

Unlikely Allies Ep 1 Jeremy & Peter

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00:00:05 Jeremy

When it was all over, he admitted to abusing 30 people from 1986 to 2009.

00:00:13 Peter

And I think the confusing thing about abuse is it doesn't start with this horror story. It starts with being chosen, and he chose me.

00:01:00 Jim Cole

Jeremy, you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

00:01:03 Jeremy

My name is Jeremy Henson. I've been a law enforcement professional for over 27 years. I currently supervise a special victims unit and domestic violence unit in a local sheriff's office in the state I live in. Before that, I retired from Fairfax County Police Department, which is where I met Peter during my tenure there.

00:01:25 Peter

And I am Dr. Peter Verdin. I am from Boise, Idaho. I don't carry the doctor title very often. People at work know me as Doctor Pete. Most people know me as Pete or Peter, or my two kids call me Daddy. Or now my son calls me Bruh, and I've graduated a Bruh. I have a PhD in Human and Sport Performance. My specialty area was pediatric motor learning. I've spent my whole career measuring performance in.

00:01:58 Peter

The numbers that are on paper, and underneath that measurement, my body was literally falling apart. I had a nervous system shaped by abuse in the most critical years of my life, and now just trying to figure that out, and just putting names to some of these things that I've experienced over the last many years.

00:02:20 Sonny Von Cleveland

I think we're going to get into a very in-depth discussion about that very particular thing. I think it's important that we start right from the start with the way that you two met. There is a reason why you are on this podcast. It's unlikely allies podcast, and we all know what this podcast is. Let's start back at the start of how you two met.

00:02:46 Peter

I actually have a question for Jeremy to start because I asked this question last

night and said I would save it for today. The first time I met Jeremy, my mom had called me in my dorm room and let me know what was going on with John, John Hamilton, my abuser. She asked me, "Did this happen to you?" I said, "It did." I just broke down in my college dorm room. She wanted to help, and I said, "No, I got it. Just give me his number, and I'll give him a call." I hung up the phone with my mom and called Jeremy.

00:03:26 Peter

And I honestly don't remember what I said.

00:03:30 Sonny Von Cleveland

You remember that phone call?

00:03:32 Jeremy

I remember it clearly. I had just ended a long day at work and had just gotten home. I had two young kids at home, and my phone rang and it was an unknown number. We'd been getting a lot of phone calls because after this case, this arrest, we did a press release and asked for people to come forward with information. So my phone had been ringing off the hook. This was a big deal. This guy was known in the community, far and wide. I had a phone call. I didn't recognize the number. I went down to my basement, took the phone call, and I knew Peter's name. I knew he was someone I wanted to talk to because I was finally getting young men to open up to me about John Hamilton.

00:04:21 Sonny Von Cleveland

Let's take a quick step back. John Hamilton is who we're here talking about today. Who is John Hamilton, and tell us a little bit about that case. How did you build up to leading to this phone call?

00:04:33 Jeremy

Thankfully now John resides in the Virginia Department of Corrections, so that's who he is now, and hopefully he stays there for the rest of his life. But I guess this case started for me back in February two thousand nine. I know it started much earlier for Peter, but I'll let him fill in some of those details. I went to my job. I was a detective at Fairfax County Police Department. I was on the child abuse squad, and the child abuse squad investigates sexual abuse and physical abuse of children. So it was a pretty tough, challenging job. I had been in that role for probably over a year and a half, so kind of had a good footing in the investigation. And my boss at the time called me and was like, "Hey, I gave you."

00:05:21 Jeremy

A case that I'm getting a lot of feedback on. I was like, "Oh, what are you talking about?" He's like, "Oh, it's going to be tough, but I want you to work it." And he goes, "You know the guy John Hamilton from the Mount Vernon District, and that's the patrol area where I worked as a patrol officer, and then as a detective, I had a lot of

cases there." I was like, "I know who this is." John was one of these guys that just wanted to make a friend with everyone. He had a lot of different roles. And this is kind of a long story, so apologize. We're here for the long stories. John's family owned Wick Sporting Goods, and part of the the contracts at that company was to do all the embroidery for the schools. Any team that had, you know, good teams travel, schools, you name it, Parks and Rec. If they were in the south end, east side of the county, they went to this company.

00:06:21 Jeremy

It was John's dad's company, and John and his mom were running it at the time. They did all the police polo embroidery, specialty teams. They did. They had it. Everybody knew who they were. John also worked. I don't know. You might not know some of these things, but he was a manager at a Domino's pizza, in the north end of that patrol district. And cops love discount food. Well, John gave free food, so all the cops that came and ate for free. John was the manager. He'd bring them out free pies. If you worked a midnight shift and you wanted food, John fed you. So he had a lot of connections. This is the point I'm trying to get across, and they were well placed connections.

00:07:03 Sonny Von Cleveland

It's safe to say he was a pillar of the community.

00:07:05 Jeremy

That was exactly the word that I have used in other times when I've talked about it, and I definitely he set himself up to be a pillar of the community, and we can definitely dive deep on that, but that was his reputation. That was how people knew him. Everybody's friend. I don't know if I heard a negative thing about him. So I get this report. I get a lot of patrol officers are calling my boss, telling me this investigation should never take place. This is a lie. And the report was of child sexual abuse, and the suspect was John Hamilton.

00:07:48 Jeremy

And immediately

00:07:49 Sonny Von Cleveland

You had officers that were telling you, 'This is not right. This is a lie. This is a lie.' So people automatically, without any evidence or knowledge of the situation, are just defending. It's important to know that because this is what an abuser does. They work their community. They groom. They groom. They groom not just the victim.

00:08:10 Jim Cole

And I think we'll get into it later. This case is a really great example of something that I've realized a while ago in my cases that people think the grooming is really only aimed at the victims, at the kids that they abuse, and I would argue that the grooming is actually more aimed at the adults that surround those children, that

are or should be there to protect them, because the child ends up seeing the monster.

00:08:46 Jim Cole

But if the offender is doing their quote unquote job right, the adults will never see the offender. They will never see the monster, and they will defend the monster.

00:08:59 Sonny Von Cleveland

And that's exactly what is happening here. This man is grooming the entire community.

00:09:04 Jim Cole

And I had a ton of cases with very similar pillars of the community who groomed, and we even had in some cases a lot of cases against teachers. And you'd have fellow teachers come in, even after these people pled guilty to the charges, and at their sentencing hearing come in and testify on their behalf about what a great person.

00:09:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

Almost a character witness. So this is the kind of person we're talking about when we're talking about John Hamilton.

00:09:34 Jeremy

And I'll say this as an aside to people that don't know: I grew up in the age of watch out for the boogeyman. That's what my mom was always looking for: stranger danger. Growing up through that, that's what I thought. As you go through and experience life and your own careers, you find out. While those are terrible cases, they are very few and very far between. You'll see them on the news. You'll see horrific cases like that.

00:10:06 Jeremy

But the people who abuse the children, the monsters, are the people who have access. That could be a parent. That could be a sibling. That could be a family friend. That could be a preacher. It could be a cop. It could be a coach. It could be anyone that has the ability to get close and have time alone in a trusted position with a child. Those are the people who offend, and we only scratched the surface about reporting. You guys all know this. I've heard things say that sexual crimes are only reported about forty percent of the time. But when people are talking about that, they're talking about typically male on female or female on male type things. You add in the component of a young boy being molested, and I think they're way, way less reported than that, and virtually unreported, at least for what is happening out there.

00:11:03 Jeremy

So the majority

00:11:05 Jim Cole

And so we kind of got a little. Getting back to that, to kind of briefing us on the case.

00:11:10 Sonny Von Cleveland

What was your instinct when that happened? When this case comes through and you automatically hear people coming in, this isn't right, that's a lie, this is.

00:11:20 Jeremy

What did your gut feel? I might be different than most. I was met with resounding support. From people that I knew and had worked with and knew very well from that district, talking about how John was innocent, this was all BS. I needed to shut it down. I came at it from a point of view that you investigate these cases that come to you until you either make the case or determine that there's not enough evidence to go forward with the case.

00:11:58 Jeremy

Like my goal is not to disprove it, you know what I mean. Even if it sounds outlandish, your goal as a good detective, a good investigator, is to investigate the case and find out if there's anything there. I had my own personal experiences that I would never discard an allegation without looking into it. So I came into it from a different sense. Did I enjoy getting a free pizza when I worked midnight from him? Yeah. Was he my friend? No. Do I owe anything to him? No, but there's a reason why these abusers make these relationships. And he made that relationship that he made with all those people for the exact reason. And and I was met with that support, either lucky for me or unlucky for him. I don't know. It came across my desk, and I think it's important to know survivors of child sexual abuse.

00:12:57 Jeremy

Often have very tumultuous childhoods, adolescence, and some go to prison. Some commit crimes. Some act out because they don't have the capacity to deal with trauma. And I'm not a psychologist or a psychiatrist or a mental health professional, but I can tell you, people react differently to trauma, and sometimes, oftentimes, it's not pretty. So the person who came forward was a well-known. Person, with the exact opposite reputation of John Hamilton, and that I hope that some of the support these cops were calling me about him was related to oh this guy's a criminal. You can't believe this guy. This guy breaks the law. This guy makes us work. This guy will do whatever. They had already determined this accuser who came forward who.

00:13:56 Jeremy

Honestly, God, I feel like he's one of the bravest people I know because he knew his background, he knew what it was going to be met with, and I'll tell you about the report. He happened to be in the neighborhood, a Fort Hunt community in Fairfax County, which is an affluent community, full of suburb suburbs and nice homes and commuters into DC, and fairly affluent. Neighborhoods, by all accounts, this kid

went home visiting his mom, who still lived in that area. He happens to be at a Seven Eleven, just a chance encounter. He happens to be there. He sees a car drive by. John Hamilton's driving the car, and he's thinking, "Oh, what a piece of shit!" I he knows what he went through with this guy, and he says as he's turning to go back in the store.

00:14:55 Jeremy

Something catches his eye in the car, and he goes, "There's a kid in the car with."

00:14:59 Speaker 5

Him,"

00:15:02 Jeremy

And this kid coming forward. I don't want to use his name because he doesn't know I'm talking about this. And while he was brave then, I don't want to put him on blast. But if you're listening, you know who you are. And he thought, "Man, this happened to me from like 10 to 12. I'm in my mid 20s." And this guy's still doing it. He goes, "I knew him. I knew his family. I knew he didn't have kids." And the fact that he's alone with a child, he goes, "That was it." I went straight to the station and reported it. He goes, "I know they didn't believe me, because I called him on the phone." He's like, he asked me, "He goes, 'Do you believe me?'" I'm like, "My job's not to believe you. My job's to investigate this." Um, but he said that John had been molesting him while he was his coach.

00:15:53 Jeremy

In little league, this kid came from a broken home, single parent raising him, and baseball was something he loved. It was tough for him to get places to play, rec, or travel. John, his coach, was more than happy to offer up rides.

00:16:14 Sonny Von Cleveland

Made it all happen for him.

00:16:16 Jeremy

He works. He would disguise it as "I'm giving everyone a ride." Sometimes there would be more kids in there. He was very good at camouflage, camouflaging his actions, and he quickly negotiated alone time with this person, and within a week was making his first physical advances and committing crimes against him. So I told the victim, come in, come into my office. We're gonna sit down and we're gonna talk face to face. And I did what cops call phone sting.

00:16:50 Jeremy

It's a controlled phone call. It's recorded. In Virginia, we're lucky enough—one party consent, so I can record any phone call as long as one party is aware of the recording. These are great tools in law enforcement. They're beautiful. They're typically short. They typically result in a confrontation. The suspect usually terminates the phone call. This phone call, I monitor it, and I sit there and try to

guide the. The The victim, the survivor, through this phone call, because sometimes it can be a shock to them to have contact with the person they're accusing of these crimes. This kid had a lot of spunk. I said, "Kid, he was a grown up. He had a lot of spunk." We get to the point within a few minutes, and it's like, "Oh, hey, how you doing?" You know, and and John's interacting. What he been up to?

00:17:51 Jeremy

And the person who came forward goes, I want to talk to you. This stuff's been weighing on me, and the stuff you did to me. And he confronts him

00:18:03 Sonny Von Cleveland

And that's usually where the phone hangs up.

00:18:05 Jeremy

You get a reaction, a denial. That phone call lasted about sixty minutes. We ended up having to turn the phone call in. I gave this person the go ahead. End this however you want to end this. Not one denial. Wow, not one. What he said is, I don't remember that. Hey, let's set up a time to meet in person. That's what he said. He wanted nothing more than to reengage. What his motives were, I don't know. I suspect a lot of that would have been able to apply manipulations and different things.

00:18:45 Jeremy

Peter's probably going to share a lot with some of the ways in which John kept himself involved in people's families, but I hung up the phone call. I went and told my boss. I'm like, 'Hey, this guy did it. This guy is so guilty.' Wow.

00:19:05 Jim Cole

Yeah,

00:19:05 Jeremy

I've never had to end a phone call before. Usually, they make that decision. I know the reporting person. Our victim goes, "What do you think?" And I'm like, "I believe you." I know it's not my job to believe you, but he goes, "He was so relieved to have that, to not be judged by past actions." You know that he took as he tried to deal with all this. And I'll tell you, I think that helped him so much.

