Episode 6 – The honeymoon stage

**Jen Lee** 01:35

Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women, more than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined. Every 9 seconds in the US a woman is assaulted or beaten. Every nine seconds. What if children are involved? Every year more than 3 million children witness domestic violence in their homes. How are communities affected? Domestic violence costs more than 37 billion a year in law enforcement involvement, legal work, medical and mental health treatment, and lost productivity of companies.

**Jen Lee** 02:18

Domestic Violence takes on many forms; physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and intimidation to name a few. To discuss the specifics of domestic abuse I have a special guest today, Lori Sutherland from the Women's Center located in Melbourne, Florida. For 10 years she has been the Director of Development and committed to creating a safe place for men, women and children who are victims turned survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Welcome Lori. Thank you for being here today. Your support is appreciated. Lori will be sharing information at the end of the segment and talk about the resources offered for men and women at the Women's Center. Also, on the resource tab on our website www.ineedblue.net. You can find the contact information for the Women's Center.

**Jen Lee** 03:22

Today, I have another special courageous guest, Gail. She is a victim turned survivor of domestic abuse. She wants to share her story with you. Gail, thank you for being here today. There are many domestic violence cases which go unreported. By Gail telling her story we hope it will help some find the courage to come forward. I know your story today is going to help women and men who can relate to the disturbing details of your situation, living with the day-to-day abuse. In this case, it was dealt to you by your husband. The perpetrators information is withheld because quite frankly, the name doesn't deserve any mention today. It is all about you, Gail.

**Jen Lee** 04:15

The beginning of a relationship is called the honeymoon stage. I think we've probably all experienced it. Can you start by telling us what it was like for you.? How had you felt? What actions made you feel special and like you were the luckiest girl in the world?

**Gail** 04:34

Absolutely. I met this gentleman and I really thought that he was an answer to all my prayers. My honeymoon lasted for about four and a half years. There was quite the courtship. I didn't see anything, no red flags or anything of that nature. I felt like I was the princess that everyone wants to be. I was the woman who would walk and felt like I was the luckiest girl in the whole wide world. He supported me and everything I did during that time. I enjoyed supporting his career as well. We had lots of trips. There was lots of admiration, love notes and all the things that a woman would want. He would send me a love note with a prayer. It was just quite the love story. People admired our relationship.

**Jen Lee** 05:57

Your honeymoon stage was a long one. How long did you date before you decided to take the next step?

**Gail** 06:11

We dated about a year. Maybe this was a red sign, a red flag, but he was very adamant about getting married. One of my children were getting married in the same month. I expressed "you know, that's a lot of wedding to deal with." We went to my children and said, "Do you mind if we get married in the same month you get married, on New Year's Eve? My children said, "No, not at all." They were getting married early on, but he was adamant about nailing it down. I was fine waiting. He was adamant. That should have been a red flag, because it was almost like he wanted to tie it all down.

**Jen Lee** 07:03

I would love to talk about how it affected your children. Were they teenagers? How did they process what they witnessed if they witnessed it at all?

**Gail** 07:28

I'd be glad to talk about it. My children were grown and on their own. They looked at this gentleman, or lack of gentleman, as being mom's Savior, so to speak. They knew they could trust him. They would say "he just adores you and the the ground you walk on." Truly, he did during that time. There wasn't any signs saying otherwise. During the time we were marrying, we had 2 other weddings and one grandchild born.

**Jen Lee** 08:36

So tell me when things started to change.

**Gail** 08:43

The first sign I noticed when something wasn't right; I walked in on him in the spare bedroom, and he was just beating himself. I'm talking about tearing himself up. So, I got down on his level and I said, "what is it, what is it that's bothering you? He wouldn't tell me. He just kept beating himself. I knew that something wasn't right. I felt like we needed to go see someone to talk about it or some meds might be needed because it's not normal to beat yourself like that. That situation was the beginning, and, in the end, I realized why he was doing that.

**Jen Lee** 10:04

It sounds like, for him, trying to understand, process and cope with a traumatic situation, which he witnessed, was a challenge. You offered help?

