

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

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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, weirdo Zama.

It's I'm Elena.

And this is Morbid.

Boop-boop.

With slurpy frogs.

You'll get that at the end of the episode.

There's a Debtem in the room today.

There's a Debtem.

Say hi.

Hi.

Yay.

And a Mikey.

What up?

We got the full coven in here.

Calling the corners later.

Yeah, we got four of us, so we can.

I missed you this week.

I missed you this week.

It felt weird without you.

It was very strange.

We, and actually I have a funny story related to it, because we took the fam to Storyland in New Hampshire.

Except for me.

And well, Ash wouldn't go.

I'm just kidding, I wouldn't go.

We invited.

I told the kids you can't go to Storyland unless you have children and TT doesn't have children.

And what's scary is you can.

You can, I saw it.

Not me.

But a really adorable thing happened where we took the girls to go see Meet Cinderella.

And she was like the prettiest, sweetest Cinderella I ever did see.

And she had the like perfect Cinderella voice, which is like that like pretty sing song voice.

Like she just was so, I was like, I am immediately soothed by you.

She was a fairy tale.

And she was so sweet.

And she held their hands in the picture and they were like, just starstruck.

And as we're walking away after taking the picture, she was like, do I know you from somewhere?

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

And I was like, maybe she was like, I listened to you on the radio.
And she was in full Cinderella character, like kept the sing song, like said the radio.
The radio.
And then she was like, she goes, I can't believe I'm meeting you right now.
And I go, I can't believe I'm meeting you right now, Cinderella.
The kids probably shit themselves that mama knows what's even better,
was she did like a mic drop at the end because she was like, have a beautiful day, Elena.
And I hadn't said my name like that was.
So the girls were like, Cinderella knows mom.
Holy shit.
Like they were like, what the fuck?
Like losing their mind.
That's iconic.
One, you were awesome, Cinderella.
If you hopefully you're listening.
Poor Rino for Cinderella.
You're awesome.
You were an amazing Cinderella.
You were beautiful.
Your voice is beautiful.
You made the girls day.
I saw a pic.
You're gorgeous.
You also made my day.
So Cinderella at Storyland from this week, you were great.
And I'm sorry.
I thought of it later.
I was like, ooh, I should have said, I should have asked if you wanted to like take a picture
or something or do something cool.
But like, I didn't think of that.
So I apologize because I was very hot.
And we'd been at Storyland twice.
And that's like, that's a lot of story that's two more days that I wanted to be there.
We all know Alina hates abuse.
But you made it and you made it like really cool.
And the girls were so happy.
And that's all that counts.
So I love that.
You were awesome and keeping awesome.
Keep it weird.
Keep it weird.
Just like Cinderella just missed you while you were gone.
Yeah, it's always weird.
I don't know.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

I didn't really do much this week.

I got a lot of wedding stuff done this week.

Well, that's good.

Yeah.

Yeah.

We I mean, we had a we had a very nice family time and we went with Deb Deb and her fan bam.

I know you guys are all so cute.

Nice little family time together.

We love family time.

You know who didn't love family time?

The Kennedys.

Definitely not the Kennedys.

And I was going to say Walter Freeman, but you you are correct.

These Kennedys did not.

That was a joke.

Yeah, we are kidding, kidding.

When we we last you, we last you when we last you talk to it's been a few days.

I also am getting over that illness that started in part one.

Oh, shit, you were sick.

And now I'm at the end of that illness

because I wouldn't have been able to talk through this if we had done it all at once.

I'm kind of glad you went away because I didn't end up getting it.

Oh, knocking on wood.

But when we left you in part one, we were right at the part where

well, we had seen Walter Freeman and his partner there.

Watts kind of fuck up a lot of lobotomies and kind of they were following

the original lobotomy procedure, which did not is not to be confused

with the transorbital lobotomy that he creates later.

Two different things.

But when we last left you, I was talking about how

he ended up performing a very failed lobotomy on one Rosemary Kennedy.

This is going to make me so sad.

And this was definitely one of his greatest failures by far.

One of his greatest failures and most public greatest failure, for sure.

Did he ever like speak on it?

He considered it just like, oops, OK, moving on.

Oopsie.

Yeah, like it wasn't really. Wow.

Just off we go. Yeah.

Doesn't like they could have like owned his life.

You would think I mean, there's a lot with this.

And I think I think the outcome was just something that was kind of

shoved to the side.

That's really sad.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

And I don't think anybody was really looking to make a big fuss out of it because the whole reason it was done as we'll go into it was like political aspirations and someone someone seeming to get in the way of that, according to certain people.

That's fucked up.

So let's talk about finally Rosemary Kennedy's lobotomy, how it came to be.

And to do that, we need to start with what happened to get there.

Because I don't know, like I know just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this.

So Rose Kennedy went not Rosemary, Rose Kennedy, her mother, sure, went into labor on September 13th, 1918.

And Rose Kennedy and Joe Sr.

They placed a call to their obstetrician

and they were thinking the doctor was going to arrive pretty quickly from Boston.

It wasn't going to be crazy.

But at that time, there was a pneumonia outbreak in Boston.

So the doctor was actually detained.

He wasn't able to leave right away.

Oh, shit. Yeah.

1918. Am I right?

You're right.

So he wasn't going to make it to the Kennedy's house

before the baby actually entered the birth canal, like it was happening quick.

So I now in 1918, we knew people knew that, like, you don't hold a baby in the birth canal.

I would imagine that, like, we probably knew that even before we knew that.

I mean, you'd be surprised.

But in 1918, it was well documented that that, like,

what the outcome would be from that,

what kind of complications would arise from it, like, very much known.

Like, right, we can't blame this on, like, oh, we didn't have the research kind of thing.

Because we did.

So at the time, believing she was doing the right thing,

a young nurse that was present for the birth

ended up trying to hold Rose's legs closed

to stop the baby from being born. Oh.

And when that, I know everybody's making the same face in the room right now.

Yep, everybody.

So it's like that could, like, kill the baby, right?

That's bad in every way that something can be bad for both mother and baby.

Yeah.

And it didn't work because, as we know,

when a baby is being born, a baby is being born.

You can't just cross your legs and stop it from happening.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Oh, my God.

So that didn't work.

So she reached into the birth canal and held the baby's head there and kept the baby in the birth canal for two hours.

Two hours?

Until the doctor arrived. Yes.

I don't know.

Like, why did the doctor have to be there if the baby was already coming out?

Anyways, like, what is the fucking logic there?

I don't. I don't know.

There is. I do not know.

What? And again, it was 1918.

It was very well established that stopping a baby who is moving forward down the birth canal would definitely result in some issues like deprivation of oxygen. It could result in birth defects, brain damage, all manner of things. And this is what happened with Rosemary.

Rosemary was the baby.

And they actually named her Rosemary, but they nicknamed her Rosemary.

Oh, OK.

Now, to anybody who was around Rosemary or just saw Rosemary, she was just like all the other children around her, you know, nothing outwardly wrong.

But by the time she entered primary school, that's when they started seeing that there was some developmental disability, some cognitive impairments.

And then I wonder why. Exactly.

And as she got older, Joe and Rose Kennedy, they tried to work with, like, you know, to try to make life easier for her, try to make learning easier.

They hired private tutors to help with school.

They also would go out with her or hire people to go out with her whenever she went into, like, the community.

