Episode 271: Eric acted in self-defense

Sometimes you find yourself in a situation that you just never could have expected.

Last month, in Long Island, New York, a woman named Danielle Tammone was at home in her back yard. Just an ordinary day, nothing unusual going on.

That is, until she felt the ground under her feet opening up unexpectedly, and she suddenly found herself at the bottom of an 8-foot deep hole. And she was stuck. Ground level was about 3 feet higher than her head, and she was surrounded by mud and water.

She screamed for help, but no one knew that she had even fallen. After about 30 minutes, some neighbors heard her, and came over to find out what was going on. Eventually she was rescued when someone brought a ladder and she was able to climb out. She experienced whiplash and some pulled muscles. The point is, she never would have predicted that would happen.

My guest for this episode is Eric. He found himself in an unexpected situation also, and he told the whole story here on the podcast way back in 2019.

Eric and his wife were sound asleep one night, when they heard someone on their porch making loud noises and banging on the door. It was a man, and he appeared to be on drugs and extremely upset.

And he was trying to get in.

Scott
Who was home the night this happened?

Eric
My wife and I were home. My son was out. He had left for college about a month before. So, it's just the two of us.

Scott
Can you describe the layout of your house so that we, kind of, know how everything is arranged as this happened?

Eric
It's a one-story house. We're kind of on the side of the kitchen. Then, in front of the kitchen is the main living room area. Then, between the living room and the street side is a large screen and deck - it's

like a raised deck that had sliding glass doors to it. So, we were sleeping on the side in the master bedroom.

Scott
How would you describe the neighborhood?

Eric
It's a middle-class neighborhood. Nothing too fancy. Nothing too rundown. Just a middle-of-the-road neighborhood. Pretty fairly quiet. We're on cul de sac.

Scott
Would you say it's a safe neighborhood, usually?

Eric
Yeah, generally. I mean, there's been a few bike thefts, but nothing big and too worrisome. Yeah, I would always consider it safe.

Scott
Well, let's talk about what happened that night. I know it was really the middle of the night. What time were you awakened?

Eric
Well, it was an odd night even before all that started because our dog had a problem with his legs, so he wasn't able to walk the night before. Ironically, my wife woke up at, maybe, 3.30 or 4.00 to carry him outside to basically go to the bathroom and bring him back inside. She locked the door and I heard that happen. I heard the cat barf, so all the animals were up. Then, I guess, about 4.30 was when I started hearing a strange sound. I've just fallen back asleep. I say strange sound - I don't even know if I'm going to try to reproduce it - but it didn't even sound human. I don't know if it was yelling or moaning or a coyote in the background. I wasn't sure what it was. So, it was about 430 when I woke up.

Scott
Was it one of those things where you're not sure if you're really hearing it or if you might have it in a dream?

Eric
Yeah, it was, definitely. You hit it on the head there. I wasn't sure if I'd heard something. I thought I heard something. I just went and did the quick check. Then, I heard it some more after. I got up and was like, "Okay, it definitely is something."

Scott
So something was going on. Can you just take us through exactly what happened?

Eric
Yeah. I got up from bed, put on my glasses, and walked through the kitchen. I could see out from the kitchen that all the lights were off inside. From the kitchen, I could see a shape outside on the deck through the living room and it looked like somebody was standing out there in the dark on the deck. I immediately thought, “Oh, it's my brother-in-law. He lives two doors down. He probably came to get the dog.” He walks our dog with his dog and then leaves them over here so that they can play all day. Like, “No, it doesn't make sense.” It's 4.30 in the morning. He wouldn't be over here. But then I saw the person walking and pacing back and forth very quickly like they were scared or agitated. I wasn't sure exactly what was going on. At that point, I was like, “There's no way it's him.”

So, I went through the living room and flipped on the light to the outside deck. Then, all of a sudden, I was face-to-face through the glass with a stranger - a man in his early 20s. He had no shirt on. He had a black eye. He looked like he, maybe, had been fighting. As soon as he saw me, he started getting super agitated and making strange sounds. I didn't hear any words. It was just moaning and screaming. Then, he started just banging on the glass and looking at my eyes. We were 6 inches apart through the glass. He was staring into my eyes and banging on the glass with his palms. At that point, I thought that it was maybe - the videos you'd see on the internet of police trying to subdue - someone on PCP or some crazy drug that was making the freakout. That was immediately what I thought was going on. He came to my porch. He didn't know where he was. For some reason, now, he was trying to get in here. Strangely enough, he had what looked like a pillow taped to his forearm or his hand was through the pillow cover for some reason. His hands were still exposed. It was almost like he was wearing, like, a little shield or something. It was pretty odd. I say that because that would come into the story later.

