

Chasing Dr. Robert Vernon Spears through our post-truth world. - Episode 16 listenNpod.com

listenN: Today in episode 16 I'm talking with award-winning author and social commentator Alan C. Logan. Allen's back to discuss his new book, Self-Styled: Chasing Dr. Robert Vernon Spears. It explores the mystery of national airline Flight 967 and its connection with one of the century's most colorful conman. Alan shares how his love for true seeking led him to Dr. Spears, a complex character who may have single-handedly set the naturopathic profession back 40 plus years. Well, hello Alan. Welcome back to ListenN.

Alan C. Logan: Thanks a million for having me back, Brian, it's great to be with you.

listenN: Oh yeah. I'm really excited to talk to you today about this new project because I know you as a naturopathic doctor, a researcher, a truth seeker, an author. But I think what we're going to talk about today is going to combine all of those passions and even add a few more.

Alan C. Logan: I think so.

listenN: Let's not wait any longer. Let's just dive in. Talk to me a bit about what you've been working on.

Alan C. Logan: So for the last couple of years I've been peeling the onion layers back on what's still an unsolved, some may say, the greatest unsolved commercial airline disaster in aviation history. Kind of stumbled into it, which we can talk about how I ended up sort of discovering this largely forgotten story about two years ago. And it took me a minute to kind of wrap my mind around the details because it seems confusing at first brush.

Alan C. Logan: And then when you start to dive in a little bit deeper and you see the incredibly rich stories of individuals that could only be described as characters. And in fact, that's what Newsweek Magazine referred to the folks that were in there. And even they didn't know the half of it, referred to the whole ensemble as a cast of characters because it's a phenomenal story of all these different lives intertwining in 1959 culminating in this, again, unsolved commercial airline disaster, Flight 967.

listenN: Yeah. So let me just go back to you say it's probably one of, if not the, most tragic aviation unsolved stories. Explain that part to me.

Alan C. Logan: Yeah. So, and those are not my words. I mean this is the New York Times at the time referred to it as that, one of the greatest who done it's. And again, it's still enduring. So I think that stand. Basically the details are, it begins November 15th, 1959. People gather at Tampa International Airport to take the flight, which was onwards to New Orleans, Dallas, and ultimately to Los Angeles. It was a little delayed. It took off a bit after midnight on the 16th and before it landed in New Orleans, it went into the Gulf of Mexico. Everyone on board was killed

and initially it just seemed like mechanical difficulties. Didn't look like there was any foul play and one of those ticketed passengers was very much alive and that's where the mystery begins. That wasn't apparent immediately, but, and I guess we can get into this really important detail because this is where it started to become this mysterious event on steroids.

Alan C. Logan: There was a woman in Tampa whose ex-husband had gone missing on the same day. And about a week, 10 days, after she collected his mail because even though they were divorced, they maintained a friendly relationship, it was amicable. They had a 17 year old son in common, so they maintained a cordial relationship for his benefit. And she gets the mail and it's a life insurance policy or more specifically, it was an aircraft flight insurance policy that was taken out at 16 minutes after midnight. Which was nine minutes before the cabin door closed on Flight 967 by her ex-husband who was not a ticketed passenger on that flight.

listenN: Oh wow.

Alan C. Logan: And the destination that he recorded on that flight insurance- Because it was commonplace in the 50's and 60's and even into the 70's that you would have these insurance vending machines in the airport. It was like essentially getting a candy bar. You would go in, you would drop a quarter in, you get a couple of thousand dollar's worth of insurance because, again, this was the heyday of aviation. I mean really many refer to it as the golden age. People were still in awe of being able to take a flight, but yet, the risks were very personalized and these insurance vending machines did quite well. And the destination for the individual was Dallas, Texas, which was the second stop on this flight. And when the graphologists looked at the signatures and everything else, there's no question that the individual who signed it was in fact her ex-husband. And then you start to learn a little bit more about the relationship between her ex-husband and that man who was a ticketed passenger who's in a 1957 pink and white Plymouth, traveling West at great speed towards the Arizona desert.

Alan C. Logan: And this ex-wife knows full well that her ex-husband and the person who was ticketed and traveling West in a car were thick as thieves. She didn't know the extent of it, just how thick their thievery really was. And she would only find that out in drips and drabs. And this just became a drama like no other. Because back in Dallas, Texas at the home of the ticketed passenger who's driving this car, his wife has gotten the news that her husband has perished in the Gulf of Mexico. National Airlines contacts her.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: She's grieving. There's a funeral, there's condolences cards. He was a very high profile person, and they were pretty well known in Dallas. So it was a big deal, the death announcement made the Dallas Morning News with a photograph saying Dr. Robert Vernon Spears has perished in the Gulf of Mexico on Flight

967. And that's really where it all begins in 1959. So this happened, as I said, November 16th of 59 and doesn't really heat up. Because when the ex-wife, her name is Alice Steel, when Alice Steel goes to the authorities with this airport purchased life insurance policy in her hand, nobody believes her.

