

## [Transcript] Morbid / Episode 467: The Murder Of Elizabeth Riser & The Attempted Murder Of Brandi Hicks

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.

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Hey weirdos, I'm Alina.

I'm Ash.

And this is Morbid.

Morbid.

This is Morbid.

We are here.

I'm here in my comfy chair right now.

Yeah, we're in comfy chairs.

We don't have squeaky chairs anymore.

I know it takes us a long time to figure these things out and to remedy them, but we get there eventually.

We are who we are, and that's all we are.

It's true.

Popeye.

You know, I am who I am.

That's all that we are.

Guys, did you?

I'm not going to talk about it because Ash hasn't seen it yet.

Have you seen the finale of Six Session?

No.

Please let me know.

I have four left.

I have a lot of feelings about it, and I need to talk to someone.

I have four left, and I want to get through them because I'm excited, but then I don't want to get through them because then it's over.

You do want to get through them.

No, I do.

You want to get through them?

I'm going to get through them.

You're going to.

I feel it.

You're going to make it.

You're going to make it.

You're going to make it through.

You're going to make it.

You're going to make it through.

But yeah, this is a Six Session household over here.

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Hell, yeah.

Fuck off.

Everybody, let's talk about it because I need to talk to somebody.

John and I are just like, want to talk to everyone about it, but no one's seen it.

Did you talk to Aiden about it? Did you talk to him separately?

I haven't yet, but I'm going to. I figured I'm going to break the seal, but yeah.

So that's where I am. And then tomorrow night is the, uh, yeah, this week of GPR.

Oh, bitch. I ran home for a little bit while you were doing your thing.

Yeah. Our rotten hail was delivered.

Oh, Ash got us some uniforms to wear.

Rotten hail sweatshirts.

For the Vanderpump rules reunion part two.

Part two.

And then I ordered John and Drew number one guy in the group because they're tied, obviously.

Those didn't come yet.

Oh, maybe they'll come in time.

I think they're going to. I feel it.

And then what?

Oh, I watched the summer house finale last night. Really fucking good.

Oh, there you go. Page forever.

Just giving you a little update on our lives. The Celtics lost game seven last night.

I knew about that sports heads.

John and I were very sad.

It was a pretty rough one.

We were, yeah, it was a really sad moment.

I just want everybody to feel that with me.

I'm sorry.

They didn't show up.

So sometimes you can't.

They really didn't.

I thought we were going to can't. Sometimes you don't, you know what?

Maybe we just weren't specific in our manifesting when, uh, when, because, you know,

like the whole thing going into game seven for the Celtics was like, we're going to make history.

And it's like, maybe we should have been a little more detailed with that

because I feel like that was a historically awful game.

Oh, no.

So like maybe we did make history as like blowing it in the worst way possible.

So like, you know, next time we'll get them

because we'll be a little more, a little more specific with our manifesting.

Yeah, yeah.

It was a rough one. It hurt.

I love the Celtics.

So this was really sad.

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But here we are. Here we are today.  
I was like, how many playoffs until the fire?  
Yeah, I was like, are we in the, is this the championship?  
I did not understand.  
I am gay.  
She said, go sports.  
I said, drag races on on Friday.  
So yeah, there's that.  
That's the update on our lives.  
And I'm about to tell you a really fucking terrible story.  
And I think I was just stalling before telling you it because it's really sad.  
Oh, good.  
Mine this week is also very terrible.  
So fantastic.  
Oh, good. OK.  
So this one is one that I had not heard of, which is incredible.  
Yeah, usually doesn't happen.  
This story is so awful that I was like, why was this not more highly publicized?  
OK, you need to shut your mouth right now because I was the same had that.  
No, not only is it the same.  
I had that conversation with Dave and typed out,  
why is this not more highly publicized?  
Wow, look at us. Weird.  
That's weird.  
We've been on the same case wavelength the last couple of weeks,  
which is very odd. Yeah, very strange.  
And you know what?  
I moved out of my comfort zone.  
I'm in 2000 today.  
She said, I've been to the year 2000 and it's fucking terrible.  
So we were there.  
Mama will be moving back out to the old times after this.  
But, you know, I came I came here for all of you.  
Pause for the collective groan.  
There you go. Exactly.  
So I'm going to be talking today about the brutal murder of Liz Riser  
and the attempted murder of Brandy Hicks. Oh, shit.  
This is it's it's awful.  
OK, so in the early morning hours of May 24th, 2000,  
that's the other reason why I'm shocked.  
I've never heard of it.  
It's like it was in an era when I feel like I would have heard it happen.  
But on May 24th, 2000,

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the Riser family was roused out of dead sleep in the absolute worst way. Twelve year old Jordan Riser was the one who heard the knock at the door. It was four a.m. And his bedroom was happened to be closest to the door. So he was the only one who heard it. No one is expecting to hear anyone want to be led into your house at four a.m. No. And if they are, they're not coming in. They're not coming in. But he peeled himself from his bad knee, opened it and he was stunned because standing in front of him was a uniformed police officer. Oh, no. At four a.m. That's not a good thing. No. He couldn't even formulate a sentence. He was just like staring at this officer for a minute, being like, I'm 12. Look at my dream. And the officer asked something about Jordan's 17 year old sister, Liz, who hadn't come home that night. And Jordan was like, I'm confused. I don't understand what you even want. So he kind of muttered something to the officer and was like, I'll just get my parents like, hold on. Yeah. But his parents, Becky Reiser and her husband, Jeff Reiser, were obviously very much asleep at four a.m. And so Jordan walks into their room and is like, hey, a police officer is at the door and wants to speak to you, which has to be like in the in the grand scale of things that you don't want your child to walk into your room in the middle of the night and tell you that goes that and then way down is I threw up. Yeah, like that's that. That is I can't fathom my child walking into my room and saying there is a police officer at the door. No, at four a.m. And when you have a child who is not in the house that night. No, no, no, no, that's not the worst nightmare that you could ever fathom. So Becky Reiser said he says this is what Jordan had said to his mother. This is Becky Reiser. Yeah. She said later that he he had said to her, he says that Brandy was in the river and Liz is missing. What? So Brandy is Liz's best friend who she was with that night. OK, so he comes in there and he goes, Brandy's in the river and Liz is missing. Jesus Christ. At first, none of this registered again, middle of the night. What the fuck?

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But all of a sudden the words hit and she came tearing out of bed, launched herself down the stairs and out the front door to the front porch to find a police officer standing on the front porch. So she was like, because at first she must have thought, like, am I dreaming? Is he sleeping? Is he having a nightmare? What's going on here? And then she walks out there and no, no, no, and behold. So the officer introduced himself as officer gentry of the Dover police. He took place in Ohio. Oh, my God, weird. Is yours in Ohio? Yes. What the fuck? Weird. What? That's really weird that we're doing that. We're not like communicating about cases. No, we never do. That's really weird. But officer gentry asked whether the couple's daughter, Liz, had been home that night. And Becky said, no, she's staying at her friend, Brandy's house for the night. Oh, no. And the officer said, OK, well, we checked at Brandy's house and Liz isn't there. But that's the only explanation that they got at first. So like nothing to tell her, hey, why are you looking for her? Yeah, like he was just like, which I can't say this is like the officer's fault because you'll find out he also didn't have a lot of information. He was just kind of sent there to wish they had sent check somebody with information. Well, that's what I mean. It was more the person who gave him the information, like the lack of information. Yeah. But like, so this woman is just hearing, hey, is your daughter home? No, she's at her friend's house for the night. OK, well, we went there and she's not there. And at this point, he didn't even say anything to her about Brandy being in the river. Well, and you're like, OK, why are you looking for her? Like, what do you mean she's not there? What are you talking about? But he was like, it's just really important that you he's like, are you sure she's not she didn't come home? And she's like, well, I guess she could have like while we're sleeping. It's like, let me check. And so he was like, I really need you to go check and see if she's home. Oh my God. And she's like, OK, so she's confused and now she's panicked. So she goes and she she's hoping beyond hope that she's going to find Liz in her bed. And no, she didn't find her.

