

Deb Thibodeau – Off The Shelf 86

Deb, you were serially abused. There was physical abuse. Your book is filled with words like whippings, beatings, strappings. Leo was a monster. He was clearly the ringleader in the abuse, but there appear to be a lot of others that participated as well. In I think it was chapter 29, you wrote in your book, every morning before school, a different brother showed up to administer a beating. How many people participated in this?

Deb: it was, it was, it was our modus operandi. It's how it worked. Children were given up and I have for years wondered how this could happen. But our parents were able to set aside that mental of protection and give us up into the good of the commune to make us better people. Uh, this is my question and will continue to be what were they trying to do?

Because I was a child. I was sinless, but in trying to make me sinless, they made me a sinner. They made me a liar. They made me a snake. Um, I wasn't a natural liar. I would say what was in, my mind. And I would say it with all I was worth. I have written in my book, how at just barely two years old, I had, I had a good vocabulary.

I, I was always in front of my sister. We were always in the same space, but she was, she would be behind me And I would speak for her, but I, somebody asked me, oh, you must be one of the you, one of those Dalton twins. And I said, I am not adult than I am a Christian, because that was the essence of my childhood.

My family name was not important. My status as a Christian was. And so that was emphatically placed in my mind. By the time I was two years old. So when. When everyone in there is basically of like mind And they stay, these are the things that we're going to do, but we're going to give the power to this one leader, Leo Mercier.

That means we are going to take direction from him. And every adult was culpable as far as I'm concerned,

[00:26:16] **Rod:** And he would tell people, you beat this person

[00:26:20] **Deb:** he would designate people to go and shoot somebody's dog or beat somebody. He would call them to the office and have them beat. Sometimes we didn't even know what we were getting a beating for.

We were just there getting the beating.

[00:26:34] **Rod:** time to get your beating?

[00:26:36] **Deb:** It was, yeah. And it could come out of the blue. We didn't know when it was going to happen when Esther and I were littler, um, the really the really bad beatings didn't start until we were after, until after we were about Six, years old. And the first really terrible beating we got is when he sent men to kill our little dog.

And that changed my entire paradigm and they cut our hair off.

And by now I've lived for Six years in an environment where I have heard every day of my life. If you cut your hair off, you are an abomination. If you're a

[00:27:21] **Rod:** cut your hair because of some perceived thing you did wrong as a, how old were you? six. seven years old.

[00:27:28] **Deb:** They said, they said that we teased our dog and pulled his tail. And that is why he bit, our little neighbor, our little companion. She came over to play a little dog bidder, and I don't know why he bitter. It was children and a dog You know, we were, we were children. If we were sick, she was probably five or, or younger. And

[00:27:55] **Rod:** And was this dog a puppy at the time?

[00:27:58] **Deb:** he was, he was not a puppy He, it was probably between a year or two years old.

[00:28:03] **Rod:** Yeah.

[00:28:03] **Deb:** Um, but he was just, there was so much joy in owning that dog and, and being part of that, that little dog. And course, every dog that we had after daddy met William Branham was, named Fritz. So this little dog was named Fritz and we just played with him.

We played with him in the yard. He was always out there with us. And our little neighbor came over and he bit her. And the next thing I knew, we were getting our hair cut off and he made my mother and my brother, he sent my dad to tell my mother he was going to cut our hair off. They stood us in, they stood us up, my mom and my brother.

Brushed our hair out and they let him cut our hair off. My parents, let him cut our hair off.

[00:28:53] **Rod:** How short did they cut it?

[00:28:55] **Deb:** They just jagged it off above our ears. You know, it wasn't like the hair cutting. I got later in life, but

[00:29:03] **Rod:** and this was, this was after they shot your dog in front of you.

[00:29:07] **Deb:** this was after they shot the dog. And that, that was probably my first experience with just seeing something die, you know, just animation gone, just a, a happy dog, turned into meat.

And it's, a, it's a crushing thing for children to experience, especially when their hearts are so new and young and full of love for something as simple as a puppy. and this was when I understood that my parents were not in control. My parents were doing what they were told and my mother, no matter how much she resisted was always brought into line.