Scott
Was it an actual pillow or just a pillowcase?

Eric
It looked like a small pillow - like a throw pillow. That's all I could see at that moment. I was just in his eyes and I started getting very nervous. I was trying to calm him down and talk to him through the glass. “Hey, relax. It's okay. Whatever you're on or whatever happened, let's relax.” In the meantime, I was talking to my wife. I think she had woken up at that point. I was, kind of, yelling to the house, “Hey, call the cops. We got an issue here.” So, she took the dog that was in our room, went to the back bedroom on the other side of the house, and got on the phone with 911. The whole time, he was getting more and more agitated, going back and forth, looking up over the sliding glass doors at the decoration, and trying to understand what was going on - it looked like that.

Scott
I think I read somewhere that your house was not the first one that he came in contact with, and that some of your neighbors had also already called 911 about it. Is that right?

Eric
That's right. There were two other houses. The first house he went to was my brother-in-law's house. He basically said the same thing happened. He came to the door and started banging and slamming against the door to the point that he thought the door was gonna break - that's a big heavy wooden door, not a sliding glass door. He had a baseball bat ready inside in case he broke through. He didn't even make it through. I guess he stayed there for maybe a minute or so and gave up.

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991 Operator
911. What is the address of your emergency?

Caller
(Hidden)

991 Operator
Is it a house or apartment?

Caller
House.

991 Operator
Okay tell me exactly what happened

Caller
Someone was banging on my front door like crazy.

991 Operator
Do you know this person?

Caller
I don’t.

991 Operator
Did you see any weapons?

Caller
No.

991 Operator
Do they appear to be under influence of alcohol or drugs?

Caller
They were yelling crazily. I'm hearing him banging on the neighbor's door now.

991 Operator
Okay. You see him banging on somebody else's door?

Caller
Yeah. He's going somewhere else - must be going door-to-door.

991 Operator
Does he have any clothes and descriptions?

Caller
I did not see him.

991 Operator
Okay.

Caller
He's yelling crazily.

991 Operator
What is he saying?

Caller
He's just, like, yelling and yelling. Figure out what that guy's up to.

991 Operator

Okay. Well, I do have to call in. We've got deputies on the way, sir. Okay? If anything, you just call us back.

Caller
Alright.

Eric
He came from the next neighbor's house banging, slamming, and trying to smash the door down. He described that his door was rocking on the hinges and he thought that he was gonna break in. He had a pistol, was ready to shoot the guy, and told him, “Please go away. I've got a gun. Just go away. Stop.” And he did.

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991 Operator
911. What is the address of the emergency?

Caller (Female)
(Hidden)

991 Operator
Okay. Tell me exactly what happened.

Caller (Female)
Somebody's banging on our door non-stop and yelling outside, and he won’t stop.

991 Operator
He's on drugs?

Caller (Female)
I have no idea what he's on, but he's staying non-stop on drugs.

991 Operator
You have no idea who he is?

Caller (Female)

No.

991 Operator
Okay. What is your first and last name?

Caller (Female)
(Hidden)

Caller (Male)
(In the background) I need somebody here ASAP. He’s on drugs.

991 Operator
Please put her back on the line. Somebody's already coming. We do have somebody already in the area. I think he's just, kind of, walking down the way. Keep your doors locked. Do not unlock your door, okay? Were you able to see who the person was?

Caller (Female)
No.

991 Operator
Is it a man, though?

Caller (Female)
Yeah, it's a man.

991 Operator
Okay. Don't open the door. Keep the door locked. Do you know if he has any weapons? Do you see any strange vehicles or any strange other people outside?

Caller (Female)
Can you see anything else?

Caller (Male)
(In the background) I can’t see shit.

Caller (Female)
He can’t see anything. It’s really, really dark outside.

991 Operator
Okay. Is he still knocking?

Caller (Female)
He just stopped, but he can’t be far.

991 Operator
Okay. Like I said, we do have another call on the same street. I think he's going down the row and just knocking on people's doors. He may have seen the deputy, but let me just go ahead and make sure. Just stay where you are, though, because I'm not sure if they're outside or not. Okay?

Caller (Female)
Okay.

991 Operator
What was he saying? Could you tell what he was saying or what he was doing?

Caller (Male)
A social security number.