00:19:44 Jeremy

Turned his life around just from that simple act, like doing that gave him confidence. And before we even got to court, this guy had a job. He was running a hotel in a major city. He was getting married. It was seriously cathartic and life changing for him. And that started it. And at that point in time, it was.

00:20:15 Jeremy

Who else do I need to talk to? Because kids always know. You want to know who's molesting your kids? You talk to the kids. They're gonna know. Even if you, as a

parent or an adult, dismiss someone's actions, kids are gonna know. So I started talking to kids. They would talk to me. I was met with a lot of reluctance because these were teenage children. They were young adults. They were older adults. John Hamilton coached so many kids over the course of twenty years in Little League that I had to interview and set up interviews of our own police officers and detectives who he had coached to see if he had offended against them. When they were kids. Because just because you didn't come forward doesn't mean it didn't happen. You weren't a victim of child sexual abuse.

00:21:13 Peter

What was the total number again?

00:21:15 Jeremy

When it was all over, and a lot of this came by John's own mouth, and we can get into how the case progressed, but he eventually came to the table after we got him to plead guilty. I thought I was such a genius, having worked through this agreement to plead guilty. I had a lot of help on the case, but John came to the table. And he, over the course of three days, multiple hours each day, he outlined from his point of view, his perspective, the people he had abused. When it was all over, he admitted to abusing thirty people from nineteen eighty-six to two thousand and nine. And if you are doing the math, you might think, "Oh, one a year," but that's not how abuse works. Abuse is daily, sometimes multiple times a day.

00:22:12 Jeremy

Sometimes more than one victim going on. These are people, but that doesn't mean he only abused people thirty times. And John, initially, was an offender of opportunity. Most, in my experience, child abusers will target a certain sex or age range. We ended up identifying twenty eight boys and two girls, so it was substantial, and that's what he admitted to. I believe, I firmly believe, he minimized. But that come to Jesus, the Commonwealth called it, where he comes and outlines his crimes was supposed to be fact checked with a polygraph to make sure he wasn't holding back.

00:23:11 Jeremy

Part of the agreement with his high-powered defense team was that if he did this, he would be allowed to remain on bond pending his plea, and that was all set up.

00:23:24 Sonny Von Cleveland

Is this before or after you met

00:23:27 Jeremy

Peter? That's after. So that's after. This is towards the end.

00:23:31 Sonny Von Cleveland

Let's let's go back.

00:23:33 Jeremy

Sure. It's convoluted.

00:23:36 Sonny Von Cleveland

No doubt. Because I'm just one of, Kind of keep it chronological here because I know there is a lot of variables to this. So once you got the report and you talk to this kid and now you know in your heart this dude's guilty. I know he is. Now it becomes your job as an investigator to prove that. Like. Yep. And then how did you get from that moment? To Peter.

00:24:00 Jeremy

Again, that's another long story. I don't want this to be completely about like what I do, but. This really sets the scene. So, I start interviewing people who played for John. I find out from the first person that I need to talk to another person that they they knew played travel and they knew was a great ball player. I call that person. They're like, "Oh, I assume you want to talk about when John got fired from coaching at the private school." I'm like, "Uh, what?"

00:24:36 Speaker 5

Oh, forgot about that.

00:24:38 Jeremy

And I was like, " Tell me more, cause I don't know what you're talking about." And they're like, " Yeah, John got fired because there were a couple of times when he masturbated in front of us at travel games in the hotel rooms. John would stay in our rooms, and we'd wake up, and he's like, 'You know, we'd make jokes about it, but like. ' " He would act like he's asleep, and he would masturbate in front of us. And he's like, " Word got out, you know, kids were talking." I'm like, " Well, I did this get reported?" They're like, " Well, yeah, we talked to the school about it." Well, the school let him go. Wow, Catholic school.

00:25:24 Jim Cole

Wow, it's that's so the norm. These institutions are more worried about their own reputation than they are, and so for them, it's easier if they just make it go away.

00:25:34 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah. So you're telling me John would pretend to be sleeping, and like he's masturbating in his sleep.

00:25:40 Jeremy

Yes. He's Uber grooming. He's getting kids used to him being naked, getting them used to him being aroused, being alone with them, and seeing who reacts poorly and seeing who he can potentially target.

00:26:00 Peter

And. That was my first memory of John. Was at his first house, wherever that was,

standing in a bathroom mirror with the most demonic look on his face. As I'm helping him pack up this apartment, and he's just sitting there masturbating, staring at me. And I was probably at that time nine years old, and that's my first experience of that as well.

00:26:26 Jeremy

Wow. And that was his go-to move still in 2009 when all this ended. It was still, he was still active. This wasn't someone reported something from ten, fifteen years ago. Now this guy was active. These are leopards who don't change.

00:26:42 Jim Cole

No

00:26:44 Jeremy

No. So I find out about that, and then when I get off the, as I'm getting off the phone with that person, you know they tell me, oh, there's more. You know, he did stuff towards me. At his house in Fairfax, which, you know, as a as a detective working in the county police agency, I want to deal with those crimes in my jurisdiction because I have the power to deal with them. I'll try to deal with those things out of jurisdiction, but oftentimes that's going to involve federal or other jurisdictions. And again, it's a bunch of kids in a hotel room that I'm probably going to get a lot of pushback from some families and everything. So I'm focusing on those those things. They outline.

00:27:30 Jeremy

Their abuse, and that John would treat the kids from the team to bowling, Kings Dominion, which is an amusement park in Virginia and a couple other places, a large place. At his own expense, he would take kids to the park. He would take them bowling. He'd take them out to dinner, and then he'd take them all home. And he would try to get kids back to his house alone with him. He would make bets with the kids. If I win this, you get an extra trip to King's Dominion, or you get dinner, or you get this, or you get tickets to this game, or I'll take you here. If you lose, you got to do something at my house. I got a fence that needs painting. I want my house painted. Sure.

00:28:14 Sonny Von Cleveland

So when they inevitably do chores or stuff

00:28:17 Peter

I wonder if that's how I ended up. I was like, how did I end up at nine years old packing up this dude's house? I must have lost a bet. That would be the only plausible explanation.

00:28:32 Jeremy

He got that person at his house, and he began soft initiations. It would be he would be in his boxers, and all of a sudden my penis is out, and I don't know it. If anyone's

ever worn boxers, you know when your penis is out, right? And who wears boxers around a child, right? And that progressed after a few occasions of that. To the oh no you caught me masturbating oh whoops I didn't know you were in here well you brought him over there right like one hundred percent but grooming one on one this an adult yeah this an adult man who's sophisticated in their manipulation yeah working a kid over mentally right so we go through that a little bit more into that abuse and he's like oh by the way.

00:29:28 Jeremy

When John left this coaching gig, I heard he went to a high school, and coached there. I was like, "What? Are you kidding?" And they're like, "Yeah, but something happened there too." So I call the high school. I talk to the people at the high school, ask if John's a coach there. They're like, "Not anymore." I'm like, "What happened?" Ah, there was something, something happened out of town, so we let him go. Like, did you report it? Well, no, I mean it was out of town, and weren't really clear, and you know the kids like it was hard to talk to, so I finally get some people from that trip and corroborate that he did similar things with the high school team, and kids were making jokes about John and masturbating, so they let him go, and they didn't report it because didn't happen here, we don't know, we can't prove it, we let him go. Now fast forward.

00:30:26 Jeremy

When I found out that John's company was still doing the embroidery for the sports teams in the county, he had convinced one of the other high schools to give them an office. His company had an office, and he would spend like half days at this high school just to make things easier if people needed things like the school store. So I never found anything from that, but this guy was never not working. It's like the ABC always be closing. This guy was always trying to offend, but I got past that, and I realize I need some help. My wife and Jim's wife both know each other from federal law enforcement.

00:31:22 Jeremy

They both have history with the behavioral analysis unit, FBI, the profilers. My wife ultimately became a profiler with the unit, and Jim's wife ultimately became a special agent and worked. Both of our wives are retired now. I really leveraged my relationship with coworkers, mentors, and associates of both of our wives, and I pretty much plugged myself into BAU. I went and did a case consultation with the Crimes Against Children Unit at Quantico, and I sat down with someone who would really become my mentor as well, and some legends in profiling. This guy, I'm not going to say his name, but he's pretty famous. He's active in Hollywood, screenwriter, producer.

00:32:20 Jeremy

Investigative reporter, I guess you would say. He's also retired, and other people who are well known in the community sat down, and I went through the case. I was

thinking they're gonna be like, not really interested. They probably see way worse than this. But when I laid this out to them, they jumped in wholeheartedly, and they're like, this guy's bad. This guy's really, really bad.

00:32:48 Jeremy

Almost prolific, and the volume and his skill set.

00:32:53 Jim Cole

He is the definition of a predator.

00:32:55 Jeremy

He's so. I felt so happy to have that support, and they were so invested that these guys don't typically leave the office unless they're called on a deployment. If they get sent to those stranger cases or the reported missing kids, serial killing, like they don't leave the office for nothing. They're like, hey, I'd really like to be involved in this contact with this guy. I am like, great. They're like, you got to get him in. You got to talk to him. Okay. And for some reason, John agreed to come talk to me. I wouldn't tell him what it was about. He came to the office.

00:33:39 Jeremy

As they frequently do, for whatever reason the FBI profiler couldn't come that day. I get John in there and I ask him about all kinds of stuff. I ask him about the person who came forward, and man, he starts railing on this kid, starts telling me how bad this kid is. All the things he's convincing me, he's trying to convince me that this is all wrong and that he's a good guy. We talk about his car, and he slips up at one time and actually mentions that he remembers being alone in his car with this person from like 15 years ago. And I think he catches himself because he is very smart. He is no dummy. He is highly intelligent. I think he realizes he doesn't. I corroborated a little bit.

00:34:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

He doesn't, in that moment, know that you had knowledge of the phone call, does he?

00:34:33 Jeremy

He does not know.

00:34:35 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah. So in his mind,

00:34:37 Jeremy

It was still just a call between him and the prior victim. One person — that's all he was thinking about, and that's what he was focused on. And he starts getting wishy washy, and I'm like, " Hey, brother, I hear what you're saying, but I got I got a handful of people telling me the same stuff. We need to get to the bottom of this." He shuts it down. He shuts it down. He's like, " Well, then we're done talking." I offer

him a polygraph because you know. Polygraph's not admissible, but it's a great tool. Yeah, because we're able to elicit things. An interview that, yep these pro these polygraphers are typically very good interviewers. So sometimes they get stuff that he might not tell me because he's not looking at them as the person who's trying to prove these crimes. Right. Right. So he's like, I'll think about it, and he he ends the interview.

00:35:34 Jeremy

But he ends it voluntarily, so I still have a chance to reengage with him. So I talk to the profiler friend, and I'm like, "Yeah, he walked out. He corroborated one piece, like he remembered 15 years ago being alone in the car with this kid, and something happened." I'm like, "I, I would not remember that." He goes, "Yeah, nobody would remember unless they committed a crime and probably one of either great gratification or trauma. Like, you know, you don't remember." Those things, unless there's there's something there, she's like, I want to come to his house with you. He goes, Let's cold call him at home. Let's come to his safe place. Let's knock on his door, and let's disarm his protection and his control. Like that sounds great. Hope it works. We go knock on the door of John's house, and he's living in the west end of our county, completely away from the neighborhood.

00:36:31 Jeremy

Where he got his start, he he moved all the way across there. Which I I always was like, that's weird. Why would you leave this beautiful neighborhood and come out to the land of the townhouse where he's at now? Knock on the door, he won't come to the door. We know he's there. We see his car parked behind his house. So we're like, we're standing in between his townhouse and the other, and we're trying to game plan. What do we do now? We can't make him come to the door. Here, the door open up. John pops out. The bottom exit of his townhouse, where his car is parked, we walk up to him. I'm like, "Hey, John." He knows who I am because we've already talked. I'm like, "This is my buddy. He's from the FBI. He's an FBI profiler," and I introduce him. And John, I don't know how else to say it, his knees buckled, and he reached and supported himself on the car to keep. He almost fell down. Wow.

00:37:28 Jeremy

It was such a smash, and I was like, "Oh my god, these profilers know their stuff." I was like, "This is a reaction."

00:37:36 Sonny Von Cleveland

" This dude is guilty. I was like, " Oh.

00:37:39 Jim Cole

My god!" In his mind

00:37:41 Sonny Von Cleveland

The gig is up.

00:37:41 Jeremy

Oh yeah,

00:37:42 Jim Cole

Dude, he sees it all come crashing down.

00:37:44 Jeremy

Yeah, yeah, and this, like, I felt like, you know, like it was like the body blow. You know, it was the first time someone's hit him, and he couldn't, he didn't have an answer, and so his body like shut down on him. Tell him we want to talk. Let's go inside. No, we're not going inside. Why can't we go inside? We need to go inside. Yeah, you want to talk with us? You know what we're here to talk about, right? Your neighbors are like five feet away. It's a townhouse community. Like you don't want them hearing your dirt. Let's go inside. No, no, we can't go inside. And he's just ashen. He looks like he's about to die. Like the blood drained from his face. I'm like, okay.

