Episode 4 – Get In My Car

**Jen Lee:** 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. We share victim turned survivor stories. When you come face to face with danger, you learn not to take your safety for granted. Now more than ever, it is important to use facts from real life situations to reinforce the valuable need of our law enforcement. To hear my story and hear other episodes, visit [www.ineedblue.net](http://www.ineedblue.net) or find I Need Blue on your favorite podcast platforms.

Please note: 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 themes which may be triggering. Please take care of yourself and don't hesitate to ask for professional help.

Today’s topic relates to child abductions. They prove to be some of the most challenging cases requiring timely response and appropriate application of all sources including local, state and federal.

In 1996, the Amber Alert system began when Dallas Fort Worth broadcasters teamed with local police officers to develop an early warning system to help find abducted children. Amber stands for America's Missing Broadcasts Emergency Response and was created as a legacy to nine-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle and then brutally murdered.

My friend Maya is here to share her story. The incident occurred before cell phones existed and the amber Alert system wasn’t a resource yet. She will share her story with us in a minute.

I remember a few decades ago, I was walking with my mom and my sister in our neighborhood. It was familiar territory. I liked to walk fast so I was ahead of them. I passed an area of the road which was somewhat hidden. You couldn't see if anyone or anything was located there until you walked past. I hadn't seen the car parked there. As I walked past, I heard, "Hey, come here." I turned. Again, I heard "Hey, come here." I stopped and stood there waiting for my mom who wasn't too far behind me. I was fortunate she was close. Just like Maya’s story, cell phones weren’t invented. I wondered what could of happened it I had been walking alone?

Maya happened to be walking alone on these days. She is here to share her story. Thank you, my friend for being here.

Maya - Thank you so much for having me. I think one reason this resonates on so many different levels are because the story I'm going to share is similar yet has three different parts. One where there was no help, one where the police were a presence but I didn't know what to do with it, and one where the police did show up and were there for me. Abductions are a topic which people don't think about until we hear the Amber Alerts, or when we hear others talk about it. For me, it was a lived reality.

I'll start with the first one at the age of five. My mom always met me at the bus stop. One day, my mom wasn't there. I was waiting and waiting. She never showed up. What five-year-old wants to hang out especially when it starts to rain? Because my moms said, "stay put?” All I knew was she wasn't there and what am I going to do? So, I started walking. In order to get to my house, I knew the general idea from when my mom and I walked to and from school every day. Colfax is a very, very busy street. We always had to cross it. I remember her teaching me this lesson; press the button in the crosswalk and wait until you see the walk figure and then you can go. That day, I was scared because my mom wasn't there. It had started to rain, but I was determined I was going to make my way home. So, at five years old there I am trucking down the road, I hit the crosswalk button, and I'm standing there. I was so proud of myself. I remember feeling like I'm doing something bad, but I'm trying to find my mom, I told myself, “It’s okay.” I waited for the walk symbol to light up and then crossed the street.

I approached a TV radio repair shop where there was a gentleman who was loading a TV or something into his car. My mom and I passed by him several times as we walked home. He was friendly and always said hi. This time he saw me by myself as he was putting the stuff in the car. "Hey, where's your mom?" he asked. I said, "I don't know, she's late, and I'm going home, I'm going to try to find her." He said, "Well, I'm loading this in my car. And if you just hold on a minute, I can take you home." I thought, okay. At five-year-old, you're not processing this could be a bad person, potentially, you should run. All I knew is that this was somebody that we had met. I got in the car and he said, “here, here's some candy. I'm going to lock up the shop and then we'll go." I remember sitting there, with the candy that he gave me. They were Smarties, those chalk tasting things that still have addictive qualities. My mom was very much a health nut. So, I'm sitting there holding the Smarties thinking, this is so wrong. It made me feel guilty and wonder if I should do this. I had heard the stories about the bad people who offer you candy and I'm like, "you know but this is not the same. I know him so I'm okay." He finished up what he's doing, and I'm still holding the Smarties. He gets in the car and he says, "Okay, show me how to get to your house."

We head down to the end of the street to a stop sign. We turned left, and then as we're driving further, I saw where I lived. It wasn't really an apartment complex, but it was a retrofitted type thing for housing. I could see it and then I could see my mom. She was walking toward us. I got excited and I said, "there's my mom!" He didn't stop. We drove past her and I'm thinking there's my mom, and we're still moving. I remember looking up and seeing the light turned red. In that moment (even as an adult as you try to process everything which happens in those quick moments) it was one of awareness. I was thinking, the lights red and he should be stopping. In that moment, it was just all of this awareness of something is terribly wrong.

