

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

You're listening to a Morbid Network podcast.

Mike Williams set off on a hunting trip into the swamps of North Florida where it was thought he met a gruesome fate in the jaws of hungry alligators, except that's not what happened at all.

And after the uncovering of a secret love triangle, the truth would finally be revealed.

Binge all episodes of Over My Dead Body Gone Hunting right now, ad-free on Wondery Plus.

Hey weirdos, I'm Alina.

I'm Ash.

And this is Morbid.

And it's Morbid in the morning.

It is, but it's one of those that I'm not sure why I kept for the morning because it's not going to start your day out on a great note.

Fantastic.

This is a pretty gnarly one.

That makes me nervous because my tummy already hurts.

I know, you're having tummy troubles.

I know.

What's going on?

I don't know, I think they're just like a random shit going around in the universe.

Yeah, maybe.

You know, we saw Corinne and Sabrina from Two Girls One Ghost recently.

We had a little brekkie with them.

That was so fun.

I love them so much.

And then Corinne had a shirt on that said, what was the shirt?

And you were like, wow.

I was like, wow, that's relatable.

It said something like, my tummy really hurts, but I'm being brave.

I need to get you that so fast.

That's how I feel right now.

That's how I feel right now.

But I'm being really brave about it.

That's how I feel right now.

It was hilarious.

That's very much a U-shirt.

I got in my car this morning and I'm like, my tummy really hurts, but I'm being brave.

But I'm being really brave about it.

I'm going to drive over it.

I'll be right there.

Oh, I love it so much.

I love it so much.

Also, if you haven't listened to Two Girls One Ghost, what do you do with them?

It's a fun, spooky-ass time.

And they're wonderful.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

They're so funny.

You'll listen to them.

But yeah, so Ash's tummy hurts, but she's being really brave about it.

Thank you.

So there's that.

I keep finding, and I was saying this this morning to Ash, that I'm in this phase of life where I can't stay up after the girls go to sleep.

I sit on the couch and I just pass out.

It's been happening for weeks and I'm like, why can't I stay awake?

See, it's funny to me.

It's very concerning to Elena.

She's like, I don't like this.

Yeah, I hate it.

It's so funny to me because that's been me for the past six months to a year.

I go home.

I turn on a TV show and five minutes into that TV show, I'm just like, I'm out.

See, usually I can handle a few hours of sitting and doing something else at night, but now it's as soon as I sit on that couch, I'm out.

We're doing a lot, man.

It's not.

I don't love falling asleep like that.

I got to figure out.

You know what it is?

It's a blanket.

Here it is.

Hello.

I figured it out.

No, I'm not doing anything physically for my body right now.

I've taken a hiatus from doing any kind of physical activity with my body.

Oh, see, that's not the problem for me.

And I think that's a problem for me because I think when I exercise, when I do the bike or something and I'm on a good routine with it, I feel like it energizes me in a way that I don't think is happening right now.

So maybe I think I stopped when I got sick at one point.

I was like, oh, I got to take a break, and then I just didn't do it again and I've been meaning to.

Do it, girl.

I got to do it.

Because I think it helps.

We got walking treads for our desks.

Yeah.

So I think it's necessary.

I need some physical activity.

Yeah, walk a mile in these Louboutins.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Exactly.

In these Louboutins.

Are you walking in Louboutins?

No, not me.

I was like, what?

But Iggy is.

But no, I'm just walking a mile.

But Iggy is.

No, I think it really is like part of it at least, maybe.

I'm hoping that physical activity will make me, I think it will make me feel better as like, yes.

In general.

But I don't know.

You might still fall asleep early.

Maybe, but maybe I'll feel better about it.

Well, also you, you're not giving yourself enough credit.

You have two brand new puppies.

That's true.

I think that's definitely having to do with it.

They're doing great, by the way.

Yeah, but like you learned how to, or not you, like your youngest learned how to sleep.

So then you were sleeping for a minute and your body was probably getting used to that.

And then you were like, oh, you know, it's a good idea.

Let's fuck this up entirely and get two dogs.

And that's probably what happened.

So you're probably, people get tired sometimes.

I know.

It's wild.

I don't love it.

Listen, all you capricorns out there, you might feel this sudden feeling that you've never felt before called tired.

It sucks.

It's down.

All my capricorns can attest, like it's, we don't like it.

Just lay down for a minute.

We don't like it because it's not, it's not conducive to productivity and that really annoys me.

What about a 20 minute nap?

That's like super good for productivity.

Maybe you should start doing that during the day.

Maybe it's time for you to develop a nap time oldie.

Maybe you got to have a nap time.

Maybe it's time for your nap.

It's time for my nap everybody.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

I'll wake you up with some oatmeal.
It was some cream of wheat.
Some cream of wheat.
I used to live with this lady that loved cream of wheat.
You know, it's, it's a real, it's a real food.
So it's so fucking real.
I don't know what else to say about this.
You're like, you know what?
Cream of wheat exists.
It's that you can eat it.
So I don't know.
I don't know if you should.
You can.
I don't know if you should.
But why don't we get into this terrible, terrible case that will probably keep me from sleeping even further.
Fantastic.
Let's do that.
This one is wild.
Someone suggested it.
A few people suggested it.
And I was like, and when I saw them suggested it, I was like, I'm sorry, what?
Because they were like, can you do the bone breaker case?
They didn't say that.
What?
Excuse me.
And then I looked it up and I said, what?
Excuse me.
I didn't know this existed.
Oh no.
And this is real rough.
So let's begin July 10th, 1994.
We got a nineties case.
It's the nineties.
This is when the body of 14-year-old Chris Steiner was found floating in the Wisconsin River.
He was discovered after a nearly week-long desperate search for him, and he had mysteriously disappeared seemingly into thin air from his parents' home in Baraboo, Wisconsin.
His cause of death was officially labeled as death by drowning, and the theory police were going with was that he snuck out of his house by his own volition that night to go swimming with friends.
They ruled it was just a tragic accident.
There was no, according to them, there was no other evidence to prove anything else.
But was it an accident?

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

No.

Or was this the beginning of a case that has torn my entire nervous system to shreds?

The latter.

That's literally what I wrote in my notes.

Oh my God.

It was the latter.

I am a psychic.

You are.

We are one.

So let's begin with Chris Steiner's death because this is so tragic.

Something about his parents just ruined my whole heart.

I feel like with a case like this, in any case in general, where somebody loses a teenager in their life, that's horrible.

And in the middle of the night, he was in his home, and then he just wasn't, and then they found him floating in the river a week later, and they had no answers.

At first, this was just an accidental drowning, and his parents never believed that.

Well, because parents know.

They just know.

They wait like a long time to figure out what actually happened to him, and it's even worse.

So on the morning of July 4th, 1994, Kathy Steiner, Chris's mom, went to wake up her son, 14-year-old Christian, known as Chris Steiner, who would have been asleep in his bedroom at this point.

So she went in his room, she opened up the door, and she found that the room was empty.

Now Chris was supposed to work a 7 a.m. shift at McDonald's that morning, so alarm bells immediately went off, because he had just started that job, and he was excited about that job, so he wouldn't have just bailed.

So Kathy informed her husband, George, that Chris wasn't in his bed, and together they searched the house.

During the search, they found that the window screens in their other son's bedroom had been sliced.

Oh, I don't like that.

Yeah.

And both the front and back doors to the house were unlocked.

Oh, shit.

Yeah.

And there was no sign of Chris anywhere.

So they immediately called the police to report him missing.

But imagine this, whatever happened, this person came through their other child's bedroom into this child's bedroom.

