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[Intro]

Steve-Hey there everybody! And welcome again to the podcast. I am Steve, of course as always joined by...

Devin-Devin (laughing).

J-Joe.

D-And that's it. We got rid of our intern.

S-Oh (laughing).

J-Nobody else. Yeah, the intern didn't work out.

D-Turns out.

S-Yeah. Yeah, turns out.

D-Yeah.

S-He had a visa problem. So as always this week we have another mystery for you. Today we're going to talk about the disappearance of Ben McDaniels. And Ben disappeared after he entered a, he was diving, and he disappeared after he entered an underwater cave on the 18th of August, 2010.

J-And he never came back out.

S-And he never came back out.

D-Well...

S-That we know of.

J-Yeah.

D-He was never seen again.

S-He was never seen again. Now if you are at all A, claustrophobic, or B, afraid of the water, or worse, both, you're going to get the bejeezus scared out of you with this story.

D-Yeah.

J-Uh huh.

S-So just warn you up ahead.

D-Deep water.

S-Deep water, yeah.

D-Yeah. Hopefully none of our listeners have rabies.

J-Oh, good point (Steve laughing).

S-That's so weird, but I get it.

D and J-Yeah.

S-But I totally get that.

D-Uh huh.

S-Weird.

J-Yeah.

D-We need to stop doing the podcast cause you're understanding my logic all the sudden. It's not good.

S-Yeah.

D-It's not good.

S-No, it's creepy (Devin laughing).

J-Time to go our separate ways.

S-Yeah.

J-Well, so how does this story go?

S-Well before we get into the story actually, this is a listener suggestion.

D-What?!

S-So I do want to say thank you to both Eden and Emily. They are currently the only ones listed as suggesting it.

J-Yeah.

D-Thanks guys.

S-Thank you very much.

J-If anybody else suggested it and we forgot to put you on the list, sorry about that.

S-Yeah. But this was a great story. It's a wild ride. You two know, I've been working on this for a month or more now.

D and J-Yeah.

S-So, good story. So taking it from the beginning. Ben McDaniels was a 30-year-old man. He was originally from Tennessee, and the year 2009 was a really bad year for Ben. He got divorced, which I imagine took a lot of his things. His business went under, which I'm sure took a lot of his things as well.

D-Uh huh.

J-Usually works that way.

S-And then he lost his home, which would have taken one of his big things.

J-Yeah.

D-Uh huh.

S-So he, he had a really bad year.

J-I'll say.

S-This was all in one single year.

D-Yeah, and he had some tax problems, too.

S-Well yeah, the business going under, I think it was a construction business, if I remember correctly.

D-It was.

J-That's what I remember, yeah.

S-And when it failed, he had a tax bill between the State of Tennessee and the Feds of somewhere around \$50,000.

D-That's a lot of money.

S-Which is a hefty, hefty bill.

J and D-Yeah.

S-So he didn't really know what to do, so doing what a lot of people do, he moved back in with his parents.

D-Uh huh.

S-His mom and dad were very gracious and they took him in.

D-Uh huh.

S-And after a while they, they said, “Well, listen, you need to kind of figure your stuff out, you need to get your act together. Tell you what,” and as they called it, “why don't you take a sabbatical. Why don't you...”

D-From life.

J-A sabbatical from unemployment?

D and S-From life.

J-Yeah.

S-From life, actually. Ok, they have a home in Florida.

D-Second home.

S-Yeah, their second home. It's in Santa Rosa. It was a condo if I remember correct. And they said, “Go to the condo. Live in Florida. We'll pay your expenses. We'll cover your living costs.” And I imagine they gave him money to, you know, spending cash.

D-Yeah.

J-That's nice of them.

S-Absolutely.

J-These people had some money, though.

S-They, they did have money.

D-Do.

J-They do.

S-Or they do have money, excuse me.

J-Yeah, they're still alive, yeah. Oh, by the way, Santa Rosa, just to spare you from having to look at Google Earth, it's on the gulf coast of Florida.

S-Oh, yeah.

D-Where the condo was.

S-Yeah. It's not on the, the Atlantic coast.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah, exactly.

S-Right. Yes. So yeah, Ben, Ben, you know, "Ok, yeah. Why not?"

J-"What the heck."

D-It'd be hard to turn that down.

J-Yeah, right.

S-It really would. So he went to Florida, and while he was there he began to indulge in an old hobby, which was scuba diving. From the stuff that his family has put out, Ben began diving at the age of 15, so he seems to have been an experienced diver. He wasn't a professional, but he was an, you know, amateur diver.

J-Uh huh.

D-Yeah, and I don't have a sense of if, how frequently that continued...

S-I don't either.

D-When he was in Florida, he was definitely diving, like, all the time. That was pretty much all he was doing, it seemed like.

S-Uh huh.

D-And it seemed like when he was a kid, he really enjoyed it. So he kind of got...

S-Maybe he picked up an old hobby.

D-Uh huh. But I don't necessarily have the sense that this is something he'd been doing avidly the entire time.

S-I would not disagree with that at all.

J-And a place like Tennessee, it might be tough to find good places to go. Cause I know, I know people around here who are scuba divers, and there's really not much, any place to scuba dive if you live in Portland.

S-Yeah, we don't, yeah. Deep lakes are what really make good, or beautiful underwater landscapes, which are what you're after. Interesting things.

J-Uh huh.

S-So I understand why he might not have done it so much.

J-Yeah.

S-Cause you don't want to just jump in the river and scuba dive.

D-Yeah.

J-No.

S-And not so fun.

D-Yeah, well also, like a waste of resources (Steve laughing).

J-Yeah.

D-If you can snorkel in it, you should just snorkel in it.

S-Yeah. So well, ok, so Ben, he's scuba diving, and he evidently didn't like diving in salt water, which I can't hold against him.

J-Salt water rashes?

S-Uh, yeah, it's going, it's going to take a little physical toll on you. Plus, the buoyancy issue.

D-I was just going to say, the buoyancy issue. Yeah.

S-Yeah. Ben was not a small guy. I think he, I think Ben was, like, six foot, ballpark.

D-Uh huh.

S-Which would, and I think he was something like 180, maybe 200 pounds.

J-I thought he was two, two...

D-Yeah, I thought...

J-I thought he was 210.

S-Is it 210?

D-I thought 210.

S-Ok. I knew that he wasn't a skinny guy by any means. So, but he didn't like to go there, so he liked to fresh water dive. So what's he do? He finds a place near him called Vortex Spring, because...

D-It's beautiful.

S-...it's fresh water.

J-Uh huh.

S-It's absolutely beautiful.

J-And it is fresh.

S-For those who are going to pull a Joe and go to Google Earth and look for Vortex Springs, it's just outside of Ponce de Leon, Florida. So it wasn't too far away from where he lived.

J-Hm.

S-And as Devin said, it's really pretty. I mean, it's a giant, it's a, it's a natural spring, so it is cool water upwelling out of the earth. I think it's 68 degrees.

D-Yeah, that's not really cool in my book.

S-Well, when it's a hundred percent humidity, and a hundred degrees out, that's fantastic!

D-Well, so it's cool in a nice way.

S-Yes.

D-We're not talking Oregon Coast cool.

S-Correct.

D-Right.

S-It is very nice to swim in and in fact, its main draw is for people to swim in it. They've got zip lines and stuff like that. I mean, it looks like a fun place to go.

J-Oh yeah, I'd like to go. But in, I'm sure the water was just all fresh and clear because it kept getting changed out.

D-Uh huh.

J-I mean, it would upwell from the aquifer and then overflow off the side.

D-It runs off.

S-And that is exactly why it is so popular with divers, because open water divers can go there. The water temperature is consistent. The current is gentle. It's consistent but gentle, and therefore it's not dirty. There's lots of aquatic life to check out. So it's really, really interesting. And let's keep talking about the cave, because there's a couple of things that I want to go over. One of which is the shape of the cave. So the Vortex Springs, if you think about it, it's a giant hole in the ground.

D-There's a big basin.

S-It's fifty to sixty feet deep, which equates to about fifteen to sixteen meters, so it's fairly deep.

D-Uh huh.

S-A ways down. And if you look at it in profile, and if you look at it, there's maps available...

D-Which you should look up, because we're not ever going to be able to describe it well enough.

S-No, no. But it almost to me, from the side, looks like a semi-deflated pastry bag. You know that thing that, like, that you decorate cakes with? Cause it's kind of triangular and then it zig-zags back and forth and it's really skinny. Devin's laughing, but she gets it.

D-I do. Unfortunately.

S-She totally gets it.

D and J-Yeah.

S-So it goes down for, for quite a bit. Nobody knows how deep the cave is. And by, or how long the cave is, is the appropriate way to say that.

D-Uh huh.

S-We know, basically, how deep it is, but...

J-It gets too skinny at the back.

S-Correct.

J-What they need to do is, is like, you know, dress up a small child in a wet suit and with tanks and everything, and send him through that skinny part (Steve laughing).

D-I think you're supposed to not do that.

J-Oh. Is that against the rules?

D-Yeah. I think yes.

S-Yeah.

D-Yeah.

J-Oh.

S-It's crazy, I know, Joe. But.

J-Oh, well. Ok (Steve laughing).

S-Ok. For the length of the cave, we know that the cave is over 1700 feet long, which again, for our folks that are not on...

D-The uninitiated (Steve laughing).

S-...the same measurement system, it's 518 meters long.

D-At least.

S-At least.

D-Probably more.

S-Yeah. It's probably farther, but that's as far as anyone has gone that we know of.

D-Uh huh.

S-And that number, by the way, is self-reported. It's from a pretty reliable source, but it's self-reported for the distance.

D-Yeah.

S-It anybody's ever gone into a cave, as we were talking about, they get harder and harder to go into cause they get smaller and smaller as they go. They get narrower.

D-Uh huh.

J-Quite often.

S-And this cave is no different. As it dives down, the walls expand and contract and change shape, but they generally continually get closer and closer together.

D-They call them restrictions, is I think what they call them.

J-Yeah.

S-Yeah, I think that's totally correct.

D-I'm doing this totally from memory, I'm sorry.

J-Also bottlenecks or squeezes.

D-Yeah, bottlenecks. So it's, like, you know, a wide open cave, and then there's this, like, part that you have to squeeze through and then it opens up again...

S-And it's narrow, and that can be horizontally or vertically.

D-...but it's usually a little narrower. Uh huh, or both.

J-Uh huh.

S-Or both, yeah.

D-Yeah. I mean, there are caves near us called the Ape Caves.

S-Uh huh.

D-Which do this. If you've ever been in any cave you know what we're talking about.

J-Yeah. Ape Cave, there's not too much of that though. It's, I mean, it gets bigger...

D-At the very end, yeah.

J-Oh, at the very end, yeah. Yeah, there's another one that's only a couple of miles away from there that's called Little Red River Cave.

D-Yeah.

J-Have you been there?

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah. It's a gated cave, but...

D-Yeah, but, you know.

J-Did you go all the way to the end?

D-Uh, no.

J-Yeah, you didn't, really?

D-No (laughing).

J-Oh. Ok. It goes downward.

D-Uh huh.

J-And there's a, it's a difficult, more difficult than Ape Cave, but it keeps going downward and there's some climbing and stuff involved. And as you get down towards the end, water starts coming in, cause you go below the water table. And so there's water dripping from the ceiling and running, running down the floor and everything, and then you finally get to this end, and it's just a lake.

D-Yeah.

J-It's like, it ends in water.

D-Which, it may, it may continue.

J-Oh yeah.

S-Yeah.

J-So if you put on scuba gear and went down that, I'm not about to, but if you wanted to, you could see how far that thing goes. But, I had my creepiest cave experience in there one time. I was like, I was caving with three friends, and we got to the end, and we turned around and started heading back for the entrance. And I was bringing up the rear, and suddenly way back, and this is, this is like, actually a distance away from the end of the cave, and suddenly I heard this, I heard this thud coming from

behind me in the cave. And I stopped and I looked. Never found out what it was (laughing). Definitely I was looking over my shoulder a little bit more than I normally would be.

D-Like foot, like footsteps thuds, or?

