

Episode 86: Jen was robbed at gunpoint

There's something I find really fascinating, and that's learning about the wildly different ways people react in a sudden emergency situation.

Imagine you're in a restaurant and the main dining room is full of people. Everyone's talking, servers are buzzing around to their various tables, people are enjoying their food. Then suddenly at the table next to you, a middle-aged man clutches his chest, yells out in pain, and falls from his chair. It's pretty clear he's having a heart attack. He's still conscious and breathing, but he is clearly in distress.

And what does everyone do? No doubt, there will be a person who will yell out for someone to call 911. There will be people who see what's happening, and their first reaction is to quickly look around the room, like they're looking for help. There might be someone who goes to the man and tries to do CPR. Incidentally, if someone is still awake and breathing, you don't need to do CPR. I can guarantee that many of the people at the nearby tables will not do anything – they're definitely going to watch and see what happens, but they won't take any action themselves. And there will be some people who will immediately get up and get away from what's going on. Their brain tells them they need to leave. I know this, because I've seen it happen.

And there will be some people who remain calm, and try to help. They'll make sure someone has called for paramedics (or they'll just take out their phone and make the call). They'll get the man into a comfortable position, maybe talk to him, maybe check his pulse. These are the people you want to have around when something happens.

But that's the interesting thing about this. If you've never been in a situation like that, you don't really know for sure how you'll react.

My guest today, Jen, doesn't have to wonder about that. She knows how she reacts. That's because one day at work in a retail clothing store, she turned around and was facing the barrel of a gun.

Scott

When this happened, what kind of store was it? Where were you working?

Jen

It was a women's clothing store.

Scott

As I understand, there had been a string of robberies for some time prior to this.

Jen

Yes. I'll tell you a little bit about how the robbery started. In February there was this string of robberies. They were happening about 20 miles north of where my store was located, and they were mostly women owned stores. Clothing stores, nail salons, and things of that nature. The store I worked at was a chain store. Some of our locations 20 miles north of me, were hit by this robber. He did come in and ask for money and it was reported, but at that time he was not caught. So what happened was our company had a conference call to go over the steps and

what we should or shouldn't do if we were involved in an armed robbery. I remember a couple specific things. One was to speak as little as possible and move as little as possible; because you don't want to startle the robber. So I heard that and I remember thinking, "Ok, those are interesting tips in conversation, but I'll never need to use them." The robberies stopped for about a month and a half. Then all of a sudden a women's clothing store got hit again.

Scott

It just seems like such a weird target to go for. A women's clothing store. You wouldn't think there would be a lot of cash. I guess it's an easy target and easy victims. Do you think that was the logic behind it?

Jen

Absolutely. Even though there wasn't a lot of cash there was less risk involved. He already hit 12 stores. I guess when you start adding up that money it probably is substantial. Yeah I do think that's why he chose to go with the women's clothing stores.

So a month and a half later he starts up again. My district manager came up to visit; she is my boss and I am the store manager. She asked, "Do you feel safe?" I said yes because the robberies were 20 miles north of my store and that seemed to be his pattern. So she went on her way. 4 days later, on a Saturday and 7:00PM, it was still light outside. We are located in a strip center, so there are lots of other stores next to me. Plus there was a movie theater not far away and a hotel also. It was a very busy area. I was in the fitting room section, which is in the middle of our store. I had about 4 people that I was helping. It's a ladies clothing store, it was close to Easter, women were looking for dresses and I was having fun like I always do. I was standing there and then behind me I heard, "Give me your money." I kind of just scoffed while my mind was registering those words. I was thinking, "I didn't hear that right." Then I hear, "Give me your money" again. I turned around and saw a gun pointed at me; close enough I could touch it. I saw a man in a mask, and then my eyes went back to the gun. At that point I turned and started to head toward the register. I could see out of the corner of my eye him waving the gun at the other people in the store, there were about 9 others, for them to head to the register to follow me.

I remember I got to the first register, I was standing behind it, and he had the other customers lined up in front of me in front of the registers. He asked for their money, for their wallets or cash or anything that they had. I remember I took the money out of the till, and so as to not speak, I took my hands and I spread it across the coins. That was my way of asking, "Do you want the coins as well?" He shook his head no.

