

[Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Kid Van

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On December 19th, 2001, residents at a local

RV park off the coast of Oregon were focused on something unnatural, rippling the waters near the shoreline. A closer look revealed the shape was small and pale with blonde hair. Authorities confirmed that it was a small boy, four years old, floating face down. There were no visible injuries. In fact, he looked exceptionally well taken care of beyond his bloated, water-soaked features. Detectives wondered if the boy had wandered away from home and fallen into the river, but strangely, no one reported a missing. Further investigating revealed that every child in the county was accounted for. This boy, found wearing only his underwear, was not from around here. After a digitally enhanced photo was distributed to the media, a couple came forward, suggesting that it looked like Zachary Longo, a little boy they would occasionally babysit, a little boy with two more young siblings that seem to be missing as well.

Welcome to Sword and Scale Nightmares, true crime for bedtime, where Nightmare begins now.

Three days after the body of four-year-old Zachary Longo drifted to shore, divers searching the area came across a deeply unsettling scene. The waters were relatively shallow, but well beneath the surface, the body of a little girl hovered in place, like a ghost. A rock-filled pillowcase was tied around her ankle, anchoring her to the floor. This was Zachary's three-year-old sister, Sadie Longo. Later, police would state that if Zachary hadn't come loose from another pillowcase they recovered from the waters, it might have been a decade before their bodies were found. Still missing, a third, even younger sibling, as well as both parents.

A background check revealed the Longo family hadn't lived in Oregon for very long. In fact, the Longos originally hailed from a completely different part of the country in Michigan.

Christian Longo and Mary Jane Baker's love story begins in the early 1990s, when they meet in a church parking lot. They're part of the same congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, and handsome Christian Longo has been actively involved in door-to-door ministry since he was a child. Spreading the word of God and living by Jehovah's teachings

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is equally important to Mary Jane, and the two were married in 1993.

They have three kids in three years. Zachary, Sadie, and the latest addition to their happy family, Madison. Even though Mary Jane has to stop working to take care of the kids, Christian appears to be keeping it all together somehow. He works several jobs over the years, eventually starting his own construction subcontracting business.

By all accounts, the Longo family lives the American dream, with the vanity license plate to match. Kid Van. They're actively involved in their church. They're able to purchase fashionable clothing and whatever the kids want or need. But most importantly, the Longos appear to be a strong family unit that sticks together through the good and bad. Which is what makes the next turn of events all the more surprising.

On December 27th, five days after three-year-old Sadie Longo was discovered, divers searching the docks near the Embarcadero Marina observed two suitcases, one of them containing clothing, dumbbell weights, and the body of two-year-old Madison Longo. Strands of hair are floated from the outside of the zipper of the second suitcase, ultimately revealed to be holding the naked body of their mother, Mary Jane Longo. Autopsies confirm that both Mary Jane and her youngest daughter Madison were strangled to death before being folded and stowed away like overhead luggage.

The two older siblings, Zachary and Sadie, were determined to have been asphyxiated. While the medical examiner could not be more specific, water was found in both of the children's lungs, leading investigators to believe they were alive as they sunk to the bottom of the waterway and drowned to death.

It was unclear if their father, Christian Longo, was somewhere in the icy waters as well. Maybe he had made a bad business deal with the wrong people, or maybe he was the one who personally committed his entire family's demise.

Either way, investigators had more ground to cover than exists from Michigan all the way to Oregon. Join the shopping membership loved by over 1 million happy customers number one by Glamour magazine for 2023.

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was

most definitely the key suspect for these gruesome homicides. A search of the Longo family's most recent residents in Oregon, an upscale condominium complex called the Landing, showed that their unit had been evacuated in a hurry, with only a few items left scattered on the floor. Housekeepers at a past residence in Oregon, the nearby motor inn, had also reported coming across several unusual items in their dumpster. Longo family photos, baby books holding precious memories like sonograms and first footprints, and a wallet containing Mary Jane's driver's license. A look into the warehouse the Longos briefly lived at in Ohio unveiled that many family heirlooms were left behind, including wedding photos of Christian and Mary Jane, as well as Mary Jane's wedding dress. Additionally, two books of note were observed, a Spanish phrase book and another book called The Modern Identity

Changer. Investigators had recently spoken to a construction worker who heard about the corpses found in the water and recalled driving into town very early in the morning on December 17. He noticed a red minivan parked along the side of a bridge overlooking the same waterway near where the bodies were discovered. The worker stopped and asked the man driving the minivan if he needed any help, but the man told him he was fine, that it was just the check engine light. The man he described matched Christian's description. On the same day, suspicious items were pulled from the motel dumpster. A green Dodge Durango was stolen from a local dealership and a maroon minivan was left behind nearby. There was no license plate on the abandoned vehicle, but the foam underneath had been imprinted with the phrase Kidvan.