991 Operator
Oh, he was yelling a social security number?

Caller (Male)
Yeah. He is heavy on drug. He is running down the street.

991 Operator
What direction of travel is he going in?

Caller (Male)
He’s running back towards the street.

991 Operator
He's running towards the back. Okay, let me go ahead and just let them know that.

Caller (Male)
He probably knocked on a neighbor's.

991 Operator
Could you tell what his race was or any clothing description or you could just see the shadow moving?

Caller (Male)
I think he's got a shirt off and was holding onto them.

991 Operator
Okay. Like a cape - kinda tied around your neck or just over your shoulder?

Caller (Male)
Shoulder. That’s what it looked like. It's really really dark.

991 Operator
Okay, that's okay. We do have law enforcement on your street. I put your address in. If you hear a loud knock on the door, I want you to go ahead and look and make sure that it is law enforcement before you open the door because they may come to your location as well. Okay?
Caller (Female)
Okay.

991 Operator
All right. Thank you.

Eric
Then, he came to our house - the third.

Scott
So, your wife Jennifer was on the phone with 911 as well.

Eric
Yeah, she was describing it and I was trying to calm the guy down. I tried to keep my voice low, look at his eyes, and give him the “Take it easy” with your hands kind of motion. “Yeah, calm down, calm down.” He started smacking at the glass, so I went to check that there. We got one of those what, I think, is called a burglar bar. It's like a lock that flips down from sliding glass doors. So, if you flip it up, it's blocking the door from sliding. If you flip it down, it can slide. We have that and the regular latch. I was checking that to make sure that it was set, and he saw me do that. He started pulling through the glass like he was able to flip it down through the glass. He was just not thinking straight. At that point,

he grabbed the handle of the door and started trying to pull it open, and I'm trying to hold it in the other direction, and we were struggling back and forth. I'm glad it didn't come off the tracks and rip it off. He was extremely strong from what it seemed. So, I was like, “Oh, he's got to be on something that's giving him all this superhuman energy” because he wasn't making any human sounds. It just seemed almost like an animal that was just trying to get in for some reason - I hate to say that he was an animal, but that's just kind of how he was behaving.

Scott
Right. That's what drugs will do to people.

Eric
Well, that's what I thought. He gave up on that and then just started backing up and slamming himself against the glass. I was like, “Okay, this is gonna break any second now. Jennifer, just get ready to close the door because he's going to be in a matter of seconds - I know it's going to happen.” Dammit, that glass is strong. It's an old door, but I have no concern about that stuff breaking because of the way I saw him throwing himself at this door and it did not break. It was a miracle.

Scott
Sometimes, when someone's on mind-altering drugs like that, they can seem to have, like, superhuman strengths.

Eric
Yeah. I was really getting worried that I backed up toward the kitchen. I was, like, one room away. Granted, once that door goes, he's just gonna be 15 feet and right on top of me. But then, luckily, he just gave up on the door. I guess he figured that he was not gonna get in this way. I was like, “Okay, that's relieving.” So he backed up and was trying to go out the screen door. There are two doors to the screen door to the deck. That other door had been latched with one of those flip latches. He couldn't figure it out, so he just kind of pushed through that screen, ripped the screen out and ran off. I was thinking to myself, “Oh, man. That is quite a story. I'm glad that's over.”

It was not over. My wife had come forward a little bit towards the kitchen. She was like, “I hear him on the side.” So, he had left the screen deck and then just run around the side, up a little path. Then, he started banging on the glass window of our bedroom or our master bedroom. Then, she went back and, like, “Get back! Get back!” He started smacking on that. Then, I heard a crash. The glass broke. That was just a thinner glass unlike the thick stuff that you'd find at our sliding door, I guess. Again, he was just smashing through using his bare hands. At that point, the fear was getting replaced with anger. I was like, “I don't believe this guy is just crashing in here! Make this stop! This has got to be a dream! There's no way this is real!” I was shaking my head and trying to wake myself up, but I was like “No, this is real.” That's when it started to dawn on me, “You need a weapon because he's going to be in here in a second.”

I was in the kitchen and looked around. The first thing I saw was the knife. I just grabbed the first one off the top, which happened to be the biggest 10-inch butcher knife. Even though I'm getting more and more amped up with adrenaline and anger, I was looking at this thing and thinking, “What am I going to do with this thing? I have no ability to stab anybody. I can't even finish off a mouse that's caught in a mouse trap. I just don't have that killer instinct. I'm kidding myself even holding this thing. Maybe, if he sees it or if I take a swipe or jab at him, he'll get the message to back off.”