00:38:26 Jeremy

All right, whatever. I'm not sure what that's about, but we don't want him to shut down because if he shuts down, we lose our chance. So, like, well, let's let's just talk out here. We finally get him to get in the car with us, and I let my buddy go with this whole thing because I'm kind of at the point where I need to try a new a new tack with him. And this guy's good. He's spitting at him. He's just working him over. You know, he's like pressing levers and pulling them, and it's just it's a Thing of beauty to watch, and at one point, like six kids go rolling by. They're like six years old, seven years old, bikes and scooters. And he's like, "See, John, like I'm worried about you. Like, see those kids. Like, I don't want you to have to like be careful about yourself when all these kids are like rolling by, and the temptation." John, not even thinking. I don't know if he was capable of thought at that point. He's like.

00:39:25 Jeremy

I'm not paying attention to them. It wasn't like I'm not into kids. It was I'm not paying attention to them. And I looked at my friend. He looked back at me in the seat. And John was like, "Yeah, whoops." He's like, "I gotta go. I'm leaving. I got an appointment. I gotta get out of here." And he left. And I swear, this is just such a good story. I don't wanna skip this part because it kind of breaks at this point.

00:39:56 Jeremy

He's left. We're sitting there staring at each other, going, 'We've got more confirmation that this guy's very bad, and he doesn't want us in this house.' What's in what do we have? How do we advance this case? The person who came forward, I love them. I would have them to my house, but I don't want to have them carrying this case around on their back like a cross. Because I know what they're going to get put through.

00:40:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

And I've been through that

00:40:29 Jeremy

Right? I understand. I know you know. I understand that. Good call on you. It's not fair to them, and the case doesn't go anywhere if we don't build it better, right? Even if it takes longer. So we come up with the idea. Let's find out what his neighbors know about him, because these people don't really know him. Right. Everyone in the Fort Hunt neighborhood knows him. So we start knocking on doors, and it's like, oh yeah. There's a lot of people who come over there. They're younger, loud parties. Don't really like that. We're hitting one house right across the street from him, and the lady comes to the door. She's like, "Oh, I don't know him, know him, but his son and my son go to high school together." I said, "Excuse me, his son?" I'm like, "Yeah, he's got a 16 year old son, and that he's friends. He's friends with my son."

00:41:24 Jeremy

And they go to the local high school. They're on that end of the county.

00:41:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

Because I guess we didn't ask here. Does he, this man, have no kids? He's not married. Just a single man.

00:41:34 Jeremy

He's not married. He's never even had a girlfriend that I could well we ever kind of understand determined that existed, right? And I'm like, he doesn't have a son. She's like, yeah, he does. I'm like, which house? She points right to the house where John lives. She goes, I'm telling you. My son's not here. I'd have him tell you the kid's name. She told me what she thought it was, and it was an abbreviation of this kid's name. And I'm not going to name him. We go. We knock on the door, and the door opens, and there is a 16 year old man. Child opens the door.

00:42:14 Sonny Von Cleveland

And John Hamilton

00:42:15 Jeremy

John's house, the house he just left

00:42:17 Jim Cole

He left; he almost collapsed. Which is why he didn't want to go.

00:42:21 Jeremy

Yes, right, because he knew we were going to be like, what the, yeah, all right. And I was like, "Are you John Hamilton's son?" Because that's what we were told. He goes, "No, I'm," and he identifies himself. I'm from. The Netherlands. I'm an exchange student, and I was like, "You have got to be!" Wow. I know we're not supposed to cuss, but it's going to be really hard. This story is a lot. Wow. And I look at my buddy,

and he looks at me, and he's like, " You want to call CPS?" I'm like, " Yeah, hold on." So I go call CPS. They respond out child protective service, child protective services for this for the state of Virginia,

00:43:09 Jim Cole

Child welfare agency.

00:43:10 Jeremy

And we have a quick little convo in the house, and we find out that the kid's been there for about six months or more. And lo and behold, John's already started up there. So we remove the kid from the home. John's nowhere to be found, not answering phone calls to come back. We take the kid to the station. We do a forensic interview to basically a non. An interview where you interview children about sexual abuse or anything, and it's in a non-leading fashion, and it's like a recognized standard by which kids can be interviewed so that the interviewer is not leading them to the answers. It's very different than an adult.

00:43:56 Jim Cole

Yeah, and we will have a future episode with a child - friendly interviewer. Yeah,

00:44:01 Jeremy

So they're good; they're really good. I'm trained to do it. I'm more comfortable letting a professional who, in that capacity. Who doesn't have to investigate the case? Do it so that I can observe it, you know, and learn. But ultimately, we end up calling the Commonwealth Attorney, which is the prosecutor in the state of Virginia for the county I'm in, and they're like, "Let's get some charges." So I charge him for the first person who came forward, like a placeholder felony, and charge him with some felonies for this other person. And at that point in time, John finally comes back home.

00:44:39 Jeremy

Another day or so after saying I'm going to come turn myself in, he doesn't. We send units out and we lock him up at his home, bring him in, process him. He refuses to make any statements, which is his right. Basically, gets an attorney. We come up with a strategy to get additional information. So the FBI helps craft a press release, which media strategies are some of the best things. That some of our federal partners can do, especially people who understand the component of the crime, and we put a lot of factual information about who John is, that he's been arrested for these crimes, when they occurred. Basically, so we bookend like over a decade of activity with these two charges, and we ask people with information to come forward. So that happens. The press release goes out. My phone starts blowing up.

00:45:39 Jeremy

And we're just getting more and more information, and people are saying he's close

with this kid Peter, who's a stud athlete and plays active player on a college team. You got to talk to him. He will know more. His family will know more about John Hamilton than anyone else. So I heard the name, and at this point, it's like how do you break into that? I don't want to cold call this person who's states away. I found out through the investigation that Peter's family was so close with John that either they acquired representation or at least began a recommendation of some representation for John. So legal counsel

00:46:35 Peter

Wow, yeah, first time I've heard that.

00:46:36 Jeremy

So. Wow. We got here for it. Peter's going to unpack. We have much more to get into. Peter's going to unpack this for you, and really, maybe that's the best point for Peter to start.

00:46:53 Sonny Von Cleveland

I was going to say this is a great spot for Peter to jump in because we've built up who we're dealing with now.

00:46:59 Peter

What's crazy about that time when I called Jeremy? It's my freshman year of college at the University of Georgia, playing SEC baseball with dreams of.

00:47:08 Jim Cole

Division One baseball

00:47:09 Peter

Top of Division One baseball. We were the number one team in the country for most of that year before tanking at the end of the year. But I'm literally getting ready to go play a regional at Florida State. I'm like the week of preparing for this regional, and that's when my mom called me in that dorm room. Just rocked my world. But I met John when I was around nine years old. He was the all-star coach for my little league baseball team. And I think the confusing thing about abuse is it doesn't start with this horror story. It starts with being chosen. And he chose me. Where was that at? Fort Hunt, little league. So back in the Virginia, Alexandria, Virginia. And so.

00:47:57 Peter

He chose me. He saw some of the potential that I had in baseball, and I don't know all the reasons, but he started giving me hitting lessons for free. My mom always tried to pay him, and he was like, "No." And then he started giving me equipment, Wicks sporting goods. They got discount equipment, so new bats, new gloves, new workout equipment.

00:48:18 Jim Cole

Showering you with gifts.

00:48:19 Peter

Just showering me with gifts. I remember the first time that we hung out outside of the baseball field. He invited my mom and I to go to an Orioles baseball game down the third baseline. It's crazy. People with complex PTSD they say like dissociate, and I have these movies that play in my head of all these memories, and I can sit there as a third person and watch us sitting in those seats. Oh yeah.

00:48:45 Sonny Von Cleveland

I get the same thing where you can see you recall certain things, and they're like movies watching somebody else's life.

00:48:51 Peter

Yep. And he—I don't know how long of that grooming process before the first abuse happened, but I remember the first time it happened. It was Carl Sandburg Middle School. He cut the lawns at Carl Sandburg Middle School. That's also where I did a lot of my baseball stuff. And I was riding on a tractor. He said, "I want to teach you how to ride the big tractor," and he said, "Come sit on my lap." And I was sitting on his lap. I was wearing blue mesh shorts that he had given me. I can picture those shorts. And his hand just slowly slid over to my groin, and I pushed it away, and then it came back, and I pushed it away, and then I didn't know what else to do, and then he started touching me over my shorts, and from there it just became a daily occurrence. He abused me from age nine until almost my 14th birthday, most days, multiple times a day, sometimes.

00:49:50 Peter

Wow, you do the math. That's hundreds and hundreds.

00:49:56 Sonny Von Cleveland

Becomes almost like part of your daily life.

00:50:00 Peter

And you talk about how grooming isn't just the kid. He groomed my family. He groomed my mom. He exploited some struggles that my parents were going through in their marriage. My dad, who I want to qualify this because my dad is one of my best friends now. He is an amazing human being. He's totally changed his life at age seventy-three by going back to therapy, but at the time it was a tough time. With work, with their marriage, there was so much going on, and John saw that and he exploited it and he started grooming my mom as well. They became best friends, and we can get into that a little bit. But he took me to two World Series. He took me to spring training in Arizona and Florida.

00:50:46 Peter

We did it in the same trip. We went to Florida and then Arizona, and then we went

back out to Arizona another time. He gave me access to professional level hitting coaches. You know, I'm still in touch with one of them. I talked to him for like two hours the other day, and I was like, "I don't think you know this," but every time I came to hit with you, I had been abused on the way there every single time. And he was like, because he was really close with John, and he had no, he's like, "It has." Tore me up knowing how close I was to him, not knowing any of this was going on.

00:51:18 Sonny Von Cleveland

What was the dynamic between your father and John? Like you got to imagine if you have a husband. We're all husbands here, and my wife has a new best friend. That's a guy that's taking my kid across the country to World Series. Probably going to have a question or hey, who is this guy? Do you know what the dynamic was there?

00:51:40 Peter

It was tenuous. The issues in their marriage were that he had stuff with work and some other things going on, and then when they became best friends and he started integrating into our lives, it caused even more turmoil. Eventually, leading my dad to move cross country to Seattle the summer before my senior year. My parents are still married and together to this day, but before my most important year of high school.

00:52:13 Peter

He left and it got that bad.

00:52:19 Sonny Von Cleveland

Is this guy coming over for dinner with family?

00:52:21 Peter

This is a guy who has a seat at our dinner table. He came to Christmas. He was in our family until the day he was arrested. He came and watched me play baseball at Georgia freshman year, and all the way up until his arrest. I don't know when his last visit was that spring.

00:52:41 Jeremy

But I'll say that. One to go back to something you said about how he contributed to your parents' problems. As the detective, I engaged not only with you but with your folks, and primarily with your mother. And in talking to them, I am going to say I don't know so much that he took advantage of what they were going through, but I think he was the architect and he master manipulated.

00:53:12 Jeremy

A wedge

00:53:14 Sonny Von Cleveland

Because that was his access point.

00:53:17 Jeremy

Disgusting way to say it, but I feel like it was his masterpiece, because this is the first and only one that I've seen him involved with, where he came into a fully functioning family. Whereas before it was single father, single mother, contentious relationship, living apart. He came into something and he just pulled the levers.

00:53:47 Sonny Von Cleveland

He facilitated those issues so that the dissension existed because that gave him more access.

00:53:53 Jeremy

Totally, and so, wow. Obviously, this is your mother, your father, and it's your relationship and your story. But I just want you to know that's my belief as a professional investigator, looking from the outside in, without that emotional thing and I don't want you to think like your folks. His team, I heard secondhand through the Commonwealth attorney that the legal team he was recommended was suggested by someone in your family, because they were the best of friends. John and Peter's mom were the best of friends. He was writing letters to my mom after he got arrested. He wrote letters from jail to my mom. I think until Peter said, "Yeah, mom, it's true. This happened to me."

00:54:41 Jeremy

As soon as I got off the phone with Peter, I got a phone call from his mom, and she was devastated. She realized what happened, and that's when she stopped her support of him. It was like he was dead to her.

00:55:03 Sonny Von Cleveland

What was the relationship like when the abuse stopped at thirteen? Because he's still a part of your family at this point. What did that look like as fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen-year-old Peter, with this man? It's because your dad's now in Seattle. What's that looking like?

00:55:22 Peter

I read a quote the other day that said something along the lines of the harm of abuse isn't what was actually done to you; it's the confusion that it leaves behind and all the turmoil that it leaves behind. And that kind of speaks to this term trauma bonding. I think people often misuse that. They think it's like bonding over your trauma.

00:55:47 Sonny Von Cleveland

I use it. So I had a therapist that taught me about that because I thought, well, if you've been abused and I've been abused, we're trauma bonding. She was like, you have to stop saying that. That's not it.

00:55:58 Peter

No. Trauma bonding is when you're abused and then you're showered with gifts,

with trips, with all of these things. It gives you a dopamine hit. It's when you bond to your abuser, and so he was abusing me, giving me all these gifts, abusing me, giving me all these gifts. And so the confusion during those years, especially after it stopped, was exponential because now he's not abusing me; he's just giving me gifts to keep me quiet, essentially. He was still very much integrated into our family. He came to every single one of my high school baseball games.

00:56:34 Peter

He was driving me down to hitting lessons. He was coming out to Georgia and watching me play baseball my freshman year, both practices and games.

00:56:43 Sonny Von Cleveland

A specific moment, when you finalized this isn't happening anymore. We're done with this.

