

North Pond Hermit

Chris Rose: "No way he could have lived out there...and it was just like mystery."

(all reporter quotes are shortened for script and correspond to SOTs)

1:43

Spencer:

It's a dark summer night in rural central Maine. Inside of one of the hundreds of cabins close to North Pond Lake, a man sits in the dark, completely still. He has a loaded .357 Magnum in his hand. Like a hunter in a blind, he waits for his prey. He has been up 13 consecutive nights waiting to finally strike. But this man is not preying on an innocent victim, his name is Neil Paterson and he is actually the owner of this particular cabin... His family has owned it for over 50 years. And tonight, like every night the past two weeks, he lies in wait for an almost mythic figure in this community to break into his house. More apparition than man, no one has actually ever seen this person...or thing. But for years, decades, this spectre has been haunting the cabins of this small lakeside community.

Music Break

Spencer:

But rather than this being a horror story, it is far more mystery, and is significantly more nuanced. Someone or something, has been breaking and entering into houses every couple of weeks for over 25 years. They pop open a door, or slide up a loose window and slink inside. Hiding in the darkness of someone's house, averse to sunlight like a golem. Often creeping around in storms to cover their sound. Sounds terrifying right? But they never damage the property, they always lock up behind themselves, and have a clear aversion to even the slightest chance of interacting with an occupant. They do all of this swiftly, silently, leaving no trace and then whoosh...evaporating into the surrounding woods only to case another cabin a couple of days later.

They would become known only as the North Pond Hermit.

2:40

Finkel: This story gives me goose bumps...is this a fable or real?

Spencer:

This is Michael Finkel, he is an author who has covered this case extensively and wrote a book on it called "The Stranger In The Woods"

Intros full story:

3:20

Spencer:

In 1987, some locals start noticing things missing from their house. And an uneasiness settles into the community.

Finkel continues story:

5:20

Spencer:

So the legend grows. Jeans are stolen from one cabin. 3 issues of National Geographic from another. Down the road Someone's refrigerator has been rummaged through, and yet another spare propane tank has been taken from a fourth cabin. Investigators search the woods. They question neighboring towns' people. They up their patrols of the neighborhood. But calls are still coming in reporting someone else having been in their house.

But then in the mid 90's a minor breakthrough occurs.

Music Break

Finkel: "game cameras get smaller..."

Intro to game warden Hughes.

8:15

Spencer:

In 2012, game warden Hughes goes to homeland security and wires up the woods with cameras and silent alarms. His main target is a summer camp that has a huge stockpile of canned goods that the hermit of north pond has often broken into. He sets up his trap and waits...for months.

Finkel: "this myth was real"

SOT: "Maine Hermit Caught"

10:20

Spencer:

He had been living in the Maine woods through summer and harsh winters for 27 years.

Finkler: "everything was camouflaged"

Music Break:

Spencer:

It's April 2013, news of Knight's discovery and capture starts to spread all around. Megan Maloney, the District Attorney for Kennebec and Somerset Counties, gets a call at 3 o'clock in the morning from a Maine state trooper:

MALONEY: "And she said to me you are not going to believe who is sitting in my patrol car right now."

Spencer:

The State Trooper goes on say that Knight is also talking...confessing:

MALONEY: "He has just admitted...27 years."

Spencer:

Images of Knight in handcuffs quickly spread across the entire state of Maine. A pale man with a full beard and glasses. He almost looks like a professor. Perhaps not the image you might have of a survivalist, but certainly someone who's been living off the grid. But Mainers were hooked. Fascinated.

CHRIS ROSE: "We started to hear...all those years."

Spencer:

Chris Rose was a reporter at News Center Maine in Portland when Knight was captured.

CHRIS ROSE: "When police reported this...was doing this."

Spencer:

TED VARIPOTIS WAS WORKING ON THE ASSIGNMENT DESK AT NEWS CENTER MAINE WHEN THE STORY BROKE:

TED: "I do recall...taken care of."

Music Break:

Spencer:

LIKE THAT STATE TROOPER, LIKE DISTRICT ATTORNEY MEGAN MALONEY...TED VARIPOTIS SAW THAT KNIGHT WAS DIFFERENT...SOMEONE WHO FOUND PEACE AWAY FROM THE REST OF US:

TED: "He was a loner...residence."

Spencer: So who is the north pond hermit?

Finkel: Chris Knight...walked into the woods of Maine

Started foraging...but quickly realized he needed to steal.

13:00

Spencer:

What was his process for this? How did this guy break into homes hundreds, if not thousands of times without getting caught?

Finkel: and he would slip back for to his home for two weeks

17:54

Spencer

So this brilliant woodsman and thief is finally caught. What happens next?

Mike: one of the interesting things...outliers like this.

Spencer:

News Center Maine reporter Chris Rose recalls how people took sides about Knight's punishment:

CHRIS ROSE 3: "All of these people...had done."

District Attorney Megan Maloney appears to fall on the side of those who feel that Knight deserves a second chance. That a lifetime behind bars wasn't the solution - or the punishment - for the North Pond Hermit.

MALONEY 3: "He promised...hold himself too."

Spencer:

But even those seven months were not easy for Christopher Knight...a man who had spent his life avoiding the day-to-day routines of civilization. Avoiding other humans:

CHRIS ROSE 4: "And I remember...by himself."

(smash cut)

Finkel: "And we exchanged letters...in the woods."

20:20

Spencer:

In all of your interviews, did you ever get a sense, beyond not liking people, why he decided to head into the woods?

Finkel: "The better question is"

Spencer:

Now Mike, are there any new updates on Christopher Knight?

Finke: "I think we will hear that Chris Knight returned back to the woods someday."

Outro Chat: Spencer Bruttig, Will Johnson, Jessica Noll