

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | BIGFOOT: FACE TO FACE

EP54 Transcript

WALTER PADILLA: I saw my life flash before my eyes. I'm not afraid to admit it. I don't care if people think I'm crazy or not. I saw something that is not supposed to exist. I saw a beast of epic proportions and I have never been so scared in my life. Ever. Ever.

NARRATION:

WE'VE ALL HEARD STORIES OF HUNTERS AND HIKERS ESCAPING LIFE-THREATENING ENCOUNTERS WITH ANIMALS LIKE BEARS OR COUGARS WHILE IN THE WOODS. YET FEW HAVE COME WITHIN JUST A FEW FEET OF AN ANIMAL OF MYTHIC PROPORTIONS. IN 2021, WALTER PADILLA AND A FRIEND THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FUN TO SPEND THE NIGHT SEARCHING FOR ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST LEGENDARY CREATURE IN A FOREST IN SOUTHERN TEXAS. IT'S THERE THAT HE CAME ACROSS A BEING SO LARGE AND INTIMIDATING, HE'S HAD NIGHTMARES EVER SINCE.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "BIGFOOT: FACE TO FACE."

41-YEAR-OLD WALTER PADILLA IS A NATIVE OF PUERTO RICO, WHICH HAS A LONG HISTORY OF SIGHTINGS OF UNUSUAL CREATURES, MOST NOTABLY THE BLOOD-SUCKING, GOAT-EATING BEAST CALLED THE CHUPACABRA.

WALTER PADILLA: Never seen a Chupacabra. I'm just a real, normal person, I guess, if there's such a thing. Nothing out of the ordinary.

NARRATION:

A MARINE VETERAN SERVING TWO TOURS OVERSEAS, WALTER WORKED AS AN EMT AND THEN FOR AN ENERGY COMPANY, HELPING TO RESTORE POWER BACK TO PUERTO RICO AFTER HURRICANE MARIA. IN 2017, HE TOOK A NEW JOB AND MOVED TO THE SMALL TOWN OF WILLIS, TEXAS. UNTIL THEN, WALTER HAD LITTLE INTEREST IN THE PARANORMAL OR UNEXPLAINED CREATURES, AND HAD NEVER EVEN HEARD OF BIGFOOT, UNTIL HE BEGAN A CASUAL CONVERSATION WITH A COWORKER NAMED CHRIS.

WALTER PADILLA: Where I work at, there's this guy that we used to work in the same shift. I'm gonna call him Chris. One day we were outside, sharing a cigarette and a break, and I asked him. I said, "Hey, I heard that you're into the paranormal. What, what is it that you do?" And you know, we started talking about it until one day he, he asked me, "Hey, you know about Bigfoot?" And I remember looking down at my feet and I didn't understand the reference. "Are you telling me that I have big feet, or...?" And he says, "No, dummy, the creature." I said, "There's a creature named Bigfoot?" So, he kind of started telling me about it. He described it as The Hairy Man or the Creek Devil and he described it as a big, big, tall, humanoid-looking creature, was very hairy, very powerful. And I remember thinking to myself, how does nobody have ever come up with one?

NARRATION:

IT'S THE QUESTION PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASKING FOR DECADES. OVER THE YEARS, LITTLE TANGIBLE EVIDENCE HAS BEEN FOUND TO PROVE THE BIGFOOT'S EXISTENCE. BUT FASCINATED, WALTER CONTINUES TO PURSUE THE CONVERSATION WITH HIS COWORKER AND LEARNS THAT NOT ONLY DOES THIS MYTHICAL CREATURE EXIST, BUT THAT THERE HAVE BEEN ENCOUNTERS IN THE WOODS NOT FAR AWAY FROM HIS HOME IN WILLIS.

WALTER PADILLA: So, one day we were talking, and he shows me a map where there's a higher concentration of sightings near where I live. And I just said, "Well, let's go there. Let's see if it's true." And he was all about it. He was like, "Yeah, let's do it. Let's do it." I thought in my mind when we set it up, you know, at best we're gonna hang out. We're gonna have a good time. We're gonna chill in the forest and we're gonna go back home empty handed. Well, little did I know that that was gonna be a very tough night.