00:56:50 Peter

So we were driving ninety five south to that hitting coach that I mentioned, and I don't know what John did to piss me off, but he did something, and I screamed at him. I remember this. This is another one of those movies that plays in my head, and I was like, "If you don't shut the fuck up, I will fucking." And sorry for the cussing. This is word for word though. I will fucking tell every single person what you have done to me. And he was like, "I don't know what you are talking about." I was like, "You fucking know what I am talking about. Shut the fuck up." And he shut the fuck up. And you were thirteen. I'm pretty sure that was around when it ended.

00:57:28 Peter

I have very fuzzy memories during that time, as you can imagine. Of course, it's very natural. But yeah, that it stopped right before my fourteenth birthday, and it had to be around then. I think at that moment, he also realized this dude's gonna say something if I don't.

00:57:46 Sonny Von Cleveland

Now I have to go above and beyond to keep him quiet.

00:57:48 Peter

And so I mean, he was there at holidays. He was there at dinner. He was there at every game. He was best friends with my mom. They formed a really close relationship. And that's the confusion, and that's what makes it really hard to come.

00:58:05 Sonny Von Cleveland

And he even showed up when you were in college. In college, he would come to the games. Were there moments that you guys were alone? And college going forward, like as you became an adult and you're eighteen, nineteen, how were those interactions?

00:58:18 Peter

Was it? I remember. So I had only told one person about the abuse prior to telling my mom when she called, and then Jeremy was the third person. It was my high school girlfriend who I am still in touch with. I told her I am writing a book, and she was like, "I want a copy." I told her over AIM chat, little squeaky door opens, and I swore her to secrecy. Sure, but it was during my senior year of high school that I did that, and that was when I was starting to feel this.

00:58:52 Peter

Coming out

00:58:52 Sonny Von Cleveland

That just that just it it just sparks a thought in me of how many kids are walking around carrying the weight of their friends' abuse.

00:59:00 Jim Cole

A lot. Oh yeah, for sure,

00:59:01 Sonny Von Cleveland

A lot. And like, God, to think of that, right? Like

00:59:06 Peter

And I didn't even know what I handed her. I had no idea the weight of what I did.

00:59:11 Sonny Von Cleveland

The victim is not at fault for that. The victim has to say that, but inadvertently, the trauma that another child now carries and sworn to secrecy. God, that's traumatic for you as well and for her.

00:59:26 Peter

Man. But I remember that freshman year of college. Again, one of these movies that plays in my head of these stories. It was after a game, family was allowed into the gate to greet us as we came out of the locker room, and he was standing there with my mom. I think it was just them two, and he came to give me a hug, and I like physically like recoiled being around him. I like. At that point, was having a really hard time just being around him, especially when he was with my mom, because that relationship, and to this day as an adult, it has caused a lot of turmoil in our family life. I told my dad this story for the first time in November. Wow. So this, and they haven't even heard all of this story. I want to just take.

01:00:14 Sonny Von Cleveland

This minute to just commend you for that bravery, bro. I appreciate that. It's gonna make me cry. And I'm honored, and this is why I'm in this work for you to share that in this space. It means something to me. I just need you to know. I appreciate that. What was the question? It's profound because so many men don't.

01:00:48 Sonny Von Cleveland

It needs to be known that it's right? And so we're talking about the moment you realize that your mom, that relationship was more than just friendship.

01:00:58 Peter

I mean he was a master manipulator. He was top of his class when it came to manipulation.

01:01:02 Sonny Von Cleveland

So then that would kind of lead us up to the moment where you get a call from your mom.

01:01:07 Peter

And all it took was her asking me. There was no pushback. She said, "Did this happen to you?" Without hesitation, I said, "Yeah." That's all I was waiting for. I was just waiting for one person to ask me. But I wasn't given the tools as a kid. How do you talk about?

01:01:21 Sonny Von Cleveland

One hundred percent. It was. But the moment the opportunity came to open up about it, I was like, "Yes, floodgates open." One hundred percent. Same thing with me. Like, the moment I was given the space to talk about it, there it is. Because we don't know how to approach it as a child and as an abuse victim. We don't know how to approach that conversation. How do you sit your mom down and be like, "Mom, I got something to talk to you about." We don't know that. We don't know how to do that. I'm making sure my kids know how to do that. When she called you because you and her had talked.

01:01:54 Jeremy

At that time, she saw the press release.

01:01:57 Sonny Von Cleveland

And then she called you.

01:01:59 Peter

Asked you, "Did this happen?" I said yes. And she asked me what I wanted to do about it. How could she help? I said, just give me Detective Hinson's number, and I'll take care of it. That's all I said. That was the end of the conversation. I had a good cry, and I called Jeremy. That was the first time we talked on the phone. I think it's also important for the viewers. I haven't seen this dude for 16 years since my trial.

01:02:26 Jim Cole

This is the first time. You saw each other for the first time in 16 years at my house last night.

01:02:32 Sonny Von Cleveland

And fun fact, we have not let them have the conversation. We have been adamant about not letting them talk.

01:02:38 Peter

And I didn't I didn't tell you this, but, Sonny knows I started crying, or I think he knows I started crying on the ride over. We both is going to be very emotional for me because this dude caught him like, duh, and has never once failed to respond to a text message, no matter what time. Never failed to respond to a phone call, and he never knew it was coming. Sometimes it's this, I'm my life is falling apart. Text message, and sometimes it's this beautiful life update. Look at my beautiful kids. Hey, I went rafting. Yeah.

01:03:10 Sonny Von Cleveland

Tell us, take us, walk us through this phone call.

01:03:12 Peter

I don't remember it

01:03:14 Jeremy

But you do. I it it was intense because even though I knew we had the right guy, I knew Hamilton was the boogeyman. I knew he was evil. I still worried about getting the case successfully through without like an anchor, right? An anchor point and. This kid who came up through little league, high school, active athlete at college, who has the closest relationship with this guy of anyone who knows John, just called and said, "Yeah, me too. Me too." For years, and at that point, I was like, "We got him so bad."

01:04:09 Jeremy

Because he can't get out from this, like this kid could prop it up on his own because he's a rock. People look up to you. People wanted to be you. Yeah, you know, and I know that, like you talk about that, what hearing Peter's story has that physical reaction to you. I can tell you the people that this is going to resound with more than us at the table is the people who haven't gotten where you are yet, who are still holding that weight. When they hear a real person, I can identify with this guy, my coach too, yeah, my whatever too. That's who your story is going to hit.

01:05:02 Sonny Von Cleveland

That's why I'm here.

01:05:03 Jim Cole

Yeah, I mean, a hundred percent. The reason that we're doing this podcast is that that is because, and I don't think people realize the effect, like like the tremendous effect, that someone like you coming forward and being able to talk about it, as hard as it is, gives other people the courage and the ability and the permission. Permission is an interesting word, right? Because it it isn't really.

01:05:33 Jim Cole

Nobody has to give you permission, but I feel like, and again, I'm not a survivor, but talking to many survivors, and and I have many relationships like you and like the two of you have with survivors from my cases. I and you tell me if I'm wrong, the two of you. But you're almost seeking the permission,

01:05:57 Sonny Von Cleveland

And that's when I. So when I use the word permission, yeah, but we need it. Right, we don't have to have it, but we need it. He couldn't talk about it until someone asked him. I couldn't talk about it until someone asked. One question. One question. Is that question? I label it as permission. You gave me permission to speak what I've been wanting to speak, but I didn't know how. Yeah, and so when I use the word permission, I'm not saying authority. Right. I'm saying you've given me the permission to do it.

01:06:23 Peter

You've cracked the. You've cracked the door open. Yeah. Now I can walk through it. Right. The door had been locked shut. Shame and guilt and embarrassment — it had been locked shut.

01:06:32 Jim Cole

And I love the fact that you just use those words because something that that when I teach about this topic and we teach about grooming and we teach about these things, we talk to parents, is what offenders do is they weaponize fear, shame, and guilt. Yes, right. They weaponize those things, and it's easy to do. Like like like we live in a society where number one, sex is. It kind of shameful and sex. You don't talk about it, and so then and then and and even normal sexual relationships are not something that people talk about publicly, right? And so when you take a a sexual like incident or or these occurrences where it's abusive and exploitative, it makes it so much harder.

01:07:14 Jeremy

Yeah.

01:07:14 Jim Cole

And then the other thing is, this is rarefied air because we've got two male survivors, and and and in my experience. The hardest dynamic to for someone to talk about publicly are are males who have been offended against.

01:07:37 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah. Well, and then if you put yourself in the position of Peter, yeah, who is this starting rock star baseball player athlete to talk about that? The the the shame is. Is ingratiated into your your mindset because of the abuse, and the offender knew that. Yeah, the offender knows this kid's not going to say anything because you are going to embarrass yourself in front of the entire baseball world.

01:08:03 Peter

I mean, y'all, that when when it all came out, like I said, I was going to Florida State. We were on the bus to game one against the number. We were number two seed, number three seed. We were playing. And my phone is blowing up. Yeah. Also, because people know my relationship with John, and one of those people was that hitting coach that I would drive 95 south to go see. And he was like, "There's no way this happened." And he kept going. And I'm sitting there on the bus on my way to this game that is very important, sobbing. Nobody in that bus knows what's going on. Not a. Actually, I take it back.

01:08:38 Peter

My mom and dad asked for permission to tell our head coach. That's the only person on the bus who has any idea what's going on. I'm sitting there sobbing before a game, trying to get myself ready. I'm a starting right fielder for that game, and he's like, "There's no way." And I was like, "Dude, it fucking happened to me. It absolutely is true." And then again,

01:08:56 Sonny Von Cleveland

We see that external opinion of other people that are saying, "No, dude, come on." Well,

01:09:03 Jim Cole

That was self-preservation for him too, right? Because, He and I'm not making excuses for him, but but the framing of that is to protect himself. Right.

01:09:14 Sonny Von Cleveland

I was. There's no way I was friends with someone who did that.

01:09:16 Peter

What it should then was that did this happen to you?

01:09:18 Sonny Von Cleveland

Because he knew my relationship with John. But also, how many kids has that guy put in touch with John Hamilton? Yes. And so that guilt and shame then comes in. Like I recommended kids to that guy.

01:09:31 Peter

Well, he ran he ran hitting camps for John. He ran camps with. Hundreds of kids.

01:09:36 Sonny Von Cleveland

So now you're starting to get a glimpse into the secondary and tertiary effects of trauma. It's never just an offender and a victim. There's this splash effect, the area effect. I want to get back to that phone call. Let's get into that.

01:09:59 Jeremy

You had laid it out. I think it's interesting to me to. That this was such a big thing of

this phone call, and that I think you repeatedly asked me, like, I don't even remember what I said, you know. And we were on the phone for a while, were we? Yeah, for a while.

01:10:19 Peter

Zero recollection. I remember the phone. I was on this little gumstick flip phone,

01:10:23 Jeremy

But that's all I remember. We were talking for a while, and I don't even think you realized the hand grenade you just dropped into your lap by letting this go. And I was so worried about him.

01:10:35 Sonny Von Cleveland

Was that like the first time you'd actually went in depth with your abuse with someone?

01:10:39 Peter

Yeah, I mean, I had told that high school girlfriend on AIM, and it was gotta be like three sentences.

01:10:44 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah, you gotta imagine that this is a very surface conversation. This is an in depth one. So this is the first time you're like really verbalizing the abuse, and you're receiving that.

01:10:53 Jeremy

So I, I begged you to talk to your coach because I was like. This guy's gonna be a mess, and he's gonna need some trusted person. And two states away, heading to a couple more states away, on a bus with a whole bunch of other like alpha athletes. God, you know what I mean. I was so worried about his mental health and his yeah emotional state. What it was gonna do to him. So, yeah.

01:11:24 Jim Cole

So, quick question with that. Because again, two thousand nine is a totally different era than now, right? And I think, I think we're better aware of some of those psychological implications and some of the needs that there, and we have better resources to deal with that. But I'm, I'm guessing, was there ever like the ability to get him in touch with with someone on the survivor advocacy side,

01:11:50 Jeremy

Like? So we have a victim advocates group with the police department in Fairfax, and. And a lot of other agencies in in Virginia do now. Some are in the Commonwealth Attorney, the prosecutor's office, and the agency I'm at now. We have our own as well as there's one.

01:12:07 Jim Cole

Did you have that in 2009? We did,

01:12:09 Jeremy

And it was it was robust, but it was in its infancy.

01:12:13 Peter

But actually, what was her name? It was a gal. I just I never recalled that until just now.

01:12:19 Jeremy

I believe it was. Funny how mine works like that. I believe it was Serae,

01:12:22 Peter

But yeah, it was.

01:12:23 Jeremy

Yeah. Ultimately, we charged five people. Right, and I know that doesn't sound like a lot considering what he did,

01:12:30 Jim Cole

But when you say charge five people, you know, you mean you charge him, charge him for crimes five people,

01:12:35 Sonny Von Cleveland

Okay?

01:12:36 Jim Cole

Multiple crimes. Wow, where did the other people come from?

01:12:38 Sonny Von Cleveland

So he initially

01:12:40 Jeremy

Was charged with five charges. So we're for crimes against five people, multiple charges. We had support from them, but again, that's all voluntary. They're trying to get people in line, and oftentimes life gets in the way, as well as our own. I got this type of a thought process.