Scott

I've got to ask you this question, it seems like a lot of people in a situation like this would've just panicked. You not only weren't panicked, but you were thinking back to that conference call where they told you not to speak much. So you pointed to the coins instead of asking if he wanted the coins. How panicked were you at that point?

Jen

At that point, honestly I had a couple of things going through my head. As I was walking to the register, in my mind I'm thinking, "How long has he been watching me, to know that I was the person he had to come to. Had it been an hour, hours, days, weeks?" Generally they case a store before they just walk in to rob it. So that was going through my mind as I was walking to

the register. Then at the register I wasn't panicking, but what I heard was the customers. They were praying. In fact, one of the customers shushed the other customer because they were praying out loud and they didn't want to hear any noise. So I was watching this unfold, I cleaned out the other register, and at that point I knew from history that that's all he wanted. He looked at the back of the store where the back door was and asked me, "What is that?" I said, "Well that goes to our back room, the office and storage." He said, "I want you to go back there." I'm thinking in my mind, "Ok this is not normal. He has our money so at this point what else does he want? You're right there are several people in this store."

I had an out of body experience. I have children, but at that moment I wasn't their mom, I wasn't a daughter, I wasn't an aunt. I became nobody so that I could become somebody for these people. I became their mom. I became very protective of them. These people that I may not have even spoken to, or even just spoken to for 5 minutes, it didn't matter I was their mom. So as to protect them- this is the point where when I went to court, I would start to cry. I ushered them to go in front of me. Not knowing his intentions or if he was going to shoot somebody, mind you he's still pointing a gun at us. If he was going to shoot somebody, I wanted that person to be me.

The customers were making their way, because you have to go around a corner. To understand, when you go through the back door on the right is the men and women's bathroom and drinking fountains. As you go straight, you go left around a corner. Right there is where our back door is. He asked me if it was locked. I told him, "It should be. If you push on it an alarm will go off." He asked me, "Do you have a safe?" I said, "No we don't." We got to the back, so we went around the corner, and now where my desk is and where there is storage. He asked again, "Do you have a safe?" I said, "No we don't." I was getting concerned, because in my mind I know I'm telling the truth, but what if he doesn't believe me. What if he thinks I'm lying or trying to hide something. All of these things were going through my mind, it was kind of crazy.

I got to the back and the other customers were lined up in front of my desk. At that point he had me pull the phone out of the wall and he asked for our cell phones. I watched the customers give up their most prized possession, you know? Our phones are like our diary. They have photos and everything very personal to them. I still had my phone in my pocket and I had on black pants that day and I had an Android phone. I'll never forget it, I loved that phone. Without him asking, we had another room back there and I instinctively knew that he was going to put us in there. I also knew that the phone in my pocket, the outline of it when I had to turn to walk to go into that room, he was going to notice it. Reluctantly, I gave him my phone. Understand, that phone was the only phone that we could potentially have left to call for help. I had to pull the other phone out of the wall, to not risk it being found hidden in my pocket.

I was right. He asked what that room was and I told him it was storage with hangers and fixtures in there. Sure enough, he tells us to get in there. It is semi-dark. There's no windows in that room. We were lined up against the back wall. There were boxes of hangers, so I remember, if you sit on a box of hangers there's an indentation because it's not a solid thing to sit on. I remember leaning up against that and the feeling of the form of the hangers on my bottom and legs. At this point, I had people crying, praying, and just stunned. The robber looked at me and asked, "Does this door lock?" I had no idea because we had never shut that door. He asked me again, "Does this door lock?" Mind you, I already told him no to a safe, I know that was the wrong answer and I felt like I was answering him wrong again. The last thing I wanted to do was irritate him; but I didn't know. He looked at us and said, "Don't say a word and no one will get hurt." Nobody said a word. He went over to the door and looked at us one more time with the

gun pointed at us and said, "Don't say a word and no one will get hurt." Then he pulled the door shut. I'll never forget that sound because the door had never been shut so he had to pull it hard.