Alan C. Logan: She looks a little kooky. She's got a big hat with feathers in it. She's not look believable. But she was not just going to sit quietly on it. She ended up going into the law offices of a Florida state representative, Sky Robert Mann, who she knew from the Methodist Church and said, "Hey, there's something not right about this." So then he ended up obviously being taken more seriously because in 1959 a man with a fancy suit and a thin tie is going to be believed a lot more than a woman, a housewife with a feathered cap on.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: So they started to take it seriously. Because initially she was trying to contact the National Airlines and said, "Hey, this guy's bought this insurance, he's missing, and I think he was on that flight." And they really dismissed her as a crank. And then Robert Mann, the state representative, starts turning over some stones. The plot thickens and literally and figuratively this Dr. Robert Vernon Spears, the ticketed passenger by now, has contacted an old friend and he's out in Arizona. So what happens is there's a warring faction occurred between the two women and that's where the media really took off. There were little in the way of facts in place at that time, but what you had was the woman in Tampa, the ex wife, and then the wife in Dallas of Dr. Robert Vernon Spears, starting having a very public spat over whose husband was actually on Flight 967.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: And there were many theories. So the media picked up on it. It went national when Alice Steel in Tampa said, "Hey, this Dr. Spears guy is an Ace hypnotist." So she floated the theory that her husband as sort of a hapless ... He was a salesman in an appliance shop similar to Canadian Tire and Tampa. Everything about him was painted to be sort of a hapless character that would be easily led. This of course over time would turn out to be completely the opposite of the truth. In fact, 180 degrees away from the truth. But the fascinating thing about this story is that the initial painting was actually quite wrong. Over time, in my own research, I began to see so much misinformation about the case, so many errors in reporting and facts that were actually presented as facts that were completely untrue.

listenN: This is a great... I just want to stop you there because I'm so curious to try to understand when you said my research. You're a naturopathic doctor, you're a researcher. How did you even stumble across this story?

Alan C. Logan: To me, that's something I love to talk about because when I... Okay, so I was working on an academic paper, which was looking at... I've been somewhat of a critic of some aspects of naturopathic medicine. I feel like there's massive room for improvement. I'm not turning my back on my colleagues or anything like that. But I think that it's really important to apply self-criticism within a profession in order for it to learn and to grow properly. I feel some aspects of it are antiquated. We were working on an academic paper about some of the history of naturopathic medicine and some of the ways in which it could be tightened scientifically and some of the ways in which critical appraisal should be adopted more rigorously, adopted with vigor, to the profession. We're working on this. I started going into Newspapers.com and Genealogy Bank because I think sometimes researchers, they rely only on the scientific databases like PubMed and maybe Google Scholar when they're doing their research work.

Alan C. Logan: But when you look at history, you actually have to dig into newspapers because it can be extremely valuable in uncovering who said what, when, how, mechanisms and so forth. It's such an important part of it. Thankfully. What's really remarkable about doing research these days is that big databases like Newspapers.com or Genealogy Bank, which has thousands of its own newspapers that are distinct from the newspapers at newspapers.com have. They have all these wonderful stories, but in this case, they have the people at the time within naturopathic medicine mid-century discussing things openly in the newspapers. You get to see who the players are, how they kind of came off the rails a little bit.

Alan C. Logan: I kept noticing something strange. This Dr. Robert Vernon Spears name kept coming up all over the place. thousands of articles about this guy is the leader of the naturopaths in North America. He was a trustee of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. He was a president of the Texas Association of Naturopathic Physicians. I'm like, "Why have I never heard about this guy before?" Because I went through the doctorate program and we learned about the history. I certainly never heard this guy's name.

listenN: Right. Now when you say Dr. Robert Vernon Spears, was he a medical doctor who then practiced naturopathic medicine? Or was he a naturopathic doctor at that time?

Alan C. Logan: Yes. He was a naturopathic doctor at that time. Now, much like many imposters and we can to some extent, because I don't want to ruin it for readers either, but there was certainly a great imposter aspect to this individual. He advertised his services in Dallas for a decade also as a medical doctor. Even though he was not licensed as a medical doctor. He put MD after his name in the white and the yellow pages. He would communicate, I've got letterhead from him where he puts MD for medical doctor while he was not. To answer your question, he was a naturopathic doctor. He was licensed in the state of Texas from about early

1950 or late '49 actually to be specific, and rose up very quickly because he was a charismatic character.

Alan C. Logan: Going back to how I fell into it, so now I'm starting to see this name everywhere peppered throughout the newspapers and stories of a period of time when naturopathic medicine was actually being banned. It was on its downward trajectory, and we don't need to go into tremendous detail here, but there's two major time points within the history of this profession. Early on, in the early 20th century, they enjoyed tremendous success and growth to the point where in the early 1920s, you had somewhat upwards of 40,000 members. You had invitations to the White House to meet up with the President. Their annual meetings were highly attended, and then it sort of all fell off a bit because modern medicine witnessed tremendous advances. The success of vaccines, the success of antibiotics, the success of surgical techniques. There was less tolerance for the kooky aspects of naturopathic medicine.