No.

How do you wrap your brain around that?

Fucked.

Now according to George and Kathy, they had last seen Chris around 10 p.m. the night before. He said his father had gone in to check on him in his bedroom, and he was in there.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Yeah.

And he said, quote, he had fallen asleep on his bed wearing the clothes he had on that day.

And Kathy was like, that was very usual, especially since Chris had worked a long shift at McDonald's that evening.

So it was his first day on the new job.

So he was like, he was exhausted.

Yeah.

So he just passed out on his bed in his clothes.

We just let him do it, whatever.

Now initially, George Steiner suspected that the window screen to the first floor bedroom had possibly been cut by one of Chris's friends because he was thinking they convinced him to sneak out of the house to go swimming.

Okay.

So they were hopeful that this was just some really shitty decision-making by his friends.

And when police checked with Chris's friends, though, they all were like, yeah, no, we did not see Chris last night.

And none of them had even seen him that night.

And they were like, we definitely didn't go to the house.

They all had things that, I don't think all of them had rock solid alibis, but I think they were like, we were home.

So now they ruled out the potential for his having simply snuck out because it just wasn't looking like that was it.

And investigators kind of shifted their focus to maybe not somebody intruded into the house and came and got him, but instead, Chris must have run away.

Because it's the 90s.

He slipped the screen on his way out.

Yeah, it's the 90s, and he's a teenager.

Of course he ran away.

Now, and it was so common at the time, I don't...

It still is.

Every once in a while, you'll hear something where they're like, they probably just ran away.

And it's like, how often does that happen?

Yeah.

I don't think that many people are running away.

Yeah.

Even the detectives working this case were having a little trouble believing that themselves because they were like, it just doesn't fit with any of this.

Like you said, the slice screen was weird.

And they said that one of them said, quote, he was believed to be a runaway, but there's not been any sign of him in a few days.

That's what I think it's soak.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Is it S-A-U-K county?

Yeah, soak county, I don't think.

Soak, right?

Soak County Sheriff's Detective Mary Ward had said that to the press that there was just no sign of him since then.

Yeah.

And that didn't really add up because it's like if he ran away, you would hear from him or someone would have.

Yeah.

Like where's he running to?

That's a thing no one hears from him.

Like he probably like, if that was the case, would have hitchhiked with somebody or stopped or going to stay with someone.

Yeah.

Like where's he staying?

Right.

And according to his parents, they said he had never run away before and they couldn't think of any reason that he would before or now.

And they said there was no stressful events, no triggers that could really have set him off.

Everything was pretty normal, he had just started a new job, he had just finished.

So like I mentioned before, the day he'd gone missing, Chris had started that new job at McDonald's and he was working with his older brother, Jim.

And he was super excited about being out of school because it was summertime and he was looking forward to earning all this money at his first job, like this was a very exciting thing for him.

Totally.

And Kathy Steiner told reporters, quote, he even had it figured out how much he was going to make working Sundays and holidays.

At the time, he had just finished eighth grade and was eager to start high school.

My God, just finished eighth grade.

Just finished eighth grade.

That's awful.

A child.

Yes.

And when you look at pictures of him, he's so cute.

And friends and family worked closely with detectives, they were very forthcoming with any information, nobody seemed to be holding back anything or being shady.

Well, that's good.

And they all spent a week, all his friends and family were posting missing flyers around Baraboo and the surrounding counties.

The police were on it.

They were doing tons of searches.

And George and Kathy Steiner were speaking to every media outlet that they could get

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

their faces in front of.

I can't imagine how hard that would be.

That is, my brain can't even wrap around that because to have to talk about it and beg people, like they were literally saying, like, if you have any information, please come forward.

Like if you know where our son is, like just begging for help.

To have to do that.

And unfortunately, the search came to an end on July 10th.

That's when Chris's body was found floating in the Wisconsin River by two jet skiers.

According to Sheriff James Smith, quote, the body was quite decomposed when it was found.

And investigators actually had to use dental records to identify him.

My God.

Because remember, this is July and he'd been in the water for a week.

So the autopsy was conducted the following day.

And the pathologist on the case was Dr. Robert Huntington, and he speculated that Chris's body had been in the water at least two days, but probably longer.

He determined that the cause of death was probably drowning, but he said the advanced decomposition from being in the water made it kind of difficult to determine if anything else had happened.

So detectives knew where the body was discovered, but where it went into the water was something that they weren't sure.

It was still a mystery because it could have floated a long way.

That's the thing.

That's what's tough when it's like water.

Yeah.

And it's like, so they couldn't tell where he went into the water and they couldn't tell if he had gone into the water already dead or they couldn't tell where the drowning had occurred.

Nothing like that.

Oh man.

And there didn't appear at the time to be any signs of physical trauma like bruising or cuts.

So they looked at it and said this seems like an accidental drowning.

Unfortunately, there was really only minor abrasions, but they said that could have been from being in the water.

So given there was no sign of struggle in the home, I don't know why they're ignoring that slice screen.

I was like, that seems struggling to me.

No apparent trauma to Chris's body.

The sheriff's office started operating on the assumption that Steiner and his friends were out partying and were too afraid to come forward with any information.

That's nice.

Which doubt everyone involved.

Great.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Also, these are like 14 year old boys and girls that you're being like, I think you're just too scared to admit that you got him killed.

And it's like, yeah.

Like what?

And they're all like, we were not with him.

Like are you, can you imagine that being put on you at 14?

Sheriff's deputies searched the shoreline in the surrounding area.

They were hoping to find a campsite, a party spot that they could be like, here it is.

This is where he went into the water.

But the river had actually risen considerably in the days before he was found.

So if there was any evidence of that, it was gone.

Now in the absence of any evidence to prove that anything else but accidental drowning had happened here, the Columbia County Sheriff's Department went with the accidental drowning theory and the case was closed.

Wow.

That's just pretty quick.

That's it.

This was very little comfort to the Steiner's because obviously that it was quick.

There was like a lot of like, it seems like that's probably it.

Like that's not very rewarding.

And they still had no answers, no real answers.

What had happened?

They didn't find a spot.

They had no one that has admitted that they were out partying with him or that they had come and got him.

And they know they're something.

They know that's not like him.

Yeah.

And they were like, we don't have any answers.

All you're telling me is that you're pretty sure that he drowned?

Like if anything, you're just making more confusion.

It's awful.

And they were just left to wonder what happened to him.

That's terrible.

And their grief and confusion was made even worse because there was odd evidence left in the house that night that he went missing.

There was the slit in the screen and there was also muddy chuprants suggesting that someone had to come into the house while everyone was sleeping and Chris had left with whoever it was.

But there was a lack of any other mess or struggle evidence which indicated that he knew whoever had come in and left with them willingly.

So that was even weirder that they were like, it seems like somebody else was here.

But again.

Oh, that's freaky.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Yeah.

Isn't that so spooky?

Yes.

And it's also like, why not look further into those footprints?

That's the thing.

Who was that?

Right.

Like they know Chris's size and clearly, like if they're like, no, that wasn't Chris's size, then who the fuck, who did that?

Yeah.

And take a look at his shoes.

Do they have that kind of shoe with that tread on the bottom?

But later.

Just look a little further.

Yeah.

And later George, his dad said, quote, what hurts so much is that you know there were other kids with him.

Something happened out there.

Something terrible happened out there.

What we don't understand is how somebody could have left him there without calling.

And that's what they were left to think happened, that everybody just left him somewhere.

That's awful.

