Matt:

What incident occurred which caused you to start your podcast, I Need Blue?

Jen:

A decade ago, I became a survivor of a group armed robbery. I was Store Manager of a women's clothing store. At 7 pm on a Saturday, there were 8 customers and 2 store associates including myself in the store. I was in the fitting room helping ladies find their Easter dress. Behind me I hear, "give me all your money."

I stopped because your mind's registering wasn't registering. Normally in the fitting room I hear, " zip me up, or does this look good?" I heard it again, "give me all your money." I turn around, and there is a man dressed in black, hoodie, and with a mask on pointing a handgun at me. Close enough I could touch it.

I turn and head towards the register. There are 2 registers. He lined the customers up in front of the cash wrap. As I gathered the money for him, he proceeded to take the money from the customers. "Where is your safe?" he asked me. "We don't have one." I replied. He inquired about the door leading to the back of the store. I knew we were headed that way. He waved the gun for everyone to go.

At that point, I knew he had all our money, so I wasn’t sure what else he was looking to obtain. I had an out of body experience to where suddenly, these customers became my kids, and I had a fierce need to protect. Not knowing his true intention, I had them all go in front of me. If he was going to shoot anybody or hurt them, I wanted it to be me. It was instinct. I'm a mom and I felt like kicked into that mode.

As we head to the backroom, again he asks, "where's the safe?" " I don't have one." I spoke. The fact he asked that question again made me nervous. I thought to myself, maybe he thinks I'm lying?

In the backroom he lined us up in front of my desk, and he asked me to pull the phone out of the wall. I did. Then he asked for our cell phones. I watched everybody hand over their cell phone. I had mine in my pocket, it was rather big to where you could see outline, and I was debating on giving it up. He asked me one more question. "What is that room?" We had one more room back there which was strictly used for hangers and fixtures. We had never shut the door; it was only for supplies so why would we?

I knew when he asked the question, we were headed there next. At that moment I gave up my cell phone in fear of him seeing it when we turned to go into the room. We are all in the room, including the robber and he says, "Don't say anything and nobody will get hurt." I hear children crying, praying, mothers consoling. My sense was in overload as I'm absorbing the scene around me.

"Does the door shut?" he asked. "I don't know because we have never shut it." Again, I'm giving him the wrong answer by saying, "I don't know." One more time, he says, "don't say anything, and nobody will get hurt." He slams the door shut.

We are abducted because we were left there against our will. In the distance, I could hear the doorbell go off, which signaled hopefully he left the building. At the same time, a lady started to have a panic attack. I must help her! I go to her, stand in front of her and pin her up against the wall to keep her still. I look her in the eyes and say, "I need you to stay with me. Breathe with me." Slowly, I can feel the weight of her body give way. I called someone over to help me lower her to the ground.

She's laying on the floor and begins having a different medical emergency. In the distance again, I hear the doorbell go off. I know either the robbers, or someone has entered the store. I don't know what's going on outside this door. Fortunately, my co-worker hid her phone. I told her to hide behind me and call 911. She called and told them what was going on. I had her hang up because I wasn’t sure who was in the store and didn't want to risk the robber opening the door and seeing her on the phone.

Meanwhile, the lady on the floor is getting worse. I didn't know what to do to help her. I needed to call 911 again. I called this time. Our 911 operators don’t get much recognition, but I couldn't have done it without them. They kept me calm. I get asked, "Jen, how did you not panic?" Honestly, when she was on the ground, having the seizure, I felt panic want to set in and I swallowed it down. That was probably the hardest moment of the incident. The 911 operator really gave me great instruction, kept me calm, until finally, that wonderful moment when the police officers open the door.

Until you experience a moment of being "rescued” and understand the feeling of being able to relinquish the pressure which is on your shoulders when trying to handle a stressful situation, you can't fully understand why I am so passionate about needing our law enforcement.

When they opened the door, we could breathe; we're safe. We have people here to protect us. I Need Blue podcast is based upon two things, real life stories of survivors of trauma, coupled with a supportive law enforcement message. We give support, and thanks to our law enforcement, because they were the ones who came there to rescue us and make us feel safe.

Matt:

I'm glad you and everybody there are safe. I assume the woman who was having medical emergency is, ok?

Jen:

Yes, as far as I know. I had to go to several court hearings: some in front of a jury. 2 years after the crime I was called into Federal court. I was able to see all the other survivors from that night and for that, I was thankful. I wanted to say thank you to them for trusting me. They could have tried to be a hero and the outcome could have been different.

I didn't want to go to court again. I didn't want to be in front of a jury. I didn't want the robber to see me shed more tears from the trauma he instilled in me. But I didn't have a choice.

Matt:

Was the robber caught?

Jen:

Yes. He took my cell phone and held onto it. I had a tracking app. I told the officers and they pinged it. They were able to find him 20 miles north in a bar. They never recovered my phone, and he took my wallet off my desk when he left.

The robber had my phone, my wallet, ID, credit cards etc. He had my whole life. It created much fear.

Matt:

As a result of going through this kind of trauma, what has life been like after?

Jen:

I lived by myself. I was in the woods. For a short while, I couldn't stay by myself. I had to have someone come and stay, just to make me feel safe. I had two cats, so I knew when I came home, if they weren't at the door, somebody could be in the house. My cats didn't like strangers.

I took a sliver of paper placed it at the bottom of the door so when the door was shut the paper would be sticking out. When I get home if the piece of paper had fallen to the ground, then I knew somebody had opened my door. I learned to take different routes home, so my path was less predictable. This became my new normal routine. I never would have thought I would have to do this to feel safe, but I was put in a situation where I had to learn to act and react differently.