[00:29:54] **Rod:** And, and the beatings got so bad that I think you relate in your book that you were a lash 150 times once.

[00:30:04] **Deb:** I've described that. That was the worst beating I ever got in there. And there's probably 40 kids who were in that same room and got those same things.

[00:30:12] **Rod:** And it's bizarre because actually the Bible says that you can't get more than 39 lashes at one time. So these guys are basically thrown out the Bible and they just said, okay, we're going to beat these kids and beat them beyond their ability to endure it. It's just, it's, bizarre.

[00:30:30] **Deb:** Well, and I don't know how, how anyone, if anyone can relate to getting 30, 30 swats with a leather belt and the absolute agony of that, And the days of bruises and, and it was, it was part of our lives. It's how we lived. And mother, mother was just, our mama was just broken by it. She would cry. She would put us in a tub with Epsom salts and she would dip water and she would cry, but she couldn't change it And there were times when I don't even know if they knew we were being summoned for a beating, but the beating that I described, the significant beating that I described in the book, I only told my own story, but there were 40 other kids there who endured the same thing that day,

[00:31:28] **Rod:** Who all got beat.

[00:31:32] **Deb:** Yeah. Including the one who got his head put through the wall.

When you have been hit 25 or 30 times with a leather belt, you can't feel anything, but the fire, unless you hit a new spot. And if they had a new spot, the agony is Jen, then just multiplied by 10, 20, a hundred, you know,

So

[00:31:57] **Rod:** And they invented ways to make it hurt as much as possible.

[00:32:01] **Deb:** well, they invented ways to keep us in position So they could do it. And this was one of the things that we watched happen, you know, kids and we were embarrassed for each other when a weapon would start and you would jump and you would squirm and you would put your hands back and you try to get out of the way.

So we were all embarrassed for each other, watching us, trying to do it. Any kid would try to do get away from a beating. So they, they took one of those metal folding chairs. You can see anywhere in the world today, we had lots of them and they pushed that against the wall. And the kids bent over that chair while two men beat them to get there, because how do you administer 50 to 150 swats to 40 kids without being absolutely worn out you can't.

[00:32:50] **Rod:** So they would take turns.

[00:32:52] **Deb:** they would just both whip you at the same time, alternating spots. But if you didn't hold yourself on that chair, it would start over.

[00:33:02] **Rod:** Wow.

[00:33:03] **Deb:** So. We saw that evolution in beatings and now understood that there was like, there's no end, you know, they can do whatever they want. So most of the adult men in the Park participated in these, it was, it was what they did.

You know, I know who my own personal abusers are.

Um, but it could be, he did things on whims. It seems like many times he would, he would, uh, I'm remembering a day when he had all the men, he had the men all go home and slap their wives, you know, just go home and slap their wives in the face to remind them that they women. And

[00:33:56] **Rod:** and they did it.

[00:33:58] **Deb:** of course they did it, you know, they were already indoctrinated too. And so this is, this is the confusion for the children of the Park who are now adults. Like I said, I'm 60. And this happened between six and 14, the worst of it.

[00:34:16] **Rod:** Yeah.

[00:34:17] **Deb:** So my entire life has been a set of questions. How could anyone let, let someone tell them that this is okay?

[00:34:26] **Rod:** This goes to the heart of what's wrong with, some of what's wrong with the message, because as a father myself I don't understand how someone would allow anyone else to discipline their kids. As I've got four kids and when our kids were small, if someone tried to discipline them they suffered my wrath or my wife's wrath.

But, I, and this is obviously because William Branham had basically anointed Leo Mercier as the leader. And so because of that, they felt the same kind of allegiance to Leo Mercier as to William Branham because of what William Branham said,

[00:35:06] **Deb:** I absolutely believe that

I've alluded in my book to the idea that their personal discernment was you served their own inclinations were overwritten

[00:35:17] **Rod:** William Branham, because he had to be right.

[00:35:20] **Deb:** by Leo Mercier because he was endorsed by William Branham and William Branham couldn't be wrong.

[00:35:27] **Deb:** So this was the part that, and I, I have written my book at a point in time when I was still living with Herbon gray slot, who were wonderful to me, the most wonderful people and probably saved me at some point, but still they, when I had to walk down for a beating, I had to walk down for a beating.

