I Need Blue, the podcast is dedicated to all survivors of traumatic situations. Together, we share our stories and explain the impact it's had on our lives, our families, and our communities. I survived an armed robbery and abduction. I was asked how did you escape? I didn't; I was rescued by law enforcement. I Need Blue continues to focus on supporting our police officers, law enforcement and first responders. Visit [www.ineedblue.net](http://www.ineedblue.net) to hear other courageous stories.

Please keep in mind I Need Blue does feature graphic content which can be sensitive and triggering for some. Remember, you always come first. Please seek help if needed.

If you're a parent, you don't want to miss this episode. Bill Mitchell is the host and creator of When Dating Hurts the podcast.

Bill:

If somebody were to have asked me back in May of 2005, what I knew about domestic violence, I couldn't fill a thimble with what I knew. I was aware of the cliches; I guess it happens when some guy comes home, has a couple of drinks, gets unhappy with something that's going on at home, and he hurts or beats his wife or girlfriend. I would have thought it took place and again, the stereotypical cliched places, it would be in some rough neighborhood or a depressed part of a town or a city. I would never have guessed it would come anywhere near me or my family in any possible way.

I was quite naive about the whole thing. I think most people are.

May 14th, 2005, my daughter graduated from college, had a job lined up and was all ready to go. She was 21 and very happy. Graduation was wonderful. She had been dating a guy, most of that year. We didn't know much about him, except within conversation with my wife, my daughter said, “Well, it's not a perfect relationship.” My wife didn't pursue the comment because in the context of the talk, it sounded like this guy was kind of a come and go situation and he was on the way out. At that time, we didn’t think to view a comment like that as a reason to ask questions.

We met him on graduation day. I was aware of the comment about it “not being a perfect relationship”. When I first met him, I thought, Wow! I'd never want to tangle with this guy! There was something about him, some vibe I picked up right from the beginning. Right from the handshake.

20 days after the graduation and meeting her boyfriend, she was dead; June 3, 2005. I received a call from local detectives. I live outside of Baltimore. She was living outside of Philadelphia, however local detectives tracked me down to tell me in person, she had been murdered earlier that day. My daughter’s murder is what motivated me to learn and understand what domestic violence was all about.

Jen:

Social media; were you friends on FB? Were there pictures of them or anything to indicate things were array? People can portray things how they want on social media.

Bill:

In 2005, I did not have a Facebook page. Back in those days, there was another social media platform called MySpace. She was on MySpace, which is liberal based upon what they would allow you to put on there. She did have a Facebook account. When she was killed, we had a lot of her friends come to our house after the funeral and burial. Her friends knew her passwords. They encouraged me to go on her MySpace and Facebook. I took down any picture that had anything to do with him. I kept her FB account.

Jen:

I briefly remember MySpace.

Bill:

Now it’s Instagram. Its Twitter. It’s TikTok. Of course, Facebook is still very hot.

Jen:

How has social media influenced the awareness on a positive side, but also the negative side of domestic/dating violence? Sometimes violence is glorified. Based upon your research, how has social media influenced things today?

Bill:

Whether it’s social media, text messages, etc they become the new and exciting ways to communicate. You could have a page to sell puppies and kittens. Or a page which is very provocative, in the worst sense. It encourages people to “misbehave” in general terms.

Text messaging is great because you can be in contact with somebody without having to have a complete phone call. The day of her graduation was the first I had heard of texting. It was that new.

You can use text messaging to keep tabs on somebody. It’s a tactic in an abusive relationship. “Where are you now? Where are you now?” It is helpful if you want to communicate something quickly, “I'll be at the store another hour”, or “I’ll meet you at the restaurant” or “I'm in traffic,”… whatever.

 I use Facebook to get information out to people so they know what I didn't know back in 2005. My wife and I didn't know enough about dating violence and abuse to pick up on the warning signs. Social media can be used for good or for neutral, or for harm, depends on what you want to do.

Jen:

Can you share the moment you were told your daughter was no longer with us?

Bill:

I was driving. I'd been in a restaurant with my parents who at that time were in their early 80s. My wife and son were at a graduation party near our home in Maryland. My daughter was in Philadelphia where she attended college. I received a phone call from a female detective. She had been to my house. No one was there and she wanted to meet with me; she needed to tell me something in person. No matter how many times and how many ways, the response was always, “no, I can’t tell you over the phone it needs to be in person.”

I wasn’t sure if it was really a detective on the phone. My thoughts turned to a situation where I I could show up at my house, walk up to the door and get jumped by a bunch of guys for some reason. I didn’t have a reason to think that, but you can’t be too careful. So, I decided to pick a giant supermarket and meet there. she showed up right on cue with another detective. There were two people present, who I found that later, were bereavement counselors.

