

S1:E7 - broken-to-beautiful-a-survival-story-jennifer-malcol...

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SPEAKERS

Amy Stack, Jennifer Malcolm



Jennifer Malcolm 00:10

Welcome to the Jennasis Speaks podcast The Transformative Power of Women's Stories, a platform that empowers women storytelling, to promote collective vulnerability, acceptance and healing. I am your host, Jennifer Malcolm, self made entrepreneur, women advocate and life balance expert. Welcome back to the next episode of Jennasis Speaks: The Transformative Power of Women's Stories, where every woman has a story and every story matters. And with me today is a friend that I've known for 30 plus years, Amy Stack. She wasn't at stack back then. But Amy's joining us today. And I'm just honored. When the podcast was first launched. I got a Facebook messenger from Amy just of encouragement of what this is about. And all is about is capturing women's stories to bring healing and courage and truth and vulnerability period. There's no other agenda besides the healing journey that stories unlock. And Amy readily raised her hand and said I'd love to be a part and so honored to have you here today and I will short little bio and then we'll jump into your story. So Amy is a wife homeschool mom to seven children, a licensed attorney in the state of Ohio, graduated from Boston Wallace, majoring in political science and minor in English composition, then graduated magna cum laude from Cleveland Marshall School of Law. She's worked in municipal prosecution as an assistant attorney general, and private practice as well. She has pressed pause on her legal career to raise her family and pursue writing. Currently an executive director and administrator at the large homeschool cooperative in Northeast Ohio hearts for Jesus

Christ, which educates teaches and trains a 300 homeschool students from three I'm sorry, from pre K to 12th grade. So welcome, Amy, I'm so excited to have you here. Again, we've known each other for quite a while, and kind of been in each other's paths for 30. Some years, we weren't necessarily close growing up, but just in proximity and hung up at some spaces, but wanted to welcome you today.

A

Amy Stack 02:30

Thank you, thank you. And I do think that what you are doing here in a space is so powerful. I know for me, hearing somebody about five years ago tell their story in a public platform gave me courage after 20 some years of being silent, or you know, somewhat silent, to really, I'm already gonna start crying. But know that that gives me courage to really be okay with my story, first of all, be okay that that's a part of my life, and then to just to not be afraid to share it, because that really gives freedom to the person who is living in the reality. But it also just encourages so many people that can just take even just one little piece of your story. So what you're doing is amazing and powerful, and I'm honored to be a part of it.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 03:21

Thank you, and you're hitting it on the head. Because when I share and as I continue to talk through my story through the podcasts, and it's coming out in glimpses, it brings healing, just speaking and sharing it brings healing to my heart. And then I know that when I do that, it also breaks shame, breaks isolation, and brings courage to someone else to you know, start breaking down those their own walls of fear, shame, vulnerability isolation. And so thank you for being here.

A

Amy Stack 03:56

Yeah, no problem. No problem. All right.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 03:58

So you we've kind of you know, subtly put your title is broken and beautiful, because you are an amazing mom, and crazy mom of seven kids now we'll get to that part. Yeah, but we're gonna focus on growing up here, and kind of what you experienced as childhood and, you know, we all have our own childhoods that we you know, experience and wanted you to share what was like growing up for for you.

A

Amy Stack 04:29

Sure, yeah. So my story has many moving pieces and parts, and we're going to focus on one I think today, but you know, there, there were probably three or four major streams of trauma that I had to walk through as a young kid. But, you know, when I was really young, you know, everything was normal. I was the youngest of three. I have a sister that's nine years older and another sister that's 12 years older. Mom and Dad were married. We lived in Slavic village, which is people are not familiar with Northeast Ohio. It is not the best neighborhood. It's a, you know, kind of rough neighborhood and Cleveland proper. And my dad Fun fact was on Jeopardy when I was five. And

J

Jennifer Malcolm 05:14

over that, yeah, jeopardy. Yeah, that's right.

