

Interview on Interpersonal Violence/Assault with Lynn, a survivor

Hello, my name is Susan and I would like to welcome you back to Rising from the Ashes: Trauma Talks, a podcast series brought to you by UB School of Social Work, The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care. This series provides an opportunity for individuals to share their witness of how strength and resiliency has allowed them to rise from the ashes. Trauma Talks follows people who have both worked within the field of trauma as well as those who have experienced trauma. Here we will reflect on how Trauma-Informed Care can assist those who have experienced traumatic events to embrace a new life of wholeness, hope, strength, courage, safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Today, I'm here with Lynn. Lynn is a survivor of domestic violence. On behalf of the Institute we'd like to thank you for being here today and sharing your story with us. I'm going to let Lynn begin by sharing your story, if you don't mind, that's allowed you to rise above and become even more strong and confident as a person.

1:01 **Lynn:** Thank you so much. September 27th, 2007 started out just as another regular day in my life—things to do, places to go, people to see—while it started out normal, it ended as the bleakest day of my life. It was Thursday, again, September 27th, I was kidnapped and raped by my now ex-husband. After dropping my daughter off at school, I was home trying to get some rest and trying to regroup. The day before I had had an incident with my ex-husband that made me realize my marriage was over. I just laid (*sic*) down and I heard some noises from upstairs and then I heard someone coming down the stairs. I barely got up and was shocked to see my ex standing in front of me. I knew by the look in his eyes he was going to hurt me and I was right; I was petrified. I tried to get to the sliding glass door, but he stopped me. He told me to do as he said or he would kill me. He yanked the phone out of the wall and he held the cord in his hands. I had every reason to believe that he would do exactly what he said he would do — to kill me. He told me to take off my clothes, reluctantly I did. Then he pushed me to the floor and got on top of me. I tried to scream, but he started to choke me. He over powered me. I knew right then that my life would not and could not ever be the same. After it was over, he continued to emotionally torture me. I was curled up in a ball on the chair not moving, just wishing and waiting for it all to be over. Eventually he left, taking my cell phone with him, and he casually walked out the front door, across the neighborhood, into the fields. He had rented a car and parked it in the development next door and he had this all planned. After watching him leave, I ran to my neighbors, she's rarely home during the day, but thankfully she was there that day. We called the police and they arrived within minutes. I was put in the back seat of a police car and the officer asked me to write down everything that happened. I'm sure you can all understand; I was not really sure what just had happened. The man I married, for better and for worse, the father of my daughter, had just held me against my will and raped me. Countless officers were asking me questions: "What was he wearing? Was he on drugs? Where'd he go? What kind of car does he drive? Were you arguing? How'd he get in the house? Did he have a key? Where did he go? Did he have a cell phone?" It was the same thing over and over again. Answering all these rather straightforward questions should have been easy, but I was in another world. In one horrific event my heart shattered into a bazillion little pieces. I lost everything I knew, everything I believed in, everything I felt. It hurt to breathe. It hurt from the tips of my toes to the top of my head. I didn't want to move. I didn't want to get out of bed. I didn't want to feel ever again. But I didn't have time to think about that; I had to think about my daughter. What would I say to her?

What would we do? My ex was on the run for three days and for three days I lived in a fantasy world. I pretended to work, I pretended to be a mom, I pretended that I wasn't scared and I played the game very well, but he was on the run and wanted by the police and the incident was published in the paper. Somehow my ex was able to obtain my new cell phone number. He called me because he knew he was in trouble. He had tried to overdose on some pills. Was I supposed to feel sorry for him? He never apologized and I told him to turn himself in. That same day he went to the emergency room [at the] local hospital and called our pastor. Our pastor called the police to take him into custody. We were finally safe, but that was far from the truth. We would never truly be safe again. Only when I know he's dead will we truly be safe.

