

The Happiest Child – Nikki Reynolds

(Musical Theme) Ring around the rosies, A pocket full of posies, Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

**Sherry:** Welcome to the Parricide Podcast. I'm Sherry....

**Marie:** ...and I'm Marie.

**Sherry:** We've been conducting research and writing journal articles on parricide for the past decade and we're excited to finally be able to share it all with you.

**Marie:** So, parricide is what you call it when a child kills a parent. We won't be covering cases involving only stepparents because research shows that a child-parent relationship is qualitatively different than a child's stepparent relationship.

**Sherry:** Parricide motives change as a child ages, so we talk about Youthful Parricide and Adult Parricide. Offenders. Today we're going to tell you about a Youthful Offender, named Jacqueline Nicole Reynolds - Nikki for short.

**Marie:** So, what is a youthful offender, and why do you differentiate between the two?

**Sherry:** A Youthful Offender is 25 years or younger. The motives for these two types of offenders differ and that appears to have a lot to do with brain development and dependency on one's parents.

**Marie:** Okay. So, what is the age range for all parricide offenders?

**Sherry:** Our youngest offender is eight years old and our oldest offender is 71 years old.

**Marie:** Wow! That's pretty old.

**Sherry:** Yeah, she killed her 91-year-old mother.

**Marie:** See, that is surprising! It seems like you could...maybe just wait? And by 71, I expect people to know better.

**Sherry:** I do, too!

**Marie:** So, let's dive into - who are we talking about today.,

**Sherry:** So, today we're talking about Jacqueline Nicole Reynolds.

**Marie:** Okay, and what did she do?

**Sherry:** She killed her mother.

**Marie:** Okay. I guess that's unsurprising.

**Sherry:** Yeah, now Jacqueline Nicole Reynolds actually goes by Nikki. Um, she was born on July 19, 1979 to Katrina Ramos. When she was two months old, she was adopted by Billie Jean and Robert Reynolds.

**Marie:** Okay.

**Sherry:** Question?

**Marie:** Nope. I just was, like, wait a second - who's this Ramos? So that makes sense - she was adopted. Okay.

**Sherry:** So, at this time she was 17 years old. She was an only child. Her dad worked for the Department of Transportation and her mom was a clerk at R.J. Reynolds. They had a traditional family - except that the mom had a job. Where the parents had both been married for a prolonged period of time and kept to some pretty traditional lifestyle choices. Nikki was clearly spoiled her parents did everything they could to appease her, and her dad told her the only rules she had to follow was to get good grades and to keep her room clean.

**Marie:** Did she follow those rules?

**Sherry:** For the most part - she did. It looks like she really did. We don't have a lot of information about the period of time where she was born up until she was adopted. And the information about Nikki as a child is a little bit murky. But I think we can tell a lot of information just by what she says and what people say about her.

**Marie:** As far as we know, did Nikki kill her parents because they abused her?

**Sherry:** No, not at all. As a matter of fact, in the Nikki Reynolds Story crime documentary Nikki said, "They did everything to make me the happiest child." Her parents were quite indulgent, and, by her own report, she pretty much ruled the house.

**Marie:** Oh, okay. I always think it's abuse.

**Sherry:** That's a common myth that's out there. Initial researchers had very small sample sizes - because they could not access the kids, and what they could access showed them that there were a lot of kids who had been abused who killed their parents. When we were given access to all of the kids who had killed their parents, that didn't bear out.

**Marie:** So, it's kind of like an update. Because we we can see all of the information that was sealed -is what you mean by accidents.

**Sherry:** Right, right. So, let's talk a minute about abuse and parricide. A lot of studies from the past indicate most youthful offenders kill their parents because they've been egregiously abused - and that the abuse is the primary underlying cause of parricide. And that really isn't true at all. In fact, a review of 754 youthful parricide cases indicates a full 66 percent of kids who kill their parents were never abused - and never alleged abuse.

**Marie:** Wow! So, okay. So well over half of the children who kill their parents don't even claim abuse.

**Sherry:** That's right. A full 15 percent of the kids were actually abused prior to the murders - and then there's this category of unverified or unsubstantiated abuse; 13 percent of additional offenders fall into that category. So, if it's unverified, or it was never substantiated by either the courts or family services, or their case goes into a plea bargain and abuse is never substantiated. So, if you take the 15 percent that were actually abused and the 13 percent additional offenders who claim abuse - either they're lying, or it wasn't substantiated because of a plea bargain - you have 28 percent who were potentially abused.

**Marie:** Okay, so 28 percent either were for sure abused or say they were abused - but 66 percent admit they were never abused.

**Sherry:** That's right. 15 percent of that 28 percent actually were abused for sure.

**Marie:** Okay. So, that's a lot of math; but what we know is most children who kill their parents were never abused and don't say that's the reason they killed their parents.

**Sherry:** That's right. They never allege it. There's also six percent of the killers who were actually abusing their parents - and most people have not even considered this.

**Marie:** That's something I don't think that is talked about. But some of these kids are 16, 17, 18, 20...they're old enough that they're able to sometimes abuse their parents. Which is unfortunate.

**Sherry:** And that, and that is something that is the case, unfortunately. We'll put this information on our website at parricide.org and on our Instagram Parasite Podcast, in case any of our listeners want to look at it.

**Marie:** Perfect. That's great for those of us who need a little bit more time to evaluate math.

**Sherry:** I know! All those numbers.

**Marie:** Okay, so let's talk a little bit about um our murderer of the day - let's talk about Nikki. So, we know that at 17 she kills her mother - but what was she like before that? Was she typically described as troubled? Was she mostly a good child? Did she hate her parents?