At that moment I had people crying, people trying to console others, people praying, and then I had the lady I was helping with at the fitting room. She had the most beautiful eyes. Her eyes were just this beautiful brown. She started to have a panic attack back there, which was then elevating the anxiety in the room. I went over to her and I remember putting my arms on her upper arms and pushing her up against the wall. I looked in her eyes and said, "Baby, I need you to stay with me. I need you to stay with me. It's gonna be ok. Look at me." She tried but the panic was just taking over and I could slowly feel her body give, I couldn't hold it up any longer. I looked at one of the other customers and said, "I need you to come here. I can't hold her up and I don't want her to fall." So he came over and he helped me to get her down to the ground. At this point she is having a major medical issue beyond a panic attack. Watching her, when you ask me when did I panic, that is the moment panic started to set in. I know how to put on a band aid. I don't know how to do anything beyond that. I don't watch ER, I don't watch any of those shows, that's just not for me.

The other people in the room were trying to give their suggestions on what we should do, but something inside was saying, "No that's not right. That's not what we're supposed to do." Fortunately my co worker was able to hide her phone. I was so thankful. Before she called I could hear the doorbell go off. That signaled that somebody had left or somebody had come in. I was thinking, "The robber left. Ok that's good. I don't know for sure but that is potentially good." A couple seconds later I heard the doorbell go off again and I thought, "That's not good. "I don't know if anybody else in the room heard the bell. I was thinking they probably didn't so they didn't understand what could be going on in this situation. I told my coworker, "Get behind me. I need you to call 911." In my mind I had her get behind me because if the robber came back and opened that door, I didn't want him to see her on the phone. So she called and they answered quickly and said they were on their way.

Meanwhile this lady was getting worse. I was swallowing down panic. I was thinking, "If anything happens to her, I'm not going to be ok." I was in this mom mode and feeling ultra protective. I asked my coworker for her phone. I said, "I need to call again. You stay behind me." Again, I heard the two doorbells so chances were likely that there was somebody else in the store. I called and the answer immediately and I said, "I need your help. I have this lady with a medical emergency and I don't know what to do." The lady on the phone was wonderful, she walked me through some steps that I could take to get her stabilized until help arrived. She stayed on the phone with me and her voice and instructions were what I needed at that moment. It took some responsibility off of me. I was in overdrive with adrenaline because I could still hear crying, it was still semi dark. I don't know how I didn't panic because it was sensory overload for sure.

Scott

We've definitely got to give credit to the 911 operators of the world. They have the ability to stay calm in virtually any situation, it's amazing.

Jen

Absolutely. I needed that and I needed direction. They said, "Stay on the phone with us" so knowing somebody was there was reassuring as well. I will never forget the moment that door was shoved open. It made the same sound as when it was closed. My initial thought for a second was, "Oh my god it's the robber he's back." But then I saw it was our police officers and

law enforcement. The sigh of relief, it felt like everybody took a deep breath in that room. The feeling I had inside was so thankful. It was great to have somebody on the phone helping me, but when you have that live person there it makes such a difference. Through the whole thing, without realizing it, your safety is slowly being unraveled. The moment the police officers opened the door I could feel it stop unraveling. It was amazing, just their presence impacted the situation and impacted me.

At that point, help had arrived for the lady. The other customers were ushered out of the room. I remember they were all situated in the shoe department because the police officers needed to get their information for anything that they needed. The officer looked at me and said, "You look rather calm for everything you've just been through." I told him, "Give me a few hours and I won't be. Right now I need a cigarette." I no longer smoke, but back then I did and I probably could have smoked a whole pack, to be honest with you. I came back in and I could see outside the yellow tape of the police line that says "Do No Cross." I could see the blue lights flashing and it was unreal. I saw that stuff in the movies and TV but now I was actually witnessing it right outside my store.

Scott

Your place of employment, where you go to work everyday, it's now a crime scene. That's gotta be pretty surreal.

Jen

It really was. The magnitude didn't even really hit me at that moment. Everything is just a scene. Somebody asked me how long the incident lasted. I said, "In those situations it's not about time, it's about events." It's about the sequence of the way things happen. Honestly I don't know how long it was but I can tell you step by step what was going on.

I called my district manager, I called my parents, then I started to work with the police and gave them the details of everything that happened. I called a girlfriend who came and picked me up and I was going to stay with her for the night. About an hour into helping the police officers I could feel the adrenaline start to dissipate. I could feel my body wanting to shake and weakness started to set into my legs. I could not drive anywhere, I was not capable. So my girlfriend picked me up and we went home and drank because that's what you do when you go through traumatic things. You want to numb it and you want to forget it.

