

[Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Spoiled

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On May 5th, 2005, Pamela Powell called her sister Alison.

It was Mother's Day and she wanted to wish her well and catch up on each other's lives.

This was a weekly ritual between the sisters, but on that Thursday, there was no answer.

After the beep of her answering machine, Pam left Alison a wonderful message wishing her the best Mother's Day and asking her to call her back. But a few more days went by and she still hadn't heard back from Alison. At first, she didn't think anything of not hearing from her sister. Pam knew that Alison was a busy woman. Then a couple of more days passed with Pam actively trying to get her sister on the phone. She called and called. She started calling the house at different times of the day trying to catch her when she was home but never got anyone on the phone.

Not her sister or brother-in-law or even their youngest son.

By Friday, May 13th, she was worried enough to call the local police. It was almost 9.30 when she picked up the phone. She dialed the number that she found in the phone book for the Chapel Hill Police Department. When an officer answered, Pam explained her situation. She hadn't heard from her sister in nearly two weeks and that was unlike her. She also tried to reach her brother-in-law and nephew but couldn't get anyone. The officer took down the name and the address and assured her that they would check into it. Pam let out a little sigh of relief knowing it was in the hands of police. She expected it wouldn't be long before her sister called her back angry and complaining about the police showing up at her house.

But Pam never got that call and when the police finally called her back to relay what they had found, it was so much worse than anything she could have possibly imagined.

Welcome to Sword and Scale Nightmares.

True crime for bedtime where nightmare begins now.

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for up to 70% off. Join the shopping membership loved by over one million happy customers and named number one by Glamour magazine for 2023. Guys, I got a FabFitFun box for my girlfriend and she knows a lot about beauty products. She knows a lot about this kind of stuff. I don't so much because I'm ugly, but she does and she absolutely loved it. I think you will too. If you're shopping for yourself for your loved one, this is a great treat. And now's your chance to get a great deal too. Sign up at fabfitfun.com slash podcast. Customize your box and get access to discounts up to 70% off on brands like Fenty, Free People, and Our Place just to name a few. Not in love with this season's options. Well, take the credit to shop their exclusive flash deals of up to 70% and save on the biggest name brands out there. If you join FabFitFun as a new seasonal member right now, you'll also get 20% off your membership. So your first box is only \$47.99 for up to a \$300 value box each season, but only while supplies last. FabFitFun boxes sell out. Join FabFitFun today and save at fabfitfun.com slash podcast. FabFitFun.com slash podcast. Pam's sister Allison lived in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, more than four hours away from her in Alexandria. Allison had an active lifestyle and was always busy. Between her regular Tuesday tennis game at the country club, her art, her kids, and co-owning J5 Incorporated with her husband, James Sapikowski, she didn't have much downtime.

James kept busy too. Outside of work, he volunteered to coach the University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill Club ice hockey team. His players called him Big Jim because, well, he was big and athletic, but mostly because of his larger-than-life personality and enthusiasm. He was something of a father figure to many on the team and tried to promote interest in the sport by buying hundreds of tickets and just handing them out to youth hockey players across the Tri-City area. When James and Allison got married, they had two children together. First, they had a beautiful baby girl named Lauren, and then they had a little boy named Adam. James also had two older sons from a previous marriage, Brandon and Chris.

James's entrepreneurial instinct led to the great success of J5 Inc., an oil and gas exploration company. It afforded them a huge home over 6,500 square feet in the Oaks subdivision, an extremely nice neighborhood on the east side of town. James and Allison tried very hard to make the lives of their children happy and full, and they were given every advantage that a child could have. They loved them unconditionally and were proud of their achievements, but they also expected quite a bit. They wanted their children to work hard and create their own success.

They achieved much in their lives and they wanted their children to do the same. Anyone looking from

the outside would say that they provided more than enough for their kids to be successful.