I grabbed the door handle and I threw myself out of the car as he just zoomed through the red light and kept going. I'm throwing myself out of the car and yelling, "mom!" She started running toward me as I'm tumbling out of the car. He was going fast enough that I hit the pavement hard, rolled and scraped myself up pretty badly. She came to me and, it's one of those things that we've talked about since, but in that moment for her, she didn't know what was happening. She just saw me rolling out of this car. She grabbed me and she spanked me. Like, I'm sitting there kind of bloody from jumping out of the car and then I get spanked. I don't know why I'm being spanked, and I'm crying. In my mind I was like, what's going on? In this instance there was not any police presence however even at five, i probably wasn't aware that someone could have been there to help me. All I knew was "mom "and "red light". And then "this is wrong".

At the age of 10 or 11, I was sitting at a bus stop waiting to go to school. The bus stop was across from an elementary school. I'm sitting at the bus stop waiting for the bus to show up and a guy pulled up. I could see the kids going into the school. It was around the time school would be in session or kids would be running late getting to school. I saw the car pull in front of me and I thought he was just another parent or had some reason to be there. He got out of the car and stood up. "Do you need a ride?" he asked. I said, "no" The way he stood up was not normal. I felt like something wasn't right; this is not normal. Like he was bracing himself for something. I didn’t expect that. He said, "I said get in the car." At that point, I saw something shiny in his hand. To this day, i wondered, was it a knife? Was it a gun? All I knew is that my brain perceived what he had in his hand as a weapon. At that time, we didn't have cell phones so it wasn't like he was hiding a cell phone and pretending it was a weapon. There was something inside me saying “weapon.”

I took off! I jumped out of the bench that I was sitting on and took off just running down the road toward my house. My house was set further back. I remember a surge of adrenaline, a surge of terror that this guy is going to hurt me. I was running, I remember the sandals I was wearing that day. The backs were flapping against my heels and I could feel them starting to come off. I was thinking “what do I do? Do I run out of my shoes? Do I keep them in case I stubbed my toe?” All of those weird things that run through your head as you're running. I remember seeing the pattern of a fence as I ran by.

I rounded a corner and a friend of our family was inside her door looking out. She normally didn't get up early, but that morning had gotten up to watch her daughter leave for school. Thankfully she's standing there, leaning against the door and saw me come around the corner. She opened the door and she said, "Maya, what's going on?" And I said, "there's this guy. This guy, he's, he's trying to get me." "Come in, come in", she said. She ushers me in and I’m starting to tell her the story. The guy drives by. And I said, "that's the guy!" "Are you sure?" she asked. I said, "Yes, that's the guy." She was looking through the blinds.

She kept looking out. "This is interesting." she said. And I said, "what?" she said, "he's still going back and forth. Like a shark, just going back and forth in the water, just circling." Eventually she didn't see him anymore. She called my mom. My mom couldn't leave from work. I was a latchkey kid, you know, what they say about us? Our generation, we were the first latchkey children, and we had to deal with things on our own. What do you do? my mom couldn't leave her job at the time. So, I sat there. The lady had things to do and felt it was safe enough for me to go home. I left and started to turn the corner headed toward our house. He had pulled into a parking space. As he saw me, he pulled out like he was going to come follow me. I immediately saw him, ran back to her place banging on the door. She opens the door. "He's still out there." I spoke. She called the police.

The police showed up. I remember being there and thinking, "what do I do?" My mom can't be here. The officer who showed up was asking me questions. "Do you remember what kind of car it was? What did he look like?" I'm trying to explain. But in that moment, you can't recall the important things they need you to recall. All you can recall is so much of your emotional flood, and you're trying to be helpful. I remember, at 10 or 11, sitting there thinking, I'm doing this wrong. I can't help someone who I'm pretty sure wants to help me.

He was a kind officer. For me at that time not being able to answer his questions, I just felt like a failure. I felt like he couldn't even help me help myself. I didn't know what to do with that, but I was trying to be as helpful as I could. Eventually he got all the information that he needed. He said, "we're going to keep sending cars around." Again, the person whose house I was at, she had things to do. Eventually, I went out the back door; a different way. As I was walking toward home, I saw a police officer drive through the community. I remember thinking, “I'm close to home.”

 Seeing the officer’s car looping around made me realize if something happens, I know the officer’s going to come back around and I can run to him. I'm relatively okay. During a similar time period, there were other people being kidnapped in our area. One made national news because they had found her in the bottom of like a porta potti up in the mountains. She had been kidnapped. It made me wonder, was this the same guy who tried to get me? Also, around that time, Ted Bundy had been hanging around the area earlier. I knew I had been in a similar experience.

