

## **Episode 181: Evi was spied on**

I remember one of my first Airbnb experiences.

I was traveling just here in Florida, and I had to stay one night on the other side of the state – in Delray Beach. I picked out a room, and reserved it, and waited for the host to approve it. Back then, I didn't have much history so there weren't many other hosts who could confirm that I was a good guest. But it got approved.

And when I got there, I found out the host was an older woman – and I was her very first guest. And she was so nice! She actually cooked me a full meal, and I helped her out with some computer issues she was having, and we hit it off nicely.

But still, I couldn't help thinking – that night, I was sleeping in one room, and she was sleeping in the room right down the hallway from mine, and it just seemed like it was kind of a dangerous thing for her to do, since she didn't know me.

And apparently her friends had some concerns too. The next morning, while we were eating breakfast, she said one of her friends called her first thing that morning and asked, "So he didn't murder you or anything?"

That was years ago, but now, it's just a common thing – you rent a room in someone's house, you get a place to sleep, they make some money, and everyone's happy. At least that's how it usually works.

My guest today, Evi, was traveling as a young single woman, and ended up staying with a family in exchange for doing a little bit of work for them.

And after staying there one night, she made a horrifying discovery.

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**Scott**

Where is home for you?

**Evi**

Home for me is Hungary.

**Scott**

Okay. So you live in Hungary and this all started when you applied for what's called a work and holiday visa for New Zealand. How does that work? And why did you decide to do that?

**Evi**

I was working in an office in Hungary. That time, one of my colleagues quit his job and told us that he's going to go to New Zealand with his wife because he got this special visa. I got really interested about it so I asked him what it is and how he got it. Then, he told me about this work and holiday visa. For Hungarians, each year, 100 people can get it and you have to apply in April. So, at midnight in April, they open the application and the first hundred people who fill out the form can actually get the visa. You still have to go to a medical check. If that's okay, then you have the chance to go to New Zealand.

This visa is for one year. This visa is for under the age of 35. So, if you are older, you can't apply for it. For Hungarians with this visa, you can travel to New Zealand and work, like, legally but, for us, it's only three months in one place. So, after three months, we would have to go and work somewhere else. It's different for every country.

**Scott**

And how old were you when you did that?

**Evi**

I was 28 when I applied and got the visa. I was quite lucky because, in a few minutes, that hundred places were gone. So, I was very lucky to get the visa. I tried it for the first time and I got it.

**Scott**

It seems so random that people in Hungary are so competitive to get to New Zealand. What's the attraction of New Zealand? Or is it just because your coworker went there?

**Evi**

No, New Zealand is a very beautiful country but it's very far from us. So, Hungarians wouldn't go there for a holiday because a one-way flight ticket would cost more than a month of salary. So, normally, Hungarians don't go there. But if you have the chance to go there and stay there for a year and work and earn money, that's very good. It's not just for New Zealand. Work holiday visas are also for Taiwan, Japan, and Australia. So we have maybe 10 countries where we can get this visa.

**Scott**

Okay. All right. You just chose New Zealand. I've never been there, but it seems like a really beautiful place.

**Evi**

I love nature and New Zealand is beautiful.

**Scott**

Yeah. From what I've read, you seem like a really kind of outdoors-type person, right? You like to hike and explore new places.

**Evi**

Yeah, exactly. I love it.

**Scott**

Also, you registered with a website called HelpX. How does that work?

**Evi**

So after I got the visa, I was talking to other people who went to New Zealand and they suggested that it's a good idea to volunteer when you are there. So I looked into these websites where you can volunteer, do a few hours of work for a family, and they give you accommodation and food for that few hours. So I registered. I chose HelpX because I think it's a good site. So I chose them. I registered there and that's how it started.

**Scott**

So it's just like a place for people who have a room and want to have someone come and do some work and you can connect with the people that want to travel and kind of move around the country, but also you pay your own way just by working.

**Evi**

Yeah, you can go and stay on a farm. They need some help on a farm but they don't want to pay anyone, but they have room for people to stay there, or it can be a hostel and they just want someone to work there for free. This is mostly for, like, travelers. So it's a good way for them to travel and stay for free in exchange for a few hours of work.

**Scott**

You didn't go straight to New Zealand, right? You did some backpacking first. What did you do before you got there?

**Evi**

Yeah. So because it's quite a long flight and I wanted to explore a bit more, I flew to Bangkok first and I had three weeks until I had to catch another flight from Kuala Lumpur, from Malaysia to New Zealand. I had three weeks to explore a bit, so I backpacked around Thailand and Malaysia.

**Scott**

All right. Then you arrived in New Zealand. What happened when you got there?