The Sapikowskis were the picture of a model family. In 2001, a family friend even used them as inspiration for a children's book called *The Guest Who Threw Tomatoes*. In the book, the Sapikowski family gets a visitor from Spain named Pepe. Pepe introduces them to the Spanish cultural tradition, *la tomatina*, the throwing of tomatoes. There wasn't much of a plot to the book, but James and Allison felt a certain sense of pride when looking at the perceived image of their family. They knew they weren't perfect, but to them, all their hard work in business and raising a family was paying off with a picturesque life. By 2005, both the older boys had grown up and moved out. Chris lived nearby, but Brandon married and moved to Texas. Lauren was in her freshman year of college at Washington and Lee University in nearby Virginia. Adam was a junior in high school at the prestigious and expensive \$16,000 a year

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private school, Durham Academy, about a 20-minute drive away from Chapel Hill. Adam, the only one to still live at home with his parents, was just as accomplished as his successful siblings. He ran cross-country and competed at this state level. He was an accomplished marksman certified by the NRA and was an avid paintball player. His grades, however, started to take a downturn. Ever since he got involved with his girlfriend, his attention to school was at an all-time low. It was nearing the end of the school year and soon it would be summer and Lauren would come home and Adam would have time off. But before the year could end, Adam was looking forward to his junior prom. He was a bit stressed out by the whole thing. His parents were putting a lot of pressure on him about his grades. He only had one more year left in high school and he was running out of time to build up his GPA. The next morning, Friday, April 29th, two weeks before Aunt Pam called police, Adam woke up refreshed. He got up, stretched, changed his clothes and got ready for school. He grabbed his backpack and hopped into his Chevy Tahoe, then drove the 20 or so minutes to the campus. On the way, he thought about the argument he had with his parents over his report card the night before. He thought about how mad his father got and how mad he got. Adam feared for a moment that he wasn't going to get to go to his junior prom, but before going to bed that night, he settled the argument with his parents. Soon, his thoughts drifted back to his girlfriend and how great the junior prom was going to be. The next day, as he got the corsage ready to deliver to his girlfriend, he looked forward to their new life together. He had decided to leave Chapel Hill after tonight, but first, he was going to enjoy the evening. After junior prom, he held an after party at his home. That's when he planned to ask her to run away with him, but it was ruined. His house smelled awful. The fridge had broken and all the food inside had spoiled. Little did Adam know that all of his future plans would also be spoiled. Customers are rushing to your store. Do you have a point-of-sale system you can trust or is it a real POS, if you know what I mean? You need Shopify for retail. Did you know Shopify powers selling in person too? Shopify POS is your command center for your retail store. From accepting payments to managing inventory, Shopify has everything you need to sell in person. With Shopify, you get a powerhouse selling partner that effortlessly unites your in-person and online sales into one source of truth. Track every sale across your business in one place and know exactly what's in stock. Connect with customers in-line and online. Shopify helps you drive store traffic with plug-and-play tools built from marketing campaigns from TikTok to Instagram and beyond. Get hardware that fits your business. Take payments by smartphone, transform your tablet into a point-of-sale system, or use Shopify's POS Go mobile device for a battle-tested solution. Plus, Shopify's award-winning help is there to support your success every step of the way. Do retail right with Shopify? Sign up for a \$1 a month trial period at [Shopify.com slash sword and scale](https://www.shopify.com/sword-and-scale). All lowercase. Go to [Shopify.com slash sword and scale](https://www.shopify.com/sword-and-scale) to take your retail business to the next level today. [Shopify.com slash sword and scale](https://www.shopify.com/sword-and-scale). All lowercase and no spaces. [Shopify.com slash sword and scale](https://www.shopify.com/sword-and-scale). PAM called the police late Friday evening, but police didn't perform the welfare check on the Sapikowskis until the following morning. It was a bright and cool spring day in Chapel Hill without a cloud in sight. The officer assigned to the welfare check drove down the winding road

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that led to 29 Whitley Drive. Tucked back into the tall trees was the opulent two-story home with a long circle driveway, two big bay windows on either side of a bold blue door, and a two-car garage. The officer pulled his patrol car around the circle drive until he was lined up with the brick walkway leading up to the front porch. He put the car in park and looked out of his windshield at the large home. He had to crane his neck from this vantage point to see the second story. He daydreamed for a moment about owning a home this grand, but after a second he

shook it off and got out of his car. As he shut the door to the patrol car and made his approach to the front porch, he noticed how well-kept the property was. The hedges were trimmed, the grass was cut, and the home just seemed maintained. When he got to the door he raised one arm and brought it down in a hard, steady, wrap wrap wrap. He heard the reverberation of his knock echo throughout the interior of the house. As he waited for an answer he looked back toward the street. He doubted anything could be seriously wrong in this neighborhood, as he stared at the even larger and more extravagant home across the street. After a moment without anyone coming to the door, he knocked again and waited. He started peeking through the windows on either side of the door to see if anyone was home. On the other side of the door was a large room. He could see through the home onto the back porch. From what he could tell it was empty. He circled the home and checked all the doors and windows. He didn't see any signs of a break-in and there wasn't anything unusual that he could see looking through the windows. It just looked like the owners went on vacation. The officer pulled out his phone and called the older Sapikowski children. First Brandon,