Just a little bit of history prior to that awful day. My marriage had been going through some problems. I didn't think the problems were anything we couldn't overcome, but I was starting to have panic attacks. After talking with my physician, he recommended I see someone. After meeting with him, I knew my anxiety and panic attacks were directly the result of the issues with my marriage. He prescribed some medication to help me. I had to make a change to save myself and my marriage and I had asked my ex to move out to give me some time to help out marriage and to help myself. He lost it. He became belligerent. He wasn't going to move out; he refused to hear what I had to say. He kept me up all night yelling at me, torching me, all while my daughter was sleeping in the other room. He became so angry he pulled my hair while pulling my glasses off of my face. I ran to the phone, but he got there first. "This was not happening to me"; I was scared. The next morning, on the advice of my attorney, I went to file a police report. That was the first time I had ever heard the words "domestic violence." I heard the police officer and he told me, but it didn't quite register. I couldn't believe that what my ex did to me was considered domestic violence. The police were going to pick him up and charge him; what did I do? I had to face the consequences of *my* actions and the reality of what had occurred. My attorney and my doctor suggested I seek counseling through an agency that specialized in domestic violence. The visits were very eye opening. The more I learned, the more I understood. The more I understood, the stronger I became. I realized I had been a victim long before I went to the police. Again, I had to process what had happened to me for many, many years and that was difficult. After he was picked up and released, my ex never came home again. We worked out joint-visitation and child custody payments. I truly thought we would work through this. He was offered to complete a PTI program, after conclusion of the program his charges would be expunged from his record. I supported him to complete the program, for him and for us and for my daughter.

6:46 **Susan:** Do you mind me asking what a PTI program is?

6:49 **Lynn:** You go through a yearlong program through law-enforcement. You go visit jail cells, you walk through the judicial system, and understanding what happens...

7:00 **Susan:** So it's like a prevention program.

7:02 **Lynn:** Prevention program. Yes, thank you. And then the charges would be expunged from his record like it never happened.

7:08 **Susan:** Ok, so prevention/intervention.

7:09 **Lynn:** Yeah. So, I supported him to complete the program, as I said, for him, or myself, and for our family. But something still wasn't right. Every time we talked about setting up visitation, it always went back to when we could come home, "When can we talk? When are we going to get back together?" The more he pushed, the more I retreated. And he still was not listening. But I was becoming stronger, finding my voice and he didn't like that and he started to see that. One afternoon he called to pick up his mail at the house and he was not permitted to be at the house. I sensed anger in his voice and I told him we could meet at the library. It was public, [I] didn't think there would be an issue. It was Sunday. My daughter and I always went to the library on Sunday. So it was consistent for her, in trying to keep some stability for her during this dramatic time. I pulled into the parking lot and started to get out. The moment I got out of the car I immediately saw my ex's truck speeding towards us. Trusting my instincts, I got just back in the car. By the time I pulled forward, my ex had T-boned me. I was trapped. He ran up to the window and started yelling at me to open the window. I refused. He confused to yell at me all while my daughter was in the back seat crying. He didn't care. He said he would leave if I gave him his mail. So, I foolishly opened the window to hand him the mail and he proceeded to grab my shirt collar and grabbed the keys from the ignition. Thinking quickly, I pushed on the horn. I scared him and he threw the keys back at me. Someone heard us and I yelled to call the police. By the time the police got to the library he was long gone. Much to my dismay, the police had to talk to my daughter about the incident. Another police report was filed. My ex tormented me in front of my daughter. How far was he willing to go? I could no longer believe in him or believe in our marriage and that was a tough pill to swallow.

9:01 **Susan:** So she had witnessed a lot of the abuse beforehand as well? He didn't try to hide it from her or...?

9:06 **Lynn:** Limited amounts, but looking back enough that she—

9:10 **Susan:** She really knew what was going on.

9:11 **Lynn:** She really knew what was going on, yes. This was her biggest incident that she witnessed. Fortunately she wasn't in the house when I was kidnapped, but enough [that] she sensed.

9:22 **Susan:** An how old at this point?