**Evi**

When I got there, I landed in Auckland and I was looking for a job, and I found the job. I was selling strawberries for three months. After that was finished, I bought a car and started to travel.

**Scott**

What do you have to do to be able to drive there? Do you have an international driver's license?

**Evi**

No, actually for the first year, if you are only staying for one year, you don't need to do anything. Your Hungarian license is fine. If you stay longer, then you have to apply for a New Zealand driving license.

**Scott**

At that point, is that when you started looking around for - a host on the HelpX site?

**Evi**

Yeah. After I got in my car and I started to travel— at that time, actually, I traveled with a German girl and an Aussie guy. We traveled together on the North part of the North Island and I decided that I didn't want to go back to Auckland yet and I asked a German girl if she wanted to do HelpX with me. I told her about this volunteer thing, about the HelpX site, and she said she wants to do that with me. So then, I called around— the HelpX site is very good because it has a map. So, it shows you where the hosts are. So I knew where we were and I wanted to stay in that area. I looked up the hosts and I called them on the phone if they needed any help and one

of the families said, yes, they actually want some help. So we drove there and we stayed with them for one week.

**Scott**

And what kind of work were you doing there?

**Evi**

They had two very nice, like, chalets and we had to clean them because they were renting it out. They were all on an island and they rented these, like, little cabins out and we were cleaning that. So we had four hours a day.

**Scott**

And then you got a message from another host. Normally, you contact the host and say, "Hey, can I come and stay for these dates or whatever?" But this time this host named Tom contacted you.

**Evi**

Yeah. So that was, like, half a year after my first heart attacks, I believe. I was traveling both on the North Island and South Island. I stopped to work on the South Island for three more months in a tomato grass house. At that time, I got a message from Tom who was a HelpX host on the North Island in Wellington and he asked me if I wanted to go and help his family. I told him at that moment, "I don't want to do that because I'm working on the South Island and I wasn't planning to volunteer." But we started to chat because he was telling me that, a few weeks ago, they were in Europe and they had such a good time. They had a lot of helpers before and some of those people kept in touch with them.

**Scott**

So they wanted to go visit the people that had stayed at their place.

**Evi**

Yeah. So when they were visiting Europe, they also met some of these people, these girls, and these girls showed them, like, their country. Tom told me that they were also in Hungary. So we were chatting about that because they had a Hungarian helper before and she was very good. She showed them around in Hungary. Her family welcomed them.

**Scott**

So he already had a good experience with someone else from Hungary. Is that why he contacted you to see if you wanted a place to stay?

**Evi**

I have no idea why he contacted me because, by that time, I didn't use the site for two months, so I didn't refresh my profile. So, even if you do a search, you would see the ones who are actively looking. So I don't know how he found me because I wasn't looking at that time.

**Scott**

Okay, so he reached out to you. Who was in his family?

**Evi**

His family was him, his wife, and a 6-year-old daughter. But he also had a first marriage and, in that marriage, he had a 16 years old daughter and a 21 year old son but they were not living

with him. So, that time when he was looking for help, he was living with his wife and young daughter.

**Scott**

On this website, are you able to look and see reviews from previous helpers or how did you check him out?

**Evi**

Yes. On your profile, you write a lot of information about yourself. But if you are a host, you write down what you need help with. Also, you've got ratings. So if someone stayed with you before, they can leave a rating after they stayed with you. So for hosts, the guests/helpers will leave a rating and, for us helpers, the hosts can leave a rating. So everyone who's contacting you, they can see other people's opinion on you. For Tom's profile, I saw that his family only had 5-star ratings. I don't remember exactly how many they have but they were all five stars and I think there were maybe 10. So for that side, that's quite good. Normally, you would have three or four.

**Scott**

That kind of made you more comfortable going to their house then?

**Evi**

Yeah. I only had one rating, so 10 rating was very good.

**Scott**

How did you end up going there? Did you just go straight there? How did that happen?

**Evi**

I discovered the whole South Island. After I finished my three months working, I was planning to go back to the North Island because I still had the East Coast there to discover. That was the only part I hadn't seen. Tom lives in Wellington and, to go back to the North Island, you have to take the ferry from the South Island. Wellington is the place where you're going to arrive when you take the ferry. I agreed that I would stay with his family for one week and I would help them when I go back to the north.

**Scott**

Tom's family was in Wellington, right?

**Evi**

Yes.

**Scott**

So the ferry goes there. That's where you were going to get off. So you figured, "Okay, I'll just go there for a week."