J-Like something heavy dropped.

D-Oh, like one thing dropped?

J-Yeah, like something, and, yeah, uh huh. Kind of a something...

S-The look on Devin's face explains it all (laughing).

D-I don't like it.

J-Yeah.

S-She doesn't like that at all.

J-Yeah. It was a real soft, just sort of a way off in the distance, kind of 'thud.' And it's like, hmm.

D-I don't like that at all.

J-I don't like that at all (laughing).

S-It was Chupi.

D-It was Chupi, yeah.

J-Yeah. It could have been.

S-It was totally the chupacabra.

J-It could have been.

D-Yeah.

J-I somehow lived through it.

S-Yeah, you did. Well, back to Vortex Springs.

D and J-Oh yeah.

S-Ok. So at the end, or the farthest reach that we know of, the cave is only about ten inches high. That's 25 centimeters, which is really, really, really small.

J-Especially if you've got a bunch of gear on.

D-Yeah.

S-Yeah. And there's, and we'll talk a little bit about the diving and styles that are required, but people are squeezing themselves through these cracks while carrying their oxygen supply.

D-Hm.

S-So it's, it's not something to be taken lightly. And it is definitely something that you need to know how to do before you do it.

D-Oh yeah.

J-Better still, just don't do it.

S-Well, we've read enough, I know all of us have read enough stories about people getting lost in caves, some of whom were lucky enough to be found alive.

D-Uh huh.

S-And this is cave diving, not just people lost in caves that are filled with air (laughing).

D-Yeah, yeah.

J-Uh huh, yeah.

D-It's, uh yeah, scary. Scary stuff.

S-Yeah, it's dangerous.

J-Crazily dangerous. I think the only way I'd do it, I'd take some fluorescent, some fluorescent green cord with me or something like that, so I could have just run a line the whole way.

S-Well, cave divers do typically run a cord.

D-Run lines, yeah.

J-That's a good idea.

S-They tend to run a cord behind them so they can turn around and easily retrace their path out. Because it's very easy, in a pitch black environment, to lose your way.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah, especially if your light breaks or something like that.

S-Yeah, anything like that.

D-Yeah.

S-Now, for Vortex Springs, what they've done is, in the 1990s, there was a string of people who drowned in the cave. Got lost, ran out of air, and drowned. And so the state said we're going to shut you

down probably, so what the owners of Vortex Springs did is about 300 feet in, they put in a gate. And that gate has a, it's a keyed gate. If you present identification and certification saying "I can cave dive," they will give you the key and let you in. Otherwise, it's meant to stop people from going into the cave and getting lost and dying. Now how effective that gate is? It's not really high tech. It looks like a bunch of pieces of rebar that are jammed into the stone and happens to have a lock and a hinged gate on it.

D-You know, my sense of it was that it is more to discourage than to actually stop people. I mean, I think that if you're a diver and you're kind of inexperienced and you're just thinking, "Oh, I'll just go to this cave, blah blah blah," and you encounter a thing that looks like that.

J-And there's a stop sign and there's this sign that's got the grim reaper on it right there.

D-Yeah, um, you're, and, you know, instead of just the sign, which would be pretty easy to just kind of, blah blah...

S-Ignore.

D-Yeah.

S-"Hey, it's funny. Somebody put a stop sign down here."

D-Yeah. I think it's more meant to be, like, that symbolic, "Hey, don't go past here unless you want to die."

S-Yeah. The problem with the gate is it is easy to bypass. Or it is not difficult to bypass, I should say. I wouldn't say it's easy, but people have been known to get around it.

D-Well, there's a video.

S-Uh huh.

D-Actually, there are a couple videos by this, this guy...

S-Uh huh.

D-...that I watched, and I just wanted to bring it up real quick.

S-Actually, let me do, really quick, I just want to finish just two little bits of detail about the cave.

D-Oh, sure.

S-And then we can talk about that, because that's really important and interesting, but the only other thing that I wanted people to know about when it comes to the cave itself, is that the depth of the cave that we know is around 150 feet deep.

D-Uh huh.

S-That's underwater, which would equate, again, that's 45 meters. And that's a significant number

because divers who tend to go to 130 feet or below typically have to breathe not just straight oxy...normal gas mix of what's in the atmosphere, a regular air mix.

D-Uh huh.

S-They've actually got to do a special gas mixture, and that's to help stave off things for decompression issues.

J-The bends, yeah.

S-The bends, exactly.

D-Uh huh.

J-Yeah. And I've been told that most divers actually always turn around at 100 feet.

D-Right.

J-Yeah, they do.

S-Most, 130 is the depth you can go...

J-That's the max, but if you want a safety cushion...

S-Correct. Yeah, yeah, for a safety cushion it's somewhere in that range. You, but that's the bottom.

J-Yeah.

S-After that you have to be, you should be, if you, well, if you don't want to kill yourself (laughing).

J-Well, you don't have to. And you might survive.

S-If you want to take that chance, yeah. But, and then you were going to talk about this, the gate. I know, because you were looking at the videos.

D-Yeah, I was just going to bring up a little bit. There's some really, really interesting videos that you should watch if you can stand to (Steve laughing). It's a, I mean, it's a little creepy. I, you know, I was telling you guys that I have developed a new fear (laughing). But one of these videos, it's not totally clear what's happening, but one of them, it was filmed by a guy named Nik. He has a diving partner, and they do these deep water cave videos, just, all the time. They have a bunch at Vortex Springs. One of them is Nik showing how easy it is to get over the gate. And it doesn't take them but a minute, you know. There's a little spot where you can just, you have to push your tank in before you, and then you climb over, and then you put your tank back on. And he does it a couple times. But that's, it's really interesting.

S-It's very easy.

D-It looks very easy.

S-Once you know how to do it, yeah.

D-It looks very, very easy to me.

J-It looks very, very easy to get caught on that thing and drown, but.

D-Yeah, I mean, it would be pretty easy to snag something on it, too. Yeah.

J-Yeah, that would suck.

S-Yeah. This is not something that we're saying lightly to just go do. We're just saying...

D-Oh yeah, please don't.

J-Yeah.

S-...this is, yeah, please don't.

J-Yeah, we don't wanna...

S-This is, at, at, from the videos we've seen from that time...

D-It's possible.

S-...and I haven't heard anything if the gate's ever been upgraded by now.

D-Yeah, I, I would suspect it has, but I don't know.

S-I would hope so.

D-Yeah.

J-Probably since then.

S-Yeah.

D-Yeah. I mean, that's super interesting and all, I have more about the videos...

S-Yeah you do.

D-...that those guys posted later, but I'll talk about that when it's relevant.

S-Ok.

D-Ok.

S-Sounds perfect. So let's get back to the story, because that's enough about the cave itself.

D-Yeah.

S-And there are maps available on the internet, so if you want to go look at those.

J-We'll probably, we will probably even post a link to one.

S-It might be one of the links, absolutely.

D-Maybe.

J-Yeah.

S-So Ben could have been diving at Vortex Springs for up to four months.

D-He probably was.

S-He probably was, cause he moved into the, his parent's house in Florida in April of that year, and so I imagine not to long after that, I'm going to guess several weeks after that, started diving.

J-And he was, he was kind of a regular around there I thought.

S-He was a total regular.

D-They knew him.

J-He was very familiar, yeah.

S-They knew him. He was there almost every day, absolutely. But what he did that was a giant no-no from everything I know about diving, and everything I've ever read about diving, is he was solo diving.

J-I know. You know, even above ground caving, you really don't want to do that alone.

S-No, there's, because if something goes wrong...

D-Pretty much any kind of adventuring you don't want to do alone.

J-Yeah, not a great idea.

S-No, you don't. I mean, it's a, you know, you always have your dive buddy, you always go down with somebody else. But according to accounts that came out after the fact, Ben was either a little bit unapproachable, maybe came off as a jerk, or people have described him as over confident. And so maybe that came through in a negative way. You know, somebody just read that wrong. And so he never got, he never made a friend to be his dive buddy.

D-I almost wonder if the over confidence really kept people from wanting to be his dive partner, in that it read as reckless?

J-Uh huh. Cocky.

D-You don't necessarily want, well, not just cocky, but I mean, genuinely reckless. You don't want to have a dive partner who's always saying, "Hey, let's break the rules and do all these things and I don't,

you know, I'm not as trained as I should be, but we're going to do this thing anyway.” That's not what you want from a dive partner. You want somebody that you're, like, very confident in their abilities, I assume.

S-He, he did, he did seem to come off, by some of the stuff I've read and watched, he said that his skills were much more than they were, in terms of his experience. Cause there's a movie that we'll talk about where he had, he was trying to pass himself off almost as a dive instructor. Which he was in no way, shape, or form qualified to be.

J-Yeah. He wanted to be one.

D-He wanted to be one.

S-He did, he wanted to be one.

J-He probably could have been one sooner or later.

S-But the point is that he was acting as if he was one, and I imagine that for people who knew what was going on, that was really off-putting. So that, that worked against him. That absolutely did not, that behavior did not work in his favor.

J-Probably not.

S-Whether, whether that's what he did or not, I don't know. But the point is he went in by himself.

J-Well, yeah, you never know. I didn't know Ben, obviously.

S-No, nor did I.

J-He'd, he'd only been there for four months, so he maybe didn't have enough time to really meet people.

S-Uh huh.

J-Or maybe he just liked to dive alone.

S-Yeah. No, that's absolutely possible. It's absolutely possible.

J-It still doesn't make it a good idea.

D-No.

S-No. So he was, like we said, he's certified to dive in open water. He's not certified to dive in caves. And as we said, he had, he decided that what he wanted to do was become a dive instructor. He'd also expressed to his family that he wanted to learn to cave dive, and that he wanted to open his own dive business.

J-Well yeah, I think one way to learn to cave dive is to do it with a qualified instructor.

S and D-Uh huh.

J-Yeah.

S-So...

D-Another way to do it is to read a lot and then just do it.

J-Which is what he did.

D-I'm sorry, I should be clear, I'm making a joke.

S-Yes.

D-Please do not do that.

S-Do not do that. Ok, so here's the thing...

J-Yeah, we can't afford to lose any listeners.

S...if you, I want, I want people who are interested in this to do this, which is to look up technical diving, and look at the certifications that you have to get, and it is a huge list with a certain number of hours of every one of them before you can be, have that to your technical diving record. You can have that and say, "I can do this." Ok, it's all hours based. Ben wanted to do this thing, so he was going underwater and logging tons and tons and tons of hours at a breakneck speed to say, so if a certification takes a hundred hours, he's like, "Well, if I go six hours a day, every day, I'll be there in no time flat."

J-Uh huh, yeah.

S-"You know, it'll take me less than two weeks. I can totally make this happen." Well that's not the way that you're supposed to do it. Cause the reason that it takes hours is so that you learn how to do certain things. They become automatic reactions and automatic functions, so that when you're in a catastrophic situation, you automatically react in the proper way. And that wasn't what he was doing. He was just piling on the hours, based on his log books anyway.

D-Yeah.

S-Um...

D-Which is, do you want to explain real quick what a log book is?

S-Oh, that's a very good question (laughing).

D-Yeah.

S-So, it just seemed so standard to me

D-I know. It's one of those ones.

S-A log book is quite literally a book where you write in a log of your activities. It's almost like a time card. You say, "Went in the water at, did xyz, exited the water at, so for a total of time of under the water." And it's a tally, and you're just keeping a record of everything you're doing. And a good practice is to then go back and reread your log books...

D-Yeah.

S-...to think about things that you did. And this is why you don't do things at such a high speed. Say, once a week you go dive for three hours, and then you reread your log book three weeks later, like, "I totally don't remember...oh, that's right, and then I do this." Like, you know?

D-Yeah.

S-I equate it to the same thing as taking a final. Did you guys ever do this? You'd cram like mad before the final, and then take the test and then remember none of it the next day.

D-After the test?

S-After the test.

J-It kind of works that way.

D-Oh yeah.

J-Yeah, yeah. It's definitely...

D-Yeah, that's how I did finals. For sure. But I mean...

S-And that's not what you're supposed to do, though.

J-No.

D-No, and I think you also, in your log book, you take notes and draw diagrams, you know?