**Gail** 10:26

I think Jen when I look back, it was the things he was doing; it got the best of him. Of course, he couldn't tell me these things. It was his way of dealing with what he was doing, infidelity on the job and things of that nature. I wouldn't be able to put those pieces together till later. And then with much counseling, I was able to look at it a different way.

**Jen Lee** 10:59

After this realization, what happened next?

**Gail** 11:13

His behavior turned into aggravation towards me. I would get up every morning and make him breakfast before he'd go to work. One morning, I made his breakfast, packed his lunch and what have you. I sat in this big chair, looking out big sliding glass doors. I saw his reflection, and he lifted the middle finger at me. I thought, what in the world? I didn't say anything, stood up and told him, “I love you and have a great day." I was left thinking, "Okay, so what's going on here."

**Gail** 11:50

As it progressed, and it progressed quickly, there became more verbal abuse. Then, those of you who are going through this, or have gone through this, you know what happens next; you get the letter the next day, or the flowers. The next day you hear, "I'm sorry, you didn't deserve that. I didn't mean it." Those type of things. That was the beginning of when things got worse.

**Gail** 12:35

They consider that gaslighting. I learned that through counseling. And of course, I didn't know what that was at the time. I was trying to understand and trying to figure it out myself, through the whole thing.

**Gail** 12:53

I kept thinking; he needs mental health help too. There was an instance where a situation made me wonder if he had issues from his past too. He was well into a three-figure income. I had bought hand towels, and I kept telling him “You can use the hand towels." He said, "No, I'm not allowed to do that." I said, "You're not allowed to do that?" He said, "my mom used to pretty much beat me if I used hand towels." I said, "it's your money You're a grown man at your home." So, in the back of my mind, I thought okay, we have issues and that's why I was thinking maybe some mental health counseling would help him.

One thing that kept me there was: I took my vows seriously. During the abuse, I always I felt like I had one wing flapping, thinking I shouldn't be treated this way, but then I had another wing behind me saying, "For better. For worse. In sickness and in health."

**Jen Lee** 14:03

Did you find yourself during the "bad days" looking back and saying to yourself, "this is just a bad day. I know the man he was, is going to come back and we're going to have that great relationship again.

**Gail** 14:25

Absolutely. And in between the episodes it would be that way. Your mind is going in all kinds of directions. There would be great days and then there would be not so great days. I raised three sons to never ever touch a woman.

**Gail** 14:46

Then the physical abuse started. And again, then we have the "I’m sorry. I'm never going to do it again." Every night he sent a prayer to me about how much he loves me and thank you God for this woman. As the woman who's seen how good he could be, I just kept thinking, if we get help then maybe the man I knew will come back too.

**Jen Lee** 15:19

With verbal abuse, there are some horrible things which are said. I know this from a girlfriend who told me her story. Until I heard it from her, I didn't understand someone would say such things to someone they say they love. If you're comfortable, so that our audience gets a better feel emotionally how this feels, could you share some of those things with us?

**Gail** 15:58

He would degrade me. He wanted me to be a stay-at-home wife. Again, through counseling, I learned some things about that. He took me out of everyday life and separated me from other people. He would constantly throw out derogatory terms and call me derogatory names. And this is from someone who says they love you. I would get upset with him and then I would get a love note or sent flowers. So, you take that into your heart, words are powerful. You can't take them back, you can say, "I'm sorry," but you can't take them back. They're already embedded.

**Gail** 17:15

It affected me as a woman and as a mother. I'm trying, I raised my boys to walk like men on this earth, and instilled principles in them on how to treat a woman. Yet I'm enduring the things which I taught my children not to do. It weighed heavy on my heart because I'm carrying this and keeping it a secret. The abuse started to become more frequent. I just kept thinking about the statements he made about the hand towels and thinking if he just got counseling and/or medication, it might get better.

**Jen Lee** 18:07

So did you cry?

**Gail** 18:10

All the time, however during counseling, I wouldn't let myself cry. My counselor would encourage me, saying, It’s okay to cry." Even when I was in the middle of counseling, I would shut down when I started to feel a tear drop. We work through that in counseling.

**Jen Lee** 18:31

Did he see you cry?