And the older she got, though, the more difficult it was getting and not just for them to, like, help her,

but it was now becoming a political thing where they were not keeping up appearances,

because now as she's getting older, it's becoming evident that something's going on.

And for them, the primary issue was that Rosemary would go into what they described as fits.

What kid doesn't throw a fucking temper tantrum every now and again?

Yeah, I mean, this was happening too as she was getting older.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

And the fits that they are describing are not temper tantrums.
They're seizures.

Oh, she was having seizures.

And apparently so the author, Kate Clifford Larson,
described them as seizures or episodes of mental illness.

Oh, OK.

These would happen in public and this would embarrass her parents.

Oh, wow. How embarrassing it is that you had a fucking seizure.

Are you kidding me? Exactly.

Now, this whole story is sad from start to finish.

It really is because it didn't become a thing of, like, you know,
let me just comfort my child and show everybody that, like, you know,
this happens to families all over everywhere that, like, you know,
kids have to go through this.

They could have been an example.

Yeah, absolutely. To show people, like, you know,
this is how you show love and affection and, you know,
support for a child who is cognitively impaired.

Like, no, we're not going to do that.

That's it's annoying.

So now at this point, like, throughout much of the 20th century,
mental illness and cognitive or developmental impairments were
a cause of shame and a lot of families would hide
or just institutionalize their disabled family members
instead of dealing with any of the quote unquote embarrassment
or any social stigma that came from it.

House. They didn't want to deal with it.

So they would just kind of lock them away.

That's it. Like, let's pretend they just don't exist.

That's that's so sad.

Imagine having a child and like you think about, like,
how badly you wanted to have kids.

Yeah. And like, how hard it is for some people.

And then some people are just going to throw their kids in institutions.

Well, and it's like, you like they you're not a parent to come into this world.

Like, you brought them in. Right.

So take care of them.

Like, that's your whole job.

Your whole job is supposed to be I brought you into this world.

It's my job to take care of you and make it safe and make you safe.

Like I'm your one protector.

Yeah, it's it's awful.

And to not not fulfill that responsibility
that you bestowed upon yourself and not only not fulfill it,

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

but actively like throw them in a cage and, you know, throw away the key.
Like, damn.

And it's like just because of something they have no control over
and did not ask for and did not participating in creating.

Like it is just beyond.

Yeah. And the thing is, this was also very difficult
for the very devoutly Catholic Kennedy family
because their church was actually
a certain kind of church that deemed disability the result of sin.
And they viewed it as a punishment from God.

That is literally so fucked up.

It makes me so angry. Yeah.

You think that that is a result of sinning?

Yeah, fuck yourself. Yeah.

Hey, weirdos.

Before we get back to our regularly scheduled programming,
I wanted to let you know that Wondery's shocking true crime podcast
over my dead body is back for a fourth season
that will literally give you literal goosebumps.

The newest season covers the story of Mike Williams.

It was Mike's sixth wedding anniversary
when he set off on a hunting trip into the Gator infested swamps of North Florida.
He figured he'd be back in time to take his wife, Denise, out to celebrate,
but he didn't come back.

Friends and loved ones feared he met his fate through bad luck
in a group of hungry alligators, leaving his young family behind.

Except that's not what happened at all.

And after 17 years, a kidnapping and the uncovering of a secret love triangle,
the truth would finally be revealed.

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So that's ridiculous.

It's really awful.

So while Joe and Rose Kennedy refused to have their daughter at this time
committed to an asylum or an institution of any sort,
they weren't going to do the thing of throwing her away and locking up,
you know, throwing away the key.

As Rosemary got a little older,

Rose said that she was having a little bit of trouble managing her daughter's behavior
because it was becoming a little unpredictable.

And, you know, as she gets older, it's harder to lay down that parent card.

And she was also having trouble just meeting her needs without help.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

So they were a very wealthy, very well connected family.
So they first sent her to various boarding schools
where they were hoping she could find some kind of structure,
get help in school, like have more focused learning in school.
I see that thought process.
But she was struggling to fit in.
She was struggling to meet the demands.
But apparently people really liked her.
Like Rosemary was an unbelievably charismatic and likable person.
And even though she was struggling academically
and struggling a little to fit in and kind of like find her place,
she worked really hard to win the affection and approval of those around her.
That was like something she really worked at.
And very much she really wanted to make her parents proud.
Like it was clear that she just really wanted to win them over, essentially.
Yeah, like win their love, that sounds like.
And again, people around her loved her person.
They thought she was, everyone said her personality was so likable, so charming.
She's like a hot ticket, you know.
Look at pictures of her.
She looks like a hot shit and she is beautiful.
Like she is just like one of the, she's like of that era.
She's what you think of.
Like it's just like she's so cool.
And so things probably would have continued this way for Rosemary.
I think they probably would have just kept trying what they were trying,
doing what they were doing.
You know, I think it would have probably went okay.
Right.
But then her father had political aspirations.
And by 1938, Joe Kennedy Sr. had been named the ambassador to the court of St. James in Britain,
which was a position that required him to present himself and his entire family
to Monarchy at Buckingham Palace.
See, I think that if you want to present yourself, that's all well and fine.
That's a lot to put on your family.
Yeah, especially kids.
You want to make.
That's tough.
That is tough.
You know what I mean?
It's a lot to, you know.
To live up to.
Yeah.
And it's a lot to expect of your entire family.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

It is.

But in order to prepare Rosemary for the, what was now going to be very intense scrutiny of the public,

the Kennedys enrolled their daughter at the Belmont House, which was a Catholic boarding school that was run by nuns and favored hands-on learning over rote memorization.

Okay.

And according to Liz Lenz, who's an author, she said, quote,

Rosemary flourished under the guidance of the nuns and was training to become a teacher's aide.

Wow.

She was thriving.

Seriously.

But then the Germans invaded Paris in 1940 and Joe and Rose pulled their daughter out of Belmont House

and returned to the United States.

So again, she was on this road of like, if things just kept going the way they were going, we probably would have been okay.

We wouldn't even be sitting here telling the story.

Now, World War II may have prevented Rosemary from being thrust into the spotlight, but it didn't change the fact that the family,

and especially Joe Kennedy Sr., was having an intellectually disabled daughter a problem.

And that's such a wild school of thought.

Yeah.

And he was searching now, not just to manage what Rosemary was going through, he was searching for a cure.

He wanted these fits to stop.

I would love to believe in my heart of hearts that he's a father and was hoping to cure this for his daughter's sake as well.

But there was definitely political ambitions at the forefront of this.

Yeah, I don't think you can argue that.

And this is when he, so in his search, he was searching high and low for something, something that would cure this.

He came across the work of Walter Freeman and James Watts.

No, thank you.

And this is when they were doing prefrontal lobotomies, and it was definitely still controversial in the medical community.

But it was also gaining some traction a little bit in the press as, quote, a cure for the physically disabled and mentally ill.

Now return to start, pass go, land in jail, stop.

And by this time Rosemary's, what they were calling them outbursts and fits were becoming more and more common.

She was struggling.

Like more frequent too.

