Episode 1 The voice behind me

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

moment, store, left, phone, room, door, robbery, robber, gun, starting, give, hear, asked, cell phone, medical emergency, praying, panic attack, story, lady, thought

**Jen Lee** 00:31

Welcome. This is Jen Lee, the host of I Need Blue. I came face to face with danger. Now I spend my time giving back to survivors and the heroes that saved us. Why a podcast? I miss talking, I miss meeting and connecting with people. The means in which to do this have changed, especially with COVID. I decided it was time to use a different platform to share my victim turn survivor story. When you come face to face with danger, and you will hear my story in a minute, you learn not to take for granted safety, and especially those who keep us safe. Now more than ever, it is important to use facts and real-life situations to reinforce our law enforcements valuable nee, not just for our individual safety, but the safety of our communities. The goal of I Need Blue podcast is to have healthy and respectful conversation.

**Jen Lee** 01:39

I Need Blue does feature graphic themes, including but not limited to violence, abuse, murder, and may not be suitable to all listeners. Some episodes also contain things which may be triggering. Please take care of yourself and don't hesitate to ask for professional help if you need it.

**Jen Lee** 01:59

Now about my story. It was almost a decade ago. Two months prior to the robbery there had been 12 stores which had been in a similar situation. Stores which were mainly run by wowmen; clothing stores, nail salons, etc. I worked for a chain women's clothing store and some of our stores had been hit. They were located about 20 miles north of where I worked. He didn't have a gun. He just took the cash and left. After these incidents, security was put into our stores to say hey, we have eyes on you. It was for our protection as well. A month and a half later the robbery stopped and security was pulled out of our stores.

**Jen Lee** 02:48

Four days before our store was robbed, my district manager came to visit. Another robbery had occurred just a few days prior. The robberies were starting up again. She came to visit and asked if I felt safe. I said "yes." The other robberies had occurred about 20 miles north of where we were. I didn't have any reason to think he would actually come down our direction. About a week, prior we had a conference call on what to do if you were involved in an armed robbery. Such things were taught as use slow movements so as not to startle. Say very little and give them what they want because your safety is more important. I found it to be a good listen, but honestly, I never thought that I would be putting those words into action.

**Jen Lee** 03:43

It was a Saturday about 7pm. My store was located in a strip center. Being Saturday, there was a lot of hustle and bustle. Working that day was a sales associate and myself. I was store manager. There was about 9 people in the store. At 7pm I was in our fitting room area helping about four different people. I was having fun like I always did with the ladies. All of a sudden behind me, I hear "I want your money." I really didn't believe what I heard but I stopped and again I heard "I want your money. "I turned around and the first thing I noticed is a gun pointed at me. I look up, here's a man in a black mask. I look back at the gun and then I turn and head towards the register area.

**Jen Lee** 04:49

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see him wave the gun for the other people in the store to follow behind me. On my way to the registe, I made eye contact with the store associate, and we had a silent conversation between the two of us. She moved out of the way so I could get behind the register.

**Jen Lee** 05:11

I think the scary thing for me at that moment is I realized he had to have been watching me to know that I was the one he needed to go to, to get the money. How long had he been watching me? How long had he been in the store for days? hours? How did he know enough to recognize who I was? Or was this just a spur of the moment decision? After all, there was only two of us there.

**Jen Lee** 05:43

I got to the register, and I'm hearing the words from my conference call, "say as little as possible." He had lined the other customers up in front of the cash register. He asked for their wallets, any money they had. I opened the first register, and I gave him the cash. So as to not speak, I used my hand and I moved it across the till where the coins are held. That was my way of asking him if he wanted the loose coins too. He said, "No." I put the till back in the register. I went over to the other one. Keep in mind, at this point, I can hear praying, I can hear crying. I remember one of the customers hushed somebody else because they were praying and she thought they were praying too loud. It might upset the robber. I could see the panic and the fear in the other people around me.

**Jen Lee** 06:48

I emptied out the other register, and I left the till on the counter. He says, "Where is your safe?" I said, "we don't have one. "Again, he says, "where's your safe?" I said, "we don't have one." It was concerning that he kept asking because I was being honest with my response.I was worried that he didn't believe me, and what would he do if he thought that I was lying?

**Jen Lee** 07:15

I knew compared to the other robberies, this situation was going a little bit differently. He just took the cash and left. But he's still here? He saw the back door, which led to our backroom. He asked, "what is that?" I said, "that's the door that goes to the back row, the back office." He waved his gun and he said, "Okay, I want you to go back there."

**Jen Lee** 07:44

In that moment, and this is where every time I had to go to court it was really hard for me to talk about, emotionally, because I knew he had all of our money and I didn't know what else he wanted. He waved the gun and I ushered everyone to go in front of me because I wanted to be last. Several things happened in that moment. One of the most monumental bein, I had this out of body experience. I didn't think about the fact that I was a mom, or a daughter or a friend or an aunt. These strangers, these customers, had now become my kids. They became my family. And more than anything, I felt an extreme need to protect them.I wanted them to go first. If he was going to hurt someone, I wanted it to be me because I needed to protect them.

**Jen Lee** 09:01

They made their way around the corner into the backroom where my desk was. Before I could get to them, he stopped me again. "Where is your safe?" Again, I explained to him we don't have the safe, which was true. We rounded the corner, which was where our back door was. He asked me if it was locked. I said, "it should be and if you push on it, it's gonna make an alarm go off." He didn't say anything else. We're in the backroom and we're all lined up at my desk. He had me pull the phone out of the wall. He asked for our cell phones as well. You know, our cell phones are very personal. It's like our diary. It has all of our photos, our contacts, everything. I watched the other people give up their cell phone from their purse or their pocket. While they're doing this, he asked me about this other room that is back there. I told them that it's storage; where we keep hangers and fixtures. Instinctually, I knew that was where he was going to put us. I also knew I hadn't given him my cell phone.

