

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

What's beneath the surface of true crime?

Uncover brings you there with premium investigations that demand justice.

Each season delves into a distinct case, from the inner workings of a cult, to the disturbing legacy of residential schools.

Promising new content year-round, Uncover will take you on a journey through explosive revelations with hosts dedicated to revealing the truth.

Uncover the best in true crime. Find it on the CBC Listen app or wherever you get your podcasts.

Hi, Kathleen here.

I'm jumping back into the feed today to tell you about my brand new weekly podcast, Crime Story.

Each week, I'll go deep into a tale of true crime with the storyteller who knows it best.

From the reporter who exposed Wilcosby to the writer who solved one of Australia's most chilling cold cases,

Crime Story guests include Gilbert King from Bone Valley,

Eric Benson from Project Unabomb, Carol Fisher from The Girlfriends, and many more.

Here's an episode of Crime Story for you now.

I speak with my friend and host of escaping nexium, Josh Block. Have a listen.

The following episode contains difficult subject matter, including references to sexual assault. Please take care.

I'm Kathleen Goltar. This is Crime Story.

Every week, a new crime with the storyteller who knows it best.

She said to me at first, people have been branded, and then a couple of days later, she said, I'm one of those people.

It was August of 2017 when my friend and colleague, Josh Block, walked into my office to tell me about a crazy story that he'd heard over his summer vacation.

At the time, we were both producers at the CBC Current Affairs Program, The Current.

He had just returned from a trip to Hornby Island in British Columbia and had run into an old friend.

An old friend that told him that she had just left a cult.

The name of that cult was nexium.

ESP nexium is a methodology that allows people to optimize their experience and behavior.

The story of the community in Albany, New York and its creepy leader, Keith Ranieri, has all been told and told a lot.

There has been more than one TV documentary made, including a multi-season HBO series.

There has been a rather cheesy, lifetime movie released, and it's even been the basis of an episode of Law & Order.

But before all of that, and before the court case that sent Ranieri to prison for life, there was a podcast.

Because after that day that Josh walked into my office to tell me about his friend's complicated, confusing and unbelievably confounding story,

Josh and I made Escaping Nexium.

Josh, welcome to Crime Story.

Thanks for having me.

So when you walked into my office that day, what did you know about nexium?

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

I knew, like not a whole lot.

I had known for over a decade that Sarah was involved in some kind of like self-help group.

I thought it was kind of like landmark.

And then I ran into her on Hornby Island and she was like a month, as you know, a month out of nexium.

And it was actually kind of difficult to understand what she was saying.

There's so much jargon, there's so much.

And she was like also processing what was happening and still didn't quite have a narrative yet.

So I knew that she was involved in something that was really scary and had gotten bad enough that she had to leave.

I knew that she was frightened and had actually a good reason to be frightened.

Because I did know that people who come out and spoken out against nexium, they had gone after them and they ended up in court.

They ended up having their lives destroyed by nexium.

But I remember coming to you and saying, I think this is a story, there's something here.

I know that the Bronfman's are involved.

I know that there's some celebrities involved.

And we were working at this current affairs program and you and I were kind of like, well, should we have her on the show?

And I think we both realized pretty quickly that there was no way to explain the story easily.

First of all, it wasn't a commonly known story.

So the amount of work you'd have to do to actually get the audience up to speed to understand what Sarah was talking about

just wouldn't work on a current affairs show at that moment, on the interview show.

So, you know, I was still trying to kind of process the bits and pieces that was there, but definitely my journalistic spidey senses and I think yours too were like, this is big.

We got to do something with this.

Oh, I just remember you coming in and every day we would talk and I would be like, but can you remind me who's that again and where was this?

Right.

There were all the, like you said, all this jargon and all these levels and all this craziness that went into it.

But did you know that she had been branded?

I can't remember if we knew at that point that she had been branded.

I did.

So we were both on this small Gulf Island in British Columbia, Hornby Island, and we actually ran each other a few times over the course of this week.

And the first time she kind of said, I've left this group.

I've left, you know, we're gone to the New York Times.

We're trying to, she said to me at first, people have been branded.

And then a couple of days later, she said, I'm one of those people.

And then I was like, holy cow.