It was, that was the. So I, in my own heart at that time, this is when I feel like I was just filling with frustration and venom. And I said to myself as a child, this will never happen. If I have children. If I have children, I will burn in hell with them before I will let someone take them from me and abuse them.

And that is how my mind was conditioned that if I didn't allow the servant of the Lord or the profit of the end times to dictate how I treated my kids, that hell was, where I was going.

[00:36:38] **Rod:** Wow. It's really, It's interesting because in, in Ephesians six, four, and in Colossians 3 21, Paul says, I think the king James is don't provoke your children to wrath, but what it's talking about is don't make your children frustrated. Don't don't do the stuff that in fact, what your father allowed to have happened to you, it is don't do that.

And so again, the Bible takes the backseat to the message because William Branham, they would say the Bible is our absolute, but it's not when you ignore it because of things that William Branham said.

[00:37:14] **Deb:** I believe that, and my father was a man among men, but the stories that you know, and you have to understand that everything, and I heard about our life before the Park was all anecdotes and stories, but my dad was a man, a leader of men. Uh, he wasn't afraid to do anything. He flew his own plane. He was, he was a mechanic.

He, he, he once was deputized by the local sheriff in the town when people stole, uh, stole car parts from him and he went and got them back, he wasn't afraid of anything. So this is the man that I, I grew up hearing about. And the man that I so wanted to see, and the man that I believed would, would protect me.

And of course my greatest heartache and the thing that hurts me to my core, more than almost anything I've experienced in my life is when he turned his face from me in Leo mercy bathroom, Liam. Uh, he was a sick sick man, and

I, don't know what it was about that bathroom. I've described it in my book. He had an all brown bathroom, a brown toilet.

I had never seen a brown bathroom. I'd never seen a bathroom that nice, frankly, but he would sit on that toilet and he would chastise and rebuke. And make you say you had done things you hadn't done. And if you didn't say it, you were

going to suffer. And as a child, it took me longer to figure that out than most kids, um, that if you don't agree with him, you're going to pay.

And I don't know what, what that difference is in some kids' brains. You know, I, I became a very concrete person because of that.

[00:39:16] **Rod:** I think in your book, yeah. You talk about how you didn't realize that the other kids were all lying. And if you didn't lie, you were just going to make things worse. So you started lying just to protect yourself.

[00:39:28] **Deb:** I, to this day, don't know why I would lie about the things I lied about. I, I w I totally believed that I was not an inherent liar. That what I wanted to say, I would say, so I became so afraid of consequences. That I would lie because I was afraid. And then that lie would grow. And I was a kid with a good brain and I was precocious.

I would embellish, I would, I would make it bigger. And this is what I did when I talk about I'm telling a lie in second grade that that whole Park in a frenzy. And this was very hard for me to tell because it was, it was nasty. And I have, I have, it took me until I was an adult to forgive myself for that lie because I feel, and I named that chapter projection and opprobrium because I believe what I did is I projected what I had experienced on someone who had no value to me, the school janitor. and I don't know what any child is doing when they do something like that, other than to say, help me,

[00:40:52] **Rod:** Yeah,

[00:40:53] **Deb:** um, needless to say that was not the outcome. Uh, and I was then labeled as a liar and that just eventually led into being able to also lay label me as a deviant and call me a sexual predator at nine years old.

[00:41:14] **Rod:** that is so bizarre.

[00:41:16] **Deb:** about.

[00:41:17] **Rod:** Yeah. Did any of the kids ever try to run away from this abuse?

[00:41:24] **Deb:** My, one of my nieces tried several times to run away and they always brought her back

[00:41:34] **Rod:** We caught her in. And obviously back then probably law enforcement wasn't as in tuned to what's going on potentially

[00:41:43] **Deb:** mentioned that in my book

[00:41:46] **Rod:** yeah,

[00:41:47] **Deb:** my mother could drive a car, they were living on an income dad made at the county garage, which I think was like \$3 and 70 cents an hour or something like that. There was no place to go untethered from husband, from father, from income. You just had to get through it.