**Sherry:** She wasn't typically a troubled child. No one ever really called her that. She had good grades, just like her father asked her to do. She was polite and respectful to most adults; indicating she was pretty well socialized. And she doesn't have a criminal history or any record of delinquency. But she does have a boyfriend, Carlos Infante, who plays a large role in her story. Her parents did not like him. They were not excited about her having this boyfriend.

**Marie:** Okay.

**Sherry:** Her extended family members and the school describe her as young-for-age or immature. I do think there were problems. Because at about the age of 14 - three years prior to the murder - her parents suddenly started taking her to church.

**Marie:** Okay. So, her parents previous to this were not active churchgoers?

**Sherry:** No, they weren't. And this coupled with the fact that Nikki - being a self-proclaimed liar - indicates that there were some problems that were cropping up. Also, she was known to be highly manipulative.

**Marie:** Okay. So, manipulative is a heavy word. So, how do we know that Nikki was manipulative?

**Sherry:** Oh - here's an example. When Nikki and Carlos started having sex, she wasn't sure what to expect. She was afraid that having sex meant that you were immediately pregnant - and she was sure that meant she or Carlos were going to be in big trouble. So, she devised a plan to get them through this discovery. She simply claimed she was raped. Here - let me tell you how Nikki tells the story to the police during her interrogation after the murder:

I told them the whole scene. And I told them a description of a male and I told him that after I got off the bus, this guy dragged me there. Because I didn't want to get Carlos in trouble, and I was worried I'd be pregnant.

**Marie:** Oh, okay. So, she's going to claim, like, that a stranger raped her - just in case she's pregnant - so that she won't get in trouble for having sex and Carlos can't get in trouble.

**Sherry:** Absolutely.

Because this is the first time I had sex and I didn't know what would happen to him. Because I didn't know if he'd get in trouble; so, I figured if I faked rape - this way I'll be innocent. And that way I won't get yelled at, or get in trouble, and I won't have to deal with the baby or anything like that. And then Carlos won't get in trouble.

**Marie:** Okay. So, I see what her parents are saying with 'kind of young-for-age.' Like, she's 16 and instead of, like, using birth control, she's going, 'Oh I just had sex. People aren't going to think I'm innocent anymore - and also my boyfriend might get in trouble.' But what really struck me is, 'I won't have to deal with the baby or anything like that.' What does she think is going to - like the baby doesn't disappear just because you were raped.

**Sherry:** Right, right. So, it's really interesting. You can tell that she's very immature and young-for-age.

**Marie:** Yeah.

**Sherry:** (continuing as Nikki)

When I faked it, they had the cops come and everything - and they asked me questions and everything like that. And two lady counselors came. And this is over... and this was, I think, in March a year ago. About a year in March. And um they came and towards the end of the night - we were there for hours - they went through an examination and everything like that and they didn't find any sperm...because it was – well, I told them it happened on a Thursday and I think it was a Sunday that I told them that it happened on a Saturday - and toward the end of the night, after the examination, the ladies were asking me. They go – 'It's not that we don't believe you. We ask every young lady this - but did you fake rape because you're afraid your boyfriend will get in trouble?' she goes "Because many young girls have done that and then we won't tell your parents this has happened. We'll tell the cops the real story and they'll just tell your parents, like, the case closed or something." So, I told them that's what happened. I faked rape because I didn't want my boyfriend to get in trouble. Well, a couple of days later the cops called my house and told my dad the whole story! He confronted me about it or...I go, 'What's wrong?' He goes, 'I think you know.' And then I called my mother at work, real quick, and told her the whole story and ever since then it's been hard trusting and I have, I've just gone on lies and more lies; like, that I haven't slept with him anymore, or we broke up, or just stuff like that.

**Marie:** Okay. So, that's kind of a surprising story for a 16-year-old...wow. So, I think it makes sense that her parents had a hard time trusting her after that and it sounds like she did keep sleeping with him - and didn't break up - she just kept telling her parents that?

**Sherry:** Yes, yes. She was saying that she would tell her parents anything she needed to tell them to keep getting what she wanted.

**Marie:** That whole interview, um, or that whole quote is - it's a little bit hard to understand what she's saying. It's a little - because we read a lot of interviews - but this is a little, almost circuitous?

**Sherry:** Yeah, it is it indicates some of her immaturity her she's a little bit disorganized in her thinking; she adds details that don't really belong, um. It's just, it just gives you kind of a little more of a flavor of who she is.

**Marie:** Yeah. I think it does. And I think it's interesting that her dad didn't really confront her. He kind of just - was upset. I would expect fairly traditional parents to sit her down and say, "So, Nikki, you lied about being raped. You need to stop having sex or you need to start using protection."

**Sherry:** Yes. Her parents had a real weakness and that was communication. They would sit at the table and whisper, "Tell her she can't go to church." - because they had a youth group on Wednesday nights - and then the father would say, "You can't go to church." They they didn't really have strong communication skills. I feel the father was kind of authoritarian – um, very much connected to the public realm - but not the private realm. And the mom pretty much took care of what was going on in the house but was not a disciplinarian.

Yeah, it kind of doesn't sound - it sounds like they loved her and wanted her to be okay, but didn't really know how to – maybe - discipline her, um, or talk to her about some of the things she did that were pretty bad.