S-Uh huh.

D-Any important information. I suspect you also say things like, "Here's what my oxygen tank was at when I went in. Here's what it was at when I came out."

S-"Here's how long it took to decompress."

D-"Here's how long it took to decompress. Here's how I'm feeling." You know? "Here's how I'm feeling the next day."

J-"Feeling kind of bendy."

S-Well that's more of a "dear diary," but. I'm making a joke. I'm joking (laughing).

D-Yeah, yeah, I know. But I mean, I think those are all very important things to be keeping track of as

well.

S-Yeah.

J-You probably should be paying attention to how your body reacts to all that crap, because it might just be that you shouldn't be doing it.

D-Yeah. And you have to give your body time to react.

J-Yeah.

D-Is the really important part, right?

S-Yes.

D-Cause if it turns out the next day, something's going to negatively affect you, if you just keep doing it and doing it and doing it, and you haven't given your body time to do that reset, you're done for.

S-Yeah. No, absolutely.

D-So that's what a logbook is.

S-Yes.

J-Ok. All right.

S-So let's go to the 18th of August, 2010, which was a Wednesday, by the way. Ben McDaniels went, in the early part of the day he took a dive in Vortex Springs, and went down. And afterward he was seen by people hanging around. So it wasn't like he did his dive, came out, and went home. He hung around. He was writing in his logbook. He's adjusting his gear. We know that at one point he went and filled his tanks, because of some security footage. We don't know what he filled his tanks with, whether it was just a regular air mix, or some specialized mix. We don't know.

J-But you mean, by his tanks, I mean, there were other tanks that were found that did have air in them.

D-Yeah, this is the question.

J-That the ones that he was actually wearing...

S-Ok, we don't know...

J-...we don't know about those ones, right?

S-We don't know which tanks he put the air in. Whether they were the ones that he was wearing and disappeared with, or the ones that were subsequently found after the fact.

D-They also, we also don't know for a hundred percent certainty that the ones that were found after the fact were actually Ben's.

S-It's, the evidence is pretty strong.

D-It's pretty strong, but we, we don't know.

S-They don't say "Ben McDaniels" etched into them, you're right (laughing).

J-Right.

D-I mean, they do now, but they didn't when they were found.

S-No, they don't.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah. And also, another thing that's frustrating about this mystery is I would like to know exactly how many tanks Ben owned. That would be useful.

D-I don't know if there's a way to find that out.

J-Well, I guess you could call his family, but the problem is they might not even know. In fact, they probably don't.

D-They probably don't.

S-Uh yeah, I don't know that they, they have an accurate number, and I don't know that anybody's ever said that. That's a really good thing and I thought the same question.

D-Yeah, but it's not...

S-I believe that if the tanks that were found were Ben's, then he had at least four tanks, if not more.

J-Uh huh.

S-But he had to have had at least...

D-Well they found three, so he would have had to have had at least four (laughing).

S-Yes.

D-Right?

J-You would think actually five, cause you don't cave dive without two tanks.

S-Right. Well, you shouldn't.

J-Yeah.

D-Well.

J-Uh yeah, I guess you could, but it'd be really dumb.

D-You could if you were going for an all time record of some kind.

S-Yeah (laughing). But...

D-But that was what my face was, that, you know, we, they found the tanks and they found at least two of them had the special mix in it.

S-The regular air.

D-The regular air.

S-They had regular air in them. They weren't a special mix at all.

D-Oh, two of them, that's right. I'm sorry. I had them switched.

S-Uh huh.

D-Two of them were normal air and one of them was the special mix.

S-Uh huh. Right.

D-Which was weird, right? Based on their placement.

S-Yeah, it's weird. Because as I said before, if you're going to dive in that cave, and you're going to go to that depth, you should be using a special gas, the gas mix, not just regular air...

D-Uh huh.

S-...for the decompression issues.

D-Yeah, but I thought...

S-So, there's, there's some very questionable judgment in terms of the way he went about it.

D-Well, I thought that normal air was used when they were coming up, during decompression, that they would be your cans for decom...like, when you're coming up slowly, once you were above a certain...no?

S-I...

D-I may have made that up.

S-I was going to say...

J-I would think it would be, yeah.

S-I, I actually don't know enough. I remember reading so much about it, and there's so much technical

details, that I will be honest, I do not remember the right answer to that.

D-Ok. Yeah.

S-So I, I don't know off the top of my head.

D-I would just think that if you're using something special below 130, it means that you can't use that something special above 130 feet.

S-No. No, that doesn't...

J-You can use it above.

D-You can use it whenever?

S-Yeah. You can use it above, yeah.

D-Never mind.

J-Yeah.

S-But it totally doesn't stop you from using it at the onset.

J-Yeah. But I imagine it's probably cheaper to buy just regular old compressed air than it is to buy the special mix, so that might account for the two bottles.

S-That's true, but I don't, I don't know that he was really concerned with cash, either.

D-Yeah, I don't have that sense.

J-Yeah. There's that.

D-Given some things that we're going to talk about in a little bit here.

S-Actually, let's leave those tanks where they are.

D-Ha ha ha.

S-And I don't mean that as a pun...

D-Yeah, ok, sorry.

S-I'm going to do this all the time, but...

D-So they, he fills his tanks.

S-He fills his tanks.

D-Ok.

S-And then, Vortex Springs closes at four o'clock at night, so everybody who's swimming and having a good time goes home. But Ben goes for a dive at sometime around seven or seven-thirty that night.

D-And that's...

J-So was he, did he sort of have a bro thing going with the peoples, the people that owned it? Is that how he could do that?

S-Well, the divers could stay and finish their dives. So, swimmers, the people that are using the zip line and everything, "Hey guys, the pool's closed. Get out." You know, to get all those people out of there. But if you're a diver and you go in at three o'clock and you got two or three hours worth of air, you're going to stay under.

J-Yeah.

S-And so I, I don't know how it was that he would wrangle the I'm going to go in after the, the pool is closed thing. It's not as if the pool was gated off. If you looked at pictures, you could walk in anywhere. You really could. I mean, there's an entrance with stairs for divers, but he could have literally gone in at any point.

D-I had a sense that the owner of Vortex Springs...

S-Lowell. Lowell Kelly.

D-Yeah, Lowell Kelly, really liked Ben, or at least after the fact seemed to like Ben.

S-Ok, thank you for the clarification (laughing).

D-I think he just didn't care, and Ben was kind of, at least, amicable with the people who ran it, given the bit we're going to talk about in a second here.

S-Uh huh.

D-So I think, I mean, I think he was just doing it. It was against the rules, but they were kind of like, "Well, he's going to do it either way, so we can't stop him."

S-Yeah.

D-Or he paid people off. Also possible.

S-Absolutely. That's absolutely a possibility. So here's the thing...

D-Cause he didn't have *no* money.

S...we know that he's in the water because somewhere around 7:30 that night, as he's going down through the entrance of the cave heading to the gate, he passes two other divers who are exiting the cave, who also happen to be employees of Vortex Spring, and their names are Chuck Cronin and Edwardo Taran. And Edwardo stops, I mean they pass him. He stops, he signals to Chuck, you know, "wait," goes back to Ben, and he unlocks the gate for Ben.

J-Yeah.

S-And that is because they were convinced that Ben had been going into the cave, and however he was doing it, he was bypassing that gate.

D-Well, he was wearing his helmet and lights.

S-He was wearing, yeah, he was wearing all of his gear to go into the cave.

D-Uh huh. And helmet, that's the important bit, right?

S-Yes. He's wearing a helmet.

D-Cause you could go down, it's called the Piano Room.

S-Uh huh.

D-Is this big open cavern before the gate, which is kind of the last stop for any normal diver.

S-It's where the gate is. Yeah.

D-Basically, yeah. So I think you can go down there without a helmet.

S-Correct.

D-Into the Piano Room, but when you go deeper you need a helmet. So that was I thought why they thought he was definitely going for...

S-Well yeah, if he's in that area, then it's pretty obvious what he's doing.

J-Well, you know, the thing about it is he'd been hanging around so much you gotta figure he's pushing the cave, you know, ever deeper all the time.

S-Yeah.

J-But, and I heard one of the reasons, it's not just the whole going around thing, but he figured if he let him in, that would save Ben five minutes, maybe, of air.

S-Yeah.

D-Uh huh.

S-That's, that's...

J-Yeah.

S-That's the only logical reason that I can think of. Now at first I thought, well, it only takes a minute or so to get in, so who cares? But really, where it's important is when he's getting out.

D-Right.

S-If he's running low on air, and now he's got to stop and do something that takes two or three minutes, that's two or three minutes of air that he may not have.

D-Uh huh.

J-Yeah. That he desperately needs.

D-Well, and I think that Edwardo even said that. He said he thought that Ben was jumping the fence anyway and he would try and save him some time, so he unlocked the gate.

S-Uh huh.

D-Even though he knew, we should make it very clear, he knew that Ben was not certified and not well trained to be cave diving.

S-Uh huh.

D-And actually, um, you know, to speak to Ben's talent as a diver.

S-His aptitude.

D-Aptitude, if you will. That guy I was talking about earlier, Nik, who records all these videos. There's lots and lots of videos out there that he has, and I believe, and this is just me putting a couple things together, so I'm not a hundred percent sure on this, so please don't crucify me if I'm wrong on this, but Nik has a video called "The Lost Diver In The Piano Room," and it's, like, a three part thing. And it's him and his diving partner are going down on a routine swim. They record the whole thing. And then when they're swimming around the Piano Room, they encounter a diver who, I guess, is maybe lost, I don't know, who I believe is Ben.

S-Didn't they say they thought it was him, after the fact?

D-You know, I don't know. Here, the way that I put this together was this guy who films these videos, named Nik, and then in this movie that we watched, Nik's, or "Ben's Vortex," they show a Facebook post that Ben had made a couple days before he went missing, that said, "Oh, I think I interrupted a video shoot today when I was down training. Nik was down there and he was, he was, you know, filming and I think that they helped me find my way out," or something like that. So I believe that this is the case, and again, I don't know that for sure. But I think, if it is Ben, so the way that cave divers...

S-Side tank.

D-...yeah, they do this side tank thing, where you think of a normal scuba diver, they have the tanks on their back. Instead when you're cave diving, you mount them to your sides, so that you're slimmer.

S-Behind your armpits.

D-Yeah.

S-They run along the sides of your body so that you are a, when swimming horizontally, are not a thick...

D-Yeah, so you are flatter.

S-Uh huh.

D-So that you can maneuver yourself in to and out of crevices easier.

S-Yeah.

D-So it looks like Ben is really struggling.

J-Well, it's hard to say. I saw the same video, and it could be that, or he could just be fooling around. I mean...

D-He could have been.

J-...I don't know, I really don't know.

D-It looks like he...

J-It's, it's hard to say what, what the hell exactly he's doing.

D-Well, it's hard to say, it's hard to see too. But it's hard to say...

S-Cause it's pitch black except for the two beams.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah. Those guys need to work on their lighting (Steve laughing). They really do.

D-Well, it's hard, so it's hard for a number of reasons. One, you know, back to the buoyancy issue, it seems like he's kind of floating. He's having a hard time diving.

S-Like he's not using the right amount of weight.

D-Uh huh, yeah.

S-To compensate for the tanks.

D-It does look like that a lot. And it looks like he's moving more awkwardly than the videos of people who are trained with the side mount system that I've seen. And he's also doing the hand signal for, like, "which way?" So he's trying to signal to Nik and his partner...

S-Which way up and which way down.

D-I think, well I don't know. It's just all his hand signal is "which way?" I mean, obviously, when you're scuba diving you can't say, like, "which way up which way down?"

S-The hard part about that video though is, I agree with Joe, at times I thought maybe he was screwing around.

D-Uh huh.

S-The other part that's really difficult to tell what's going on and potentially wrong is that everybody is spinning in space, and there are times where you can tell the camera is upside down and the person in frame is upside down because, you know, the bubbles...

D-Yeah.

J-Uh huh.

S-...should be going above them and instead they're heading towards their feet.

D-Yeah.

S-They're standing on the ceiling (laughing).