**Gail** 18:32

He did see me cry. It didn't faze him at all. That's hard to comprehend because, again, when you have someone that you think loves you, you expect empathy. I kept thinking, where's your empathy? It started to feel like it was almost a game with him. So, I started to see these things, slowly. But I always go back to my vows and the fact it seemed like there was something deep rooted there.

**Jen Lee** 19:04

This is all about your comfort level. If you are comfortable, can you talk about the intimacy?

**Gail** 19:09

The intimacy was okay. It was good. The fact it was good created some of the confusion. There were days it was great. He would come home from shift, and we go to the beach, I'd watch him surf. His co-workers told him, “This is the honeymoons stage. She'll stop making you breakfast because you get up early." I still did this after the honeymoon stage. I would go to his job and do some things there. His co-workers knew who I was.

**Gail** 19:56

I didn't change, but I could see he was changing. As far as the sexual situation, everything was good at this point.

**Jen Lee** 20:22

It sounds like it's some verbal abuse, maybe emotional and mental. Can you tell us a little more about the isolation?

**Gail** 20:43

He would call while I was with my girlfriends. They made a comment one day, "what in the world, this man will call you constantly asking what are you doing? Where are you at? What you are wearing?"

**Gail** 20:55

I looked at his questions as he adores me. He cares. He thinks i'm beautiful. I viewed the inquiries as "I have someone that cares enough they want to know what my days is like." And my girlfriend was like, "Okay, this isn't normal, you know?" I just felt like, wow, you know, she's jealous. She hasn't had anybody in a while.

**Gail** 21:20

Without using the name of the volunteer service. I got bored because you can only do laundry so much when it's just you and your husband, the house is spotless, and there's no one else to mess it up. I thought about a volunteer job. While my husband was on shift, I met with a gentleman at his volunteer service. We talked and he said, "You know, I think I see something in you." And I said, "Oh, okay." So, we talked about volunteering, the hours and what have you. Well, I got home, and I told my husband about it. In the meantime, I received an email from the gentleman at the center. I shared it with my husband: "I'd really like to talk to you about a position that I think that you would do amazing in, and I would like to meet you for coffee, and we can discuss it."

**Gail** 22:21

Well, that was it! It was rough and he went off. He said, "I make enough money to buy you everything that you need, want, and desire. You're not volunteering, you don't need to volunteer. If you want to come to my job, you can come and volunteer, cook or whatever. But there's no reason. I make enough money; you have everything that you want."

**Gail** 22:48

He didn't understand, I reached out to do something for myself. It got shot down. That became part of the isolation tactic. On days when he was off, he didn't leave my side. He was right there next to me. He didn't do things with other people or anything like that. He expected me to be the same way.

23:19

As the days and months went by, it started to get more physical. There were things which he would do out in public that would embarrass me. If we were in a grocery store and a gentlemen looked my way, he would make a huge scene. I would beg him, "please don't do that. You're embarrassing me." So when we would get home I tried to speak to him about it and that’s when the physical started happening.

**Jen Lee** 23:51

Was he confrontational in public? Did he say anything to a gentleman who looked your way?

**Gail** 23:53

Absolutely.

**Gail** 23:55

It was embarrassing. He would say, "are you looking at my wife?" while using other choice words or "what, don't you see that diamond ring on her finger? Doesn't that mean anything to you? Because it's this is my wife!"

**Gail** 24:05

At this point, I'm no longer looking at this behavior as admiration. I'm looking at this as embarrassing and something is not right here. So, when we get home, I would address it. That's when the physical started with the pushing and the pulling.

**Gail** 24:22

I would make dinner and he would come behind me and slap me on the back of my head. I would turn around and ask, "what are you doing? Why are you doing that? " He's like, "you need to understand that I'm the one in this house that makes the decisions and if I speak to someone outside this house, you need to represent me and follow my lead." I shut down and would be quiet and make dinner. Then we would pray over dinner saying, "I love my wife. Thank you." He would bring prayer in again.

**Jen Lee** 25:02

Did you go to church? It sounds like prayer was kind of a normal.

**Gail** 25:07

We did.

**Gail** 25:07

We did go to church. We attended services every Sunday that he was off. We'd pick a church and go to it. Going to church was a regular part of our life.