And now her behavior was kind of teetering.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Like she'd started sneaking out at night.
And she just had fun.
And the nuns were getting worried that she was going out to pick up men and would end up like pregnant or whatever.
Right?
Go crazy.
With that being brought to the Kennedys, they were like, okay.
So Joe Kennedy brought up the procedure of the prefrontal lobotomy to his wife, Rose Kennedy.
Rose was skeptical.
And she was like, I don't know about this.
And she asked her daughter, Kathleen, to find out more.
She was like, will you go find out for me?
I don't know anything about this.
Please just like go tell me if this is real.
Okay.
And according to Clifford Larson, Kathleen spoke to a journalist whose name is John White.
I know him.
Yeah.
And this John White guy had done some reporting on mental illness and treatments for the Washington Times Herald.
And he had done a real deep dive into this.
So he told Kathleen that the results of the lobotomies were quote, no good.
And he said, don't know.
Like I can tell you through my research, people are ending up sometimes worse than they began.
Don't do it.
It seems like more often than not worse than they began.
And, you know, according to reports, Kathleen went back to her mother and said, oh no, mother, no, it's nothing we want done for Rosie.
So she was like, no, this is not good.
The results are not promising at all.
Don't do this.
In fact, it's a little scary.
Like don't do this.
So Rose was like, okay, like thanks for letting me know.
But Joe went ahead and made the decision to have the surgery performed on Rosemary.
So like went behind their backs?
Just went behind their backs.
In fact, biographer Lawrence Lemur wrote, Joe liked to cut away at a problem and then move on.
I don't know if Rosemary would be a problem.
Yeah, like I don't know if I would word it like that, sir.
Because also I'm like, that is the most to cut away at a problem.
If you're considering Rosemary the problem, that's exactly what you're doing, cutting away and then moving on.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Yeah, seriously.

Now, after checking into George Washington University Hospital, Rosemary was evaluated by Walter Freeman and Watts and they diagnosed her with agitated depression.

What?

And I was like, I don't know if that's it, my guys.

No.

And they both said, oh, what's great is that this is easily treatable with a prefrontal lobotomy. It sounds like you could have a fucking case of the sniffles and they'd be like, oh my God.

You know, we can fix this.

Prefrontal lobotomy.

Now, based on that initial evaluation, Joe Kennedy Sr approved the surgery.

Without telling his wife or explaining to Rosemary what was happening.

They didn't tell her what was happening.

She was 23 years old and they did not tell her what was happening.

And it was just after that initial evaluation, they took a peek at her, said she's got agitated depression.

We can probably cut into her skull and scramble around her front lobes a little bit and I think it'll work.

What even is that?

And he was like, sign her up.

Oh my God.

And knowing he knew nothing about it, it sounds like.

It doesn't sound like Kathleen, he listened to what Kathleen said.

Yeah.

Also, this was the same day.

They did the initial evaluation.

Evaluation, quote unquote.

He said, go right ahead.

Later that day, Rosemary was given an anesthetic to numb her brain.

She was strapped to a table.

Oh my God.

Watts drilled two holes into her skull.

Oh my God.

And used the leukotome to sever the connections in her frontal lobes.

While they were doing this, they had Rosemary recite poetry to indicate that she was, that everything was going on.

Which also, she loves poetry, loved poetry and was very good at poetry.

So she was reciting it while they're drilling into her skull.

That is like a scene in a movie that would make you start bawling your eyes out.

Isn't that macabre?

Yes.

Like that is beyond macabre, all of that, like thinking about that.

Oh my God.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

This young, beautiful, vivacious, but struggling young woman reciting poetry.
As they sever her brain connections.
While they drill into her skull and sever her prefrontal lobe connections that her father consented to.
And was he in the room, like just there?
I have no idea.
Oh my God.
Now, how do you do that to your child?
Yeah, I don't know.
And it's like, how did he even have the right to do that when she's 23 years old?
I'm assuming there was something.
I mean, this is way back.
Yeah, there's no rights back then.
And I'm assuming it has something to do with what she was struggling with that they just assumed that it was his decision to make.
Like giving me anxiety.
And I don't know if this was in the time where like, you know, he's the father.
Like, so he can make a decision.
All the decisions, right.
But again, he had approved this whole thing based on the fact that Freeman and Lotz had assured him this was going to solve all of Rosemary's problems.
Or at the very least, they claimed it'll make her docile and more manageable.
That's the other thing.
That's also such a, that's so haunting.
That's haunting.
Like, yeah, docile.
That's one way to put it.
And you know what?
The surgery did do that, I would say.
Don't you think or wouldn't you think that you would want to see cases of like, like they're like their patients that it's worked on.
I would want to see for my own eyes those people before I ever, I mean, I can't imagine putting my loved one in that position.
But before you ever did that, I would want like concrete physical proof in front of me.
And he didn't even have that.
And remember, they were kind of like over-inflating their results here.
Like they would follow these people for like a minute and a half and then be like, well, it looks good to me.
And then all these issues would crop up and they wouldn't even report it.
Wow.
So it did put to an end her explosive outbursts and, you know, the seemingly difficult behavior that they were dealing with.
It also rendered her unable to speak and unable to move.
She became paralyzed.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

After months of therapy, she regained the partial ability to walk.

Oh my God.

But one leg was turned in significantly and never was the same.

Oh my God.

And did he ever like speak publicly about this?

This was one of those things that was just like, and that's that.

That's a fucking stain on your life, my dear.

And what's in.

So it took also months for her to regain the ability to speak.

And when it was, it was quote, a mix of garbled sounds and words.

Oh my God.

So she could barely even.

And like right up until the point that they did this to her,

she's just reciting poetry and then is now she's like,

she can't even speak.

She, it's like she's locked in her own body.

That's like, I'm sure those outbursts were still happening in her mind.

Oh yeah.

She just couldn't outwardly do it.

Oh my God.

So they put her in a prison of her own mind.

Yeah, absolutely.

Essentially.

How fucking dark.

Now, once she was deemed stable, Joe sent her to Craig House, which is a psychiatric facility.

And then she was transferred to St Colettas,

which was a residential facility in Jefferson, Wisconsin.

And she lived at that facility until her death in 2005.

What?

For six decades, she lived at that facility.

In a facility, in her, she's a Kennedy.

Joe never visited her.

He died never visiting her.

Fuck that guy.

Yeah.

Fuck that guy.

And following the whole, the surgery, Joe was very cagey about where his daughter had gone.

Fuck him.

But Rose and Rosemary lived at, in fact, it was 20 years before she saw any family member.

No one went to see her for 20 years.

She lived at St Colettas for 20 years before any of her family members

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

found out where she was or went to see her.
So most of her family didn't even know where she was.
He wouldn't even tell them.
He just wouldn't even tell, all to be a fucking political leader.
And it was only after Joe's death in 1961 that Rose Kennedy learned where her daughter was.
She never knew where she was.
He never told, he wouldn't tell her.
That man is a monster.
And he went to, yep.
And she went to see him, her after 20 years of not seeing her.
And when Rosemary saw her mother for the first time in 20 years, she ran towards her.
And I guess like Rose held out her arms because she's thinking.
She's gonna hug me.
She's running into my arms.
And all the nuns there immediately went to stop her because they knew.
She ran at her mom and started pounding on her chest and they said she was shrieking at her.
And they said after 20 years and a fucking lobotomy, she remembered that her mother was not there to take care of her when she needed it.
Oh my, this is a gut-wrenching story.
There's a, I'm just trying to find, there's a People Magazine article, which I'll link in the show notes, that tells you the story of when Rose saw her for the first time.
And that's where it came out, like, you know, that after 20 years and a lobotomy, she still remembered that she wasn't there when she needed her.
How could you ever do that to your child?
Yeah.
And I guess there were, after that, it was, she still, she still knew what it like, you know, there was still anger there.
Of course, they ruined her fucking life.
She would bring her to like, you know, to the cape and stuff.
Rose would bring her to the cape.
Rose would bring her into the house and everything and try to like, you know, be a part of her life at that point.
But it's like, oof.
Too little, too late.
And in that same article, I think there's a story about, I think the mom, Rose going swimming and wanting her to come in and Rosemary just like wouldn't even look at her.
And like, the nuns were like, she, yeah, it's like, you know.
She was abandoned.
Yeah, she like, I don't know what you expect here.
And I guess Rose was quoted as saying like, Rosie, what do we do to you?