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah.

D-So it's hard, it's hard to tell, but it's interesting to see, if that is indeed Ben.

S-Uh huh.

D-It doesn't look like he's very confident or moving as fluidly as you would hope somebody who's attempting dives like the ones I think he's attempting.

S-Uh huh, yeah.

J-Yeah.

D-So I just wanted to also throw that out there too.

S-Yeah.

J-Maybe, I don't know. It's hard, again, it's hard to say what he's doing.

S-Yeah, yeah.

J-It is dark in, it's a murky little video.

S-It, yeah. Well, that's the problem. And that's the thing again, I think we talked about this a little bit more, but, before, but cave diving, the only light that you have is the light that you bring.

D-Uh huh.

S-So if you have crap, have you ever had a car that had crappy headlights?

D-Uh huh.

J-Oh yeah.

S-And then you got a car that had good headlights? You're like, "Oh my God. How did I not run anybody over?"

D-Uh huh.

S-It's the same thing cave diving. You've got crappy little headlights, you're not going to see very well.

D and J-Yeah.

S-And that's what makes that video so difficult.

D-Yeah.

S-But back to Ben and Edwardo. As we said, Edwardo figured that Ben was bypassing the gate so he, he unlocks it, and then normally what Chuck and Edwardo would do is they would finish their dive. They'd go topside and they'd wait until they saw Ben's bubbles coming to the surface, because that meant he was out of the cave, he was going through the decompression process, things should be fine, and they'd leave.

D-So that was a fairly frequent occurrence, then, that Ben would dive at night?

S-He had obviously done it several times.

D-Ok.

S-And these guys, I really feel like they were kind of trying to look out for him. Like, "That idiot. We'll hang on, we'll keep an eye for him in case something seems like it's not right, and then we'll have to, we'll go try and help."

D-Sure.

S-That's the sense that I got. But instead, this particular night they didn't wait for Ben. They left. "Eh, what the heck." They took off.

J-That's, they had something going on, probably.

S-Well, yeah, I think they went to Edwardo's house and had coffee.

D-I heard, yeah.

J-And besides, you can't be babysitting, you know, this guy all the time, right? Yeah.

S-No.

D-Although, it is a little suspicious that this is the one night they didn't stay, but fine. Whatever.

S-I know.

D-But ok.

S-That is raised a lot. It is suspicious. The one time they don't stay.

J-Uh huh.

D-He's...

S-He disappears.

D-Yeah.

S-So those guys go home.

D-Uh huh.

S-The next day Ben's truck is in the parking lot cause he has not, that we know of, come out of the water.

D-Uh huh.

S-Nobody notices.

D-Well...

S-Notice I'm using "notice" with quotes. And that means it was a Thursday, though it was August, so maybe school was still out, it was particularly hot, very busy, they said they didn't notice it because they were busy.

D-I, you know, I think that doesn't bother me that much. I think you're a little busy so what you're really saying is "I didn't notice Ben," because if he was diving at the rate that he, that we seem to think he was diving at, it's totally possible that he would get there really early in the morning and go for a dive.

S-A very valid point.

D-And then hang out in the middle of the day when it's really busy and then go for a night dive after everybody's left. And that they were just used to seeing his truck there all the time.

J-Yeah, true.

D-And so what they're really saying is, "We didn't notice Ben around but, you know, his truck is always there anyway."

J-His truck is there, he's probably off under water somewhere, you know?

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah.

S-That, you know, that's a really good point. I'd never heard anybody, I mean, we've heard about his night diving habit.

D-Yeah.

S-I'd never actually seen anything that said if Ben was an early riser and was in the water at six when they opened up at eight, they just, "Uh, Ben's diving again."

J-Uh huh.

D-It sounds like he was doing a very accelerated process so...

S-He really was.

D-...I mean, it wouldn't surprise me to find out that he was often there early in the morning too.

S-Uh huh.

J-Yeah, so.

S-So the next day is the 20th of August. That's a Friday, and that's the second day he's missing. Eduardo, actually, is the one who recognized the truck and realized that it hadn't moved, and asked around and nobody said they had seen Ben, and so then he turned around and called the cops.

D-Yeah. He probably thought, "Oh, I left on Thursday, and it's been there the entire time. Hm."

J-Uh huh.

S-Uh huh. Yeah, probably something like that. The police came. They searched the truck. They find Ben's wallet. It's got seven hundred bucks in cash in it. There's equipment and his logbook in the pickup. They eventually, when they can't find him, they bring cadaver dogs. Cadaver dogs, for those who don't know, I know we've talked about them before.

J-Yeah, they're not cadavers.

S-No (laughing). The dogs are not cadavers.

J-No.

S-They are dogs that react to the smell of a decomposing human body.

J-Yeah.

S-Those dogs were brought and, supposedly, triggered when they smelled the water.

D-I don't...

S-I have a hard time with it as well.

J-I don't think the body would have started decomposing that quickly.

D-I don't think so either.

J-Especially if it was cool water.

S-I don't think they could have smelled it if it was under 80, or a 100 feet of water like that.

D-Yeah.

J-And plus, there's going to be other things dying. Of course, cadaver dogs are well trained to differentiate between say, a dead possum and a dead human being, correct?

S-They are supposed to be, yes.

J-Supposedly. Yeah.

S-Yeah. So I, I have a difficulty with the whole cadaver dog thing, but you will see that reported. They, like I said, they signaled on the body, so...

D-No, they signaled on the water.

S-Or, thank you, yes. They signaled on the water.

D-Uh huh.

S-And at that point, local divers who were certified to go into the cave, and knew what, and found out what Ben had been doing, went into the cave. And those divers logged hour upon hour looking for him in the cave. The strange thing that they found right away was they found a pair of his tanks near the entrance of the cave.

D-Which we mentioned before.

J-Yeah.

S-Uh huh. We talked about that before. So that was weird. The location of them is weird, because typically what a diver does, is you don't leave all of your air in one place.

J-Yeah. You drop tanks on the way.

S-You drop tanks, it's like bread crumbs, you drop tanks so you can A, find your way back out, and B, get some air if you really need some air, if you got a low tank you can switch them out.

D-Uh huh.

S-So it's odd that they were there.

D-Somebody said that it looked like they were placed by somebody who didn't know what they were doing.

S-Oh. Yeah, you do hear that.

J-Could be.

D-Yeah.

S-I mean, there, there is a lot, and I...

J-There were, and there were three tanks, right?

S-I believe there was. But what I wanted, I do want to touch on real quickly is there have been a lot of things that have been said in the media, and we have started saying some of this as well, which is questioning his diving abilities.

J-Hm.

S-And so when we say things like that, I don't want it to come across as we say Ben was an idiot. It was he was doing things that were not done the way that a proper cave diver would have done. I just want to make sure.

D-Or...

J-Or those tanks, he did put those tanks where they wound up.

D-Yeah.

S-Or yeah, that's also a very valid point, but I just want to cover that, because I've noticed it's kind of happened a couple of times.

D-Yeah, no. No, we're not saying that Ben, I mean, he may have been a novice.

S-Inexperienced. He was a novice, and shouldn't have been doing what he was doing.

D-Right. Probably.

S-That's completely different.

J-Yeah, he was an experienced scuba diver, but not in caves. Yeah.

S-Uh huh.

J-By the way, I, so this place was very, very popular? Vortex Springs, with scuba divers?

S-Yeah.

J-And so scuba divers coming and going every day?

S-Yeah.

J-Ok. So it's strange that nobody noticed those tanks.

S-Well, they may have noticed the tanks. It may have been that a diver who was like, "Oh, well there's somebody obviously in the cave. That must be his tanks."

D-Ok, so here's a question.

S-Yeah.

D-Uh...

S-I see the look on her face. She's going to hit me with a zinger (Joe laughing).

D-Yeah, here's a question for ya, a real brain puzzler, if you will.

S-A real doozy.

D-So Edwardo unlocked the gate for him Thursday night.

S-Uh huh.

D-And it's a padlock with a key.

S-Correct.

D-How did it get locked again?

J-Well, Ben could have locked it. But it was locked, correct?

S-When?

J-Uh, well, that's something, I mean, that's a really good question, is that I'm assuming that Edwardo unlocked it, and maybe even handed the padlock over to Ben, just in case a prankster wouldn't come along and lock it.

S-Not at that time of night.

J-You don't think it would?

S-No, I, I imagine that if, that if Edwardo unlocked it, he left the unlocked padlock on the loop.

J-Uh huh, yeah.

S-He wouldn't have given the lock to Ben. Ben has no use for it.

J-Yeah.

D-Well, the use is that you have it with you so nobody's going to lock you in.

J-Yeah.

S-But if nobody else is expected to go in that night, then what's the problem?

D-Uh huh, but he definitely didn't leave the key, right?

J-Yeah.

D-So as far as we know...

S-I do not believe he left the key, no.

D...Edwardo unlocked the gate and then...

S-At some point later on the gate got relocked.

D-...somehow it got relocked.

J-It...

S-It had to have been relocked at some point, yes.

D-Ok.

J-It was relocked?

S-Eventually.

J-Uh huh.

S-I mean, it's not as if when they, you know, I don't believe that when they went down, when the divers went down looking for Ben, they said, "Hey look, the gate's still unlocked." I'm sure that some employee that was looking around went, "Uh, nobody's been in here today. Somebody left the gate unlocked." And they, they relocked it.

J-Uh huh.

D-And so...

S-I imagine that would have happened the next day, but I don't...

D-I guess.

S-This is speculation.

J-Or, or Ben relocked it.

S-No, absolutely no idea when that could have happened.

D-For me, that's a really, really, really important detail.

S-You're right. It is. It's the bubbling gun in this case (D and J laughing). And I don't know.

D-Ok.

S-I have no idea when that gate got relocked.

D-Great. Ok.

S-Ok (laughing). Zinger done.

J-Yeah.

S-Ok, so let's continue on with the story here. So Ben's parents come to the area, and they stay there while the search has begun for their son. They've made some not so great choices in the way that they've discussed the case with social media specifically. They've peeved some people off in the diving community.

D-Well...

J-Yeah.

S-Because...

J-Poor choices of words.

D-I mean...

S-Poor choice of words is exactly what it is. It's not like they're intending to anger anybody.

J-No.

D-Yeah.

S-They actually know they need these people's help.

D-What I'll say is that they, they have said things in the way that you would expect grieving parents to say them.

S-I'd agree with that. So while they're there, there's divers in the cave looking. One of the things we've talked about in the beginning is that this spring, obviously because it's an upwelling, it overflows. The water overflows out through and drains into Blue Creek, which then goes into some swampy areas, cause it's Florida.

J-And of course they checked those for corpses.

S-They checked all of that. They ran dogs through the area. They searched it. So no body is found, at this point, below or above the water. So Ben's body has completely disappeared. His possessions aren't there, like his dive gear. Everything he would have had on. None of that has shown up at this point. The, as they have to do eventually, the police call the search off. I mean, the divers are like, "Listen, we can't find him. He's not in here." And the police are like, "We can't find him on the ground, we're not going to keep combing this area." They call it off.

J-Yeah.

D-The divers...

J-It's not that complicated of a cave, really. I mean, it's twisty and long, but there's not that many side passages to get lost in.

D-Well...

S-That's, that's, for the most part I am in agreement with Joe. I know, Devin, that you feel a little different.

D-I do.

S-But when I watched that, though the walls do undulate, they are essentially a straight line. From the over view, from space, if you look at this cave, it seems to kind of be in a bit of a bend, maybe almost an 'S' shape as it goes away, but for the most part, it's a tube that goes straight in the ground...

D-I will, I will agree with that for the moment.

S-So there's no giant off shoots is my point.

D-No, there's...

S-It's not as if you can go...

D-As far as you know. As far as we know, but there are places where there are holes, you know, between where the floor is and the wall, that who knows what's behind there. Because frankly, every single person who has gone into this cave has a care for their life and wants to come back alive, so they're not going to stick their head in there (Joe laughing). So we don't know if there is a cavern in there, if somebody did squeeze in there, anything like that.