And she did it.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

I mean, I didn't see it, but she then kind of dawned on me that this is serious. It's, you know, the extent of it is to do with physical harm, not just psychological harm. I had never heard of anybody being, I mean, obviously horrible stories of the slave trade. You heard about stuff like that, but like modern day us, people that we knew, it was insane to think that somebody had been branded. And I remember you and I trying to even figure out how that happened. Like, was it a pen or was it like a stamp? I don't think she told me right away then, but it was only, certainly once the New York Times article came out, but I think we actually interviewed her before that time, or we had talked to her before that time, and then she started to describe that it wasn't this five second kind of searing of the skin. It was this 45 minute ceremony where she was being held down with a cauterizing pen. And having this very, very painful symbol burned into her body. And the symbol ended up being the initials of Keith Reneary. That's right. So who was Keith? What did we find out about Keith? So, I mean, Keith Reneary is, well, you know, there's a public facing side of Keith Reneary, and then there's actually who he was. So Keith Reneary kind of espoused, the mythology about him is that he was this enlightened figure who was exceptionally intelligent. He claimed he could speak in full sentences at the age of one, and read fluently at the age of two with a piano prodigy and a judo prodigy, and was this like incredibly intelligent person. And then also he had this story of like discovering that he was an enlightened being at the age of 13. So we had these kind of two things about him. I'm like, super smart. And by the way, I'm like really enlightened and everyone should follow me. So he had kind of this classic guru leader quality about him. He was in the world record books for being this smart. Well, one of the wild things was that he actually, like it wasn't, like a lot of it felt like it was who he, but then it turns out in 1989 that the Australian Guinness Book of World Records listed him as one of the smartest men in the world. And this becomes like this huge culling card for him. And like everything he was involved in before Nexium still had this quality around it, that people would congregate around him and kind of gravitate towards him and he would lead them towards like financial success and personal success. And then eventually he lands on this, this idea of building Nexium. So he like really like the public facing side of him is this super rational, scientific, you know, kind of high achieving person that can help you realize your dreams. Of course, what we discovered is this other side of him, which didn't quite match up with that. And in fact, like it is wild. As you get closer to him, you start to realize that he had theories that people were, you know,

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

that his inner circle at Nexium were reincarnated Nazis.

And that and people bought that.

And he was like, don't tell anyone because we were into the science world right now.

Like that's that we're all about rationality and like scientific inquiry.

But by the way, you are Hitler reincarnated and people bought this.

You talked a little bit about how he lured them in, but I mean, he was luring people in from an early age.

What was it about him that he could enrapture people the way he did?

Right. I mean, I think you and I talked a lot about like once we started digging into who this guy was, we're like, wait a second, this guy is a dork.

He's like really nerdy looking and he like plays volleyball twice a week and invites people to come play volleyball

with him at night and watch him play volleyball and like whisper questions in his ears between points.

And he's he just doesn't have, he's not like this larger than life charismatic figure.

But you know, as we went out and started interviewing people that knew him from way back ex-girlfriends and people in Nexium,

I think we discovered the same idea that people kept saying again and again,

which was he had an amazing ability to lock into you and make you feel like you're the only person in the room.

And it's kind of like a quality of narcissists.

Like often people say that about narcissists is that when they shine their light on you, you just feel enraptured by it and so taken by it.

And I think a lot of people gravitated towards him because of that.

And he obviously had a skill to kind of lock in and figure out what made people tick.

And clearly an ability to engage with people on a lot of different levels.

You know, we heard about pianists and scientists and all kinds of like really prominent people coming to visit the Nexium headquarters.

And that, you know, Keith Ranieri would come and engage with them and then feel everyone felt like there was a real honest authentic rapport.

So we obviously had this like nimble ability to engage on a lot of levels.

But I do think it was that kind of one on one ability to connect with someone and kind of figure out what it is they needed and where their vulnerabilities were.

It always used to make me think when people said that, you know, like I once produced an interview with Bill Clinton and it was just over the phone.

And everybody had always said that he has this ability to do the same thing that when you're in the room with him and he sees you, everything else falls away.

And it even felt like that on the phone.

Right.

I think Barack Obama had the same characteristics and lots of people had the same characteristics.

And I always think that they're all kind of the same type of people.

It's just which direction they go and you can decide whether even the political path is evil or good or not.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

But I mean, I felt like that was something about Keith that we learned as he had that charisma that had nothing to do with a moral compass.

It was just this ability to connect with people that way.

Right.

And he connected on a sexual level too.

Like we ended up finding out that most of his life as an adult or even starting as like a teenager, he had these women swirling around him that even though he told people he was uninterested in sex, he was actually very interested in sex.

Right.

100%.

And there were actually, I think there were different stages of Vanguard as he was called in next year.

Like initially he was a celibate and a renunciate and he, you know, just, he couldn't bother with the material world.

Eventually, and I remember Sarah saying eventually I think it was in like 2010 or so, suddenly they were like, Keith seems to have some like girlfriends or whatever.

And there was a little bit of a sense that he has actual partners, but 100% from the get-go.

And this is like part of his philosophy going way back and it was deeply kind of entrenched in nexium philosophy as well.

It's that men are inherently polyamorous and women are inherently monogamous.

And he kind of set up throughout, you know, the various projects he had in his life situations where he would have multiple partners in nexium.

He had like almost a so-called harem of like 10 or 15 women who all were devoted to him.

They could only be with him and were aware that he had multiple other partners as well.

One of the more disturbing things, I mean, there were so many disturbing things.

I shouldn't say that, but was when we were interviewing Sarah, we discovered the misogyny at the basis of so much of what he was teaching.