**Evi**

When I arrived, it was a Monday. It was in August 2019. It was dinner time and the family was having dinner when I arrived. They welcomed me to the table. We were chatting. The wife was quiet but Tom was very talkative. So we chatted with him. We also talked about a trip to Europe and everything was okay. After that, Tom showed me the whole house. He showed me where my bedroom is going to be and he showed me the bathroom I can use. He was very proud

because he told me— I believe he said nine years ago. I'm not sure, but that's how I remember it. He said, nine years ago, he redone the bathroom. So I complimented him that it's a very nice job. After that, we went back to the living room. The little girl went to sleep because it was late. The wife started to read in the living room. Tom was using his computer. I also got my Kindle, so I stayed in the living room with them in case they wanted to get to know me a little bit better.

After a while, Tom finished on the computer and he came to chat. We were talking about HelpX and about previous experiences on it. He was telling me that they had very good experiences except for two occasions when they had two bad experiences with two ladies who were very dirty. He was telling me these stories and I had a strange feeling that something's not okay, I don't know. I just had this intuition that maybe I'm being manipulated somehow by these stories. I had a previous bad experience couchsurfing in Jordan when I had the same feeling. I felt very unsafe there and I was very scared. This time when I was talking to Tom, I had the same feeling. I didn't understand why but I was feeling like something was off. We were chatting for a little bit and then I decided to go to my room and have a shower because it was quite late. So I went to my room. I left them in the living room.

**Scott**

How is the house laid out? Is the living room near your bedroom and bathroom?

**Evi**

No, it was quite a big house. As you go into the house, the living room was on the left side and there was a hallway leading to the right. At the end of the hallway, there was my room. Across my room was the bathroom. Between these two rooms was another door. I didn't know where that leads because Tom didn't show me that one. It was, like, on the opposite end of the house - the living room and the place where I was staying.

**Scott**

Okay, so you went to take a shower.

**Evi**

Yes, I went to take a shower. Tom gave me a towel when he was showing me around, so I took that towel with me. This is winter time in New Zealand. This is August, it's winter, so it was quite cold. Where I lived, the house was very cold and even the water. So, when I was having a shower, I had to open the tap and wait for a few minutes until the water was warm. I was used to doing this for three months so, this time, I did the same. I opened the tap like how I normally did.

I started to brush my teeth. When I was brushing my teeth, I heard weird noises. As I go into the bathroom, to my right, there is a sink. At the sink, there is a mirror but, on my right on the wall, there was another mirror. So as I'm brushing my teeth, I hear weird noises. It was a little bit like animals moving inside the wall or something like that. I didn't know what the sound was but it was strange. So I looked into that little mirror on my right. I put my face right up to it, like, looking inside. Then, I checked if I could take it off but it was a built-in mirror, so I couldn't take it off. And the noise stopped. So I was like, "Okay, whatever, maybe it was the pipes or something." Then I undressed and got into the shower. As I was showering, I really felt like someone was watching me, so I felt very uncomfortable. That mirror was right behind me.

**Scott**

The way this is set up— if you're standing at the sink, if you look to the left, that's the shower?

**Evi**

Correct.

**Scott**

And still facing the sink, if you look to the right, that's the other mirror.

**Evi**

Correct.

**Scott**

So the mirror is facing the shower right across the sink. ?

**Evi**

Yes, that's correct. I was very uneasy and I really didn't want to turn around to face that mirror but I had to. The towel was behind me so I had to turn to get it, and I did. Then, I noticed this towel was very small so I couldn't even cover myself with it. But I got out of the shower, got dressed, and then I left the bathroom, I went into the bedroom and closed the door. As I closed the door, a few minutes or seconds later, I heard footsteps going towards the living room.

**Scott**

So someone was near your bedroom at that time.

**Evi**

Yeah. I find that strange because the time before I went into the bathroom, no one was in that part of the house.

**Scott**

Is there anything else in that part of the house where someone would need to be there?

**Evi**

Well, there was that one door between the bedroom and the bathroom that I didn't know what was in there, so I had no idea. I find it strange. I sent a message to two of my friends in Hungary. We had, like, a little group chat on messenger and I told them like, "Oh, I felt very paranoid while I was having a shower. Someone is watching me. Then I heard these footsteps. It's so strange." But I actually didn't believe, like, someone was watching me. I just told them this is strange but I don't know what's going on. But that time, I decided that I will check that third door the next day just to make sure that no one was actually watching me.

**Scott**

Did you feel like, "Oh, this is silly, I'm just being paranoid"? Or did you think it was really something?