NARRATION:

WALTER AND CHRIS MEET AT 9 PM ON NOVEMBER 8, 2021. CHRIS JUMPS INTO WALTER'S TRUCK AND THEY HEAD OUT INTO THE SAM HOUSTON FOREST, FOLLOWING SMALL DIRT ROADS THAT GET MORE NARROW AS THEY HEAD DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE WOODS. AT AROUND 10 PM, WALTER PARKS THE TRUCK.

WALTER PADILLA: It was a very, very dark road. Everything was really pitch black. I mean, you really can't see, it's so dark, and there's so many trees that it's almost impossible to actually see anything there. I'm not nervous at that point, I mean, I'm armed. My only concern is it's too dark. If there's a threat, I'm pretty much not gonna be able, unless I hear it, I won't be able to see where it's coming from.

NARRATION:

THE TWO MEN STEP OUT OF THEIR VEHICLE AND ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, CHRIS IS ON EDGE.

WALTER PADILLA: We're talking about what we're gonna do. Next thing I know, he says, "Did you hear that?" He said he kept hearing something in the bush to our right side and I just kept saying that, "Whatever." I was like, "Gotta be the wind."

NARRATION:

AS THE TWO MEN CAUTIOUSLY EXPLORE THE WOODS, THE HEADLIGHTS FROM A TRUCK SUDDENLY LIGHT UP THE AREA. THE VEHICLE PULLS UP, ITS TIRES SCRAPING TO A STOP AGAINST THE DIRT OF THE ROAD. THE DRIVER JUMPS OUT OF THE CAB OF HIS PICKUP TRUCK, WHICH HAS SEVERAL RIFLES STRETCHED ACROSS A GUN RACK, AND WALKS OVER TO CHRIS AND WALTER. HE INTRODUCES HIMSELF ONLY AS TEX.

WALTER PADILLA: I'm just looking at the guy. He was about six foot two, six foot three. He had kind of a law enforcement appeal to him. You know, certain words he's using, mannerisms. He had a hunting dog with him, and I'm just looking at the body language on this individual. He wasn't demonstrating any aggressive or any hidden intentions. All I heard was the guy say, "Are

you guys okay? Oh, you're here for Bigfoot." What? How do you come up to a stranger in the middle of nowhere, and the first thing that comes outta your mouth is, "Are you here for Bigfoot?" So, at that point, what I thought in my mind was: okay, this is weird. Where is this going? So, the guy goes, "Well, if you wanna see it, I can show you where it is. I know where they are." We thought it was strangely odd, obviously. But other than that, we were more curious about Bigfoot than our safety at that moment. Me and Chris look at each other, we're talking about it. And, "You wanna do it? Let's do it." Against our better judgment, I said, "We'll follow you."

NARRATION:

TEX LEADS WALTER AND CHRIS DOWN A DEEPLY WOODED ROAD TO A DEAD END. THEY STOP THEIR CARS, TAKE A MOMENT TO ASSESS THE SITUATION AS FAR AS THEIR HEADLIGHTS CAN SEE, THEN STEP OUT INTO THE DARKNESS.

WALTER PADILLA: The minute we got out of the vehicle, you could tell that something was off. First thing I noticed is that it was eerily quiet for a forest. There were no sounds. And I walked towards the creek to my right side and there's a tree, and at the base of that tree, there was a very, very big scat — feces of some kind of animal that was very fresh. You could see vapor coming out of it. I've been hunting for quite some time with a lot of experienced hunters. Based on that knowledge, when I saw the excrement leaning against that tree, and I started thinking to myself, this is not bear. This, obviously, it's not a deer. It wasn't any known animal I had ever known about.