9:23 **Lynn:** She was five. I could no longer trust him. Someone that would upset my daughter was no longer permitted to be around her or myself. I continued to live as normal as possible so my daughter could finish kindergarten where we were. I was sleeping my cell phone on my chest, the door barricaded with chairs, had police escorts, [I was] always looking over my shoulder for his car, calling friends before and after I left the house. We had lived in a small community so it was pretty normal to see him within the community. My family sensed my fear, they told me to leave immediately. So, within a week, I packed up the car with out belonging and left everything we knew. We left our hopes and our dreams behind; we would have to start over. It was more than the move that scared me; I was just plain terrified to start over. I took a risk moving home because domestic violence affects everyone that is associated with me. I floundered for a year searching for help and support that I really, desperately needed. While I

had the support of my family and my friends, which was truly appreciated and obviously needed, they didn't understand what we were going through. And then only after a year and a half did I find the services of the Family Justice Center, which was a perfect match for me and my daughter in what we needed at that time and knowing that they're there for a lifetime. Knowing everyday something else could occur, may not occur, but knowing they're there was the support I needed—or didn't need, whatever I needed from them—they were there.

11:01 **Susan:** That's great.

11:02 **Lynn:** So that's my story in a nutshell.

11:04 **Susan:** That's a hard story. Thank you for sharing that.

11:07 **Lynn:** You're welcome.

11:08 **Susan:** So, one of the things we talk about in trauma-informed care is we talk about these five principles of trauma-informed care. And the principles are safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. And those are tools that we see that service providers can use to help people who have had experiences like you just shared.

11:29 **Lynn:** Right.

11:30 **Susan:** You talked a lot about the fear before your marriage ended and even after and that ending incident. At what point did you feel like there was some safety for you? Did anyone do anything that made you feel safe or when was the first time you felt safe—or do you?

11:49 **Lynn:** Safety is something I used to take for granted and probably most realistically, if I didn't truly feel safe until I moved home, to my family home with my mother—and even then looking over my shoulder. Probably within the last two years do I truly feel safe because I'm now in my own place, we have our own place, our own — I don't have anyone else to count on but myself, but that took a long time even to feel safe in my new place. Locking doors and even then, my new place, which is still — I've been there a few years now, but — [it] has an upstairs and I believe I was meant to be there to get through hearing footsteps on the stairs.

12:33 **Susan:** Oh, right. Sure.

12:34 **Lynn:** Because when I moved home, back to my mother's, our family home, my room was upstairs and for many months I would still feel like I heard footsteps. And then when I moved into my new place, I would hear footsteps again. So, probably within the last two years or so do I truly feel safe, but I never want to take that for granted.

12:48 **Susan:** Because when you've gone without feeling safe for so long...

13:00 **Lynn:** Correct. And it's something I truly took for granted. And you don't realize. I mean, I get double-checking to lock the doors and looking out the window and thinking you see something. Never, obviously, before my incident had I ever done that. [I] never had reason to.

But I always have this little cloud over my head; my ex is still out there. Real safety, no, but I'm able to live comfortably and feel safe.

13:25 **Susan:** You're taking measures to create your own sense of safety.

13:27 **Lynn:** Yes. Exactly.

13:30 **Susan:** Did anyone—I mean you talked about the police asking you questions over and over again, which we now know can actually re-traumatize people over and over again.

13:38 **Lynn:** Absolutely.

13:39 **Susan:** Which is something, actually there is a risk of doing that with these interviews. So, again, in the interview we want to make sure that we aren't re-traumatizing you, so if you're not feeling comfortable let me know.

13:50 **Lynn:** Thank you.

13:51 **Susan:** Did anyone, especially after that horrible incident, did anyone do anything initially to make you feel safe? Was it the police or a medical provider or your counselor, anyone?

14:02 **Lynn:** After I finally got counseling, in talking with my counselor after the incident did I start to breathe again and start to feel normal. I don't want to say feel safe, but at least start something. [The] police, no not really, it was all doing their jobs. I could say, yes, they put me in the back of the police car, would not let me get out of the car, I couldn't go back into the house, I couldn't get my glasses, I couldn't do anything. I was in the car.