Alan C. Logan: One of the problems that they had, which they still have today, is that it was a sort of anything goes, any type of outlandish thinking is welcome because it's all about strength in numbers as opposed to being specific about, "Hey, well these are the modalities that actually work." So they were not discerning and that ended up coming to haunt them. You get to mid-century, and there's really nary a discussion of what happened in the mid-century with naturopathic medicine in the history books. Then you get to the other time point, which was the great revival, which happened in the 1980s and early nineties. You see this massive interest in alternative medicine once again. Naturopathic medicine that was on life support. There was about a hundred practitioners in 1980 throughout the country, whereas at one time, there were literally tens of thousands. When Dr. Robert Vernon Spears took over, there were certainly just in Texas alone, there was about 700 licensed naturopathic doctors under his reign. By the time he was done, naturopathic medicine was outlawed in true Texas style. It was outlawed.

listenN: Wow.

Alan C. Logan: You get to see this wild thing that happened. I'm starting to see this and I'm like, "Well, what's going on with this guy?" Then you start to see how many of those mentions of his name were connected to this flight. Then you get to see, like spokes in a wheel where he's at the center of it and you have all these wagon wheel spokes out to an unbelievable cast of characters that he was associated with. In many ways, I mean he single-handedly rolled back a lot of it, like the attorney general of the state of Texas stated specifically the events of this recent flight 967 cast a light on what I've been trying to tell you for years, that naturopaths are... And this is his words now, I'm not saying this is correct. I'm trying to underscore the point of how remarkable this was as national news. He stated that, "I've been telling you this for years, naturopaths are one of the most dangerous groups ever assembled." These are his words.

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listenN: Oh, wow.

Alan C. Logan: You really see where Robert Vernon Spears became this character that really was the death nail of naturopathic medicine. Well almost, it was on life support, as I said, by the time he was done with it. He was not just an outlier. As mentioned, he was a trustee of the national organization, president of several local chapters and including the national president of Texas. That's kind of how he stumbled on him. Then I start to peel back the story on 967 itself. Again, it's a little bit complicated when you first take a glance at it. Then when you peel it back, you start to see how incredible it really is.

listenN: Yeah. No, that's fascinating. I mean, to me it all feels very, I don't want to say organic, but full circle in the sense that your desire to go out and do research that helps move the practice and the respect for naturopathic medicine forward in this day and age leads you to the guy who sort of single-handedly brought the profession to its knees.

Alan C. Logan: Yeah, it's absolutely the truth. It's almost like the reverse of that thing. I laugh about it when I talk to friends. You have that silly montra put out by the more kooky people within the alternative medicine, the salesman-type thing, which is, "It's the secret your doctors don't want you to know." But in many ways, Robert Vernon Spears is the secret your naturopath doesn't want you to know because it's such an incredible story of a man that really had just such a profound impact culturally.

Alan C. Logan: I mean to really underscore this, the main events of this case played out in Florida, obviously, where the flight originated from, Dallas where his family was home and he was so well known, and then in Arizona where he ended up getting sort of holed up with a colleague, another naturopath that was another shady, shady operative, who was also very high up in the ranks. And so you have these three states, and at the end of 1960 when they recapped the events, the top news stories of the year, in each of those states, in Arizona, Texas and Florida, the case of Robert Vernon Spears and Flight 967 was voted in the top news stories of the year. You're talking about Spears being on the front cover of the New York Times for three days in a row.

listenN: Wow.

Alan C. Logan: This is the written up, a full feature cover story in Life magazine, Newsweek, Time magazine because there was also, there's so many other stories that ended up emerging from it, likely police corruption in Los Angeles, payoffs for abortion. One of Spears close associates was an MGM Grand guru prior to World War II. So in the glory days of MGM, in the late 1930s as a really young guy, this guy, Donald Loomis, who was Spears' bestie, if you will, they were thick as thieves. Loomis was the health guru, the health director, on the MGM lot. He actually had his own studio. There's photographs. A wonderful book about the

MGM lot, one, sort of the greatest production lot ever, and most of it's gone now, but it is a wonderful book that has all the incredible imagery from that.

Alan C. Logan: There's these really deluxe apartments that were reserved for A-List actors and a separate one for A-List actresses. And there's a website about MGM, and there's a wonderful photo of about 10 of the A-List actors who had these really deluxe apartments there with fireplaces. They referred to it as The Bordello, and there's a name on there underneath the likes of Clark Gable, and it says "Donald Loomis." Now every other actor was really well known of... I think there was about 10 names. And the website, there's this wonderful conversation ongoing at this website called Cinedrome, and they're like, "Well, who's Donald Loomis?" And no one could figure it out, and the summation was, which is rational and reasonable, that Donald Loomis must be a pseudonym for someone who didn't want their identity to be known. He was dead, but actually the Donald Loomis in question was the health guru. And the point being, this is how deeply embedded and how much the brass at MGM loved Donald Loomis.