**Evi**

Well, I watched too many movies - like, these things happen in movies. So, I was thinking, "Okay, I watched too many of them." There were clues, there were strange things, but I was just thinking, "Okay, tomorrow I will check and just make sure that nothing is going on." So the next day when I woke up, Tom was in the kitchen with his daughter and they were discussing that she didn't feel so well. I believe she wasn't in school on Monday. So, the day I arrived, she wasn't in school because she didn't feel so well. She didn't want to go to school the next day

either. So they were discussing this and then Tom asked me if it would be all right if the girl stayed home with me and I said, "Of course, it's all right." So yeah, that happened. The girl stayed with me and the parents went to work.

**Scott**

And what was your plan for the day? Did they assign you any jobs or anything?

**Evi**

When we agreed that the daughter would stay at home, I asked if I can do anything else, if they want me to clean something or what else can I do? Then, Tom told me that I can clean the upstairs bathroom. So that was all that he asked me to clean and just look after his daughter. We also had a little chat in the morning and he was looking at me very intensely. I don't know. He was looking into my eyes for a long time and I was looking into his eyes, so I didn't look away. He was also telling me a weird story about a show. He was a former teacher. He was a drama and history teacher and he told me a strange story about a show the students made, and we had a chat about that.

**Scott**

You said he was looking at you intensely. How did you interpret that? It sounds very uncomfortable.

**Evi**

Yes, it was a bit uncomfortable. I don't know why that happened.

**Scott**

What you've said so far made it seem like Tom is a rather odd person.

**Evi**

Yeah. Even like the night before, when he was telling me about the bad experiences they had, sometimes, he looked down on the ground and he had this strange smile on his face, like, he zoomed out a little bit. I find that a bit creepy. So yeah, he looked down, had this smile for a bit, and then looked back up and continued with his story.

**Scott**

Yeah, that's a little weird.

**Evi**

The parents left and I stayed with the girl. We went upstairs to look for some games we could play. She decided that she didn't want to play. She would rather watch a movie and I said, "Fine." So I left her in the living room and then I went upstairs to clean the bathroom we discussed before. So I cleaned the bathroom and then I remembered that I was planning to check that third mirror at the end of the hallway. So I went downstairs and I put my hand on the handle and my heart started to be very fast, like adrenaline. I opened the door and then I noticed I was in the garage. On my left side was the wall that shares the bathroom. So this is the other side of the mirror, the little mirror on the right. I noticed there were two boards. There was a pinboard and a whiteboard on that wall. I put my hand on them and I was able to slide the pinboard to the left. Then, I put my hand on the whiteboard and I was able to slide it too. When I did this, I got to the back of the mirror and there was a big envelope. I bent down the envelope and I could see straight into the bathroom.



**Scott**

When you saw that, what was going through your head?

**Evi**

I got really scared that, somehow, the parents got notified that I went into that room. There was a sensor or I don't know that somehow they noticed and they're going to come home and I will be in trouble.

**Scott**

Yeah, because you knew immediately Tom is a bad person when you found that.

**Evi**

Well, I didn't know who it was. But yeah, I thought it's probably Tom.

**Scott**

The thing that I would be concerned about is - you were in the garage - what if they had a camera with motion detection so they know when someone goes in the garage? They could have immediately been notified on their phone, "Oh, Evi's in the garage."

**Evi**

Yeah, that's exactly what I thought. I quickly went into my bedroom and I got my phone and my camera. With those, I recorded a video going from the bathroom all the way to the back of the mirror. I also took pictures. I had a friend. I became very good friends with this other backpacker. So I sent him the videos, the pictures. I sent him the address where I am. I sent him Tom's phone number and I told him what happened. I sent him a message so, in case something happens to me, he knows what's going on and where to go.

**Scott**

That was very smart,

**Evi**

But I was scared.

**Scott**

Yeah. You were scared but you were protecting yourself. Maybe that's a benefit of watching all those movies. Now you know what to do.

**Evi**

Yeah. Quickly, I sent a message to the HelpX site because I wanted them to know about this and I started to pack because my first instinct was to get out of there. I wasn't thinking of anyone who stayed there before or could stay there after me. I was just thinking of myself at this point and all I wanted was to get away from that. But then, of course, I had the little girl so I wasn't able to leave. But anyway, I packed all my stuff and then I was thinking that I'm going to go outside in front of the door and just call Tom to come home because I'm leaving. Then, I was thinking, "He obviously will have an idea of why I want to leave. So what if he hurts me? Okay, that's not a good idea because who knows what he's going to do." I was also sending messages to some of my friends in Hungary telling them what happened. Then I decided to call the police. Because at first, I didn't want to call the police. I never had anything to do with them before. I was thinking that someone watching me having a shower is not a big deal, so I was thinking maybe this doesn't concern the police.

**Scott**

That's an interesting take to think, "Well, maybe it's not that big of a deal."