NARRATION:

THINKING SOME LARGE, STRANGE CREATURE HAS JUST PASSED THROUGH THE AREA, WALTER AND CHRIS ARE ON HIGH ALERT, PEERING INTO THE DARKNESS, WONDERING WHAT TO DO NEXT, WHEN AN HORRIFYING SOUND ECHOES THROUGH THE TREES.

WALTER PADILLA: We heard this deep, low growl. It felt like it was probably 10 feet away, but we couldn't see that far because it was too dark. And the only thing I can compare it to is that type of low growl that you can hear for miles. With every one of those roars, my rib cage would tremble. Now I've never felt anything like that in my life, at all. So, it was quite shocking, and I just kind of froze for a minute. I looked over. Chris says, "Man, get out of there, let's go back. Let's go back to the cars." And I said, "Well, hold on a minute. Let me see if I can find any prints." And I jump in the creek, cuz the water level was very low, and the minute I did that, it started growling even more, more aggressively. But yet again, in the same low tone. It was very demon-like. It's the only thing I can describe it because I've never heard anything like it. And you would hear a sound from our left side, and then a reply from the right side. And I told him, "You know what? I think we're being surrounded, because we're hearing it on every side." And, to me, it felt like they were trying to funnel us in one direction. It felt like they were trying to push us to keep heading up the mountain. Chris said, "Are you stupid? Get out of there, or you're gonna be eaten." So obviously, I realized that I am being an idiot.

NARRATION:

WALTER JUMPS FROM THE CREEK AND RUSHES BACK TO CHRIS AND TEX, WHO HAVE FLED TO THE SAFETY OF THEIR TRUCKS. ALL THREE MEN ARE SHAKEN TO THE CORE.

WALTER PADILLA: I am very scared because I don't know what's making this noise. And I'm shaking. Chris is shaking, and I asked him, I said, "Do we have any big cats here? Do you have any, you know, cougars, pumas, or any of that?" He goes, "No. No, no, no, we don't have any of that here." And then, out of nowhere, we hear a cow and we looked at each other and we're like, "How the hell does a cow fit in between a forest that is so thick?" And I remember asking Chris, "Is that a cow?" He goes, "Listen, listen, listen." Oh my Lord, that is not a cow. Then we start hearing coyotes. It would do the howl, but at the end it would get really, really excited, and it was loud. I mean, loud. And I was like, man, what the hell is this? And I remember Chris saying, "I told you. I told you those are Bigfoots."

NARRATION:

AS WALTER, CHRIS, AND THEIR GUIDE, TEX, GATHER THEIR WITS, FIST-SIZED ROCKS BEGIN TO PELT THEM, BEING THROWN FROM THE DIRECTION WHERE WALTER HEARD THAT FIRST GROWL. AT THAT MOMENT, TEX DECIDES TO TAKE A STAND.

WALTER PADILLA: Tex opens the door to his pickup, and tells us, "My dog is a hunting dog. I'm gonna sick him on whatever is throwing that." So, he opens the door, and he's telling the dog, "Go. Do your thing." And what does the dog do? Gets out of the inside of the car and hides right underneath the car. This dog said, "Nope, not today." He did not go anywhere. Did not move. I never seen the dog that scared, and Tex was just perplexed. He didn't know why the dog would not chase whatever he was telling it to chase. He was like, "The dog's never done that before. I suggest we leave." And me and Chris were like, "Nah, we're gonna stay, because this is what we're here for."

NARRATION:

SO, TEX TAKES HIS DOG AND DRIVES OFF, LEAVING WALTER AND CHRIS TO CONTINUE STALKING A CREATURE THEY HAVE YET TO ACTUALLY SEE WITHIN ITS DARK DOMAIN. AT FIRST, ALL IS QUIET. BUT THEN...