At that point, I heard another crash because there were a couple of panes to the window. At that point, I ran into the bedroom yelling, “Get out of here! Get the fuck out of here! I will kill you! Get out of here!” He just started coming through. Between the two glass panes, there's like a little bar that he had to crawl over, so he was trying to crawl over that. In the meantime, he had knocked the blinds and the screen away - we have like a metal screen over there. He had knocked all that away. I couldn't see anything other than the shape.

I said, “Now’s the time. You got to give him a little jab because he's coming in. He's halfway in the window.” So, I just kind of gave a lighthearted weak jab, and it hits that pillow that he had strapped on his arm. I don't know if he had ever intentionally thought to use it as a shield, but that's how it acted. What dumb luck that I hit that thing. I could kind of see where he was, so I went around beside it to give him a little jab. Then, that anger just turned to pure fury and I just felt myself lose any inhibitions to kill or do whatever I need to do to stop him. So, I just stabbed as hard as I could a couple of times - I guess 1-3 times. It's hard to recall how long it took - maybe a few seconds or 30 seconds. I don't know. I will say that I'm glad I didn't see it and I'm glad that it was dark and that I didn't have to see the knife going, but I felt it and it was kind of a disgusting feeling. When you feel a knife just get buried to the hilt in a man's chest, it hits a feeling that stays with you.

Right when that happened, it was like something snapped in him and he said, “Oh my chest!” Those were the first and only words I ever heard from him. He snapped out of whatever state he was in and went into, like, a protective mode. Whatever spell he was under was, kind of, broken at that point. So, he backed off, screamed, and ran away.

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911 Operator
911. What is the address of the emergency?

Jennifer
(Hidden)

911 Operator
Tell me exactly what happened

Jennifer
Some dude is on our porch yelling. He’s screaming out. He’s yelling. (Interruption) Shut up. He’s banging on our window.

911 Operator
Do you know if he has any weapons?

Jennifer
He had just broken the window. WAIT! STOP!

911 Operator
Alright. We had multiple calls from your neighbors about this, but you said that he just broke the window. What happened?

Jennifer
I don't know. He’s breaking the window.

911 Operator
Take a deep breath for me, okay? We already have deputies on the way. They’ll be there in a little while, so just stay on the line.

Jennifer
Oh my God.

911 Operator
Okay, what's going on?

Jennifer
It’s my husband. He's just washing his hands.

911 Operator
Could you tell what race this person is?

Jennifer
He’s a white kid.

911 Operator
Approximately, how old?

Jennifer
Short hair. Thin build. No shirt. Shorts.

911 Operator
You mean jean shorts or just shorts?

Jennifer
No, they just look like shorts.

911 Operator
Dark or light color?

Jennifer
A dark color.

911 Operator
Okay. I understand he was yelling. Could you understand anything that he was saying?

Jennifer
No.

911 Operator
Okay. I have three deputies on the way out there, okay? Just stay with me until they get out there.

Jennifer
Did he run towards the house? (Inaudible) He said he doesn't know.

911 Operator
They’re, maybe, pulling into your neighborhood now. Let me know when you have eyes on them, okay?

Jennifer
My mom lives down the street and she's really terrified of things like this.

911 Operator
It seems that they made contact with him.

Jennifer
They found him?

911 Operator
I believe that they found him.

Jennifer
Where is he?

911 Operator
The deputies are at the end of the street. They were able to catch him at the end of the street

Jennifer
She said that the cop saw him.

911 Operator
Just a couple of houses down from there.

Jennifer
I wonder if that was my brother. There are only five houses on our street

911 Operator
So, I do know that they will come to speak to you.

Eric
I went into the kitchen and just rinsed the knife off in the kitchen sink just out of habit because I didn't want the wife to see it. It was covered in blood all the way up to the hilt. It was just a mess. As I turned on the water, I was like, “You dummy! You shouldn't have done that!” So, I just set it down by the sink. Jennifer was crying on the phone with 911 still.

Scott
So they haven’t shown up yet?

Eric
No. This whole thing took, maybe, 2, 3 or 5 minutes. She didn't know I stab him. I said, “Well, tell the cops that I stabbed the guy. So, he's been injured.” She started to cry and relay that to him. She was fairly composed as far as I could tell, but I didn't want her to see the bloody knife. That's why I rinsed it off and then immediately regretted it. Then, I set it down and went up toward the screen door. I didn't see any sign of him, so I turned all the outdoor lights on. I just wanted to see if he was still there, but there was no sign of him. We have, like, a 3-foot dog fence, basically. You could see that he had just run right through it and knocked the thing down, trying to get away. So, at that point, I went outside and there was no sign of them.