And George and Kathy Steiner had to bury their son at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Baraboo on July 14th, 1994.

More than a year was going to pass before they would get any more information about what actually happened to Chris Steiner.

Oh, God.

Oh, it's time to talk about my favorite freaking meal kit and America's number one meal kit, HelloFresh.

I freaking love it.

With HelloFresh, you get farm fresh, pre-portioned ingredients and seasonal recipes delivered where?

Right to your dust up.

Skip those trips to the grocery store and count on HelloFresh to make home cooking easy, fun, and my personal favorite, affordable, which is why it's America's number one meal kit.

Guys, flavor is in full freaking bloom at HelloFresh.

Enjoy the taste of spring with chefcrafted recipes featuring ripe seasonal ingredients that are delivered where?

Right to your dust up.

HelloFresh does more than just delicious dinners, by the way.

Not only can you take your pick from 40 weekly recipes, but you can choose from over a hundred items to round out your order from snacks and easy lunches to desserts, pantry necessities.

Everything arrives in one box on a delivery day that you choose.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

And I don't know if you knew this because I found out recently, HelloFresh, you guys, does breakfast.

And I said to myself and I said to my Drew, let's give it a go.

So one of the breakfast that we made last week when we tried it was a bacon apple breakfast pizza.

It had delicious caramelized onions, guys.

My mouth is actually watering right now.

And ricotta cheese, my favorite.

I felt like Jada De La Rente's up in the kitchen.

It was amazing.

You guys are going to love HelloFresh.

I love HelloFresh.

We can all love HelloFresh together.

And to do that, go to HelloFresh.com slash Morbid50 and use code Morbid50 for 50% off plus your first box ships free.

Again, that's HelloFresh.com slash Morbid50 and use code Morbid50 for 50% off plus your first box ships free.

HelloFresh, America's number one meal kit.

Hi there, Morbid listeners.

It's Ash and Alina.

As you all know, on our show, we share a passion for all things spooky, the paranormal, and of course, some mind blowing true crime cases.

There's another podcast that we think you will all enjoy called Suspect, Five Shots in the Dark.

This latest season looks at a case with two victims, one murdered in cold blood and one imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit.

It follows Leon Benson's story, a man who spent more than half of his life, a total of 24 years, in an Indiana State prison for the murder of Casey Shane, a man he never met.

There was no physical evidence, no known motive, and no one coming forward with information. He was sentenced to 60 years in prison, all because one person swore they saw something.

But what if she was wrong?

Some Wondery in Campside Media comes season three of the hit podcast, Suspect.

You can listen to Suspect early and add free on Wondery Plus.

Find Wondery Plus in the Wondery app or on Apple Podcasts.

So that brings us to July 30th, 1995, a year later.

911 Dispatchers in Columbia County received a very scary and unusual call from a panicked teenage boy.

He claimed he'd been kidnapped, tortured, and locked in a closet for two days by his teenage neighbor, Joe Clark.

What?

Yep.

The dispatcher traced the call to a home and officers arrived at the scene very quickly, only a couple minutes later, where in this scene was Joe Clark's home where he shared

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

with his parents.

I was going to say he lives with his parents, correct?

This is where they discovered 13-year-old Thaddeus, Thad Phillips, stop.

He was disoriented and suffering from severe dehydration, broken legs, and other bruises and injuries.

Holy shit.

And he had broken out of a closet.

Now first responders rushed him to St. Clair Hospital.

He was immediately taken into surgery for the broken legs.

They basically had to save his legs.

They were so broken.

Wow.

Like they were so shattered in so many places that they weren't sure they were going to be able to save his legs.

Holy shit.

That's like on another level.

I mean, and this is like a child.

Yeah.

Like an actual child.

Meanwhile, Baraboo police waited for 17-year-old Joe Clark to return home.

And when he returned home, they immediately took him into custody without incident.

Who the fuck is this kid?

So Thad Phillips had a terrifying ordeal.

His ordeal had begun two days before this, shortly after midnight, on Friday night, July 28th.

Thad was watching television with his sister, his five-year-old sister, by the way.

Oh.

And this was the last time either of his parents saw him before he went to bed.

Oh my God.

This is wild.

So right now.

Oh yeah.

Because this case is like these teenage boys are in their own home.

Right.

That's the scariest thing to me.

Like they're not out, they're not walking down the street, they are in their own fucking home.

Like he's hanging out with his five-year-old sister.

Yeah.

And at some point, Thad had fallen asleep on the couch with his five-year-old sister.

He never falls asleep on the couch.

Right?

As we just started talking about that.

But he was with his five-year-old sister too, like they both had fallen asleep on the

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

couch.

That's adorable too.

And he was awoken in the middle of the night, and he thought he was awoken by his parents trying to lead him into his bedroom.

Yeah.

So this was not his parents.

This was his teenage neighbor, Joe Clark, who had walked into his fucking house and woken him up on the couch.

He lived like a half a mile down the street from the Phillips house, and Thad didn't see, like, couldn't, like, understand that this was him, he was disoriented, he was only half awake.

So he didn't really like fight back or question a lot when Clark helped him off the couch and out the door.

Oh God.

And he had guided him down the street to the Clark house and into his second floor bedroom.

Joe's.

What?

Now, at that point, like, Thad had started waking up and was just like, what the fuck is going on?

But at the, and then Thad's father, Donald Phillips, woke up around 4 a.m., and he went to the living room to make sure the children had gone to sleep in their beds, and he only found his five-year-old daughter sleeping on the couch and no Thad.

And he was like, never would he have left his five-year-old sister alone sleeping on a couch.

No.

Like, he never would have done that.

He would have carried her into a room.

Of course.

So he was like, what the fuck is going on?

And more confusing, his shoes, his sneakers were exactly where he'd left them earlier that evening.

So wherever he went, he went barefoot.

Oh my God.

Yeah.

He was like, that was his pair of shoes.

How haunting would that have been?

Yeah.

So the Phillips had only recently moved to the area a few months earlier to like a welcome to the neighborhood.

And neither Donald nor his wife really felt comfortable going to a lot of the neighbors for help because they didn't know them.

Yeah.

And they were a little, at this point, they were probably concerned, like, I don't even know these people.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

They were one of them, right?

Yeah.

So they started, they spent the entire morning checking any place they thought that could have gone.

Like the Columbia County Fair, the Baraboo swimming pool, they went to a camping spot at the Baraboo River, and they spent the rest of the, most of the day searching for their son.

But when they couldn't find him, Donald Phillips called Baraboo police to report him missing. And at no time during this search, did it occur to either of Thad's parents or anyone else, for that matter, that the boy was being held only less than a mile away from their home.

That is unbelievable.

In a teenager's closet.

And the parents had no idea.

Oh yeah.

We'll talk.

So by the time they'd arrived in Joe Clark's, excuse me, the time that he had arrived in Joe Clark's bedroom, Thad was definitely, like I said, more awake and more like what the fuck's going on.

So he was very confused about why he was bringing, brought there in the middle of the night. But Thad had seen Clark in the neighborhood, they've never really spoken.

Oh, that's even stranger.

I've seen you, but like what the fuck is going on?

And they had a four-year age difference.

So like they never really would have hung out or been friends anyways.

But Clark told Thad he just wanted to hang out, and that's why he had brought him to his house.

That's why I abducted you.

I just want to hang out.

Thad accepted the explanation.

I think it was cut probably because he was so out of it.

But after a very short period of time, he was like, I would like to go home.

Like I, it's like three AM.

And to be honest, he might have accepted the explanation in my opinion because he was like, you're terrifying.