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Oh God.

And it's like, cause you, you have to look at it from the perspective of a man made the decisions for his family back then.

And who knows?

Like you said, he probably never told her where Rosemary was.

So then you have to feel like Rose was robbed of her child.

Yeah.

It's a horrific story.

Nobody won here.

No one won.

And it's like, neither did you, Joe.

Because now you're going down in history as somebody that lobotomized and threw away your fucking child.

Yeah.

And it, years later, I guess, somebody, Lawrence Lemur, who I mentioned earlier, was doing research for his biography on the Kennedy family.

And he ended up meeting a server at a Nashville pancake restaurant who said that she was actually there and an attending nurse during Rosemary's surgery.

What?

It said, quote, the nurse was so horrified by what she saw happening that she left nursing and never returned to the profession and was a waitress at a pancake house.

I believe that.

Yeah.

Now, in 1941, when Walter Freeman and James Watts just cavalierly recommended Rosemary undergo a fucking lobotomy by just looking at her.

Just later that day.

Oh yeah, we have room in our schedule.

They had no research or evidence to say that that was going to solve her problem, but they, they claimed it.

Because they wanted that name.

They wanted to say we did the lobotomy on Rosemary Kennedy.

And they figured, let's roll the dice.

If it turns out in our favor, then we win.

If it doesn't, they'll lock her away.

So who gives a shit?

Oh my God.

Just to experiment on human life like this is beyond sickening.

Yeah.

I probably said beyond a total of like 52 times at this point, but.

It's crazy.

And they, they were medical professionals, obviously.

Which is insane.

But they had spent all their time in labs and lecture halls.

Neither one of them had a lot of surgical experience to begin with.

Right.

So this is like, they, and now they have a growing body of evidence that's really showing that this is not a good surgery.

No.

But they still went ahead with it.

And when it went terribly fucking wrong, they just brushed it off and went ahead totally undeterred. And they just kept doing them.

Yeah.

They're.

Oh no.

Well, now they, now they, they were like, hmm.

This is when they went transorbital.

Because if there was any trait that Walter definitely demonstrated throughout his entire life from very young, it was impatience.

This man had no fucking patience for anything.

Seemed to say that in part one.

And we know that doing things quick and doing them right are not always the same thing.

Those are actually two very different things.

He was always looking for the quickest way out.

And in fact, one of his biggest issues with psychoanalysis as a treatment for chronic illness, like, you know, talk therapy and cognitive therapy, it was that the process could take years or even decades to show progress.

He didn't like how slow it was.

I want it done now, which in one sense you're like, okay, I understand wanting to find something to add to, you know, psychoanalysis, you know, quote unquote, that can maybe speed it up in a healthy way, like something that can lead it along hand in hand with that, you know, that's always a good thing is to make people suffering less and quicker.

Of course, definitely.

You shouldn't just be looking for the quickest thing.

You should be looking for something that in, you know, in tandem with what's going on.

It just, and so that's what bothered him the most.

And while he believed the prefrontal lobotomy was definitely the solution to many of society's like issues, he was growing kind of frustrated with the fact that this procedure was being limited a bit because they needed trained neurosurgeons to do it.

And there was long recovery times due to, you know, the fucking head trauma that you would sustain during the surgery.

Drilling a hole in your skull might take a second to heal.

So in the years after Rosemary Kennedy's absolute disaster of lobotomy, he shifted a lot of his attention to adjusting the procedure so it could be done quickly and by trained medical practitioners without the need of a hospital or long recovery times.

So in search of this solution, not in a hospital, have your lobotomy on your lunch break.

Can I ask you a quick question?

Yes.

So when you drill a hole into the skull, I know like sometimes bone can kind of like

regrow itself, right?

But does that happen on your skull?

Do you know, like it can fuse back together?

So with the regular lobotomy, as well as the transorbital lobotomy, they're kind of like drilling holes in the skull.

So they're not taking like a big chunk out of the skull.

It's like a drilling a hole.

So that you just leave.

Like it's that will.

I'm not sure what happens to that.

I'm sure a lot of the issues that happened after that was probably did stem from that.

But yeah, I don't think the entire thing was very well thought out from start to finish.

Because I mean, you're just walking around with a hole drilled in your skull.

Like that seems like it could be an issue.

Like wouldn't you think that it would bleed or like, you know what I mean?

Like, and then you would get like blood on the brain or.

Yeah.

Like there's there's a whole host of issues that come from this for sure.

You just tried to picture it in your in your head and you're like, what?

And you're like, I don't understand this.

Last time he gave me a headache.

I went home with a headache because I thought way too much about like my brain.

Drilling holes in your brain.

Yeah.

Well, to find a solution to this like slowness that Walter Freeman was not not digging.

He turned to the work of Amaro and I think it's Fiamberte.

It's very Italian.

Sounds very pretty in there with an Italian accent.

He was an Italian psychiatrist who also shared Freeman's enthusiasm for quick fix solutions to the problem of mental illness.

I don't understand how in a medical profession, you're like, yeah, quick fix solution.

Totally.

That'll work.

Now a few years earlier than this, Fiamberte had successfully found a way around the need to drill into the top or sky side of the skull by accessing the frontal lobes through the orbital socket.

Oh, no, no, no.

It basically would be inserting a guide needle into the space between the eyeball and the wall of the eye socket.

Just and it's the one that's like next to the bridge of your nose.

Nope.

So the inside and Fiamberte was able to quickly and easily penetrate these.

It's a very thin sheet of bone that separates the eye socket from the brain cavity.

You got to go.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

And once the frontal lobe was now accessible, the guide needle was removed and the leukotome was inserted where that was to sever the connections.

The procedure was very quick and the side effects were minimal, I guess.

Question mark, question mark, question mark.

Typically they included like headaches.

Yeah.

A black eye.

Eye aches.

Maybe a fever every now and then.

But best of all, at least from Walter Freeman's perspective was it was quick.

It was simple.

Could be performed in a doctor's office.

Patient could leave a short time after.

They got discharged that same day.

At least for the most part.

What the actual fuck?

Oh, yeah.

I'm just going to be a little late to work today because I have a lobotomy scheduled for this morning, but I'm still going to make it in.

But I'll make it.

Yeah, don't worry about it.

What the fuck, dude?

And honestly, in 2023 with the way that work is.

If you were like, I have a lobotomy scheduled at noon, they'd be like, you better be here for the end of the fucking day or you're fired.

Like, you know, at least here where we are.

America, America.

Yeah.

But the thing is, here's the thing.

So that sounds like, whoa, Fiamm Bertie, like, what are you doing?

Holy shit.

But Fiamm Bertie, he had only done it a handful of times and he got bad results.

So.

You don't say.