And I actually remember you sort of realizing it as you were interviewing her and feeling kind of pretty sick about the whole idea because of your connection to Sarah and her husband.

So tell me a little bit more about what we discovered in terms of just exactly what that base was and how hard it was for the women and how they got caught up in it.

Yeah, I mean, I think ultimately one of the big motivating factors that landed Sarah in this secret women's group called DOS, which is where she got branded,

was because of this idea that Keith and the folks running nexium instilled in the nexium followers.

And it fundamentally comes down to the idea that women are somehow inherently deficient and that there's a different path that women in nexium have to go along to address this deficiency.

So there was all these like precursors to DOS where women and men would be separate or be like given separate curriculum in order to address these issues.

And yeah, I mean, it was surprising.

I mean, I think part of that period of time of Sarah coming out of nexium and trying to grapple with the things that she learned was contending with some of these ideas about like, I mean, the names of the groups.

Like the Society of Protectors was the name of the men's group that her husband Nippy was one of

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

the leaders of.

And they had this other program called Genests for Women.

So for the reason Sarah eventually was convinced to join this group was that a mentor in the program, Lauren Salisman, comes to her and says,

you know, it's time for us to take our training to the next level.

Like we as women need to take accountability for our inherent deficiencies.

And the only way we can do it is by going next level and joining this kind of secret group.

So it's incredibly disturbing to hear that the ways that Sarah was complicit in that.

And she's very smart.

And I felt like there was this real effort on Keith's part and some of the other leaders who were teaching to kind of carefully pretzel her thinking.

Right.

And that's what they did is they would say things that seemed on the surface either sort of benign or common sense.

Like men are physically stronger than women.

All the women in here.

Do you understand why we hate you?

Do you understand why your obnoxious bothers?

Why all your little whining and complaining and all this garbage that you do and how much you think you do.

And it's just all a bunch of crap.

And then you brought her slowly to this place where she started to like be like, yeah, women are pains in the asses.

And that was very hard to listen to.

Totally.

Now I remember that.

But like, oh yeah, women complain a lot.

Women can't handle pain as much.

And like all these things that she was just sort of saying matter of factly and you're like, wait a second.

What's going on here?

And you know, and one of the things in terms of that like pretzeling, which is so like one of the key things they introduce in nexium is an edit.

And this is classic for all coercive groups and all cults is an inability to question.

So as soon as you start questioning the situation you're in, you are told that that is your issue, that you have an issue that's holding you back from being successful because you are the kind of person that won't act.

You'll just question.

And so it creates an inability if you're in that group to at all challenge anything that's going on.

And Sarah described when she's on the table getting cauterized incredible pain for 45 minutes and so much of her body and her mind is saying, run, get the hell out of here.

The other part of her brain, which had been trained for 12 years is saying, this is this is it.

See, this is your deficiency is to run away from a situation to not handle the pain because you're not



## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

good enough because you're a woman because of all those things that had already been instilled in her.

And that's like a really, I think we talked to a lot of people that when when you ask them in retrospect, like there's a ton of red flags from the first course you take a ton of red flags about the organization that you're part of.

I mean, down to having to like call this dude Vanguard and his number two prefect.

Like there's just a lot of weird things, but part of what happens is this idea of like, are you willing to invest in your personal growth and challenge yourself to not always ask questions and challenge authorities.

Just trust the process.

Trust it.

Super dangerous and super red flagging itself.

And I just remember us trying to figure it all out.

You know, it was so dense and so complicated and Sarah had spent 12 years trying to learn and you and I had like two months.

And I remember our office.

Remember the posters on the wall where we had like the stripe path written out.

Right.

And we had like his teachings written out on big poster boards on the wall because we kept having to reference the word salad as they call it.

Yes.

It was, you know, it's such a stark difference between those of us coming in and trying to like figure it out versus like Sarah who had been indoctrinated slowly over this time.

And we did eventually get there and start to be able to obviously not agree, but see the logic that they would use to get them to think the way they wanted them to think.

Totally.

And I feel like that's one of the decisions we arrived at.

I mean, we had this big board.

We have a million different things as we started to dig in the story.

There were so many different threads to pull on and so many different directions to go.

I mean, the Bromfman sisters, this like, you know, billionaire heiress is, is a whole story which we were fascinated by.

And at some point, I think we made a really smart decision, which was to say, what is our like, you know, added advantage here or our advantage here?

What do we have that no one else has?

And it was Sarah.

It was the access to Sarah and that inside view.

And even though like you think a podcast is like seven episodes, you have so much real estate.

It's really not like you, you need to be so focused and especially on a complicated story.

So I, so I think we had early drafts where like the first episode was going to like tell, you know, this sweeping story of Nexium.

And we were like, pair it back, pair it back, pair it back until it really just became Sarah's story and actually a very specific part of Sarah's story of just how she got branded and how that kind of what

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

led up to that moment.

Which I felt was like a big relief once we kind of discovered the way to tell it.