The next morning she drove me back to the store and again I met with the detective, and other law enforcement officers. We walked through the steps again, because I really didn't sleep. In fact, I had sunglasses on when I met them because my eyes were red and puffy. Quite honestly they were unrecognizable. When I looked in the mirror I didn't even recognize myself, everything was just crazy. So I was back at the store helping them anyway that I could. I had an immense need to give them information and be there with them whatever they needed.

Scott

Did they get a statement from you the day before? Or did they say, "Go ahead and take care of yourself. Come back tomorrow and we'll get a full statement with more details?"

Jen

No they will get a statement right away because everything is still fresh in your mind and the adrenaline is still there. So no, I gave them as much information as I could possibly remember. But you're right in asking that, because as time went on, I started to remember little details. I

was really amazed, honestly, when you're in high stress situations, what you remember. I remember customers from earlier that day, I remember what they were wearing. It was interesting. I learned that we take in way more of our environment than we actually realize.

Scott

Yeah it's just being able to access it afterwards. Sometimes that's the tough part, but you were able to pull up a bunch of details though?

Jen

I was. Obviously I still can. Even though I've told my story more often I'm amazed at what I still remember. As victims turn survivors, you never forget. You might not realize it as much, but I know as I tell my story it gets a little bit easier, but you never forget. It will forever affect your life, to be honest with you.

Scott

Did your company give you time off work after this?

Jen

Yes. I was given 10 days off. I lived by myself, so I had someone come and stay with me. Odd things happened. I guess you could say my sense of safety was not broken, it was shattered. Completely shattered. I didn't feel safe anywhere. So I had someone stay with me. I don't know why, but I could not go in my bedroom. I would not sleep in there. I got out the few things that I needed and that was it. I don't know why, but I would not go in there. I had 2 cats who didn't like strangers, so I got to where, number one, I put a sliver of paper in the door jam on the bottom. So if I came home and that paper was on the ground I would know that somebody had been in my home. I also knew if my cats weren't there that somebody was in the house, because they were always there to greet me. You're probably wondering why I'm taking so many safety precautions. I didn't mention this before, but it's very important. Other than my cell phone, he had also taken my wallet. I didn't realize that right away. My wallet had my current address. So now the robbers had my wallet and my cell phone and I was living by myself. They never found my personal items, so they are floating around out there. It was very scary. So yes, within my 10 days, the first week I spent pretty much everyday with the detectives or at the police department. About 24 hours after the robbery I got a phone call at night, around midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning. I got a phone call from one of the police officers to say, "We got him." I was so relieved.

Scott

I guess they knew that you wouldn't mind getting a phone call at 1 in the morning with this kind of news.

Jen

No! In fact my first question was, "Does he have my phone and my wallet?" They said, "No ma'am, we weren't able to recover that." In the process of the investigation I had told them that on my phone I had an app called "Where's My Droid" which is a cell phone locator. At one point, they had used that app and that is what had led them to about 20 miles north, in the area where the other robberies occurred and they found him there at a bar having a good time.

Scott

So he must have had your phone with him at that time then?

Jen

Yes! He never got rid of it. Which is good and bad, but as a robber I don't know why you would keep someone's cell phone, knowing that technology is very advanced, you can find all kinds of things using your phone. No, he kept it.

Scott

Why weren't they able to get your phone back then if he had it at that time?

Jen

You know, I don't know. I never asked that question. That actually is a really good question. At that moment I didn't think of that, I think I was so relieved that they got to him. That's a really good question and I don't have the answer to that.

Scott

Yeah, technology is advanced but the IQ of a criminal isn't necessarily that advanced.

Jen

You are exactly right about that. (laughter) So I was dealing with the triggers at home and feeling very unsafe, but I decided that I needed to see my family also within this timeframe. They lived a couple hours north of where I did, my brother and my sister. I arranged to also make sure my children were there. Fortunately they were staying at a friend's house at the time that all of this happened. My kids, they always have play guns and I didn't have a problem with guns- I still don't have a problem with guns to be honest with you. I grew up in a hunting home so I was familiar with guns and hunter safety and all that other stuff. I told my children, "You can't bring your guns. I can't see them." Not even their Airsoft guns. I went up to my family's house, and normally we would play cards and have a good time; but all I could do was sit there on the couch. I remember just playing Angry Birds on my phone, at that point I had gotten a new phone.