Alan C. Logan: Then World War II happened. He went to World War II, came out and went through chiropractic training. So he became a chiropractor, and then he began a very superficial front-facing chiropractic clinic and a very lucrative abortion clinic upstairs from a liquor store on Crenshaw Boulevard. And, again, this is at a time when abortion was illegal. So him and Spears were tight, and this is a big, big part of where this story goes as well, including the widespread assumption Loomis had told Spears, "Don't worry, everything's covered over here. We've got the police in our back pocket." So this is another big part of the story as well.

listenN: Welcome back. I'm talking with award-winning author, Alan C. Logan, who is sharing the details of his new book and how he was drawn to tell the story of Dr. Spears, a complex character and conman, who was about to slip through the cracks of history. Again, I mean it's 60 years ago, but it feels like it's echoing our times today where we have these people who are in leadership or power positions that we're not, we're not sure if they're real or not or are they telling the truth or not, or we keep looking to find that they're con men in some way, shape or form.

Alan C. Logan: Yeah. That's really well said, and I get into that a bit certainly in the afterward about the driving force because we do need to understand how it is that these con men get into tremendous positions of power. It doesn't matter whether you're talking about a national guild of alternative medicine or whether it's someone that's looking to become the leader of a nation. We need to understand critical appraisal, and this is sort of bringing me back now to what the original quest was and the discovery of the Spears story. The critical appraisal, I think, has become so important, and that's why I think there's a tremendous craving for stories of con men, these true stories that are emerging now because I think individuals and groups really understand sort of what's on the line today, and we're living in this so-called post-truth world. And

understanding the ways and means I think is really, really important and the larger scheme of things.

Alan C. Logan: And the thing with Spears, there's always a grain of truth, right, to the stories that are told. And in the book, *Self-Styled*, which is different than... There was one other book written about it. It's long since out of print. It was more about the flight itself, the Flight 967. It was written by a guy who was the admin, the marketing director of National Airlines. National Airlines at that time, it suffered several airline disasters under their brand, so they were really on the ropes. This guy, Brad Williams, wrote a book about it, and he's a good writer, but there was... I came to learn that there was loads of misinformation with the book, like lots of facts of error and he kind of made stuff up. He played loose with the facts and filled in gaps that he didn't know by just flat out making it up, and that includes how Spears came to become licensed and things like that. I was able to determine that.

Alan C. Logan: I mean what worked in my favor, in fairness to him, was that when you have newspapers.com and when you have ancestry.com, you actually have, you have access, and especially now because over time, there's when a certain amount of time goes past, you can actually gain access to material that wasn't available previously, which is, you're at that point. For example, Spears after... On the 50th anniversary of someone's death, anyone can then gain access to an FBI file on that individual. It becomes public knowledge, for example. That's just one example, but you could start with ancestry. And this is a great plug for ancestry.com, but you can actually start to get his marriage licenses, who Spears was married to. So you start to see the, where he had worked into these social circles in San Francisco when he was really, had really ingratiated himself, as many con men do, into these social circles. It's always built on a grain of truth.

Alan C. Logan: He was in fact a World War I aviator. He was assigned to Stonehenge. Now, he had influenza very early on and was essentially spent most of his time there in the lounge, as they call it, sections of several hospitals, one of which was at Oxford. So he was in Oxford in the hospital with the influenza, and then later in life he would tell colleagues that he trained at Oxford. So you see how they, how there's always a little something there and learning how that happens. But just to return for a moment to... You're dealing with the Flight 967 details, which Brad Williams attempted to do in 1963 in his book, and there really hasn't been anything at all since. It's just like this story just vaporized and it disappeared other than fairly sizable announcements in most United States papers, including the New York Times, who provided an obituary notice when Spears died, which is interesting-

listenN: Like when he... sorry, but when he actually died-

Alan C. Logan: Yes, when he died for the second time. That's right. Well said. So when he actually died, you had... and everyone, all of the newspapers, whether it was in Florida, Texas, Arizona, the New York Times, as I mentioned, it was always the

reference to mystery figure has died. And it was assumed that he took a lot of it to its grave, but I can say that there's actually a lot that he didn't take. And the reason for that is the Alcatraz files. Thankfully because of the significance of Alcatraz to American history, there's 900 pages of Spears records in the Alcatraz files. So-

listenN: Sorry, explain to me when the Alcatraz files.

