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# The Infamous 'Worst Roommate Ever' Was My Dad's Childhood Nemesis

We knew the murderer/squatter Jamison Bachman as a bedtime-story terror called Jammie



Jamison Bachman in Netflix's "Worst Roommate Ever"

ILANA BEAN

FAMILY HISTORY

16 MINUTES AGO

**E**very time I log into Netflix I'm confronted by the face of my dad's childhood nemesis: infamous murderer/serial squatter Jamison Bachman, the subject of a viral *New York Magazine* story "**Worst Roommate Ever**" and a recent **Netflix true crime docuseries of the same name**. His eyes are blotted out in a promotional image for the show — this is supposed

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A set of navigation and social media icons including a calendar, a question mark, a close button, and social media icons for Facebook and Twitter.

Growing up, my siblings and I knew him as Jammie. I never met him, but he was embedded into family lore like a freaky, demonic, phantom uncle. Jammie grew up in the same Philadelphia suburb as my dad. They shared a best friend (Bob F. from the docuseries — not to be confused with Jammie’s other docuseries friend, Bob B.) but couldn’t stand each other. Bob theorizes that Jammie wanted to be his only best friend and considered my dad a threat. Whenever my dad — a man blessed with the unbelievable name of Skip Bean — was around, Jammie teased him by saying “Hiii Skipper Bean,” in a high-pitched voice, already set in his malevolent ways.

up scenarios in which Jammie would get up to some horrible mischief and my dad would foil his plans. In one, the Queen of England visits Philadelphia, and Jammie writes “your royal highness” on his palm, but the ink smudges so he actually calls her "your royal hiney" and humiliates himself like the doofus he is.

Jammie was, as my sister put it, “the symbol of a mischievous, two-faced, self-promotional, lazy, asshole child.” He was animated by one desire: the desire to be the worst. At the beginning of a story, my dad might be climbing a tree, when Jammie would shout, unprompted, “Climbing trees is for idiots!” We wanted Jammie to suffer for his blatantly untrue words. We were delighted when my dad tricked him into climbing hawthornes covered in poison ivy.

Over time, the stories became more outlandish. The boys traveled the world together. They met celebrities. They went to space. They were an unholy trio of brothers: my dad, Bob, and our doofus boogeyman Jammie Bachman.

My dad and Bob remained friends, although, growing up, whenever we visited Bob , my dad required a vow of silence regarding all things Jammie. Bob had intermittently kept in touch with Jamison in adulthood, but it hadn't ended well. For a while, he let Jamison stay with him, until his wife said she didn't want this man — who was arrogant and strange and baselessly claimed to work for Fox News for some reason — living in their basement any longer. It took multiple tries, but they eventually got him out.

In 2005, I was ten, and my family had just aged out of Jammie stories. The real Jamison was roaming the world, a few states away from us. This was the year Jamison met a woman who he'd date and move in with, withhold rent from, and attack when she asked him to leave. He'd steal her cats and bring them to kill shelters, except one, which he kept for himself. He spent the following years moving into vacant rooms and terrorizing whoever he lived with. He claimed to be a lawyer, despite having

bulbs and hoarded them in his room.

Upon realizing that Jamison couldn't be evicted, one roommate hatched a scheme, as reported in the *New York Magazine* story. She threw a party expressly to pressure Jamison into leaving, blasting rap music because he hated it — antics that feel deeply faithful to my dad's stories. This Jamison was more violent than the character I'd grown up with, who was only bullyish and mean. After the party, Jamison stabbed his roommate in the leg. Initially, Jamison's brother, Harry, bailed him out of jail after the assault, but when Jamison was re-arrested for telling the roommate, "You're dead, bitch," Harry was reluctant to help again. This began the chain of events that would lead to Jamison murdering his brother, booking a hotel room with Harry's very traceable credit card, attacking the police who found him, and eventually dying by suicide after arrest.

My mom sent the family group chat the link to this story when it was published in 2018. She wouldn't tell us what happened, but insisted that we read to the end. I had heard that journalists had contacted Bob about Jammie, but at the time, I wasn't certain anything would come of it. I'd had no idea what had become of Jammie, beyond some rumors about squatting problems — the notion that he even kept existing without us seemed inconceivable. It may be callous to admit this, considering the violence and terror Jammie inflicted on real people, but, initially, I was secretly delighted to learn that his epilogue played out with such dramatic flair. I couldn't believe it: My bedtime story antagonist had really been really out there, stabbing roommates and flushing cat litter down toilets.