We learned so much about making podcasts, making that podcast because we had no idea what we were doing.

At all.

At all.

There was a lot of, a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear and then just barreling ahead.

A lot of phone calls all night being like, what are we doing?

Absolutely.

How are we going to get through this?

At the height of Nexium, how successful was it?

Well, it's interesting because like in a lot of ways as we go, we went down to Albany and we visited their headquarters and their headquarters is like rinky dink.

It says executive success on the door, but like the letters are peeling off of it.

It's just like one story building in an industrial area outside of Albany, New York.

Right.

And it really is like a couple, I don't think a couple hundred people at most that live there.

I don't even think that many, probably dozens, but there was a few things about it that made it like totally defy the peeling letters on the door.

You know, one of them is the celebrities they started to recruit.

You know, the Bromfman family or sisters, you know, Alison Mack and Nikki Klein and others that were, you know, had some amount of fame that became like really important calling cards for the recruiters, people like Sarah to get people to come in and take new courses.

And by the way, like the vast majority of people that as you know, that engaged with Nexium, all their experience of it was like you come, you spend \$5,000, you take a five day course or a 10 day course and you're on your way.

It was something like 20,000 people that did that.

And it was only a few people that then would go on to become more involved with the organization, maybe move to Albany or maybe like be part of another center.

So they were successful in the sense that like even when we ran into Sarah, they were operational, you know, in multiple centers across North America, they had big centers in Mexico, they were expanding into Europe.

And then they had, you know, let's just say that a couple other like major figures that gave them serious legitimacy.

So in Mexico, the son of the former president and son of a major media tycoon there, media baron there, it was part of Nexium.

So they had like really like strong inroads into like powerful Mexican community.

And then in 2009, I think probably the biggest coup for them, the biggest legitimacy was that they invited the Dalai Lama, they hosted the Dalai Lama, they come speak in Albany.

And there you have the Dalai Lama, Keith Ranieri and his number two Nancy Salisman on stage together.

Indeed, I'm very, very happy to be here.

And it's essentially an endorsement for them.



## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

And they have these photos, they have these videos.

And, you know, Sarah says that now in a recruiting meeting, you know, an informational session where she's getting people to come take the course, she can say, look, Keith Ranieri with the Dalai Lama, like what better legitimacy can you have than that?

So that I think elevated them.

And it's kind of wild because, you know, they had these like really lofty visions.

I mean, one of their goals was, was control as much money as we can in the world, and we'll spend it ethically.

And that's how we're going to change the world.

And they're like, that's kind of laughable, except he also had this goal to have a Nexium member as president in Mexico.

And that was not outside the realm of possibility.

I mean, there is a world where if he didn't sort of get so distracted by his sexual proclivities or whatever, or like that he would have been able to draw in a ton of power.

So it's this interesting tension there between the kind of small size of it and the amount of resources they ended up having.

And I mean, that's really where Sarah was so important to the organization too, because she ran, started and ran with a partner, the Vancouver office, the only Canadian office.

And that was hugely successful.

Right.

Well, I mean, Sarah was their star recruiter.

And Sarah made huge inroads for Nexium in the acting world, in the, you know, in the yoga world as well.

But, but certainly like the whole Alison Mack, you know, Smallville was shooting in Vancouver.

That whole cast was in Vancouver, and she was able to kind of infiltrate that world.

So that was, you know, everyone got their role in Nexium.

And like Keith would set up people with different projects, and they quickly identified Sarah's skill set as a recruiter.

And like it was almost, you know, these kinds of pyramid schemes or like multi-level marketing, it's like next to impossible to make any money.

It takes forever to actually recruit enough people.

And she was one of the few people in Nexium that actually got to a point where she had enough people enrolled.

And those people that were enrolled were enrolling other people that she was actually making money for a period of time.

She made a lot of money.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And then you mentioned our trip to Albany.

Yes.

And I have to just talk about one of the most fun.

I mean, that was such a fun, crazy trip.

Right.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

And we were nervous most of the time.

And we tried to do a quick undercover session in the Nexium offices where we got you all set up to go.

And we thought of every convoluted story we could think of as to why you were going into the offices to ask questions.

But obviously they were on high alert.

Well, it was hilarious because we were, we had come up with a scenario.

We were like, I'm going to walk into the offices.

I think we had talked to CVC and the idea, the rule was that we couldn't lie about anything.

So I said, you know, I'm visiting my partner who is in New York, which is true.

And I'm through Albany and I've heard about Nexium, which is true.

And I'm very interested in taking a course was my story.

So I like knock on the door.

No one answers.

I liked peering through the window.

No one's there.

I had like a wireless mic.

And you're waiting in the car all nervous.

My heart is pounding.

And so eventually I like try the door and it opens.

And I was like, oh my God.

I have to go in now.

And suddenly a woman like pops out of an office and she's like, hello.

And I was like, hello.