She wanted to know if I would like to sit in her car; she had something to tell me. I kept saying, well, what is it? She said, “I think we need a quiet place.” Because it was a local detective my thoughts clung to an issue with a neighbor or my wife or son. I was not thinking it was my daughter who was 125 miles away. Finally, I said, “look, let's just do it right here.”

 By the automatic doors of the grocery stores, I hear, “Mr. Mitchell, I hate to inform you, but your daughter, Kristen was murdered today by her boyfriend.” I don't know if I asked her what happened or if they just offered the information that she was stabbed to death by hi. They had an altercation and he killed her. They wanted me to take a phone call with a detective who was in the Philadelphia area. He had all the facts which were gathered during that day. I found out she was attacked and killed at about 3am on June 3, 2005. I didn't get the phone call from police until 8pm or so in the evening.

 It was a cool, rainy summer day. If you think of a Hollywood movie, horrendous acts of murder fit easily into a dreary, rainy nighttime setting. And my “movie” also happened with the worst news of your life delivered in front of a grocery store. A horrible thing. It was a horrible thing!

Jen:

I'm sorry about the situation and your loss. I can't imagine the grief. I can't imagine that phone call or conversation. Can you describe the grief?

Bill:

I remember my initial reaction from this news almost 16.5 years ago. I said to her, I don’t understand what you're saying, and I just stood there. My mind registered what “die” means. It didn’t sink in we were talking about my daughter and she was no longer around.

The detective said, “I have to tell you, you're taking this very well.” I guess she thought I was going to collapse or freak out or start crying. I said to her, “well, I'm acting. I'm just acting.” My mind was processing this, and it didn’t occur to freak out or cry because I got it. I knew I was going to be crushed by it.

I talked with another detective in Philadelphia. He told me everything he knew. I drove back to the house. Around 9:30 p.m. on Friday night, my wife, son and parents came over. I called them on my way home but wouldn’t tell them the news until I saw them in person.

When I was driving home, I started to process these thoughts, no more birthdays, no more holidays, especially Christmas and Easter. This whole area of your life which you were looking forward to is now gone; marriage, kids, me bouncing grandkids on my knees, etc. That’s gone now. It’s all edited out.

I remember gathering at home with my family, my wife and son and my two parents. I told them the news. They were crushed and crying. Shortly after I knew this would have greater meaning. Some families fall apart and change after a traumatic situation. I knew we wouldn't do that.

The next day we were in and out of funeral homes, driving and walking around cemeteries. We were making big decisions as we are visiting this grave site knowing this plot is where we will visit her. We had to pick a casket and decide on a funeral home. You can’t plan for this. We never saw this coming. You feel horrible. I was receiving calls from the apartment complex, where she lived. She was killed in her apartment. I talked with the detectives. It was one phone call after another. It was a lot.

Jen

It's not natural to plan your child's funeral. There's a progression we expect in life. We don't expect to be handling those types of things. How many times did you find yourself looking back and saying, how did I miss this? What could I have done?

Bill

Not so much, but rather there was times I felt guilty. I would ask myself why didn't I pick up on things? I've used that as my motivation to become a real energy source to get information out about those things. When my daughter said, “the relationship is not perfect” was perhaps a clue to discuss the comment further. My wife did what I would have done back then, which is just kind of go “okay”, and talk about something else like graduation or your job. There's no point talking about the boyfriend because it sounded like that was in the process of ending.

Knowing what we know, we may discuss it further by saying, “okay, what would be the perfect relationship?” or “what makes it not perfect?” Lead the conversation. It’s key for parents to want to learn how to talk to your kids without sounding like it’s an interrogation, which is a big turnoff. Show interest, “Where do you meet this guy?” or “What do your friends think about him?” The conversation is not to hear yourself talking or judge them for their decisions. Don’t pounce on them.

Jen

Did they catch him?

Bill

She was stabbed and slashed 55 times. The only two people who were there when it happened were my daughter who was now deceased, and this guy. The police pieced the situation together as best they could. He attacked her around 3 a.m. He then proceeded to create evidence to make it look like it was self-defense on his part. His story was there was an argument, she got a knife, came after him and he had to defend himself. Then he had a friend take him to the hospital. He got to the admitting nurse and gave his story which was riddled with untruths. The nurse, while looking at him, asked, “have you been in a fight?” He said, “Yes and I think she may have died.” “Where is this place?” she asked. She called the police and they dispatched police to her apartment. They had to break through the door to see if they could save her. She was already gone by then. That’s how they got the boyfriend. They picked him up at the hospital.

Jen

Describe the moment you decided to use this situation to advocate for dating/domestic abuse violence through writing articles and a book?