01:13:05 Jim Cole

I know, and again, this is all because when I started working these crimes, it was two thousand three, and victim advocacy wasn't. I think it was a thing, but it wasn't well established. There wasn't a lot at all. And so, over time, moving into as we're approaching victims of sexual abuse, later we would always make the approach with a physically present advocate, so that you're not just left to your own devices with that drop in. And this is a difficult decision because he was in another state, and were federal. We could have arranged for someone. But you were on a bus too.

01:13:51 Peter

I got all of my advocate emailed me a few times. I remember, but that was pretty much the extent of it. I was hyper focused on baseball. That's honestly what kept me on the rails. Like you talk about some of these other survivors and how their lives went sideways. One, I had a great sports.

01:14:08 Sonny Von Cleveland

Let's get into that because as you get off the phone with him, life still happens. You have to then continue the bus ride to go to this.

01:14:17 Peter

I mean, to this day, not a single one of my teammates knew what was going on. I'm supposed to meet up with one of my college roommates, my sophomore year college roommate. He was in my apartment when the case was going on, when the trial was going on, when he jumped bail and went across to Europe. We haven't got to that. We haven't got to that. Yeah, just seating it. I'm just seating it. So,

01:14:37 Sonny Von Cleveland

So you go to the game.

01:14:40 Jim Cole

Yeah,

01:14:40 Sonny Von Cleveland

How did you?

01:14:41 Jim Cole

Yeah,

01:14:42 Sonny Von Cleveland

Would love to know how you coped in that.

01:14:44 Jim Cole

How did you cope? You're out there in right field. You don't remember the game.

01:14:49 Peter

Yeah, and actually, I do remember. And I don't. I think it was at this. No, it was a hundred percent. And this makes so much more sense now that I'm thinking this out loud. And this is how writing the book happens. Is like I start having these memories just come flooding back.

01:15:04 Sonny Von Cleveland

It'll do that. Yeah,

01:15:05 Peter

We're in the third base dugout, and I had trouble with coaches, as you can imagine, my whole career. And it was no different. Why, why, Peter? And I didn't figure that

out until like a few months ago. Why I had these problems with coaches? I am like, oh, that makes a lot more sense now that I think about it that way. I went off on one of my coaches. I think I got, I might have even got. I don't know if I got pulled out of the game. I almost got pulled out of the game because I went at one of my coaches, cussing him out in his face. I don't know what he said to set me. I probably wasn't even that much. Wouldn't have taken that much at that time, clearly. But I clearly was not.

01:15:43 Peter

In a good state of mind, but people with complex PTSD are expert compartmentalizers, and I still am. It actually is a great tool sometimes, but at the time, it was breaking me.

01:15:56 Sonny Von Cleveland

For sure. So after this, you arrest him. We do. That phone call is all you needed to get a warrant.

01:16:06 Jeremy

Yeah. We we had something the Commonwealth Attorney wanted, like. An opposing pillar in the community, so to speak. You know what I mean? Someone who could really cut away at the underminings and remove the support. You know, because we knew when word got out that how bad this was, he was he was going to lose all community, all of his support. It even brought members of his own family in to talk, for fear of their own children.

01:16:38 Sonny Von Cleveland

Which at this point we don't even know that he had other family. This seems to be a solo operator.

01:16:44 Jeremy

But it brings in siblings, nieces, nephews. Oh my, who believed it once things started to come out, even their support. I think his only staunch supporter, in the end, was his mother.

01:17:00 Sonny Von Cleveland

And so that's that's something that we see a lot of is family support for the abuser. Yeah. Not believing it, even when you go through a trial. Yeah, I went through that same thing when you talked about, you know, having to be there with family. I still had to go to my grandmother's house. Yeah, they put me on the phone with my uncle while he's in prison, who's my primary abuser, and I have to talk to this man on holidays. So that dynamic exists because these families will just outright don't believe you, and I don't understand that.

01:17:36 Sonny Von Cleveland

It just annoys me. I'm getting off track. Talk about the arrest. How does that play out?

01:17:44 Jeremy

Unfortunately, I didn't get to be there for it.

01:17:46 Jim Cole

And this is actually the second time that he's arrested on this case because you'd arrested him initially after you found the exchange student.

01:17:56 Jeremy

Well, the exchange student, and we lodge other charges, so he's he's still in jail when we lodge the charges. Yes,

01:18:03 Jim Cole

Now so he's not re - arrested. He got held. You just launched more charges.

01:18:07 Jeremy

Not then. Not then. He's held, and at that point in time, he is lobbying Peter's mother, neighbors, other people in the community for support. Yeah, like just sending out blanket thanks to his defense team. I think he actually writes Peter's mom's letters because she was giving me letters that he would send to her. And it was basically begging for her support, you know. Wow! But not an owning of any, not admitting to anything.

01:18:41 Jim Cole

Was he still claiming his innocence?

01:18:42 Jeremy

Yes, yeah. He's like, I didn't do this, right? Yeah. And on the way over here, I pulled an email that I had, I had gotten, and I read through it, and it's just the things you forget about a case like this. It's, it's a. I could talk all day long about this case, right? Um, one of the neighbors. Was so inflamed by this request for support that she fired off the snarkiest, most awesome responses to his questions. You know, he was basically looking for character people to prop up against any kids that had come forward. I want to say kids, like they're all adults at this point in time. And you know, she was like, he asked one time, like, about what a good person he was, and.

01:19:29 Jeremy

Time they spent together, and her responses go from, well, the type of person we thought you were, and these conversations would have never happened had we known who was really living beside us. And it was just like she cooked him, you know what I mean? She cooked him up, and she sent me the email. Nice. They didn't call her. They really didn't call anyone. But so we're working working on the case. We're following up with additional interviews. I get another phone call from another person who's come forward, and now this this person probably still struggles, or at least last I spoke to them was struggling more than than any of the other known known people who came forward, the survivors. I was blown away to hear his story, and that's where the two girls come in.

01:20:28 Jeremy

This, this kid at the time, his his dad had a professional job in Washington D.C. that he couldn't walk away from. This kid's mom got sick and passed. So we had a dad trying to take care of two kids, a boy and a girl, who had to go to work. Was exploring options like nannies. I don't know how it happened because the dad was so. Like eaten up with what he subjected his children to, that I could never really talk to him to find out how Hamilton got insinuated into their life. But one thing I did love to tweet John Hamilton about: he became the nanny, so I would refer to him as the Manny, and that would make him so mad when I would call him the Manny. I love that he got hired into this man's home and in charge of basically like a ten-year-old boy.

01:21:25 Jeremy

And like an eight or nine year old girl, and he was there for a couple of years, and he instantly began taking steps. He had full unfettered access. Like some of his worst crimes in that house, and he was very young. I think John was probably eighteen or nineteen at the time that this was happening. John Hamilton, yes.

01:21:48 Jim Cole

Holy sh! Really? So this is early,

01:21:51 Jeremy

Early.

01:21:52 Jim Cole

So that's a great question. How old in in the in the five years or four years ish that the abuse was going on with you? How old was he then? Yeah, thirty two. Oh,

01:22:02 Jeremy

He was he was in his lower thirties. Yeah, he he was a professional.

01:22:06 Jim Cole

Yeah, by that point, I mean it's kind of put like twenty years of abuse, but but like the reality is, this he's probably been doing this since he was a teenager.

01:22:16 Jeremy

Yeah, and and and since you say that, I'll go ahead and. Let this let this go. When we did sit down, when John did come to the his defense team and say, "Hey, I'll plead guilty to these crimes," I have to get out on bond, though. If I'm going to do it, I have to get out on bond. And we countered, right? We countered with the agreement: you have to come in. The Commonwealth Attorney at the time, Ian Rodway, he was awesome, like one of the the deputies.

01:22:49 Jeremy

He was like, " Let's make him queen for a day. You can tell us about everything, but you have to tell us about everything. Has to be true, and we're going to check it with

a poly. We'll give you bond because then John has served the case against him through his own words, which there's no stronger evidence.

01:23:06 Speaker 5

Right?

01:23:07 Jeremy

Right. So, in one sense, legally brilliant. What we were never considering is that this was all John's endgame: get free. Yeah. Bounce. Well, why else does he want bond? Yeah. What?

01:23:23 Sonny Von Cleveland

What other?

01:23:25 Jeremy

So, but but one of the things, and to get back because I know I'm drifting. To get back to what he said, he said that he began his earliest known crime against a kid. He believed he was 13 to 14. Wow. And he was volunteer swim coaching at a local pool, and the kid was 10 years old, and it started with touching. You know, you're in the water teaching kids to swim. It's easy to have the feels, and then it progresses to exposure, and then some. I identified that kid,

01:23:57 Speaker 5

And they lived.

01:23:58 Jeremy

A few states away, and we tried to have FBI agents meet with them with Caffies, their child forensic interviewers.

01:24:12 Jeremy

That person refused to cooperate, and so I think it's even worse than what that what that was. But that was that was teenage manchild John starting his thing, and doing.

01:24:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

That most of his life. And so he until we stopped him.

01:24:31 Jeremy

So so he he gets the bond,

01:24:33 Sonny Von Cleveland

He gets the confession,

01:24:35 Jeremy

He gets the bond, and then we have a plea date set. We're good to go. I go to the grand jury where I get indictments. It's just me and the grand jury there. I give them all the facts of the case. They say, "Yep, yep, these are verified crimes." They issue

the indictments. We're set for the plea, and we go there. Rose, his mom, she's on the front row. She's talking to his defense team. The judge calls the case. He's not there. Defense team goes, "Oh, he'll be here in a minute." I don't. I don't know what's going on.

01:25:09 Jeremy

He should be here. We've talked about this. We get to the end of the docket, and the judge is like, "Counselor, call your case, and we need your guy." And they call the case. He's not there. And I go talk to the mom, and she's like, "We went to Europe, and I don't think he's coming." I'm like, "Wow, what?" She's like, "Wow, yeah, we went to Europe, and." And he told me he was going to spend a couple more weeks there, and then two weeks later, I got a call from an unknown number, and he said, "I'm never coming home again."

01:25:44 Jim Cole

" So he didn't have to surrender his passport, which yeah,

01:25:48 Jeremy

Yeah, wow,

01:25:49 Jim Cole

No bit of hindsight there.

01:25:51 Jeremy

Well, you know, this goes into certain things like that's not the end all be all. Like this guy, I think he's one of the the people that would probably take steps, and I don't want to like. Tell someone how to plot their escape from the country, but you know there's ways that that could have been like this was going to happen. He would have planned it, you know, in a way. And he's gone, and no one knows where he is. And we start working on the case with the U. S. Marshals. Where are we?

01:26:22 Sonny Von Cleveland

Are you being filled in on this? As I knew,

01:26:25 Jeremy

Yeah,

01:26:26 Peter

I knew he had jumped bail or a bond,

01:26:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

But did they tell you that he got bond? Was there any communication happening? We went down. We arrested him. He's gonna plead guilty, but we're gonna give him a bond. I don't think I knew.

01:26:38 Jeremy

I definitely told families. I don't know if I specifically told you or not, but it was all

with the sense of, hey, we're we're not going to have a trial. You know what I mean? Most people were relieved at that. Once, yeah. Once you start the legal machine, it sounds great till you realize what's going to be asked of you, and. Going through a trial as a law enforcement professional can be rough, emotionally, mentally, physically, everything. When it's you're the survivor, the person that has to give the words in front of the person you're accusing and the jury, people start to freak and they start to worry. And these are open courtrooms because it's circuit court; it's your final level court. Anyone can come in.

01:27:28 Jeremy

And people start to really feel the stress, and and so I was met with a lot of relief. He's going to plead. That's great. We never in a million years considered he's going to go to Europe and try to find a non-extraditable country, which there really aren't a few. There aren't a lot, thankfully. But we knew this was our chance to make the case and make it stick. And maybe get more, and the agreement was: if you abide by this, we'll only charge you for what we've charged you. If you don't abide by it, you open yourself up to every other thing, right? So the case gets potentially better, and you know nothing we can change about it now. But he flees. People come forward, and they provide information. Family members come forward.

01:28:25 Jeremy

And provide investigative leads to us. We find out that he is spending time in a foreign country with a previous exchange student's family. Who, again, I suspect he committed crimes against that person. They would not cooperate, and they were actually back in the U.S. on a second program. And he was with this person's mom, who was. Clearly, that he couldn't be accused of these crimes, I must support him. He bounced around at places. He was in numerous countries. When he finally got caught, a lot of what he the reason he got caught and tracked was a family member provided information on an electronic device that the marshals and Interpol were able to exploit, and they found him. and Polish border guards snatched him off a bus.

01:29:22 Jeremy

Along with some U.S. legal people, and he was on his way to Czechoslovakia, and once he got to Czechoslovakia, his next plan was to go to Russia, where we would have never gotten him back. Yeah, he fluent Danish, German, Czech, and he was almost conversational in Russian by the time we called. What? Highly intelligent man,

01:29:49 Peter

Highly smart man. I had no no clue of he. I mean, he was in my life for fifteen years. I had no idea he spoke another language.

01:29:58 Jeremy

He learned that over there. Oh, smart!

01:30:01 Peter

In that little bit of time. Oh, it was. He was gone a while. How long?