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So she goes back to the porch.

And at that point, her husband, Jeff, Liz's dad was down there too, talking to the police officer.

And when she said no, Liz isn't in her room, they both looked very concerned.

And this is when the first small amount of really awful truth came to light.

Oh, no.

Officer Gentry explained that Liz's best friend, Brandy Hicks, had been walking down the road and had flagged down an officer off duty hours earlier, and she had been taken to Union Hospital.

That's the information they got was that they found out hours ago, hours ago, walking down the road in the middle of the night

and had she had flagged down someone and was brought to the hospital.

This is like the beginning of an absolutely horrific movie.

That's it's like you're trying to be as a parent.

I can't even fathom this, like put these poor people.

No, like Becky and Jeff were probably like,

what the fuck is going on?

What do you mean?

So Officer Gentry, unfortunately, didn't have a lot of information.

But Brandy had told them when she was picked up

that she had actually been in the Tuscarawas.

I believe that's how you say it, River.

She was soaking wet.

She was freezing. Oh, my God.

And she was hurt, but she was alive.

Liz, however, was not with her.

And all Brandy could tell the police was that she was missing

and she didn't know where she was.

OK.

Oh, my God, I just want to go to Spain this summer.

I don't know if I told you that last time,

but I'm just really trying to get to Spain this summer, maybe Barcelona.

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So that's all the risers we're able to get in that moment.

Oh my god. An officer gentry, you know, said thank you for your help, gave them his card, said I'm going to be in touch with you, you call us if she shows up.

They're just stunned. Of course, and really like nauseous and confused, panicking. Yeah. And Becky and Jeff just like,

were like okay, and just like watched him leave. And now we just sit here and try to figure out what any of that meant and what is about to happen for the rest of the day.

And I guess Becky later said, she was like in retrospect, I was like, why didn't I press him for more information? But like, why would you, I don't know how I would read, like that's a weird situation. I feel for them a lot. Like that is,



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what do you do with that? Like you're 17 year old, you know, like I don't, that's a very stunning thing. And she said, the last thing in my mind was that Liz would have acted out in some way that would have caused trouble. Because like when the police come, you think something is wrong that way. Liz, Riser and her entire family were very devoutly religious. Okay. So she was basically the last person that Becky or anyone else was going to picture getting into trouble with the police or doing something that would have caused an issue. And of course, hearing all this after being shot out of bed at 4am by a police officer at your door, again, so jarring and confusing, mixed with the idea that you're like, she couldn't have done anything. Like she's a good kid. I don't know what this is. I really don't blame her for not having questions ready. No. But this was actually the first time that Becky had allowed her daughter to stay overnight at a friend's house on a school night. Oh my God. And it's like, I think Brandy lived with roommates. So like this was kind of a big thing that she was allowing her to do this. And she knew Liz was a really smart, a really good girl. But she was like something like she said, like her mother's intuition told her like, okay, this isn't like something bad happened here, like something really bad. And like she said that immediately she was like, something really bad happened here. But she said at first she was hoping that, and she was like, of course, I'm hoping she got into trouble. Like she did something bad. Like I was hoping that was the feeling and that we could deal with that as a family. I was not hoping that something had happened to her. I was honestly hoping that she had done something. But I guess they said they got together, they immediately prayed together. That was how they were able to cope with this. And she said she was fighting off all those feelings that maybe something really, really bad had happened. She said by, she was like, you know what, I'm just going to rehearse the lecture that I'm going to give her as soon as she gets home. Like I'm going to, I'm going to picture exactly what I'm going to say to her about whatever she has done wrong. She probably needed to do that to put her mind somewhere else and 100% to like self preserve and be like, she's still here because you're just sitting there and she's in trouble. You know what, I'm going to give her a piece of my mind when she walks in this door because she's going to that's the I don't blame her at all. Like that is, and it breaks my heart that that's the only way that she could cope with this because she had nothing to go on. No, I can't fathom it. And you can't let your mind go there before no, of course not. For sure 100% of your mind can be there. So you're just saying she's going to walk in this door and she's going to be grounded because she got into trouble. I know it. Yep. But she was just assuming and hoping this and I don't blame her at all. But then hours were going by and she wasn't hearing anything and she's not getting any more answers and Liz is not walking in that door and Becky was starting to worry. Okay. I don't think she got into trouble. I think trouble found her. So Officer Gentry, like we said, may have seemed like a little cagey with that, but that's only because he honestly didn't have the details of what was happening around 1.30am that night. So a couple of hours earlier, that was when an auxiliary police officer was on his way home. He was off duty and he spotted someone walking down the side of the road. And of course that's already at least cause for further inspection because this is at 1.30 in the morning. What are you doing? Yeah. And he said that this person looked a little unsteady on their feet. So this officer was like, I think this is like a drunk person trying to walk home.



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Yeah. And they're going to get hurt maybe or worse. So he got a little closer and was just trying to inspect to see if he could like help or anything. And then he realized this is not a drunk man or like an adult. This is a teenage girl. Oh, shit. Oh, it's Brandy. And he said, as he passed by her, she started frantically waving him down like looked and she looked like she was injured, terrified. And so he pulls off on the side of the road and he and so she comes closer to the car and she was again, unsteady on her feet. She's soaking wet from head to toe, no shoes or socks on and she was bawling her eyes out, crying hysterically. And the officer is like, what the hell is going on? And he was like, she's obviously been in water. And he was able to get that out of her that I've been in the river and that she was hurt. But he said she was far more concerned about her friend. And she was saying like, I don't know where she is. We have to find her like something bad happened to her. And according to the officer, she wasn't making a ton of sense and he couldn't understand a lot of it. She was like really upset, hysterical, as we'll find out, very traumatized and was dealing with the aftermath of a fucking terrible thing. Oh, no. So regardless of what was going on, he just knew she needed a lot of help. So he was like, you can come in my car. I'm going to drive you to the police department.