He concluded that the risks of this procedure vastly outweighed the benefits.

Okay, good.

So he was like, no, we tried it.

It didn't work.

Moving on.

So, but Walter was like, I don't know.

I think the one thing that it's missing is me.

Oh, yeah.

That's what everything in life is missing.

I think Fiamm Bertie didn't do it right.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

But I think me with my skilled hand and my genius and my confidence,
I think it could be a revolutionary process.
I don't understand how this motherfucker looked in the mirror and was like, yeah, I'm a good guy.
Yeah.
I think he was like, I got this.
That's like a narcissist.
He was like, you know what?
The problem with Fiamm Bertie's technique is Fiamm Bertie and not Walter Freeman.
So he was like, I think this will forever change mental on this procedures.
Like, I think I can do this.
I think it did, but not in the way he hoped.
So he, he reasoned that Fiamm Bertie's bad results were because quote,
probably because Fiamm Bertie's patients needed more.
That's all.
How do you even know that?
You don't, they, you know, you don't, don't ask questions.
Don't worry about it.
That's right.
How do you know that?
You know, he just knows that.
Why are you asking Walter Freeman questions?
He's telling you things.
Why do you need to know?
But he also believed that one of the problems with the procedure,
as it had been performed, and this is where what people probably know the transorbital lobotomy
by another name, and we'll get to it right in a minute.
But he thought that was the issue that, you know, Fiamm Bertie was doing it and not him.
And the second issue was that the procedure, as it had been performed, was it needed instruments
that it was using instruments that weren't sturdy enough in his, in his opinion.
Is this where the exit comes in?
That they had a tendency to bend or break and you took the, you took the lead.
But he, so he was like, you know what?
We need something that is, you know, slender.
Sharp, tough, something that's not going to bend, not going to break.
And he found that instrument at home in a kitchen drawer,
in the form of the U-line ice company's ice pick.
How the fuck he had that in his kitchen drawer?
Yeah.
What the hell is Walter doing with an ice pick?
Just, you know, ice picks, you know, you pick an ice, I guess.
Deeply upsetting.
Yeah.
So Freeman wasted, so that again, that's as Ash said before,
you probably know the transorbital lobotomy.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

You've probably heard it called an ice pick lobotomy.

Oh my God.

That is why it's called an ice pick lobotomy,
because he literally started it with an ice pick.

Oh my God.

So he wasted no time perfecting his new technique over the course of several weeks.

And on January 17th, 1946,

he tested out the procedure on a real life person
on 29 year old housewife, Sally Ellen Linesco.

Oh no.

Like many of his other patients, she had a very long history
of struggles with depression, anxiety.

She was also dealing with a lot of manic behavior and violent behavior.

She was having bouts of violence.

And in these bouts of violence, she would strike her daughter.

Oh no.

So having run out of any other options,

Sally's husband brought her to see Freeman,

who quickly suggested this new technique.

And the couple together did agree to do it.

And he had told this couple that it had been done in Italy a few times,

and it was very quick, easy, low risk.

Now remember.

Meanwhile.

The emperity stopped doing it because of how awful the outcomes were.

This was working.

Now, after agreeing to the surgery, he brought Sally into a private room.

She was rendered unconscious.

And the way they did that was using an electroconvulsive machine
to render you unconscious.

I'm sorry, what?

Exactly what it sounds like.

While this happened.

And Ash is like speechless.

I am no words at this point.

While this happened, a nurse would hold towels under the patient's nose and mouth
to collect any mucus or other fluids that would flow out of your orifices while this happens.

Walter then peeled back Sally's eyelid,
inserted the ice pick into the orbital socket,

gave it a few tap, tap, gentle taps with a hammer to break through the bone plate.

And once he had broken through, he quote, unquote,

wiggled the ice pick about to sever the frontal lobes.

He has no idea what he's doing.

He's wiggling it about because it's not even like you think about how they can use like cameras now

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

to go in like people.

I mean, there's surgeons now that can operate on fetuses in the like in utero, like on a screen, they are doing brain surgery and heart surgery on fetuses in your, I mean, that is remarkable.

We're a magic species at that point.

But like they didn't have a camera.

They didn't even have a fucking camera.

There wasn't even like.

So you don't, how do you know what you're doing?

You can just go in in there and wiggling it about, quote unquote.

Like that is not a medical procedure.

You are, you are like a Frankenstein doctor.

He's fucking around and finding out.

That's all he's doing.

No, the problem is he's not finding out.

That's the thing.

He's just fucking around.

Oh no, he's finding out.

He's just not sharing.

That's all he's finding out though.

Oh my God.

He knew all these, these results.

He just wasn't sharing them.

That's all he's such a douchebag.

Now, as Sally was regaining consciousness, it appeared that the operation had been a failure because she could not speak immediately after the procedure and she needed assistance walking.

How do you do this to people?

But then in the days and weeks that followed, Sally was showing what they referred to as slow progress.

She regained the ability to walk and talk and she never experienced any of the symptoms that had led them to coming into Freeman's office.

Okay.

But.

Yeah.

Her daughter, Angeline said, quote, it felt like he had given me a tremendous gift to give my mother back to me.

And after monitoring Sally's progress for several weeks, Walter happily reported that his patient was now enjoying good health.

And in 2008, her daughter said.

She changed.

That's quote from her,
that it felt like he had given me a tremendous gift
to give my mother back to me.

That was in 2008.

Wow, so okay, so it did work.

So he looked at this as irrefutable evidence
that this is successful across the board.

It's going to help everyone.

That's just a one-off, my guy.

Now, after conducting just a few procedures,
he concluded that his technique was safe enough
to operate on both sides of the brain in the same day.
And decided to do so with his fourth patient.

Can I ask you, I don't know if you'll have an answer.

Do you have any idea why it would have worked?

Maybe he just didn't sever a connection.

Do you think that could have been it?

I think it's literally just luck.

Yeah.

I truly do.

And I don't know.

I mean, I'm going to listen to Angeline here
and say her mother was a functioning person and was cured.
But like other results that they looked at as desirable,
I guess could have been that that person just became docile.
Right, that's the thing.

And manageable.

But I'm going to listen to Angeline here.

If she says her mother was back, her mother was back.

And that's, I think the problem with the lobotomy
is it's just a fucking crapshoot.

Right.

It's literally like, there's no way that you can sit there
and tell me you're doing it right every time.

No.

And as we'll see, he became a lot more unhinged as he won.

It sounds like it.

Is there any possible way that he could have put the ice pick
in a part of the brain where there were not connections?

And maybe that's why it worked, because no connections were severed.

I mean, who knows?

I mean, your brain is such an intricate and complex organ.

Right.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

It would be hard not to hit something of importance with that thing, but who knows?

I mean, stranger things have happened, you know?

Okay.

He decided now that he was going to operate on both sides of the brain in the same day.

And he used his fourth patient.

So he's done three that he's considered successful.

It's also like three and you decide to make that big of a move?

Like that is not a case study, my guy.

This is not tic-tac-toe, my sir.

So the fourth one, his name was David Berman.

And unfortunately, Walter never got to operate on the second side of the brain to test his theory, because Berman began hemorrhaging, because Freeman accidentally punctured a blood vessel in his brain.

Oh my God.

Did he die?

I want you to picture him hemorrhaging.

Who is I?

Was probably the most horrifying thing ever.

Now, he was sent home after this partial lobotomy.