**Jen Lee** 10:27

I knew when I turned and walked into that room, the outline of my cell phone would show through my pants. I'll never forget that phone. It was at Android chocolate, and I loved that phone, but it wasn't worth him seeing it and not knowing what he would do. So I gave him my phone as well, just like the others. Now, I have no landline and no cell phone.

**Jen Lee** 10:58

Sure enough, he had us go into the other room. It was like our final place where he left us. While we were in there, he asked me if the door shut. Honestly, we had never shut the door before. Prior, it was a clearance center. I had asked them to close it in because I felt it was better real estate for me to put full price dresses. After a little battle, they did that for me. Now I'm thinking to myself, Oh my gosh, I had them close in this room. And now I'm in here, which was kind of crazy. But I answered him, we've never shut that door. He again, was irritated with my response. We were all lined up against the back wall leaning up against hangers. I remember my bottom sitting on top of this box and leaving an indentation.

**Jen Lee** 12:00

I can hear crying, praying, the same things that I have heard throughout this whole ordeal. He looked at us and he said, "don't say anything and nobody will get hurt." He goes over to the door, looks at us again, points the gun at us, and says "don't say anything and nobody will get hurt." He shuts the door.

**Jen Lee** 12:33

It's semi dark in this room we have been left in. There are younger people crying and praying. I look over a lady I was helping in the fitting room. I knew she had some tragedy because of the story she shared with me while I was helping her. She was starting to have a panic attack. I went over to her. I pinned her arms up against the wall. I was looking straight into her eyes, her brown eyes. I will never forget them. To be honest with you, I feel like if I ever had the chance to look into the eyes of the beautiful Whitney Houston, those would have been the eyes. They were just beautiful. I had such a connection with this lady to see her starting to go into a panic attack was very concerning.

**Jen Lee** 13:34

I had her pinned up against the wall, but I could feel the weight of her body start to go down. There was somebody else in the room that I knew had more strength. So I called them over I said, "Listen, I need you to help me. Because otherwise she's going to fall. The last thing I wanted was for her to fall." They came over and helped me. Next thing I knew we get her down onto the ground and she's still panicking. If you see someone have a panic attack, it's like they can't catch their breath. It's a very scary, scary moment. It's a helpless moment. Anyway, from there, she starts to have another medical emergency. You have to understand I know how to put on a band aid and that's the extent of my medical experience. I didn't watch ER and I didn't watch Grey's Anatomy. That was not my type of show. I just didn't watch.

**Jen Lee** 14:33

The first moment I started to panic in this whole situation was when I was watching her laying there. She was getting worse and into a situation that I had no idea how to handle.

14:46

I found out my sales associate still had her phone. Also, at that time I heard the doorbell go off and it meant either somebody left or somebody entered. I was praying that the robber had left, but I didn't know for sure. I told my sales associate to go behind me and call 911. She said, "ok."

**Jen Lee** 15:16

In the meantime, I hear the doorbell again. I'm thinking, Oh my gosh, I don't know if he's come back. I'm worried that somebody is going to shove the door open, it's gonna be the robber, he's gonna see her on the phone. And then Lord, we're gonna have one heck of a serious stretch, stressful situation. She hung up with 911. I told her, I said, turn off your ringer, put it away and just sit here.

**Jen Lee** 15:40

I remained in control. Somehow. I watched this lady's situation get worse. I don't know how I managed to keep my panic under control. But somehow I did. I heard the doorbell go off. Again, I don't know who's in the store. I don't know what's going on outside of the door.

**Jen Lee** 16:05

I had her give me her phone so that I could call 911. I made the phone call because if the robber did push open the door, I wanted him to see me on the phone. And not anyone else. The 911 operator was wonderful. I told them, "I have this medical emergency. I need you to help me because I don't know what I'm doing." They were so patient and so helpful and professional. And honestly, I don't know what I would have did if they hadn't have been there to walk me through.

16:44

As I'm on the phone with them, all of a sudden, the door to the room is pushed open. For a moment, I was afraid that it was the robber, he had come back. But no, it was the police officers. I can tell you in that moment, there were so many emotions going on with everybody in that room. There was a sense of relief, a sense of breathing, you could hear everybody just take a breath, because we knew we would be safe now. We were safe.

17:14

I will never forget that moment. It is that moment which motivated me and reminded me this is my purpose; it is time to share my message. The ambulance came, they immediately started to assist the lady who was having the medical emergency. They ushered the customers out of the room and had them sit in the shoe department area; they needed to get their information and any details of what they remembered.

17:50

I remember an officer looking at me and saying, "you look relatively calm for everything that's going on." I said to him, "give me a couple of hours and I'm not going to be okay." I said, "right now, I need a cigarette."

18:08

And that's where I'm going to stop my story today. The next episode, I'm going to go over what happens to you as a victim, what you go through in your head as you try to cope and understand everything that is going on. I want to thank you for listening today. I hope my story has touched someone and they understand that they are not alone. We are here to talk and we are here to listen. Go to www.ineedblue.net, subscribe. Together we can show our appreciation for our law enforcement and first responders. I know firsthand how essential they are. Thank you again for listening to I Need Blue. This is Jen Lee