I remember behind me hearing my sister-in-law say, "I don't know what to do for her. She's just sitting there." I found out that one of the challenges for the victims is their family; because they don't know what to do. They want to help but they don't know what to do because quite frankly, the victim doesn't know what they need. Their world is so turned upside down, that just being quiet and distracted by electronic games was all I could handle at this time. I needed their presence, so I think it's really important for families to know that just their presence is important and we don't necessarily need you to fix anything at that moment. I remember that was kind of hard for them. I wasn't the normal Jen that they were used to and they didn't know how to handle it; but we made it through it. It's ok.

In the meantime, after the robber, they caught the driver as well. I had never seen the driver, but I ended up having to go to a jury trial for him. I had never been in front of a jury or in a courtroom before. For me, that was a shocking and traumatic situation.

Scott

What was traumatic about being in the courtroom?

Jen

All I knew was what you see on TV, but I had to get up on the stand, you have 10 strangers looking at you and listening to you words, you have someone looking at you in the courtroom

who you've never seen. They just wanted to know the trauma, as an accomplice, what he had done to me. Also, I didn't realize when I went into the courtroom that his family and friends were there. All of the sudden a new fear set in of, "Oh my gosh, they know what I look like. They know what I drive. They could follow me home." That was really tough because even if I started to get a sliver of feeling safe back, it was now gone again. This new fear came in that I had to deal with. I asked the law enforcement, "What if they follow me home?" They said, "You know the chances of that happening are very slim. It's not something they tend to do." In the back of my mind I was thinking, "Well, I didn't think I would get robbed either." I wasn't trying to beat the odds or anything like that. So that was really interesting and a whole new step to this process.

I started therapy. Mind you this is still going within the 10 days I had off of work. I started therapy and that was very helpful. I don't remember a lot of my conversation with him, but I've always been an advocate of therapy anyway. I think if you deal with people you need therapy. It's really helpful in building relationships and learning how to cope with things, because we are all different. Then my 10 days were up, and I was expected back to work. My therapist said, "No. You are not ready." I told him, "I have to go. I have to try because I am one of those people where I don't stop half way down a road and wonder what-if the rest of my life. I have to go to the stop sign and know." So I went back to work.

It was very weird to walk in, especially into the back room. I stood there and it was like lightbulbs going off. Different triggers of things I remembered like standing in front of my desk, the phone that pulled out of the wall, hearing that door be pulled shut that had never been shut before. I would not go into the room with the hangers where we were left. I wouldn't go in there and I never did. I remember we had a conference call led by my district manager and she asked me how I was. I said, "I don't think I'm ok." She said, "Well you know you're going to have to figure it out because this is the busiest time of the year." I understood that because it was business. She still has a business to run and numbers to make and all these other things to think of. What was really hard for me is that I was a very accomplished manager. I was successful. I had a huge impact on the district number and performance and things of that nature. It was fun, I was a media spokesperson for the local market, so I really enjoyed that. As I was sitting there having this conversation with the district manager and admitting that maybe I can't do this right now, it brought about a feeling of inadequacy and weakness. I felt like, "I just saved these people's lives and you're just going to discard me." So now it's a new feeling that I'm trying to process as well.

Scott

Yeah it sounds like your work performance was almost a big part of your identity, and now you seem to be losing that as well. That's gotta be pretty tough.

Jen

You know, you're exactly right about that. It was very much a part of my identity. I thrived at my job. I enjoyed working with people in training and development. I was only working there for a couple of months and then they gave me my own store. I got credit card sign ups like no other. I was really known for that, I would teach classes on it over conference calls. It was very much my identity and my success and title.

So I got up from the desk after my conference call and I went to head out to the sales floor with all of these thoughts going through my mind. I could feel anxiety trying to set in. I started to come out of the back room and I stopped because there was a man right there. I just about burst into tears. My assistant manager came over and I grabbed her arm. She asked, "Are you

ok?" I said, "No. This is what happens to me." The gentleman was apologizing to me, and I was saying, "No. It's not you, it's me." You know that famous relationship line, if it was ever true in my life it was in that moment. I felt so bad and I was embarrassed. Come to find out, he was our security guard that had re-installed that service into our store. I told my assistant manager, "I can't do this. I know now I definitely cannot do this." I called my district manager and told her what happened and I said, "I'm really sorry, but I can't do this." I could hear the disappointment in her voice, which was really hard to hear. It re-instilled that feeling of disappointment in myself and feelings of, "Why can't you be strong enough? Why can't you get over this? You're fine. Everybody lived. Move on." It doesn't work that way.