And he ended up writing in his notes that this man recovered fairly well.

What?

Now, he wrote that in his notes.

He recovered fairly well.

Berman suffered from seizures and partial paralysis as a result of this f**k up for the rest of his life.

He struggled for the rest of his life.

This man is the OG Doctor Death.

Truly.

Like, wow.

It's crazy that you don't really hear more about him.

That's why I wanted to do this, because if you say the name Walter Freeman, a lot of times it's like, I don't know who that is.

Yeah.

And it's like, he did a load of s**t.

And it's like he was a bad guy.

Like, this is a bad, bad situation.

You literally hit someone's blood vessel in their brain and say they recovered fairly well.

Oh, it's going to get worse, my friend.

After they hemorrhage on your table.

It's going to get worse, my friend.

Wow.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

So, of course, he's not going to be deterred by this failure.

He had to have killed someone.

When has he ever been?

Freeman and Watts just charged ahead.

They just went right ahead with it.

And this was supposed to be something that was a last resort.

Initially, when the, when, you know, Fiamberti made it, created it,

he was touting it as, it was conceived as a last resort for the most impaired.

Like, this is your end of the road, Hail Mary thing.

Lasted effort.

And he saw it wasn't working.

So he was like, this can't even be your last resort.

Right.

They're doing it now.

Not as that, but as a quick fix for everything.

They even did it for nervous indigestion.

Oh my God.

And suicidal thoughts, hysterical paralysis, they called it.

Like, anything that they, anything on the spectrum.

Of illness, especially mental illness.

They would recommend a prefrontal, a transorbital lobotomy.

But even indigestion.

Yeah.

Wow.

And some, and it's crazy because some people in the medical field at this point, we're starting to kind of come around to their theories because they were having some successes.

So they're looking at it.

Some of them as like, you know, we, we judge this a little bit.

And I think it can be something we're looking at.

They were thinking like, there's something here.

There's something here that maybe we can jump off.

But a lot, yeah, a lot remains skeptical.

And they were warning that there was risks that were just inherent to this procedure that you really couldn't work around.

And in December of 1947, for example, Swedish psychiatrist, psychiatrist Dr.

Gosta Rylinder addressed a conference of over 700 doctors and said,

although he had used the technique to some effect,

he thought it was a very risky approach to any kind of illness.

And he said, quote, because of the personality deterioration that might occur.

So he's saying, yeah, sure, you might fix some of the issues that this person came in with, but they're going to become a docile zombie.

Yeah.

Potentially.

A hundred percent.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

And like, this just isn't worth it to like destroy someone's personality and ability to do basic motor functions just to get them away from whatever they're struggling with, like we can do better here.

A hundred percent.

Now, despite Dr. Rylander's insistence that this lobotomy should really only be relied on in extreme cases, the most extreme, Walter Freeman forged ahead and he said, you know what?

I'm going to keep doing it to literally anyone that shows up in my office, regardless of age.

By the end of the 1940s, Freeman and Watts were performing dozens of lobotomies each week, sometimes on kids as young as four or five years old.

No.

Yep.

Yep.

And to Walter, this growing popularity and people flocking to him was just a sign that he was doing something right and he was a success.

You feel so bad for these people because they don't know any better.

They're thinking this is going to cure everything I've ever gone through.

Because you're budging results.

And there's no like, yelp back then.

No.

Or any kind of peer review.

But interestingly, by 1950, James Watts, his partner there, was becoming a little disturbed by the frequency with which people were turning to lobotomy.

And he was like, wait a second, I think this is too much.

This should be only in extreme cases.

Like we shouldn't be doing this to fucking four-year-olds.

How do you put a four-year-old on that table and shove a fucking ice pick in their eye?

Exactly.

Into their brain.

Oh my God.

And then, I mean, you think about ruining the rest of somebody's life in general, that's horrific.

You think of doing it at four and like 80 years at least ahead of them that are just a fucking horrible trauma that they're going to have to deal with.

Oh my God.

So only one of them had real surgical training and that was James Watts.

And he took his role as the surgeon in the two very seriously.

And they often clashed over what he considered to be Walter Freeman's very cavalier attitude about cutting into a person's fucking brain.

Yeah, I think that you could be cavalier about certain things in life, but cutting into a person's brain, not so much.

No.

And Watts was getting a little frustrated by that and he was like, this is a little weird, man.

Gee, I wonder why.

And Watts' frustrations dated back to 1946 when he entered their shared office one day

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

and found Walter standing before a patient with two ice picks sticking out of their eye sockets.
What?

Casually, he looked at Watts and said, Jim, can you come here and hold the picks while I take a photo?

What?

That's when Watts turned and left the room and they never shared an office again.

But they continued to work together?

But that was in their shared office that he walked into the shared office and that was what was happening.

He was like, I would like my own office now.

I would like my own country now by so I can move to it and never see your ass again.

Yeah, that's how I would feel.

But by 1950, he was even more disgusted by Walter's obsession with what he deemed, quote, a brain damaging operation and they ended up parting ways in 1950.

He turned into a mad man.

Yep.

So, but it was 1946 that he walked in and saw that like him standing in front of a patient with two fucking ice picks sticking out of their eyes and wanting him to hold them to take a photo.

How disgusting.

And by 1950, he was like, fuck you.

And he ended up, Watts described it.

But in 1950, he was like, I see it as a brain damaging operation.

I'm surprised it took four more years after that.

But at least it happened, you know.

But this didn't slow down Walter's enthusiasm about the surgery.

I had a feeling you were going to say that.

Yeah, his most productive period, in fact, was between 1949 and 1952.

Because he got bold.

A span where thousands of transorbital lobotomies were performed across the country.

In fact, during a two week period in 1952, he visited a hospital in West Virginia and he performed in two weeks, 228 lobotomies.

There's no way.

In a two week period.

There's no way you could, even if it was a procedure that was like a helpful procedure.

Yeah.

Performing that many.

No.

You would have to be exhausted by the end of that.

Of course.

And like losing your skill set as you're going through it, I would think.

Well, what's worse, exactly.

And what's worse is he's kind of becoming like a celebrity at this point.

And that's going his head.

And now he had taken to performing lobotomies for audiences.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

No, that is just beyond fucked.

And he would then, now he's going into like shock jock territory where he like to quote, shock his audience of doctors and nurses by performing two-handed lobotomies, hammering ice picks into both eyes at once.

I'm sorry, is this the fucking circus, my guy?

Sure is.

I mean, yeah, the circus is fucked up in and of itself.

And that's from NPR in 2005, that quote.

But yeah, he would literally, two ice picks, one in each eye socket at once.

Now.

Why would you even want to go see that?

I don't know.

But despite his enthusiasm, by the mid to late 1950s, a growing awareness of the major risks associated with lobotomies and the wide release of medications like chlorpromazine, thiorazine, led to a pretty dramatic decline in the public's interest in reliance on this procedure.

And aware of this, that it was declining in popularity.

And also gaining a reputation for being a little barbaric.

A little.

Now, Walter began promoting the transorbital lobotomy as a cure for problems other than those related to mental health.

Of course.

So among those was the growing number of men who were publicly identifying as or being outed and or arrested for being homosexual, many of whom were committed by their own families or the courts for their quote unquote behavior.

I have to go.

This shit makes me so fucking angry.

This is really going to get you right now because this was so angering to hear by some estimates.

And this is from 2023.