She later said that this police officer was like her hero because she was like, he listened to me. He comforted me when he brought me to the police station. Remember, he's an auxiliary police officer and he's off duty right now. Yeah. Brought her to the police station and she said he stayed with her, like would not leave her. Didn't just drop her off and say like, okay, I'm off shift. See you later. He sat there with her, like would not leave her side. Yeah, one of the good ones. So on the drive, he tried to find out more of what was happening, like tried to calm her down a little bit. But all she could say was that her name was Brandy Hicks and her friend Liz Riser was missing. But he didn't need the whole story to know that something violent had clearly happened to her because one of her eyes was completely bloodshot. Oh my god. There was a big wound near her mouth, like she had been struck in the face really hard. Oh god. And she had deep red marks around her throat as though she had been strangled by something, like a ligature. Oh. Now, when they arrived at the station, the dispatcher said they had actually just received a call about a girl wandering along the side of the road near the Tuscarawas River and a bunch of cars had actually been sent out to look for her. So they were glad that he had picked her up because calls were starting to flood in, people had seen her. Now, Brandy was taken into Captain Robert Everett's office and she was given blankets. They tried to warm her up, like make her comfortable. Because again, she's soaking wet in May in Ohio. Oh jeez. In the middle of the night. So it took some time for her to calm down and be able to even begin to tell this story. But she was able to explain that someone had taken her to the railroad trestle over the Tuscarawas River and had attempted to rape her. Then he had tried to strangle her with a shoelace. She had lost consciousness a couple of times. The man thought he had killed her because he then pushed her body

over the railroad trestle. But her foot got caught on the railroad tracks and she dangled upside down from the bridge for a few seconds before he kicked her off where she fell 30 feet into the water below. Oh my god. She explained that she had fallen down near a log jam in the water, like a big area with a bunch of debris. Yeah. And so she had clung to the logs and pretended to be dead, like tried not to breathe, didn't move, and was hoping that her attacker would just leave. But he stood above her on the bridge for a ton. She was a long time, smoked some cigarettes,

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kicked stones into the water at her and just casually at the water, and then finally walked off. And she waited even longer before she was able to get herself out of the water and up to the road. And that's where she had flagged down, the police officer. Oh my god. And she must have been terrified wondering, like, has he been watching me this entire time from, like, a further away vantage point? Yeah. Like, is he around and just waiting? Is he going to pick me up? Right. Immediately everyone was like, what the fuck? Are you kidding me? And they were like, who is this man? Like, what happened? How did we get here? Right. Like, did she know him? Like, what are you talking about? And so Brandi's calming down more. She's starting to explain more of the story to Captain Everett. And she said she and her best friend Liz had made plans for a sleep over that night at her house. So around 9 30pm, they went to a Hollywood video. Oh my god. I worked at a Hollywood video. I love Hollywood videos. So it was a Hollywood video at the Newtown Mall in New Philadelphia. And they were going to rent some movies. They had a whole night planned. Sounds like a chill, like regular sleepover with your friend. Like having a blast. So they're walking back to the car. And they said this man in his mid to late 20s came up to them and said, I'm so sorry, I'm trying to get a ride home to the south side of town. And he said, if gas is an issue, because they were like, at first, like, and like, honestly, if he approached me like you want some, his name is Matthew Vaca. Vaca. And if he approached me, I would also have been very hesitant to allow that man near me. But they were so they were like, and trying to think of like a polite way to say no, which by the way, that is very like admirable that they felt like they had to be polite. You do not need to be polite. Don't worry about it. Yeah. But he was like, if gas is an issue, I can give you 20 bucks for gas if you'll just drive me there. And he was like, really ask acting desperate. And he even mentioned that he wanted to get home to his wife and kiss his kids goodnight. Oh, he did have a wife and kids. Are you serious? By the way. So the girls talked it over and they ended up agreeing because they were like, this is the right thing to do. Like, we're supposed to help people like that's what we've been taught our whole lives. I remember Liz is very religious. She comes from a religious family. Yeah, she was taught you help your fellow man. Right, of course. And so they got into the car and they said, Cheryl, we'll drive you home. And Brandi was driving Liz was in the passenger seat and this man who said his name was Mark went into the back seat. Now they had only been driving for a few minutes and suddenly Mark was like, Hey, can you stop by this nearby bridge? And he said he had stashed something in a plastic bag there and he wanted to pick it up. And he was like, it was just really heavy. And I was hoping I could just pick it up on my way home. So she's like, Brandi's like, this is a little weird, but she's like, okay, whatever. So she stops and she's like, okay, go get your bag. And it turned out he was like, it's a six pack of beer. I just didn't want to carry it with me. So once he was back in the car, he was like, Hey, we're only like a mile away from my house. So they were like, great. So they drive. Yeah, like cool. So they drive about a mile and Brandi's like, how much further? And he's like, Oh, only like a mile or so. And she's like, we just drove a mile. And he's like, Oh, yeah, it's close. So but now he's made them stop for this weird bag mystery bag, which at the time they didn't know it was beer. Okay. And then he's all of a sudden giving these weird directions and saying it's a mile more and a mile more and a mile more. So finally, after a while, after like obliging him through all of this, Brandi stopped the car and was like, I'm so sorry, we have to

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get home. I'm going to drop you off here. I hope you're close to your house, but like you need to walk the rest of the way. Yeah, which like good for her, you keep saying it's a mile. So it shouldn't be too far. Exactly. Now this is when he pulled out a gun. Oh, and he said, you're going to keep driving. So I want to know what his original plan was here. And no one will ever know because as we'll find out, he doesn't give a reason for this. Like, I don't know what his plan was here. Like, did he think they would just continue driving forever? Do you think he was trying to get them somewhere more remote? That's the thing, you would think that, but they were like just driving in random directions. When they didn't even seem like they were going, no, it's just like driving in normal places. That's weird. Like, was he always planning to pull out a gun at some point at this point at another point? Yeah. Like, it's a strange and reckless series of events that he takes. Now, this is when the man named quote unquote, Mark took over navigation and directed Brandy now to a remote location. He made the Brandy drive to a field off of Harmon Hill Road in Auburn Township. Later, Brandy told Captain Everett that she thought the man was definitely familiar with the area. He was not somebody who was just blowing through. Because she said, when they reached where the field was, he said, slow down, there's bumps in this road. So she was like, you've been here before. So like, you know your way around here. And they finally go and they get to this opening of this field, which is terrifying. And she said that there was clearly like beer cans around trash around, like, it was very clearly like a party spot. And that this man knew where this was, like he had obviously been here. And so he tells Brandy stop the car. And then he demands that she and Liz remove their shoelaces. Then he uses the shoelaces to bind Brandy's hands to the steering wheel, and uses the other shoelaces to tie Liz's hands behind her back. Oh, no. So Brandy is now stuck bound to the steering wheel. And Mark takes Liz with him down the path towards the field. Brandy said she just had to watch helplessly and like cry as like she watched him disappear with her bound with her hands behind her back. And Brandy didn't know it at the time what was going to happen. But she later found out the details and she had to face them like as we're going to see head on. Because what happened was once they had reached a little clearing in the field, Mark, which is Matthew, but they knew him as Mark at this point, forced Liz to kneel on the ground, which she did. He smoked a cigarette and said he can later said he just considered what to do. Okay. And he thought, you know what, maybe I should just let her go and tell her to just like start walking back to New Philadelphia. But he was like, it was too late. Like she'd already seen me. No, it's never too late. No. So instead, after contemplating this for a couple minutes, he pulled out a curved linoleum cutting knife from his pocket and slashed Liz's throat three times. What the fuck? The injuries were 10 inches long and two and a half inches deep. Oh my God. He severed her trachea. I was going to say that takes incredible like pressure and strength. He wasn't done. After cutting her throat, he stabbed Liz in the neck, the back, and then stabbed her five times in the head. What? And then just walked away from her. And he had never done anything like this before. Not that we know of. What? So he goes back to the car after doing this. Okay. And Brandy said he just saw him return without Liz. And the first thing she did was say, where's Liz? And he wouldn't answer. So he grabs, he unties Brandy and bleeds her to the place where he just killed Liz.