I guess a couple of minutes later, we saw a cop car up the street. I went back inside and locked the door again, just in case. We saw the cop lights. At that point, Jennifer came back. I gave her a hug. I think she was off the phone with the cops by that point - they hung up. They said, “Yeah, somebody's on the way.” I don't remember if she was still on the phone or not.

Then, a few minutes later, we saw the flashlight of a deputy coming up to the house. At that point, I saw him, so I unlocked the door and came outside. We started looking around. On the side of the house from the bedroom window. I could see the blood trail. He had left a trail down the sidewalk - we have a little path down the driveway out in the street. You can just see the drops - it was pretty thick in some places, I guess, because we had a little fence gate that he had gone through that was all covered in blood.

Scott
Of course, it's still dark too.

Eric
Yeah, that's right. It's maybe 5 in the morning, I guess, but the sun was starting to creep up and we have a lot of the outdoor lights turned on outside. At that point, the detective basically said, “Hey, just come out here and wait. You guys are okay. We caught the guy up the street, maybe, two or three houses at the end of the street. They had caught and found him. Just wait here. Don't touch anything because it's a crime scene now.” So, I got a glass of water and just waited for the actual detective/inspectors to come down, and the cop waited with us until they arrived.

Scott
Did you wait outside with them?

Eric

Yeah, I just went inside to get dressed because, the whole time, I was in a pair of underwear. That was all I was wearing the whole time - a pair of underwear. I was a little chilly. I may throw on shorts and a shirt.

Scott
I know this happened in Florida, but it can get a little bit cool that night even in Florida, especially if you don't have many clothes on outside.

Eric
Well, the adrenaline still was keeping me pretty warm too. I got cold later as things calmed down. I got really cold, but I didn't want to greet the inspector in my underwear, so the only reason I went back inside was to get dressed.

Scott
News reports identified the man as Chase Richardson. He was 23 years old and he had just escaped earlier that night from a group home called the Savannah Group home. Do you know anything about that place?

Eric
Yeah, it's actually behind our house. On our block here, there's a chain link fence. On the other side of the chain link fence is that home. There are folks with mental disabilities who stay there. I'm not sure the number but there are several people who stay there 24/7, along with their caregivers who live there with them.

Scott
And I understand that he had a history of mental disabilities, as well as a criminal record of burglary and prowling. Had you ever had any experience or interaction with anyone from that home prior to this?

Eric
Well, I just learned something about the criminal record. I didn't know that. I guess you did better research than I did. I knew that he had a mental illness, but I thought he had been on some kind of drugs at that time. When I learned that he was basically mentally ill, I felt a lot worse, like, “Oh, man. I could have done something different.” But to go back to your question, we never really had a problem with the place before. Sometimes, you would hear screaming or swearing from over there - somebody's having a bad day or the meds aren't right. Then, they would bring the person inside because they try to let them be outside. Quite often, you'd hear a lot of screaming and yelling.

Scott

Sometimes, you would hear that just from neighbors without even having a group home nearby. That's true.

Eric
That's true. It’s not like an argument, but more like somebody's freaking out, kind of, screaming. That was about it. I did not know that he had a record.

Scott
At that point, did you talk to the police there about the legal consequences for you? What was your concern?

Eric
At that point, we were still waiting for the inspector to come. Then, the deputy was waiting with us. I heard the report on his walkie, “Yeah, he's dead.” At that point, I just sunk and, basically, dry heaved into the bushes. You just join the club that you never want to join when you kill someone. Then, the inspector arrived, came down, and just asked me to basically go through everything I told you. We were waiting out there on the porch and had me sign some paperwork to agree to a search of the area - essentially, just a warrant to photograph the premises because it was a crime scene. They wanted to see if I had weapons or whatever the deal was, take all the pictures that they needed, and dust for fingerprints. That's fine. At that point, I started really getting cold because the adrenaline had worn off, so I threw out a little jacket.