14:34 **Susan:** But that's a scary time in itself, too.

14:35 **Lynn:** Right. And I understand that now that it was their safety measures, I didn't understand that there was no one—

14:42 **Susan:** So no one was explaining it to you that this is what we are going to do to keep you safe.

14:45 **Lynn:** No, right. Which, I now I see what they were doing, but then at that moment, no. And even getting to the hospital, no, I was left in a stark naked, white walls by myself until the nurse and the doctor came in before doing the kit.

14:49 **Susan:** They didn't let anyone stay with you or there was no advocate?

15:02 **Lynn:** No advocate, no nothing. I did not have an advocate for the services at the time until after my exam was over. As a matter of fact, I picked up the phone, there was a phone in the waiting room, and I called my attorney and called some friends to come meet me because I was alone. I was thinking of my daughter.

15:17 **Susan:** And where was she at that point?

15:19 **Lynn:** She was at school. And I'm like, "Oh my god. Somebody's gotta get her." I mean I went in to fight or flight and I'm like, "I gotta do something before he gets there. I need her to be safe." So, my attorney and a friend, and yes my friend got there, but prior to that, no one.

15:36 **Susan:** Did you feel a little bit better when you knew that she was safe?

15:39 **Lynn:** Yes. After I knew my daughter was safe, I felt better. Knowing my ex was out there, I had every reason to believe he'd go after her—and that's my vulnerability—so someone had to get her. I had to know she was ok.

15:53 **Susan:** What did your counselor do specifically that helped you feel like you could start to move on or start to feel safe enough to move on?

15:59 **Lynn:** Truly, she listened. She let me speak. She just listened. Didn't say a lot, she listened. Extended her hand. I remember she taught me how to start breathing again—breathing I still do to this day, you know in through your belly and out through your nose, you know, taking those breaths, those grounding breaths. It was huge. Obviously with her training, understanding that, but that first session after all this was huge. And just once I called her she's like, "Get in. Come see me" and just listened.

16:30 **Susan:** And you mentioned receiving services here at the Family Justice Center. What are the things that they do or did that make you feel safe and your daughter to, how did you rebuild that sense of safety in her?

16:39 **Lynn:** The moment I walked in the door at the [Family] Justice Center, it was just like relief. And I can't explain it; it was just that welcoming and this is where I needed to be. Walking through the facility and hearing stories— "I'm not alone." I heard about, you know, yeah, there are people going through this, but until it happens to you and finally meeting other people, I was like, "This is bigger than I ever knew. This is a bigger issue than I ever knew." [I] never thought, obviously, it would happen to me. I had that preconceived notion of what domestic violence meant. So just being there and knowing they were there to help and finally found my spot talk home. Because I had been floundering and where to go and the right services that fit for my daughter and I. And after meeting with the counselor here at the [Family] Justice Center, they enlightened me and reminded me that there may be a time when something may be needed for my daughter. Not knowing at the time, she was fine, going to school, doing well, making friends, made the adjustment—easier than I did, easier than I expected her to, but they are resilient. [She] took the lead from me and me still playing my game with her by playing that role for her to make her feel safe and comfortable was important for me and for her. So, knowing if I needed them her for, they were a phone call away was huge, because I didn't know in such a big city where would I go first, where would I start? Throw a dart at the dartboard and hope for the best. I didn't want to take that chance, when that time came it was going to be needed immediately.

18:21 **Susan:** So one of the other five principles that I mentioned is trust. It sounds like you had some folks, like when you were calling folks from the hospital, that you already trusted, that would be there to support you and believe you, and help take care of you.

18:35 **Lynn:** Absolutely.

18:36 **Susan:** Is there—and it sounds like actually when you're talk about the Family Justice Center, that that trust is not only in their services providers, but it also helped to build trust for you in understanding and believing what you had been through. Were there things specifically that helped you begin to trust again whether that was yourself or other people?