There wasn't women's shelters there wasn't, it just wasn't a time in life where people recognize that need. And so my mother was trapped there. She was absolutely trapped and they, they did throw her out once and she went back to Kentucky and stayed there for several weeks and ultimately decided to come back and just endure.

But what they did to her after that was take her children from her and keep her. She was drugged on value. And for the last seven years we were in there

[00:42:49] **Rod:** Wow.

It's really interesting to note, because you talk about in, in your book, how Leo Mercier was obviously well into substance abuse, not just alcohol, but also I don't, it was morphine or some kind of opiate.

And it's interesting to know, first Corinthians five, 11 to 12 tells us that we are, have nothing to do with evil men.

Right. And he's clearly evil, but

[00:43:20] **Deb:** yeah,

[00:43:20] **Rod:** evil and William Branham's comment basically absolved him from all evil.

It sounds like people would even make note of the evil. They knew something was going on. They knew it was wrong, but they just kind of turned their head and didn't take it to its logical conclusion.

[00:43:37] **Deb:** I will never understand, but this is the first time I saw this reverence. If we go back to the point in time and when we brand them visited the. I saw the way he was revered by the people, my own mother and my own father. We lined up on either side of the Park when they drove out of the Park and the folks were all singing till we meet again, it was reverent, it was incandescent.

It was beautiful. Uh, my father had tears on his face. I could see that they absolutely revered this man. And so this very revered men who says to them go on, I see it all coming out. Okay. So my entire adult life was spent asking myself, wanting to ask my father what you are telling me and asking me to believe is that everything that happened to me was meant to be that God said it was okay to do these terrible things to me as a child, because William Branham said, go on.

I see it coming out. Okay.

[00:44:57] **Rod:** So we've talked about physical abuse a bit of both psychological and emotional abuse, which you talk about in your book as well. And I'm certainly not an expert on the subject, but I do understand from what I've read that psychological and emotional pain is far worse. Then physical pain because it damages self-esteem it, it creates long-term mental health problems.

How did that affect you as an adult years later?

[00:45:30] **Deb:** It has taken me most of my adult life to recognize how it affected me, because this is what we do. We just move on. And if we're alive and we're breathing, we go on and we make our lives. But because of those wounds in our heart and our mind, and I've mentioned in my book, how moral wounds never heal, they're always there and they're always fresh.

And the memory of the beatings and the injuries, they are not, they did not hamper my life the way the words did. And So in my life words have become a very valuable and very powerful thing. And so it is my desire above all else right now, to use words, to help people understand that children must not be ruined in their brains.

When they're little, when Leo Mercier called me a whore, a lesbian, a prostitute, a molester of little. These were words. I didn't even know. I

[00:46:39] **Rod:** know.

[00:46:39] **Deb:** know.

I didn't know what they meant. I didn't know what a lesbian was. Well, he told me very graphically what a lesbian was. I've I've written that in my book, but he said to me, you are serpent's seed.

You are the evil twin, And I have to get you away from your sister before you ruin her. You

[00:47:04] **Rod:** heard of the promise where you didn't believe it.

[00:47:08] **Deb:** well, he didn't believe it when he said you a good man will never want you. You will never give a man control over you. You will never allow a man. He demoralized me so completely as a child that I believe what I did and learned to do was insulate myself. And because that's the kind of brain I had, I made a safe place in my head, but there are times when I felt that slipping and I, this is the impact that I want to make with some of my statements in the book.

When I said I will make my way with the God that I begged to spare my mind when I was. Well, my body was being abused and any faith I had was being ripped out of my heart. This is the impact I want to make. This is what we can do to our children, if we're not careful. And the first thing that you do to them is, is make them feel unworthy, worthless, dirty, wrong.

Our children should be lifted up as the most beautiful thing in our life. The most incredible thing we can give our wisdom to. So, yes, I found as an adult and being in a product of the Park made me very good at my job in the emergency department. I, I feel like I can only describe myself as somebody. I had decreased empathy.

Um, I became very inflexible. I, and I think, I believe I've described this in this, in my book, how I

[00:49:07] **Rod:** you probably can disassociate yourself.