**Sherry:** That's possible and that's just conjecture - I'm not sure?

**Marie:** Yeah, it's hard to know for sure.

**Sherry:** Yeah it is.

(Music Interlude)

**Marie:** So, let's take a second and talk about what's going on with her mom through all of this. Like, Nikki was upset and mooning over Carlos; but how was her mom dealing with it?

**Sherry:** Oh, her mom was not happy about the course of events. In fact, she was very concerned about all of the fighting she and Nikki were doing and, according to Crime Time on Oxygen, when Billie Jean - her mom - was relaying her concerns to a neighbor she said, "Don't be surprised one day if you come home and there's police cars and fire trucks up and down the street. Because one of us - it'll be me or Nikki - is going to be gone." I'm not sure she knew how accurate she was.

**Marie:** Okay. So, she started having conflict with her parents over Carlos because she was 16 and having sex - sounds like unprotected sex.

**Sherry:** Actually, the conflict started before then her parents did not want her to have a boyfriend. They wanted her to concentrate on school. They didn't like the looks of Carlos. They thought he looked like a bad boy.

**Marie:** Okay.

**Sherry:** He was actually a pretty nice boy. Her parents tried restricting her from him - it didn't work. Her mother took away her phone, her computer; trying to create a barrier (make it difficult for her to contact Carlos). They stayed together – so, finally her mother invited Carlos to come over so that they could talk. And she actually liked Carlos quite a lot. She just really felt Nikki was too young for a relationship.

**Marie:** Okay. So, I mean, she's 16. It's pretty normal to be dating - maybe not having sex. But it sounds like she was just worried because she didn't feel like her daughter, specifically, was ready to date.

**Sherry:** Yes. And they were very religious. They didn't want to have her involved in early sex; they didn't want her to have the problems that usually comes with a boy when you start dating early.

**Marie:** Okay. So, that makes sense that they have some conflict.

**Sherry:** They were actually Baptists. They went to the Coral Baptist Church. They had started three years ago. I think I mentioned that already, and...

**Marie:** Okay. So, she - so the Baptists - do they believe in, like, the being saved phenomenon. Where, like, you're baptized and then um then Jesus will forgive you for whatever you do?

**Sherry:** I'm not a Baptist, but according to Nikki that's exactly correct. Well, anyway, I found a transcript of her initial police interview through Murderpedia which was conducted on the same day as the murder and - as we've talked about - her language is real typical of a teenager: a bit circuitous and disorganized. So, I went through and cleaned it up and put it into a chronological timeline. Um, it's kind of long, but I think it would be really interesting. Would you like to hear it?

**Marie:** Yeah! Absolutely! I think it's great to hear, kind of, from the horse's mouth.

**Sherry:** So, this is in Nikki's voice:

Carlos Infante had broken up with me this past weekend because he didn't trust me. On Monday we had a conflict with a bunch of friends and ended up at the Counselor's for remediation. Then I figured I was going to lose him anyway, so towards the end of the mediation I said, "Well, I'm...I could be pregnant."

My counselor kept me and him after the mediation and asked us what we were going to do if we were pregnant - asked me about it. He said he would stand beside me and help with the baby and stuff. But he said if I wasn't really pregnant, we were going to go our separate ways. On Tuesday I told him, "It's positive. I'm pregnant!" And he came back to me. My only way of getting him back was to fake a pregnancy. Today I made him think he had a baby - like I was pregnant. We were fine and we were happy, and we went through the whole day. He thought I was

pregnant and everything like that. Then today the Counselor said she wanted to get hold of my mom. She asked for my mom's number. I said sure and gave her one of my old numbers that didn't work anymore. When it didn't work, she asked Carlos. He told her I'd given her my old phone number and gave her the real one. But then Carlos started having his doubts. The counselor called my mom at work and said, "So your daughter's pregnant." And my mom said, "No." And the counselor said, "But did you take her to the clinic?" My mom had no idea what was going on because I was making up the whole thing.

So, my mom decided to leave work and come to the school. She hasn't really trusted me for about a year.

**Marie:** Okay, so about a year ago is when she made the false rape claim. So, it makes sense there's been some trust issues since then.

**Sherry:** Well, there have been quite a few false claims of pregnancy apparently, also.

**Marie:** It sounds like she's really motivated to be (or to pretend to be pregnant) because then Carlos will never leave her. Her main motivation is to keep Carlos in the relationship.

**Sherry:** Her main motivation is to keep Carlos in the relationship; yes.

**Marie:** Okay, and it sounds like Carlos is kind of getting wise to it.

**Sherry:** Absolutely.

**Marie:** Okay. So, let's see what else she has to say.

**Sherry:** When my mom came in, she found out I started seeing Carlos again today when we were in school. I played it like I was still pregnant. I tried to convince my mom I was really pregnant this time. I told her I took two pregnancy tests and they were both positive. I told the counselor that the last time I thought I was pregnant, my mom said I would have to get an abortion. My mom said, "No, you don't have to do that. I just want to be able to support it financially." She was really worried and kept saying, "I don't know what we're going to do, financially and everything, if you're pregnant." The counselor made an appointment for me, my mom, and my dad to come back tomorrow - which is today - at 10 something o'clock.

**Marie:** Okay, so, she kind of - it sounds like - was trying to play the counselor against her mom. Like well, I didn't tell my mom because she would make me get an abortion.