**Gail** 25:30

Another example of the physical abuse was the following: I never carry cash in my purse, we have a joined debit account. We knew everything about the accounts. I had a dressing room which had my clothes and shoes etc. He came in and said, "I need $20." And I said, "I don't have cash." And he goes, "Yes, you do." And I said, "No, I don't. We're both on the same account. Just get the money out of the account on your way to work."

**Gail** 26:09

I turned and I was walking into the room, the dressing room. The next thing you know, he came around the corner, grabbed the top of my forehead, and he was shoving $20 bills down my throat. Way down my throat to where I thought I'm going to die because I can't breathe. I mean, literally. And he's grabbing me. And so finally I'm trying to fight him off. In my head, I'm thinking, what are you doing? I fell to the ground, and he left the room. I went into a fetal position. I thought this is not good. What can I do about this? I can't go to my son's, they're going to be like, "Mom, you taught us that we can't touch a woman." I continued to think, what am I going to do? I remember being in that fetal position. I slept there in the dressing room, and he slept in the bedroom, and then I let him go to work without me getting up and making breakfast. And then a note on the counter. "I think I might need help. I just got mad at you because I thought you had money". We had a joint account; he is opened to see everything. And the doing something and then coming back to say I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

**Gail** 27:46

At one point, he got mad at me because I said something about his phone. “Those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing.” My phone is available for him to look through. He was very protective of his phone. I made a statement while we were leaving to go to dinner, I'm in four- or five-inch heels and a dress, and he pushed me down the stairs. He ran down to the bottom of the stairs and pulled me by my hair to get me up. And he's like, "now can we go to dinner?" We went to dinner, and I was quiet. "Why are you so quiet?" he asked.

**Jen Lee** 28:33

Did you suffer any injuries?

**Gail** 28:35

My knee bothers me, after the fact. If I go to a doctor, they are going to want to know how it happened?

**Jen Lee** 29:22

Did he ever apologize in person?

**Gail** 29:26

He did. He did. And on his knees "I'm sorry. This isn't me."

**Jen Lee** 29:59

Was his family around? Did you celebrate holidays?

**Gail** 30:03

We did. We did holidays with my family. My boys grew closer. He went to all the weddings. He was there for the birth of my first grandchild. My children let their guard down and had let someone in close.

**Gail** 30:29

It kept getting worse. I tried to get him to go to counseling. We ended up going however she was saying things that he didn't like, so that was the end of that. I kind of knew it was going to happen because it is hard for people to hear they must work on themselves. I continued to go. I didn't tell her the truth, just that we were having marital problems. I knew she had an obligation to tell when abuse is admitted.

**Gail** 31:53

The abuse started in January. And then about 15 months later, April, it came to a head. I was going to watch my first grandson; mom's gone back to work.

**Gail** 32:16

My children became more of a focus at this point. He set my kids down one time at a time during a barbeque and said, “All right, you need to have your babies in these seven years, because we're going to be retired. If you want your mom to watch the baby’s then get busy." It was a joke, you know.

**Gail** 32:44

I head downstairs, and into the garage where my son met me. I was standing there with my grandson. Of course, my son’s bringing half the nursery even though upstairs, he's got his own nursery, but Daddy's got to do what he's got to do.

**Gail** 33:00

A young co-worker, walked in my garage. (We live in a gated, private community) I was holding my grandson, and she asked to see my husband. I introduced myself, my son and then I introduced our grandchild. At that point, she said, “I don't really care who you are. I want to see your husband." She proceeded to say, "I have been having unprotected sex with him for seven months. And there are six others."

**Gail** 33:40

At that point, I handed my grandson over to my son and said, "Go home." Of course, my son being the man that he is, said, “absolutely not. I'm not leaving you mom." We went back and forth for a few minutes on that. I gave him the stink eye "the mom" look, everybody knows the mom look. He put the baby in the truck and said, "You're coming to my house." I said "yes, I'm going to get my purse and keys."

**Gail** 34:04

I open the door, called out for my husband. I said, I" need some help." And he said, "okay, babe, I'll be right there." When he came out the garage door, she was standing there and I said, "I believe she would like to speak to you."