I continued to go to therapy. I was on workman's compensation for 6 weeks. Mind you, it's just me, so I can't be without work. I have bills to pay. So now I was without a job, I'm going to therapy, I'm on workman's comp which is not 100% pay, and I had to find a way to find another job. In the process, I now had to go to court for the robber's trial. I'll tell you, I had a stack of subpoenas. I must have had about 25 of them. For me being the main witness, you have to go for motions, pretrial, and all of these things. Even if it was just to sit on the bench, I had to be present. Trying to find a new job, I had to automatically explain, "There are times when I can't come to work because I'm not given notice. I'm given notice the night before that they need me in court at 9 a.m." So it made it challenging, especially in retail, because a lot of individuals don't understand that process. They are focused on business. I went in front of a jury again for the robber. Everytime back then it was so hard, I just cried and cried and told my story. He ended up being sentenced to jail. I don't remember how long. There's facts that you are aware of but you don't necessarily care about because you are really just trying to forget this. Yet I was being dragged back into court again and again, and now I had to see him again, and I just wanted it to go away. So I knew he was sent to jail, and in my mind I was like, "Ok that's fine." I was starting to feel safe again and work through all of those feelings. I ended up finding another job that was a little bit further away but in my same field. So that worked out fine.

About 2 years later, I thought this was all over and thought I had dealt with the emotional trauma. I had moved a couple hours north so I wasn't even in the same area. I kind of wanted to start over. I got a phone call. I'll never forget where I was standing. The phone call came through and they said, "We need you to come to federal court." I told the lady, "I can't!" I started to cry and she said, "I'm sorry, but you're going to have to come." Everything came flooding back and all I could do was cry. I went home and about a month later the court date was scheduled. It was an hour and a half away, so I drove there. I remember this was the first time that all of us victims had been together, now in this room.

Scott

So everybody that was in the store at the time was attending this court session?

Jen

Yes. We were all called into federal court. It was a very serious situation because he had multiple robberies in multiple counties. Not that anything like this is simple, but this was not just one store in one county, there were several places involved. This was not his first crime.

Scott

So what was it like seeing all those people again? The people you had been through this traumatic experience with?

Jen

Actually I was thankful to see them. The one thing that I thought of all the time was that I wanted to thank them. I wanted to thank them for trusting me to not react. One of them could've wanted to be a hero. Anything could've happened in that scenario when you're dealing with that many people. I looked at them and just said, "Thank you." I was so thankful for that opportunity. They went around the room and wanted to compensate us for our mileage and what not. The lady came to me and I just started to cry and I just said, "Ma'am, I just want you to leave me alone. I don't want your money. I don't want anything. I just want you to leave me alone." That was hard because I was the only one crying there amongst the other victims turned survivors.

This courtroom was very different. It was much darker, there were more people, it was bigger. I remember walking down the aisle and getting in my little box. The judge, once I was sitting, was on my left; and I had the robber right in front of me. He had on glasses now. The jury was also on my left. I started being asked questions and I asked for Kleenex, because I just cried. I remember that Kleenex ended up being a ball, almost disintegrating in my hand, because I was trying to wipe up the tears. They finally brought me some water, so I could speak as well. The toughest thing about that was that they tried to tear apart my character. As soon as they started to do that, the person who was assigned to defend us stood up and said, "No. We're not going to do this. That's not fair." So it was stopped, and I'm really glad. When a victim goes through- I'm just going to be honest -there were times where I wish I didn't know the robber, I wish I didn't see him. I wish all of those things, because going to court was I think harder than going through the whole incident. The incident lasted, let's just say minutes. Court lasted up to 2 years.

Scott

You keep ripping open the same wound.