Yeah.

That's what I was thinking.

And I'm not going to flip out here.

I'm just going to be like, cool.

Let's hang out.

That's exactly what I thought when you said that.

Yeah.

But he was like, I would like to go home and this is when Clark lost it.

He shoved Thad to the bed and began attacking him.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

And months later, Joe Clark told a judge he'd blinked out and didn't remember what happened after he pushed him onto the bed.

And he said when he woke up, he said that Thad was belly aching about his legs.

What?

Which Joe Clark is such a manipulative piece of shit.

Sounds like it.

Like I love my favorite excuse for these fuckers is always I blacked out.

I don't remember.

So wild that you just blacked out.

No, that doesn't happen.

Yeah.

And you went out of your way to break into this boy's house and steal him off the couch next to his five year old sister.

And then you just blacked out.

But then you just, you didn't mean to hurt him though.

Like nothing was going to occur.

Like you're an idiot.

Now, according to the report filed with the sock, soak, soak.

That's really hard to say.

It's probably like soak.

I think that's probably more like it.

Sour county.

Yeah.

That makes more sense.

Sheriff's department.

Once Thad was on the bed, Joe Clark.

This is really graphic, by the way.

I just want to point this out.

If you don't like bones and breaking bones.

Oh, I don't.

Can I go?

I mean, hopefully the name of the thing kind of made you stay away if that's something you don't want to listen to.

But Joe Clark grabbed him by his left ankle and began twisting until the bones in his ankle broke.

Goodbye.

Over the next two days, Clark subjected Thad Phillips to brutal outbursts of violence.

And that included Joe repeatedly jumping on his legs, causing fractures to both femur bones.

Femur bones.

Femur is so thick, Eka.

How like, is Joe a big kid or no?

That's the thing.

He's like not a like massive kid.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

No.

But it's like, it was just the rage and violence that he had.

I'm like, where the fuck are your parents?

He also caused knee fractures and dislocation, ankle fractures and dislocation and tibial fractures in both lower legs.

So he broke his femur bones on both legs and his tibia on both legs.

Knee things, freaking me out.

Every part of both of his legs was shattered.

That is an absolutely insane.

Months later, Dr. Michael Plute, who was the surgeon who performed Thad's first two surgeries, said to the sheriff's department that quote, the force used to break Thad's bones was equivalent of Thad having been in a car accident.

Oh my God.

And there was more injuries on top of that.

Like he had contusions.

He had abrasions and he was also severely dehydrated because he wouldn't eat or drink anything during the time because he was scared that Clark was going to poison him.

Yeah.

I would think the same thing.

Now when he wasn't physically torturing Thad and breaking his bones, Clark was taking immense pleasure in psychologically tormenting him.

Joe told Thad quote, he was fascinated by busting people's bones.

What?

And that he had done this to at least two other boys.

One of whom he said was Chris Steiner.

And did Thad know Chris Steiner?

He was like, I know that name.

Like he'd heard of it.

Yeah.

And at one point he said quote, Clark had exposed himself.

This is very upsetting, by the way.

He had exposed himself and proceeded to masturbate in front of Thad and placed a pillow over Thad's

face to smother him, though it's unclear whether he was doing this in an attempt to kill him.

What the fuck is wrong with this kid?

What you find out is that like this kid, Joe Clark, and he's not a kid at 17, no, he's an animal.

He's a fucking monster.

He literally got off on suffering like watching someone suffer like he's a straight up monster.

Oh my God.

On Sunday, July 30th, Joe had left the had to leave the house.

So he carried Thad's body like broken body and you know, this guy wasn't carrying him in a nice way.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

So this guy, this poor kid Thad has two shattered legs from the waist down there, just broken. He must have been in like complete shock.

Oh, I can't imagine the pain and like, I can't even imagine.

And he had carried him to a closet in his bedroom and after binding Thad's legs with a bandage, he locked him in there.

What the fuck?

Yeah.

This is like, oh my God, this is like unimaginable.

It really is.

The fact that somebody could do this, but a 17 year old, like this sounds like a movie that I would never watch.

And one that you would be like, that's insane.

That's like, because no way.

Exactly.

That's why I wouldn't want to watch it.

And so Thad is in the closet with two broken legs.

He's been psychologically and physically tortured for two days, dehydrated as hell.

And he sees a guitar in the closet and he's like, well, this is my only chance.

So he uses the guitar to break a hole through the door, like busts through the door.

How this kid had any strength to do that.

I have no idea.

And he was able to unlock it.

He dragged himself down the stairs with two broken legs.

What?

And you know, his legs were banging on every step along the way.

Oh my God, stop it.

He found a telephone and he called 911.

Holy shit.

And by the way, no parents around this point.

Thank you.

That was my next question.

The Phillips family were relieved that Thad had been found and they raced to St. Clair Hospital, but they found that doctors were now trying to put several rods and pins and stabilizers and Thad's legs, which they were like, what the fuck?

Like what do you mean?

And Donald Phillips told investigators that he'd never seen Joe Clark before.

Donald is the father.

And he said, as far as he knew, Clark wasn't friends with his son.

He was like, I don't know who this kid is.

Right.

And at the time, Phillips was like, this must be some kind of like one time freak attack.

Like what the hell is this?

Like everybody was just like, he must have snapped like what is going on.

Because they hadn't seen anything like this.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

And they hadn't heard Thad say, hey, he said he did this to Chris Steiner.

Oh shit.

Now while doctors went to work on saving Thad's legs again, they had to work to save them.

They were thinking they were going to have to amputate both of his legs.

I can't imagine like what shape he was in.

Oh my God.

And it looks like he like played sports and stuff.

He's a little cutie.

And mentally, what his state was in, I can't even imagine.

He probably had to like learn how to walk again.

Because he was like awful.

He would like berate him and scream at him.

He would like say awful things.

And then he's standing over him like masturbating while he's suffering like so fucked up.

That the trauma.

How do you get past that?

That's like layers and layers of trauma.

Well, Sheriff's deputies transported Joe Clark to a juvenile detention center and they sat down for an interview, which I'm sure was a terrifying interview.

Wild.

Now at no time during the arrest interviews or trial, did Joe Clark really become forthcoming or honest with anybody?

Not surprised.

Yeah.

And initially Clark was held on kidnapping charges, obviously, which gave detectives a little more time to investigate other potential charges.

And according to Clark, he'd seen that in the yard a couple of times on previous occasions and went to the Phillips house after midnight on the 29th after seeing the Phillips car is absent from their house.

The fuck?

Yeah.

So he's an actual predator.

He's like a stalker.

Like he was watching Thad Phillips in his own fucking yard on several occasions, then waits for it to look like his parents aren't home, steals him off the fucking couch.

This guy had no idea.

I know he's doing much worse things, but it's like he had no idea if the parents were home or not.

And he's just leaving his five year old sister on the couch as no.

Oh, it doesn't give a shit.

Yeah.

He doesn't give a shit.

If you have the audacity to walk into somebody's home like that, you don't care about anything.

He said when he showed up at the house at midnight, the door was unlocked.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

And so Clark just let himself in the house.

Yeah.

It's definitely your house now.

And he found Thad sleeping on the couch with his five year old sister and he said he, quote, assisted him off the couch.

Oh yeah.

You're so great.

He walked slash carried him into his house.

Like abducted, I think is what you mean.

Yeah.

I think I believe that's the word you're searching for.

Now beyond that, he said that he, again, blinked out and doesn't remember anything that happened.

But two days doesn't remember a damn thing.