**Sherry:** Right, right. That's what it sounds like to me, too.

She took me to the drugstore after the meeting - with the school counselor - and got a test that she made me take. I called Carlos while my mom was checking for the results. Mom came into the room and told me to get off the phone. I said, "Well, no, I want to see what the

results are." She said, "Well, let me talk to him." I handed her the phone, but I stayed right there on the couch and listened. She said, "I'm sorry she had to do this and I'm sorry that she..." - well I basically worried for him. He was worried for his life. Then she asked him how he could do this and not use protection - but mostly she's saying she's sorry I did this to him - and said, "Please don't do this again" and everything like that. And now he hates me. He said, "Why did you lie to me?" And then all this started. We got into a big argument and he broke up with me again. I told him about all of the bad things I did throughout our whole relationship and admitted how untrustworthy I'd been with him; I lied to him when I lost him a couple of times. I told him I was pregnant when I wasn't - and I always got him back by that. So, that's why I would lie to him about it.

I was hoping it would come out positive so I wouldn't lose him and everything. But I did have sexual intercourse with Carlos yesterday. So, I really could be pregnant. About a year ago - somebody at a clinic told me you really can't read a pregnancy test until seven to ten days after the intercourse. So, we really don't know if I'm pregnant now or not. But I don't think I am - we never really use protection or anything.

**Marie:** So, Carlos couldn't have been that mature if they keep having sex that's unprotected. She keeps saying, 'I'm pregnant' - she keeps not being pregnant - but he, I mean, he's not doing anything to prevent pregnancy, either.

**Sherry:** It doesn't appear so.

**Marie:** Okay.

**Sherry:** So, kind of interesting. I mean, they're both teenagers. I guess that happens.

**Marie:** I guess. But I mean they're 17. It sounds like maybe they're both...a little bit, maybe not like the most responsible kids.

**Sherry:** That's probably fair. Okay so, I'll continue:

When I was sitting there on the couch, listening, I wasn't thinking about killing my parents. I was just thinking, 'Now I've lost him forever.' And then my mom took me to see a Counselor at our church at 4 pm - because I've had a problem with lying for about the last year and a half. My mom has had continuous counseling at the church since last September. She's been upset that I lied to her and haven't told her the truth and everything like that. This is the first time we've sat down together with her to talk. I guess I wasn't being respectful to my mom. I was suggesting she wasn't doing a good job of being a mom. The Counselor got mad and was saying, 'Your mom's never made a mistake at being a mom. She's a good mom.' And things like that. And I got mad! I didn't know her! And I was in a bad mood because all this was

happening; and I just got mad! So, I got up and left - but then I came back. Maybe 15 or 20 minutes later.

**Marie:** So, her mom took her to counseling. She did storm off. But she came back. So, that seems good. She came back to the table.

**Sherry:** But wait! This is kind of interesting. I found a book that was written by Samantha Reed. I think that Samantha Reed is probably Nikki's pen name. It's a small book in Kindle and she actually talked a little bit about how she left and made a plan. She decided to kill Carlos and her parents.

**Marie:** Okay, so at this point she has just taken a break from counseling and decided to kill Carlos and her parents. What happens next?

**Sherry:** At that point, Nikki returned to the Counselor's office and apologized.

**Marie:** So yeah. So, she calmed down because she decided what she was going to do - not because she realized, 'Wow, that Counselor was right, and I should be trying to be nice to my mom.'

**Sherry:** Right. And one of the things we want to do with this podcast is to point out red flags for parents who are going through rough times with their kids. So, one red flag would be that often parents will see a change in their spiraling relationship just before a final explosion. The child will be surprisingly compliant, or loving, or attentive - it's kind of like when a depressed person has made that decision to commit suicide and they suddenly make a move in a positive direction. The parent thinks they've turned the corner, and the child actually has a plan to blow everything up.

**Marie:** Oh, okay. That's a little bit disheartening.

**Sherry:** Scary, right?

**Marie:** Mm-hmm.

**Sherry:** Yes.

**Marie:** So, so - the Counselor - she goes back into the Counselor. Did she tell the counselor, 'I'm sorry?' Did she - what happened when she went back?

**Sherry:** Ah, okay. Well, back to the interrogation.

The Counselor wanted to talk to me by myself. So, Mom went downstairs to work on the choir music and the counselor asked me some questions. When I went downstairs, I knew I didn't want to go to school with my parents for that counseling appointment. I wanted to go to school at the beginning of school so I could kill Carlos after art class. I said, "You're going to let me go to school and I'll meet you there." And they said they wouldn't let me go to school before that - we would all go to school together and we would meet together.

**Marie:** Wow! Like that's pretty bold! 'You're going to let me go to school and I'll just meet you there.' Like she's laying down the law.

**Sherry:** She's very assumptive. She, she's been ruling the house, I think, for a while.

**Marie:** Yeah.

**Sherry:** So, I'll continue.

I'm thinking, 'No.' Because I was thinking - well my plan to kill Carlos was to wait 'til he comes out of his first hour, come up behind him, and slit his throat. But then she's like, 'No. We're going to your counselors.' I'm like, thinking, 'What am I going to do now? My plans are ruined for that! And tomorrow's a half-day - so we get out of school around 11:55, I think? I think that's what it is. Anyway, I was thinking, 'Well, I don't know how I'm going to do this, because I don't know how - after the meeting - if they're going to say, 'Well, take your daughter home.' Or something like that, it won't work out. I won't be able to kill him. So, I figured if I kill my parents tonight while they're sleeping, then I can drive to school tomorrow, slit his throat, and it'll be done.