**Gail** 34:20

I went and got my keys and my purse. As I was coming out, of course he was using derogatory language towards her, I could hear, "I don't know you, I don't know who you are." It didn't matter to me at that point. I said to him, "I will meet you back here at two o'clock and we'll talk about financials." I left. So, two o'clock came around that day, and I am sitting at the table with all the financials, planning to go to the divorce attorney afterwards. I text him "Are you coming?" He said, "Yes," I said, "okay, I'm waiting."

**Gail** 34:58

He didn't show up. Suddenly, I hear this loud knock. Like the door was going to come down. I thought, oh, maybe I made a mistake by wanting to meet here. Bang, bang, bang on the door. He's got a key so I don’t' know why the banging. I open the door and there were three police officers and two detectives. They said, "Are you okay? Are you okay? Are you okay?" And I'm like, "Yes, yes, yes, I'm okay. I'm okay. What, what?" And I said, "Did I do something?" "No, ma'am. No, ma'am. You need to come down to the police station with us." I said, "I'm not going anywhere, unless my sons are with me." It seemed like I said that, and poof, they were right there.

**Gail** 35:43

They drove me to the police station. My best friend who knew just a little, met us at the station. My boys wouldn't leave my side. The detective was talking and said "your husband made a mistake. He thought this was the Catholic Church, because for some reason he came in and started talking about abusing you, throwing you downstairs, pulling your hair, just on and on. Is any of this true?" I'm thinking, my boys are in this room. I said, "No, none of its true." My girlfriend was sitting next to me. The detective could feel the vibe in the room. He said, "gentlemen, will you step out for a moment. We're going to let your mom be with her girlfriend. You can stand right outside the door." They did.

**Gail** 36:50

The detective asked again, "Did any of this happen?" I got quiet. My girlfriend looked at me and said, "if you don't start talking, I am." So, I said, "Yes." They said, "Okay."

**Gail** 37:05

Earlier in the day, prior to the grandbaby arriving, I told my husband I wanted to take the baby out. He wanted to go, and I said, no you don't have to go. " He said, "I'm going to go. Why can't I go?" He started to shake me. I kept telling him, “Don’t, you're hurting me! Don't. My son's coming." I'm explaining taking out he baby saying, "I'm just going to run out. I want to be by myself." He was just grabbing me so hard.

**Gail** 37:38

When we were at the police station they asked, "do you have any bruises on you now?" "No sir." "Do you mind if we have a lady detective come in? Would you remove your shirt for her so we can make sure there's no bruises?” And I said, "Sure," not even remembering what happened earlier that day. When I took my blouse off, I was just black and blue.

**Gail** 38:04

He was going to be under arrest for domestic violence.

**Jen Lee** 38:09

Can you share how you got help afterwards?

**Gail** 38:14

Yes. They give you a packet with all kinds of resources in it. The State Attorney did that. It took me about three weeks, I thought I could do everything on my own. When my children found out they were devastated. Not devastated that I had taught them differently, and yet I was accepting abuse, but devastated that their mother had been hurt and treated the way that she was. I moved in with my son which he wasn't going to have it any other way. Immediately, I got a packet from the state attorney and the police advocate. It stated if you need help, it's here. There were all kinds of resources which are available. Three weeks went by and of course I've got my little grandson that's giving me unconditional love and was a godsend during this time. But after three weeks, I realized there's other things I can't deal with. There was so much coming up.

**Gail** 39:37

I opened the paperwork to find a pamphlet with the Women's Center. I called and I could barely speak. They said "come in." I said "okay." When I say I crawled in there, obviously not on all fours, but broken. Weak. I could barely speak. They opened the doors, and I entered a room. They had to get the information. That started my journey with the Women's Center and counseling.

**Jen Lee** 40:24

I think that's amazing.

**Jen Lee** 40:25

I have Lori here from the Women Center, who is going to share with you a little bit about what they do and have some conversation with Gail. I think we all have tears in our eyes from listening to what you have been through. Lori, I'm going to go ahead and let you take it away.