Now based on Thad's report that Clark, because now he had said, Hey, by the way, because he was with it enough to say, by the way, he said he did this to Chris Steiner, Sheriff's investigators in Columbia County reopened their investigation into Chris Steiner's death.

And we're very eager to find out what Joe Clark knew.

So when Steiner's body was discovered in the Wisconsin River that previous year, again, he had been in the water for nearly a week and it was the decomposition was considerable.

That's why it made that autopsy so difficult.

Because your bones deteriorate.

Well, it's like, they don't deteriorate, but it's like, it's tough to figure out what is postmortem injury and what is perimortem, premortem, like there's no, it's hard.

It's very hard, especially in a river like that, when it can, you can slam into things and break bones.

I'm a little confused why broken bones weren't discovered here that noted from what I, but I don't know.

Okay.

I'm just saying to me, I'm a little.

And a full autopsy had been done previously that yeah, so that's, that's confusing to me.

That is.

But that's just me.

That's weird.

That's suspicious.

That is a little weird.

So Steiner's body was actually exhumed and reexamined for this.

I was thinking that.

And it was x-rayed this time, which I'm like, it wasn't x-rayed before.

Yeah, weird.

But I imagine that's probably because they went in with a pretty preconceived notion that he had accidentally drowned and had left his house on his own village.

So perhaps it wasn't quite a full autopsy.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

So this is a good lesson for not going into something like this with a preconceived narrative of what went down.

Right.

So they did their whole job not to do that.

So they did the x-ray and, huh, after an x-ray, the coroner reported that Steiner had indeed suffered broken knees and broken ankles, very similar to the injuries that that Phillips had.

Holy shit.

And the findings of the second autopsy and their implications came as no surprise to Kathy Steiner, Chris Steiner's mom.

Right.

She had always suspected Clark.

What?

Yep.

Why?

The last one to talk to Chris that night and she said he wanted him to go somewhere with him, but Chris refused.

He also knew that Chris's brother was not going to be home that night.

Oh, shit.

Which like Kathy, Kathy knew.

Kathy fucking knew.

And that's why he broke in through the brother's room because he wasn't going to be there.

Because he figured the brother wasn't going to be there that night.

Oh my God.

Right.

This kid, like he did.

What's the BTK thing that he said he would do?

He would like troll.

I think he called it.

This fucking troll in neighborhoods.

It's true.

He's like, oh, it's so disgusting.

And according to Kathy, Joe Clark had been hanging around her son a lot in the days before he disappeared.

And she said that Clark was quote, very domineering and said he quote, hung around younger boys because he could bully them.

Ew.

So he's a disgusting predator.

Yeah, he's a fucking weirdo.

As the coroner's office conducted their second autopsy of Chris Steiner's body, investigators served a search warrant at the Clark home in Fairfield, Wisconsin.

Among the evidence seized in the search was quote, a 48 by 40 inch plywood board with quote, unquote, satanic writing and illustrations scribbled on it.

A film canister quote with possible marijuana seeds.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Remember it's the 90s.

Yes.

A leg brace and a body brace, several horror films on VHS, which by the way, Dave found out which horror films were like among those.

And I love it because Dave, when he wrote this to me was like, these are the films that were found.

So among other things, Joe Clark had terrible taste in horror movies.

It was Witchcraft, which is I don't know which year there's a few witchcraft movies, but none of them look like they're pretty awesome.

One I want you to look this one up guys.

Children shouldn't play with dead things.

Oh, what the fuck?

It looks, if you look at the IMDB page for that, it has like a little trailer for it or some little clip.

It looks ridiculous and so weird.

Ew, even the cover, I'm like, what?

And he also had close encounters of the third kind.

So he's not killing it in the horror game here.

Definitely not.

So that was found.

There was also, and this is the most chilling to me, they found several sketches of house interiors in the area.

What?

No, no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no,
no, no,

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Yeah, he did.

So kids at school knew he had done it.

What the fuck?

They didn't know.

They didn't have the evidence, he didn't admit it to them.

But they were like, this fucker did it.

Wow, he must have been like,

I can't imagine being like, oh yeah,

like that was definitely my fellow classmate

that tortured that boy to death.

He for sure did it.

Like what?

Yeah.

And his father said to reporters,

I even heard with my own ears,

a girl come up to him in the parking lot at school

and say to him, did you kill Chris Steiner?

Well.

And I wanna say, parents, does that concern you at all?

That his entire peer group believes

that he killed one of their own?

Like what is making them think that?

Like I know kids can be fucked, I understand that,

but maybe sit him down and be like, why are they saying this?

Like yeah, cause there's some kind of reason behind that.

Talk to him.

Yeah.

Why are you not talking to him?

Why are you just going, wow, fuck, that's crazy.

That's wild.

That's real fucked up.

Like sit down with your fucking child

and go, why does your entire school think you killed this boy?

Right.

Because if this is just like a witch hunt here,

which is what they describe it as later.

Oh my God.

Yeah.

Then we need to do something about it,

but like if this is based off of things you have done

or said, then you need help my boy.

Right.

Like that should be the discussion.

Let's get you some help.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

We need to get you some help,
even if you are falsely admitting to this
or alluding to that you did it,
you need to get help and we are here to help you.
Exactly.
They did none of that.
So during her testimony in the Phillips trial,
Joe's mother, Bertha Clark said to the jury
that Joe was genuinely distraught over Sniner's death
and it caused a noticeable change to him.
But she said, but what I think is when she says
he was genuinely distraught,
I think what she means is he was trying to act distraught.
Yeah.
Because it's like, you're forgetting that he did it.
Right.
Let's not say he was genuinely feeling
any kind of feelings about that because it's like, no,
he brutally tortured this child.
To death.
So no.
And she said, Joey was hurt because his friend had died
and people were trying to blame him for it.
Could you imagine how that would make him feel?
But Bertha girl, he did it.
Like I'm sorry girl, what?
So they didn't believe that he did it.
No.
And also it's like, I'm sorry,
can you imagine how it makes Christina's parents feel?
To know that your child, your 17 year old child,
abducted him and murdered him.
Abducted him from his home, from his bed,
in his bedroom, dragged him to this house
and tortured him for God knows how long.
It also be like, hey Bertha, what do you think about him?
All the fucking images he has sketched
of your neighbor's holes.
The interiors of people's houses.
What do you think about that?
What about the lists?
Of boys names.
Like that doesn't concern you at all.
Like we're not gonna touch that.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Let's not put on rose colored glasses.
Now, according to the parents,
the harassment at school became so bad
that they had to withdraw him from Barabu High School.
And he was unable to,
before he was even able to finish his senior year.
Well, don't murder people and that won't happen to you.
And when they pulled him out of school,
they said he worked a few entry level farm jobs.
He had some stints as a cook and dishwasher
at a local restaurant, which is horrifying.
But Joe's parents also came under a little scrutiny
after this.
One would think.
Because they were trying to figure out,
everybody's trying to figure out
what the fuck is an explanation
for this kid's violent anti-social behavior here.
And how the fuck did this happen in your home
and you had no idea?
Exactly.
Now, on the evening that Thad was abducted from his home,
the Clarks were visiting their daughter in nearby Portage
and they weren't planning to return until the following day.
So they had left Joe alone in the house
for most of the weekend.
His father did say to reporters, and again, he's 17.
So like leaving him alone is not like a felony here.
No, that's not crazy at all.
His father told reporters, we called Friday night,
so it's not like we were out of touch with him.
So that's fine, whatever.
I'm not worried about that.
No, me either.
But according to investigators
who conducted the initial search of the Clark home,
the house was in a state of big disarray when they arrived.
The kitchen was strewn with beer bottles.
And when they looked in Joe's personal journal,
which was taken into evidence,
he details his parents' extreme alcoholism.
And at one point he says,
mom and dad are downstairs getting drunk again.
I don't like admitting it, not even in my journal.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

That's sad.