**Marie:** So, she didn't even want to kill her parents because she was mad at them. They were just like - "logistically, I can't get to art class by 11:55 to kill Carlos if my parents don't let me drive to school."

**Sherry:** Absolutely. And that's one thing I have found in the research, is that kids often kill their parents because they have become obstacles to goals.

**Marie:** That's crazy! I assume that a kid is killing their parents because their relationship is bad; not because they're in the way of killing someone else.

**Sherry:** Well, their relationship was bad. But I don't think their parents understood how bad - or that, that, they basically were objectified. They were just objects in the way of her goal.

**Marie:** Yeah. That's kind of crazy.

**Sherry:** It's really, really crazy. Anyway:

I decided I was going to kill Carlos because I couldn't live without him. I figured I would be happy if he died and no one else could have him. I would be satisfied if nobody else could have him. So, I decided to stab him. And I knew I would get in trouble for it because I was going to do it in front of people. I did not want to be kept home until 10-something for that appointment that morning. The school had told them to keep me home because they thought I was still pregnant - and I wasn't! I needed to be at that school! Carlos knew the test was negative, so I was losing Carlos, for sure, and I had to figure out in my head how to get to school before 10. I decided I would wait until my parents were sleeping and then I would slash their throats. But it was Wednesday.

Usually on Wednesdays we have a Youth Group at church and my parents both go because my dad is the leader and my mom goes to choir practice. Today has been very upsetting for my mom. She decided to stay home, and I was going to be staying home anyway, because she had grounded me. So, I figured this makes it even easier for me. I can kill

my mom, clean up the mess, and wait until my dad gets home. Then I'll kill him, and then I'll drive to school tomorrow, and then I'll kill Carlos!

I was acting like I was cleaning the kitchen and my mom was starting to work on the computer. She had a red piece of paper in her hand - something about church - and she was getting ready to type. I grabbed a big butcher knife and I felt it when I was pulling it out of the drawer to see if it would be sharp enough to cut somebody's neck. I finally got up the nerve to come up behind her, and I tried to slash her throat - and it didn't exactly cut her. She started screaming and saying, "No, Nikki, no!" And she jumped up toward the laundry room. I kept stabbing her and I kept saying, "I'm going to have to kill you, because I can't live without Carlos." And everything like that. And I just kept asking her, "Are you dying? Are you dying?" And she was, like, "Yeah." I was crying because I felt so bad. I couldn't believe I was doing it. And I said, "Mom, please don't hate me for this." And she said, "I don't hate you for this." And I kept stabbing her.

She asked me to call my dad and I said, "No, because I have to kill him next. And then I have to kill Carlos." And I kept stabbing her until she was on the floor. I didn't really think about stopping. She would just call the police. I thought, it's too late to stop because I was already stabbing her anyway and I just wanted to finish it off so she would just die already. I didn't want her to suffer. I just wanted to keep stabbing her, so she'd lose blood and die. She kept pleading with me and telling me she still loved me and, um, I checked with her to make sure I was still going to heaven, and she said yeah - but I still kept stabbing her. I said, "You get to go see Jesus." And she said, "Yeah, but your father can't live without me - he's not going to be able to make it without me." And that's true! Without her, we'd fall apart! My dad doesn't know how to cook or run the washing machine. We couldn't really make it without her, it's true! Sometimes I'd be trying to see if I could get a sharper knife, so I could just end it quicker, but I was afraid she'd get up and call the cops or something like that. There was blood everywhere! I tried cleaning up a little bit - it was everywhere! I washed the knife off a little bit, and I put it in the sink. I didn't scrub it or anything - I just rinsed it real quick. Then I panicked and called the police.

My dad is probably going to have to move because of the house and what happened. But I think my dad will forgive me. My mom will, too, because that's the way she is. But she might be scared of me.

**Marie:** Okay. So that's a lot to unpack. Um, I think that her plan to kill her parents while they were asleep, um, would have been easier. But she doesn't seem to have thought through the fact that her mom's not going to hold still while she kills her.

**Sherry:** That's very true. And it's very difficult to kill two people with a knife because one might wake up while you're trying to kill the other one.

**Marie:** I guess that's true. But it's kind of - I guess the thing that's most shocking to me is stabbing someone and saying, 'But you still love me, right?' and "But I'm still going to heaven, right?" Like she's still kind of asking for comfort as she's stabbing her?

**Sherry:** As she's murdering her mother.

**Marie:** Yeah, and I don't know. It sounds like she didn't stop because her mom was just going to call the police. She says something about wanting her to be out of her misery? But it, also, was like, "Well no I'm not going to call dad because then he won't come home and then I can't murder him."

**Sherry:** Right.

**Marie:** It's fairly logical for a girl who so far doesn't seem to have it together. Like, she doesn't seem to understand that, like, saying you're pregnant when you might not be or claiming someone raped you is likely to be uncovered. But she's planned the murder fairly - I mean not that well. Because she only managed to kill one person, when she wanted to kill three.

**Sherry:** But on a four-hour notice she's put it together fairly well.

**Marie:** Yeah, so she's - seems like she must be somewhat bright.

**Sherry:** Oh, she's a very bright girl. She did very well in school. She doesn't seem to understand outcomes or consequences.

**Marie:** Yeah. She seems to have a hard time with the idea that...when you do something, other things are going to happen. Like, if you say you're pregnant when you don't know that you are, your boyfriend will eventually find out.