At that point, it was becoming a circus of police activity up the street. There must have been 20 or 25 cars just all over. Everything was taped off at where he had been found. The little evidence markers were out where the blood was. He asked me, my wife and the neighbors to come in for questioning. So, we went up there. I guess they didn't have any other vehicle, so we got right in the back of the squad car, which was surreal - watching the sunrise with your wife in the back of a squad car. It was very cramped back there, but we got in there. Basically, everybody had to go to a separate room, I guess, just to keep everyone's stories straight. Just like on TV, they don't want you to be conversing with each other and just keep their brain out of gas.

So, I sat down and I just started feeling just dread just on top of everything that had already happened. I just kept seeing it happen over and over and over and over again. Then I was like, “Well, what if, because he didn't have his feet inside the house, it is not legal to fight someone off? He wasn't armed.” These kinds of things go through your head. “What if there's a really zealous prosecutor who is out for blood for some reason? He wasn't on drugs. He was just a poor, mentally handicapped man.” I didn't know if any of those are even rational thoughts, but that's what was just going through my mind and I felt so bad for the guy even though I was so mad and scared at that time. As soon as he was gone, I just started feeling terrible for him.

Scott
No, I think they're all rational thoughts, especially for you. I mean, you have never been put in a situation like this before and you don't have any idea what's going to happen. Did you consider having an attorney present during that questioning?

Eric
I had thought about it but I was like, “I feel, in my heart, that I didn't do anything wrong.” The detective on the scene, the neighbors, my wife, and everybody that morning had said, “You did what you had to do.” Maybe, from a legal standpoint, somebody would say, “No, you should always have a lawyer”, but I didn't feel I had anything to hide. It was self-defense. So, I didn't get a lawyer. They came in with the recorder, and read me my rights, which I didn't know if they have to do that, but they did.

So, they just went through and I relayed the whole thing to them. At that point, they asked for DNA. They were taking the fingerprints and they need a piece of each one of your fingernails, which I didn't know they did. Then, they took all my clothes and asked someone to come to pick me up later and bring me a set of clothes because, I guess, in a homicide investigation, they take all of your clothing to check for DNA or blood or whatever, which I can object to since I was in my underwear the entire time. The inspector was kind of thorough. He said, “This is very procedural. It might seem strange that we're having to do all these things and just, kind of, lay it out for you as a standard practice. We want to make sure we do everything by the book.”

I will tell you, they didn't even come to speak to me the first time for at least three and a half hours, maybe four hours. I was sitting there by myself in that room. That's when this stuff just started rattling through your brain and reliving that over and over again. I guess they came to me last because there were so many other witnesses to talk to. There were two detectives. They interviewed both the neighbors. They interviewed my wife. They interviewed the caretaker from the group home.

I learned later that the man, Chase, had been in a fight at the home. He locked himself in his room. When they came in to check on him, he had snuck out the window. He basically broke out of their group home window. At that point, I think the caretaker was already looking for him. The caretaker found him staggering up the street, and I kind of felt how bad that caretaker must have felt to see one of his charges covered in blood and collapsed at his car. So, I felt bad for that guy too. When you're basically sitting in that police station for hours and hours by yourself, I just started having a panic attack - I just couldn't believe it - shaking your head over an hour, trying to wake yourself up, and it was not working.

Scott
It's pretty amazing that everything was normal and routine before you went to bed. Now, there you were at the police station. It's amazing how life can quickly change.

Eric
Yeah, you're in a different world all of a sudden. So, we finished and signed all the paperwork that was needed. I went downstairs, saw my wife, gave her a hug, and went downstairs. My folks were there - they took us home, gave us a ride, and offered me something to eat, but I just had no appetite at that point. It was probably 2 or 3 in the afternoon - I'm not sure what time it was. So, it was almost 12 hours since it had happened, and it was just a media circus outside. A lot of the cop cars had left, but there were news vans and all that. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I didn't want my whole name to be in the paper. No comment. My family was great. They really helped out so much. I went inside, had a cup of tea, took a Xanax, sat in a recliner, and just relaxed, and they helped clean everything up - the broken glass and all the blood. They got all the blood out. I guess hydrogen peroxide does a good job. I was glad because I didn't want to have that reminder and get the window fix that day. It almost looked like nothing had happened with the exception that the blinds were broken down. So, we needed to get new blinds. But if you looked at it, you wouldn't know that anything happened at all that day.

Scott
Did this happen on a weekday or a weekend?

Eric
I think was a Monday morning.

Scott
So I assume you probably took some time off work.