I remember feeling a mix of disappointment and thinking, what did I do wrong here? Why did this happen? I looked at myself and, in the modest, fundamentalist environment, I start checking my collar button, was it unbuttoned? Was my shirt not buttoned? I know now, these things generally happen not because someone is attracted to you. But you don't know that, right? You're just 10 or 11 and trying to process this big thing.

The third example, I was 16 or 17. I don't remember the exact age. I find one of the things I've tried to point out to people are victims don't remember all the details. I can't even remember how old I was, except the example when I was five because of the school year. We lived in a different area. All three of these incidences happened in totally different parts of the city.

 I was walking home from school, again, in high school. There were times walking home that I would stop, sit at a bus stop and then take the bus home. Today, I wasn't going to take the bus. I was just going to walk; it was a beautiful day. It was normal for guys to pull over and say, "hey, do you need a ride?" And I'd be like, nope. Or if I was sitting at the bus stop, they would ask me "Do you need a ride?" And I'd tell him no. A few would be a little persistent, but for the most part, they would move on.

I was walking on the right side of the road. I could sense a car had pull up beside me. A guy rolled down his window, leaned out and said, "hey do you need a ride? I said, "No, I'm good". I had come to the end of the street. He pulled up in front of me and blocked me in. He said, "I said, do you need a ride?" And I said, "and I said no." He said, "No, do you need a ride!? "And I said, "No, I don't need a ride. I'm fine." He leaned forward very deliberately and made eye contact with me. He said, “I'm not asking this time, get in the car!"

That’s when the situation changed. He was in front of me, blocking me and telling me get to get in the car. I was thinking, what do I do? The traffic to my left was a very busy road in the area. I think it was six lanes. It may have been five lanes. I just knew I needed to get out of here. I had some friends who lived about 1/2 mile away. It was too far for me to get to them. The only thing I could think to do was to start playing Frogger across the traffic.

It was a very busy road. I started across dodging lanes of traffic. Cars going this way, cars going that way, cars turning in the middle, getting honked at. I'm looking across the traffic, and he takes off. I remember thinking, I'm okay, I'm okay. Once I made it to the other side of the street, I looked up and I saw what he had done. He had gone around the block, and was waiting to turn so he could head down the direction I was now walking. I saw him there and started across the street again, dodging my way across the traffic. I looked back and saw that he was turning again and he would then be coming back up my way. I went across the road again. I did that, I don't even know how many times.

You just know you’re fighting for your life, you're fighting for survival, and at the same time thinking, “do I try to flag down a car? what do I do? what if it's another bad person?” At this point bad people could be anywhere? I kept going back and forth. We did that several times. At one point, I did look back. I saw that there was someone who looked like a student from my school. I didn't know her, but I looked back and I saw her walking toward where I was. I ran toward her and I said "I'm so sorry. But I have this guy following me. Can you help me? Can I go to your house? Is there any way that I can go to your house and call the police?"

She said, "Sure!" At one point, he had already driven by. I pointed him out, I'm like, that's the guy and she immediately shoved me to the inside, away from the road. I still think about that gesture of how she was probably my age, and yet she was putting herself between me and him. Whoever she is, bless her. I just want her life to be amazing, because she was amazing.

He drove by again. At that point, there was almost a confrontation. The second time when he came by, she was making it clear by her body language, "you're going to have to go through both of us." I'm sitting there thinking, “now I've put someone else in danger. What do I do?” Now I feel bad, because I'm still scared. “What if I also put her in danger. What if he has a weapon, then what?” The last time he came by us, he slowed down. He very deliberately looked at both of us. I saw his rage and menace and malice, and if he could have run us over, I think he would have but we were on the sidewalk and he's not going to wreck his car.

We got near her house, and she had the presence of mind to say "Wait". She kind of help me back a little bit. She was watching as he was taking another turn to loop back around. She waited until we couldn't see his car. Then she said "run!" She grabbed my arm and we took off. We got into the house and she immediately called the police. She had to go to work, but told me to stay there so the police could talk to me. She left. Now I'm sitting in this house of someone I don't know.

When the police showed up, I had a moment of, “do I answer the door?” I had such doubt, and I remembered stories of people dressing up like the police. I told myself, “I'm pretty sure this is the police.” But I couldn't help thinking, are you really who you say you are? Are you here to save me? Or are you here to hurt me? All of these things are just flooding your system. When the police officer got there, he was so kind. I remember the moment, when I could fully trust that someone was here to help me. Just the relief I felt of, I don't have to do this by myself, I'm not putting this other person in danger anymore. Here's someone who can who can take care of the situation. He was just so gentle.