A

Amy Stack 05:16

Yeah, yeah. And we still watch it every night so closely. He moved us from Slavic village to be village, which again, if you're not familiar, is more of a fluent suburb of Ohio. So that was early on. I just had, you know, I think I don't have a lot of pictures for my childhood. But when I look back at that, I'm very vibrant. I'm very, I have it up. I'm dressed in rainbows. I mean, I'm just like, the epitome of like, happy little girl. And things changed pretty quickly. After that, um, we went through a couple years, my parents had separated, gotten back together, one of my sisters had run away, and not my oldest sister started dating, who would soon to be her husband. So she was not around that much anymore. And by the time I was eight, my parents were divorced, it was really long and hard. And both of my sisters for a while one of my sisters was out of the house, the other one was about to leave. So I went from this happy, healthy, vibrant, hammy, you know, posing for the camera to life changes really, drastically, really quickly. And by the time I was nine, it was just me and my mom in the house. And that's when a lot of things started really going south. And there was a man who was close to the family, who was around a lot. And I think the first time I can think of being uncomfortable around him, was probably when I was nine. You know, later on in life, I read a lot about sexual abuse and what it means. And I think when you are not familiar with it, you might think like, sexual abuse is made or molestation or being forcibly raped. And that's it. And I think what people don't realize is, a lot of times for childhood victims, there's a long grooming period that can be part of your story. And certainly, it was part of mine. And so when I was about nine, this man was very close to us. And, you know, he was around a lot, he was the cool guy. Um, you know, before he may be uncomfortable, he was the cool guy and had brought home things from work to blow up in the street. And you know, I have these memories of, you know, a popsicle on a hot day, and just things that weren't abnormal. But slowly, things started to

change and shift. And the first time I felt uncomfortable around him was when I was nine, and we were outside. And he just kept yanking out my shorts and touching my legs, and it just was very uncomfortable. And for people who don't know what grooming is, it's just the art of making somebody who is uncomfortable, more comfortable with touch or words. And so he spent a good amount of time. grooming. Wow. And, um, yes, so it was probably another so I was young, I was nine, maybe almost 10. I have a memory about 10 years old. I remember my sister had just gotten married, where I was in his home. And again, it wouldn't be very abnormal for that to happen. I actually don't remember this particular day why I wasn't at home. But, you know, it was very odd. He was on his boxers. He said, we're gonna watch a movie. And he had porn on and I didn't know at the time what that was. I'm just speaking really candidly



Jennifer Malcolm 08:51

Go for it. Oh, do not have to filter here.



Amy Stack 08:54

I don't know if I've ever speaking this candidly before So, but I think it's important. And so I it was really uncomfortable. And I think when I replay this in my head, I think I should have asked right I mean, like, you get up and you leave, but I didn't feel like I could and that was part of I think the psychological part of what childhood sexual abuses is. There is a part where mentally you don't feel the freedom to leave and it doesn't make a lot of sense until you can process and heal right. But that's what started a two year abuse relationship between him and I went that went from very uncomfortable moments to touching to pull out right. And I lived in that for about two and a half years.



Jennifer Malcolm 09:44

I I want the audience to hear very very specifically about the grooming piece where shark pumping in your in your, you know, eight nine years old knows like, Okay, this is odd and it makes me feel uncomfortable, but the entire goal To start making that normal, and Right, right, not afraid of that feel or that touch, and that's normal. And so that grooming process that then gives injury for more to occur. And that as a child, or you're just, you're just trying to be a kid. You're just trying to be a kid. And yeah, we're taught to minder parents and respect adults and, and there's supposed to be safe and protect us. And that part of our brain and psyche hasn't formed yet to really understand what's going on.