Later, the same green Dodge Durango stolen in Oregon was recovered out of state at San Francisco International Airport. Inside was the Kidvan license plate, along with Christian's checkbook and a diploma. On December 28, 2001, as Mary Jane and Madison were being positively identified, Christian Michael Longo was added to the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list and officially charged with murder. He was once again on the run, only this time without a family to hold him back. Where he ended up next was anybody's guess.

Okay, so we're flashing back one more time to September of 2001. Christian and his family have urgently left Ohio and they enter the state of Oregon with less than \$500 to their name.

Mary Jane puns the engagement ring Christian was never able to afford in the first place and adds another \$600 to their stash. They're exhausted from too many nights on the road and managers at a vacation rental property take pity on the polite and well-behaved family, allowing them to pay cash and stay in a nice house for \$300 a week. Within a few weeks, Christian is unable to afford even these payments and the family is told to leave.

But before they do, Christian decides to steal a couple of crab traps, which he later pawns to help pay for the next place. The Longos move just a few miles away into the Newport Motor Inn. Christian gets a job working behind the counter at a department store Starbucks and when chatting with his new boss, Christian lies and explains that he actually runs a profitable internet company. He's only taking the part-time gig because he just loves Starbucks. You know, we all love Starbucks. Who doesn't love Starbucks?

Living at the cramped Newport Motor Inn quickly becomes intolerable for Christian.

So he takes a drive to the beautiful waterfront condominium complex known as The Landing.

He tells the manager there that he's a subcontractor living in town while he surveys the Oregon coastline and installs a fiber optic network. He also explains that his family lives out of town,

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but it will come by for the occasional visit. The manager at The Landing lets Christian move in. Without any money up front. And he continues to buy Christian's story that he's just waiting for a delayed paycheck. But the truth is Christian can barely afford the groceries while he's making \$7 an hour at Starbucks. Christian knows it will only be a matter of time before they're kicked out of their beautiful landing condo and be forced to hit the road once again.

So on the night of December 16th, Christian returns home from his barista shift around 11 pm. Mary Jane and the kids are already asleep, so Christian quietly nibbles on some wine and cheese. Then he goes onto the deck to contemplate how he's going to tell his wife just exactly how much trouble they're actually in. Yet, again. On his way to the bedroom, Christian passes by his two oldest children, Zachary and Sadie, sleeping on the living room couch. He lays awake next to Mary Jane for hours, no doubt hearing the soft and calming snores of two-year-old Madison who was sleeping on a comforter on the floor.

The exact time that Christian begins to manually choke his wife to death is unclear. But not long after, Christian repeats the horrific act of violence, this time to his youngest daughter. Detectives believe the two other children were still asleep as Christian gives disturbing new meaning to packing up his suitcases and loading up the kid van for an early morning drive. The two suitcases containing Mary Jane and Madison are thrown off the docks right by the landing, their fancy condominium complex. And Zachary and Sadie are likely just coming to their senses after a half-hour's car ride as Christian pulls up to a bridge. Or maybe they're still sleeping as their daddy ties a rock-filled pillowcase around each of their ankles and tosses them into the dark abyss below. Over the next couple of days, Christian swaps his maroon minivan for a green one. He tries to distract himself by going to the gym and renting a movie. He tells the manager at the landing that he and his wife are having some problems in their marriage. So he took her and the kids to the airport. Of course, there is no airport. And there is no family anymore. He also attends a Christmas party with his fellow Starbucks employees. There's a gift exchange and the person who opens Christian's gift gets a partially used bottle of perfume. Mary Jane's, to be more precise. On December 19th, as a little boy's body bobs up to the surface near an RV park, Christian works another shift and tells his co-workers that his wife left him for another man. He works December 20th as well and plays volleyball with a friend. And on December 21st, when the little boy is positively identified as Zachary Longo, Christian picks up one last paycheck and leaves Oregon behind for good old California. After arriving in San Francisco, Christian applies for a new job at a local Starbucks. But suddenly, he has a change of heart. He books a plane ticket using a customer's stolen credit card information and flies out of San Francisco International Airport to, well, the good old FBI is really good at things like, you know, surveilling us and all that, but they somehow can't catch bad guys. In fact, at this point, they were offering up to \$50,000 to anyone who could provide them with any information that would lead to Christian's arrest. The tragic story of the Longo family was also featured on the long-running television program America's Most Wanted, which offered a phone number for viewers to call in if they had any tips. As desperate and chaotic as it all seemed, somehow incredibly, it worked. A woman had just returned from a vacation in Cancun, Mexico when she saw the publicity, recognized Christian from her trip, and reported the sighting. At the time, the man had introduced himself as Brad,