Up to 40 percent of Freemans patients were gay men operated on to change their sexual orientation.

Yeah.

Fun fact, you're not going to do that.

Up to 40 percent.

Wow.

Now, as understandings of mental illness and emotional health started to change in the 1960s, becoming a little more compassionate, a little more nuanced, at least slightly, especially from the 1950s.

Walter was growing increasingly desperate to remain relevant and didn't want to turn away any patient regardless of any symptoms or claims.

He just wanted to keep doing them.

And it's like, it shouldn't be about you.

It should be about your patients, which clearly it never was.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

And this is when Lou Dully brought her 12-year-old stepson, Howard Dully, to see Walter Freeman in the fall of 1960.

She described his issues as being a major source of trouble for the family.

And honestly, when you hear what they were, you're like, so he's just like a 12-year-old.

What were they?

She said, he objects to going to bed, but then sleeps well.

Are you kidding me?

Is that not every child in the fucking world?

He does a good deal of daydreaming.

And when asked about it, he says, I don't know.

Me too, still.

He turns the room's lights on when there's broad sunlight outside.

This woman is a cunt.

Those are the reasons that she wanted a transorbital lobotomy for her 12-year-old stepson.

So what you're telling me is that she didn't like her stepson.

So she was like, he's annoying me.

Worst stepmom in history.

Okay, okay.

We can drill a nice pick into his brain if you want.

Like, okay, marriage is blank.

And she was like, that sounds great.

Right.

And four days later, Howard was delivered to Freeman's office without being told what was going to happen.

Oh my God.

Where was his dad?

Where was his mom?

Yeah.

Now, looking back on it, Howard believes his stepmother, because he did live through it, luckily.

Oh, God.

He believes his stepmother had never wanted children and resented him for reasons he'll never understand.

Yeah, it sounds that way.

He said, quote, in 2005, he told NPR, my stepmother hated me.

I never understood why, but it was clear she'd do anything to get rid of me.

Here's the idea.

That woman should be in prison for the rest of her fucking life.

Like if you don't want children, don't have them,

or don't marry somebody that has them, that seems simple.

This is what you've even wilder.

She, Lou Dully, had taken Howard to several other doctors

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

before Walter Freeman, and they all told her,
nothing is wrong with Howard.
And many of them told her,
it might be more of, quote, a stepmother problem.
Yeah, sounds like it.
Yeah.
Wow.
No, I hate her.
Looking into Freeman's archives at the George Washington
University Library reveals a lot about Howard's surgery.
I mean, it's reckless to say the least.
It said, Mrs. Dully came in for a talk about Howard.
He wrote in his clinical notes.
Things have gotten much worse, and she can barely endure it.
I explained to Mrs. Dully that the family should consider
the possibility of changing Howard's personality
by means of transorbital lobotomy.
Changing his personality, not curing him of anything,
just changing him.
No.
Let's change this kid.
Now, the procedure was done, and it failed
at changing Howard's personality.
So Lou Dully turned to more extreme measures
and convinced her husband to give up his parental rights.
What?
And made Howard a ward of the state.
What?
Yeah.
I'm sorry, what the fuck is wrong with the dad there?
So, oh, there's, yeah, fuck both of them.
Because now, like, this woman just hates her stepson,
didn't want kids, married a man with kids,
which, like, what the fuck is your problem?
Like, you knew what you were getting into, bitch.
Right.
Decided to get him a transorbital lobotomy
just to see if it would fucking ruin his personality
and make him a zombie.
But she wanted to throw him away.
When it didn't, she convinced his father to just abandon him.
Yep.
I don't even know what to say to that.
And this left him obviously deeply traumatized.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

I mean, abandonment and the lobotomy.
They shoved ice picks into his eyeballs.
Yeah.
He told NPR it took me years to get my life together.
Oh, Howard.
Through it all, I've been haunted by questions.
Did I do something to deserve this?
No.
Can I ever be normal?
Yes.
And most of all, why did my dad let this happen?
Why did your dad let this happen?
Some people.
I have, like, chills.
Like, my whole body hurts for this child.
I don't understand why people don't realize
you don't have to have kids.
Exactly.
If you don't want kids, if you are thinking that you could
possibly give up your fucking child, like, in, like,
rights to your child when they're 12, I don't mean, like,
give them up for adoption.
No, like, at just to be clear.
12 years old.
Oh, my God.
To just abandon your child because he's a nuisance
to the new lady you married?
Like, you're a fucked up individual.
Get a fucking grip, my guy.
And this woman, what the fuck is wrong with you,
you fucking monster.
Lou what?
Lou Dully.
Lou Dully, you're a fucking dull bitch.
Like, I spit on you.
Yeah, I don't even, you just shouldn't even deserve our spit.
So, luckily, Walter Freeman performed his last transorbital
lobotomy in February of 1967 on a long-term patient
of his, his Helen Mortensen.
What do you mean, long-term patient?
She had just been a patient of his several times.
He had been.
Multiple lobotomies?
Yeah.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Oh, wow.

The procedure was the third lobotomy
that he had actually performed on Mortensen.

What?

And, unluckily, this is very sad.

It resulted in her death from a brain hemorrhage
when Freeman nicked an artery.

Is that the only person he killed?

So, when I said, luckily, he performed his last one,
I mean, like, thankfully, he was never allowed to do one again.

Right.

But it is horrific how this ended.

So, so, sorry.

So, I'm like, are you all right?

No, my brain is like, on another level.

So, he never killed anybody before that?

No.

That's at least on the books.

Yeah, like, that's, this was the.

That's shocking.

Yeah, he never killed one person.

Now, I mean, tragic, like, the fact that she had to die,
that's horrible.

Oh, it's horrific.

Yeah.

And that she was a longtime patient.

She was obviously struggling to go through more than one.

And it's like, that's how you end hemorrhaging
from a nicked artery in your brain.

Oh, my God.

Now, the accident resulted in Freeman being banned
from operating on anyone in the state of California.

Bye, bitch.

And honestly, that's like, it's kind of wild
that that's the, that was the only consequence.

And only in California.

Yeah.

Like, obviously, I know there's, they don't have the power.

And he really didn't have a lot of, like,
formal surgical training.

That's the other thing.

Like, the fact that this was the first one.

He's just shoving ice picks into people's brains
really nearly.

Really wild, those odds right there.

Truly.

But he, so he lost his ability to perform the procedure that he had invented and advocated on for decades.

And he officially retired and spent the next several years traveling around the country, conducting follow-up studies on his former patients until he died from cancer on May 31st, 1972.

Now, over the course of his decades-long career, he conducted approximately 3,500 lobotomies.

Holy shit.

Three quarters of those were transorbital or ice pick lobotomies.

So most of them.

Nearly 500 of those resulted eventually in the death of the patient.

And that's according to Hugh Kay, and that's from 2023, the dark history of gay men, lobotomies, and Walter Jackson Freeman.

Wow.

So 500 people eventually died of whatever injuries they sustained from it.

I think with his last one, with Helen, it was more of a immediate thing that caused him to lose license.

Right.

Well, some of Freeman's patients, likely those that were operated on the more surgically inclined James Watts, I would think, did feel their lives were improved by the procedure.

Reality was that the results buried so widely.

I mean, it hit all specter.

It was literally like playing roulette.

It was just, you see what happens.

There was no rhyme or reason to it.

So that's not a good procedure.