then Chris, then Lauren. All of them said the same thing. No, they hadn't heard from their parents in about two weeks. No, they didn't know where they were if they weren't home and no, they didn't know where Adam, the youngest sibling, was either. The officer told the siblings he would call them back when he knew more and set off to question the neighbors. Have you seen James or Allison? One by one, the neighbors gave the same report. They hadn't seen the Sapikowskis in a couple of weeks. The only thing they noticed out of the ordinary was their driveway lights. Normally, they turn them off during the day and after they go to bed, but it had been on for more than a week solid. What about Adam? Have you seen him? They reported seeing him as recently as a few days ago,

but didn't know where he was now. The officer was informed that Adam's girlfriend lived in the neighborhood though and after knocking on many doors, he eventually found her. She had no idea where his parents were, but she did know where Adam was. She directed the officer to the courtyard by Marriott and Durham. The officer called Chris Sapikowski and told him that he didn't have a lead on his parents, but that he had found his brother in a hotel in Durham. He asked Chris to accompany him to get his brother and Chris agreed. The officer swung by and picked him up and headed

to Durham. The manager of the courtyard told the officer Adam first checked in on May 1st and that he had begun checking in and out, staying there off and on for the past couple of weeks. She directed the officer to his room. When Adam peeked through the curtains, he only saw his brother Chris, but when he opened the door, he noticed the officer. They immediately asked Adam to gather his things and come with them back to Chapel Hill. Adam did as he was asked and all

three climbed into the patrol car and headed back to 29 Whitley Drive. On the way back from

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Durham,

they asked Adam where James and Allison were. He told them that both of his parents flew to El Paso

about a week ago to visit his brother Brandon and his newborn child and he hadn't heard from them since. This answer alerted suspicion in both the officer and Chris. They both had talked to Brandon already. Brandon didn't know where they were. They certainly weren't there and he was unaware of any

plans they had to visit him. Both Chris and the officer sat in silence for the rest of the trip.

They didn't know what to make of Adam's obvious sly. Once they arrived, the officer got out and asked Adam for his key. Adam remarked that he didn't have a key. The officer thought this was unbelievable. If the Sapikowskis did go to El Paso, which they didn't, they would never leave their kid home alone without a key to get in and out of the house. The officer left the two brothers out front while once again making a trip around the home, this time to look for the easiest way inside. He found a door on the side of the garage that he was able to open with a credit card and a little force. The officer swung the door open and peered inside. There were James and Allison's vehicles parked in the garage. On the opposite wall was the door that led inside. He walked to that door. His footsteps echoed through the garage. He reached the door and put his hand on the knob. With a twist, he saw that it unlocked. With a slight push, the door creaked open. He felt a rush of air escape the home.

Instantly, the officer knew why Adam was at the hotel. When no one had seen his parents in weeks, the rush of air escaping the Sapikowskis house carried with it a stench of death. The officer stepped over the threshold and walked inside. The entrance from the garage led into the kitchen next to a short hallway. At the end of the hallway was a door that the officer noticed immediately. In front of the door were four chairs stacked into a makeshift barricade. At the bottom of the door was a rolled up towel stuffed into the gap. He knew it was a crime scene and backed out of the home and called for backup. I guess I was wrong, he thought. Something was seriously wrong in this neighborhood. When the crime scene investigators arrived, they made entry into the home and took pictures of the hallway, the chairs, and the towel before trying to open the door. When they did, they immediately found James. Still dressed in his workout clothes, he was wrapped

in a blanket just on the other side of the door. He was dead long before the pool of blood formed around him. He had gaping wounds on his chest, head, and neck. Just past his body, investigators followed a trail of blood to the master bathroom. There on the floor lay Allison. She too had gaping wounds on her shoulder and her head. Obviously, she had attempted to flee her attacker. Investigators were dumbfounded. What happened here? Two people were dead, but they couldn't discern why.

Why were these two pillars of the community now dead in their home? The investigators confronted Adam, still waiting outside with his brother. Your parents are dead. What happened? Adam hung his head

and confessed. I killed my parents. The police and Chris were shocked. What they couldn't understand

was why a kid from a well-to-do family with no history of ever being in any serious trouble whatsoever had just confessed to the murder of both of his parents.