18:55 **Lynn:** That still takes time, but again people just listening. Putting me in touch with other women that have been through domestic violence. And having that connection was huge to start building trust. And hearing their stories helped break down some of my barriers and my walls and I think just getting back in the work place, because I had taken some time off, and [it] kind of forced me to start trusting even on a professional level, which worked its way into my personal life in putting positive role models in my daughter's life for trust as well was huge. Is there one specific thing that they did? Not that I can remember, so I think it was just over time and how they've stayed connected to me.

19:40 **Susan:** So it was building the relationship of trust over time.

19:43 **Lynn:** Right. Absolutely.

19:45 **Susan:** That makes sense. Is there any one thing that a provider said or did that helped you build that trust? Is there anything that sticks out for you?

19:53 **Lynn:** More so what my providers have told me is the time, in trusting the time. And first trusting myself and what I was going through and to recognize that before I began to trust them and what they were telling me because other services I had weren't necessarily the right fit and recognizing that I didn't, not distrust them, but didn't have such great beliefs if that makes sense. So if they were referring or telling me to do something it just wasn't—like, "Mmm, I'm not sure this is right."

20:25 **Susan:** Right. This doesn't quite match who we are and what's going on.

20:28 **Lynn:** "and where we are and what I was saying." And so again I go back to that they listened to me and what my daughter and I had been through to offer suggestions and didn't say, "This is where you need to go," but offering suggestions and that, in looking back, helped me trust myself in the services that were like, "Ok, here or here would be a good choice" and I'm sure that the one I chose would be a wonderful choice and I made that choice, but they made me see, "You made that choice." So that helped me start trusting myself, my instincts. Helping me continue to be a mom in where we needed to go.

21:00 **Susan:** And it's great that you actually talk about choice, because that's one of the other principles, so that's perfect timing. So it sounds like you did have a choice in picking your services helped a lot in finding what worked for you.

21:12 **Lynn:** Yes

21:13 **Susan:** Did you ever feel like you were not given a choice? Was there ever a time when choices were limited?

21:18 **Lynn:** I would say my choices were more limited from where I came in the south where the violence first happened. I was down south. So choices were more limited in what was available to me, so I didn't have as many outlets. Although a good choice, and it very much worked for me, [was] coming home, there were many more resources available and that is where I go back to it was overwhelming and I floundered for a good year knowing where to go, where do I start, started with the church, because that's my foundation and that wasn't a good fit; they didn't get it. While they provided guidance, which I appreciate, it just didn't fit. And so I'm like, "Ok, we need to move on from there." For a while I wasn't doing anything and that wasn't working and then I actually saw a video on the Family Justice Center online on Buffalo Rising and I'm like, "I've got nothing to lose, let's give this a shot" and it was the perfect fit.

22:15 **Susan:** And so, looking back now for women who are in that point in time that you were back then, do you have a suggestion for how they can have choice, but it's not quite so overwhelming? Is there anything that providers can do differently?

22:30 **Lynn:** I think, the [Family] Justice Center does a phenomenal job with what they do in getting the word out. I mean, I think just continuing to get that out there is whatever way, I say with as many tentacles as we can, we're hard to reach. In that moment I was at it's hard, taking myself back to that point, to make that leap to say, "I do need help. I can't do this alone." Being a woman you're supposed to be strong, you're supposed to have the answers. Getting to the point where, "I can't. I don't know those answers. I can't just sweep this under the rug and pretend it'll go away" it's a huge leap, you know, going through the guilt. "It's my fault? Whose fault?" But in finally recognizing that is starting over and that was extremely difficult for me at my age. It was like, "Ah! You have a great opportunity! A new place to stay. New furniture." and I'm like, "I'm forty-seven years old." That's hard. It's hard to build friendships, lifelong friendships at forty. Going through what I see my daughter go through and "I don't want to start over again. This wasn't supposed to happen. It wasn't in the plan," you know? I'm supposed to be in the rocking chair with my ex. While yes, I've recognized that some of it is wonderful, I can say now, had I not been through what I went through, I wouldn't have some of the relationships I have now and some wonderful people and experienced some wonderful things. But it's hard; it's a challenge. It's hard to get there and it's hard for providers to find those people. They are obviously out there— too many out there—to get them to come to you.