[00:49:10] **Deb:** yes, and not disassociate to the point of another personality, but to Disconnect.

um, because I felt that that danger of disassociative identity. When that beating started the really bad one, because it was not me walking up there.

It was someone else. It was some other little girl. And that's the first time I felt that dis associative possibility. But oddly enough, I mean, I was being beaten the way a child should never be beaten, but what snapped me out of that was embarrassment. I was embarrassed for trying to get away from two grown men who were beating me and calling me a monkey because I jumped over the chair and hit the wall.

I was so embarrassed by that, by the ridicule. So how does that happen? How does that happen? That a child can be embarrassed by the ridicule and by how they appear in front of their peers. They're the other children as being unable to take their beating, but that embarrassment snapped me out of that disassociation.

And I decided, uh, they won't laugh at me anymore. How does that happen to a child?

[00:50:38] **Rod:** No.

[00:50:39] **Deb:** It's, it's a mystery still, but as an adult, I can see how these things hurt my first marriage. I can see. How this dysfunction made me somebody who was utterly inflexible and in, ER, it worked well. I didn't have, I wasn't broken by horrible events that happened.

I could move right on to the next trauma or the next horrible event. And believe me, I saw everything you can imagine in 30 plus years in the ER, and when I lost mom and dad, it seemed like part of the course, it was, it was natural. It's what should be happening. My mother's death was beautiful. My father's death was not, but when Esther died, I felt something I had never felt before.

And that was just a gripping, insane pain that she couldn't see her children finished their lives, that she wouldn't see her grandchildren grow up, that she wouldn't get to enjoy these things in her life that every person wants to enjoy. And believe me, I've seen enough death to understand that there are many people who miss those things, but Esther should not have been in that position.

And it was also part of me. It was losing part of me.

[00:52:04] **Rod:** Yeah.

[00:52:06] **Deb:** So, but I recognize that the damage to her psyche was different than the damage to my. She became very impulsive. I mean, whatever

environment she was in, that's what she was doing. If she was in church, she was in church, If she was at a party, she was at a party.

Um, you know, she was just impulsive. She made impulsive decisions. I feel like her marriage was impulsive. She didn't know the, the man long enough to marry him. So as you get older and you watch these kinds of things happen and you see the differences in brains, and I've watched this with all of my siblings, I've watched how we have been psychologically changed by our childhood and the younger siblings.

You know, we deal with that every day and it's just part of our lives.

[00:53:07] **Rod:** There's a part in your book where,

You get ripped out of your home and you're transplanted into a home of a couple that don't have kids, herb and grace, and it's like suddenly in this black and white, terrible environment, you get colored because these people put. Obviously put. some love into your

life.

What happened to Herbon grace? And I won't, we don't want to spoil any, anything for people haven't read the book yet, but it's just, it was very interesting to me. I was curious to say, okay, so this wonderful couple who you spent, a year and a half, two years with, what ended up happening to them?

[00:53:43] **Deb:** so I believe, I believe actually Leo Mercier had some notion of psychological. I believe he knew how to manipulate people psychologically. And I believe his intention was to, because they were cultured people. Um, brother herb was educated and kind kind, man. Um, and I was, you know, trailer trash the last of 12.

And I believe that what he wanted to do was bring them down a notch or two by throwing this uncultured child at them?

And what they did was they were wise enough to see that I was very close to broken. I feel like I was on the verge of no return when I went to their house, I had given up there's no, Jesus, there's no parents.

There's no family, there's no protectors by then. I had experienced police that don't protect you teachers that don't protect you. So it was just one more place for me to go and expect more punishment free of any kind of concern from my parents. So what I experienced was exactly the opposite and they just took me in and they brought me back from that edge just by kind of letting me be a child.

Now, these are two people who were message who were in the Park,

who who lived to the very last of their days in the message. But they, you know, brother herb,

he was just, his brain was somewhat outside of it. If that's any way to say it in that he, he allowed me to have books to read, to experience, and then he would, he would take great. Pleasure in discussing those books with me and they weren't the Bible. They weren't the message. They weren't the voice of God.

Um, I'm talking about Lim is, um, uh,

[00:56:30] **Rod:** literature.