S-So something to go along with that, and why there may actually be off shoots that we don't know, is the floor of the cave is very silty, and I've actually read accounts from divers who have been stuck in sandalanches, I believe they called it. It's very sandy, and they went into something, and then the sand started coming in, the silt started coming in, and they had to dig themselves out. And for every two shovelfuls out, or one out, two seemed to come in.

D-Uh huh.

S-And it took them a while to get some headway to get back out. So yes, it is entirely possible that he squeezed in a hole, and he knocked something loose, and the hole closed behind him. That is possible. And that could be some giant tunnel off shoot that we don't know.

D-One of the other things, one of the other things they found was his shovel.

S-They believe.

D-They think.

J-Somebody's shovel.

S-They think it's his shovel because it was placed very deep in the cave, but they don't know that it was Ben's. But it's believed to be his, yes.

D-And it apparently matched the description of a picture.

S-Which is a standard issue folding shovel.

D-Oh yeah, no, it could have been anybody's, but it also could have been Ben's.

S-Uh huh. Yes. Absolutely.

J-Yeah, the thing about it is, is I used to know some cavers. I did caving myself. There's always, the real hard core ones really, really want to push the cave. That means that if they find some little crack or crevice or hole, they'll go try to force their body into it to see if they can actually, you know, break through and find another room or another cave or something like that.

D-Yeah. Yes.

J-And the thing about it is, is even the hard core cavers that I used to know would never do something like that by themselves. You know?

D-Well.

J-You know? (Laughing). It's like, you know...

S-Yeah.

J-When you get stuck, you want to have somebody to grab your feet and pull you back out of that hole.

D-Uh huh.

S-Yes.

D and J-Yeah.

S-That is, that is very imperative.

J-Yeah, you really do.

D-Yeah.

S-So back to the McDaniels though. Ben's family.

D-Oh yeah.

S-So while they're there, remember I said they were there while the search was going on, and then once the search was called off, what they decided to do was they decided to, and this is the part that I told you they, where they kind of bungled things, and they really made people mad.

D-Yeah.

J-Uh huh.

S-Is they put out a \$10,000 reward for someone to find their son's body, cause at this point they know he's dead.

D-Uh huh.

S-But they say...

D-Well, they think, they think he's dead.

S-They're pretty sure. They'll give \$10,000 to anyone who is, as they put it, "brave enough to go find him."

J-Yeah, well it's obvious that it was not a good choice of words.

S-No, because all of the cave divers are like, "Are you kidding? Do you know how much danger I put myself into going in this cave looking for him in the first place?"

J-Uh huh.

S-And the cave diving community is up in arms, and they are saying, "Listen, you need to, you need to pull back this reward offer. You're going to get somebody killed."

J-Uh huh.

S-The McDaniels, on their part, they ignore that. They increase the reward not once, but twice, to the tune of \$30,000 total in the end.

J-Eventually they took, they took that away, but...

D-Well.

J-They took it down.

S-They did, only after a gentleman by the name of Larry Higgenbotham, and he's from Biloxi, Mississippi, March 2012, he drowned in the cave. And it's believed, not confirmed, but people were pretty sure he was going in there and looking for Ben because he was having a hard time and he needed some cash.

J-Uh huh.

S-He thought, if I find...he evidently said something about finding this guy and collecting the reward.

D-Well, he had, he had also been following the case.

S-Yeah.

D-I mean, he was a cave diver...

S-Yes, he was.

D-...who had been following the case since, since it started, so.

S-Uh huh.

D-It wasn't just, like, out of the blue. "Oh, \$30,000? I will, I've never done this before but I'll do it."

J-Yeah (laughing).

S-No, no, absolutely not.

J-I got to say, that must really suck to be, you know, that moment when you kind of...

D-I don't want to think about it. No, no, no, no (Joe laughing).

S-Joe, let's stop right there.

J-Ok, I won't...

S-Don't want, don't want to think that through at all.

J-Yeah.

S-The moment when you realize you're out of air.

J-Yeah, or going to be out of air.

S-So, so, Ben's parents did eventually withdraw the offer of the reward. They've still been very active in regards to the case. They are still very active on social media and anywhere that discusses the case. I've seen them come up in discussions threads from articles all over the place. Chances are they're probably listening to us right now.

J-Oh yeah.

D-It's possible.

S-And if they are listening, I do want to give my condolences for the loss of Ben and Paul. I feel terrible for these people.

D-Yeah, all of us. Yeah.

J-Yeah, seriously, me too. Yeah, we all do. And, by the way, we've been saying some, you know, I think that Ben was a good guy. It's like, you know, we're talk...we're saying stuff like he was an incompetent cave diver...

S-I'm questioning...

D-I'm not saying that.

J-Well, I'm an incompetent cave diver, too. (D and S laughing). And I'm also, you know, a much more incompetent scuba diver than Ben.

S-Yeah. I, I've had a respirator and a tank once and I was in a swimming pool. I don't know what I'm doing.

J-Yeah.

S-But, ok, well that is our story.

J-Ok, well.

S-That took a long time.

J-Yeah. Good-bye everybody (D and S laughing).

S-So, at this point we should probably go ahead and get into the theories.

J-Yeah.

S-And there are three very different theories.

J-Yeah.

S-It's actually kind of an easy one, there's three simple theories.

J-Yeah. Chupí, UFO, drowning.

D-Yeah.

S-I thought Bigfoot was in there? No, it's not drowning, it's Bigfoot.

J-Underwater Bigfoot.

D-Yeah.

S-Underwater Bigfoot.

J-That sounds like a song.

D-Loch Ness monster.

J-(singing) Underwater Bigfoot (Steve laughing).

D-You don't think the Loch Ness monster did it?

J-Oh, that's true. Nessie.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah, that's true, Nobody's, nobody's actually proved that this, this cave does not connect up with Loch Ness.

S-True. Nobody has.

J-Nobody. Yeah. Show me the proof. No, ain't there (D and S laughing).

S-Oh, this is one of the moments when I love working with you, Joe.

D-Ok.

S-Ok, let's go to theory number one.

D-Yep.

J-All right.

S-Which is that Ben is still in the cave.

J-Yeah. He crawled into some tight little crawl he shouldn't have done.

S-Uh huh.

J-And, yeah.

S-Here's, here's something that people need to know about what, this is sadly what people have figured out after the fact, what happens to cave divers when they, their bodies are retrieved. They tend to, when they're running low on oxygen, panic.

D-Weird.

S-Strange, I know.

J-Yeah, go figure.

S-And what happens is, their bodies are found in little cracks and crevices that they're trying to squeeze themselves through in the mistaken belief that that is the way out, you know? They're panicking, they're thrashing, and they get...

J-That's the way to the surface, that crack in the ceiling.

S-Yeah. And so they get into it, and then that's where they die and that's where their body stays, and that's where it's found.

J-But, yeah...

S-So, it's possible, as we talked about, he could have been freaking out, and gone into some teeny little crevice, and stuck into an area, and...

D-I mean, frankly, he could've been not even a little bit freaking out, and got himself into a little area that he thought was going to be...you know, cause I think one of the things that we kind of glossed over was that he was very vocal around Vortex Springs and saying that he was going to discover, you know, he was going to find a different part of the cave and he was going to go deeper than anybody else ever had, and he was going to find all this new stuff.

S-He had a lot of bravado about him.

D-He did, and I, you know, it wouldn't surprise me that if he saw something and he was like, "Oh, I can fit in that crack."

J-Well, yeah, bad.

D-"There's got to be something interesting in there, and I can fit in there."

J-It'd be a bad idea.

D-That he went through there and got stuck.

S-Well, it's, yeah, it's possible that he went through and he got stuck because it was a dead end and he couldn't get back out.

D-Uh huh.

S-Or like we talked about before...

D-The sand avalanche.

S-...the sand fills in the hole and there's no hints of him having been there.

D-Or, you know, his line got cut.

S-I don't think he was diving with a line.

D-No, I mean his, like, air hose.

S-Oh, his air hose.

J-His air line.

S-Air line, ok. Sorry (laughing).

D-Sorry.

J-I don't know how, how it could have gotten cut though, unless somebody actually cut it.

D-Well, if he had been, like, shimmying under rocks. I don't know.

J-Yeah. I didn't see a lot of sharp rock down there, really.

D-I didn't either.

S-Yeah. It's a limestone.

D-Yeah. You're, that's true,

S-So there's not a whole lot of really jagged edges.

D-The only problem I have, I know I'm the one who's saying it could have been this, but here's the reason that it wasn't, is that as far as I can tell, all of the cave divers that went down there afterward reported seeing no disturbances.

J-Yeah.

S-They're, yeah. And let's, let's talk about that briefly. Ok, so people who are listening, what you need to remember is that it is a silty bottom, so if you run your fin through it, you're going to leave an obvious mark. If you're squeezing through a hole, you're going to scrape the stone and leave marks, because there's algae and stuff growing on the rocks. And you're going to scrape that off with your suit and your helmet and your arms and your tanks and all of that. You're going to leave very obvious signs on the walls and the floor and the ceiling.

D-Yeah.

S-And there were none.

J-Yeah.

S-That stood out as "this is brand new, and weird, there's a bunch of scrape marks that go into the sandy thing that's just here." That wasn't what happened.

D-Yeah. And it does sound like it wasn't very frequent that people were going down into this cave. I mean, I don't think it was one of those things where you would be able to say, "Well, you know, somebody went down a day or two before him, so good luck."

J-It wasn't one of those things where there were, like, several people a day going in there.

D-But I don't know that for sure.

S-I don't know the traffic. I have nothing that has ever said what the traffic in that cave is.

J-Yeah.

S-So I have no idea.

D-There was the one report, one guy who went down, like, really, really deep who was this, you know, legendary...

S-Oh yeah.

J-Was it Ed Sorenson?

D-And he said, he said there was evidence of no one having ever been in as far as he was.

S-Correct.

D-So.

J-Yeah, that's true. Yeah, I'm assuming that most of the divers that played around in Vortex Springs probably stayed above a hundred feet.

S-They do, they do.

J-Yeah.

S-Here's the, so I talked about, for divers that do die in caves, is that they tend to cram themselves into little holes. There's also been a number of cave divers who have disappeared, and everybody has gone looking for them, and for several years couldn't find them. And then five, ten years later, somebody's bopping along, kind of like what Devin was saying, and suddenly spotted an opening, because again, it's pitch black. You only have your lights. So if you're not at the right angle, you may not see it, and they have gone through a bend, and they've looked up, and there is a mask on the floor and a wetsuit full of bones.

J-Uh huh.

S-It, it does happen that way.

J-In this case...

S-And there's been a great number, or a number of divers have been found that way.

D-Yeah, I don't think it's going to happen in this case.

J-I don't think so...

D-I'm with Joe on this.

J-...because that's not that complicated of a cave.

D-But also, also in "Ben's Vortex," when the dive team went down, they went down with a high definition camera and a pretty solid light.

S-Uh huh.

D-It seems, it's felt like you could see anywhere that anyone could have gone.

J-They had banks...

D-A lot of technology.

J-They had banks of lights for that one.

D-Oh yeah.

J-They really illuminated it well.

S-Uh huh.

D-So it felt like you could see everything, and there wasn't really any, just...

S-No. They didn't, they didn't seem to come across that.

D-A crevice that somebody missed.

S-The thing about, you said, Joe, earlier that Ben was saying that he was going to find the end and he was going to find things that people had never done before.

J-Uh huh.

S-Again, this is one of those things that his dad, I don't know how his dad came upon this, but his dad said online that everybody went the wrong way in the cave, and that if they would just go the right way, they would find Ben.

J-That makes a lot of sense (laughing).

S-I know you're joking, but it doesn't make any sense to me because everything I've seen on this, nothing supports that. So I don't even know where Mr. McDaniels got that information.

J-I don't, he's never been in there. I'm sure he's seen the same maps that we've seen.

S-I'm sure he has, if not better ones.

J-And it sounds to me like many, many divers dove all the way, as far as they could, as far as they could squeeze through.

S-Uh huh.

D-Although I guess the interesting thing is, oh gosh, was her name Jill? From "Ben's Vortex?"

J-Yeah.

S-Jill Heinerth.