He was asking me questions, “do you remember what the guy looked like? What kind of car was it?" All I could tell him was the color of the car; pea green. That was the common car color among several of the people who had tried to pick me up. Pea green is not my favorite car color. If I see it, I’m looking at you a little bit like what kind of person are you? Not fair, but it's just one of those things, you know? I was answering these types of questions.

 He eventually asked, "how far do you live from here?" "Not far at all." I spoke. He could tell that I was shaken. He said, "I'm technically not supposed to do this, but I'm going to take you home." He said, "just so you know." And he was letting me know ahead of time, which I was very grateful for "the car is going to lock on you. Don't be afraid and I can still get you out of the car, if you need that." His presence of mind, of recognizing what I was probably facing and dealing with is astronomical. I don't know what training the officer had. He was amazing. He really was so thoughtful. He got me in the car and I remember sitting there hearing the door lock. There was a moment of panic, but also at the same time "you can't get me now. Because I'm in the officer’s car".

As we were driving to my house, across the radio came a report of a girl that had just been found in a warehouse. She was estimated between 13 and 14 years old. I was so sorry for this girl and I told myself I won't cry. I'm sitting there and I remember they described her clothing. She was wearing a red sweater and blue jeans. I remember looking down at myself and I was wearing a white t shirt with long sleeves passed the elbow, because we were good girls, we dressed modestly. I was wearing a jumper which went to the floor. My collarbone was covered, my elbows were covered. I was wearing a white

t-shirt and a blue jumper. She was wearing a red sweater and blue jeans. I sat there thinking, this is America, red, white and blue. I'm in a police car that represents the security and the safety that we look for in our officers. I’m here safe. And the other girl wasn't.

What do you do with that? How do you process that? The officer, either he looked in the mirror and could see my face or just had the presence of mind to flip his radio off. I don't think you're supposed to do that as an officer. But he did and immediately started making chitchat, small talk. " How's your mom?" and similar questions. He got me to my house. He was very kind and said, "Are you sure you're okay to go in?" "Yes, I'm home." I spoke. " Are you sure you don't need me to call someone else for you?" He said he was going to sit out there for a few minutes. "Once you get inside, if you need to look out, I'll still be here. And then we're going to also start rolling some units around here just so you feel safe." And they did. He sat there for a good 10-15 minutes and he could have been filling out the paperwork, but just knowing that he was there made me feel good. I sat inside my home processing these experiences. What do you do with it? I remember feeling overwhelming relief that I made it home.

 I've had to talk to my mom about it. Being a child raised under the ministerial, instruction they believed, "if you're a good person, good things will happen to you, God will make sure good things happen to you. If you're a bad person, bad things will happen." I'm a child. And how do you process that? And yet, as I've been talking to my mom about some of these things later in life. One of the things that she pointed out when I mentioned, “you know, why did you not see this as something that could be impacting me?” For her it was, "well, you made it home. And the police officer was there or these other people were there. God provided?" And yet for me, it was trauma. As we've been talking here, we do need the police officers. If I hadn't had the one who showed up, I don't know what would have happened? Who would you call? What do you do in those situations?

Jen- Did they catch any of the assailants?

Maya - Not to my knowledge. And that's also part of what hangs out there. It makes you question, “What if this is the same person? How do they know who I am? Am I safe down the road? Am I safe in the future?” Shortly after, I went to a store which was behind our house. I was about to go in, when I saw this guy who reminded me of the guy who tried to tell me to get into his car. He was washing the windows for the store. I remember a moment of terror? I ran home and I made sure he didn't see me. My freeze flight or run.

I spent time thinking what I could have done differently? What if the guy who hurt the girl they had found in the warehouse was one who approached me? Since he couldn't get me, did he go looking for someone else? You know, it's all of those things that go through your head. For me, it was a lot of guilt and shame. "I didn't help. I didn't get this bad guy off the street; I couldn't do anything and I should have." That's something that I'm still working through.

As you say the words, “I’m still working through,” it is a process. Everyone is different. I’m not a doctor or anything close to it. I’m relatable through experience. This is what I Need Blue podcast is about, being relatable, understanding, and listening to each other. For some, sharing and not feeling alone is a healthy step to take. Only you know what is best for yourself. If your day is here and you want to share your story, reach out to me on our web-site, [www.ineedblue.net](http://www.ineedblue.net). To hear this podcast and all of the I Need Blue episodes visit [www.ineedblue.net](http://www.ineedblue.net) or any podcast platform. Thank you for listening and we look forward to you joining us next time.

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