WALTER PADILLA: We start hearing footsteps all around us and in the creek, like jumping in the creek, running in the creek. Whatever it was, it was on two legs because you could hear the splashing, and the running, the walking on the leaves. And Chris says, "Look, look, look!" And behind a tree, you could see a pair of eyeballs, huge eyeballs. And then it would go low down to the ground, and it would crawl like a spider would, like on all fours, running around the forest and it would, you know, disappear from our view. And Chris turns to the left, and he yells, "Right there, right there, right there!" And I instinctively grab my gun and I run in the forest, and I come up to the edge of the creek on the left side, and I'm looking, obviously, into the darkness. The only thing I can see in front of me, about 10 or 15 feet in front of me, there's a big, thick tree. But you could hear the breath of this animal. It's gotta have massive lungs, whatever this is. I remember yelling something absurd, cuz obviously I was getting a bit stressed out about what was going on. And I said something absurd like, "If you're a human, you better

show yourself, cuz I'm about to fill you with a lot of lead." And from that tree, a head pokes out and decides to show himself, and I look up and I see the head and I just, "What?" This thing is about nine and a half to 10 feet tall. Massive muscles. He looked to be black, but he could have been dark brown. Again, it was very dark. It looked like it had no neck, like the head was just plopped on top of the shoulders. Eyes as big as golf balls, and I noticed that his hands were so big, and they reached a bit below the knees. I mean, this was a massive creature.

WALTER PADILLA: I froze for the first time in my life, and I felt an impending fear of death. It's like, I grabbed my gun. I holstered it. I realize my weapon wasn't gonna do anything but piss it off. So, I put my hands up in the air and I started yelling, "I'm done. I'm dead. I'm dead." I turn around, and I'm walking out thinking that this thing is gonna grab me, tear me to pieces, eat me, do something to me. I pretty much said, "This is how I'm gonna die. This, I'm dead. I'm gonna die." And I just kept walking, and nothing happened. And I headed it to my car. I was so afraid that I couldn't find my keys that were in my pocket. I couldn't find my keys. I was just leaning against my car like, what did I just see? How do you process? I mean, that was the most terrifying thing I've ever seen.

NARRATION:

CHRIS, WHO HAS TAKEN COVER WHILE WALTER ENGAGES THE BIGFOOT, RUNS OUT FROM THE WOODS, ANXIOUS TO KNOW IF WALTER IS OKAY.

WALTER PADILLA: He's like, "Man, what's going on? Man, hat's going on?" And I'm like, "Dude, we need to get the F out here. We need to leave now. I just saw this thing. It's massive." And he's like, "That's it. I'm done. We're done. We're done. I've been wanting to leave. Let's go."

NARRATION:

THE TWO JUMP IN THEIR CAR AND TEAR DOWN THE DARK, DIRT ROAD, HEADING FOR THE SAFETY OF THEIR HOMES. FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS, WALTER TRIES TO TALK WITH CHRIS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED, BUT CHRIS WANTS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, AND WITHOUT HIM, WALTER HAS NO ONE HE CAN TURN TO WHO WILL BELIEVE HIS EXPERIENCE WAS REAL. SO, WALTER KEEPS TO HIMSELF.

WALTER PADILLA: In the beginning, I didn't wanna talk about it because I felt like people were gonna think that I was crazy, but I needed to talk to somebody because I could not understand what I went through. I mean, it's just so many thoughts at once in my head, it just felt like my head was about to explode.

NARRATION:

WALTER REACHES OUT TO THE JRG RESEARCH TEAM, A GROUP OF BIGFOOT HUNTERS, AND IS REFERRED TO JOE DE HOYOS, A PARANORMAL INVESTIGATOR BASED IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

JOE DE HOYOS: My whole life I've been interested in this subject — paranormal, UFOs, aliens, and a bunch of other strange and unexplained phenomenon.

NARRATION:

JOE IS A BUILDING CONTRACTOR WHO SPENDS A GOOD DEAL OF HIS TIME DOCUMENTING BIGFOOT ENCOUNTERS IN AND AROUND SOUTHERN TEXAS.

JOE DE HOYOS: The first time I heard about Bigfoot here in Texas had to be around 2007, 2008. I was on the internet at the time and I was just interested in the subject and I saw that there were sightings, and there were sightings from, like, the 1880s all the way up to present day. And that really, really piqued my interest and I just had to get out there and look for this creature.