**Sherry:** Yes. And she's - as she's murdering them, she's wondering if they will forgive her if they survive.

**Marie:** Yeah.

**Sherry:** Yeah. So, then she said, "I don't understand why I did this. Ever since they adopted me, I've always been their little baby - their little girl - and everything like that. I've always been precious to them and everything like that. But this month has been really triggering for me."

**Marie:** Okay. Um, well, so let's - maybe let's take a little break - and then talk about, um, what happened after she stabbed her mom a whole bunch.

**Sherry:** What happened next!

**Marie:** Yeah.

(Musical Interlude)

**Marie:** Okay. So, I needed that break. Um, that was a lot but - so now that she's stabbed her mom, I guess - spoiler alert: her mom does die – um, but kind of what happens next?

**Sherry:** When asked how she planned to kill her dad, Nikki said she was going to hide behind a wall in the living room and wait for him to get home. And that she would attack him from behind.

**Marie:** He's a lot bigger. I don't know that that's going to go well.

**Sherry:** Well, and she kind of thought about that. So, this is what she says:

Then I started thinking about Carlos is not saved yet (here's that religion part that really concerns me). He hasn't found Jesus. Then I started thinking about my mom and all the stuff she's done for me and everything. But I knew it was too late for her anyway. I just wanted to put her out of her misery at that point, I guess. She was getting dark under her eyes and then they just glazed over and her lips were a white-purple. She wasn't moving, so I figured she was already dead. I'd been thinking that it would take a lot of stab wounds to kill my dad. But then I figured that was going to be too hard.

So, I called the cops and said, "I killed my mom." I told them, "I'm crazy and you have to do something with me. My life is destroyed forever." The lady on the phone said I needed to help my mom and I said, "She's dead. I think I did help her because she's real religious and now she's in heaven." And then they brought her out on a stretcher, and I prayed to God she wasn't dead. I'm really hoping she's alive, because I know if she's dead - then I'm gone.

**Marie:** Okay. So, she switched really fast from "I probably shouldn't kill my mom and now I feel bad." To, "Well she's dead. I'm not going to even try to save her." To, "Well, I hope she's alive. Because if she's dead then I'm definitely gone." Even though she just described, in great detail, the look on her mom's face to let her know she was dead. So maybe...

**Sherry:** I think it's breathtaking how self-centered she is.

**Marie:** Yeah. She immediately said, 'Well my life is destroyed forever.' It's like...

**Sherry:** It's not...yeah...it's not...

**Marie:** You just murdered someone. Their life is destroyed.

**Sherry:** Right. It's not...'I feel so bad that I killed my mom.' It's, 'Oh, if she's dead, I'm gone.'

**Marie:** I think it's really interesting that she instantly said, "I'm crazy." When there's no indication that she thought she was crazy before today.

**Sherry:** Exactly. And that actually indicates that there was some planning that occurred before this date.

**Marie:** Yeah. It sounds like she's heard...oh, well, if you plead insanity it's not really your fault.

**Sherry:** Right. And she brought up an Insanity Plea three or four times in this interview. It was really interesting to listen to her plan. She also brought up issues of Battery; which most kids don't talk about battery vs. assaults

**Marie:** Yeah. That sounds like she's been searching some legal terms.

**Sherry:** Yes, yes. That's what I thought, too. Okay, shall I continue?

**Marie:** Yes.

**Sherry:** Okay. So, I don't...ah, this is it!

I don't, um, I should plead insanity. Because no sane person would do something like this. And I wasn't like this a year ago. I wasn't even like this a month ago. I've never thought of killing mom or anything like that.

**Marie:** Okay, so she doesn't have a real firm grasp on what the Insanity Defense is. But that's interesting that she's already going there.

**Sherry:** Right. And I think it's very - I think all of it is obviously disturbing.

**Marie:** Yeah. Her description of her mom dying was really disturbing. Like the details that she was noticing and just kept stabbing.

**Sherry:** Well, and something that is also worth mentioning is she's one of the few kids who is completely upfront and honest with the police. She's not trying to mitigate what she's done. She's not trying to say someone else did it. She doesn't try to get someone else, like Carlos, involved in it. She's just very up front. Which...

**Marie:** I don't know what that means; that's really interesting though. You're right. She's very, 'I did it, this is how I did it; here are the details of what I was thinking while I did it.' Which, you can see that she's kind of self-centered but she's not really...

**Sherry:** ...sophisticated.

**Marie:** Yeah! She's not really sophisticated.

**Sherry:** Yeah. I thought that was really worth mentioning. So, here's what she said about her lying in the police interview. She said:

I lie about...sometimes where I'd go. Because it got...I got so used to lying it became - that was what I did! It became a normal thing for me. And instead of some, like, some people are always honest. I was always lying to them and it just got so bad that it all ended up today. It was like I couldn't handle what I was doing anymore. And I didn't think I'd get better, so I figured (I don't know why) but I figured killing them - even though I'd get arrested for it...as long as Carlos is dead, then no one else could have him and I'd be okay with that. But, no um, I just...and not to be, like, religious or anything like that. But now, I guess I can say that God's got a hold on me now. And if I get through this okay and everything turns out - my mom's all right - I'll get charged for battery. A couple of years in jail, probably, or something like that. And after that: straightforward with my life. I know I had picked a hard way to learn, but I did learn. In our religion...

**Marie:** (laughter) So she feels like she's learned her lesson. Like, what is this, like a couple hours after stabbing her mom?

**Sherry:** Oh this is...yes. Definitely within the...

**Marie:** This is really intense!

**Sherry:** She's a very intense girl.

**Marie:** So, she's - right away – going, ‘Well it was a hard lesson, but this is because I lied so much and now, I mean...’