My voice was like 10 octaves higher than it should have been.

Hi.

Yeah, I'm here.

Is this the executive success program?

And I, and I like rather, you know, the idea was like just divulge information if it's asked of you.

But I just let it all pour out.

And I was like, well, I was coming from New York and I have my wife's down there.

And now I'm traveling up to New York and I really want to take a course.

Can I take a course?

Can I take a course?

Who are you?

My name is Josh.

I just wanted to find out about some programs.

A friend of mine had taken some courses.

Who are you here to meet?

I just wanted anyone that could tell me about some of the programs that are here.

Well, you would need to be meeting somebody.

How did you get in?

That door was just open, but I knocked on that door.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

So it turns out nobody cold calls Nexium.

You don't walk into the Nexium office.

The whole point of a multi-level marketing company is you get recruited.

So she was like big red flags.

Maybe the red flags with you.

Yes, right.

She's like, you don't feel like safe to me.

So she was like, okay, give me your phone number and I'll call you back.

And I was like, okay, okay.

Then I just like ran back to the van and I was like, let's get out of here.

That was so funny.

I've reported other people's stories for a long time confronting people in power.

But behind this broadcast voice, I've hidden my greatest secret.

I was in an abusive marriage.

It lasted a year, but it changed my life.

Part of me always blamed myself for what happened and I've lived with the shame.

So many of us live like this.

It's time we changed that.

I'm Anna Maria Tramonte.

Welcome to Paradise is my story.

Available now on CBC listen and everywhere you get your podcasts.

How's Sarah now?

Do we know how she's doing?

She seems to be doing great.

It's been a whole process of redefining herself.

I think that like, you know, for 12 years of her professional life,

all she had under resume was like star recruiter of Nexium.

There's been a process of like re-entering the world as not a member of a self-help group.

But I think in a lot of ways she has, you know,

used her experience of leaving a group and turned that into a career.

So she has her own podcast and she's, you know, has a book and she has a speaking engagement.

So she's done really well in that space as being a kind of outspoken advocate for survivors of cults.

Yeah.

And she also was a big part of getting Keith finally arrested.

So let's jump to that part of the story.

So when we were in Albany, he wasn't there.

We didn't know where he was.

It ended up that he actually had fled to Mexico.

And he was in a very expensive villa provided by the Brafman sisters.

And what happened to him there?

So, I mean, the FBI had, you know, had a warrant for his arrest and they basically came with the Mexican police and raided the compound.

I think Nikki Klein was filming it at the time.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

So suddenly we'd be privy to this like video clip on YouTube of like all the inner circle of Nexium being chased around by cops in this fancy Mexican resort.

I think Keith was hiding in a closet and they found him and then they hauled him back to the States and there was an arraignment and we attended.

Yeah.

We saw him in real life.

In real life, which was wild in a courtroom in New York, sort of before the trial.

And that was wild because we had been hearing about him and thinking about him and hearing other people talk about for months and months and months.

I mean, I spent so much time.

It's almost a year, I think.

I know.

Yeah.

I think we both had like dreams about him.

Like he just became this like real force and then suddenly to see like seeing a celebrity and this courtrooms are not big.

I mean, there was like five or six rows of seating for people attending the trial.

And there he was in a jumpsuit and, you know, handcuffed and with lawyers.

So it was like a really, it also was like this crazy journey and a pretty compressed amount of time from that first day of walking into your office and being like this.

I don't even know how to pronounce this thing.

I don't see him like it's spelt weird and blah, blah, blah.

And like, you know, us trying to pitch each other people and sort of not registering to at that point as it totally become part of the of the zeitgeist and people were aware and it become a kind of big news story.

It's a media circus.

It's a big media circus.

Yeah.

So he, there was six charges.

I mean, the prosecution's main charge towards him was racketeering, which is essentially a charge you go after like mob leaders with to say that Keith Reneary

and his co-conspirators were engaged in a pattern of illegal activity for personal financial gain.

But in there is also sex trafficking, child pornography, wild wire fraud, human trafficking.

So there's a whole host of charges and eventually he got 120 years in prison.

And that was really something like, I mean, we joke about him even now when we think about him as sort of this really a silly pathetic twerp.

Right.

But his crimes were evil and they were against young, especially this one girl.

And I remember reading the testimony of the WhatsApp conversations that he would have with a lot of his victims.

And it was within those moments where you finally actually got to see the true evil manipulating Keith.

And it wasn't funny and it wasn't silly.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

It was incredibly dark.

Incredibly dark and the victims will never be okay.

Right.

Yeah.

I mean, and there was, you know, having run, you know, he was running that organization for almost two decades.

And so there were a lot of victims, a lot of victims, testimonies that were involved in the trials.

And certainly the most disturbing stuff were to do with grooming young girls.

I mean, he groomed several young teenagers.

Teenagers.

Yeah.

From an early age.

And again, they were like in this really sealed off community.

In one case, a Mexican national who had they had withheld her passport.