01:30:04 Jeremy

This show was on America's Most Wanted three times. How long was that? I didn't know. How long was he gone? It was over a year. Really? Yeah.

01:30:12 Peter

So he wasn't caught until my junior year.

01:30:15 Jeremy

Yeah, he was caught late. Like what? That makes so much.

01:30:18 Peter

When we got the court, it was almost immediately after that. Junior year was my worst year of playing, and I couldn't figure it out. Writing this book, I thought it was my sophomore year. I was like, I had a pretty good year my sophomore year. I must have. I was all right, and no, yeah, is that's crazy.

01:30:35 Jeremy

You know, one thing I forgot to, there was a brief moment that he had made bond after he was initially charged for everything, but he he had a half hearted like suicide attempt. We we used that to take to revoke his bond, and then and then ultimately when the bond got revoked again, that's what brought him back to the table for this final. Sure, gotcha.

01:30:57 Sonny Von Cleveland

So he's gone for yeah. So he's gone for nearly a year.

01:31:00 Jeremy

Oh, Sonny, but doesn't let me just tell you, like, child abusers don't have to be big imposing people. No, but John Hamilton is probably about six five. He was probably when we arrested him. He said he was 285. He was like three bills.

01:31:18 Peter

He got over 300. I remember.

01:31:19 Jeremy

Yeah, he was over 300. This is a large, large man. And I'll never forget when we get him, and the marshals call me, and they're like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "I don't know." He's like, "You want to go to Poland?" I'm like, "Well, before he goes, we got John." I'm like, "Let's go." I'm like, "When are we going?" He's like, "We're going in like three days." I'm like, all right. Well, I don't know if I can do that. He goes, he goes. If we don't have him within a week, the Polish authorities are gonna let him go. Yep. He's causing so many problems at the Polish prison. He's taught everyone how how to make complaints to like the Hague and everything about

treatment in prison. Oh yeah. And they're like, you guys got to come get this guy because we're getting rid of him. Yeah. And they sent me a video, and it was God. I don't even know if I have it now, but Polish prison is an ugly place.

01:32:14 Jeremy

Looked like he was in something off a video game. Prison, the cell he was in, and he's all like hunched over in there. But we go, and the Polish guards bring him to the airport. I land in Poland. We go the hotel, and they're like, "You guys gotta be back at the airport at six a.m." I was in Poland for less than eight hours. Yeah, less than eight hours. Go the airport, and I am walking the airport with these two marshals. And I hear somebody from across the the concourse, Jeremy, Jeremy. And I look, and I'm like, I'm like, I don't know who that guy is, but clearly he knows my name. He lost about one hundred and thirty some pounds. Wow. He was thin like you. They've been starving him. Ah, he's just gotten himself in shape. He completely changed his appearance. He could have walked past me had he not verbalized anything, and I would have been like, "Where's John?" Wow.

01:33:13 Jeremy

He complete. I told Jim, I'll send the pictures to you guys. What he looked like when we arrested him, and what he looked like when we got him from Poland, and you'll be like, wow, oh my god, like a skeleton, amazing, amazing, crazy, crazy. But we get him back. He enters his plea. We talked about charging him additional things, and ultimately, we were like, if we charge him with additional things, we're going to have to put on a full blown trial. Because that's what his legal team was saying. We're going to fight everything if you guys bring more, or we'll plead him like we agreed. So even though we had the leverage for additional charges, it was like a couple of the guys I didn't know if we could get them through it, and our advocates were concerned we could not get them through it. So ultimately, Khan was like, "Let's take these five placeholder."

01:34:11 Jeremy

Survivors that bracket a time of over twenty years of abuse, ranging from ten year olds to fourteen year olds or sixteen year olds at the time.

01:34:21 Sonny Von Cleveland

It's enough to cook him.

01:34:22 Jeremy

And we will we will let the judge sentence him, because we were confident that the judge was going to really hold him accountable. They did, yeah. And and it was okay. I mean, I can talk a little bit about some things that happened at the. At the at the plea, but it was pretty interesting from a detective sense to see the survivors see each other in the courtroom for like the first time. Because like I don't talk to Peter about about this one, and I don't talk to Peter.

01:34:56 Sonny Von Cleveland

About these survivors for the first time to come in,

01:34:58 Jeremy

Right? Because that's not my place. That's not my story. I investigated this, but that's Peter's to tell. That's that other person to tell. You know, that's their thing. And so to see them see each other, to see them hear the victim impact statements that they elected, and Peter spoke, and well,

01:35:22 Sonny Von Cleveland

So you were in there too.

01:35:23 Jeremy

Peter's mom spoke, and a couple of the other guys spoke, and one of them had to be removed to the courtroom because they let him have it in a level that you know the court was like, okay, that was a little much, sure, but to have them get to hear. What happened to other people from that person's mouth? I mean,

01:35:45 Sonny Von Cleveland

I can't speak to what you're going. No, but I'd love to know what that what that moment was like for you.

01:35:49 Peter

I remember it. I remember sitting next to the judge in that box, and I looked at him the whole time I read that statement. Yeah,

01:35:57 Sonny Von Cleveland

You were doing this, weren't you? Yeah, right to the judge.

01:36:00 Peter

No, I was looking at John. You were looking at John. I couldn't. I was staring right at John the whole time I read that, looking right through his soul. But kind of backing up that girlfriend that I told in high school. So at this point, she's you know got a boyfriend. She's married to that guy now, has kids and a family. But and I hadn't really talked to her. She came with me to the trial to support me. Oh wow! My mom came with me, but I made my mom agree that when I went up there, that she wouldn't be in the courtroom. I made her leave for my testimony because it was pretty graphic or my statement. And again, there I am, like protecting the people that were.

01:36:36 Peter

Protecting me, yeah, yeah, and I — I mean, I — it's a blur. It's one of again. Sometimes I see it in first person. Some some of these memories. That's one where I have the the camera is behind me and it's fuzzy, and I'm walking in, and I remember walking, you know, across the the parking lot, and and I sitting in one of the the aisles, but I don't remember a whole lot from from that day.

01:37:01 Jeremy

So, John and his legal team decided they would take. A mitigation tactic for John's sentencing. They knew because he pled guilty that he was going to have to deal with the the sentencing. I don't know whose idea it was, but I I suspect it was John's because, like anything, he tries to be in control. But John had his defense team argue on his behalf that he was also a survivor and that he was also a person who went through child sexual abuse, which may or may not be true.

01:37:36 Jeremy

I gave John the chance to talk to me about that. He chose not to provide any details. I could do anything about. So, you know, that's on him. I was going to do my part, but he wouldn't do it, which led me to believe it was more excuses, more game and shit from John. But John had his defense team argue that the reason this happened, that he was responsible, but he did this because he was victimized and he was a closeted homosexual, which. Infuriated me because you don't have to be homosexual to abuse children, no matter what the sex is. And I thought it was the most reprehensible thing to say. And it was so proud of the judge who had that same visceral reaction and was just dressed him down and hit him for near for like nearly the max on everything. And the only breaks he gave him.

01:38:34 Jeremy

Where he held fifteen years off in case John ever survived, that he'd be able to have fifteen years over his head. Where if he ever messed up, and I just, you know, that's one of those things. I think that whole sexuality, sexual preference, are things that abusers use to twist up little kids, especially when they're boys, to concern them about their to where. It will give them pause, right, before they reveal themselves as that, or fear of what their peer groups may or may not say to them.

01:39:11 Peter

I remember, there was a time John and I were paintballing. I don't know how old I was, but he told me he was like, I think I'm gay, and it was like all this manipulation into what he was doing to me. It might have been after it had stopped, actually, but he told me that.

01:39:28 Sonny Von Cleveland

So, what what did it do for you when? The sentence came down. Did did it do anything for you? I mean, was there a moment where you were like, " Good," or was it just like?

01:39:39 Peter

I mean, each charge that was read, I was just like, " Yes." I remember just like this weight falling off, like they're giving it to him.

01:39:47 Jim Cole

Yeah, we haven't just like what was the ultimate sentence?

01:39:51 Jeremy

Yeah, what did he get? Yeah, he got fifty - seven years, maybe fifty - five, with fifteen over his head.

01:39:56 Jim Cole

And how old was he at that time?

01:39:58 Jeremy

Um. Close to forty. Yeah, so this should be a life sentence for him.

01:40:03 Jim Cole

Yeah,

01:40:03 Sonny Von Cleveland

So unless you're somehow.

01:40:05 Jeremy

Yeah, this this should be a life sentence for him. And there's more with him that doesn't end my John Hamilton involvement. Yeah, but you know it happens well well past the sentencing date. But yeah, he's he's going to be there forever.

01:40:22 Peter

But we had also talked about doing a federal. We talked about that last night because. My abuse happened across state lines many, many times. The World Series, you know, all these trips he would take me on, and so there was also that. If he was, I was going to say push for that. If he didn't get enough time, I was like, we're going to get him some more.

01:40:39 Sonny Von Cleveland

He's effectively in there for the rest of his life.

01:40:41 Jeremy

So, and so the the AUSA at the time, Mike Rich, who was like a legend, and the Eastern District of Virginia, senior prosecutor. He's passed on now, but he was the prosecutor I was talking to, and. His fear about levying federal charges was that it would either upset the applecart and interfere with the plea, and make him go to just guns, guns blazing. We're fighting everything, and and the concerning thing about when you're dealing with a state prosecution and a federal prosecution, like the cases can't mingle in any way. Like the state case can't backstop the federal case, or vice versa.

01:41:26 Jeremy

And you get into very tricky legal things and technicalities that could, you know, void a verdict, right? Completely. So, so as soon as we had those verdicts and he was set for sentencing, like the feds are like, we can't jeopardize that. Yeah, just we can't force him to try to lodge an appeal on some basis, right or wrong, and

jeopardize this. We have to preserve that, and so that's ultimately Peter why we we did not do. The federal charges when he went to Arizona, where he took teams to Ohio, where yeah, you know, like so.

01:42:02 Sonny Von Cleveland

Then we get to the the culmination, and you have to start picking up the pieces of your life and moving forward, which ultimately leads to your book. Yeah, and what what was life like from that moment to the Peter that we now know, who's about to release this book.

01:42:22 Peter

That's a loaded question, Sonny.

01:42:23 Sonny Von Cleveland

I think it's important for for people to hear totally the the secondary and tertiary yeah ramifications of being a survivor because not everybody can pick themselves up. Yeah, not everybody can go through and and have what seems to be. I think what survivors are trying to find is normalcy. Yeah, like what does a normal life feel like? Yeah, because we'll never know.

01:42:47 Peter

Yeah, but I do think something we we we kind of. Breezed over was when he was out on bond, the America's Most Wanted episode in the filming of that. I have an excerpt from the book that I think really well describes it. I would like to read it if that's okay. Yeah, of course. Okay. So this is chapter two. It's called Backlit. There is a man pointing a camera at me, and his only job right now is to make sure you can't tell it's me. We're in a suite at the Game Day Suites in Athens, the kind of place boosters rent fall Saturdays, leather couches, a wet bar.

01:43:19 Peter

A wall of windows over a city. This afternoon, has that has no idea any of this is happening. The producers have killed the light, the overhead lights, and set a single one behind me, so that when the camera finds my chair, I'm not I'm not a face. I'm an outline, a shape with a voice. They run the voice through some something to drop the pitch, sand off anything in it that might belong to a specific person. By the time it airs, I'll be a black silhouette speaking in a stranger's register, and that is the entire point. That's what we. All of us are in this room to build a version of me that nobody can recognize. It's a strange thing to be good at hiding when the rest of your life is spent being very seen. Because the rest of this spring, I'm extremely findable. I'm a starting right fielder for the University of Georgia, an SEC program on television most weekends. My name in box scores, a kid people in the state can pick out of a lineup. In a few weeks, there'll be a draft, and my name will be in that too. I.

01:44:15 Peter

I have spent my whole life making myself easy to see, bigger, faster, more measurable, the surface buffed to a shine, and there I am in a rented suite, asking a man to erase me frame by frame, so I can say out loud to a camera, to the country, the one thing I have never said out loud to anyone. Please help us find them. They want B-roll, so we go to the cages. They film me from behind, just back. Just the back of a kid in a batting cage, the swing, the turn of the hips—nothing that says Georgia, no logo, no number. The wardrobe checked twice for every anything that might give it away. I hit off a tee for a camera that is being careful to not know who I am. I am even now, even here, performing. I'm good at it. I've always been good at it. It's the thing I am about to spend the next decade and a half learning. I was too good at. This man I'm asking the country to find is named John Hamilton.

01:45:07 Peter

Until a few weeks before this, he had a standing place at our table. He had been he had been my coach, then my family's friend, then a fixture. Birthdays, holidays, the seat that was always saved. There is no clean word for what he also was the whole time. That is the reason I'm sitting in this dark suite at all. But I'm getting ahead of it. The silhouette is the end of the story, or close to it. To understand how a college baseball player ends up backlit on national television, asking a stranger to erase him from his own life on camera, I have to take you back to the first person I told. She was a junior, I was a senior, and it happened over a chat window in my dad's office, in the computer, on the computer on the left.

01:45:49 Jim Cole

Wow! Wow! Wow!