It is sad.

Now, according to Joe, his mother drank routinely.

During an interview, she drank routinely and intensely to the point of passing out all the time.

Wow.

She said that's not true.

She had never drank to the point of passing out, that's not true.

Of course, the press and public at this point are hearing all this stuff

and they're speculating on Clark's possible motive and the circumstances that led him to become this.

But they were gonna have to wait for the actual trial to get any real sight into his psychology and they were gonna get it.

Oh, God.

So initially Joe Clark's trial for the crimes against Thad Phillips were gonna begin in early September.

And it was gonna be presented in two parts.

The first was gonna be basically to determine did he commit these crimes?

And the second was gonna say, did he do so because of quote, mental defect or disease, so insanity.

But when he appeared before a circuit court judge on September 5th, 1996,

Joe pleaded no contest to the charges against him.

Interesting.

So the guilt and innocence phase was moot now.

They didn't need it.

Now all they had to do was determine whether he was mentally incapacitated

when he abducted, tortured, and attempted to kill Thad Phillips.

So the trial to determine his competency began September 16th, 1996.

During this time, his defense attorney, Mark Frank, presented the case for insanity.

Frank's case really rested largely on that head trauma thing and the potential brain injury suffered

when he was thrown from,

I think it was a dirt bike more than a motorcycle in 1993.

According to medical records,

he suffered a blood clot above the covering of the brain,

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

not below it,
which made a quick recovery after surgery.

Ah.

But since the accident, Frank told the jury
that Joe Clark quote,

has had and continues to have
an abnormal condition of the mind.

Now according to Frank, the defense attorney,
the injuries that he got from the accident
required treatments,

including having arteries to the brain cauterized
which could affect mental processes.

He called several witnesses who also gave testimony
saying that there were dramatic changes in his behavior
in the year since the accident.

He had hallucinations, psychotic behavior,
suicidal impulses, delusions,
social impairment and personality.

Wow.

These are all,
none of them are experts, they're all just people.

Oh, okay.

So unfortunately for the defense,
under cross examination,
several of these witnesses were a little less effective
than they were when they had been initially.

Presented by the defense.

Joe's mother Bertha, for example,
and this part annoys me how they went about this
because I think there was just a better way to go about it,
but that's just me.

Okay.

Bertha had to walk back a lot of statements about his injuries
because she made them seem worse and worse and worse
and definitely was like overplaying them.

Sure.

But when prosecutor Pat Barrett came to cross examine her,
they basically said that the woman's eighth grade education
could not be expected to understand
arcane medical terminology.

Okay, well.

And it's like, like, fuck off.

I don't think we need to do that
because I don't care if you have an eighth grade education

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

or what, if it's your child, like, you know what I mean?

Like, I don't think that's a great way to go about it.

I think that's kind of like poking.

Yeah, it is.

It feels like.

Well, and I think they were,

I think they were treating her that way probably

because of what had come out.

That's the thing.

That's just kind of like, and actually to demonstrate this,

they handed her a paperclip and a ruler on the stand

and asked her to tell the paperclip size and centimeters.

Okay, so they're humiliating her.

That's the thing.

I don't think humiliation is necessary in this situation.

I don't understand that.

Because regardless of.

It makes me uncomfortable.

Yeah, that's the thing.

It makes me uncomfortable.

I was like, that's not a good,

I wouldn't feel good about that.

No.

Like it's just, I understand that, like,

we're trying to prove that she's really not a great witness.

Well, like you're taking mansplaining to the next level.

Well, and there's very easy, like you can,

we can tell that she is lying and over exaggerating things

and that she is not a great credible witness.

And if you can do that without pointing

to her education level.

And that's the thing.

You're just, you're kind of going for like low fruit.

Exactly.

That's what it feels like to me, but whatever.

And although she was not an effective witness

when it came to describing the physical trauma

her son suffered in the accident,

she did insist that she'd seen a big change

in her son after the accident,

which could absolutely be true.

She said, there's something terribly wrong.

He needs psychiatric treatment.

Which is like, okay.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Correct.

Did you try to get him any?

Yeah.

The answer is no.

And if you were that concerned, you would have.

Yeah.

And Barrett countered this statement by producing a big amount of reports from various school and social service agencies who had all done assessments of Joe in previous years after he had punched another student and threatened to kill a teacher among other things.

So there were warning signs here.

And the reports contradicted the claim that Joe required considerable, considerable care after the accident.

Totally contradicted it.

And also the fact that he had been, he was evaluated for psychological impairments after that as well.

And there was, it was an unremarkable report.

Like not at all.

So it doesn't look like where we're getting this insanity defense.

Exactly.

And Barrett points it out.

While Bertha Clark may see a need for psychological treatment now, his parents had at no time tried to get him help before this.

Before sitting on the stand and screaming at everybody that he needs help.

Seems convenient.

None of them had even lifted a finger to try to get him help.

It shouldn't take your son murdering or kidnapping another child and holding them hostage to make you realize that.

You know what?

He needs help.

And it's like, okay.

Too late.

Sometimes I know it can be hard to get help.

But you didn't even make the effort.

There was no evidence of them ever making an effort.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

That's shitty.

And the problem with the case put together by the defense was that it relied almost exclusively on the testimony of just regular witnesses.

Like lay witnesses.

Yeah, no expertise to speak on physical, mental or emotional health of this child before or after the head injury.

And none of the, they had four psychologists evaluate Joe Clark after his arrest

and none of them were willing to support a diminished capacity defense.

So that tells you everything you need to know.

And as if the prosecution's well executed for the most part, aside from that paperclip humiliation, they're well executed cross examinations of the defense witnesses.

As if that wasn't bad enough.

Frank, Mark Frank's odds of success plummeted even more when Barrett called his first witness, which was Thad Phillips.

Oh, shit.

So Phillips detailed the absolutely horrific ordeal for the court.

He said he grabbed my throat and twisted my right ankle.

I could feel it snap.

Oh my God.

He said when I looked down, my foot was on backwards.

Holy shit.

He said he pushed my leg up at an angle towards my head.

He kept pushing it and pushing it until it broke.

He also told the jury early on in the ordeal, he had asked Clark if he had ever done this before and Clark responded saying, do you know Chris Steiner?

Wow.

According to Thad, Joe Clark also told him that there was an unnamed boy he had paralyzed.

What the fuck?

Yup.

And the boy's testimony was so heart wrenching and compelling that everybody was just silent.

I believe it.

People were crying, it was just awful.

And at one point he became too emotional

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

and he said he was like, please,
can I stop talking about this?

Of course.

And they did, recess was granted.

Good.

Now, among the last and maybe the most important witnesses
to be called by the prosecution

was well-known forensic psychiatrist, Park Dietz.

He had actually testified in the Jeffrey Dahmer case,
the Ted Kaczynski case, and Betty Broderick.

Ah.

Now, according to Dietz, Joe Clark quote,
is a serial sexual sadist who takes pleasure
in breaking his victim's legs.

But his antisocial personality disorder
is not a legal defense to his crimes.

Dietz said Clark is faking his amnesia
and falsely claiming every kind of hallucination
known to man in order to avoid responsibility
for his crimes.

Mm-hmm.