Alan C. Logan: Yeah, so basically anyone, it was approximately 1,400 men that ever were incarcerated there, and the US National Archives treats Alcatraz a bit differently than they do from any other federal prison. There's a couple that historical records from that particular prison, Leavenworth is another one, but Alcatraz is the primary one. I mean you've got tour boats going there. It's just a significant part of American criminal justice history. So what they've done is they've preserved all of the records on any inmate there. Now had Spears gone anywhere else, those records wouldn't have been available.

Alan C. Logan: But because, and I can tell you it's very interesting, buried within those 900 pages in his Alcatraz file is a note from the Director of the Bureau of Prisons of the United States and between his assistant director, so the two top members of the Prison Bureau. There's a little note scribbled on the bottom. And I was really shocked to see this, and it said "Should we teach this old conniver a lesson? Maybe a bit of Alcatraz with doing some good." And you see the awareness of what Alcatraz truly meant between the directors. I mean, it was just in plain sight how they went about that. So I won't sort of ruin the reason why Spears was ultimately sent out Alcatraz, but I can say at this juncture it was really nothing to do with Flight 967.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: So in that aspect... But to getting back to the 900 pages, what you find are letters in there, the communication between him and his wife, Dear John letters. It was such a rich, rich find and that's on top of all of the other documents that were attainable from so many other places, including in Canada, the Guelph Reformatory. Because our friend Dr. Robert Vernon Spears was also spent time in the Guelph Reformatory under the name of Robert C. Buchanan. And among other things, because the thing is, when you think about Flight 967, it in itself is worthy of this incredible discussion in the annals of commercial aviation history.

Alan C. Logan: But actually the Dr. Robert Vernon Spears part of it is such a rich history, from his upbringings in rural Oklahoma to going to Stonehenge as part of the 314th Aero Squadron, making his way back, marrying into society, ingratiating himself with the MGM Grand guru. He impersonated a journalist in Minneapolis. Again, he got involved in an incredible caper where he had the town of Weatherford, Oklahoma chasing him, and he was a grown man at this point. He was not a

teenager or anything. And he turned around and let off a tear gas round at the pursuing town folk, including the mayor. This happened in 1941.

listenN: Holy cow.

Alan C. Logan: So you have all these incredible stories of this guy, verifiable. And that's the beauty of it. Because one of the things that, going back to your point about the conman story and why we're so fascinated by it today in the post-truth world, is that sometimes the stories that we think that we know about various conmen turn out to have very little veracity. Whereas this is actually quite the opposite. This hidden story is loaded with easily verifiable references because Spears left such an incredible trail of documentation along his way.

listenN: Right. And I imagine at that time, you could do something in one town in the United States, like tear gas the population and the mayor, and then get in your car and drive a couple of hundred miles in any direction and show up in another town and they never know. Whereas today we have things like social media and the internet that would at least probably haunt someone like that from having as much of a run as they were able to get away within their lifetime.

Alan C. Logan: 100%, and you find that with some of the more recent conmen tales that had been told in television documentaries and so on, that it was the, actually the undoing was, for example, women who would find each other on social media and say "Hey, this guy has been conning me. He's pretending to be a military Colonel with me. He's been pretending to be a wealthy industrialist with me." And they find each other on social media, and then the gig is up kind of thing. But you're right. And the other thing that he would do to move around and be so mobile is just jump on the trains. This was very common for them to do as well.

Alan C. Logan: Another big part of the story that I think is important, something that had never been reported before at all in any media, pertaining to Spears best friend. Again, there was this notion that he was this easily led character, a salesman that was just in awe of Dr. Robert Vernon Spears. And as I mentioned at the top, he had his ex-wife in Tampa, he had a 17 year old. The assumption was that well he would never just up and leave and be missing. There has to be some foul play on the part of Spears.

Alan C. Logan: But actually, I was able to determine in never reported research before, that this guy Al Taylor had actually abandoned another family earlier in his life, in 1928. He had a kid and a wife and he just woke up one day. He was doing accounting work, setting up a new card file system for the folks that make Terminix. This was The Bruce Company in Memphis. He just snapped, if you will, and took pads of their checks and went on a spending spree.

Alan C. Logan: It was short-lived. He went up to St. Louis where he enjoyed it for about a week or 10 days. So no one had known this about his past. And that's one of the

things that comes out in the book as well. Then you know, everything that had been kind of presented, because even Williams... Remember when Brad Williams wrote the book Flight 967 in 1963 as the head of marketing for National Airlines. In the book reviews at the time, it was clear that he was indicting Spears.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: Even though there's a lot of circumstantial evidence that Spears was clearly... If circumstantial evidence was enough to convict, there's no question about that, that Spears was clearly in play. But when Brad Williams constructed his narrative, it was very much he eliminated any discussion from any other rational explanations for what happened with the flight, and he took other players out of the mix as being involved. Because he just, he wanted this kind of cut and dry narrative. And really that's what the book reviews picked up on too. It wasn't just me. The book reviews at the time said that it was really just essentially an indictment of Spear, which is precisely what National Airlines would have wanted.

listenN: Right, right. And it's an interesting thing because we've had many plane crashes since then, and what are the odds of there being these types of characters on those planes where these incredible stories unravel from? And because I'm assuming we don't know how the plane actually came to its demise, is there a chance that he actually brought the plane down?