D-Yeah. She, she said that when she looked at the map that Ben had been making, that it didn't correspond, at all...

S-She's not the only one who said that.

D-...with her understanding of the cave. So I guess it is, that is an interesting thing, whether he was mapping it poorly or maybe he did...

J-He discovered some new passage.

D-...maybe he was going a different way. I don't know. Maybe he wasn't, maybe there is some hole that leads to a different part out of the, you know, Piano Room, for instance, right? So that he hasn't actually been jumping the gate this entire time. That there was some random hole that he had discovered, and that's how he went.

J-I...

D-I don't know. I don't think so.

J-I doubt it. Well, because, there was I don't know how many divers there were. I got the sense at least a couple dozen divers went down there searching the cave.

S-Oh yeah.

D-Yeah.

J-And...

D-It was a lot.

S-Hundreds of hours of dive time were logged looking for him.

J-Yeah. And I can't believe if Ben found some hole somewhere, I can't believe that those guys didn't find it too.

D-I would agree with that, unless there was, like, a sand avalanche. But, I mean, yeah.

J-Yeah.

D-That's just worth mentioning, I guess, too.

S-Uh huh.

D-But there's some other really compelling evidence against him not being in there.

J-Against him being in there, or against him not being in there?

S-Against him being in there.

D-Yeah, sorry.

S-And, and that is the cave is full of aquatic life, specifically eels, which are carnivores.

J-Yeah.

S-And so if there had been a body in the water, there should have been increased activity among the eel population.

J-Uh huh. You bet.

S-And there should have also been a spike in the bacteria in the water due to the presence of a decomposing human body.

J-Yeah, they've been testing the water, right?

S-They, yeah, they tested it, I think, like a month straight they tested it.

D-Yeah.

S-And there's no increased eel activity, and there is no spike in the bacteria. So that is what has led the vast majority of people to say, "There's no way his body's in that cave."

J-Yeah.

S-Because the scientific evidence says he's not here. There's no signs of him.

J-Yeah.

D-Uh huh.

S-So that then leads us, duh duh duh! To theory number two.

D-Ben's not in the cave.

S-Ben's not in the cave.

D-Then where is he?

J-Yeah.

S-Ben's not alive, but Ben is not in the cave. That is what theory number two is. Ok? So we briefly touched on him, there's a guy by the name of Ed Sorenson, who through a series of miscommunications, I didn't get to talk to (laughing).

J-Oh damn it.

S-I tried to line that up, but Ed is, in that area and among cave divers, he is very well revered. He is one of the most experienced. He has his own, he's got his own school, and he teaches cave diving. The guy knows how to cave dive. He's been doing it for years. Decades.

J-Yeah, I know. I read a, some gripping tale about this family that had gotten trapped in a cave, and he actually went in and rescued their daughter.

S-Yeah. Alive.

J-Amazing thing, yeah, he totally rescued her.

S-He's pulled out more than one person alive. Because believe it or not, if you know somebody's lost diving in a cave soon enough, you can send a trained professional in to get them.

J-Uh huh.

D-Turns out.

S-And he has done it multiple times. The guy is a really good diver, and he's good at caves, and he knows what he's doing.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah. If I ever go cave diving, hopefully he's going to be around somewhere nearby.

S-Oh, I'll go to his school, but I'm never getting into a cave underwater.

J-Yeah, me neither.

S-So, the thing is, is that Ed shows up several days after Ben has disappeared. They call him in, and he says, "Yeah, I'll go. I'll go in and I'll go look." And he's got better equipment for cave diving than Ben had. He's got the experience. He also was using an underwater propulsion device. You know, one of those little skimmer things.

J-One of those torpedo things.

S and D-Yeah.

J-With the hand grips on them. I've always wanted to have one of those, ever since I was a kid and I watched "Sea Hunt."

S-Yeah (laughing).

J-Yeah.

S-Well he used stuff like that, so he, he shot himself down through there so he could cover ground faster, and then he started diving the cave. He was dropping tanks along his way, so he had tons of air supply with him. Not the band.

J-Ah.

S-And then he is, he's looking all over and he goes, he's the one who went to 1700 feet back.

D and J-Yeah.

S-And he said, "Listen, there's, there was not signs of anybody in that cave." So he is one of the huge proponents of...

D-He's the one.

S-The guy's not in the cave.

J-Yeah, he says he's not...

S-"I didn't find him, and I found everybody else that got lost in every other cave." I kind of got to say well Ed probably knows what he's talking about.

D-Yeah, I would say yes.

J-I would say so, yeah. So he ain't in the cave. Well, that solves that problem.

S-Actually it doesn't.

D-Oh.

S-It then brings us to a gentleman we mentioned briefly earlier, which is our resident skeezy character in this story.

J-Oh, the owner, right?

S-The owner, Lowell Kelly.

D and J-Yeah.

S-So the guy who...

D-The late Lowell Kelly.

S-The late Lowell Kelly. So Mr. Kelly, as we said, was the owner of Vortex Springs, and so he says that he was there the night that Ben disappeared, later than Chuck and Edwardo. And he said he didn't see Ben, and didn't see anything hinky going on, except for that random drunk guy he says walked up at sunset and wanted to go diving. The drunk guy, by the way, is only in Lowell Kelly's account. I've

never seen him anywhere else, and he supposedly walked onto the site, which is not easy to do. So I sort of discount the whole drunk guy thing, but Kelly says maybe, "Well, maybe that guy was responsible for what happened to Ben."

J-Oh, is that what he said?

S-Well, it's alluded to.

D-He kind of infers it.

S-I discount that right away because on foot and drunk is a long way to go to get in there.

J-Oh yeah. It's kind of out in the middle of nowhere, yeah.

S-So it just doesn't add up. It doesn't add up.

J-Yeah.

S-So then, here's why I don't like Lowell Kelly in general, besides the fact that I just think he was a bit of a dirt bag. Is that he had an employee that he said owed him thousands upon thousands of dollars, and by the way, I don't know the date that this happened, this what I'm about to talk about. It's prior to Ben's disappearance. We know it because he got into legal trouble, but what he did is he had an employee who he said owed him thousands of dollars. He got that employee into his vehicle, we believe under duress. Took them out into the swamp, Everglades, woods, something something, and then attempted to extract the money from them with a baseball bat.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah.

S-Except that that employee managed to get away, and Lowell Kelly only earned himself a bunch of charges

J-Uh huh.

S-Kidnapping and assault being two of them.

D-But he got away with just probation.

J-He got, yeah, seven years probation.

S-He got very lucky. He only got probation.

J-And he didn't even have to serve all that (Steve laughing).

S-He didn't.

D-Well, I don't know if that was the lucky part, yeah.

J-Yeah.

S-Yeah, I don't think he had very good luck, because a year after Ben's disappearance, we're to, looking at 2011. There's a barbeque happening at Vortex Springs, and according to the story, and I'm using air quotes here, he "fell down some stairs." Take that to mean whatever you want. All I know is that he was injured, somebody gave him a ride home and put him in his bath that night. Somebody else showed up at his house the next day, and found him in a very bad state.

D-In a coma.

S-Well, I don't think he was in a coma quite at that point, but then they took him to the hospital...

D-And he slipped into a coma, yeah.

S-...and he was in a coma. He died within a month after that. He was in hospice for basically a month.

D-Uh huh.

S-Head injuries is what I have to infer this whole thing means, is he fell down the stairs...

J-Yeah.

S-...and wailed his head quite severely.

D-Uh huh. And this is one of those cases where you think well, uh, if instead of taking him home and helping him out of his clothes and helping in a shower, and then laying him down in his bathtub to sleep it off, if you'd just taken him to the hospital, he might have lived.

J-It might have been a good idea, yeah.

D-But he did try to beat money out of a person with a baseball bat, so I don't know...

S-It, well it might have been, it might not have been the person who was helping him's call. He may have said, "If you take me to the hospital, you're fired."

D-Yeah, he could have.

S-I mean, this guy seems to have had some very irrational behavior to begin with.

D-Although I, I'll be honest, I don't necessarily think he was in a cognitive place to say things like that, but maybe he was.

S-I agree entirely with that (laughing).

D-So yeah, so Mr. Kelly passed away.

J-So anyway, but he is a suspect for you?

S-Well, he's a suspect because let's run down this road. Let's say that Edwardo and Chuck let him in the

cave. Well, Edwardo specifically. And Ben goes in, and Ben drowns.

J-Uh huh.

S-Well, the water, it's an upwelling. It's all coming out of the cave, and it's entirely possible that Ben's body was pushed out of the cave.

J-Uh huh.

S-And he came to the surface, at which point Lowell finds him, and I understand that this is hard if you look at the map, because it does some kind of switchbacks, back and forth.

J-Yeah, it's a little hard to believe the body would actually, if it was positively buoyant, that it would actually come up to the surface, because there's, like, a spot...

S-There's several spots.

D-Particularly...

J-There's one spot right outside the cave entrance...

S-In the Piano Room.

J-And he, if he was positively buoyant, where is body would have wound up.

D-Uh huh.

S-I'm, I'm not in disagreement with that.

D-Well, and particularly for it to have happened that fast.

J-Uh huh.

S-It's possible, cause it was the next day...

D-And it also could have gotten caught on the gate. He probably would have got, I mean, like, the hole in the gate isn't that big.

S-Ok, so maybe Edwardo and Chuck said something to Lowell, and at nine o'clock Lowell went down, found Ben dead, ok? Let's add that to the mix. Either way, Lowell realizes that Ben is drowned, and Lowell has already dealt with the heat of the divers that died in that cave in the past, and says...

J-So he got rid of the body.

S-..."I got to get rid of the body."

J-Yeah.

S-So he hauls Ben out, and he takes him somewhere, and he buries him or he throws him in a swamp

and lets the gators get him.

J-Can I tell you what I think about this theory?

S-Yeah.

J-Well, it sucks (Steve laughing). Because, because he didn't do a very good job of sanitizing the crime scene.

S-Uh huh.

J-Number one, he leaves, he leaves three tanks behind.

S-Yep.

J-And a pickup truck.

S-Yep.

J-All of which, you know, you would think he would have gotten rid of.

S-Abso-friggin-lutely.

J-Yeah.

D-Well, so here's a question.

S-Uh huh.

D-What if Ben, well what if, actually, Lowell said, "Hey, Edwardo, Chuck, I know you guys usually hang out and wait for Ben, but I can stay. I'll stay." Right? So that explains why they didn't stay, cause that's extremely out of the ordinary for them. He goes down, and you know, finds Ben or maybe he's annoyed with Ben, or I don't know what. You know? So he does pull him up, but then he thinks, "Ok, if I just leave the truck and leave the tanks and leave everything else, people will just assume that Ben drowned, and it will be a non-issue and there won't be a thing." I mean, why sanitize it that much?

J-Well...

S-Because he's trying to, because there's two reasons. Either A, he doesn't want the heat that he is already gotten by having divers die in the cave before.

D-Uh huh.

S-Which by not sanitizing the crime scene he ends up getting anyway.

D-Well, that's true.

S-Or, it's entirely possible that some shady dealings were going on on property at night, at which point you want to get rid of the cops, any attention from the police, like, you know, get them away! Get them

away, get them away, get them away.

D-That's true.

S-I have nothing to say that Kelly was doing anything weird like that, but it's the only thing that I can think of that would justify him ditching the body. But I completely agree with Joe...

D-Yeah, that's true.

S-...that he would leave a truck that is prime evidence, and oh, it just happens to have a bunch of money sitting in it as well.

D-Well...

J-I...

S-It doesn't make any sense for him to get rid of the body and not get rid of the truck.

J-And yeah...

S-Cause if the truck is found...

J-And the tanks, and the tanks, also.

S-Yeah. But if the truck is found fifty miles away..

J-Yeah. Well, that's the beauty part.

D-How does he move the truck?

S-With, uh, the keys. He drives it away.

D-What keys?

S-I have no idea.

J-I don't, yeah, I don't know exactly what you do when you're scuba diving. If you have a locker inside the scuba shop, maybe, where you leave your, leave your wallet and your keys and stuff?

S-Yeah, I, I don't know.