NARRATION:

JOE SPENDS MOST OF HIS TIME FOCUSED ON THE SAM HOUSTON FOREST, A HUGE, ONE-HUNDRED-SIXTY-THOUSAND ACRE TRACT OF LAND AN HOUR NORTH OF THE CITY OF HOUSTON, WHERE ALMOST 50 BIGFOOT ENCOUNTERS HAVE BEEN REPORTED OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS.

JOE DE HOYOS: The Sam Houston Forest, it's really a pretty diverse forest as far as forest goes. It's a very, very, very dense forest. It's a place you could probably put a T-Rex back there and no one would ever see it.

NARRATION:

OVER THE YEARS, JOE HAS SEARCHED AREAS OF THE FOREST AND FOUND LARGE HUMANOID TRACKS AND MYSTERIOUSLY BROKEN BRANCHES, BUT HE'S FOCUSED MOST OF HIS WORK ON CAPTURING SOUNDS OF THE CREATURE, BY SETTING UP SENSITIVE RECORDERS, LETTING THEM ROLL, AND LISTENING BACK TO THE HOURS OF DATA FOR SIGNS AND SOUNDS OF BIGFOOT.

JOE DE HOYOS: When I'm out there, I just try to get as much evidence as I can. I think vocals is going to be a good way to prove this species exists. I've got a recording of some howls.

19:57

[DE HOYOS HOWL RECORDING]

JOE DE HOYOS: I love showing these hunters the vocals that I have, and they're like, "Man, I've never heard that before." And so, I think vocals will play a big part, and that's what I try to concentrate on is getting as much audio as I can.

NARRATION:

JOE HAS SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS IN THE WOODS LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE OF A BIGFOOT, AND HAS CONDUCTED DOZENS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH OTHERS WHO'VE ENCOUNTERED THE CREATURE. HE KNOWS HOW DIFFICULT IT IS FOR PEOPLE TO COME FORWARD WITH THEIR EXPERIENCES.

JOE DE HOYOS: So, when I first met Walter, he sounded extremely serious. He sounded scared. He sounded like he didn't have anywhere to turn to. And that was the first thing I tried to do,

was try to assure him that I believed him, and that it's okay, and that he could tell me anything. So, when he told me his story, it just really threw me for a loop that these creatures were that aggressive with him, and they were luring him in or trying to funnel them. That's whole next level experience. That's a whole next level of an encounter.

WALTER PADILLA: I told Joe about my encounter, and he was very interested and he wanted to see for himself where this happened, and Joe kept encouraging me and he kept saying, "Come out with me. You'll see everything will be fine. Nothing's gonna happen." So, I took him to the site where it happened.

JOE DE HOYOS: We went out, like, in the middle of the daytime and we're driving down this long dirt road. And we start getting closer and closer to area where he had his encounter, and he's grabbing his steering wheel and I'm looking at him and he's, like, white knuckling that steering wheel. He's, like, gripping it so tight, and for him to show me that kind of fear, that was very surprising that he, being in the military and being deployed overseas. That surprised me.

NARRATION:

AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR'S DRIVE, THEY ARRIVE BACK AT THE SCENE — A SURPRISINGLY DARK, DENSE PINE FOREST SURROUNDING A GENTLY RUNNING CREEK.

JOE DEHOYOS: The area where Walter had his encounter, it makes so much sense that these creatures would be there because it is so far from any main road. It's so far from the little town that's closest by, and there's a big creek and it's very deep. It's got plenty of water in it and it's running water at that. And it just has so much brush, so much cover. It's just so far out from civilization. I think it's just the perfect area for these creatures to be in.

NARRATION:

BECAUSE IT'S ONLY BEEN A FEW WEEKS, THERE IS STILL EVIDENCE OF WALTER'S ENCOUNTER THAT SUPPORTS HIS STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED.