**Evi**

Well, I don't know that but I was thinking that I felt strange telling someone, "Oh, someone watched me having a shower. Can you come and help?" Of course, thinking of it now, obviously, everyone should call the police if something like this happens.

**Scott**

Of course, you were still kind of panicking - it sounds like.

**Evi**

Yeah, I was.

**Scott**

Okay.

**Evi**

I called the police and they told me what to do because I didn't know what to do. I spoke with a lady and she talked with someone there and they agreed that they're going to send me a unit because there was a unit nearby. They sent a policeman and I opened the door. I never had anything to do with the police before so I didn't even know if I'm allowed to let them in the house because, from American movies, they need a permit to go into your house. So, I didn't know if I'm allowed to let them in. The policeman said, "Of course, you are allowed." I don't know what he said but, obviously, I let him in. The whole time I was doing all of these, the little girl was in the living room on her iPad behind the closed door, so she had no idea what's going on.

So I let the policeman in. I showed him the bathroom, showed him the mirror, and then he noticed a camera that I didn't notice before, so I got even more shocked, like, "What? There is a camera?" Yeah, the camera was right there in front of me but I was so shocked that I could see into the bathroom that I didn't even look around. It was right there in front of me but I didn't see. Then, this man was telling me, "Don't touch it," because I got a little shock, like, "What? There is a camera?" Then he told me that he's going to call, I don't know, the forensics. I think they call people to get evidence.

Two other policemen arrived and they wanted to take me to the station and I told them I can't go because I have the little girl. Then, they were saying like, "We are the police, it's okay to leave her with us." So one of the policemen asked me if I wanted to drive or if I wanted them to drive my car to the station and I told him that I would prefer it if he drove my car to the station.

**Scott**

When you went to the police station, did you bring all of your stuff with you or did you have to go back to the house to get that?

**Evi**

No, I took everything. I had one big backpack. My car was full of things like camping stuff and a lot of stuff. But the night before, when I went into the house, I only took my backpack. I had one big backpack. I threw everything in there before the police arrived. So, I was ready to leave. I only needed to grab that and then I could leave. We left one policeman in the house to wait for

the forensics and two policemen went to the station with me. They took me into the room to take my statement and they were very nice. Even on the way to the station, we were chatting and the policemen were super nice.

When we arrived, he kept asking me if I would like a tea or a coffee and I said, "No, I don't drink any of them." Then, he asked me again and I said, "No, thank you." And the third time I said, "Okay, yes." Then, I realized later, "Maybe this is not true." I think he wanted my fingerprints because they never asked for them after. I know they took the fingerprints from the mirror so I think he just wanted my fingerprints, but that's why he was really keen on me drinking something. But maybe this is not true. I don't know.

**Scott**

Well, if he would have asked for your fingerprints, you probably would have given them to him anyway, right?

**Evi**

Yeah, this is my theory. I didn't know why he really wanted me to bring something when I told him twice, "Thank you, I don't need anything." I gave my statement and a policeman came in and said that if I wanted to go to the women's refuge, they said they would take me. So he gave me the option to go to the women's refugee place or go to a hostel. If I go to the women's refugee place, I could stay at a safe place. By this point, I was like, "Oh, that's an adventure. I've never been to a safe place." Well, it's not a good thing that you go to a safe place, but I only heard it from a safe place from movies. So I was interested. Okay, let's check it out. It was a bit of an adventure that time, so I said yes to that. Then, they told me where to go for the women's refugee office.

**Scott**

When you say the women's refugee place, what kind of place is this? Who would live there?

**Evi**

First, it was, like, an office - where I spoke to a lady who arranges the safe place. So I didn't go to the safe place. I was just there to talk with a lady and I told her what happened and then she told me I could go to the safe place and she showed me the direction to the place. So this is a place even the police didn't know the address to. So even before that, I actually got a phone call from Tom. This was a time when I was driving from the police to the women's refugee place and I didn't pick it up. I got a shock, like, "Why is he calling me?" Then, I realized that probably it was the time when he arrived home and he didn't see my car. So he probably got worried, like, where is my car? There I am. I went to the safe place. There were two other women with their children. Then, I felt a bit guilty for being there because I actually wasn't feeling unsafe or I wasn't abused or anything like that. So I felt a bit guilty for being there when actually other people needed to stay there, but it wasn't like I was taking anyone's place because there were plenty of places, but I still felt a little bit bad.

**Scott**

You said you felt guilty for staying there because you were not abused but, really, you were abused, would you agree?

**Evi**

Yes, because I didn't give consent to anyone to watch me having a shower.