**Sherry:** ‘I’m forgiven. Let’s move on.’

**Marie:** Yeah! Even though she told 911, ‘I’m pretty sure my mom’s dead.’ Now she’s kind of resurrected her mom and she’s going to be just fine.

**Sherry:** Right. When they brought her mom out of the house she was on a gurney, and they hadn’t put the blanket - or the sheet - over her face. So, she thought there might be hope that her mom was alive. In fact, she was sitting in the back of the police car and they had her recording on and she was saying, “Oh God, please let her be alive, please let her be alive.” But it wasn’t because she wanted her alive; she wanted to not be in trouble.

**Marie:** Yeah. She seems to have a real theme of, ‘I don’t want to stop doing the things I plan to do. But I don’t want to be in trouble for them.’

**Sherry:** Right, right. And her parents are real obstacles to her getting her way.

**Marie:** Yeah. So, okay so, let’s go back to the interview. She’s thinking that Jesus is...

**Sherry:**

(as Nikki) In our religion, it’s like when you think Godly things, they are the righteous thing. And then when you think evil things, it’s from the Devil. Well, apparently I’ve let the Devil, like, just totally get control of me because I didn’t - this never happened before.

According to crime documentary, Nikki again asked a question indicating research had occurred prior to the murder.

That’s why I think I need to, I don’t know, what do they do when you plead insanity?

**Marie:** So, she’s like...she’s got multiple avenues for how she’s going to get out of this. “Well, maybe it was just battery.” “Well, maybe I was insane.” I mean, she’s...she’s not really taking responsibility, even though she’s giving, essentially, a confession here.

**Sherry:** Right, right. And here’s where religion keeps playing... This case was so notable because religion played the *wrong* role in the way this girl thought. And I don’t blame the religion. I think religions add structure to children’s lives. I think it’s just the way she chose to twist it to meet her needs.

**Marie:** It sounds like she kind of took what's supposed to be a lesson on Forgiveness and used it to absolve herself of all responsibility.

**Sherry:** Right!

**Marie:** For anything she ever does!

**Sherry:** Right, right. So, she says,

"I understand. And I understand he still forgives me. But even though 'once saved, always saved' - they say, 'once saved always saved and no matter what you do, you're still forgiven.' I understand that; even though I don't think I should be forgiven. I know I am, because I still trust him as my Savior, but I'll never forget it. Because it's - we're only human and what I did to her – never, ever and I mean...and then I try to think about...even though they would want to bail me out, I don't - even though they did have a lot of love for me - or anything, I don't think they'd really want to get me out of jail. If my kid tried to kill me, I'd be like, "You're staying in there!" I don't know why they'd want to get me out, anyway. And forgiven or not. I think, even though in religious-wise they say forgiveness - forgive everything - if you're a real Christian you'll forgive anything because it's the love of Christ. But I think there has to be some kind of limit, right? You're not going to forgive right away. My - what hurts me more, is that she was forgiving me while I was stabbing her! I, while I was trying to kill her, she was telling me she loved me and that she doesn't hate me. I'm like, "You hate me, don't you? And she said, "No, I don't hate you."

**Marie:** Can you imagine being the police officer and listening to this and having to, like, stay calm and keep a straight face?

**Sherry:** No. I can't. It blows me away. I think police officers have some of the most - the detectives especially - have very difficult jobs. So, at this point the officers offered to take a break and asked Nikki if she wanted a drink or some food and Nikki said she would like a bathroom break. And then she mentioned that she had taken some aspirin in an attempt to overdose before she went to see the Counselor. So, the officer said, "We probably need to terminate this interview and take you to the emergency room." And she immediately said, "I don't want to get my stomach pumped, though."

**Marie:** Okay, so she's, maybe had her stomach pumped before then. So, maybe there have been previous overdose attempts or...

**Sherry:** Yeah. There may be. You know, people often say, "You don't know what goes on behind closed doors." And we *don't* know what goes on behind closed doors. But what we *do* know - because of research - is that it's usually not abuse. There *are* times when parents are egregiously abusive, but in many cases it's like this; something's gone wrong, but it's not abusive parents.

So, let's go ahead and talk about the trial.

**Marie:** Okay. So, Nikki - she murdered her mom in 1997. So, her trial - it took a while to get her to trial. Her trial began in April of 1999, and it was two weeks long - but then they had a hung jury. So, they had to do a second trial. And she was - and she ended up being convicted of Second-Degree Murder. Which was kind of surprising; because it sounds like she did do some planning. But the jury didn't think she committed first-degree murder - so she was given second-degree murder.

**Sherry:** Can you tell me the difference between First and Second Degree Murder?

**Marie:** So, it depends, somewhat, on the State. But in most cases, First Degree, um. it means Malice Aforethought - which means you have thought it out and planned. So, for example, if you really hate your neighbor and you've hidden in a bush, and you've plotted which bush to hide in, and you sat there and waited, and then shot them. Then that's, you know, First Degree. Because you thought it out - you made a plan. You had, kind of, a chance to kind of go, "Oh, wait, never mind. I'm not going to do this." But then you did it, anyway.

**Sherry:** Okay.

**Marie:** In Second Degree, it's usually - there can be a degree of planning, but it's more like - you were really mad at someone and then you killed them like that same day? And, maybe, you had to do a little planning, like, "Oh I'm gonna go home and get my gun." But with not the same degree of Malice Aforethought.