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Literally brought her to force her to look at what he had just done to her best friend. And he said, I killed your friend. Oh my God. Like just, and she said he just with no emotion, like literally nothing to his voice. I killed your friend. Oh my God. Now, fortunately, she can't already tell also like Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, it was so dark that Brandy said she couldn't see. Exactly. Like she couldn't see the tremendous amount is what it was described as blood that had soaked everything around Liz and her.

And she could, but she could definitely tell she could see her. She could see that something had happened. She wasn't moving and she was on the ground. So after forcing her to look at the brutalized body of her best fucking friend, Mark then directs Brandy back to the car where he forced her to get in the passenger seat. He drove. He demanded that she remove her socks and shoes now. He then placed the socks over his own hands before touching anything in the car because he didn't want his fingerprints on the steering wheel. And I'm like, you were in the back seat. Yeah, like you've already been in this car. Your handprints are here, sir. Yep. But then he leaves he pulls the car away, leaving Liz's body there alone. He then drove them to a parking lot next to the East Ohio Gas Company. He parked the car and he forced Brandy to walk with him along the railroad tracks towards Dover. She must have been just been absolutely terrified. I, my brain can't even understand what she must have been thinking. And like such a minimal detail, but she's walking

barefoot now along these tracks. Oh yeah, because this is terrifying. And also, like you said, as they're walking the tracks, Brandy told him like my feet hurt. This hurts my feet. So at one point he removed his shoes and gave them to her. What? And so she's like, okay, it always weirds me out when they do weird. When they do something kind. Comfort things. Not like kind, but like comfort things. But then moments later, he was like, give me those back. And she was like, okay. And then he gave her his socks and was like, wear these. Oh, no, thank you. I'd be like, no, thank you. Then he also demanded that she carry the plastic bag that they had stopped for with the six pack in it. So she had to carry his six pack of beer in a plastic bag, wearing his socks, walking down a railroad track. The most bizarre situation. Truly. Nightmarish. And through the whole thing, she said he kept his baseball cap really low, like trying to obscure his face. But he'd already seen it. Exactly. And he talked very normally to her, like casually even, like got to know her, was asking her if she was going to college. And she was like, and she had said like, no, I don't think I'm going to college. I think I'm going to go to work like she already had. And he was like, he was like annoyed and like put off by that. Like had this weird conversation with her. It's so weird. And it's like, he had just brutally murdered her best friend and then showed her her best friend's brutalized body. He said, I killed her. And now he's sitting here having like a weird, like, hey, are you going to college? Conversation with her. It's like, what the fuck is wrong with you? So after walking for a little while, they reached this abandoned train car. It's going to get really rough here. I'd just like to let you know there is a trigger warning for sexual assault and rape. Okay. He instructed Brandy to get inside. And then he made her give over her three rings that she was wearing. Okay. So she did. And then he made her strip out of all of her clothing. And then he began sexually assaulting her. He was unsuccessful on his end, trying to rape her. So he demanded that she perform oral sex on him. However, he was also unable to do that.

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So he told Brandy to put her clothes back on and continue walking down the railroad track.

So that just happened to her in an abandoned train car.

And then she just had to get up and walk. After she just saw her best friend's dead body.

And now he's like, walk.

Like, unfathomable. This woman.

Unfathomable. I wouldn't even be able to stand up, I don't think.

Truly.

Since his death in 2009, the world has struggled with how Michael Jackson should be remembered as the king of pop or as a monster. I'm Leon Nefak, the host of Fiasco and the co-creator of Slowburn.

And I'm Jay Smooth, a hip hop journalist and cultural commentator. Michael Jackson was accused of child molestation for the first time in 1993. Our new podcast, Think Twice, Michael Jackson, is the story of what came before and what came after. Throughout the podcast, we explore what makes Michael Jackson seemingly uncancelable. And we dig into the complicated feelings so many of us have when we hear Billy Jean at the grocery store. Through dozens of original interviews with people who watched the story unfold firsthand, Think Twice is an attempt to reconcile our conflicted emotions about Michael Jackson, the man with our deep-seated love of his art.

Listen to Think Twice, Michael Jackson, wherever you get your podcasts or you can binge the entire series ad-free on Audible or the Amazon music app.

So after this whole thing happens, they reach the railroad trestle over the Tuscarawas River.

And the man then instructs Brandy, Mark as we know him, instructs Brandy to get on her knees and face out towards the water. So on the edge of the trestle. So she does this because she doesn't know what else to do at this point. And Mark pulls Brandy, pulled Brandy's shoelace from his pocket, put it around her neck and started choking her. And he did it until she's on her knees on the trestle and she lost consciousness, briefly. So he hadn't taken into account how hard it was to manually strangle a person to death. So she wakes up from unconsciousness, he's still trying to choke

her, then he gets frustrated and tries three different times to snap her neck. Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god. This woman, what she has been through in this short period of time, he tried to snap her neck three times, strangled her to unconsciousness and then tried to snap her neck three separate times. He's holding her head, trying to snap her neck. Oh my god. And she's just sitting there helplessly as he does this. And hoping that the next time and the next time and the next time isn't it. Oh my god. So again, he isn't able to successfully do that.

So he begins strangling her again with the shoelace, she lost consciousness again.

Brandy. To be clear, he raped her in a train car and then made her kneel over a railroad trestle where he tried to strangle her so brutally she lost consciousness twice and he also tried three separate times to snap her fucking neck. And this is all after killing her best friend.

Killed her best friend. And showing her the body. And this is because they were kind enough to give this fucking swamp creature a ride. Right. Well, and the weirdest, I mean not the weirdest, but one of the weird things here too is he's got a gun and a knife and he's not, now he just isn't using them. Well, what we find out later was that he so brutally stabbed Liz, that he snapped the blade of the knife off. Oh my god. And what about the gun? The gun, that's the thing that I'm not, I've heard two different stories about this,