**Scott**

Okay, so you started contacting other people.

**Evi**

Yeah, so I got to the safe place and then this is the time when I remember, "Oh, they had so many people. They were mostly women. They were girls staying with them. All the ratings on the profile were all girls and there was one couple, I think." So I had no WiFi in this place so quickly I went to a library and I sent a message. First, I sent a message to the Hungarian girl because she was one of the people who left the rating. So I was able to contact her on the HelpX site and then I sent her a message to find me on Facebook. I told her my number - sorry, my name. I told her what happened and I have videos and pictures to show her. Quickly, I put some money on my phone, so I had data from the safe place. So, I went back to the safe place. Then, I started to message everyone who left the rating on Tom's profile. I sent them all the same message telling them what happened, how to find me on Facebook, and to contact me.

**Scott**

Did you start seeing contacts coming in from Facebook?

**Evi**

Yes, the Hungarian girl answered me straight away. We got in contact on Facebook. I showed her everything. She was shocked. Slowly, all the people started to respond to my message, even the couple. They were, like, an older couple. The lady replied to me that, when they were staying at this house, they were only house-sitting. I believe they were house-sitting when Tom and his family went to Europe because they were house-sitting for them for a few weeks. She said they were not affected by this but I should let the police know that they also had exchange students from high schools. So there were underage girls staying there before. She was also super nice. She offered to help me in any way she can. A lot of girls contacted me on Facebook and it was easier for me to just make a group and put everyone in the group so we could discuss what happened and everyone could tell their experiences and I could give them the contact email address of the policeman. I gave them the case number.

**Scott**

How many people were in this Facebook chat?

**Evi**

There were 25. I contacted maybe 10 people. I don't know. Like I said, I don't remember how many ratings they gave Tom on the site but I contacted all of them and I put everyone who contacted me in a group. But these girls, some of them were not alone when they were helping at this house. They added more people. Some of these girls, when they stayed with Tom, were also exchange students. So everyone who knew someone who stayed there before, they just added them to the group. So, at the end, we were 25.

**Scott**

What was the response from the HelpX website when they found out about this?

**Evi**

It was very good. I contacted everyone I could on the website on the same day this happened because, by the end of the day, Tom's profile disappeared from the website. So for me, there was no other way to contact anyone or to know who stayed there before. So I was very glad that, after arriving at the safe place, my first thought was just to reach out to everyone. From the

HelpX site, I got a message back. They replied, "Did you talk to the wife about this?" And I was like, "Okay, that's not very helpful. How do I know if the wife is not on this?" So I just replied, "It's all right. I already talked to the police. The police are handling this. Everything is okay, but maybe next time don't say such a thing. "

**Scott**

Yeah. That's an unusual response when you report something like this and they say, "Well, did you talk to the wife?" Well, I don't even know what that means. So what if you did talk to the wife?

**Evi**

But at this point, they didn't know there was a camera, but they knew that I was watched while I was having a shower.

**Scott**

How long did you stay at the safe place?

**Evi**

Because I was feeling guilty for being there, I was planning to stay for only one night, but I actually ended up staying for one week. The lady told me I could stay until next Monday. So I could stay for nine days if I wanted. I stayed because Tom got, like, a court hearing the next week and I wanted to stay in town for that. I also didn't feel so well. Like, I didn't want to have a shower on the first night staying in the safe place. The next day, in the afternoon, I was like, "Okay, I have to have a shower." So I forced myself to have a shower. But, of course, I checked everything and it was okay. I was mostly just hiding in my room. I didn't feel like eating or going anywhere. That was very unusual for me because whenever I arrived at a place, all I did was go out, explore, go for a hike, discover the beach, and I was never inside.

**Scott**

Well, you'd been traumatized.

**Evi**

Yeah. One of the ladies was so nice. She noticed that I wasn't eating and she came after me to my room and she asked me, "Did you eat?" And I said, "No, I haven't eaten yet." So she grabbed my hand, took me to the kitchen, and she put a big plate of food in front of me. So while I was staying in a safe place, more than once she fed me. She was so nice.

Two of the girls who left the rating stayed just right before me. So I was arriving in August but there were two Irish girls who stayed there at Tom's place in June and there were two girls who stayed there in July. These four girls were still in Wellington. We discussed that we're going to meet up. So we went to the city center to meet up and talk about what happened. That was the first time I went to a place where there were more people and I felt very uneasy. I was very jumpy when someone was near me. It wasn't so easy. We met up. Oh, but before this, actually, two of the French girls went to the station. I sent them a message on Monday and, I believe, they went to the station on Wednesday to ask about the case and tell the police that they also stay there and they got the information that, after I left the house, the police took everything from the house, every hard drive, every laptop, every electronic they could find, and they took the fingerprints from around the mirror. They took Tom in for questioning. They also talked to the wife, but they were okay with the wife. They couldn't find any evidence that she was involved in any way. So they let her go. Tom was arrested and he was bailed.