So, you know, she wasn't even able to escape.

There were also cases of essentially, you know, well, of rape, but through this DOS system where women had given over their collateral to be part of this secret women's group, thinking it was a program run for women by women was actually run by Keith Ranieri.

So they had, you know, Sarah included had given over collateral to kind of show your commitment to yourself improvement.

And that collateral was nude photos.

It was videos, things that if they were to be released would destroy your life.

So people were really, you know, once they were in, they were locked in.

And then there were cases and it came out in the trial that women were instructed to go have sex with Keith.

And if they refused, they were threatened with having this collateral released.

So it's incredibly dark, incredibly manipulative.

And it is, I mean, in a lot of ways, it was the culmination of all that misogyny and control.

And like, you know, we talked a lot about, you know, what was behind all this and why was Keith Ranieri doing this.

And the psychologists and called experts that we talked to, you know, talked about this need for control among narcissists like Keith Ranieri.

And that it's almost like a drug, like, you know, first you start this organization and people come to you and they venerate you

and they have to say, thank you, Vanguard, after every meeting and you get a little bit of a buzz from that.

But then you have to take it to the next level.

And a lot of ways DOS was like the logical conclusion of that, of like, what happens if I can control people so absolutely that every second of their waking day, they are in my control and my power.

And that was ultimately his demise.

It was a structure that could never actually sustain itself because it required recruiting more and more people into it.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

And at some point, as it did, it was going to crumble.

And another one of those cases of that kind of control ended up being Lauren Salzman, whose mother was prefect, second in control, Sarah's best friend, the one that convinced her to get the brand and join DOS.

You know, in our mind, Lauren often sort of wasn't the good one in the story.

But during the trial, she testified against Keith and she really, I completely changed my mind about her and she became as much of a victim as anybody else.

Her story was heartbreaking, not excusing her behavior, but tell us a bit about what Keith did to Lauren.

I mean, Lauren is like another incredibly tragic story in that she essentially grew up inside Nexium. I mean, her mom was prefect.

This was from, I think she was a teenager basically when Nexium was started.

And so this was her world and this was the path set up for her for, you know, how she could become a successful person.

She did rise really high in Nexium and got a lot of praise and saw a lot of success within that system.

But she, like a number of women, you know, part of being in this inner circle around Keith was eventually being invited to become a sexual partner of his.

He promised her that she would carry his baby.

And I think she dedicated a lot of time and energy and a lot of herself to that path and that dream and didn't have other boyfriends and didn't do other things that people were doing as, you know, as you come of age.

And by the way, like, you know, part of that inner circle and the control around that inner circle was actually a dietary restriction and you could see it.

You could see it with Alison Mack.

You could see it with a number of women and Sarah talked about it, that people were put on these like caloric restrictions of like 800 calories a day and that and Lauren was part of that as well.

And that obviously has like a bunch of levels of coercion and it's a classic tool that coercive groups will use to just like not make you function at 100% by withholding calories as well.

So, you know, Lauren was right in there and Keith had his talons in her and she became one of the like first line.

So like in this DOS kind of pyramid scheme of Keith at the top of it, she was one of his like slaves and she became really implicated in this blackmail system inside DOS as well.

So I totally agree that like she's and I think this is like the reoccurring theme within people that have been a part of Nexium is like this tension between your victimization and your complicity in the organization.

And, you know, I think as we talked to people about the podcast, it was interesting to see the different responses that people had as some people were very empathetic towards Sarah and towards others that were a part of it and really realized how traumatizing and damaging and coercive the organization was.

And I think some people had a really hard time wrapping their head around just being empathetic and felt like, well, wait a second, weren't they recruiting other people?

Weren't they complicit in it?

Don't they have like free will as well?



## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

And I think it's, I've always felt like both those things have to exist at the same time and there has to be a space that like, and it's just how complicated that we are.

And I think it's what the cult experts say is that you can be both.

Like we all are vulnerable to a certain extent of being drawn into these, you know, really damaging and violent and terrible systems.

And there ought to be compassion for people that suffered that and maybe perpetuate some bad along the way.

I mean, and Lauren really embodies that, like one of the stories that really threw me was when we were in Albany and even before we got there, we had heard about a woman that we were told.

Has been locked in her room for three years, two years.

Right.

And we weren't really sure that that could possibly be true.

We even went by, remember, and you thought you saw somebody look out and we had no idea.

Again, like adding to this whole, there was something scary about being in Albany at the same time, thrilling and just, none of it was making any sense.

Right.

And then in the trial, we found out that not only it was true, but tell us more about what Lauren did.

I mean, Lauren was her, what's the word, like she kept her in there.

Right.

Her captor.

Her captor, yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

I mean, this is again, it all comes down to Keith and relationships to Keith.

So she was one of Keith's partners.

And the rule is if you are a girlfriend of Keith, that you are dedicated to Keith and only Keith.