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so I don't know which one it is, if he just said he had a gun or if he showed them a gun. And perhaps maybe it wasn't loaded or something. Perhaps not, that's the thing. So I'm not positive because I seen it both ways, but either way, he did have a knife on him, he did use that knife and he broke it. That's how brutal it was. Wow. Now, after the second time of strangling her into unconsciousness with her own shoelace, she came too, but she came too without him realizing it. And just in time to see him hovering over her to determine if she was alive or not. So she was quick enough after all she's fucking been through to play dead. To realize this, and smartly, she held her breath to appear as though she wasn't breathing. Like, thought to do that. And meanwhile, all her body at that point wants to do, I'm sure, is take a fucking breath. Breathe. Exactly. She managed to continue holding her breath, even as he was slapping her on the back to try to force air out of her lungs. Oh my god. Like, was literally trying to force her to breathe and she was holding her breath. Wow. So because of her quick thinking, he was like, oh, she's dead. So Mark picked Brandy up and threw her from the train trestle. This is when her foot got caught in the tracks and she hung by her foot over the water. He freed her. Unbelievable. It truly is. And she fell 30 feet below to the water. And she's like, you shouldn't even die that way. Just like, exactly. So she's floating in the water. And like we said before, she played dead, trying to keep this repulsive fuck from realizing that she's alive. And from her position in the water, she said she could see him through the slats of the trestle. And he was just walking back and forth, smoking. She was talking to himself, kicking rocks at her into the river. After like, like a long time, like almost an hour, he was there. Mark finally started to walk away. She had to play dead for an hour. So Brandy waited a few more minutes because she was so worried he was going to come back. And then she made her way to the riverbank and she tried, she said several times to pull herself out of the water and couldn't do it at first. Like she had nothing. She must have been so weak at that point. Eventually she was able to flop herself onto land and get to the road. And that's when she passed down the auxiliary police officer who drove her to the police station. What's wild is some of the officers on duty doubted her story. Fuck them. One officer told the ambulance driver when he showed up. I think she might be making this whole story up. She says she doesn't know this guy, but I think she does. She must. Have you never heard of a random crime occurring? Like what the fuck makes that up? And like, oh, she tied a ligature around her own throat? Like what? I'm like, what are you talking about? And she punched herself in the face and broke skin. Like go fuck yourself. Well, luckily Captain Everett, who she was talking to, very much believed what she had to say. Can you imagine if he didn't and she had just found all of that? Yeah, for nothing. Wow. Shame on that officer. Yeah. And Captain Everett was like, I really didn't want to believe her. Like I didn't want to believe that any of that had happened, but I did. And he said he had actually known the Riser family for years. And so he said Liz had been friends with his daughter. Oh, God. And so Brandy had told him that she thought Liz was dead, but she couldn't be sure. And so he was like, we got to go out there and see. And he was like, I really didn't want to do this. But like, obviously we have to. But he was like, I was hoping she was mistaken. So the area that Brandy described like where Liz was, it was kind of vague because trauma. And it's also, I mean, it's a field. Pitch black, trauma, stress, terror. Yeah. So local police actually got the help of the Ohio State Police to search for Liz. Once they were all together, Captain Everett explained to all of them, all the search and rescue officers and

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everyone that was there, everything that Brandy had told them. And they used a big map and then they just broke it off into several little bits for everyone to look at. And it was just after 4am when Ohio State Sergeant Ryan, Sergeant Ryan and Trooper Richmond actually made their way down Harmon Hill Road. So this was just after 4am. 4am is when one officer had gone, Officer Gentry

had gone to the riser's home to look for Liz. About four miles away from where they started the search, the officers came upon a dirt service road. And they said it looked like it had been driven down recently. And they said it kind of resembled what Brandy had described. Armed with only flashlights, they went down the tracks a little way. And they immediately started noticing that there was a lot of potholes and divots in the road. This was part of Brandy's story that he had said that. So the troopers were like, they didn't see anything at first. So they were like, okay, let's just leave this. Maybe this isn't it. But then as they were shining the flashlight around, they caught something quickly in the beam. And they said at first they thought it was just a pile of something. But when they got closer, they realized that it was a young teenage girl's body. It was clear to both of them very quickly that she was dead, but they did check her for vital signs, obviously. But what they said, her eyes were fixed and dilated, her mouth was open, it was clear she was gone. They saw several very severe cuts to her neck immediately. And officers also noted several deep scratches on her back, one long cut down her spine. And they photographed the scene and they called for additional officers and an ambulance who arrived a short time later. And she was taken to the coroner's office. Meanwhile, Becky and Jeff Reiser were getting more and more anxious at home. They're getting more and more restless. So they left their home around 6am. Because it's been two hours since they heard this. And they went to the hospital, hoping that maybe they would find Liz in the hospital, or at the very least find Brandy to try to get what happened here. Apparently nurses were like a little ill prepared for their arrival because they just kind of showed up. So they just led them into the waiting room where Brandy's family members were waiting. And no one said anything for a while, I guess, in there. But then they said, Jeff Reiser just blurted out, I know Liz is dead. And then he said, God told me she was, I believe this is a war, it's a war against our beliefs and what we stand for. And everyone in the room just didn't know what to do. But they said he was just going, it's a war. I think he was just completely out of touch at that point because he was just like, this is his child. And for him, I very much think that parents have an intuition when it comes to their children. And you know that he just knew something bad had happened. That was where he was thinking of it. Now, they also, they were probably taking some context clues here. Everyone's very somber, quiet. There's a heavy police presence. No information is being shared. I mean, like intuition was definitely a thing here. Unfortunately, he was going to find out that he was very correct only a few minutes later, because a detective from the Dover police station confirmed that they had found a body matching Liz's description. And then they told them what clothing she was wearing and it matched the clothing that she was wearing that night. Absolutely terrible. Becky Reiser, her mother gave the detective a recent picture of Liz and he confirmed, yes, this looks a lot like the girl that we found. The Reiser's apparently took, you know, the time to answer some questions that they had and then they returned home. And because it was all confirmed. Yeah. And they had to break the news to their other children that their sister was dead. Oh my God, it had been brutally murdered. Now, despite what had



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seemed at the time and what still seems when you look at it as a very chaotic, very impulsive crime by a very disorganized killer, there really wasn't any evidence left. So it's like that it was disorganized in a way, but it was also organized. And so there was little very little evidence to work with here. Brandy tried really hard to give a good description of the killer, but the trauma and his attempts to like obscure his face with his cap, she had a description, but it was kind of vague. And she didn't have the right name. Yeah. And she's saying Mark, that wasn't even his name. What about the car? The car was their car. But like any help, like did they didn't find anything in there? I think they didn't find anything. But to Scarowas County Sheriff Harold McKimmy told reporters, we think it's somebody from this area. This guy knew where he was going when he went to Auburn Township. So immediately they were like, we know it's a local.

But while police were searching the hayfield where Liz's body was found, a technician from the Stark County Coroner's office began the autopsy on Liz Riser. The cause of death

was a 10 inch quote, incised wound of the left posterior, of the posterior left neck that extends from the left lower neck to the right posterior neck, causing almost complete transection of the trachea and right sternomastoid muscle. That is a very intense cut. Like nearly decapitation, right? So that's like, and the coroner also recorded an eight inch incised wound midline on the upper back and abrasions in the shape of an X at the base of the neck and upper back measuring seven inches by four and three quarters inches. What was that? Yeah, he was very brutal. Because that wasn't it. They also recorded a partial transection of the right thyroid in your neck, five stab wounds to the top of the scalp and several scrapes and cuts. He stabbed her in the top of the head. Yes. What the fuck is this guy doing? And the technician found no evidence of defensive wounds because remember he found her and he had slit her wrist first. I mean her neck first. Now the news went out to New Philadelphia and Dover that morning and it was sheer panic. Everyone was like, what the fuck is going on here? Who is this? And this is, she's a teenager. Yeah. So her peers were informed at high school. Oh, God. And grief counseling was offered immediately. Well, that's right. Because it was the first time she had gone for a sleepover on a school night. Oh my God. One counselor, a grief counselor at the school, said some of the students are okay, but others have had a tougher time of it. Our whole community has been rocked. There's a lot of fear. The biggest thing we're trying to do is reassure them. They want to feel safe again. Yeah. Because they don't know what the fuck happened here. Was she taken out of her room? What the hell happened? Right. So one student told reporters for the Akron Beacon Journal, people keep saying everything happens for a reason. I don't think anyone can give me a reason why a church going loving, a church going loving girl needed to be cut to pieces. No. I don't think anybody can give any reason for anybody to be cut to pieces, church going or not. I hope nobody

can. But yeah, like she seemed like a very sweet, kind, smart, charismatic, good, just decent human. Like, you know what I mean? Like all around, just like one of the good ones, you know? A whole life ahead of her. And she was so sweet looking. Like when you look at her, you're just like, fuck, like I want to know Liz. You know, like Liz seemed like such a sweet art. No, she looks like somebody that like would come and sit with you if you were sitting alone at lunch. She does. She just seems like that person that would like give you that hug that you need when you're upset.