**Scott**

So he was arrested and charged with whatever crimes, but he was out.

**Evi**

Yes. The crime was making an intimate visual recording. He was charged with this, arrested, and he was bailed. He had to appear in court in the next few days. That's why I stayed in Wellington, because I knew that he had to go to court. So the time the French girls went into the station, the police also took a picture of them so they could identify them from the videos because they found a lot of videos. They told them that it's a woman who's going to check all these videos. They will let them know if they find anything on them. The next day, one of the French girls got the news that yes, they have a video of her. The police didn't really tell me what they found. I got some information from the media because there were, like, articles online. That's how I knew that they found almost 400 videos and lots of pictures. There were nearly a hundred women in these videos.

**Scott**

A hundred women?

**Evi**

Yes, and there were also girls who were as young as twelve. It was, like, 31 hours of videos - what they found in that house.

**Scott**

And these were all people who were staying there from the HelpX website?

**Evi**

These were women who stayed there from the HelpX site. There were exchange students from a lot of countries. There were family members, I don't know, lots of people. He was charged with 53 charges of making intimate recordings. They wanted to charge him with 90 but, because of statutory limitations, they could only charge him with the last five years he was doing this. So that was 53 charges.

**Scott**

53 counts. And it was making intimate recordings and making objectionable material. And yes, that's incredible. They can only go back five years. He had been doing it longer than that. After five years, they can't charge him because of the law. He must've thought after all that time, "All those years, I'm never going to get caught."

**Evi**

I don't know what he was thinking because. One of the French girls said she noticed that mirror when he was showing them the bathroom and she said, "Oh, that's a strange place for a mirror." And he was like, "Oh yeah. Hahaha. Once I had a shower here and I noticed it too. Oh, that's strange. What must my guests think of why I have that mirror there? But it's just there so you can see your profile better." If I were him, I would be so scared that the girls realize that it's a two-way mirror.

**Scott**

But he was just way overconfident.

**Evi**

And he didn't even lock the garage.

**Scott**

Yeah. That's the other thing. You just walked right in.

**Evi**

Yeah. And some people told me in the group that they were working there. They were working in the garage.

**Scott**

Evi, the investigator, went looking and found it. If you hadn't found it, it could still be happening now.

**Evi**

Yes, probably, I don't know. So I stayed in Wellington and, with two of the French girls, we went to the court hearing. We had no idea how these things go and we were thinking that he would be questioned, and he has to give answers, and we wanted to hear these answers. But actually, the whole thing was, like, one minute. He didn't plea so they just gave him a new date. So it was, like, nothing. So, the next morning, I just left Wellington. I went on my way and continued with the things I was planning to do. I don't remember when was his next court hearing but he didn't plea either, and this was going on for weeks and months. The strange thing is that after three weeks of the mirror being discovered, he sent an email out to a lot of these girls who stayed there before. He sent, like, a catching-up email. He was writing about the weather, people being sick because it was a cold winter, he had some teaching issues and he's hoping that they will be solved, about how important it is to laugh and how good it is for you, and it was strange. These girls by now knew what he'd done and we didn't understand why he would send this message. It was very strange. In December, he asked the judge for sentencing indications, like asking how long he would be imprisoned if he pleads guilty. By February, they told him that they're going to give him two years and nine months imprisonment if he enters a plea, and then he did, finally. He said, "Yes, he's guilty."

**Scott**

So that was his sentence - two years and nine months.

**Evi**

It was two years and ten months, what they told him. So this is February and the sentencing was in June. So, he had the chance to talk to the victims. If he agrees to talk to the victims, he could get less time. By the time June came, he was sentenced to two years and nine months in prison, so they took away some time because of previous good behavior or something. They wanted to give him four years but, because of his good character, they gave him a discount and 25% off for early plea. So the sentencing was, at the end, two years and nine months in prison.

**Scott**

Is he still in prison?

**Evi**

No. So it was August 2018 when I found the mirror and he was sentenced in June 2019. After one year of being in prison, he had his first parole hearing and it was at night. Then, he had

another one the next year in May and, I believe, they granted that parole. So after two years, he was out of prison. He was released in June 2021.

**Scott**

How did this affect you psychologically? Did you get therapy to help process this?