22:48

JOE DE HOYOS: We did a little walk around. He went through his whole story. He told me that the creature that he saw was about nine and a half feet tall. And he said, "I remember there was, like, this little white spot on the tree, which happened to be, like, fungus." So, we broke out with the measuring tape and we measured to that spot in the tree and sure enough that it was right at nine and a half feet. And I was like, holy cow, he saw a big boy. The one you saw was huge.

WALTER PADILLA: Fortunately, when he went there, the excrement was still on the tree. And another thing, one of the people that was with him found a footprint in the creek.

JOE DEHOYOS: When he told me about his encounter, he said as soon as they got outta the car, they started hearing the howls and the screams and there were throwing debris at him. We actually found this big branch. And he told me, he said, "Look at this branch right here. This is

the branch they threw at us.” So that's, was very interesting to me was that they were just very aggressive, and they did not like the fact that he and his other friends were in that area. They very well could have been in some big danger if they hadn't have left when they did.

NARRATION:

THE BIGFOOT SEEMED TO BE PROTECTING HIS DOMAIN, TYPICAL OF MOST ANIMALS IN THE WILD.

JOE DE HOYOS: I don't quite know what Bigfoot is other than it is a non-human primate. I think it's a normal creature of this earth. Just like a bear, a wolf, coyote, raccoon. I don't think it has special abilities. I just think that they're masters of their domain. You know, people call 'em the forest ninja for a reason. And it seems to me that when someone actually runs into these creatures and see 'em up close and personal, and they have this encounter where they feel like, like an insect. They feel like they are nothing to this creature, and it's a very life-changing moment for a lot of people.

NARRATION:

SINCE GOING BACK INTO THE WOODS WITH JOE AND REVISITING THE PLACE WHERE HE HAD HIS BIGFOOT ENCOUNTER, WALTER IS STILL TRYING TO COME TO GRIPS WITH HIS EXPERIENCE.

WALTER PADILLA: This affected me profoundly. I had a lot of nightmares. I still do sometimes. I began to get scared at everything. I mean, it was a traumatic experience, but I need to deal with it because I refuse to give up enjoying nature. You know, they say that there's, you can only do two things when you meet Bigfoot: either you shut it out. It never happened. You put it outta your mind, or you just keep digging deep and you just chase the rabbit hole, and I'm down that rabbit hole. I need to know more. I need to find out more about this. I wanna spread the word, let people understand that they don't need to be afraid, but they have to respect it, because it is a real thing.

NARRATION:

WALTER HAS RETURNED SEVERAL MORE TIMES TO THE SAM HOUSTON FOREST WITH JOE AND OTHER INVESTIGATORS, DETERMINED TO FIND MORE EVIDENCE OF BIGFOOT AND REVEAL THIS HIDDEN CREATURE.

WALTER PADILLA: I know what I saw. It's a fact, and if I had such a horrendous experience, and I can come out there and let everybody know what happened, I'm pretty sure more people will come forward with their stories. So, I just want to come forward and let everybody know, listen, this is real. This actually happened to me. It was a very traumatic experience, but I have learned with time to deal with it. And, if I can do it, anybody can do it.

NARRATION:

WALTER'S FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER WITH THE TEXAS BIGFOOT IS UNIQUE IN ITS INTENSITY AND PROXIMITY, BUT HE'S NOT ALONE IN STATING AS FACT THAT THE MYSTERIOUS CREATURE EXISTS... AND THAT IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL ONE IS CAPTURED, OR IN SOME WAY

BROUGHT OUT OF THE DARK WOODS, INTO THE LIGHT OF DAY, FOR EVERYONE TO SEE. IF YOU HAVE HAD AN ENCOUNTER WITH AN UNIDENTIFIED CREATURE, SHARE YOUR STORY AT UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

SANDRA LANGE: The only reason Matthew is dead is 'cuz somebody chose to kill him. And they thought they had the right to do this, and they didn't. Evil is not supposed to win.

DAVID LANGE: They only have one conclusion and it's that he was scheduled to be executed.

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Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13, an Audacy company.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 54 of Unsolved Mysteries.