friend, Mary. I was so stunned I couldn't even talk. She looked at me and she went, “Oh,

hi Heather. Can you do me a favor and go get Mary a coffee down the hall? There was a little kitchenette down there." So I said, "Yeah, sure. Mary, can I see you out in the hall?" So Mary came out and I told her what had happened the night before. She said, "Oh, she seems fine to me. She was sleeping when I got here. But then, she woke up and we had a conversation." She'd been there for half an hour, so I just was so stunned.

So I went down to the kitchenette. There was a nurse sitting in there doing some paperwork. I turned on the kettle and whatever, and she said, "Strange how that happens, isn't it?"
And I said, "Oh, you know what's going on down there?" And she said, "Oh yeah, I see it all the time." And I said, "Oh yeah, it's bizarre. We were just here last night because she was supposed to die and now she's sitting up in bed. I don't get it." And she said, "Is she really close to that woman?" And I said, "Oh yes, they've been friends for many years. They're very good friends." And she said, "Well, was she away somewhere?" And I said, "Yes, actually, she was over in Holland visiting family." And she said, "Well, I bet you she said, 'I'll see you when I get back from my trip'." My mother was just holding on, waiting for her to come.

The next day when I went in, my mother was back unresponsive. The next day, I think she had the death rattle. She was dying of lung cancer and then it turned to metastasized brain cancer. So I was sitting there and I was only 23 years old. My father had passed away when I was 17, so this was my last parent. So I was sitting in the room with her. She would breathe and then it would be really shallow. Then, I'd look and wonder if she had passed, and she didn't pass, and then she'd gasp, and it was really terrifying, actually. And I was afraid of death. I'd always been afraid of death, but I didn't want her to die alone.

So anyway, I went down to the kitchenette to see if there was anybody there who could come and sit with me and there was a nurse in there. She said, "Oh, I'm really sorry. We're a little short-staffed today." And I said, "Oh, okay." So I went back into my mom's room and next thing the nurse comes in and she's got my mom's little table thing. She had set that up so that she could do her paperwork so I wouldn't have to be alone. So that was very nice.

So I sat there all day, literally, from probably 6 in the morning. Then, my sister-in-law and my brother came in right after they finished work - so probably about 5 o'clock. I was a smoker but I didn't smoke all day because I didn't want to leave my mother alone. So, as soon as they came in, I got up and went into the smoking-room again. This was a long time ago so, yes, there was still a smoking room in the hospital. So I went in and I just sat down and lit my cigarette. Then, my sister-in-law came running in and she said, "Heather, your mother passed away." And I was so angry that she had done that. I sat there all day long against my wishes, I guess you could say. I didn't want her to be alone, but I didn't want to see her die either. It was kind of a very torn experience for me. Anyway, I was very upset about that.

Then, one of the nurses was in the smoking room talking to one of the patients and she came up to me because I was beside myself. I was very, very upset, crying and crying because she had passed away, but crying because she purposely waited till I was out of the room.
That's how it seemed to me. So she said, "Well, you're the baby and she probably knew that you didn't really want to be there, and you were just doing it for her. So as soon as she felt there was somebody in the room with her that could handle her passing away, she passed." So just listening to Julie's stories brought back a lot of memories for me. So I thought I would call and share them with you. I love your podcast. I've called in a couple of other times. Anyway, take care and keep up the great work and interesting stories.

Scott
And if you'd like to listen to Julie talking about her hospice work, that's episode 168 titled "Julie is a hospice nurse".

I always welcome any comments or questions about any episode. If you have something to say, you can record it and send it to me like Heather did. Or you can come on over to the Facebook group and join over 6000 other listeners for some super interesting discussions. And you can answer our new question every Tuesday! That's at WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

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

And here we are at this week's Listener Story. You know who sent this in? A listener – just like you. We want to hear your story! Just something interesting that happened to you, that you can tell in about 5-10 minutes. Record it on your phone and email it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

This story is about a boss, who had something important to say.

Stay safe! I'll see you next time.

(Listener story)

This happened in the summer of 1982. It was a summer job between high school graduation and college. I got a job with a group of other kids who were in my high school - about five of them - at a country club, and we were basically a mixture of janitors and laundry people. Where we work was not air-conditioned. It was really hot. The laundry place with dryers and no ventilation got extremely hot. Someone even passed out. We had to wear these course uniforms. It was a little uncomfortable, but that was fine.

Now, I have to give a little background. I worked at a Jewish country club because I'm Jewish. Because the other two country clubs in my town were restricted, there were no Jews allowed and no people of color. Our boss was this older German woman in her mid to late seventies, and she was very sprightly and very stern. She had very high standards and I really wanted to please her. I'm pretty much the only one who went above and beyond, and she really liked me because I was a good worker. This group of high school students– all of them made fun of me because I was like the teacher's pet. We kind of jokingly said, "Oh yeah, she was probably a Nazi, ha-ha-ha-ha."

Little by little, she'd invite me a little bit each day to come into her air-conditioned office and she would serve me cake and Start to tell me about her life before, during, and after World War II in Germany. Over the course of a couple of weeks, I heard more bits of the story that she wanted to tell me. Basically, what I remember is that she had such a great marriage. She met her husband before the war. He was, I believe, a mechanic and he joined the Nazi party because his boss made him do that and he just went along. She said that, as things kind of got worked up in Germany, people saw something in Hitler because things had been so bad before. Her husband was drafted and went to war.

The war ended and that's when the whole concentration camp stuff came out. At this point, she got very emotional. I mean, there was some crying and she said, "We didn't know. We didn't

realize. Nobody knew. I was 17 and I didn't know how to process it." So I was like, "Well, I'm in air conditioning and I've got cake. That's good." She told me what happened to her husband. He was captured by the Soviets, ended up in a gulag, and eventually sent back home. By the time he returned, he was so emaciated. His health was so bad. He had been tortured. I think he had broken bones - they didn't heal well. He was just in really bad shape and he died soon after. She was bawling.

I didn't really know what to make of it, so I just listened and I supposed she was confessing to me like I was a surrogate jew and I was going to forgive her. Other kids I worked with weren't Jewish, so she picked me to confess to, I suppose. So the summer ended. I went off to college and I thought maybe I'd write something about it. I thought maybe I could make some meaning about it, but I didn't. I just went on with my life and that was my summer job before college.