Jen

Exactly and I had to see him. I don't want to see him. I finished day 1 of being in front of the jury. I don't remember what happened, but I had to come back again. I drove back the next morning and got on the stand and again was asked more questions. Finally the judge looks at me and says, "Is there anything else you would like to say or ask?" I looked at him and said, "Sir, do I ever have to come back?" He said, "No ma'am, you don't." Then I looked at him, said thank you, and walked out of that courtroom never to return. I have not returned, and I hope I never have to be in a courtroom again. I do want to say this, because court was really tough and that is absolutely how I felt at that moment, but I would do it again. There are many who live with the, "They didn't catch him, what is he going to do next." He already went from just taking money and leaving to now abducting people. What would be next? For me at least I got closure knowing that I helped to put him away. I've talked to other people where the perpetrator never got caught. Then they live with wondering, "What else has he done?"

Scott

I've heard you say that you thought after this of what could have happened. That was what haunted you, what could have gone worse. Why do you think that those kinds of thoughts came into your head?

Jen

That's a really good question. Some people look at it as, what could they have done differently to change the outcome. I don't think there's anything I could have done different. There are things that could have gone wrong. One of the other victims could have tried to be a hero. When we went to the back room we went past the bathrooms, and what if he had taken me in there and raped me? What if he shot me? I put myself in a position where those things could have happened. I already knew that these things were not his normal behavior compared to the prior robberies. Those things haunted me, those questions. That was what was challenging for me. When you're in those situations you just don't know, everything is a series of events. I'm fortunate that none of that did happen.

Scott

It's been several years since this took place. Prior to our conversation here I was doing some research and I found the robber's mugshot and I sent it to you asking, "Is this the guy?" You had not seen his face in years. What went through your head when you saw him again?

Jen

Honestly the same thing. I don't have a problem getting information, I think it's important. I hadn't seen his face in 10 years so I think it really shocked me that when I did I cried. It triggered something that I thought I had perhaps worked through. It made me realize that I hadn't, but that that's ok because I don't have to look at his face often. I did it for research purposes and I would do it again, absolutely. I have chills now. Yeah, the reaction surprised me, maybe it should and maybe it shouldn't.

Scott

If someone listening to this conversation has family or a friend who has been through something like what you went through, what's the best thing for them to do or to say to help that person?

Jen

That's a really good question. As the victim, we don't really know ourselves. I think that's part of the frustration and maybe even sadness for family members. We don't want to see someone else hurting. There is a natural instinct to help right? If you see somebody has a cut, you want to put a band-aid on it. You want to help with the healing process. For me I didn't even know what I needed, I just knew that I needed them around me. I felt safe and I knew they loved me. So I think just the presence is all that somebody really needs in the beginning. If they want to talk they'll talk and with you being there they know that you're there to listen if that's what they need.

Scott

It seems that this experience has kind of spawned a new adventure for you, and that is, your own podcast.

Jen

I believe everything happens for a reason. I've often asked myself, "Why did this happen to me?" I think now it's come into light via my podcast, "I Need Blue." It is a victim turned survivor advocate show, based upon real stories such as mine, but on any topic. It's not just limited to robberies. There is sensitive information so I always make sure that people are aware of that. I wanted a place for victims turned survivors to share their stories, fears, tears, joys, accomplishments, where they are today, and what they did to get there. I think it's really important because when you realize you're not alone, it makes the healing process easier. In turn, as you heard me say, one of the most memorable thankful moments of that experience was when the police officers pushed that door open. I will never forget, that moment instilled

that little bit of safety, that feeling of being safe in me that had been lost. I'll never forget that. They were there through the whole process helping me. Having to go back to the scene and help them with whatever they needed, they were very sensitive to my needs. Emotionally, physically, whatever, as a victim. They were very patient, empathetic and helpful. I feel that that side of what they do needs to be told. Not everybody goes through this experience, and until you do, you don't understand and you don't appreciate it. So thank you to them.

Scott

That's why you named the podcast, "I Need Blue" blue indicating law enforcement. So where can people find this show? Do you have a website?

Jen

I do. It's www.ineedblue.net.

Scott

If people like hearing the stories you just told, you're going to have some similar stories on that. I know my audience loves hearing first hand true stories.

Jen

Absolutely, I just launched my fifth episode this morning, so I'm really excited about that. If any of your listeners have a story they want to share, absolutely contact me. I want to help you. I'm a platform for you to share your story to help others.