And she committed what they call an ethical breach, which is that she had feelings for someone who was not Keith.

And they said, well, you're going to have to atone and atone for your ethical breach and stay in this room until you apologize.

And she refused or they wouldn't let her out and literally for two years.

And it's a really, it's a story made even more complex because her entire family was part of Nexium.

And so this was done with some degree of complicity with her own parents.

The door wasn't even locked.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And her parents were living in that house.

And this is the case where they had her passport and she's a Mexican national and she couldn't leave.

Yeah, that was unbelievable.

Is anybody still loyal to Keith?

There are a few.

I mean, it's so interesting as the layers of information or as like the stages of information came out about Nexium.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

You slowly started to, you know, there was a period of time that like it was a huge exodus, but a number of people in the inner circle that were holding out and just saying, you know, this is like a smear campaign.

And by the way, like one of the things that Nexium did and Keith did really early on was talk about the way that the media is going to come after us.

I mean, he planted the seed because there were like throughout Nexium's history cases of people doing investigations and trying to go after the organization.

And he was kind of inoculated to the group by saying this happens when there's courageous leaders that stand up, people will take you down.

And so I think that, you know, that idea kind of persisted for some people all the way through the trial.

So even at the trial, there were a dozen people there that were there on, you know, to defend Keith and they're on Keith's behalf.

And he was locked up at the, you know, at a prison in Brooklyn and, you know, many nights there would be his supporters would come out and dance outside his window and dance for him.

And he would have flashlights and he would kind of respond back.

And they started a whole website and a kind of like they had a whole narrative about the way that the prosecution had fabricated evidence.

But even, but slowly, slowly, as more information came out and more people, you know, confessed and more people turned against him.

It kind of had this snowball effect so that even some of those diehards, people like Nikki Klein not too long ago coming forward and Nikki Klein is, you know.

She was like, I think she might have been one of the last women.

Totally. That was still, that was so deeply, deeply committed.

And it just felt like, well, if the trial and the testimony and all these investigations and documentaries and podcasts and everything come out and it still doesn't shake you from it like what possibly could.

But then she did and something clicked and she kind of recognized that she, that, you know, Keith was not who he said he was.

But there are still a few people.

I don't know if you saw that Keith, I'm sure we talked about it, Keith put out his own podcast at one point.

Yes.

Which is really more of a monologue from a prison phone.

But the kind of the, the producer of that, the guy on the other line is still, still going strong and still committed to him.

And there's, you know, others, there's a whole side of Nexium.

They had this treatment program for Tourette's and Mark Elliott was a someone who, you know, suffered from Tourette's and claimed that it really cured him and was just like, I have the evidence. It's me, it's in my body.

I know that Nexium has treated me and able to cure me of my symptoms.

So he has remained really loyal to Keith as well.

And one of the most engaging stories to me and one that I wish we had been able to do more on is Claire Brofman is still and she's in prison.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

Yeah.

Yeah.

And, you know, and she's, she's in prison.

I mean, she could, she did plead guilty to some charges.

She's in prison for, I think, over five years.

And during her, her sentencing, there were a number of witnesses that came forward or number of victims that came forward pleading with her to say, please just renounce Keith.

Like, like, let hit, let it go.

Like, can't you see the damage he's done and the damage he's caused?

And she's refused.

And likely it had, it played an element in her sentencing as well, just the inability to recognize that he's a bad person.

So I said Claire is one of the stories that I wish we had been able to dig into more.

Are there any stories that we didn't get to tell that you wish we had?

I mean, I think the Mexico story is something that, that, you know, not only did we not touch on it, but I think there hasn't actually been a lot done on it.

And it is fascinating and also incredibly dark and partly just because of the amount of power, the nexium.

A number of people who had power that were part of nexium and how corrupt this, you know, judicial system and various systems are in Mexico that were leveraged by them or certainly threats were leveraged.

I mean, there were people who we spoke to who had left nexium, who had been whistleblowers, who received threatening letters.

Essentially, they would never travel to Mexico because they knew that the moment they stepped foot in that country, they would be arrested and thrown into prison.

There were actually charges, right?

And so there's a whole story there just about how, you know, they were able to infiltrate that world.

And, you know, there were a steady stream of Mexican both adults, but also teens that would come and visit the Albany Center.

And it's also a very disturbing, we've heard accounts of like grooming going on there and this kind of like pipeline of young girls that were coming from Mexico that Keith had access to.

And connections to other dangerous groups in Mexico, right?

That's right, yeah.

Yeah, I know.

It really is a story that I feel like has so much to tell.

And this changed our lives.

I mean, how many downloads of this podcast were there?

I mean, I think we're, we've got to be close to 25 million or more.

Yeah, it was crazy.

It's insane.

You know, and from like, there was a certain moment, I'll tell you what the moment was.

There was a moment after the podcast was released where we were, you know, doing interviews and on different shows.

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

And then the PR, our PR person in the States said, Megan Kelly wants to interview you.