He's a perfect true-crime character — fit for both magazines and the screen — largely because his actions make no sense. He didn't appear to be motivated by money or sex. Like his fictional counterpart, Jamison seemed to walk the world looking for opportunities to exercise cartoonish cruelty. You could argue that he was interested in control. You could even say these behaviors were

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A yearbook photo of Jamison Bachman, along with a note he wrote to a classmate.

Media portrayals love to highlight this story as a fall from grace: Jamison's life had once looked promising. He was handsome and smart. He enjoyed a comfortable suburban childhood. It's similar to how, when depicting a small-town murder, a show must include a townspeople who has never locked a door in their entire life wringing their hands and repeating incredulously, "I can't believe it

handsome man act so strangely? How did he become this way? Could anyone? My dad, irritated, countered, “He’s not *that* handsome. Do you think he’s handsome?” I said he isn’t my type.

The docuseries offers a couple theories about where it all went wrong. In one, we hear speculation that his father might have been cruel and that family tensions weighed on him. In another, we learn that in college, Jammie witnessed a brutal, incomprehensible murder at a frat house, which affected him deeply. I believe that it did: Witnessing a murder is traumatic, and people react to violence unpredictably. But still — the presentation seems a little pat. I asked my dad what he thought, and he started listing the ways people can be traumatized. He detailed the grotesque deaths we would have witnessed had he and I been born Middle Ages peasants.

He said, “The explanation that the trauma was too much so his brain exploded just gets nowhere. It misses the point.” The point, he said, is that production could try to connect the dots. They could piece together what happened in the years between the fraternity murder and Jamison’s final era; they could follow the downward arc. My dad said it puzzles him that Jamison never retook the bar after investing so much in law school. He’s interested in how Jamison’s tutoring business operated; he must have offered something worthwhile to have repeat clients. He’s worried people will remember Jamison was Jewish and then we’ll have to explain that when we already have Epstein and Madoff on our plate. He talked about Jamison joining the Israeli Defense Forces. He was kicked out after weeks — neither my dad nor Bob know why.

**I IMAGINE PRODUCTION ARRIVED WITH A TRUE-CRIME STORY ARC IN HAND, A LAB-MADE FORMULA MEANT TO SATISFY A CRIME VIEWER.**

viewer. They fulfilled the desire for a deviant villain with a compelling backstory — but it comes off a bit neat. It's less that I think portraying trauma as a radioactive spiderbite that transforms you into a murderer is unethical, and more that I think it's boring. When Jamison's bizarre behavior is chalked up to a handful of singular events, we miss the meat of what makes him interesting: the lifelong quest for control, the intellectual and creative energy he poured into his schemes, how it might feel to live like this. If we can't get the backstory right, I'd rather just say Jammie was born to symbolize humanity's follies. I'd rather say: a wacky god put him on this earth as a spectacle of chaos, shooting across the sky — glory be.

My biggest question is this: How did my dad know? The stories started long before the media coverage. All my dad really remembers from childhood is sitting with Jammie in the back of a minivan when Jammie started kicking him. I wish there was something juicier, like Jammie throwing a rock at pigeons or taunting the elderly. It's not exactly surprising to learn that if you put two 9-year-old boys in a car, one of them will start kicking the other. Still — of all the people my dad met or disliked in his lifetime, of all the kids he kicked or was kicked by, the one who stuck with him was the exact guy who would grow up to become a notorious murderer. I refuse to write it off as coincidence. My guess is that my dad saw something in Jammie that disturbed him. He didn't have the language or memory or narrative structure to explain it. Instead, he translated this uneasy feeling into stories about Jammie menacing children, threatening to give my dad "a mouthful of bloody chiclets," frying ants with magnifying glasses, throwing his head back with laughter as their bodies caught flame — like he was born for this.

I asked my family group chat how they felt when they found out Jammie had died. He was cruel and violent, but his story also helped bond us to each other — if at the expense of what his victims lost. My dad replied with a cryptic text: "Every tragedy should have a good third act." He clarified that, like many of Jamison's victims have expressed, he wanted Jammie to face trial. Bob said he holds no ax to

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I suppose the whole affair makes me a little sad.

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