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Yeah. Like even if you don't like hugs, like Liz would give you that hug. I just get that vibe from her. She's so sweet looking. Fortunately, the unknown wouldn't linger for very long. People wouldn't have to ask questions for very long because very soon after all of this, a call came into the Dover Police Department and it was from a woman named Sheila Davis and she said she needed to report a murder. According to Sheila Davis, she had received a call from her son's brother-in-law, Jeff Mullenix. Okay. This guy, Jeff Mullenix, her son's brother-in-law, had told her that her son, 27 year old Matthew Vaca, had been involved in a terrible crime and Mullenix thought they needed to speak to police. Okay. So Sheila Davis is Matthew Vaca's mother. Thank you. But the person who had told her this was her son-in-law. Okay, okay. Essentially. So basically he told his brother-in-law. Yeah, exactly. So police immediately got in touch with Jeff Mullenix, who had a story to tell. According to Mullenix, he said he had been at home asleep in the early morning hours of May 24th and he said he shared that house with his sister and her husband, Matthew Vaca. They also had three children, him and his wife. So he really did have children? He really did have children. Three of them. Three children. What? And he said, yeah, this was in the early morning hours, remember, and he was awoken by Vaca, who said, get dressed, you're going with me. And he said, he said it was weird, but he said also, like, we would go out driving aimlessly a lot and like smoke pot together, listen to music, like he was a weird guy. So like we just, in every once in a while, we would just like wake up and he'd wake me up in the middle of the night, we'd drive. Okay. To each their own, I suppose. I love going for drives, but if anybody woke me up, I would not be going for a drive. But after they'd been driving for a little while around, Jeff was like, where are we going, Matthew? Like, what do we do? Like, what's the plan here? Like, what are we doing? And he said nothing. And he was like, and it was very silent and it was weird. We weren't talking. And he goes in and out of nowhere. He just says, I killed a girl. What the fuck? And Jeff was like, fuck you. No, you didn't. Like, he was like, I didn't believe him. Like, don't say that to me. But then he said, okay, let me bring you to the fields. No, thank you. Nope. He brought him to the fields and showed him Liz's body. Holy shit. Yep. He just wakes this guy. This guy has nothing to do with this. Nothing to do with it. And he just wakes him up in the middle of the night. Oh my God. And then it gets even worse because he says he actually needed his help. No. And he said that he said he had to find the blade of the linoleum knife that had snapped off during the attack. No. Yep. Now it was really dark and Vaca wasn't able to find the blade even with Jeff's help. So they both drove to a truck stop that was open all night and they were going to buy flashlights. What? Which I'm like, Jeff, what the fuck are you doing? Yeah. When they went inside though, Matthew was like, oh shit, his wife's aunt was working at the truck stop. Okay. And he was like, she's gonna be like, what the fuck are you doing here? Well, she's gonna see the, my, my, his clothes were covered in blood. Oh, of course. Yep. So they left the truck stop and instead went to a 24 hour Walmart and Vaca removed his jeans that were covered in Liz's blood and wore a pair of shorts into Walmart where he purchased the flashlight. He also purchased a ceramic coffee mug and a lighter shaped like a gun. And he did this because those two have a little weight to them. And as we'll see, he was going to use them for something. Now they went with their flashlights and they found the

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knife

blade back at Liz's body. And Vaka put it into the Walmart bag and they put his bloody jeans in there as well, the coffee mug and the lighter, which was very heavy. And they threw the entire bag into the river that they bought those things. So it would sink. Okay. Then they just went home. He could buy a weight. Yeah, you would think. Now, based on what Jeff Mullenix had just told them, that entire story, it was pretty clear that the man that Brandy knew as Mark was actually Matthew Vaka. Also like, Hey, Jeff, there's this number. It's called 911. The authorities are there. You can reach them. Yeah. But the fuck are you doing calling his mom?

Exactly. Call the fucking police, you pussy. I'm saying. Now, just before 5am on May 25th, and so this all happened within like, you know, the day of it happening. It was very quick. Right. And this was on May 25th. The sheriff's office issued a warrant for Vaka's arrest. And a bunch of plainclothesed and uniformed sheriff's deputies tracked Vaka to a nearby lake park, and they arrested him without incident as soon as he came out of the park to the parking lot. No incident. This motherfucker is just at a park the day after he murders two girls or thinks he's murdered two girls. Yeah, because remember, he thinks he's murdered both of them. Yeah. Now,

when the news came out about what had actually happened, the residents of Dover were like, what the fuck? And they were like, this has to be an outsider. He's got to be some hitchhiker that just came through this town and like, you know, he must have moved on after this. Like, that's wild. But no, when they heard it was Matthew Vaka, everybody in the community was like, oh fuck, we know who that is. He was a husband, again, a father of three. He'd grown up in the area. He knew a lot of the people in the area. Also at the time of the murder, he was actually known by the Dover police, not just for being like a good citizen. He had convictions for drunk driving and driving on a suspended license in 95 and 96. In November 96, he actually pleaded guilty to 15 counts of felony forgery. Damn. And for that, he ended up serving a one-year sentence at the Stark Regional Community Correction Center. And after that, he went on probation and he was

on probation since 1998 at this point. And he was still. So for a couple of years, he was still on probation when he did this. Good. So he'll get a violation, loves it. Now, luckily, his arrest on May 25th, like you said, was a pretty obvious violation of probation. So they had due cause to detain him while they investigated further. Fantastic. Now, the news of the arrest made Vaka's neighbors lose their minds. I would want to move out of my house. Most of them, a lot of them knew Liz Riser, too. Like this was a community that knew each other.

So one of his neighbors, Mark Hines, was stunned by this. He said, there was never any noise or fighting, no problems with the little kids. His wife was real pretty. I don't know why he would have done anything like that to those girls, but you never know what people are up to. Like, why did we have to throw in that his wife was pretty? They're just like, he's a pretty wife. Like, I think it was just like, he has a pretty wife. He's got three great kids. Like, what's he doing? I don't, I've, and for him to say, like, there's never a problem with the kids. Like, I don't hear people yelling. That's not like, and it's not an outwardly abusive situation. Yeah. Like, you would think they'd be like, oh, like, that's a pretty fucked up house. You know, like, no. Well, and especially with all the drunk driving charges and all that kind of stuff, too. Yeah. And for him to say, like, but you never know what people are up to. I'm like,

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truer words, never fucking spoken. That's why I mind my fucking business.

Because you don't fucking know. You don't know people.