24:06 **Susan:** Well you said two things now that resonate for me. You said it takes time to build trust, but you also talked about the Family Justice Center being here for you forever. So, in terms of whatever stage you're in in recovery and resiliency, they're going to meet you in that place

and so it sounds like that's one of the things that providers can do is to know that it takes time and know that needs are going to change and being in relationship overtime is effective.

24:35 **Lynn:** That long term; that they're in it for the long-haul, that service is going to be with you from start to finish. Finish is who knows when. I love the part of the [Family] Justice Center, while there's many services that fall under the [Family] Justice Center, it's that family component. That while I'm talking to you and I may finish my time with you, but it maybe someone else who will take me through this next step, but it's still all under the Family Justice Center umbrella. So they are, wherever we're at, whatever we're feeling, they understand that.

25:05 **Susan:** And it sounds like another gift that they have given you is empowering you, too. I mean you said earlier when we were talking that you had been asked to speak at one point and that was a part of this journey for you. Do you mind telling us about that? Is there other ways that you feel empowered?

25:23 **Lynn:** Certainly. It's obviously been many years since 2007 and initially I'm thinking, "Oh! I got this. I can do this now that I found the [Family] Justice Center. I can do this. I'm going to get through this and maybe me putting myself on a timeline, and I got this. In a few years I'll be good" and realizing, "no, it's going to take a little bit then a hop, skip, and a jump" in going through the emotions I was in being back home in professionally finding my spot for work and personally for my daughter and what our next steps were is a journey. And one time I thought I was ready to speak and I wasn't, and they recognized that and they were ok with that. They were fine. Mary's like, "It's ok, I understand." She did—the [Family] Justice Center—did feature me at one of their breakfasts and they did a video, which was hard, but again to challenge myself, anything that's easy isn't right. I mean if it's uncomfortable I need to get through it. And again, Mary was there with me to get through the video, she was there with me at the house. So that was comforting.

26:30 **Susan:** So it was empowerment with support.

26:31 **Lynn:** With support. And very comforting. She put me in touch with other women that had experienced domestic violence, just as a support group, and [I] met some wonderful women. And just fearing different stories and different situations and us all just sharing is empowering in and of itself. I went through another one of Sue Green's programs...

26:52 **Susan:** Seeking safety?

25:53 **Lynn:** Seeking safety. [I] was a candidate for that. I started the program and as you mentioned earlier on in our talk, it wasn't the right time. It brought up too much and made me digress and I called Sue, Sue's like, "That's fine, I understand" Mary's like, "No problem," because I felt horrible. She's like, "Nope, we get it." I learned some tips, I met some other women, so there was a positive to it, but [I] knew when I would leave, I wasn't feeling comfortable and wasn't feeling safe. For no fault of anyone else, just of where the program was leading me and [I] wasn't ready and that was fine. And just recently I had the opportunity to speak with some women from Haven House about my story and somebody said to me, "Did it go well?" and I'm like, "I'm not sure what that means when I share a story like this."

27:40 **Susan:** Right.

27:41 **Lynn:** I mean there was obviously some women [who were] very upset, in tears and others that were fine. So I said, "I guess it was good, but... it's hard to, you know, you don't want a standing ovation after something like that" I know I'm continuing to move in the right direction, [I'm] feeling more comfortable in sharing my story and just as I meet new people, in building that trust when it's appropriate and when it's time for me to say, "Oh, and by the way I'm also a survivor of domestic violence."

28:08 **Susan:** Well and that's actually a real strength to be able to say, "You know what, nope, this is actually not working for me because it's bringing up too many memories, feelings. I need to put a pause on this." And then be able to say, "Ok, I can do this and I'm willing to take a chance on this." That actually shows great strength on your part.