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and then later, oddly, as Mike. Authorities received an even more specific tip from the tour guide who had recently given Christian a tour of the Mayan ruins. The man he recognized hadn't gone by the name Christian then either. Shortly after authorities apprehended him on January 13, 2002, they learned that Christian was not only living an entirely different life, he was having the time of his life. Over the course of those few short weeks in Mexico, Christian had convinced the entire resort community that he was a New York Times travel journalist named Michael Finkel, an actual journalist who would later write a book about his bizarre, tangential connection to this case. Before he was arrested, Christian spent time at the beach. He snorkeled. He went to nightclubs. He got drunk. He smoked pot with a group of British travelers. When he was ultimately pulled from his grass cabana and arrested, he was sharing it with an attractive German travel photographer, one whom he had already been sexually intimate with. It was the Mexican police who arrested Christian, not the FBI agent assigned to the case. Years later in court, Christian's return to the United States became a topic of contention for the defense. They suggested that Christian was tricked into coming back by the FBI agent and that Mexico would have never extradited a criminal who might face

the death penalty back in the US. But the reality is that Christian didn't want to spend a single night in a Mexican jail cell. He allegedly told the FBI agent that his good looks and speaking skills allowed him to get away with so much over the years. But they were ultimately his downfall. When asked more specifically about the murders, he said, quote, I sent them to a better place. End quote. Wow. You have to be cold-hearted to murder someone, but Jesus.

Christian pled guilty to the murders of Mary, Jane, and Madison. But he did not want to enter a plea for the murders of his other two children, Zachary and Sadie. In March of 2003, Christian took the stand in his own defense and shocked everybody with his testimony. In short, he explained that on the night of the murders, his wife, Mary Jane, picked him up from work. Only she was barefoot and dressed in a bathrobe. He claimed Mary Jane was furious at him for the litany of crimes he allegedly confessed to her the previous day and that she was the one who killed Zachary and Sadie. Yep, he blamed his dead wife for the murder of his children, the wife that he killed. Yep.

Do you process that yet? Get. Let's move on. Christian said that Mary Jane hysterically told him the kids were already in the water and that this was all his fault. According to Christian story, he lost control in that moment and strangled Mary Jane to death out of anger. He then suggested

his youngest daughter Madison only appeared to be laying dead in their bedroom. After he killed Mary Jane, he saw Madison was barely breathing and decided, in his ultimate wisdom, that it was best

to, you know, end her life as well, for some reason. But prosecutors suggested that Christian had been planning to murder his family for months, pointing to his internet activity, in particular, frequenting a site called Hitman Online, which suggested various ways to kill people. Christian had also successfully isolated his wife, Mary Jane, from the rest of her family.

When they began to be concerned with her whereabouts, he sent misleading postcards to create a false trail. The jury also considered Christian's long history of manipulation. Not to mention his attempts to literally throw away any indication he'd ever been married or had kids. Christian Longo was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to death by lethal injection.

While on death row in 2011, Christian wrote a letter to a female inmate he claimed to be in

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love with, in the letter he admitted to killing his entire family and that he agreed with a psychologist's analysis that he had a narcissistic personality disorder. In 2015, a film about the murders starring James Franco and Jonah Hill called True Story was released. As the film was being promoted, Christian wrote another letter from behind bars where he told People Magazine,

quote, I realize I can't do anything about it now, except try to live as positively as possible with a view that I don't deserve the breaths I get to take. I don't feel that I can be redeemed, end quote. More recently in December of 2022, all prisoners in Oregon's death row had their sentences commuted to life in prison without parole. Go Oregon. It's been reported that Christian received an infraction for shipping a hole in his prison cell window.

Some viewed it as an escape attempt, but others noted that many prisoners have done this to their windows as a way to see through to the Oregon coastline. It seems Christian Longo never stopped loving the good life. He stopped loving his family, but not the good life. Well, at least now, he's got a long life ahead of him, one with a completely enviable ocean view.

Sweet dreams and good night.

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