Mind my business until I have a reason not to. Yeah, exactly. Now, wildly,

Vaca himself also seemed shocked by his own actions. To, he never resisted. He quickly confessed to the entire thing. And Detective Walt Wilson told reporters, he said he didn't know the young women and they didn't know him. The original motive he said was robbery and it just went bad from there. But no, that's not true at all. Yeah. He actually later said, and they bring this up later, he fluctuates between he has no idea why he did it. And then at one point, he said he just wanted to know what it would feel like to kill another human being. I think it's that. Yeah. I think he's fucked in the head and that's the problem. And in his statement to police, Vaca said he planned to rob them, but he didn't know what led him to kill Liz Riser in that hay field. He was like, I don't know why I did that. I just wanted to rob them. That's even more maddening.

It is. It's, oh, it's so maddening. And no, you didn't just want to rob them. You made them drive for miles and miles and miles. Exactly. You could have just robbed them and left the car.

And you came with a knife. You came with a gun. That's the thing. You knew to have them take their shoe laces off. Like this was at least thought about beforehand. Exactly. You were aggressive right from the jump. And he said he had planned to let her go when they got in the field, which is what, you know, he claimed forever. But for some reason that he couldn't pinpoint, he said he just decided to kill her. Like he contemplated it for a minute and then he decided he was going to kill her. Okay. Detective Orvis Campbell told reporters, he said he doesn't know why he just decided to do it and cut her throat. He told us he was planning on letting her go.

I don't believe that. I don't either. On June 5th, Matthew Vaca appeared before a judge in the Common Pleas Court, and the judge set a June 30th hearing date to revoke his probation officially. Although Vaca had not yet been formally charged with any crimes, during the preliminary hearing that happened, assistant to Scarowes County prosecutor Scott Mastin announced that they had every intention of seeking the death penalty in this case.

In the meantime, Vaca was going to remain in the Scarowes County jail and he was not going to have any opportunity for bail. He was stuck there until he had trial. Good. Now, Vaca appeared before a grand jury on June 13th, and that's when he was officially charged. And he was charged with

one count of aggravated murder, one count of attempted aggravated murder, one count of aggravated

kidnapping, two counts of kidnapping, two counts of rape, three counts of tampering with evidence, and one count of abuse of a corpse. Knowing the prosecutor's office actually wanted the death penalty, he instead decided to agree to a plea to what would essentially be a life sentence. He wasn't going to be eligible for parole until 2096. He would be 123 years old, so loves it.

Sheila Davis, Vaca's mother, said this has been his decision from the start. He said he didn't want to victimize Brandy a second time or the Reiser family, and this is the only way he will have any possibility of seeing his children in the future. One, so sweet of him to not want to revictimize the woman. He was sure he had fucking murdered after he raped her twice. So sweet of him

to not want to victimize her again. Fuck you. Two, this is the only way he's going to see his

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kids. You think anyone gives a shit? I'm sorry, but if I was his wife, I'd be like, we're not ever seeing dad again. Like, are you kidding me? No. This is the only way he's going to see his kids. I don't give a shit. You know who doesn't get to see their kids again? Fucking Liz's parents. Exactly. You know who has to deal with trauma for the rest of their lives? Even as a mother now, Brandy Hicks. Yup. Fuck off. Yeah. I don't give a shit about you. No. Or you're saying, yeah, you're a real great dad. No. You left the fucking house in the middle of the night to brutally rape and murder fucking teenage girls, you piece of shit. Seriously, what the fuck? Like, that puts me off so much. No, that makes me so mad. And to make it seem this was his plan all along. And no, it was that he took a plea deal later on. Like, it's not that he doesn't want to revictimize. He wants, you just told me he wants to see his kids. And it has nothing to do with Brandy. And he doesn't want to get gas to death. He doesn't want to die. Exactly. Let's call it what it is, my friend. Exactly. Okay. Like, come on. This case makes me so angry. And that's the thing. Like, don't put that in there about seeing your kids. Yeah, because you just, I just, now I know exactly why you did it. Like, wow. And I don't give a shit. I don't want you to see your kids. And just say that when, like you just said, like Liz's parents will never see her again. Yeah, Liz's parents would love to see their child alive again. Like, fuck you. How dare you be so callous. Brandy's parents, Brandy's family, Brandy's loved ones would probably love to see her not have to deal with this for the rest of her life. Yeah. Fuck you. How kind of him to not revictimize her. Thank you for not revictimizing. Douchebag. So the prosecutor, like I said, had planned to pursue the death penalty, but it was ultimately the victims in the case who talked them out of it. Wow. Even though, like, the plea was, like, went through anyways, they wouldn't have, like, sought it because the victims said no. County prosecutor Amanda Spies, born host, Horst, I think it is said, Brandy Hicks indicated that she is satisfied that Bakka will spend the rest of his days in jail. She, she's tired of talking about it and doesn't really want to go through a trial. And the risers said they would just leave it up to me. Right. So they were all just like, whatever. I just, I don't want to, like, please don't put us through this. Also, a plea deal would mean that Bakka would simply go through the sentencing process and then begin serving his time kind of like, out of the public eye, it would just go through. Right. But a death penalty case would drag on for years and years. And the media would get super involved. Yeah. And they would automatically get a ton of appeals before the execution happened. So as far as everyone in the prosecutor's office was concerned, Liz Riser was not going to be brought back by him being killed. No. But they could, they could do something, meaning they could spare Brandy being re-traumatized every time she has to sit and testify and she has to read and she has to see reports and she has to look at his face. Yeah. No, she doesn't. So they were like, you know what, we can do that and at least help one of these women. So we're going to do that. Exactly. So Matthew Bakka appeared before Judge on June 22nd and he pleaded guilty to all 11 accounts against him. The courtroom was packed with friends and family of the victims. They came to support Brandy and the Risers. In a statement to the press, Brandy actually said, I knew it was bad news as soon as I told him to get out of the car. And he said, well, I've got a gun. I didn't think he was going to actually kill us. Oh. Which, how would



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you? No, why would you? And she told reporters that she was working on forgiving Bakka, but she said she was struggling with it right now. And you know what? Which you have every right to. She doesn't ever have to forgive him and that doesn't make her any less of a good person. Not at all. You don't have to forgive somebody. No, you do not. You do not. And I know that these, all of these people were like churchgoers. They were religious. That is part of the forgiveness. They're religion. So I understand that that was something that was very important to them, but you by no means have to. I just feel like I hope everybody knows that you don't need to forgive people. No, you don't. You really don't. But if you feel like... You can move past it. If you feel like that's something you absolutely need, then like more power to you. But like I feel bad when people put pressure on their own heart to forgive someone when they don't have to. You don't have to. I promise you you don't have to. That's not an action that you asked for. No, you did not ask to be put. It's not all in you to figure out how to forgive somebody for doing something to you that you never wanted done. And you don't hate. Exactly. Exactly. Stop. That's not my problem. And what she said was, I know I should forgive him. I'm trying really hard, but at the right at this moment, I can't. That's what she said at the time. I hope she knows now that she doesn't have to. Well, when Brandy's mother, Kimberly Klein, said, none of this makes anything better. We're thankful Brandy lived, but we miss Liz and always will. Absolutely. So a week later on June 30th, Vaca went back to court for sentencing. And this time, he had to face the tsunami of testimony and victim impact statements from all the people whose lives he had blown apart. Here for it. So to be honest, for most, it was the lack of motive that was the incredibly frustrating aspect here. It is. So of course, there was a lot of people outside of like, you know, especially outside of like the family and friends here, just like people seeing this whole thing that were assuming it was his interest in heavy metal music and, you know, horror movies or violent movies. We've been down that road. But addressing, and like, you know, they went like the porn route and all that, which I don't know a lot about like what he was doing in that situation. But porn doesn't make you kill people. He's just a bad person. Movies don't make you kill people. No, exactly. Songs don't make you kill people. People kill people. You do that. Yeah. Now addressing Vaca, the judge, Edward O'Farrell, asked him, you know what? Can you give us a motive? Give this family the reason why you did that. And he said, Matt, you understand what you are about to face. You already acknowledged it. You know there is not going to be a surprise here. But you know, facing what you're going to face, can't you in this final act, before you're banished from this county, from the lies of these people physically, can't you tell them why you did this to their children? And so Vaca just stared down at the floor and muttered, I don't know. I don't know myself why. Yes, you do. So Judge O'Farrell was fucking thoroughly irritated by that. Me as well. And he said, what were you thinking, Matt? You told people you wanted to experience killing a human being. That is what they told us. Why did you say that to them? Why did you want to experience killing a human being? Was it drugs? Was it me? Was it the music? Was it the pornography? Is that what you can tell the young people in this community? Like he's like, give a reason. Give us anything. Give us anything other than I don't know. Like, so Matt finally interrupted the judge and said, I am responsible. You gotta know that. I'm willing. And then he stopped for a second and said, I'm willing to give my life.