**Lori** 40:48

Thank you, Jen. As you said earlier on, I'm Laurie Sutherland, Development Director for the Women's Center of Brevard. We have Melbourne offices. And we have Titusville offices. We try to cover as much ground as we can in Brevard county. There's a lot of need. Gail, your story was so compelling. It was difficult to listen to. I'm so happy that the Women's Center had resources you needed to get on track. You realize that you were a victim and as such, you're not thinking straight. You think you are strong, and you can do it yourself. Some people may be able to, but you had severe manipulation, emotional manipulation happening to you. And that's where a lot of confusion can come in. You mentioned you had the honeymoon phase of your relationship at the beginning, which was extended, four and a half years is a long time. It gave your abuser the time to lay the groundwork for the manipulation. I think when a victim is abused, it's kind of a shock to their system because intuitively we want to look at the good. Victims quite often believe that the person is that person, but I will say this, the perpetrator is that person always. And they know how to use the mental manipulation to persuade the victim that they are decent and good. And that's what that's why seeing the red flags and warning signs in relationships, whether it be a marriage, dating, you must see the red flags early. Getting out of an abusive relationship early makes a huge difference.

**Gail** 42:47

Absolutely. I'm happy to say that I was with the Women's Center, once a week and it was my lifeline. There were days that I didn't want to go, but I pushed myself to go. There were days that I couldn't get in there quick enough. But the beauty of it is you can get resources from your counselor. You are taught different ways of looking at things because you've been so manipulated, that you don't know how to look at things a certain way. Every time I went, little by little, it was going to be a process and it was a process. But every time I walked out of there, I walked out with a goal for the next week. I walked out with affirmations of the kind of woman that I am. It would lead me to want more and to get better.

**Gail** 44:02

Towards the end of my journey, The Women's Center helped me to learn how to love again. I wanted to love again. I didn't want to deflect anything that I had been through on someone else. It's kind of like, why should I clean up someone else's mess? I didn't do it. I wanted to be able to go through my life learning. I wanted to learn how not to make someone else pay for something they didn't do. So that was another journey in counseling to learn.

**Gail** 44:35

Red flags. I am on top of my red flags now. Not to a detrimental type of situation, but more so just being aware.

**Gail** 44:49

The center taught me boundaries. A lot of women think the word boundary is a bad word. It could be in a domestic violence situation, a relationship, with your children, a work situation, friendships.

**Lori** 45:08

Boundaries are healthy in many different relationships you have. I'm glad our counseling services gave you the tools to step by step, rebuild your self-esteem. Because that's key. You must rebound and realize that you are a strong person and admit to the manipulation. Earlier, when you were telling your story, you alluded to the fact that you were in denial, and you didn't want to say it out loud, you didn't want people to know, because victims quite often feel embarrassed, even though it's not their fault, they feel embarrassed. And quite often, they are coerced into believing that it's their fault. That is psychological manipulation.

**Lori** 45:55

Another point which you made which was very important to me as a domestic violence advocate, is the isolation. That is a very large factor. You can misconstrue that as flattery. And I want you to stay home, I make the money that's all about the abuser’s ego, by the way. Why do you need to do anything else, but then that's chipping away slowly at your identity and who you are? That's a red flag too. Also, people are confused when there's emotional abuse, and psychological abuse, because physical abuse is obviously right there, bruises and someone grabbing you physically shaking you, that is shocking. That's where emotional manipulators can have an edge on really getting their claws into the victim by using those tactics to continue the abuse. Your story is a classic tale of escalation where the abuse just kept getting worse and more violent into physical violence.

**Gail** 47:13

I brought paperwork today, the little things that I got from the Women's Center, and you could see them, they're all torn and rippled. It's daily affirmations. I continue to use these and the things they gave me. I have a notebook, and when I feel like I need to revisit that I do. All of it was amazing. Different ways you start to break down situations as you start to question things, wondering what is true. You learn to dissect situations and say, "did they really mean it that way?" You're so used to being manipulated that you don't know. You're always wondering are they telling the truth?

**Lori** 48:02

Questioning yourself. You must retrain the way you think.

**Gail** 48:07

And that's exactly what they had me do. We talked about triggers, and how to deal with them in different ways. Because maybe my way isn't going to work for another woman or a man. But they'll help you find the way where you can self soothe yourself during a situation that triggers you. One of my triggers is the sound of sirens.