[00:56:31] **Deb:** yes, um, classics, uh, gosh, the count of Monte Cristo. Um, and, and, you know, we would go to flea markets and he found a huge stack of these old classics and he brought them all home for me. So we're talking about all of them, 2000 leagues under the sea. Um, you know, the secret garden, Robin hood, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, king Lear's daughters.

And of course, you know, I've talked a lot in my book about the two that we discussed most frequently and, and that would be, and these are the things how I sort of likened them to the way he felt about tea. He was passionate about tea. He was kind of a foodie and I had never experienced things like that.

Our food at home was basic. It was oatmeal, it was bacon, it was eggs. It was toast, green beans. You know, when I came to their house, I experienced things I had never experienced before. I had never had caviar on a cracker or pickled daikon or. You know, poppy seed, crackers things I've never heard of, but I had

a very curious mind. So I never said no. I always wanted to try. And these books the first time, the first day that I sat at their table, when I was still half out of my mind, he was the tea was steeping on the table. He didn't say anything to me about the horrible child that I was. He didn't say anything to me about being a molester of other little girls.

He didn't, he didn't call me any names. He just talked to me about tea and how tea had to be contemplated. And it had to steep for exactly the right amount of time. And then you, just enjoy it while you converse. And that was like the opening salvo. And I could actually breathe because I understood in that moment that maybe my life wasn't just going to be another stint in terror.

And when, and I talked about how we talked about the, the forgiveness of John Bell, John, the revenge saga of Edmond Dantes, and we talked about both of those things

and he never made a conclusion for me. He never took me to the place where he thought I should do. You just let me.

go there. But in looking back, I feel like those are things that then just steeped in my mind, like perfect tea.

Do I forgive or do I want revenge? And revenge was a huge part of my life in my mind until I had an opportunity to forgive. And ultimately I chose forgiveness and that I learned something about myself in that too.

[00:59:41] **Rod:** So you tell a story of which I've

as a guy, found fascinating that the older man organized

fistfights for some of the teenage boys, which I, can't imagine it, it didn't sound like they were wearing boxing gloves. This sounded like it was just bare knuckled letting the teenage kids go at each other and until they couldn't go anymore, which is,

Again, another very cruel thing to do.

Did that, was that just a one-off or

is that something that happened more than once?

[01:00:16] **Deb:** that only happened once that is large in my memory. And it's because it's attached to the beginning of that event in which my older brother had been clocked in the head by another kid. They were out in the woods, running a big draft horse and pulling logs down out of the Hills. And he showed up at home bleeding from this huge laceration in his head.

He had blood, you know, mom grabbed the dish towel. She pushed it on his head and she was sitting there with him. But the other kid primed the story, you know, so dad came home and I will never forget him leaving my mother, sitting in the kitchen with a bloody dish towel in her hand and dragging Johnny down to the garage.

So we had all these main points in the Park. We had the dining hall, we had the toddle house. The dining hall was the adults. The toddle house was the children. We had the chapel, we had the tape room, we had the office and we had the garage and the garage now. And you have to understand that. I only know about this from how it has been described to me.

I didn't see it,

[01:01:27] **Rod:** Yeah, Yeah.

[01:01:27] **Deb:** but my

brother was, then I believe that it was spur of the moment. I believe they decided just to pit these two boys against each. Who had already been in a fight. And my brother had been whacked in the head with a two by four or a piece of wood or something, but he was bleeding from the head.

So he was down there with an open wound on his head and they pit those boys against each other and they fought with each other tooth and nail just hands fists. There was no boxing gloves. There was no organization. It was just go at it. One of you wins. And then for whatever reason, they wanted more. So I can only relate this to Bloodlust.

You know, it was

[01:02:15] **Rod:** Bloodsport. Yeah, that's, it's

[01:02:17] **Deb:** watching

[01:02:17] **Rod:** like the Colosseum in Rome.

[01:02:20] **Deb:** They pulled somebody, another kid in and made, made my brother fight that kid. And then when that one was over. But before that fight started, they handicapped my brother by smacking him in the shins

with a metal bar. So we're talking about a kid whose head is already cut open.