Bill

When it was time for his court hearing, he pled guilty to murder, sentenced to 15-30 years. He’s still in prison. In terms of me, becoming active in that area. In November of 2005, five months after she was killed, we attended a candlelight vigil. We wanted to say a few words; my son who was 17 spoke, my wife spoke and then I spoke. We each took the time to write something personal for her. We didn’t share it with each other until it was read at the vigil. I created a 5-minute video so people knew who she was.

We spoke at a reception and the gratitude was overwhelming. That moment the light came on in my head saying maybe we have something to say, that people will listen to. It also occurred to me from hearing other people speak that evening, people who were trained in the area, experts, they didn’t get the interest in their message as I did in mine. People related to our story. I didn't anticipate that would be the case. I noticed when we speak the place is quiet.

I found captivating an audience to be kind of a superpower. I think part of the reason people paid attention was out of respect, but I think part of it was they found they needed to know the information.

I was asked to speak before almost 1,000’s of people for the House of Ruth, Maryland. And that went very well. I only spoke for five or 10 minutes. There was so much positive feedback. And “That was great.” “I love when you said this.” I wondered if they were feeling sorry for me or was it good? People said it was that good.

As I continued to write someone asked why I didn’t publish a book? So, I did. My wife wrote a chapter, my son wrote a chapter, various other people who have just amazing things to say wrote chapters. I heard from people who said they read the book in a day or 2. Its 320 pages!

It's self-published. Seeing such interest, I asked myself, “what’s next?”

I started a podcast and asked people who I kept in touch with to be guests on my show. They were thrilled to come on and share their stories. The podcast, When Dating Hurts, was born.

Jen

You found your purpose?

Bill

 I did. My purpose was handed to me. If I had it my way, I wouldn't be doing any of this, and my daughter would still be around. She'd be 38 today. At the time she was 21. It was a big burden, but I have no choice. I feel like I must do this. I didn't get a choice about what would happen with my daughter. It's truly making the best of a bad situation.

Jen

Thank you for sharing because your information is going to save lives.

Bill

I think it already has. It’s tough to prove when it saves lives but it’s easy to prove when somebody gets killed. I’ve had emails, or people have come up to me at events and say, “I got to tell you, I almost got the same result as your daughter. Then I remembered things you had said in a speech.” People have written me and said, “I was in a relationship that my mother felt was very unhealthy. My parents couldn't stand this guy, my siblings couldn't stand this guy. I kept hanging in there and hanging in there because we had good days. But we also had bad days. Then I heard your speech and realized I was crazy for dealing with this person.”

Getting out of these relationships is quite dangerous. My daughter being the poster child for that. Trying to leave is when things can go to a bad place, and you must prepare to get out. You can't just say, “Okay, I'm done with this.” Because the other person will react. Anybody that's full of power and control in a relationship, doesn't take well to be told they're being canceled.

Jen

Can you share some warning signs to look out for.

Bill

It's all about power and control. It's somebody who runs a controlling or dominant behavior situation. They must have things their way including things like how you cut your hair, how you dress, what you do and when you do it. The relationship starts out wonderfully like a romance storybook where he takes you places and gets you things. He’s so friendly, and he's charming, etc. People who do this all the time are very practiced, they know what they're doing.

That’s how it starts. Then it slowly leads into isolation. The abuser wants all your attention which means your friends are unnecessary and he’ll do the best to crop them out of your life. Your parents, your relatives, he is focused to get them out of the picture. He's going to do his best to dissuade you from doing things you like to do. Say for example, your dad has a big birthday party planned. The abuser will buy special tickets to a concert and state, “oh, I totally forgot it was your father’s thing before I bought these tickets. These are great tickets! This is an example of isolation.

Isolation then leads into threats of violence. Somebody doesn't have to hit you to control you. They must find a way to let you know, when they don't get what they want, when they want it and how they want it, things could get bad. For example, maybe they slam on the brakes in the car, and you jerk forward. He says, “When you talk to me and say things like that, you remind me of the way my mother used to talk with me. I never put up with that.” You’re thinking, I want to get back to the storybook romance. I don't want this guy mad.

It can escalate from there into violence where someone gets strangled, punched, slapped, or something is thrown at them, or they kick your dog. Something gets broken in the house. For the relationship to keep going, it's followed up by a convincing apology, where it’s said, “Look when you said those things, I had a rough week, I thought I was going to get a raise, I didn't get a raise. I was just mad. It's not about you. I'll never do this again.” “What do you want to do? Let's go out to eat, let's go to that place that you love.” Or the next day, he shows up with a new cell phone for you. Then the relationship feels like it goes back to storybook romance. And the cycle repeats storybook romance, isolation, threats of violence, actual violence, apology, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, and it keeps going. For some people, this goes on for months into years, maybe they get married.