Court was a whole new beast. It was very traumatic. I had to go to motions, pretrial, etc. They caught the driver, so I ended up going to jury trial for him even though I had never seen him. I think they needed to see the emotional impact that his accessory to the crime had done to me. My first-time walking into the courtroom, I saw his friends or family and the fear started all over again, but in a new way. This time, other people knew what I looked like, and they could potentially know what I drive, and they could potentially follow me home. It was scary for me and something I never really would have thought about, regarding victims who must go to court.

I did talk to the detectives and the police officers about it. They assured me any type of follow-up incident would be rare. They were right, I was fine. Like I stated earlier, 2 years later, I get called into federal court. I remember where I was standing when I got the phone call that I had to appear. I just cried. Like, I just cried because everything that I worked so hard to overcome and the fear I worked through all came flowing back.

Matt:

I imagine there were some reliefs when the robber was sentenced, however, having to go back to court 2 years later when you thought you were done, was traumatic?

Jen:

Yes. I didn’t have my sense of safety shaken, it was shattered, literally shattered in front of me. It's a feeling which is hard to understand unless you have experienced it. Being summoned to court made me feel like a victim all over again. I told the lady on the phone, "I just want you to leave me alone." That's all I wanted. To just be left alone.

I don't want to discourage people from going to court or coming forward. The alternative is, let's say they didn't catch him, or I didn't go to court, he'd still be out there. He could still be hurting other people, he could hurt them worse, and it could turn out with someone getting hurt. I'm thankful. As hard as it was to go to court, as many times as I did, I'm thankful they caught them. I would do it again. Yes. But it is nice that I can tell my story to give people a realistic view of what to expect.

Matt:

At what point did you decide to take this experience and turn it into a podcast?

Jen:

When I started my podcast, I had never listened to a podcast, which is interesting. I just really missed talking, especially dealing with COVID for a year. I missed talking, I missed meeting people, I missed listening and learning different points of view. A neighbor was the one who threw out an idea of, "do a podcast."

I thought, I can do that. I can do it at home. It should be easy enough. So that is how the idea of a podcast started. I ended up picking this topic while standing in front of my refrigerator, I pulled one of the doors open and suddenly it like hit me. Okay, Jen, your purpose now is you need to tell your story. You need to help people, and you need to couple it with a supportive law enforcement message. The fire it created inside me, like passion. Like this fire burns and I knew it was what I needed to do. I knew it was my purpose. And so that moment when I opened my refrigerator, I decided it was time to start a podcast and use my story to help others.

Matt:

So, you've never listened to a podcast. So, what was it like? Doing one for the first time? Like what was it that you? What was the research that you did understand what these are? How they work? How to launch one? How did you go from your neighbor telling you to do a podcast to, I guess I'll do a podcast?

Jen:

I did a lot of research. I joined a couple FB groups. There I found suggestions on equipment which weren’t too expensive. I needed a headphone and a microphone. The internet is a great resource to find anything. I knew my message, but I needed to decide a name. From there I got a domain name, email and needed to learn how to make a website. I had business cards made and looked at local on-line platforms to start talking about my podcast. I had someone help me with the recording and editing. I was afraid of that process. I shouldn't have been. While editing takes some time, I enjoy it. I have control of my brand when I handle things from A to Z. I had to work to find my content, I still work to find my content. I don't let that stress me out because I believe in my message, and if I keep digging my ditches, as I call it, networking, and going on different podcasts, I am able to connect with all types of people.

I am fascinated by the fact that you use the neighborhood app to do research and start promoting your content. A lot of folks hesitate to do local based content. There are folks who have dealt with traumatic issues and crimes nationwide. You can talk to anybody, but I'm fascinated by the fact that you dove into that app. I wonder if there's anything you learned about using that platform which you could share with us.

Honestly, I was blocked from it. They told me I was promoting a business, even though I was asking for stories, and not money. I was providing a public service to those who would like to share. But they blocked me, and I think I could be because I am pro-police. I've been blocked several times, so I don't post anything about my podcast. I posted some local events which weren’t mine, and I was blocked.

Matt:

It is frustrating there are certainly things that can be changed about law enforcement at state, national, and local levels and there are certainly problem spots, but at the same time, however, most of the people who put on a uniform are out there to serve and protect. Policing should not be political, and the fact that simple support of the police automatically gets you flagged by someone is annoying, at the very least. I don't want to get too deep into that, but I hope that was not the reason a lot of your content was flagged in this app.

I think it's an interesting lesson about using that platform; depending upon your neighborhood, there might be people who really object to using it to promote a business or promote content. Local Facebook groups could also be beneficial, although you could run into the same problem. There are groups that don't want you to promote a business. They want you to promote content. There are others who view you as part of the community and are focused on how we can help you.

On Causepods you can pick a charity which you would like to spotlight. You picked Police Blue Nation, there are policebluenation.org. Share with us what they do?

Jen:

I spoke with Leo is the founder and he shared some information with me. Police Blue Nation has what's called The Blue Heart for Law Enforcement. Its concept is like the purple heart which it for military. I really liked the recognition which is given to the law enforcement officer. It's awarded in the name of the department for those who are seriously wounded or killed during the performance of their duties. It's important we recognize our law enforcement officers while they're alive, but we also need to carry on their memory. It's a five piece, and a piece of it goes to the spouse.

Matt:

We must remember our law enforcement have families, parents, siblings, significant others, children, and they are also making a huge sacrifice by these folks putting on a uniform and serving and protecting. PoliceBlueNation.org.

Any last words you would like to share?

Jen:

Your podcast is your story or topic. It is your story. It is your brand. It's not a sprint, it's a marathon so learn along the way. Don't be afraid. Challenge yourself because when you do, you learn and grow. Have fun. Absolutely have fun.