And he said, as evidence of deviant pathology,
he said that Clark wrapped Thad's legs and ace bandages
and put three pairs of white gym socks on his feet
before masturbating in front of him.

Ew, what the fuck?

And he said, quote, Clark's fetish for gym socks,
which he took from the Phillips home
before abducting the boy.

And the fact that he masturbated in front
of the injured victim showed he was aroused
by making people suffer.

That's so, so gross.

Yeah.

Now, the following day, September 18th,
and that was like damning.

That was real damning.

Yeah, he stole gym socks from the house.

Yeah.

That's on another level.

Yeah.

This whole thing is on another level.

It's really ick.

The jury deliberated for just one hour

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

before unanimously rejecting the defense's claim that Joe Clark was suffering from any kind of mental incapacity when he kidnapped and tortured Thad Phillips. The verdict really wasn't a shock to anyone in the courtroom. An observing attorney in the courtroom that day actually said he had sympathy for Mark Frank, the defense team in the defense team. He said it was, quote, a dog case, but somebody had to take it. So basically they're all like, yeah, you're not winning this one. Right.

Moments after the verdict was read, Thad Phillips was smiling and hugging Pat Barrett. And he was very happy with the outcome of the trial, he told reporters.

At the sentencing hearing on November 14th, Joe Clark was sentenced to 100 years in prison for the kidnapping and assaults of Thad Phillips.

Goodbye.

Goodbye.

["The Last Song of the Year"]

Now in October, 1997, a civil court judge ruled in favor of Thad Phillips and ordered Joe Clark to pay 31,566 medical damages, \$6 million in compensatory damages, and 21 million in damages to the victim.

Holy shiitake mushrooms.

Clark had no money at the time?

Yeah.

And he's like, you know, 17.

And he's in prison.

He's unlikely to really earn anything.

So how did he get that payout?

The judge ruled that he was, that she was gonna allow him to make money from the case so that he could pay this.

Okay.

She said, given the sensational nature of this case, it is entirely possible that the defendant could reap some financial gain through media coverage in the future.

Okay.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

And she was like, and it's gonna go to them.
Thad must've been okay with that and his family.
Now on to the murder trial.
Yes, I was gonna say.
We have only done the Thad Phillips trial.
So some of the most important parts of this
was that they needed to connect Joe Clark to the murder
in 1994 of Chris Steiner.
And Clark had been among the small number
of potential suspects that had been interviewed
following the discovery of Steiner's body.
Oh, wow.
Yeah.
And Steiner's parents had strongly suspected him
of involvement in the death, like from the beginning.
So investigators pretty much were like,
okay, we got our guy.
And their suspicions only grew
when following Clark's arrest the previous year,
a second autopsy of Steiner's body
had shown those injuries that were so similar to Thad.
And then Thad's testimony that Clark had just admitted
to him that he killed Chris Steiner.
That was really the last piece of evidence
that they needed.
So less than a week after the verdict was read
in the case against Clark for the attack on Phillips,
Columbia County District Attorney Mark Bennett
announced that he was gonna be filing criminal charges
against Joe Clark for the murder of Chris Steiner.
In a press conference a day later,
he cited the testimony collected
during the Phillips investigation in the subsequent trial
but saying, we feel those statements are very relevant,
but we do have other evidence.
Some included in the complaint and some not included.
Okay.
So after the press conference, Ron and Bertha Clark,
Joe Clark's parents, they spoke out
against the County, Columbia County District Attorney's
office, they accused investigators
of misrepresenting the facts of the case.
And they said, quote, we're talking about two kids
who got in a fight.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

The police made up the rest of the story.
I don't think that that's what we're talking about.
I think we're talking about one kid that went home
after killing the other and putting him in a river.
It's like, I think we're talking about different things
here, Bertha.
Your son and Joe abducted and tortured somebody
and was like convicted of it.
Like it's sitting in prison as we speak.
I don't know how you deny it when this kid called 911
from your fucking house.
How do you deny this?
That's just like, what?
He didn't go down the street and call
and be like, it was at that house.
He was in your fucking house.
And you have a broken closet door
to prove that he broke out of it.
It goes beyond denial.
You can't.
That's ridiculous.
Are you kidding me right now?
And now you're going to say that they're railroading him
when he admitted to killing this other kid
in the exact fucking same way?
Like, yeah, it sucks that your son is a murderer.
But you've got to come to terms here.
Exactly, because you're disrespecting another family
by saying it hasn't like known.
Several other families.
It's like, come on.
They thought their son was being unfairly accused of murder.
And they said that he's only being accused
because he was seen with Chris the day he disappeared.
And it's like, no.
He's being accused because he said he did it.
And Ron said that's the charges
they wanted to bring in the first place.
Thad Phillips was just a way to get there.
Thad Phillips was in your home, dude.
You mean the fact that your son like,
absolutely abducted, tortured
and tried to kill Thad Phillips in your home?
That was just a convenient way for them

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

to get him on murder charges?
I don't understand how these people can't like.
That's the thing.
I understand that it's, I can't even fathom
how hard it is to come to terms or grips with your child
being this fucking level of a monster.
But don't speak again.
But it's like, you can't.
You're sounding wild right now.
Disrespectful as fuck.
And disrespectful saying
that they were just trying to pin this on him.
Are you saying that the entire thing was set up?
Like Thad's bones are broken
because they just wanted to get a murder conviction
on this random kid?
Like I don't understand.
Like no.
So the preliminary hearing was to be held in early October
and Thad Phillips was gonna be
the state's main witness in the case.
Although they had other evidence,
his testimony was really gonna be,
that was already known to the public.
It was pretty much key to prosecuting the case.
But a few days before the hearing was to begin,
Thad Phillips got into an argument with another boy
which resulted in the boy shooting Thad in the shoulder.
Oh my God.
According to the shooter named Michael,
Thad and a friend had threatened to kill him
and were entering his home without permission.
So he shot Phillips in the back.
What?
Yeah.
I didn't see that coming.
Yeah, nobody did.
Apparently Thad recovered by the following month
and in early November,
Joe was formally charged with three criminal counts,
including first degree intentional homicide of Christina.
But that was like a what?
Was Thad in trouble?
I don't think he was in trouble

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

because he was the one that was shot.
But I was wondering if the person was telling the truth.
I don't think they had a lot of like evidence
to the contrary, but woof.
What a life.
I was just gonna say, like Jesus,
like you are very young to be having all this stuff happen.
Now the trial began on November 4th, 1997
with Kathy and George Steiner
being the first of a lot of witnesses called.
In their testimonies, both parents told the jury
how they discovered their son was missing,
the frantic search that followed,
and then them finding out
that Chris's body was found in the river.
Kathy Steiner told the jury about the argument
her son had had with Joe Clark that afternoon.
Oh, right, I forgot about that.
And the significance of which was compounded
by Thad Phillips testimony
in which he detailed the extent of his own ordeal
and Clark's confession to the murder of Steiner.
So they had everything they needed.
Now there was a lot of overlap
between the two cases, obviously.
In the Steiner murder case,
kind of unfolded pretty much the same as the Phillips case did.
A lot of the same evidence, many of the same witnesses.
And this time, however, Ron and Bertha Clark
attempted to provide an alibi for Joe.
They told the jury Joe was asleep in his bed
on July 3rd, 1994,
the night that Steiner was believed to have been abducted.
And you're just telling us this now, how convenient.
Well, and the prosecutor quickly challenged that.
They confronted Bertha with the photographs
of empty beer cans in the house,
that being in such disarray,
as well as Joe's journal,
where he repeatedly wrote about his barrens drinking
and how they were always passed out.
They were always incapacitated.
And basically they said,
if this was indicative of a pattern,

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

we really can't trust your alibi.