Eric
Yeah. When I was waiting for the inspector to come down, I just texted my manager the very basics. “Hey, we had a break-in. I can't make it today.” She was great. She was like, “Fine.” Then, when she heard the fuller story, she and the management there were supportive. “Anytime you need, whatever you need, take some days off, whatever. It's no problem.” It was a few days before I went back to work - no more than two days off, I guess. I just tried to clear my head. Even on that first day back, I don't think I stayed past lunch. My heart just wasn't in it and I couldn't concentrate.

Scott
Did your coworkers all know what happened?

Eric
No, I think only a couple of people. I wasn't, like, telling everybody this.

Scott
Yeah. Even if they saw it in the news, they wouldn't know necessarily that it was you.

Eric
Right. It's not like a story that I just want to tell over and over again to a lot of people.

Scott
Do you still live in the same house?

Eric
Yeah, we're still here. We like it a lot. It's a nice house. I've spent many years fixing it up, so I'm too stubborn to leave at this point. Too much work has been put into it.

Scott
Not only that but, statistically, what's the chances of something like that happening twice at the same house, right?

Eric
That's true. I felt like I had won a bad lottery but now I was, kind of, spared from anything like that ever happening again because it'd be pretty crazy. On the first day, obviously, I was just stunned and I was just in shock. The next day, I went and saw my therapist. I spoke with him for a while. That was helpful, but I was still in physical shock. I talked to a counselor from the sheriff's department that contacted me - I guess she was a victim's advocate - and she had, kind of, described a lot of the symptoms that I told her I was having. She was like, “This is perfectly normal. You're basically going through shock.” I want to call it PTSD because it had just happened, but I was getting flu-like symptoms. I couldn't sleep and didn't want to eat. My thoughts were racing and I kept picturing it happening over and over again. She was like, “No, that's normal.” Sure enough, that started to ebb away. What's funny is, every time I kept picturing it happening in my mind over and over again, I get queasy. I would see the knife coming out at me instead - I was always picturing it from his perspective, for some reason. Strangely enough - I don't know if people would believe it - I literally felt an actual ache in my chest where he got hit. I could feel physical pain - it’s not like I had been stabbed, but it was aching, which I thought was very strange. I don't know if there's some kind of weird psychic connection or something - I'm not really into that kind of thing. But I tell you, I really felt that.

Scott
It sounds like, maybe, you have a natural or an extraordinary sense of empathy. Would you say that's true?

Eric

I think so. I think that's true. My wife prays a lot, but I really don't. She thinks of Chase often. We would talk about him and try to imagine what his life was like and try to not make his death meaningless in some way to, kind of, keep him remembered.

Scott
I know there are a variety of emotions that go with this. Do you feel or have you ever felt guilty for what happened?

Eric
On and off. I know that I'd do the same thing a second time, and I'd probably tell anybody else to do the same thing, but it's kind of hard to talk yourself out of that guilt. It's just gonna happen. I don't think I did the wrong thing. I think I did the right thing, but that's something you have to live with. Strangely, a few days after that, I had seen my counselor again. I started to go into, like, a happy manic state where I felt, "Oh, this is a new lease on life. You've been given another chance. You could have died. Now do something good somehow." I had that manic energy, which unfortunately kind of wore off. You feel like you're gonna become this wonderful person and I'm gonna volunteer and do all these things. Then, you just kind of become yourself again. But I am at least glad that it didn't make me a worse person. I was worried that a woman would become very paranoid, filling the house with guns and cameras, being the person staring out from behind the shades, and being suspicious of all his neighbors. That didn't change me at all. I'm not fearful to walk around taking the dog for a walk at night. I don't feel any extra fear in any situations like that. So, at least things didn't get worse for me.

Scott
What is your opinion about having a gun for self-defense?

Eric
Well, I mean, in that case, for it to even made any difference, I probably would have it sitting out loaded and ready right there, but things happen so fast and I didn't need it. I guess, statistically, you're more likely to kill yourself or a loved one or someone by mistake, but I don't think anybody shouldn't be able to defend themselves. I'm not going to come out as anti-gun in the house. I still haven't gotten one, so I don't know if I will or not.

Scott
Well, if you haven't gotten one now, it's probably not gonna happen after.

Eric
Yeah, that's the test, I guess. They did take all my knives, so I had to get new knives.

Scott

Obviously, he wasn't very communicative, but do you have any idea what his intentions were if he actually got in the house?

Eric
I have no idea what he was after. At the time, all I could see was he wanted to come in badly and he was very violent. I thought he was going to kill us. Why did he do that? I wish I knew, but you can't know what's going on in someone's mind.