01:45:53 Sonny Von Cleveland

Powerful. It's going to be such a powerful book,

01:45:56 Peter

But it is crazy. I mean, literally that. Maybe next, I don't know when it aired or when it was recorded, but like I'm on national television one moment, then I'm on national television another moment as a shadow.

01:46:08 Jeremy

Tell us the name of your book.

01:46:09 Peter

Oh yeah, book's called Gold in the Cracks. So, I mean, like I said, baseball was really what kept me on on the rails for so long, and like I also said, I had a lot of hard times with coaches that junior year when all this was apparently going down. I thought it was my sophomore year. Now it makes a lot more sense. My junior year, I went into my head coach's baseball office, my head baseball coach's office, and told him I quit. Wow! A guy who was supposed to be playing professional baseball at the

end of this year, I said I was done. I talked to my dad about it for a while. I couldn't do it. There was one coach that I had that was a yeller and a screamer, and with my background and my history, like it wrecked me. And so I went in there to quit, and my head coach convinced me not to.

01:46:58 Peter

Ended up getting drafted by the Nationals later than I had hoped because I did not have a good year that year. Imagine, imagine that. And I went back to college in my senior year. I played the best year of baseball because this was my last year. I went into that year saying, "This is my last year. I'm done after this." And after baseball, I channeled everything into the weight room, into going. Going back, getting my master's into work, into getting my PhD, which is no small feat.

01:47:34 Sonny Von Cleveland

No, no, that's so. But you were drafted by the Washington Nationals, correct? Yeah, which is a major league baseball team for people that don't follow. So not only did you maybe won the World Series, right? Not only did you make it to the apex of baseball in that regard, and you chose to then pursue your life.

01:47:51 Peter

I mean, I got a PhD. Yeah, I mean, I was a peak. Like physical specimen, I looked in college like I do now. I could run a four four forty, a six two sixty. I could throw ninety upper nineties from the outfield. I was the listed as the fastest person in the Georgia draft class, the the state of Georgia draft class. But I was falling apart one hundred percent on the inside. Sure, and I was talking to my that hitting coach that I would drive and see in ninety five South and Stafford, and.

01:48:25 Peter

I lost my train of thought there. I'm getting emotional. But what was that? Help me out here.

01:48:36 Sonny Von Cleveland

You were leaving baseball. You just left, and you were driving down to see that coach. Yeah, like your journey. Yeah,

01:48:43 Peter

My journey. It's gone. It's okay. Yeah, it's all right. Yeah.

01:48:47 Sonny Von Cleveland

I would tell us about. Yeah, sorry. The PhD. It's okay. You went through. You got the PhD.

01:48:53 Peter

Yep. And so. You know, I really poured everything into my work. That was my coping mechanism was performance. I performed as as hard as I could in every aspect of my life, while still falling apart at the seams.

01:49:12 Jim Cole

It's interesting because I am watching your body language right now. No, you are you are yeah, you are clammed up, tight up. Right? I am not trying to make you self conscious at all. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But but it's like it's interesting because I think. Most people would think, you would you would have the toughest time talking about the four to five years that the abuse is going on. Yeah, but here we are, like, right at this later point. I think it really, it really goes to how, like you said, this the how the trauma. I think people think.

01:49:45 Jim Cole

And we we were we were talking about this earlier, Jeremy. It's like this word closure, right? And it's it doesn't really exist. It's not a thing.

01:49:53 Sonny Von Cleveland

It's like the quote that he said, right? Yeah. The the trauma itself, the act itself, is not the most worst part. It's the confusion. Yeah. It's the the turmoil that goes on. Those.

01:50:05 Peter

And then I would also say, like, and I want to get into this, like, what it's done to my body. Yeah. Um. It's wrecked my body in so many ways, but. To just kind of go down the path of like what brought me to this point, you know, I got married at 25, and we had two kids. We we have two kids, and abruptly in the middle of COVID, after our second child was born, my wife said we're getting a divorce, and at that time.

01:50:41 Peter

Was also accusing me of abusing my children. For about a year of my life, I had to sit through not just a divorce, which is his own trauma. Yeah, I had to sit through questioning by the police, questioning by CPS, being treated like John Hamilton in a lot of ways. Yeah, I had to take a polygraph test,

01:51:04 Sonny Von Cleveland

Which is a whole other level of retraumatization.

01:51:07 Peter

From this.

01:51:07 Sonny Von Cleveland

But did you know about this?

01:51:09 Jeremy

Yeah.

01:51:09 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah,

01:51:10 Jeremy

And Peter Peter was calling me, and we were talking.

01:51:12 Peter

I was crying on the phone. I was like, "Dude, this is so fucked up, man. No, it's fucking with my head. Yeah, it wrecked me. I can imagine. And so that was my first gut punch of my adult life. Um, I was also teaching elementary school at the time. I had to go into my principal's office, and I had to tell my principal what was going on because I'm working with kids being investigated by CPS and. God bless her. She was like full in my corner. She was like, I know that's not true. Like, but like sitting down for a polygraph test with a police detective and answering graphic questions about abusing your children was dramatic. Three hours of answering questions and being questioned about it. It was. It wrecked me. So at that time, I was teaching and.

01:52:06 Peter

Dealing with all of this, I got strep throat four times that fall. Two, two ear infections. The stomach flu, COVID, hand, foot, mouth. My son got five ear infections. Had to put tubes in his ears. Like it was wrecking us. Wow, physically wrecking us. Not to mention the mental aspect. So that was gut punch number one. That put me into sales because I couldn't physically continue pouring my life into. Other people's children, while my life was falling apart, I just I didn't have it in me anymore, and so I went into sales, and then got laid off from a job not long after that, and that totally destabilized my life. And then found another job that ended up curdling, and I thought it was anxiety, and so I went down this path of treating anxiety and depression, which led to a really adverse effect from some medication.

01:53:02 Peter

That led to these blackout rage events. That I was just white knuckling my way through this job, and being very successful at it. Like there's the performance part of it, like compartmentalizing and being able to perform. I was still very successful at this job, and then was very abruptly and very unfairly, I'll say it in that way, fired from that job, and that was five months ago, and it wrecked me.

01:53:31 Sonny Von Cleveland

And so we're. I think we're seeing a pattern of ripple effects from trauma. Yeah, of how that can affect your life. Do you? You talked about the blackout rages. Do you ever feel like there's a Jekyll Hyde thing going on at all? Is there like a?

01:53:47 Peter

No, this was purely a medication related impact. Like I didn't experience it before that, and I haven't experienced it since.

01:53:54 Sonny Von Cleveland

It was just the the medicinally induced.

01:53:56 Peter

I had been. Logging all of these receipts of symptoms onto a single receipt—the only one that I had a name for—and it was ADHD, and that’s what I was treating. And then that job started to get toxic, and I started treating anxiety and depression, thinking that’s what it was. And then I had this reaction, and then I got on another anxiety medication. It helped a little bit, but nothing was ever fixing what was actually going on. And then this happened, and I went into a psychiatrist, and I was like, “There is something wrong with me.”

01:54:27 Peter

And I don’t know what it is, and I know I’m not treating the right thing. I need a diagnosis, and so he screamed me, and that’s when I, for the first time, was diagnosed with complex PTSD, something that a lot of people don’t know about, and I didn’t know about. But now that I do, I’m like, that’s what’s wrong with me.

01:54:44 Sonny Von Cleveland

What’s wrong with us? We see the ramifications of all the improper self - diagnosis. Yeah, right. And because then you will try to treat those things, thinking that we have that, and.

01:54:53 Peter

And And so I hit this fork in the road where, I mean, I was having a hard. I could barely show up to work, and it’s that crossroad in your life you only come to a few times where it’s like this can either be the thing that takes me out, or I can take control and I can control the narrative and I can heal from this, and that’s what’s gotten me into the seat. That’s what led.

01:55:13 Sonny Von Cleveland

And then you have begun what I think, as someone who has authored my own book about my life, my memoir. One of the most therapeutic practices you’ll ever go through. It’s gonna suck. It’s gonna hurt. It’s gonna feel great. It’s gonna make you angry. It’s gonna make you happy. Tell us about the book.

01:55:31 Peter

Yeah. So the name of the book is Gold in the Cracks. Three days after that breakup, I had flown back, and I got to show up to work. She’s on short - term disability. She gets to do whatever she wants. I’m. I got to show up. I got two kids that I got to feed. I don’t have a choice. I got to perform, and I’m good at it. I can. I can usually figure it out, but I started going to therapy, EMDR therapy, one that I had never tried before, and I’m like, “Why did no one tell me to do this before?” And my therapist’s like, “You need to write a book.” So, anyways, three days after that breakup, I’m sitting across from a customer, and she starts telling me this story about the Japanese art form kintsugi, and.

01:56:18 Peter

If if you don't know what this this is, it's when it's an old Japanese craft. Instead of when a ceramic piece breaks, a bowl drops. Instead of sweeping up the shards and the pieces and throwing it in the trash, you repair it and you put gold in the cracks, or sometimes silver. And the gold, the fractures, the fault lines that were once there are now the most beautiful piece of that that ceramic piece. And she's telling me this story, and I'm like. This is my metaphor for my life. Like I'm sitting across from her in pieces. I've made that decision. Like this isn't going to end me. I'm going to figure this out. I'm good at figuring stuff out. I can do this. And I was like, that's going to be the name of my book. And so that's what the cover artwork kind of represents. And I don't know. I think what's really cool. I I had never read a memoir until I read Sunny. So I had no concept of what a memoir is supposed to look like. And so I actually like that because I like. I'm.

01:57:16 Peter

I've always been a little different. I like to take a different approach, and so it's a very focused memoir. It's very topical, walking through this story, and there's there's comedy, a line of comedy that that comes throughout, like trying to earn the gut punches with some funny lines. Like one of them, we we didn't really talk about this. John had a roommate. His name was Don, and Don got arrested on child pornography charges. I don't know what year that was. After, yeah, and. There was a porta potty company in Northern Virginia called Don's Johns, and I was like, "There is no better metaphor for these two pieces of shit than a steaming hot porta potty." Wow,

01:57:58 Sonny Von Cleveland

That's a whole other story in itself.

01:58:00 Peter

So there's this whole line of comedy also throughout, because that is a coping mechanism of trauma I've learned, and it's a way of reflecting kind of on what you've gone through, and it's actually very therapeutic and healing. So good. And also, I think what's really cool about this is it's written from inside of the healing. I'm not writing this from a future self. Yeah, I'm writing this in the process of real time. In writing it, I should I should qualify that it's hardly written. Similar to how I wrote my dissertation in five weeks. Um, that's the engine that has no brakes. I am all gas, no brakes. That's just that's me, and that's the trauma, honestly. And I've.

01:58:41 Peter

Now experienced a lot of the side effects of that, but throughout it, there are these journal entries, and it gives the reader kind of a real time look, and they're dated by like days since the breakup, so you can kind of track my thought process throughout, and it's my internal monologue on the page in healing, in my reflections. Rather than editing those pages, I thought it was kind of a cool tool to put in there, but yeah, it's been. It's been really therapeutic to write. Honestly, I'm

really excited to share it. I think I hope some people will see it and relate because it's really a book about complex PTSD. I didn't know that when I started writing it. I think that's.

01:59:23 Sonny Von Cleveland

What makes the book so interesting to me. Is it's a book that's being written in real time as the process is happening, and it's basically you discovering something you didn't even realize existed. That is something that you need it, yeah. Right, that just that whole word soup right there of things that are happening is very intriguing for me. I'm very excited to.

01:59:47 Peter

I think and Jeremy, Jeremy was a part of this one, this piece of the story. But I've been plagued with back issues my whole life, lower back issues since age 14. My dad, he's an orthopedic surgeon, like expert in that area. We went and got bone scans, fMRI's, X - rays, MRIs every. Specialist, you could imagine, you know, Washington at the time, Redskins now Commanders, doctors, physical therapists, and no one could tell me it was wrong. They said it's a unstable SI joint is what it got diagnosed as. That's all they could point to. Well, after this breakup, within a few days, my back went out. Imagine that, or no, not not within a few days. Excuse me, I was in this acute phase for like two weeks. Once I left that acute phase.

02:00:33 Peter

My back went out after my nervous system kind of started to let go, and I texted Jeremy and I was like, "Jeremy, when did my abuse stop?" And he was like, "Just before your fourteenth birthday." I texted my dad. I was like, "When was my first doctor's appointment for my back?" He was like, "Just after your fourteenth birthday," and I was like, "That's not a coincidence." And so I started looking and doing research into some of Peter Levine's work in somatic experience. And for anybody who's been through some trauma, like I would highly recommend looking into that because it has explained so much of what I have been through. When you're a victim of sexual abuse, you involuntarily contract your pelvic floor in these moments of fight or flight. Your iliopsoas muscle, which connects your spine to your lower body, is one of the primary muscles engaged when you're in fight or flight.

02:01:22 Peter

And those are also two things that lead to lower back pain, and I just found that out like two months ago.

02:01:29 Sonny Von Cleveland

So that's why I have back pain. The body keeps the score.

02:01:32 Peter

All body keeps the score. I mean, these. I writing that chapter backlit by the end of it. I was literally convulsing, and that started happening after my divorce. And I

always logged it under anxiety because that's what I thought it was. Well, Peter Levine talks about these things called neurogenic tremors. He watched. Animals flee from predators. Then, once they were escaped, they would lay down, they would shake, and they would go on their way. And it was the nervous system's way of all that energy that had been stored to flee coming out. And I'm experiencing those.