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Oh, thanks. You weren't though. You took a plea deal. Yeah. So Judge O'Farrell was pissed, but nothing comes close to the statement that the prosecutor, Amanda Spies Bornhorst, had prepared for him. He said, she said, the death penalty does not provide the swift justice it was intended to. Do I think you deserve to die for the crimes you committed? Absolutely. And then she said, I want you to understand what you have to look forward to in prison. You will be beaten repeatedly, and you will be brutally raped, and you will lose every ounce of dignity that you have left in your body. And you will live in terror, not for the hour or so that Liz Reiser did, or the hour that Brandy Hicks did, but for every minute for the rest of your life. And I said, whoa. Yeah, that's wild. That was heavy. That was heavy. Shit. So finally, I go, okay, Amanda. So finally, Brandy Hicks took the stand and read her victim impact statement. How fucking brave of her and she's a teenager to face the man that raped her twice and thought he had killed her. She's a teenager. She had gone through unthinkable, unspeakable trauma, and she stood there looking at the man who did this and said, I guess I have to forgive you. I don't really want to, but it's like my mom said, if I don't forgive you, God won't forgive us. I do forgive you. I just want you to know that. Wow. Like that's, that hurt my heart. That hurts my heart. But she's a tough girl. It hurts my heart that it sounds like she didn't necessarily feel that to forgive him. Yeah, because you're just like, I just want you, I just want Brandy, however that comes, to feel what she needs to feel. What she needs to feel. Not what God wants her to feel or anybody else. And again, not dogging it because not at all. If that's what you believe in and the forgiveness thing is important to you to move past these kind of things or move forward through these kind of things, then if that is important to you, then that should be what you work towards because that is important to you. Yeah. But if it is not important to you specifically and is only important to someone else, you don't have to do it. It's okay. That's not yours. That's not for you. Either way, if Brandy did end up feeling like she could forgive him, I hope that's, I hope that's what happened and I hope she feels great about it. Absolutely. But if not, if she didn't feel like she really forgave him, that's okay too. Like I hope she's just, whatever she is feeling, I hope she's happy. Me too. That's all I want for Brandy. I just wish her happiness and peace. Yeah. And I know that she like, I think she's married. I think she's a mother now. So like, I hope she is just happy. Good for her. And that's all I want for Brandy. But once everyone had made their statements, Judge O'Farrell asked Vaka whether he had a final statement to say before the sentencing was going to be passed down. And the public defender that was defending him actually read his personal statement and said, I know I destroyed three families in one night. I know the Lord is with us watching over us. I'm ready and willing to face the consequences of my actions. Okay. Sure, Jen. So when all was said and done, the judge put down the maximum sentence on him of 96 and a half years for all 11 counts against him. And later the same day, he had to go before another judge for the probation violation where he would receive another 22 and a half years on top of that. Iconic. Goodbye. Don't let the door hit you on the way out, asshole. So because he pled guilty to the charges, he was ineligible to appeal any of his sentencing because he pled guilty. He said he did it. Yeah. He remains incarcerated at Mansfield Correctional Facility in Mansfield, Ohio. He is still to this day never given an actual coherent explanation for why the fuck he killed Liz Riser and why he tried to kill Brandy



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Hicks. That is, that's the most. He still has not done it. That's the most maddening part about this whole thing is like, sure, you just, you, like you said, I just wanted to know what it was like, but that there's more to that. Yeah. It's not just one day you said, gee, I wonder what it would be like to murder someone. Exactly. That does, it doesn't make any sense, but the fact that he won't give an actual, any kind of explanation is so infuriating. But since the years that this has happened, this was in 2000. So 23 years ago, Brandy has tried to move forward with her life. Like I said, she's married. She has three children now. One of them, she has honored part of their name with Liz's name for her best friend. Oh, that's beautiful. And the Risers have also tried to move forward through unspeakable tragedy and pain. I can't imagine. But they've used it to kind of inspire their, you know, their ministry that they do like their face. Yeah, they've tried to kind of inspire other people. Good for them. Becky Riser started a blog in 2007 and she shares her Liz's memory in that blog. In 2014, she published a book through My Tears, A Wash in Forgiveness, which is a self-published memoir that was co-written with Michael Camilla. It basically talks about the family's experience of losing Liz and their experience with the justice system after that. Okay. Now they, excuse me, Becky and Jeff actually speak publicly still about the experience whenever they can. And they still say they have completely forgiven Matthew Vaca for the murder of Liz Riser. And again, if that is what is important to them, then good for them. Like they're better people than I am. Truly. Truly. Like I feel that way too. And honestly, like the fact that they have turned it around to be a thing where they are just sharing her memory and trying to inspire people like good for them and good for Brandy. And I hope everyone's fucking thriving. I do too. I really do. And this just really broke my heart. I feel so fucking bad for the Risers. I feel so fucking bad for Brandy and her family, but it looks like they were able to at least like keep Liz's memory alive in like a positive way. And that's really, and Brandy seems to be like thriving. What a tragic, tragic, senseless case. Matthew Vaca is a fucking swamp creature. Like he's animal. He's the shit slime on the bottom of the swamp. Wet lettuce. Truly. It's he's fucking horrific. The shit he did is unspeakable. He should never see the light of day again. That man is a fucking dangerous creature. Seriously. Wow. I hope he's fucking miserable. But that is the story of the brutal murder of Liz Riser and the attempted murder of Brandi Hicks. Damn. Well, yeah. Thank you for that. You're welcome. That's so, so sad. And I feel so horrible for both of those families. But again, so happy that Brandy is thriving and that Liz's presence found forgiveness and can speak about this and keep Liz's memory alive. Wow. Yeah. Well, guys, that was bonkers. I hope that you all enjoy the rest of your day and make somebody's day better and do a positive act. Exactly. And we hope that you keep listening. And we hope you keep. Whoa, I just almost said on it. Weird. Weird. I'm sorry. I don't have coffee in me right now. There's a coffee in front of you. I bought it for you. I know it's full. I know she hasn't All right. Love you guys. Bye.

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