He's already been in one borough hall with a kid a year or two older than him. And now he's in a brawl with a second one. And then when that one was over,

they just decided, oh, let's take it a little further. And so, they dragged in my other

brother, my other younger brother, not younger than me, but the youngest of my brothers

and made him fight the younger brother of the boy that.

Was originally any original conflict. So I feel like it was just, wow, this is kind of cool. Like a cockfight, you know, I wonder if they put money on it.

[01:03:24] **Rod:** Yeah. I mean, that was a that's the first thing came to mind.

They were having,

[01:03:29] **Deb:** I do know what happened and, and I watched these things harden, my older brother and injure the younger one there, their brains were different just like

Or

[01:03:41] **Rod:** For our listeners, I want to specifically

talk about a specific inset, a person who, a young man who would again, was raised

in the Park and I've done a little bit of research.

But I know, you know, much more and that's a man by the name of Keith Loker, who was one of the children abused while he lived at the

Park.

Keith Loker was convicted of four counts of robbery, two counts

of first degree murder. One count of attempted murder and assault with a deadly weapon. Second degree commercial burglary was given the death penalty. What happened to him, caused him to become who he was.

Is that correct?

[01:04:27] **Deb:** That's correct?

Now, Keith was only about five when the Park broke or going on five. He was born in 1971 and I was living with my sister. I moved to my sister's when he was about two and I was there until he was almost four. And my personal belief is that he's probably on

the spectrum. Um, and he didn't talk when he was very young and mother was, I'm trying to think how to put this.

Leo Mercier married his mother to a man known to be homosexual. It was their way of pray, the gay away. Um, they were in a hurry, him to a woman divorced DEI. And strangely enough, with my older sister, this all happened before marriage and divorce came out and they, my understanding at least what I've heard, because remember I was still a child, is that they work to get this done before marriage and divorce was actually.

[01:05:36] **Rod:** they were told that this is something's coming out. So if you're going to do anything, do it now.

[01:05:41] **Deb:** So she gave up custody. She divorced her first husband and gave up custody of her two older sons who were horribly abused in the Park. In fact, one of them is, um, you know, I mentioned in the beating story, what happened to one of them, but, um, and then they married her to this man, um, a kind man, but he was homosexual and this was their attempt to fix him there.

Their relationship was, I believe she loved him. I don't know that he loved her. Um, and their consummation occurred based on beating him up and putting him there. So they had three children, the oldest named by Leo Mercier named Leo, Eugene who died at birth. And then also when Keith was born, he was named by Leo Mercier, Keith Thomas.

And I could remember my sister talking about how, why would he want him to have this name? Because Thomas was the day. Well, Keith was not, his

tendency was not homosexual. And when they left the Park, he did not experience the degree of abuse in his very young years that I did, because by that time, Leo was very well, uh, inundated in his drugs and alcohol.

Um, and, but they then moved to the church in Indiana under Coleman, Tommy Dillard. And I believe his life there was equally horrible because people assumed that he was homosexual because his father was. And so that sort of thing was thrown on him. The same way me being a sexual predator was thrown on me.

I feel like I was lucky enough to take that abuse and turn it into something different. The Keith was wildly conflicted between the two families and he was enchanted with the idea of the Dalton gang. And you know, what, what the message and what Leo Mercier ripped us away from is the Pulaski county.

Dalton's, there's a lot of them and they're wonderful people that I would give almost anything to have spent my life getting to. And be part of, but they were disavowed. I didn't even know we had the family we had in Kentucky for so many years. So the family that my sister married into, there was a lot of conflict between the two families, but marriages between the two families kind of, you know, it was on again off again, but it was never an easy relationship.

And as Keith got older, almost anything he did, somebody would throw that homosexual thing at him, including my own family. You know? Um, I felt like the first time I saw someone who needed help was when I was visiting with my sister and my son was about five and he and, and Keith were playing with some trucks on very innocent.

It was innocent. They were just playing with trucks on the carpet, but my sister got so nervous and so upset and worried that she kind of called him down and he immediately understood what she was thinking. That was the point in time that I. Keith needed some help. He needed some counseling, he needed some psychological intervention, but of course the only intervention is church.