**Evi**

Oh, no, I didn't. I was all right. At the beginning, like I said, I didn't feel like eating or going out and felt jumpy but, as the time went and I forced myself to go out and do the things I liked, I was all right. I was always checking the bathrooms whenever I went. I was a bit paranoid. I was covering mirrors and windows when I was having a shower. Yeah, I left that behind. I'm fine now. The New Zealand police were amazing. Whenever there was a hearing or something, they gave me a call and they checked up on me, victim advice, called me to check up on me if I'm all right, and they sent me websites where I could get help. Yes, they were amazing.

**Scott**

Have you used the HelpX website since then to find other places to stay?

**Evi**

Yes, I used it one more time in New Zealand before I left. Then, after my visa expired, I went to Australia and I used HelpX site there too. It's an amazing site. I love it. Even later in Europe, I had amazing hosts. I have very good memories from my stays. So yeah, it's a great site. I would recommend it to travelers.

**Scott**

When the police were doing their investigation and looking at those videos, did they find any videos that were of you?

**Evi**

Yeah. So at the end of August, they sent me an email that they found a video of me. I think that was obvious. Well, maybe not. They let me know there's a video of me. After the sentencing, they got rid of all the videos. I registered for victim notification. So, every time something happened, every time he had a court hearing or a plea, anything, I got an email.

**Scott**

I was reading in one of the online articles, Tom made a statement in court and he said he was horrified by himself and was glad that he was caught. Do you believe him? And does it make any difference that he said that?

**Evi**

Well, for me, it was easy. This whole thing, I got the least damaged by it because I didn't know this family. I had no feelings towards them. Some of the people had been in contact with them for years and they had a good relationship. Some were family members. This was such a big shock for them. For me, they were strangers, so I didn't care about him. I don't know if I believed him or not. I probably didn't believe him. I think he would just say whatever he wants people to hear.

**Scott**

Yeah, it's hard to tell if people are sincere after they've been caught. I'm glad that you were a good detective and solved this crime, and thanks for sharing your story.



**Evi**

Thank you for letting me share my story.

**Scott**

I'm wondering – does hearing this story from Evi make you think twice about staying in the home of someone you don't know? Let me know what you think.

If you didn't catch it, Tom's career was working as a teacher – but that is now over. And he's been put on the Child Protection Offender Register, so hopefully he can no longer abuse people like this.

And one more thing – you heard Evi mention that as soon as she discovered the 2 way mirror in the garage, she got her phone and created a video. I've seen the video, and it is creepy. She starts recording in the bathroom, so you can see the real mirror and the fake mirror, and then she walks out the door and around the corner to that entry to the garage. She slides the envelope out of the way, and you can see the view right into the bathroom.

You want to see that video? It's available to watch, in the Facebook group. We'll also be discussing this episode, and I'm sure there will be lots of comments about this one. You can join me over there, along with over 7000 other What Was That Like listeners, at [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook). If you've had an experience like this where your privacy and trust were violated by a stranger, come on over and tell your story.

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

And now, the Listener Story. You know how it works. Every episode, here at the end, we play a story that was sent in by a listener. And we're still waiting to hear yours! Just record it, something like 5-10 minutes on your phone, and email it to me.

This week's story is kind of in line with this episode – an unfortunate event while traveling.

Stay safe, and I'll see you next time.

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(Listener story)

I just listened to your most recent episode about Chris and it made me think about the time that I did a study abroad program in Greece. I am a musician. I'm actually an elementary music teacher and I teach piano lessons as well but, in college, I studied voice as an opera singer.

My professor was doing this program in Greece and he invited me to come. I was like, "Yeah, I'd love to travel. It's like a once-in-a-lifetime experience." Of course, I was 20 years old. Now, looking back on it, I kind of can't believe my parents let me travel all the way there by myself. But I was an adult, so I went all the way to Greece by myself and met up with the people there. We took a boat to Athens, from Athens to a little island called Syros, which is beautiful. I was supposed to be there for five weeks. I did end up doing the whole program and learned a lot, got to sing in a beautiful performance venue, and ate a lot of gyros and yogurt and stuff like that on the island.

On my first night there, I was sitting on the beach. Of course, I met a boy. We were sitting on the beach and the beaches there on this island are, like, rocky. So, it's like a rock beach. We were sitting on the beach on the rock, basically, outside of our hotel. Since we were sitting out there, the romantic time, I ended up, like, sitting on his lap. For some bizarre reason, he decided to stand up and I fell backward. We were on a ledge. I fell backward about, I don't know, six or seven feet - maybe even higher than that - and hit my head on a rock, and I lost consciousness. I woke up and spent my first night on the island in the hospital and my grandma had given me money to spend on the trip and I had to use it on my hospital stay. So that's my crazy story.