**Gail** 48:41

I'm two years away from being at the Women's Center. But I guarantee you, if I called up and said, I need some help, they would be there for me. I just got out of a work situation because it changed hands and I could see the manipulation, and the toxicity. I was strong enough to see that and say no, I'm not working under this situation. I am stronger, and I need to put myself in healthy situations.

**Lori** 49:19

And you deserve better.

**Gail** 49:20

Absolutely. I'm no longer there, and I know that the door is going to be open somewhere else. Before the Women's Center counseling, I never would have had the strength or the tools to see that.

**Gail** 49:43

I have had some successful dating situations where I have been able to use some of the tools which I have been given. There is a future after this. You, you can be happy again! But I will tell you, you must do your homework too. Your counselor can work with you, and work with you and work with you. But you must love yourself enough to follow through on some of the things which they asked you to do like your assignments.

**Gail** 50:17

It's like a lightbulb moment where you're like, I don't know what this paper means? I don't know what she's getting at. But then finally, it clicks. It's like a light bulb. Then there's another lesson and you learn to better yourself and to have a future.

**Lori** 50:37

I give you credit for taking the step to come and get help and understanding that it's a process. It doesn't just happen overnight. The healing can be slow. But you had the fortitude to stay with the plan, you kept coming to your counseling sessions, and you got to where you are. That is a real success story.

**Lori** 51:01

Victim advocacy is where we first start with somebody. You came in as a victim, you had a victim advocate that worked with you. And then you were referred to counseling, everything is a process. When people come in, I think they're kind of surprised, because we must get all your information, everything needs to be documented, which is so important. Our victims are important to us that we make sure we do it properly. And everything goes with a plan.

**Gail** 51:33

The plan when they get all of the information is so important. The lady who helped me was so kind and sweet. She'd let me take my time and what have you. She got all the information and then she set me up with an appointment. I ended up getting in that day. They worked around everything. It was such a godsend. I look back and little did I know that I would be such a big advocate, and able to share my story like this. Who would have known?

**Gail** 52:27

I hope this will help others who are listening. I would let them know that it might not happen right away but there is a journey you take. There is a light at the end of the tunnel and the light can be bright again. You can find your self-worth and your happiness again. You become an advocate for yourself by learning boundaries, and different things that they teach you. I do hope that there's someone out there that this helps. My story helps them, and they can reach out for help if they need it.

**Lori** 53:14

Jen, if I can elaborate more on our other services, I'd love to do that. I'm so passionate about the Women's Center and what we do. It's so inspiring to me to be sitting here face to face with a person that we've really helped come out of a really difficult situation and flourish and have bravery to talk about it to share your story with other people. In addition to our victim advocacy services, we also have our counseling, which I know has helped you a lot. And I'd like everyone in Brevard County to know that we have housing, we have transitional housing, and we have a program where we can help our victims have a safe place to live and build skills to be responsible and take care of themselves. And quite often we have victims with children that come and stay in our transitional housing units.

We also run the only rape crisis center in Brevard County, in which a lot of people don't know, which is a huge endeavor for us. But it's that important. We work with the local hospitals. We have 24 hours, seven days a week rape crisis intervention, and somebody that's always there on call to talk to somebody who needs help. So that's an important part of what we do as well. We also have prevention services. Quite often, when you think back on it, it's like seeing those red flags, when you're made aware of the red flags and the warning signs that's where prevention comes in. That's important. Simply talking about it and sharing your story makes a very big difference in people's lives. Because when people are abused, they get used to a certain situation. And they don't even realize it. And quite often victims will stay in toxic, abusive relationships, because of children because of finances, because of housing, because of pets, a lot of people don't want to leave because they don't want to leave their pets. There are many factors involved, but the Women's Center is here for victims in Brevard County.

**Lori** 55:36

It's easy, just get on our website: www.womenscenter.net You can start your journey. All the information for the different offices, on phone numbers, etc. to get started, and don't be afraid. And Gail, you're a success story. Jen is putting the information on her website under the "resource" tab.