28:27 **Lynn:** Well, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

28:29 **Susan:** And you actually already sort of mentioned collaborating with other, so both the Family Justice [Center] and even talking with the Haven House residence, things like that, it sounds like you're collaborating in a lot of other ways in terms of your recovery process. Are their other collaborations that have worked really, really well for you?

28:46 **Lynn:** I had my counseling through Child & Family Services. [I] had a wonderful experience with them and they got me through my legal battles as I was dealing with through legal issues down south with what had occurred, with both the criminal justice system and family court. So that was good and they provided that guidance for me, and knowing what was right as I was going through criminal court. You know, every time my ex would have to be in court they would notify me. "Was this the time his case was going to be heard? Do I want to travel? Do I want to be there in court?" So it was every very months and I'm like "Here I go again." So my counselor was there to get me through that, never knowing how am I going to handle this, how am I dealing with this—I mean I could never really put it to rest until it was almost a year and a half later, until his case was finally heard and how do I want to do that? Did I want to be there in the courtroom and—you know, the expense, taking time off of work, was a hard choice to make. But guiding me through that and helping me making that choice and ultimately I did not go, but then getting through family court with my divorce. And again, all out of town, expense...

29:55 **Susan:** What an emotional rollercoaster.

29:56 **Lynn:** It really was. And yes, I knew I wanted the divorce, and how far did I want to go, and also having a Guardian ad Litem appointed for my daughter because I wanted to have her name changed, [I] didn't want her to have the stigma of a different last name than her mother, and, quite frankly, having her father's last name could be a trigger, [it] was for me. [I] ultimately did go down for family court for the divorce, but again they were there to walk me through that, to help her...

30:27 **Susan:** Did you feel supported—

30:28 **Lynn:** I did. I know it was challenging for my counselor, knowing "Ok, you're doing this away," but again listening and understanding and helping me—again I look back—she was helping me make those choices and to be comfortable with those choices. As I always tell myself, "Pick a lane. Left, right, pick a lane," and I picked a lane and stood by it. [I] tried not to second guess myself, but I made a choice and lived with that choice. That was helpful. For my daughter, Lakeshore Behavioral Health, they were there for Lexi. She eventually did experience some trauma with everything she had been through. Dealing with her emotions of losing her father. She also went through counseling with Child & Family Services. Did they just merge?

31:10 **Lynn:** Yes, there is a merger happening—

31:12 **Susan:** She went through Child & Family Services as well first initially, because she was being very emotional, not knowing how to handle her emotions.

31:22 **Susan:** Do you mind if I ask, does she have contact with her dad now?

31:25 **Lynn:** She does not. He is not in her life nor has been since the day we left. Last time I saw him was in court for family court and he was in shackles and chains. Taking a step back, she was having trouble crying. She was holding so much in, not knowing how to express herself. Oddly enough, she had made a comment while she was in confession with father, because it was face-to-face, and she became very emotional. He didn't know how to handle it, called the principle, the principle wasn't sure so they called me, which I'm grateful for. [It] could have been handled a little bit better...

31:59 **Susan:** But due to her trust...

32:00 **Lynn:** Right. It didn't help her. She got in through the [Family] Justice Center they said call Child & Family Services, so she had some counseling and even through her counseling, she kept up that wall. [They] brought me into help her, so she still had that wall even with me, but having her at least understand the choices her father made were his choices. They weren't right choices the way he handled himself was not correct. Yes, she doesn't get to see him because of those choices and that's something she needs to understand, so that was hard for her, understandably. But it also helped our relationship in talking about it because I was very—I didn't speak about it a lot to her. As a mom I didn't want to share that with her. [I] didn't know how much to share. She's still my baby, she's still a child, she does well, I didn't want to upset the fruit basket and through her counseling I realized it's ok to share some things of where she's at and have her see me upset. I've never spoken ill of her father to her, nor will I ever—the time is right. So that was good. For about a year and a half now, going through her teenage years, she sees school—the father-daughter dances is always hard, and certain triggers which we've recognized, father's day, but again through counseling we now recognize it and know it's coming so we can plan for it and talk about it. Because she was vulnerable coming into her teenage years, someone took advantage of that and told her that cutting would be the way for her to feel better. Fortunately one of her friends, good friends, saw something on Instagram and noticed it and alerted the principle at school.