True.

And it's the truth.

Yeah.

And that's the whole point of this is to discredit the witness.

Of course.

Now, after several days of testimony,
the jury sided with the prosecution
and he was found guilty
for the first degree murder of Chris Steiner.

Yeah.

Two weeks later,
he was brought before Judge James Evanson for sentencing.
Evanson called Clark a mean, sadistic killer
and noted that the evidence was overwhelming
in proving Clark's guilt
despite his continued statements of innocence.

Before passing his sentence,
Judge Evanson asked whether Joe Clark
had anything to say to the court.

And he said, I've done nothing wrong.

You're condemning an innocent person.

For you've done nothing wrong.

Totally.

Okay.

Hey, look at that over there.

Yeah.

He was just in your house with broken legs.

Yeah.

Wanted to break through your closet for funsies.
Luckily, Joe Clark was sentenced to 110 years in prison
for the murder of Chris Steiner.

Wow.

Which he had to serve concurrently
with his 100 year sentence he was already serving
for the abduction and attack on that Phillips.
210 years.

He will have to serve at least 70 years of his sentence
before even being eligible for parole.

Good.

Now outside the courthouse,
his parents said the sentence was basically bullshit.
And they called the trial a witch hunt.

Yes, for sure.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

A witch hunt.

Like you're, what?

It's not like he's this innocent boy
that they plucked out of nowhere.

He was, there was a boy in his, your house.

Yeah.

Calling 911 with broken legs,
saying that this kid had abducted him from his house.

I can't with these people.

Ugh.

And apparently,
they accused the authorities of conspiring
against their son.

Why would they do that?

It's only a bunch of circumstantial evidence,
testimony from a bunch of kids they dragged in here
from jail to tell stories.

I don't know.

I think it's based on a bit more than that.

All right.

Doesn't change the fact that he's in jail for 270 years.

So in the fall of 1998,

Joe Clark did appeal the ruling in the Phillips case.

I figured.

And apparently challenging the factual basis
for his convictions on the homicide,
mayhem and mental harm charges.

Excuse me.

What?

The petition said that Clark had been wrongfully
convicted of mayhem.

This blows my mind.

Because mayhem is defined as an act committed by one
who with intent to disable or disfigure another,
cuts or mutilates the tongue,
eye, ear, nose, lip, limb,
or other bodily member of another.

So Joe's lawyer said,

well, due to advances in science and medicine,
that Phillips didn't suffer any permanent damage.

Oh, my God.

So his client could not be guilty of mayhem
as it's defined by the law.

Oh, my God.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

I got to ask, sir, how the fuck do you sleep at night?
Like that is, you go home
and you put your fucking head on a pillow.
Like, damn.
Yeah, I don't know about that.
I know defense attorneys have a hard job.
Have a very hard job, some of the hardest jobs.
And I know you got to do what you got to do.
But in this situation, I'm like, there's a line.
I'd be like, dude, that's not something I'm willing to do.
I'm not stamping my name on that.
You got to give this one up.
Like you got to let this one go to be saying that,
that due to medical advances,
that didn't suffer any permanent damage.
How about permanent mental damage?
Are you kidding me?
Are you fucking joking?
And you're literally saying, well,
if it was like way back when, and this happened,
sure, it would be mayhem,
but because we're smarter now
and technology has advanced, we can't do that.
Also, he has like rods and shit in his legs.
Yeah, that's not permanent damage.
I would call that permanent damage.
Oh, it just blew my mind.
If my leg is no longer just my leg, that's damage.
Luckily, the court justices disagreed with that argument
and they upheld the original finding.
Imagine that, like the back offices when they got that.
They were like, whoa.
They were like, wow, shoot for the stars, I guess, my guys.
How's that reach?
They said, we do not see anything
in either the historical notion of mayhem
or its current placement in the statutory scheme,
which would require a victim's disablement
or disfigurement to be permanent.
It is reasonable to infer that Clark knew
that these injuries would disable his victim from escaping,
especially in light of Clark's additional threat
to paralyze the victim if he tried to leave the house.
Yeah.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Therefore, the trial court's findings of a factual basis for mayhem was clearly not erroneous. Now, additional challenges were made to the attempted murder and mental harm to a child charges.

Oh, sure.

Which I'm like, you gotta stop.

Yeah, like, where is the line?

And they were trying to do it the same way with the strict interpretation of the law.

Like looking for a loophole, essentially.

And these arguments were very unpersuasive.

All of them were upheld, so which is like, you are really going after mental harm to a child charge based on strict interpretation of that law?

I would never.

Like, dude, I, that I don't get.

There was a second appeal that was filed in March 1999 and it argued that several pieces of evidence in the Steiner murder case, specifically Thad's testimony and the list of names discovered on those lists and the investigations, they lacked merit.

What?

And the verdict should be reversed.

I don't think so.

Essentially what the petition argues is that because these pieces of evidence were from a separate trial, from the Thad Phillips trial.

Sad was from a separate trial.

They should not have been allowed to be used in the murder trial.

And the justices were like, no.

But like these two events correlate, my guy.

The trial court properly exercised its discretion in determining that the evidence was relevant for purposes of motive, plan, intent, and identity, and in determining that its probative value was not outweighed by unfair prejudice.

After reviewing all the evidence, the ruling was upheld.

So Joe Clark is gonna be in jail, but ever and ever and ever and ever and always.

I, and then there's just like no info on if he paralyzed a boy.

That one, because I looked everywhere for that, they could not find what that was about.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

So maybe he was just shit talking.
So he could have just been shit talking
or he did it to someone who was in a bad position
and wouldn't be able to come forward.
Yeah. Damn.
Wow, that was something.
That was a really intense case, very upsetting.
I feel so bad for her.
In a lot of ways.
Chris Steiner's family and Thad.
And now Chris Steiner's family now knows
what he went through before he died.
That's even worse.
Absolutely.
Like they have, it's closure is such a weird word
we always say, but they have that closure
of knowing what happened now
instead of just wondering what happened.
But my God, at what cost?
Like that knowing that that's what happened, I don't know.
I wonder how they feel about knowing.
I hope they're okay.
I hope they are too.
I hope that's okay.
I know, I hope Thad's doing great.
And honestly, wow, that was a lot.
I hope Joe Clark's parents got it together at some point.
I honestly do.
I hope they got it together.
I hope they were able to accept what had happened
and move forward.
And stop denying it.
Hopefully, healthily.
Yeah.
Like hopefully you got it together and yeah.
You know, but oof.
That's a sad story all around.
It's an awful, awful, awful case.
Damn, where was that again?
Wisconsin.
That's crazy.
Yeah.
You guys are just supposed to be known for cheese, I think.
I know, what are you doing?

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 456: The Bonebreaker Case

Calm down.

Calm down over there.

Well, thanks for listening.

Yeah.

And we hope you keep it weird.

Well, but not so weird that you forget to say weird
at the end of your own show.

And I don't think you should ever keep it
as weird as Joe Clark did.

Cause or else you'll be in prison for 200 and forever years.

Don't keep it that weird at all.

Billy, love you so much.

Bye.

Hey, Prime members.

You can listen to Morbid early and ad free on Amazon Music.

Download the Amazon Music app today.

Or you can listen ad free with Wondery Plus and Apple Podcasts.

Before you go, tell us about yourself

by completing a short survey at [Wondery.com slash survey](https://wondery.com/survey).