I'm just going to fly you down and interview on the show.

And I was like, okay, but the experience of being on that show and sort of walking, you know, they called, they called us up in the commercial break to sit on stage.

And they wheeled out this like two story high scrim of the, of our escaping next to him like key art that they had just made for this like five minute section.

And there's Megan Kelly and this whole audience of people that were there.

And I was like, this is never going to happen again.

It's just, it was to do.

And I think, you know, there was a point probably earlier on that the serendipity of that story landing in our laps and the way that it became this international new story kind of under our feet.

So that by the time we released it, it was like a huge trial coming up.

And there were such a massive appetite to understand the story, to find access to the story that the, you know, the stars just kind of aligned in that way.

That is really hard to manufacture.

But it also gave us like, you know, podcasting was very young.

Serial had come out sort of, you know, either the years before that and we didn't know what we were doing.

And I'm even still happy that we thought podcasts like that, that was still young, even at CBC.

And both of us, myself and you, we really never looked back.

We sort of quit daily news and we've been making podcasts ever since.

I feel like, well, one, I'm grateful for you to coming into my office and allowing me to be part of the journey, but also just like giving us this like access to a way of telling stories that I've come to realize is the best way in the world to tell stories.

And I love every minute of this job.

And we said nexium, escaping nexium was the best professional experience of my whole life.

And I don't think that that has changed.

Yeah, no, it was, it was on so many levels remarkable, both because of, you know, working on that story, the team of people working on that story.

And, and also it's, it's reception.

But yeah, the way that career wise opening, opening up a ton of doors.

And as you said, it happened at a moment in, you know, even now where only what five years or six years since it was released, the podcast landscape has like radically changed again and really shifted.

Like that was a moment when you could kind of release a podcast and it could become a hit and it's sort of not, you can't really do that in the same way anymore.

So it was, it was a really lucky moment to release it and then to have the kind of doors open that have opened.

But, but I totally agree with you that the, the medium is incredibly exciting to work in.

I mean, that, that, you know, the privilege of sitting inside a story for a year and like feeling like you really become an expert and talking to dozens of people about it and just really getting to sink your teeth into it and tell a story in a

fulsome way. I love, I love doing and certainly now having like done others and like helped, you

## [Transcript] The No Good, Terribly Kind, Wonderful Lives and Tragic Deaths of Barry and Honey Sherman / Introducing: Crime Story

know, overseeing that a bunch of times.

I also kind of laugh at how we were fumbling in the dark and trying to figure out as we went, you know, how to put these things together because it is tough.

And it does, it actually does feel even, even still at every project is its own kind of nut to crack.

And it always felt like you're kind of painting in the dark, like you sort of like, you know, pulling clips together and writing and whatever.

And then only when you've heard it and sat down or really digested it and then, you know, having to like take a bunch of notes and go back to it again and again.

Can you get a sense of if it's coalescing?

But there's many steps to, you know, to the moment, like it's really bad until it's not.

What's the, what's the, I don't know if we can keep this in, but it's like, what are the five steps to making a podcast?

It's shit. It's shit. It's shit. It's done.

Okay. Well, thanks, Josh. I mean, one of the other things for me was it made you my work, turned from my work friend to like a dear, dear friend, which was already on the road of going that way.

But I feel like that gave that to me on a personal level. So that makes me very happy too.

As well. And you know, it's rare to find someone that you can work with so easily together.

We had a group.

Yeah. I mean, literally we would sit down and be inside a Google doc together and co-writing stuff.

And it's a really vulnerable experience, as you know.

Well, you cried a few times. I still make fun of you for that.

That's true. Not crying for my performance, but for the things I heard.

But it is so difficult to like, you know, in the series of moments where it's really not going well or where you're like grappling with it to feel like you can trust someone else and like work through it together.

It's a rare thing. So I totally agree that it was really fortunate that we landed on it together for sure.

Yeah. Cool. Well, thank you for coming in.

Thank you so much.

You've been listening to Crime Story from CBC Podcasts. We drop a new episode every Monday.

You can get our next episode a week early on CBC Podcasts' YouTube channel or by subscribing to the CBC Podcast's true crime channel on Apple Podcasts.

Next week, I'll be talking to Nikki Egan about exposing Bill Cosby.

I stood my ground because I believed my reporting and I believed these women.

I'm not one who's going to back down when someone's attacking my reporting.

Crime Story is written and hosted by me. Our producers are Alexis Green and Sarah Clayton.

Sound Design by Graham McDonald. Our senior producer is Jeff Turner.

Additional audio from HBO and the official YouTube channel of the Office of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

Executive producers are Cecil Fernandez and Chris Oak.

Tanya Springer is the senior manager for CBC Podcasts and Arif Narani is the director.

That's the first episode from Crime Story. A second episode is waiting for you right now in the Crime Story feed.

New episodes are available every week on the CBC Listen app or wherever you get your podcasts.