Scott

We'll have links to all of that in the show notes for this episode. Jen, thanks again.

Jen

Oh you're so welcome, thank you for helping me share my story.

If you liked Jen's story, there's another previous episode of this podcast that you might also enjoy. The guest was a young man named Joey. He was working delivering pizzas, and he ended up saving a woman who was being held hostage. Here's a short clip from that story:

Joey

So I gave him the food and at one point he just kind of grabbed the box and then opened up to make sure the toppings were right. He was asking the woman he was with, "Is this what you ordered?" She was like, "Yeah that's what I ordered." I just happened to look up at her, as he was looking at the pizza, and I noticed that she had a black eye on her left eye. She pointed to it and mouthed, "Help me" to me. She didn't actually say it, she just wanted for me to see that she needed help without vocally or audibly saying it, so he wouldn't hear.

That episode is called Joey Prevented a Kidnapping, and it's at WhatWasThatLike.com/10, because it was episode #10 of this podcast.

Thanks to listeners like you, this podcast continues to grow. At this point, each episode has tens of thousands of listeners just in the first 30 days of being published. And we're on our way to making that **hundreds** of thousands of listeners for each episode.

One thing that's happened, with the growth of the audience, is that I have a lot of listeners who discover the show, listen to all the past episodes, and then they think, "Hey, I have a story that

might be good for the podcast!" So they go to the website and click on Submit your story, and they tell me what happened.

And I love that! So if you're thinking about maybe sending in a story, I wanted to let you know about a few types of stories that I typically don't cover, and a few stories that I'm actually looking for right now.

The ones I usually have to decline are mostly in 3 areas.

Number 1, anything to do with the paranormal. There are lots of podcasts doing those stories, so I leave that to them.

Number 2, stories that are mostly medical-related. Like someone who had a rare disease, and was given a 1% chance of survival, and now it's 5 years later and they're still alive. Great story, but I just don't do them here on this show.

And Number 3, stories where the primary topic is drugs, alcohol or sex. These stories are just way too common and honestly I don't really find them interesting. If someone did something stupid while they were drunk, I really don't care. I mean, you've seen the kind of stories I do on this podcast. A story about being drunk or high wouldn't really fit in.

Now, having said all that, there are a few stories that I'm interested in covering. I'd like to talk to someone who has lost a limb due to a shark attack. I'd like to have someone who was a passenger in a car when it was hit by a train. I'd also like to talk to someone who was trapped in rubble for a few days after an earthquake, and then rescued. And there's a particular occupation I'd like to hear about – someone who is an employee at a prison, and in charge of execution.

Those are just a few of the stories I'm actively pursuing. If you know of anyone like that, or if you yourself has been through something like that, please get in touch with me. You can contact me through the website, or submit your story directly there – WhatWasThatLike.com.

And now, this week's Listener Story. Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

Dave

This happened to me a few months ago at my current workplace. Occasionally my wife will be a very kind soul and will actually make my lunch for me for work if I don't end up having time the night before. Sometimes when she does this she'll include a note that she'll write on a napkin or paper towel. Usually it says something like, "Have a great day" and such. This time she wrote a note that said, "I love you - love me" in Sharpie and on a paper towel. I work in an office and it has a small break room where I eat my lunch. On this particular day, I sat down in the break room and began to eat my lunch, normal situation. On this table there happened to be a black Sharpie and little paper towels. I set them aside to give myself a little room to eat. I set up all my things and began eating and watching a video on my phone. As I'm eating, one of the department heads comes in and a few minutes later so does my boss. I chat a little with them both and while talking the department head happens to look at the note my wife wrote me, on the paper towel in Sharpie, next to the roll of paper towels and a Sharpie. The same note that says, "I love you - love me." He then proceeds to ask, "Dave, did you write yourself a note?" I had to look at the note, the Sharpie, the paper towel, my boss and the department head. They seemed to have a growing sense of concern for me. I quickly realized how it must appear to both of them. My mouth was stuffed with food, so I had to very quickly explain to them that I'm not in need of serious emotional help. It didn't help that I was also laughing at the time since this was a very hard situation to believe. Luckily they both laughed and believed me and they

haven't brought it up since, so hopefully I'm doing good there. Thank you very much for listening and have a great day.