That was the thought. And in church he was vilified. So in so many ways, the kid didn't have a chance. People could see that he was not socially adept when he was in a crowd, he would always take things too far. Um, he didn't know, willing to kind of shut things down. He was funny. He, he loved Jeff Foxworthy jokes, you know, but his confusion arose from his own.

If he liked a girl and that girl didn't respond to him. And then his own fear was that somehow he was homosexual and maybe didn't know it. I can't speak to all of it, but I do think it's what drove him to the past that he came to.

[01:11:03] **Rod:** Yeah.

[01:11:04] **Deb:** And when we, when we sat in that trial, what I decided is that Keith could not be completely held responsible for what he did.

Yes. He committed horrible things and yes, he. He has done criminal heinous things, but he was broken as a child by, by overzealous preachers and religion. Children are natural entities and a lot of their evolution has to do with sexuality, whether they're preached at whether they're talked to, whether they're told what's right, whether we're told what's wrong, they still have these organs in these body parts that react when, when they, you know, understand that they're there.

So that thing that happens when was always so overwhelmingly shameful, and Keith was shamed at such a young age for doing something, a lot of children do, you know, they just recognize that they have bits and pieces that act strangely and, uh, trying to figure out how they work. But his attraction was to girls.

You liked girls, but they didn't respond well to him. And when they didn't respond well to him, that would make him angry and confused. I feel like what happened was Keith making a decision to just be the robber, Baron, to be the gang guy, the, and in some ways it was all kind of funny to him. You know, when he, when he came back to Arizona after the original.

And he had breakfast with some of my nephews and he told them I killed a bunch of people in California this weekend, you know,

[01:13:03] **Rod:** Wow.

[01:13:05] **Deb:** and they thought he was joking and we had some connections or one of my family had connections with a detective there in Flagstaff. And they found that it was true that it was LA county.

They weren't even looking in Arizona for anyone. So that evening, when he figured out that everybody knew he took off and he ran from the police again, he loved cars. He loved to drive. He was a good driver. Um, he had, I believe he had a lot of fantasy in his mind about being this outlaw, you know, uh, and who can say exactly what he had in his mind.

If going out in a blaze of glory was his ultimate quest, but he was stopped by, uh, an armed citizen. So that changed that thought. And I have, I have taken my sister to visit him numerous times over the years

and we talk, we talk a lot.

Um, and so he know is someone who from the time he's 19 until he's 50 has been on death row.

And sometimes when we're there, he doesn't seem very

involved with the message. And other times he does. Um, he, he, but he has accepted his life there and I feel that had he not come to that pass, there would have been more criminal activity because it was how he felt alive, but it was all the umbrella that got tossed on him as a child.

He should have been raised without anyone making him aware of his father's homosexual past. Why

can't people do

[01:14:56] **Rod:** or at least not to transfer that onto him.

Right.

[01:15:00] **Deb:** Why make it automatic?

Automatically assign proclivities to children.

[01:15:04] **Rod:** yeah.

So.

I read a book last year. What happened to you which is by Dr. Bruce Perry

and Oprah Winfrey a very

enlightening book to me. And it talks about the impact of physical, emotional, and psychological

trauma on children

and how it impacts them in later life.

And that we should never ask someone

the wrong question is what's

wrong with you? The right question is what happened to you because often what happened to children, very Trump, a traumatic events particularly abuse

happening in their early childhood can significantly create dysfunction and and fear in their later lives.

I certainly have seen this in the message kids who suffered from emotional, psychological abuse at the hands of their parents. Well, in the message and, later on, they end up in jail variety of felonies, and I don't have any doubt. It was because of the abuse that they suffered. They're good kids who were emotionally shattered by their parents.

So one of the things that, I read through the court transcript and I had known that you were in the trial, but it, that the transcript stated talks about Lee. And they call a Mercer rather than a Mercier.

Mercer ordered that a girl's hair be cut off to punish her because he had a vision from God that she had been sexually inappropriate with young children.

She was beaten and forced to wear a mask and clothes that covered much of your body hiding her bruises, her fingertips were burned so that she would know what hell felt like was that referring to you?