**Sherry:** Okay.

**Marie:** But, again. It varies from State to State. But anyway, she only got Second Degree, but she was still sentenced to 34 years in prison. And this was in 2001. So, she ends up getting re-sentenced. But sentencing guidelines are kind of rules that tell the judge, 'this is how long we think somebody should be in prison for a certain kind of crime.' So, the Sentencing Guidelines apply to the year you committed the crime - not the year you were sentenced for the crime. The Sentencing Guidelines used in Nikki's case were those from 1995. So, she was sentenced to 35 years.

**Sherry:** 34.

**Marie:** Sorry. 34 years. And then, um, a couple of years later, another prisoner who had been sentenced - um - 34 years was kind of the maximum allowed in the Sentencing Guidelines.

**Sherry:** For a second degree.

**Marie:** For Second Degree Murder. Yeah. So, under the Sentencing Guidelines, they said you can - you can sentence her for up to 34 years - and they decided to give her the 34 years. So, then um a case came out where a man named Curtis Heggs - it's H-e-g-g-s um - and he challenged his sentence (which was also based on these 1995 Sentencing Guidelines). The details of why he challenged it are not real important, but it was a Constitutional challenge. So um he won. He won his challenge, and so he got to be re-sentenced, but the State of Florida said, 'Okay, well, it's not really fair for him to get to be resentenced based on these guidelines being wrong, and everybody who is sentenced under them not to be, you know, get another chance to be sentenced fairly.'

**Sherry:** So, let me get this straight. The Sentencing Guidelines they used were the 1995 ones - and when he won his case, everyone could now use the 1994 (the old) Sentencing Guidelines?

**Marie:** Yes.

**Sherry:** Oh, okay.

**Marie:** And they liked that, because the 1994 Guidelines gave you fewer years. So um, because her - she committed the murder in 1997 (which was within the time period that this case covered), she got to have an appeal and her sentence was reduced from the 34 years (that the 1995 Guidelines allowed) to 21 years. Which was still the top of the amount that she could be sentenced to, under the 1994 Guidelines.

**Sherry:** So, the old maximum - from 1994.

**Marie:** Yes.

**Sherry:** Okay.

**Marie:** So, her sentence was reduced - but it wasn't like, "Oh well we don't think you really did it." Or "Your intent wasn't there." It was just, "Oops, our sentencing guidelines were wrong and so we had to fix them for everybody."

**Sherry:** Okay. That makes sense.

**Marie:** Yeah. So then, um, she ended up serving 18 years. She was released in 2015 - and so she'd served 86 percent of her 21-year sentence.

**Sherry:** Is that typical?

**Marie:** Yes. So, the hard thing about Sentencing is: when they say someone gets life in prison or someone gets 21 years - they usually end up getting some time served if they behave and are good in jail.

**Sherry:** Oh! Like Credit for Time Served.

**Marie:** Yes. So, then they're - they get out a little early a lot of times. They're still on probation for a while, but they very rarely will actually be in prison for the whole sentence.

**Sherry:** So, I once heard that it's 80 percent. You'll usually serve 80 percent of your sentence. Do you think that's accurate, from what you've seen?

**Marie:** It's usually about 80 percent. But again, a lot of that depends - somebody who's better behaved is going to end up getting to spend less time in jail. Somebody who goes to jail and starts fights or kills other people is going to stay there a lot longer.

**Sherry:** So, because she had a 34-year sentence, that got switched to a 21-year sentence - I'm guessing she behaved fairly well in jail - in prison, I guess.

**Marie:** It sounds like she did. Probably was a very good prisoner; which makes sense. She seems to generally know what the rules are.

**Sherry:** And wants to be a good girl.

**Brooke:** Yeah.

**Sherry:** She at least wants to be out of trouble.

**Marie:** Yeah. She consistently - whether it was having sex with Carlos or murdering her mom - didn't want to be in trouble for it. So, hopefully, she's learned how to not do the things that get you in trouble and she's um she's not living near her dad, anymore. She lives in the Southwest. And, um she - he did visit her in prison for a while. But he stopped seeing her at some point. And he's - he sold his house. He moved out of State.

**Sherry:** I think he quit see - I think he quit visiting her when she was found guilty and sentenced and went to prison.

**Marie:** That makes sense. I think that's right. And it makes sense that he would have a hard time letting go – but. also, ultimately not want her in his life very much; especially where she planned to kill him too. I can understand why that would be a hard thing, too.

**Sherry:** I think that would be very difficult, as a parent, to make those decisions once everything's gone. So, how do we close this out?

**Marie:** Well, that's all folks! (laughter)

So, today we talked about Nikki Reynolds, and we noted that if you have a difficult relationship with your child and then, suddenly, they take a turn for the better - this isn't always good news. This is a good time to pay attention, because they may have devised a plan to blow your relationship up.

**Sherry:** And remember to look for abuse stats on our website at parricide.org. If you have any parricides you would like us to discuss, you can email us at parricidepodcast@parricide.org and you can join our conversation on Instagram at Parricidepodcast, on Facebook at Parricide Podcast, or you can send us an email at (you guessed it) ParricidePodcast@parricide.org.

**Marie:** If you enjoyed the Parricide Podcast, please subscribe, review, and follow our show on Spotify, Apple, Stitcher, or wherever you listen. It helps other listeners, like you, find the show.

**Sherry:** We'd like to thank Jade Brown and Woke Nation for our music - and thanks for listening! we'll see you next time.

**Marie:** Bye!

(Theme Music) Ashes, ashes, We all fall down.