J-I'm not really sure, but I'm sure there was a way to get into the truck.

D-Well, frankly, I think it casts less suspicion on Lowell if something, like if he did kill Lowell [sic] for instance, right? If he, like, actively...

J-If he, if he killed Ben?

D-I'm sorry, if Lowell killed Ben, yeah, thank you.

S-I was going to say, if Ben killed Lowell, he did a hell of a changing act (laughing).

D-I know.

J-Yeah, smart move.

D-But so then, it is less suspicious that the car is there and the money is there and all that stuff, cause you just assume that something happened to him. Yeah, ok, like, you may catch heat for, like, oh, another person died, but if you have Edwardo saying, "Listen, this guy didn't know what he was doing, but I let him in anyway, cause he was going to go in anyway," and you're able to kind of cast this in a, "This guy, these people, this guy didn't know what he was doing. He just, he accidentally killed himself. It was an accident."

J-Yeah.

D-Maybe that's less heat than, "Oh yeah, I killed a guy." I mean.

J-Well, uh...

S-I still don't understand what his motivation to kill would be.

J-I, I don't...

D-Well...

J-There's been a lot of talk about how shady some of these people were, and I'm not sure any of them really were all that shady.

S-Uh huh.

D-No, although...

J-But the thing about it is, is when you, when you commit murder, you don't leave the corpse. Like, I work in an office. Now, if I was to go murder somebody and dispose of the body, I wouldn't leave it in the lobby of the office building I work in (Steve laughing). I would, I would take it, I would make that body disappear permanently, somewhere far away from me.

D-That's smart, yeah.

J-Yeah, so I don't think anybody that worked at Vortex Springs is really a suspect in my book. But, if you are somebody who hung out at Vortex Springs, and you happened to know Ben, and you know he's spending a lot of time, you know, in that cave pushing the envelope and stuff, and for some reason or another you kill him, either deliberately or accidentally, well you get rid of the body, and then you go park his truck, and drop some tanks into the, into the Vortex.

D-Uh huh.

J-So there's one spot if you dropped them in here, I don't think a tank would roll all the way down to the gate. I mean, if it got past this one...

S-So what Joe is pointing to is the map, and on the map there's a bit of a bend in the base of the, the bowl.

J-Yeah.

S-Before it turns to go into the actual cave itself.

J-Yeah. Essentially...

S-And I don't think, Joe, I, I think what you're getting at is it is nearly impossible for somebody to be able to, from the surface...

J-Yeah.

S-...toss a set of tanks in and have them get all the way to the bottom.

J-Yeah.

S-In the cave entrance.

J-Yeah, it would have to be a diver, yeah.

S-Yes. It would have to be a diver.

J-But here's the thing though, is that if you got to that cave entrance point, this point right here where it narrows down.

S-Uh huh.

J-And you just started, you just rolled that thing down, it would go all the way to the gate, and it wouldn't go any further. It can't roll any further because there's a gate there. So you can drop it there. So I'm just saying, if somebody wanted, if somebody wanted to kill him...

S-If somebody wanted to disappear him.

J-Yeah disappear him, and then totally, totally misdirect everything, you'd take his truck, you park it there, and you'd put the tanks in the Vortex...

S-In the spring.

J-Yeah, in the spring.

D-I mean, I guess, I guess it's, we don't know that...

J-I mean, we don't know that, we don't know, actually, that he didn't successfully complete his dive that night, and leave and go home. We don't know that.

D-I'm sorry, I was just going to say, we don't know with a hundred percent certainty that who, what Edwardo and Chuck saw was in fact Ben.

J-That's true too. I mean, I assume, I assume they sort of knew what, they identified him because they knew what his gear looked like. Like his wetsuit and his tanks.

D-Yeah.

J-Maybe that's how.

S-Well, you...

D-But it could have been somebody else in his stuff.

J-Yeah, uh huh.

S-I, I guess that is, that is possible.

D-If you were reasonable close.

S-So are you...Ok, I'm just going, I just want to ask a question, because I'm not sure if I know where you're heading here. Are you saying that it could have been Lowell in Ben's gear?

D-Not just Lowell. I'm just saying if we're going to say somebody killed Ben...

S-Ok, I didn't know if you're pointing the finger.

D-...and disposed of his body, then they created this whole other thing, right, that Ben maybe didn't actually do. Maybe Ben had been dead for hours. Maybe he had not been dead for hours.

J-That's a good point.

D-But that a decoy story was set for him to set up the idea that he...I know...

S-Which pill was it? Was it the red pill or the blue pill (laughing).

D-Right.

S-It's totally (laughing).

D-Totally, absolutely. But I'm just saying that it is possible because it is...

J-No, it's a, it's a good point, because how do you identify a guy? By his gear I'm assuming.

D-Probably.

J-That's...

S-For the most part in that dark, yeah.

J-Yeah. So they...

S-But all of, you know what, if I saw the guy, and based on the video we saw, if I saw him several times, that is...it's pretty, it's a pretty unique set up. His specific helmet, his mask, cause not every mask is the same. His tanks...

D-But it's his gear.

S-It's his gear.

D-So, like, if somebody dressed in Ben's gear, even if they were, like, not six feet and 210 pounds, if they were kind of close, it would be pretty easy in that much dark to just say, oh yeah, it's Ben.

J-Yeah. So all this guy was doing, what that guy was doing, he was just placing the truck there and taking the tanks down to plant them.

D-Right. It's possible.

J-Yeah.

D-I mean, it's not likely, but it's possible.

S-It's totally possible.

J-Yeah. And, and I think the reason probably the tank wasn't any further than the gate is that guy, whoever it was, and again it's all hypothetical, really didn't want to go past the gate. Maybe...

S-Cause he didn't want to get lost in the caves.

J-Yeah, exactly. "So I'm just, I'm just going to drop it right here. That's good."

D-Uh huh.

J-And so, and then...

D-And then hung out down in the Piano Room for a while.

J-Just hung out, hung out for a while, you know? And then, you know...

S-Like, with their iPod.

J-Yeah. And then eventually, after it's dark...

D-Those work under water.

S-Totally.

J-...you know, you slither on out and walk home.

D-Yeah.

J-And, and in fact, it might be that...so how far, you know the talking box?

S-Uh huh.

J-How far down is that?

S-Vertically?

J-Yeah.

S-I think it's 40 feet.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah.

S-It's, I think that it's, anybody, and regular diver can get to that box.

J-Yeah, yeah. So my understanding is this, so if you hang out down there, and you go through your complete decompression routine, and then, it's my understanding is that the two tanks, they found one down low and one up on the platform where the talking box is. Now imagine, you've just parked the truck there, so you're going to have to hoof it. You got to walk a ways. And you got to take those tanks with you. Or, you can just leave them behind. So whoever it was could have just left them on the platform at the talking box, and then just swam up to the surface, and gotten out that way. So that's just a rough theory.

S-Yeah. We're, we're in conjecture canyon at this point.

D-Oh, for sure.

J-Very much so, yeah. Cause I, but I think that foul play is, is quite possible here.

S-So I think we've covered that theory enough.

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah, I think we've beat it to death, yeah.

S-Yeah. Let's go to our final theory. Let's dive into it.

J-Ok.

S-Which is that Ben ran away and started a new life.

J-Yeah, he's living on a farm with Dorothy Arnold and Amelia Earhart (Steve laughing).

D-Uh huh.

S-I know that every disappeared person's story comes across as, "And they left to start a new life."

J-They're always...

D-This one's actually pretty good.

S-This one's actually got some legs under it.

J-Uh, small legs.

S-Yes. They're short legs. So, very short theory. So we talked about this a little bit already, is that there's a documentary out there called "Ben's Vortex," and we haven't really, we talked about things we saw in it, but what it is, it's a husband and wife team of documentary makers who also happen to be divers...

D-Well, one of them is.

S-Well, they're both divers.

D-Well, yeah.

S-Jill, the wife, is a cave diver.

D-Professional cave diver.

J-Yeah, and then her husband...

S-Uh huh, Robert.

J-...has enough sense not to do that.

S-Yeah (laughing). Robert McClellan, he is not, but he is a diver. So they started making a documentary, and their initial idea was, "Listen, we're going to go in it, we're going to film the cave, we're going to bring this back to Ben's parents, so they understand how, what this cave is like, and that he's not in there, so that they'll take the reward away. So that they'll stop enticing people to go in there and potentially lose their lives." Now, over the course of their documentary, Jill changes her position 180 degrees. She comes to believe that Ben is in the cave, based on his maps. But her husband, he, Robert, he still, to this day, thinks that Ben just skipped town.

D-I, I appreciate that bit about this documentary the most, is that she...

S-Because they don't follow a common line.

D-They don't. And she outright says, like, "I really want to say he's not in the cave, but I think he's in the cave."

J-Yeah.

S-Uh huh.

D-Which is crazy.

S-Yeah.

J-It is crazy, because...

D-Especially because her husband even says, sorry, not to interrupt.

J-No, go ahead.

D-But her husband even says, "You are the one who presented me with all of the evidence to say that he is not in the cave, which is why I think he's not in the cave." And she goes, "I know, but I think he's in cave." (All laughing). It's great.

S-Like, it's a totally, it's a hung jury.

D-Yeah.

S-It's one of the few times you see that.

D-Uh huh.

S-So, here's the, here's the thing about the documentary. It's really interesting. But Ben's parents, they go to visit the family, and they are very open with these folks. And they let them film everything, and they talk with them, and at one point they come to realize that Ben is not their only son, but they actually have three sons. And they had a son whose name was Paul, and he had died two years prior at the age of 22, from a stroke.

J-Yeah. Or, if you look, go out on Reddit, he died of an overdose, but, you know, that's Reddit for you (laughing).

S-Well, that's what, that's what starts to come out, is as they start looking at the autopsy, and as they start digging into some of the history, they come to question the, the stroke theory. So they settle on, or they get, it's the autopsy report, right?

D-Uh huh.

S-They get the autopsy report, and it says overdose on it.

D-Yeah.

S-So then they start to think about what the family has done, and they realized that well, they're strangely controlling about information, and the way things are presented, which from one perspective I totally get. They're a grieving family and they want their child to be put in the best light.

J-Sure.

S-But on the other side, they start this whole thing, this whole foundation for stroke prevention.

J-Yeah.

S-Which is something that their kid didn't die from. So it's a little...

J-Yeah. Ben was even, like, kind of heading it up and everything.

S-Yeah. So it's very questionable, and as you read correspondence from Ben to his family, he always makes, it always, in everything that he writes, he's always thanking his parents for everything they've done. Now that could be because A, he realizes how much they've done for him, and he is sincerely thankful, or it's brought up maybe that's because he is required to say those kind of things for the cash to keep coming in, or the hell to not rain down.

D-And I, we should...

S-I don't, I don't know. I mean, this is conjecture.

D-Well, and we should clarify that when we say required, it's not as though his parents said, "Listen, if you don't say to us every single time..."

S-It's a learned behavior.

D-It's a learned behavior, right? I mean, almost every kid who's ever relied on their parents as an adult learns that what, I mean, whether you feel it or not, you have to say, "I am *so* thankful to you." And that's how you keep getting things.

J-Yeah, absolutely. I think...

D-It's true, cause as soon as you start saying, "Ah, man. Screw you guys." They're going to be like, "Ok, just kidding. We won't give you a bunch of money."

S-Yeah. "Hey, Mom, Dad, you're a total set of jerks." "Oh, well you know that deposit we were going to make for you? Cause we love you? No. We don't love you that much."

D-"Never mind. We don't love you that much anymore."

S-"Yeah, you know what? Instead, Dad wants a new, a new motorcycle." I mean, that's the, that's the way it comes across. It's completely possible. So now...

J-So, let me get this straight.

S-Ok.

J-So he's living for free in this condo in Florida.

S-Yeah.

D-Uh huh.

J-And also getting cash from the parents.

S-Yeah.

J-And all he's got to do is say thanks occasionally?

S-Yeah.

J-So is that the kind of job you would quit?

S-No.

J-No. Ok.