Alan C. Logan: Well, there's no question that would be the leading theory. This isn't really interesting because it kind of brushes up against the CBC series on a Canadian Pacific Flight 21.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: But in that case, you knew that an incendiary device had been brought onto that plane. That was proven. So in this case, you don't know that because the plane went down in the Gulf of Mexico. It was never recovered. The fuselage to this day remains there. So you don't have any friends it's to say with precision what happened. There was an eyewitness not far from New Orleans that saw what he thought to be was a mid-air explosion and a white tail of flame spiralling down towards the water. So there was an indication this happened in midair. But as far as, did he do this? Did he bring on a package? There was confusion at the boarding time. This is all brought out in the equivalent of the NTSB, which was called the Civil Aviation Board or CAB at the time, which has now become the NTSB. They close at that time. They closed 94% of their cases.

listenN: Wow.

Alan C. Logan: They were able to prove what happened. Flight 967 fell in to that 6% of unknowns. In 1962, they closed the case. I mean that's not to say that this is not

an ongoing investigation. Like the FBI would still consider this an open case in the sense that even though Spears is long dead, we don't know what happened. Just because the CAB closed their investigation doesn't mean it's still not the source of a criminal investigation today because it could clearly be that.

Alan C. Logan: You had this chaos at the gate. The man that was responsible for the boarding process stated that a man in brown suit carrying a briefcase and an overcoat ran up to one of the other planes. Because at Tampa International at that time, it's far and away different than any of our international airports would be today. You have the planes sitting out on the tarmac with those kind of rolling stairs that take you up to the cabin door. You emerge from behind the chain linked fence. There were several planes sitting there. It wasn't uncommon for someone to go up to the wrong set of stairs. Obviously done with a little bit more precision these days. An individual had gone up to a different plane was, again, not uncommon. It was a bit chaotic at the boarding process.

Alan C. Logan: Evidently, the head count was a little bit chaotic too. So is it possible that someone got off and got back on again? Yes. The leading theory, or at least the one proffered by Alice Steel, or that's Spears's friend Al Taylor's ex-wife, she was convinced that Spears had either hypnotized her husband or convinced him to take an incendiary device onto the plane. Essentially what she was claiming was that he did it on purpose. He said, "Hey, take this package." He didn't tell Taylor what it was. He just said, "Hey, take this package. I'll meet you in Dallas, and I'll drive your car." That was her theory.

Alan C. Logan: But to me, the more that I learned through the research about Spears, even though this guy had an incredibly profound criminal past, and I think it's safe to say that without ruining the story, notwithstanding the tear gas thing in Oklahoma, he never had any history of violence at all. Nothing. Of all the prison terms he served, he never had a single infraction of violence. Each and every time he got out early for good behavior. There was no indication. So you have to think about that in the background.

Alan C. Logan: Then you also have to think about the fact that Al Taylor was his friend since 1928. They had decades long friendship. These guys were like thick as thieves in their bond. Spears used to send... Because Al Taylor was a salesman of Tampa. He wasn't making tons of money. Spears would send him boxes of his used clothes, shirts, suits, shoes. Al Taylor would wear those and he would have them tailored to fit. He did so because he loved wearing them and loved to know that they were from Spears.

Alan C. Logan: The notion that these two guys who had done so much together, and you'll see in Self-Styled the book how rich their relationship was for all those decades and all the different things they got up to. To me it just doesn't add up that Spears is going to tell his best friend of many decades, a man with essentially no history of violence, to take on this package like it's Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner and say, "Hey, get on the plane, and I'll meet you in Dallas." It just doesn't add

up. I just don't think there was that level of desperation on Spears. For the listeners, I'll back up for one second because I haven't provided the potential motive here. That is for Spears was facing abortion charges in Los Angeles along with the MGM grand guru, Donald Loomis.

listenN: Welcome back. I'm talking with award-winning author Alan C. Logan who is sharing the details of his new book and how conmen have been able to maneuver their way into positions of leadership because we are losing our ability as a society to engage in critical appraisal. As a researcher and somebody who has written numerous books, but not necessarily of this kind, when did you know that you could stop? Or are you still lying awake at night wondering is there more? When do you know like, okay, this is the story and I'm now going to write this book? How do you get the confidence to know that you've turned over enough stones?

Alan C. Logan: Yeah, it's a great question. It's so hard to say what that exact moment was, but I look back and was trying to even contemplate when that moment was. I think it was learning through Ancestry.com that the Alcatraz files existed. It was doing public records requests about halfway into it. Initially I was reading with interest and the more that I learned through newspapers just to satisfy my own curiosity I'm like, "Wow, this is really incredible." But there was no intent to write a book about it.