**Gail** 56:01

Thank you. And again, I wouldn't be where I am today without the Women's Center I hope this opens up someone's eyes and they can understand there is light at the end of the tunnel. There's resources there for them to use.

**Jen Lee** 56:22

Lori, would you give your website one more time?

**Lori** 56:24

I will. It's www.womenscenter.net. Women's Center, and it has all the information you need, explaining our programs, victims’ stories, which are of course anonymous. We share the phone numbers for both of our offices to get your journey started to heal.

**Jen Lee** 56:48

And again, that's for men, women, for men?

**Lori** 56:50

Men, women, and children. Yes, and we do have male victims that come in. And if I can just make a little sidebar point about that. Statistically, most victims are women and girls. But men are victims also. A reason the numbers are lower for men is because men don't want to admit they're being abused by a woman. They feel like they're being weak, but it's not weakness. And I've seen plenty of situations where men are abused in relationships.

**Gail** 57:23

When I did finally start to date again. You don't know whether to share your story or not. I started to have a relationship with this person, so I felt comfortable. As I shared my story, he looked at me and he said, "I am too." I said "what?" He said, I am too, and then he shared his story. We had that in common. I said, "thank you for being brave enough to share that with me."

**Lori** 57:32

Don't be afraid. Any victim should know there's help for them. And it just takes the one step of contacting the Women's Center. And then we will guide them through their journey of recovery.

**Jen Lee** 58:30

Thank you so much Lori.

**Jen Lee** 58:33

Gail, would you like to share one or two affirmations with us today? I can tell you I'm looking at her paper and it has been well used. It's a living document, I can tell you use it a lot. So yes, please share a couple.

**Gail** 58:47

Absolutely. Again, this is a handout that my counselor gave me, and it's called affirmation for self-esteem. So, you say "what I am? I am lovable and I am capable. I fully accept and believe in myself just the way I am. I accept all the different parts of myself. It's good for me to take time for myself. I have good qualities. Those are some of those affirmations and there's a whole list.

**Gail** 59:22

I'll go on to another thing given me. It's, building self-esteem through positive affirmations and it's learning how to become your own best friend. Physical activity, taking a walk outside, they talk to you about abdominal breathing. They'll teach you these things. They'll teach you ways. They'll also teach you like if your mind goes into a certain place to shout "stop!" Shouting "stop!" is another way of being able to stop those memories are those things that you don't want to go through again.

**Gail** 1:00:03

Also snapping a rubber band against your wrist. It slows you down and makes you think "I'm not there." If you're putting yourself in a situation where you used to be, a trigger comes, snap that rubber band and it fits you right into reality. These are the things they offer at the Women's Center. Again, I can't say enough about the journey and I'm proud to say, I did come in as a victim, but I am a survivor.

**Jen Lee** 1:00:34

Congratulations! I want to say one other thing. I have a friend who was in a abusive relationship for a few years. She had one question she could never get figured out. What was real? The past matter years of my life, what, what was real? She went to therapy, the therapist told her, "your feelings. Everything that you felt was real."

**Gail** 1:01:05

It is so true. And I did the same thing. I didn't know where the starting point was. Where did my life start? Did it start at the very beginning? Or did it start in the middle of the honeymoon? I mean, what was real? When did I get when did I start getting the rug slipped out from underneath me? I realized again, through counseling, it doesn't matter. I was there. I knew what I was thinking. I knew what I was doing. It's something I could work on and get over. I did. Because you feel like you are living this great, wonderful life and then suddenly it was just pulled out from underneath you and everything that you knew was not.

**Jen Lee** 1:01:55

Acknowledging and understanding our feelings are important. Ladies, if you don't have anything else to add, I'm going to close here by number one saying big thank you. You're welcome to both of you. I am always a resource if you ever need anything. Thank you. This is Jen Lee with I Need Blue. Thank you for listening today. Again, if you are a victim of violence, we hope this information moved you, instilled some confidence in pursuing that help. You too can become a survivor of domestic violence, sexual abuse, visit www.ineedblue.net for local resources, the Women's Center or call your local police. Again, you find this episode on www.ineedblue.net or any of your favorite podcast platforms. Thank you for listening