02:02:03 Sonny Von Cleveland

Kind of like deregulating itself.

02:02:05 Peter

Yeah, it's healing. It's healing. I always thought it was like a problem, but it's healing.

02:02:08 Jeremy

So I told Jim about this on the way over here. We're at his house yesterday, and I haven't seen you in 16 years. You come up the stairs. And you go to give me a hug, and I hug you. Your whole body, every molecule is just vibrating. Really? And I can just feel you. And I'm like, is Peter going to break down? Like it was just like your body was just.

02:02:33 Peter

I don't. I didn't even log that.

02:02:35 Jeremy

It was the craziest thing, and then it faded out. That's that's. And but I saw your face, and like I was, you know what I mean. And I was like, I told you, I'm like, it was like. Peter was quivering when I gave him a hug. How how crazy to hear that science put behind that,

02:02:55 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah. And it's such a profound journey for the two of you, right? Like, you know, it's it resonates really hard because, like, this man is the hero that I wish I would have had most of my life, right? And and to be able to share a space with him now, like, he's more than just a best friend to me, right? Like, it's it goes, it transcends that. And I think what the two of you have is something rare. And special, right? And and it's, it unfortunately it's not as rare as you might think, because it happens a lot. Um, but I think by doing something like this and putting your story on display and and having the courage to come out, it just can't be easy for you either as a law enforcement officer. Understanding you you didn't go through the trauma, but you've had your own trauma dealing with this, and that's something I think is a goal.

02:03:43 Jim Cole

Well, yeah, and you talk about that, I think. What we experience in these cases is vicarious trauma. It's a it affects us differently, but a lot of the symptoms are very similar. Yeah,

02:03:59 Peter

Yeah. I mean, I'm reading and speaking to that, and this is a little bit different. But I'm reading Sonny's memoir, and I'm like, he's on a different path than I took. Yeah, sure. But listening to his, listening to your thoughts and your processing of of your trauma, it's the same. Stuff like I'm like you're in the hole talking to Mallory across the hall and thinking through all this shit and I'm like that's and then the same thing.

02:04:22 Sonny Von Cleveland

Huge majority of it becomes internal dialogue yes as I'm walking through pacing the cell back and forth and then speaking things out loud which is why I'm such a big proponent of using our voices and talking and speaking out that's why I wanted to put those journal entries in because that's what.

02:04:37 Peter

It is.

02:04:38 Sonny Von Cleveland

Internal monologue that as well yeah.

02:04:40 Jim Cole

Yeah it's interesting because like. You're like why we're sitting here today. Actually, is Jeremy texted me and was like, "Hey, man, do you have a few minutes?" And so we got on a call. He's like, "Hey, I had this case, and there's a survivor, and he's really looking for a an outlet, right, to to voice this and to and it was interesting. It's almost serendipitous because I I told Jeremy I said interestingly enough.

02:05:15 Jim Cole

We're we're standing up a podcast, and we're going to be filming just in a few weeks, and but I had concerns, right? And you remember, you told me that, yeah. I said, Jeremy, I said, listen, I said I need to talk to him because not like it can be. If you're not ready to have the conversation, it can be traumatic and cause deeper issues, right? So I needed to be sure that we weren't going to cause harm. Retraumatizing you. This wasn't going to be. This was going to be helpful for you, not retraumatizing for you. So we had a conversation, but as we spoke, I it was so clear to me that I needed to put you in touch with Sunny, right? Because I can relate to you in the way that Jeremy relates to you, right?

02:06:08 Jim Cole

Because I have been the Jeremy to others, and and and and we see the cases, but I can't relate to you the way that that Sunny can relate to you, and that you can relate to Sunny.

02:06:19 Peter

And Sunny was the first person I talked to that I knew was also a survivor of abuse.

02:06:23 Sonny Von Cleveland

We got on Zoom, and we must have been on there for a couple hours.

02:06:27 Jim Cole

Yeah, because you and I talked for a good hour and a half.

02:06:31 Sonny Von Cleveland

Yeah,

02:06:32 Jim Cole

And then I was like, okay, I'm going to put you sent the three way, and, And Sonny hit me up. He's like, " Oh, I'm talking to Peter on Saturday. I think it was." Yeah. And then afterwards, he's like, " Just got off like two and a half hours." Yeah, we were cut from the same cloth.

02:06:46 Peter

We are.

02:06:47 Sonny Von Cleveland

We are so. It's crazy how you see that dynamic in survivors. That and I see it more often than you would think. The more survivors you start interacting with, the more you'll see that there are these correlating experiences that we all have. Like you said, a lot of the same modalities that I experienced in my own. Self healing journey you've been experiencing that we've experienced those same things even though our abuse was different our circumstances are different our places different we're still going through because that's what healing looks like right like we can which is why we have created this platform of bringing people from all aspects of the fight to the table because we are so dedicated to trying to eliminate this problem.

02:07:32 Sonny Von Cleveland

But to educate the people that are experiencing it right now, I think is the biggest and most important thing: educating parents, educating kids on what they can do. As you have said, we can't do something and we don't know how to do. So, as an abused child, I don't know how to tell you until you open the door for me to tell you. We need to create that culture.

02:07:53 Jim Cole

Yeah, and I hope that you know even bigger. Like, look, law enforcement is incredibly important to this fight. Right, holding offenders accountable. People like John. And there are others that that just need to be away from society because if they're in society, they they're going to offend one hundred percent. And so that's an important piece. The problem is with the with the enforcement side of it is we're almost always after the fact. The harm has occurred, and we're coming in after the fact. But where I think we're where we moved the needle is prevention, and the only way that we.

02:08:28 Jim Cole

We are able to do is if we talk about it, and we talk about because one of the things that I see is, you know, I've worked in this field for for twenty plus years, and what we see is there's a it's difficult for people to talk about. There's not a lot of funding that goes to this problem because of how uncomfortable it is, right? And and it's it's because if we don't talk about it, well then. We're never going to get the funding. We're never going to get the the eye on this, and so you know, I think this platform of bringing people like you on, who are able to talk about, you know, very transparently, like you, oh, you've opened up your soul, right here, at this table, and and I really thank you for that. One hundred percent, really, really, both you, you know, and but really, I'm grateful for that. But I do think that.

02:09:27 Jim Cole

There are people on the other side of this camera that are going to be impacted by it, and hopefully there will be parents who are like, " Oh, wait a minute! This person — I've seen these trade, I've seen these activities. Maybe I need to be more protective, or or preventing it from happening in the first place.

02:09:47 Sonny Von Cleveland

If you know what to look for, that's right." You know how to step in, and that's where prevention begins, right? Right.

02:09:52 Jim Cole

Because most parents are looking for the stranger danger, the white van, the boogeyman. That's what they're, and that's really not the threat. I mean, it's really not the threat.

02:10:00 Peter

And I think, really, I mean, as a parent, a lot of it is like that culture you create in your home and what that family unit looks like. I grew up in a house like, if I had an emotional problem, if I had an outburst, and I was a reactive kid before the abuse, had ADHD before the abuse, so I was already on a hairpin trigger. I got sent to my room. I didn't deal. I didn't talk about my emotions. I didn't have those conversations. So, like creating a safe space for your kids, that's the biggest prevention. Absolutely, not just informing them about like what is appropriate touch. You know what. You know what should adults see and not see, and who's safe isn't safe, and what do you say if something happens. But it's creating a environment in your house where it's safe to talk about emotions.

02:10:39 Sonny Von Cleveland

And I think having those types of conversations with your children also helps. Expedite their learning process because in the in the culture of AI in social media that we have now, kids are learning at a much more rapid rate. They're going to learn very adult things much younger, and so by engaging, I have an eight-year-old and I engage my eight-year-old like he's thirty, right? Like I, I will literally have

discussions with him. I want you to start. To challenge to use the brain, to challenge the thought process, critical thinking, critical thinking skills. Challenge you at this young age. Why don't you like this? Why are you uncomfortable? What about this makes you uncomfortable? Identify the feeling, and if parents start having that type of culture in your home, your child is going to be that much more comfortable telling you if something does happen, right? So prevention then becomes the the mainstay because.

02:11:32 Sonny Von Cleveland

You can't get to my child. If you shoot my child a DM, I'm the first one that knows about it. If you touch my child, he's going to scream, run out of the room, and tell the first human being he sees, right, what's happening, right. And so that's how prevention starts.

02:11:47 Jim Cole

And the other thing we know about that is is children who are armed with those skills because that it's a skill. It is. It's a skill. It's a learned skill set. It's not generally innate. It's a learned skill set. But children who are armed with those skill set. Are less likely to be victimized because the offender sees that as a hardened target, and they will move on to somebody who's not. And it's the same with violent offenders. I actually just saw something. There was a study where um they actually looked at the way that the people's gait, how they walk, just just like how they walk down the street, and they they took.

02:12:26 Jim Cole

Violent offenders who are in prison and show them video of people just walking on on a a street, and a bunch of different violent offenders who used to rob people and take advantage of people in that way, and they basically said, okay, out of all these people, here here's twelve different people just walking down the street. Who would you target? And and they and they looked at like based on the way people walk, if they're not paying attention, they're not situationally aware. Yeah, that would be a target, or they were walking kind of like meekly, like timid, and that would be someone they would target. And so it's kind of the same thing. Yeah, it's give them the tools. Yeah, you have you have to give them the tools, right?

02:13:09 Jeremy

I think you know, in addition to like what we're trying to teach the kids with tools, we have to have parents who are willing to question: Why does this person want access to my child?

02:13:23 Sonny Von Cleveland

One hundred percent.

02:13:24 Jeremy

We can't. Take at face value. It's just the love of the game. They love baseball, so

they want to impart that. Okay, so why is this person with no child, or why is this person with no tie to this? Or we have to question those things. And and and one one other thing, as well as a parent has to give the kid permission. Not every kid will be ready that first time you give it to them. You have to know if you think something's wrong.

02:13:54 Jeremy

Be present and continue to engage because there'll come a time. Fourteen-year-old Peter may never have told his mom or dad. Yep, grown-up Peter has learned a lot. So we have to be fair to ourselves, right? And and don't look at your fourteen-year-old self from your adult man's eyes. Mean and knowledge.

02:14:16 Peter

It's hard. It's hard not to like the guilt of knowing that people were abused after me, and I could have said something. Is probably the.

02:14:22 Sonny Von Cleveland

That's hard because I've gone through. I had my whole family on that because had I said something the first time and stayed with it, none of my cousins would have been. They were all done after me. There's yeah. So that guilt is real, and and it stays that way. I think. Lastly, before we wrap this up, parents, it's not a one - time conversation. On average. This is it was a global study. Forty-six minutes is the amount of time parents spend talking to their kids about this. Not a day, or a month, or a year in their entire lifetime. Forty-six minutes is the amount of time parents spend talking to their kids about this. I don't know if it was ever. I might have been zero for me. Right. It needs to be a mainstay conversation in your household. Yeah. Do you celebrate birthdays? You celebrate anniversaries. Make it a.

02:15:13 Sonny Von Cleveland

Annual thing at least to hey let's have a checkup let's have this conversation I do it weekly with my son it's not hard to do right just have that conversation create that space gentlemen thank you guys thank you from the bottom of my heart thank you so much for coming all the way out here and sharing this it is a very profound to see this dynamic between you two Peter thank you my friend for for your bravery and your courage and breaking my hand yeah He's.

02:15:42 Jeremy

A performance machine. I didn't need that. Like I told you then, first conversation, and I told you at court, Elian, I'm proud of you for having the guts and the courage to do this. It doesn't matter when it comes. This is a big thing, and it takes a lot to do this.

02:15:59 Peter

And I don't know if I've ever told you, but I am so grateful for you, Jeremy.

02:16:04 Jeremy

You're my hero. I'm not your.

02:16:06 Peter

You caught him. You have supported me over the last sixteen years and given me way more than I've given you. Never failed to answer my texts or calls, no matter how unhinged they are. I am just so grateful for the work that you have done and continue to do.

02:16:23 Sonny Von Cleveland

It was my pleasure. Wow, these guys are awesome. Yeah, thank you guys. Thank you guys so much for that. If this episode has affected you or touched you in any way, please make sure you share. This episode. This how you can get involved. You as a viewer. This how you can help with what we're doing. Join the team. Become part of it. Join the fight. Go to [ourrescue dot org](http://ourrescue.org). That's [o u r r e s c u e dot org](http://ourrescue.org). Check out the Unlikely Allies podcast. Engage in the community. You can jump on our Facebook. You can jump on our Instagram. Engage with us. Spread the message. That is how we take a chunk out of this fight. The way that we're going to stop this prevention.

02:17:06 Peter

I would also just say one more thing: If you are listening to this podcast and you've been affected by abuse in any way, and you are still holding that, reach out. I am happy to talk. I would love to talk. Reach out to somebody. It's worth it. Like it is worth getting it out there. It sucks sometimes, but it is absolutely worth it.

02:17:25 Sonny Von Cleveland

I couldn't leave this without saying that. There is so many resources available. Again, you can check out our website. There is tons and tons of resource information available for Jim Cole. I'm Sunny Von Cleveland. This is Unlikely Allies, and we will see you on the next one.