Alan C. Logan: Then I ended up picking a rare copy, because they're so hard to find, of Brad Williams, Flight 967 book written in 1963. I already knew that some of the things that he were saying were not matching up with public records, that weren't matching up with things that I had discovered that were verifiable facts. Then I'm like, okay, this plot's thickening here. There's a lot to learn here.

Alan C. Logan: Then I realized that nobody had actually written about Spears himself. Nobody knew the guy's background and all these incredible things, and I use the word incredible, obviously not with admiration in the sense that some of them were not that kind to other people. But at the end of the day, like many conmen, neighbors loved him. Everybody considered him charming. What a great guy he was. Again, that fits the mould. I'm not sure when that moment was, but it's so true though, Brian. You get to this like point of saturation like a sponge, and you just know that it's not going to be able to contain any more water. You're like, this has got to be documented. It's far too important of a story in the annals of Americana.

listenN: Right. Well, it's interesting. We've talked about con-men a couple of times. I've always been fascinated because I've spent my life around a number of different types of characters that could be, whether it's narcissistic or pathological liars or people that are conning in some way, shape or form. Not because of my lifestyle, but just you come from families and families are complex and they're interesting and there's always a cast of characters somewhere. As someone

once said to me, they go, "There's always a black sheep. You might just not know it yet."

Alan C. Logan: That's right.

listenN: I always think of like the Dunning-Kruger effect where...

Alan C. Logan: Yeah.

listenN: This whole thing around the fact that as human beings, we innately trust confident people as being, they must know.

Alan C. Logan: Yes.

listenN: In fact, all the science points to the fact that the more you know about a subject, the less confident you are about it.

Alan C. Logan: That's correct.

listenN: Is that something that's kind of playing out in front of our eyes right now on what we're seeing in the political realm in the United States and in other parts of the world? Is this something that allows the quackery to infiltrate different sorts of professions like naturopathy? Is this something that you've discovered as well to be more true, that these charismatic, confident people end up in these leadership and power positions? Because we yet haven't figured it out as a society that the confident person is the last person you should trust.

Alan C. Logan: Absolutely. That has 100% been my experience. As the years unfolded, even with my own experience in research writing about what I consider to be the more rational aspects of integrative medicine, like lifestyle, exercise, rational nutrition approach is mind-body medicine, meditation, connecting with nature. All of these things are rational. They've been part of health care since time immemorial. What happens is you start to see the outliers, the gurus, and sometimes there's this cult like aspect to it.

Alan C. Logan: And 100% at Dunning and Kruger they appear to know much, but actually the further you dive into it, you start to discover that they know little. And sadly, any emperor having no clothes, everybody kind of knew the emperor had no clothes, but sometimes with these, with these gurus, everybody thinks they're wearing a fine Armani suit. Do you know what I mean? It's like they're drinking the delicious nectar of falsehoods. And I guess more specifically to drill down into your question, yes, there's been tremendous focus on this in the last several years due to not just elections in North America, but elsewhere in Europe and Australia and so on.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: And many westernized nations. But we're contending with something with the rise of the internet, social media, Instagram, Twitter. We know from published science that the spread of falsehoods is far and away easier and more rapid than truths. So we're living in critical times where critical appraisal is essential. And it's one of the things that I've realized that it's changed in me in the last several years because I can't take care of certain patches of politics, but I can write and try to be brave enough to write about what I see to be shortcomings in the area that I'm somewhat familiar with, which is having gone through and gotten a doctorate program in one of the accredited schools, having experience with it now, not just for, a year or six months, but almost two decades since I graduated.

Alan C. Logan: So now it's time for me to at least be brave enough to say, "Hey, a lot of this stuff that's out there, it's just not on. It's just not right." So this is part of my own journey and in a way, Spears allowed me to talk about some of the things that you're bringing up right now.

listenN: Yeah. Which is fascinating because the serendipity of it all is amazing. I've always been one of those people that it's okay that things are invisible and it's okay that things might be placebo, if they work. I don't care about anything having to be 100% scientifically proven if it works. In other words, if some human being is able to change their life for the better because they believe something, I don't necessarily pass judgment on that. What happens for me is I'm waiting for the time and I'm hoping it's coming soon where we start to study what that is, meaning in other words, when you say that falsehoods travel faster and easier than truths. So if that's fundamental to the human experience and if I can believe a falsehood like a placebo and it can have an amazing effect on my life or whatever, I want us to study that, because I think that's the piece that we don't understand. Right?

Alan C. Logan: Well, one of the reasons why I think you and I connect so well together is because that's precisely why the article that I was working on when I discovered Spears was a just about precisely that. It's like, okay let's explore scientifically placebo. People tend to think of placebos or pills, but it's actually the entire environment that surrounds the beliefs that are formulated. It need not be a pill. It's everything associated with what could be a healing provocateur in the environment. It could be the kind gesture. It could be anything. The good news here, Brian, is there actually is an international group for placebo studies now, and these are top flight scientists. Many of them are at Harvard university under the guide of Ted Kaptchuk.