33:35 **Susan:** She she's getting help for that now.

33:37 **Lynn:** So they called me and [I] was enlightened to a whole new world of cutting and it's been a good six months. She's better, she's much better through the help of Lake Shore helped her and she gets it, she hasn't cut since. But again that's where the [Family] Justice Center comes into play to know there maybe other bumps in the road and I would anticipate, but to know where to go and to say "this could happen," I don't live in a little bubble that this couldn't happen to her—and the other outside influences in recognizing she had a dad out there.

34:15 **Susan:** But what a gift you're giving her in being able to not only to name it, but be able to identify her own triggers and her own issues, like planning for father's day or days, his birthday, or things that would come up that could really push people down. You know, what a huge gift that you're giving her to be willing to talk about that, plan for it, and be honest, and not hide it from her. That's huge.

34:37 **Lynn:** It's hard. I know it's hard for her, it's hard for me, course I don't like to see her upset. She has suffered more than I have. I can deal with what I go through, but to see her suffer hurts more and knowing, I truly don't know everything she is going through. But knowing that she has a father out there. You know, I had a dad and my dad has since passed, it's been many, many years, so it's different, but I'm like "How would I feel if I knew my dad was out there?" And while I'm grateful he hasn't contacted her, I know she yearns for that and I have told her when she's 18 if she wants to find her father, I will help her find him. Because I have recognize that whatever she wants to say to him—we traveled back to South Carolina where we lived when the violence happened only this last fall. And she had been wanting to go for many years and I wasn't ready to take her back. And only did we go and again, "we have to face our fears and just do it." And so I said "we're going to do this" and I said "I don't know if we're going to see your father, that's the last place he was so that may happen" and she's like, "ok" and I said, "we'll see and take it from there." I was initially nervous, I was nervous for her. We never saw him. We went back to places we were together as a family. We had a great time. So it was healing for me to know I can go back and have fun. Laugh. And she had a good time. So I think that was huge—it was a huge step for us both—that was huge. That was real big. I don't know if he's there, but again that's the last place that he was, it's a small community. I stopped looking over my shoulder and said, "If it happens, it happens"

36:15 **Susan:** That actually is remarkable. Really remarkable. That says a lot about the work that you've done.

36:19 **Lynn:** Yeah, I finally patted myself on my back. It was the first time, with everything—you know people tell me other things—but that was the first time we did that and yeehaw for us. So, yeah, that was the first time I truly celebrated with my journey.

36:36 **Susan:** Well thank you for sharing this with us. I really appreciate it.

36:37 **Lynn:** You're welcome. Happy to do so.

36:39 **Susan:** Is there anything that you would like to, in terms of supporting others who are going through this that you think providers should know before we end?

36:49 **Lynn:** For providers to know—value those relationships with us as survivors and know that we are not a number, that we are human—those feelings and everything—and just take us through that recovery and help us. That we really truly do count on those providers to get us through. I mean, they're our lifeline. I can speak from where my journey was to where I am now, I mean, everybody played a role and I've been fortunate as I found the [Family] Justice Center with the services that I have. I value those relationships with those providers and for those providers to do that in reverse. That it's huge for where we are in where we're going, that we do count on them. And it's ok for providers to make those mistakes, but recognize that and help us take those next steps because, as I said, they are our lifeline and the recovery for the rest of our lives. They impact us tremendously because what we've been through, hopefully we will never go through again.

37:50 **Susan:** Well thank you. Officially on behalf of the Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care I'd like to take you for taking time out of your day to join us and share your story with us. It was a real pleasure.

37:59 **Lynn:** Thank you.