“I've got money, you don't need to work “and you're thinking, it would be nice not to have to work. He didn't want you to work because he wants to control the money. If he controls the money you can’t leave. This process is done slowly.

As a victim, you don’t have the option of raising your hand and saying, “I’m leaving. I’ll see you later.” No, the person is going to explode! Learning how to safely escape is another challenge.

Jen

There is a lot of fear and that is how they control.

Bill

Fear is a bigger motivator than getting rewards. These relationships are all about rewards and punishments. Do what he wants, you get rewarded even if it means he will be nice today. Punishments, things are taken away, things are broken. Somebody yells at you and your ears are ringing. If you comply with somebody who is abusive, you’ll see better days. People who are being abused, eventually learn that. To make him happy they cook favorite meals exactly how he likes them, and God forbid you goof up.

Jen

You spend your time helping others, giving tips and teaching them. What have people taught you?

Bill

I've learned a lot from other people. At the top of the list, would be how courageous survivors are. The level of courage they have shown makes me wonder if I could have done it. Survivors who are willing to talk, will tell you absolutely everything. They have found so much courage, they're so brave, and they want to tell you what happened. And they do. I've learned alot from law enforcement. I’m still in contact with some of them today. In the very beginning, the prosecutor would not only tell you what's going on, but she would explain it step by step. I can't remember any time or where I felt hurried off the phone. I could ask all kinds of questions. She always asked how we were doing. She took an interest in us as people and we weren't a case number.

 My son had to find his own path, my wife had to find hers and I had to find mine. We didn't walk the same path the same way. We did it together, but we didn't do the same things together. I think we showed when the going got tough, we got closer. I had my parents who always seem to know the right thing to say at the right time.

My appreciation for strong women, determined women has just gone through the roof.

Jen

Can you share some memories of your daughter?

Bill

Kristen was a lot of fun and very smart, but she was also a kid. She wanted to have fun with her friends. Her friends shared many of these stories with us. She had a partial scholarship when she went to college. Her college professors came up and told us how they thought she was a terrific student, a great participant, who is very creative.

She loved to write poetry and prose. She would write things which were very deep, probably when we would first read them, they were deeper than we even realized. You would read them and say, “Wow, okay, you go to some interesting places in your mind.” She was a really good person. She was very generous.

She's a huge loss like many people. I find a lot of people who get into these relationships are kind souls. They're nice people. The abuser predator looks for people like that because they can dump their garbage on them, and the victim puts up with it. They hang in there because they're nice, kind people. My daughter was that type of person. The night she was murdered, she was breaking up with him because she'd had enough. Her friends were all saying walk away from this guy. She kept making excuses for his behavior. “But you don't see him on a good day” she would tell her friends.

She was loyal and very much about family and she was our daughter. She would have been a great mom, grandma, etc. I'm sure losing any child is a real arrow through your heart. I’m fortunate because I took a lot of pictures through the years, right from the very beginning. I have a good memory. I remember 1000s of times being with her, and I can still laugh and share with my wife something funny she did in the car, or when she was in a car seat all those years ago.

Jen

Do you have any final thoughts for our listeners?

Bill

Think about this: when you drive down the highway, there's an accident and you slow down to look. Somewhere in your mind, you're probably thinking, “I'm glad that wasn't us. Glad it wasn't me.” People could look at dating/domestic violence like that. You don't see yourself in that accident because that doesn't happen to you or it wouldn't be that bad. You might have a fender bender, but it would never be that bad. You can't imagine it. You think you're immortal.

 I want people to know the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship. In fact, you may be in one right now. Or your daughter or your niece or your neighbor or your coworker. They don't know it and you don't know it, even though they might have said “Yeah, well, my boyfriend's kind of a jerk sometimes and he does these things.” You wouldn't think to pursue it. You must, and you must open your mind a little bit. Take the initiative to learn what I need to do to detect it, to deal with it, and then to safely get away from it.

That’s why I started the When Dating Hurts podcast. It’s why I wrote When Dating Hurts book. 1 in 3 women will suffer serious physical harm from an intimate partner relationship sometime in their lifetime. 1 in 3 women and it typically happens between the ages of 16 and 24 but can happen to any woman at any age. On the male side, it’s around 1 in 4 or 5. It’s hard to picture. It's coming. Be aware and be prepared. Save your life, or at least save you from having a miserable life. Look at COVID, 750,000 people have died out of 330 million people in the United States. It’s a fraction. If it were 1 in 3 people in the United States it would be 110 million people. You just must believe it could happen and you must do something, so it doesn't happen.

Jen

Listen to your instincts. They're there for a reason. www.WhenDatingHurts.com Thank you for listening to [www.ineedblue.net](http://www.ineedblue.net).