Alan C. Logan: There's another center in Europe. So this international society for placebo studies, they're doing incredible work right now. They're doing studies where you actually open label it, where the person knows it's a placebo. It's this research area called Placebos Without Deception. And it's a really burgeoning area of scientific research. There was a study just published the other day about if the clinician believes that they're giving legitimate medicine, the outcome for

the recipient in terms of pain reduction is magnified. Even though the clinician was actually prescribing, unbeknownst to them, they thought that they were in the group that were prescribing the real... They even made up a great pharmaceutical name for this gel that they were supposedly prescribing, but they were actually just prescribing petroleum jelly.

listenN: Right.

Alan C. Logan: And the benefits were magnified. These researchers were so startled, they'd had to repeat the experiment several times because they couldn't believe the effect. That's what we need to study more. I am in complete agreement with you. I think sometimes though, where it gets tricky is when you have commercially available products that I would label to be nothing more than bowls of sugar or drops of water. Now you start getting into the tricky area of ethics. So then, at what point, if you know that there's no biological activity at all to what it is that you're prescribing, then it gets murky. Is it now a placebo with deception at that point in the sense that you're... Where do the ethics sit? So this is a tricky conversation, but I'm with you. It's very easy to sit back and... You're not the one, suffering from a mood disorder or a chronic illness that is debilitating. But if this intervention really helps you and it provides-

listenN: Relief.

Alan C. Logan: ...comfort, wellbeing and relief as you said, well then I think we need to check our judgment. So I think this is a wonderful conversation about placebos. It's ongoing right now. And the good news for you since this is an area of interest to you, is that there is a tremendous global interest in this right now.

listenN: Yeah. Because I think that when we can understand that, we will then see the falsehoods.

Alan C. Logan: I agree.

listenN: So I've always been one of those people that when bad things are happening, I have a strong belief that they're there to expose us to a truth. You know? And so to me, we're seeing all this false, post-truth world we live in, we're seeing con-men in all positions of power. We're seeing narcissism, running rampant. And I believe that as we try to figure that out, if we can understand the part of humanity and the psyche or whatever it is that allows us to be duped like that, once we understand that, we won't be duped by that anymore.

Alan C. Logan: I completely agree and I love that you're saying this because this is exactly where I'd like to get us to as well. Is to understand... And I think this really needs to be taught early on, we talked so much about STEM, but I think that critical appraisal is something... And again, when I use the term critical appraisal, I'm referring to what you just now said as well, understanding the ways and means in which we can become tripped up, cognitively by the conmen, to use the

broad brush stroke in what it really means. That needs to happen early on in life.

Alan C. Logan: I think that even in childhood we should be taught these skills because they're so applicable to the modern world. And I don't think we can waste any time on this because it's just such a critical skill. And we can talk about the great pressing issues of our time, in terms of what our planet is up against at the moment. And then when you think about that, and when you think about how that can be short circuited by con-men at the edges of politics or in the core of it, rather, I should say, then you start to think, "Well, okay, we really need to teach critical appraisal skills early and often."

listenN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that your book is going to be a lovely dive into just that subject matter, and I'd love the fact that it brings naturopathic medicine into the conversation around that. I'm looking forward to getting a copy and reading it. When is the book coming out and how do people find you and it, Alan?

Alan C. Logan: So the book will be out shortly. I would say certainly before the anniversary of Flight 967, which is November 16th. The website for more is [chasingspears.com](http://chasingspears.com).

listenN: Okay, chasing Spears, so that's his last name, which is S-P-E-A-R-S.

Alan C. Logan: That's right.

listenN: Chasing Spears.

Alan C. Logan: [chasingspears.com](http://chasingspears.com). Book should be out in and around November 10th, 2019. It will be out in hardcover and Kindle on Amazon first, and then the soft cover to follow shortly thereafter on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). It's published by Glass Spider Publications.

listenN: So we'll put links to all of that on our website in our episode notes, but I want to thank you for this conversation. This has just been fascinating. I mean, I'm so blown away that this is coming to the surface and this existed in a time that I find very fascinating, which is the '60s.

Alan C. Logan: Yeah, it's such an incredible cultural moment. Spears died right on the eve of that tumultuous summer of Woodstock, the moon landing, and everything else that happened in '69, so to me, it's a fascinating time in North American history as well.

listenN: Yeah. Well, Alan, thank you so much for being on listenN again and sharing this exciting project.

Alan C. Logan: Wonderful to be with you, Brian, and I look forward to joining you again soon.

listenN: Yeah, I hope that happens soon as well. Thanks, Alan.

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Alan C. Logan: Thank you.

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