That's not a good procedure

when you're literally just rolling a dice and it can land anyway.

Who would sign up for that knowing those odds?

Exactly.

And he was also reckless.

Absolutely.

He was reckless with it.

And he was egotistical, and he just wanted it done quick.

That's the thing.
He never put forth the real effort that should have gone
into creating a procedure like this.
Because maybe had he actually put effort in,
he could have figured something out.
And something in there in the beginning
wanted to make a good difference.
Like wanted to take suffering from people.
Wanted to cure mental illness.
Wanted to take this away.
It just got lost in ego.
I was going to say in himself.
Yeah.
And just in the impatience.
The need for celebrity.
Fame, exactly.
And just, there was a lot that really just,
it tampered down any of that good
that was in there to begin with.
I do believe there was some good in the beginning,
that good intentions.
Absolutely.
That just were completely washed away throughout this.
And it's really sad to see that somebody could turn into that.
This is one of the most tragic cases ever.
And luckily, the transorbital lobotomy definitely faded out
over the course of the 60s and the 70s.
And was considered pretty obsolete by the 1980s.
But still, neurosurgeon and author Dr. Henry Marsh
cautions against judging men like Walter Freeman too harshly.
He says, quote, their theory was based on this terribly crude,
simplistic view of the brain.
That the brain was a simple mechanism.
And you could just sort of stick things into it.
He wrote.
And reflecting on the history of the now unthinkable practice
of lobotomy, Marsh said, this business of dividing doctors
into heroes and villains is wrong.
The generation of surgeons who trained me had,
I wouldn't say God like powers,
but they had enormous authority.
Nobody questioned them or queried them.
And I can think of some of the people who trained me
who are essentially decent people who had been corrupted

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

by this power and became a little bit monstrous as a result.
That's kind of what we were just saying about Walter Freeman though.
How he lost it a long way.
Is that like these essentially decent people get corrupted
by this God like power bestowed on them.
Right.
And it turns them monstrous.
And it's like that's synonymous with evil.
That's the thing.
So it's, but it's like they don't begin that way.
Right.
They don't all begin that way.
You know what I mean?
Like this is a very, this isn't a black and white thing.
Like he did not begin as an evil villain
who was out to fuck people over and kill people.
And he wasn't, he didn't want to kill people.
That's the thing.
Like he was, his ego took over and his need for fame
and his need to do things quickly
and to have his name on this procedure
and be revolutionary and all this.
And it took over any kind of forethought into well,
maybe we do need to take some time to perfect this.
We do need to do some more research.
We do need to figure out how we can make sure
that we're not just wiggling about an ice pick
and instead figuring out how to target specific things
that we do lots of research on,
that we find out when we target this thing,
this is what happens instead of just being like,
yeah, we'll just sever a few things and see what happens.
The other part that I think is interesting
that Marsh pointed out was how back then
there was such like a simplistic view of the brain.
Like it wasn't looked at as this complex,
as complex as it really is.
So I think that also kind of informed a lot of these
reckless things that people would do.
But again, he just turned into a monster.
He really did.
Like he, there's really no getting away from the end of that.
He did turn into a villain.
And he waited until he was retired

to go check up on all his former patients.
It's like, I don't know,
maybe you should have done that
while you were doing the procedures.
100%.
That's just humanity.
Like it's like, and to make sure.
Like you got to check up on them
and see that they're still living functional lives
to be able to say that that was a successful procedure.
And that's the thing, exactly.
Like how can you, you can't say your procedure is successful
when you're not doing a follow-up visit.
But that's how they were all able to do it.
Like Moniz there who made the original,
the original lobotomy, what we know now as lobotomy.
And he made the device too, right?
The leukotome, he didn't make the device,
but he was the one who would literally
not check up on the patients
and just mark them off as a success
because they didn't die in his office.
That's cheating.
And they looked a little docile when they left.
It's like he would not check up on them
after a couple of weeks.
And then he just like success.
And it's like, no, no, no, no.
Some of these things are going to show up down the line.
You got to make sure that you didn't fuck something up
that's going to show up a month or two later, a year later.
Right. Like you can't measure it.
You can't mark that as a success.
And that's why I feel like you can't really like
measure your own success necessarily.
In this case, it should be like a board
should have been overseeing all of this.
Like there, there's so many things
that should have happened here
that unfortunately just didn't
because it was such a different time.
Implemented now luckily to kind of safeguard
some of this stuff, but honestly,
this probably had a little bit to do with it

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

because it's like, this is just reckless.

It's just reckless behavior.

It's reckless monstrous behavior.

Completely.

And for, I mean, I'm glad that James Watts

kind of realized the situation at some point.

And like I said earlier, I'm pretty sure the ones
that were success at all were probably done by him.

Because he was the only one.

Surgical skill.

Yeah. He was the only real surgeon on the team.

Just the fact that Walter Freeman had no

no surgical training.

Barely any surgical training.

No, like formal surgery.

Like he had obviously done it for medical school and such.

When you think about what doctors have to go through now
like pre-med, you have to go through all the different rounds
and all the different like various types of,

I don't even know like the correct way to say it.

Oh yeah, like you have to go through.

Exactly. You have to hit all the different levels.

You have to go through all these different rounds of.

It doesn't sound like it was like that when

Walter became a doctor.

Yeah, it was a different situation.

For sure.

That's so crazy.

And now they make you hit like every department.

So you have a vast understanding of everything.

Right.

I remember because all the fucking the trainees like
hated coming down to the morgue for their rotation through the morgue.

And when you had your one of your C sections, wasn't there like?

Yeah, there was like a trainees that came in.

They asked me if I was in mind and I was like, yeah, they need to be.

They're going to be doctors someday.

They should see one.

Yeah.

That's what I'm not going to tell them now.

At that point, you don't give a shit.

You're like, sure, everyone come in.

You're like, just take the shit out of me.

But yeah.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Wow.

That is Dr. Walter Freeman and the transorbital lobotomy slash icepick lobotomy.

I don't even have words left.

That is something that's a story that will always stick with me.

It's a it's a rough one.

And just all the people's lives that were affected so negatively even.

Even the people that like it was a success, you know.

Yeah.

Like they still had some kind of after effects.

And it's a traumatic thing to go through no matter what.

The two that stuck out to me the most in this part are obviously Rosemary Kennedy and Howard there.

I know Howard broke my heart.

He daydreams.

He daydreams and he leaves lights on.

When the sunlight's coming in.

It doesn't want to go to sleep, but then sleep's great.

It's like you're just a kid.

You have a child.

Yeah.

You have yourself a bonafide human child.

Wow.

Like I'm an adult and I leave lights on sometimes.

I don't even believe in hell, but that woman's in hell.

She's somewhere.

Tell you that much.

Oof.

Well, thank you for listening.

We hope you keep listening.

And we hope you keep it weird.

But not so weird that any of this because oh my god ice picks in your eyes.

No, thanks.

Oh my god.

Not for me, dog.

You just, you, you.

Sorry, I was trying to get it.

Are you showing up?

Yeah, I'm showing up.

Okay.

I was a gross one.

Because I tried to force it out.

That's, he sounded like a frog.

He sounded like a slurpee frog.

A slurpee frog.

[Transcript] Morbid / Episode 488: Walter Freeman Pt 2

Are there other types of frog?

Many kinds of frogs.

But they're all pretty slurpee though.

She did sound like a slurpee frog.

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