S-And that is my problem with this theory, is that if Ben ran away, let's...the theory is, just so we lay it out in it's entirety, is that Ben went down. Ben came up, and marched on foot with his gear, out of Vortex Springs, or had somebody meet him...

J-Uh huh.

S-...and took him there and left his truck behind. My problem with that theory is that he would have had to start over, so he wouldn't have had any cash, so it seems crazy to me that he would have left a wallet with seven hundred bucks in it.

J-Exactly. I mean, I mean, it lends credibility to the dying idea if you leave a wallet with at least a couple hundred bucks in it, but seven hundred bucks? And also, also the dog, you know? He left his dog behind. His dog could have starved.

D-The dog is troubling.

J-Yeah.

D-The cash is less troubling to me. It doesn't seem to me that seven hundred dollars seemed like a ton of money to him, given that he was...having seen the house that he grew up in in Tennessee, and you know, it's possible that he had a bunch of money whiled away, and it was just, like, whatever he had in his wallet at the time. I mean, yeah, I think seven hundred dollars is a lot of money. I think most people do, but I also didn't grow up in a house like he did.

S-My, I guess my issue and why I point to the seven hundred bucks, is that he's going to have to start over, and chances are when he starts over, he's going to have to start over in a lifestyle he is entirely not accustomed to.

D-Yeah.

J-Uh huh.

S-So knowing that you are going to have to live like you've, cheaper and, than you've ever done, and also under the radar. You take every dollar that you could conceivably take. That's what I would, if I was going to just disappear...

D-Yeah, but you've lived poor before.

S-I have.

D-Yeah. So, like, I know some kids who have, like, never lived poor before in their entire lives, and then, like, we went to college (laughing). And suddenly their parents were like, "Well, we'll give you seven hundred dollars a month allowance." And they were like, "Well, I can't live on that. What do you mean seven hundred dollars a month?" And for me...

S-"A latte. A \$5 latte every day."

D-And for me, for me it was mind boggling, right? Because that's like, that's so much money! You can do almost anything you want with that amount of money.

J-Well, it depends on if that's, if that's after, after rent, utilities, everything, you know?

D-No, no, no. That's, like, their parents were paying for everything. That was their, like, spending money. That's their walking around cash.

J-Oh, ok, that's not so bad.

D-Yeah. No, that's really good. But I think that there are kids in this world, and I mean it's possible that he got to the age of 30 where he just, like, I mean, you don't get \$50,000 in debt to the IRS for not spending any money. Right? You don't incur as much debt and have as much stuff going on, for not living large or beyond your means. So I think, it's possible that, you know, what's the, it's the "Arrested Development" quote, "What is it, a banana? How much could it cost? Ten dollars?" Like, I think there are people in this world who have no idea, and so seven hundred dollars may seem like, "I don't need that amount of money."

J-Maybe.

S-And that's entirely possible. I mean, I don't think that Ben showed up in Florida with, you know, five tanks.

D-Yeah.

S-He probably picked up tanks while he was there. And he may, I mean, they're, Joe and I were talking about this earlier, they're standard sized tanks, so it's not like he bought anything crazy, but tanks aren't cheap.

J-Yeah. No, they're not.

D-Yeah.

J-But yeah, they were, like, 80 cubic feet tanks...

S-Yeah, so he bought himself a set of tanks, or at least a set of tanks. He could have bought gear.

D-Uh huh, uh huh.

S-I mean, yeah, you're right. It is a situation where he may not have, and that possibly could have been what got him in trouble in his business, is he didn't understand the way the world works when it comes to money.

J-Entirely possible, and this is...

D-Well, he was...

J-Oh, go ahead.

D-I was just going to say, he was also doing that real estate thing.

S-Well, he started out in construction, and then he thought he could spin himself into real estate.

D-And it, but it was like a pyramid scheme real estate thing.

S-Basically, yeah (laughing).

D-Well, it was.

J-And also, also the year was 2010, which was when the real estate market...

S-The bottom dropped.

J-...was really in the crapper.

D-Uh huh.

J-The thing about it is, is the whole disappearing thing, I just don't see what it got him.

D-I agree.

J-You know? I, I mean, it, the negatives are, well the positives are basically nothing. The positives...

S-Well, no, no, no. The positives are you are out from underneath the thumb of mom and dad, and you are free of them, who...

J-Yeah, but you don't need to disappear to do that.

D-Well, you might need to disappear to get rid of your \$50,000 worth of debt to the IRS.

J-Yeah. I did hear, I did hear one rumor online that the fifty grand had actually been paid off.

D-It's possible.

S-I've never seen that. But I'm not saying...

J-I did see that. I did see that, but, you know, I could be wrong about that.

S-Ok, huh.

J-But, you know, maybe his parents paid it off and they just said, "Hey, you know, Son, whenever you're back in money."

S-"Ready to come back."

J-"Whenever you're back in the money and you got a lot of money, you can pay us back, please. You know, please do it, otherwise we'll just take it out of your inheritance." Or something like that, you know (laughing).

D-Yeah.

J-I mean, it could have been something like that.

S-I wish I had an inheritance coming.

D-Yeah.

J-Oh I know, me too. Yeah, and the thing about it is, is I mean he was walking away from some good stuff. I mean, he had a dog, he had a girlfriend. And I've seen, I've seen stuff on the web about how, "Oh my God, his parents were horrible people." Well, I don't think...

D-I don't think they were.

J-I don't think they were either. I mean...

D-From...

S-I don't think they were horrible people.

D-For me, my biggest drawback on the walking away from life is to see how Paul's death affected his family, and to know that, I don't think that Ben was like, a horrible guy.

J-No, I don't think so.

D-And I can't imagine, even if you didn't really care that much about your family, putting your family through something like that.

J-Absolutely, yeah.

D-That's my biggest thing.

S-Ok, so the things that I see that could, and I'm going to do this, and then let's finish the theory.

D-Yeah.

S-Is that his, if he believed his brother had died of a stroke, or knew that his brother didn't actually die of a stroke, but his parents put up this front that said it was a stroke, and we're going to do all this stuff, and by the way, you're going to be the front man of that organization, he may have kind of just got sick of it, "I can't take this anymore." The other thing that may have driven it, driven him to that was he had not too long before he disappeared gone home. And one of the things that you see in "Ben's Vortex" is you go through the house. And I would call it a shrine.

D-Hm.

S-There is a shrine to Paul. In a single room, it is nothing but Paul. Same thing now for Ben.

J-Uh huh.

D-Yeah.

S-They got a house big enough that they can have an entire room dedicated to this one person.

D-Yeah.

J-They have a nice house, but, but I mean do you really think he wanted a shrine to himself?

S-But the point is that, but he may, it may have been the situation where he had to walk, you know, his parents said, "and go visit Paul," and he had to go in there. And it just feels, you know, it feels like he's betraying the truth and just so sick and so fed up, and I mean, I know people get that way, and it may have been that he said, "I'm going to hatch this cockamamie plan, and I'm getting the hell out of Dodge, and I never have to see you people again, because you're liars and I can't take it anymore."

J-Uh huh.

D-Yeah, maybe.

S-This is, again, I'm making this up, I don't know.

J-Uh, I kind of doubt it. I kind of doubt it. I think that...

S-I don't, I, I agree.

J-I think that probably he...

S-I don't think it's real, but...

J-He might have been totally on board with the whole thing about, about hushing up the whole overdose thing.

S-What's, Joe, what's your favorite theory?

J-My favorite theory?

S-Yeah.

J-Is that somebody killed him and made it look like he died on a dive.

S-Devin?

D-I think he's in a crevice somewhere.

S-I'm tied. I'm thirty percent that he's in the cave.

D-Ok.

S-I am seventy percent that he is not in the cave.

J-Yeah.

S-And I believe that, of the seventy percent, fifty percent is Lowell Kelly is involved.

D-Yep.

S-I, I don't know how, I don't know where he's at, but I don't, I really, I don't believe he's in the cave.

D-I would say Lowell Kelly, in my mind, is, like, thirty percent involved. But I think he probably is just in the cave.

S-Ok.

D-It's interesting.

J-I don't, yeah...

D-We're all, we're all three different.

J-Yeah. I don't think Lowell Kelly would be involved, again, because you don't crap in your own nest.

S-I have chickens, they do it.

J-Yeah, I mean...

S-They do it all the time.

J-Given the fact that there is evidence that, you know, the car's parked there, he left tanks behind, it looks like maybe he drowned in the cave. Lawsuit, you know? I mean, seriously. Or if it's murder...

D-There's not a lawsuit. They have to sign a waiver.

J-Well, there's that, but waivers, waivers can always be broken by...

S-Ben wouldn't have signed a waiver.

J-Yeah.

S-Ben wasn't allowed to go in the cave.

J-Yeah, he wasn't, yeah, and so...

D-Yeah, that's true. But there hasn't been a lawsuit against them.

J-No, no...

S-Cause there's no body to prove that he died in the cave.

J-They, exactly.

S-So that's why I think that he's not in the cave, and I think Lowell is involved. I think Lowell was, "Crap, this jerk went in there and never signed my damn waiver."

J-Yeah, yeah.

S-"I'm going to get the pants sued off of me."

J-Yeah, exactly. But, so he disposed of the body, but he didn't dispose of the tanks and the truck. Again, I'm sorry, I'm not buying it.

S-Bungling moves.

J-I'm not buying it, at all.

S-Yeah, I know, I know. We're belaboring the crap out of this. All right, so at this point we have gone over this story quite a lot.

J-Beating it like a dead horse.

S-If you want to read any more about it, we will have links to it on our website. Website, of course, thinking sideways podcast dot com. On the link, you can listen to the show, you can download or stream it. We will also have, there on the website on the right hand side, there is going to be links to merch, so we have merchandise available if you want. We also have options to support the show if you are so inclined. We have the Paypal for a one time donation option, or links to Patreon, which is patreon dot com slash thinking sideways. Patreon is a sustaining donation, it's a per episode donation. However much you're comfortable with...

J-Anywhere from fifty cents to a million bucks.

S-...or if you're not comfortable with, we get it. So it's totally voluntary. We love every body who is currently using Patreon. Thank you so much. It is a massive help.

J-It does help.

S-But it is not a requirement.

J-Yeah.

S-So, we also have the ability to be listened to and downloaded, and a lot of people do this, is through iTunes. If you're on iTunes, please do take the time to leave a comment and a rating. A nice rating. If you've got an objection with something specific about the show, we would much rather you get a hold of us by email so that we can talk about it.

J-Please.

S-Cause we can't really talk to you when you just leave a random comment on iTunes. If you want to do that, though, and get a hold of us, you can send an email. The email address is thinking sideways podcast at gmail dot com. We are available to stream as well as on iTunes. People are streaming us on so many websites. We've been getting so many emails.

J-There's billions of them.

D-Uh huh.

S-Yeah, they're all over the place.

J-Yeah.

S-We are also on the social media. So we have the Twitter account.

J-The Twitter and the Facebook.

S-Which is, the Twitter and the Facebook. So Twitter is thinkin sideways, without the 'g' in the middle. And for Facebook we have the Facebook page and the Facebook group. So you can follow the page, or like the page, and then join the group.

J-Yeah.

S-Cause there's always conversations about episodes that we've talked about, as well as all kinds of other random mystery stuff on there.

J-I, I love it that, who was it, Frederick Gasoline (Steve laughing) posted a comment on it today.

D-Yeah (Joe laughing).

S-From your le Prince episode.

J-Louis le Prince, yeah. Frederick Gasoline challenged me to a duel.

S-So there's always some really fun stuff going on in the group. It's a good group of people.

D-Yeah.

S-And the only thing I haven't talked about yet is that we do also have a subreddit.

D-We do.

S-So the subreddit is there. People are slowly but surely joining up. So you can join that if you'd like to talk about episode in there. And you two have any other things that we've missed or need to talk about?

J-Nope. He's not in that cave, that's about it.

D-He's in the cave.

J-Yeah, not in the cave.

D-He's in the cave.

J-Not.

D-Yeah he is.

J-Not.

D-Yeah.

J-No.

D-Yeah.

J-Not.

D-Yeah.

J-Not.

D-YES!

J-Not.

D-(Annoyed sigh.)

J-Ok, bye (laughing).