Adam tried to explain what happened. On Friday, April 29th, 2005,

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Adam was excited about going to junior prom with his girlfriend, but his parents were upset. He hadn't kept up his end of the bargain. His grades were too poor and they expected more from him. His father yelled, you're spending too much time with that girlfriend and not enough time studying. Adam heard it all the time, but he wasn't used to it. Every time his father laid into him, he felt this sense of anger and disgust rise inside of him. His parents had been telling him for years that he wasn't working hard enough and his grades just weren't good enough. He struggled for a long time with depression and suicidal thoughts because of it. This time would be different, though, he thought. This time, I will end it once and for all. But this time, he had something to live for, a life with his girlfriend. Instead of wanting to kill himself, he wanted to kill his parents. Adam went and got the family's 410 shotgun. He breached the barrel and loaded a single shell. He waited for his father to come into the kitchen. When he saw his father around the corner, he pulled the trigger. Big Jim recoiled from the shot and fell to the ground, but he wasn't dead. Yet, Adam breached the barrel again and loaded another shell, aimed and fired into his father. The close range didn't leave a lot of time for the bird shot in the shell to spread so his father's head and face were completely decimated by the dozens of pellets. Adam loaded one more time and fired. His father was dead and his mother was next. He loaded another shell and he walked down the hall to his parents' bedroom, where his mother was. She was still in her bathroom when he fired the first shot. He missed and winged her in the shoulder. She fled to the bathroom only to realize she was trapped. She called out to her son to stop, but he loaded another shell. He rounded the corner to the bathroom and found his mother on the floor. As she lay there begging for her life, he aimed and fired a final shot. He had one shell left, but he didn't need it. He dropped it where he stood over his mother's body. He was done. He was free of his parents' harsh rules and constant badgering about his grades and his girlfriend, not working hard enough or what he could or couldn't do. It was all just over. He wrapped his mother's body in a sheet and left her lying on the floor in the master bathroom as a pool of blood formed around her. Then he went to his father's body lying just outside of the kitchen. He wrapped him in the comforter from their bed and dragged him back into the master bedroom. He pulled and pushed his father's body to just the other side of the door before closing it behind him. He stacked up chairs and barricaded the door as if someone was trying to get out. Adam explained that his father would get so angry with him that he would verbally assault him and sometimes get physical. That night, in his anger over Adam's grades, his father came at him with a baseball bat and he feared for his life, he claims. He says that is why he shot his father, a statement supported by the Blood Spattered Report Card and aluminum bat found in the home. But Adam's siblings adamantly rejected the idea that their father would do that. They never experienced any abuse and that explanation didn't even address why he killed their mother too. Along with the bloody report card, investigators found the murder weapon and more shells packed into his SUV along with food and camping gear. Adam planned to flee but didn't follow through with it when his girlfriend turned down the invitation to go with them. Another plan spoiled, Adam likely thought. And I wonder if at this moment he questioned whether killing his parents had been worth it.

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Adam was arrested and charged with two counts of murder. What was left of his family would completely disown him, leaving him alone to face his judgment. It would take three years and several attempts at making Adam look insane before the case would finally go to trial. He claimed he was suicidal and was moved from the jail to a hospital. He told psychiatrists that he had heard voices since middle school and was just doing what they told him to. But ultimately unable to wiggle his way out of his situation, Adam took a plea deal. He pleaded guilty to felony obstruction of justice first. This conviction would put a felony on Adam's record, allowing the judge to impose a stiffer sentence. Adam pleaded guilty to both his father's and mother's murders, getting sentenced to 24 and a half years and 25 and a half years to run concurrently. Not long after his conviction, his siblings had the executor of their parents' state request that the court block Adam from ever receiving any death benefits. They didn't want him to eventually get out of prison at age 57 and start living a comfortable life. At the sentencing, his sister Lauren said that since she had been deprived of her parents by Adam's action, she defines herself by one word, orphan, and that there isn't a day that goes by that she isn't reminded that she is alone. Trying not to cry, Chris shared that when the time came to explain why his youngest daughter never met her grandfather, he didn't know what he was going to say. Adam killed his parents so he could go to junior prom, something that he was wildly excited about and he held in the highest regard. In his mind, this was the end all of parties. Imagine that. A party worth killing for. Sweet dreams and good night.

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