Scott
He had already been denied entry into other houses. So, maybe, that's what kind of got him amped up even a little more and more determined to get into yours.

Eric
Maybe. I've kind of developed a mental trick that whenever I start reliving it-- I get kind of queasy from some horror movies. I mean, I like scary movies well enough but, sometimes, I get a little queasy and, then, I picture myself with a knife and that happening. When it starts to replay in my mind, I just pictured it with my peripheral vision and just let it play out, like, in “Theater 2”. So, I've turned it into a movie. I can just pretend that didn't really happen. It's just over here playing as a movie. So, I don't suppress it, but I just kind of remember it as a movie that I saw.

Scott
That's interesting. Is that a technique that you came up with? Or did your therapist give you that?

Eric
I came up with it just after a few days and I told him about that, and he was like, “Oh, that's an unknown technique, I guess.” Well, okay. I guess it works because even when I saw the movie, “Parasite”-- I don't have I won't give out spoilers, but there's a scene where there's a stabbing, and the knife and the butcher block look exactly like mine. As soon as I saw that, I started to get that feeling and I just said to myself “Theater 2” and I can just kind of dismiss the fear of that happening again. You just have to be on top of it so it doesn't start rolling around in your head over and over and over again. So, it has helped me to be aware,

Scott
Is there any part of the story that we haven't covered or anything that I haven't asked you?

Eric
I don't want to cast any bad light on people with mental illness. I think he had schizophrenia. I know it's a serious subject. I don't want to make people fearful of people with those conditions. I guess, in that case, I don't know what else could have been done. My wife had said, “He was in a bad place and,

now, he's not. Maybe, you've helped him in a strange way because he seemed like he did not want to be in the world or he was having a very hard time." So, that's one, kind of, cold solace that I can give myself - maybe, in some way, that was meant to be. It was meant to be that he would be put out of his pain.

Scott
Thanks for sharing the story.

Eric
Okay, Scott. Thank you very much.

Scott
Unfortunately, I don't have any update from Eric. We recorded that conversation 7 years ago and since then I've lost contact with him. But honestly, if I had to guess, I think he would probably decline coming back to the spotlight again anyway. I think this show is the only place he ever told this story publicly and it's very understandable that he just would rather not keep revisiting that trauma.

In this episode, you heard some 911 audio. It's not always possible to get the audio from an emergency call that's related to a guest's story, but I do like to include that whenever I can because it puts us right there in that part of the story as it's happening. Just makes it more real.

And this week's question in the Facebook group is directly related to that. The question this week is, "Why did YOU call 911?". For me, I've been in situations a few different times where I've made that call. Once when I was following a car and the driver was clearly drunk, and another time when I was following a car and I THOUGHT the driver was drunk, but it was actually an elderly woman who didn't really know how to drive – she was trying to get to the hospital to visit her husband. And another time I called was when I spotted an adult man walking down a public sidewalk, completely naked. I've actually played that call on a previous episode of the show.

So – have you ever had to call 911? Come on over and share that story with us in the Facebook group. It's completely free, and you can even post anonymously if you want to. WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

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

And now we're gonna hear this week's Listener Story. It's one of my favorite parts of the podcast. Just a short story, like 5-10 minutes, sent in by a listener. You can just record a short story on your phone and email it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

You know we've talked about the dangers of kids being in hot cars here on the show. Thankfully, this listener has one that has a happy ending.

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

(Listener story)

In the summer of 2015, my family and I decided to move a little bit further south in Texas in July. I don't know if you know but it can get up to like 110-115 degrees around here during the summers, sSo it was a very hot day. We were unloading and cleaning and moving furniture around – all the things you do when you're moving into a new house – and very distracted. I assumed I didn't have to worry about the kids because they'd be excited and moving their stuff in, checking out the backyard, and whatever, but I realized my three-year-old was missing and we went into panic mode. We searched the house high and low, searched the garage, the backyard, all the places.

It finally occurred to me that we need to check the vehicles. So there he was, laying in the backseat of my car, windows up, car turned off, doors all closed, just completely drenched in sweat. And when I went to shake him awake, I was so grateful because I did not know if he was going to wake up or not. I don't know how long he was there and I don't know how much longer he would have needed to be there before tragedy struck. But he was alive. And I said, "Man, what are you doing here? It's too hot to be laying in the car." He said, "Well, I was just really tired and I wanted to take a nap, but I don't have a bed yet." So my poor baby, he just wanted to take a nap and almost died.