Amy Stack 10:41

Sure, yeah. And I think it's important to know, there's so many layers to this, there's, there's fear, and there's shame. And there's confusion, like mass confusion, right? I mean, there's just no grid for this. I mean, even when you're an adult, if you've never had to walk through it, there's not a lot of grade for it. But as a kid, when you're trying to form, relationships and trust, there's just no grid. And so it's really hard to kind of decipher what's you know, what to do what to do. And I think part of the process for me, once things started, you know, like I said, there was probably almost a year, if I were to go back, and really be honest, there was probably about a year of inappropriate touching any appropriate things to say, you know, putting his arm around me and touching me in places he shouldn't. And I'm not even including that necessarily in the, you know, when we really entered the abusive part that was to me part of the grooming, it was making me it was always uncomfortable. I was never comfortable, right. But it was doing it so much that it normalized it that became my normal relationship with him. And so it almost became an expectation. And it was almost like you turn up the fire a little bit at a time, right. And so once you were comfortable with one thing, he kind of, you know, entered a new phase and touched more and said more, the, the first few times that things really got, you know, from the time that I was in his living room watching that movie, or trying to divert my eyes, honestly, when he was watching him, where he, you know, he perjured himself during that whole thing, and that was, I mean, I would 10 I've never seen anything like that before. I didn't understand what was happening at all, like, not even I had not had to talk, you know, class, no birds and knock them off. No. I mean, I went to the small private school, like, we did not talk about that, you know, you hit you left room for the Holy Spirit between people. And it was just No, no, great. And, um, and I remember him almost, you know, there was almost an embarrassment, I think on his part, and it was a lot of, you know, you're such a good girl, you're such a good girl. Thanks so much for just eating. It was, it's been a hard day. For me, this was just a way for me to be happy. Thanks for making me happy, you always make me so happy. And it's this, like, almost narrative played over and over and over again, to where, you know, in the middle of mass confusion and shame, which I don't even know if I could identify that I felt shame at that moment. But, um, you know, I'm hearing I'm helping him, right, I'm helping, you know, and so, you walk away with this mass confusion going, Okay, but maybe, whatever. I mean, I don't understand what just happened. But he's happy. I feel like garbage. But, okay, that's it. And it wasn't it, it was, um, you know, it was kind of that slow burn as, Hey, come here, I've had a hard day, you know, come just sit by me. And it was a lot of touching. And at first it was just him pleasuring himself, probably almost for a year. And then it got, you know, it continues to get deeper and deeper and deeper, and at some point, and forgive me, I really don't remember when there's a lot of lag, you kind of disconnect from your body when you go through this. And so there's not a lot of detail as far as timeline for me, but at some point, the narrative kind of shifted to you know, that if you tell anybody, we're both

in trouble, you know, if you tell anybody about this, you're, you're a bad girl. You know, if you tell anybody, this is your shame, and I don't know what I must have given off to where that kind of shifted, but that's where, like this whole nother layer of psychological abuse, you know, was involved because it made me feel guilty, right. And I didn't do anything wrong, you know, so. So it was like this, this, I felt already trapped. I felt like I couldn't tell anybody. And just so everybody's aware, I didn't have you know, this is where I said there's so many moving pieces of my story, but I didn't have anybody to talk to during that period of time. My mom and dad were divorced. My dad and I have a great relationship. Now he has been my constant. But at the time he, I was I was led to believe that he was not a good man. And so we did not have a close relationship for many years. And so he was not an option. Both of my sisters weren't an option for many reasons. And my mom certainly wasn't an option. This is not one of those things. You want to tell your girlfriends at school when they're talking about, you know, going ice skating on Friday night, and you know how they wear their hair, you don't just tell them? And so you find yourself in this place where you're like, how do you even Who do you talk to you? How do you even broach the subject? I remember trying a couple of times with a friend of mine kind of trying to hint around, but it was so awkward. I mean, she's just so like, they don't have a grid for that either. Or, you know,

J

Jennifer Malcolm 15:50

And I think it's important that the layers of what you're doing, you're a good girl, you're a good Yeah, you're a good girl. So he's, you know, he's trying to put into positive reinforcement, for devastating harm behavior, but trying to groom you into. But this is a good thing, because you're helping your own. And as a small child growing up, that's all you want to do you want to you know, we, you learn right and wrong, and learn to help other people. And he's reaffirming that what you're doing, and what he's experiencing is helping. And yeah, when you're in that for months at a time, it sounds, you know, potentially up to a year of that positive reinforcement. Yeah, through abuse of any changes. It's where we'll know if you should say anything, you're a bad girl. Yeah, you're that silencing your voice. And, and, and not allowing that to come forth. Again, it's the psychological abuse. That is, is unheard of, wow.

A

Amy Stack 16:52

It's huge. And he knew, I mean, he knew me, he knew my family, he knew what we had gone through. So he knew I'm a, you know, I'm a recovered people pleaser, I say that I'm still recovering. I like I like to make people happy. I've always been that way, you know, and he knew that and he knew that, you know, I was going, he knew that my family was decimated within the matter of a couple years, he knew that I was vulnerable. He knew

that. Because I lived with a single mom, there was plenty of opportunities to come and enter my world, you know, and really remain unnoticed. But that part. So he knew all of that. And that's where the predator status really, you know, that's where you just for years and years and years, I felt guilty for allowing it to happen and not calling it out. But it was many years later that I realized that he was preying on me, you know, it was not it was not my fault. It was him. But you have these layers, too. You know, about five years ago, your oldest sister actually invited me to this conference that she had done in Columbus, and she had a speaker Her name was Nicole Braddock Bromley and she is a fantastic speaker about you know, speaking your story with regards to sexual abuse. And she I got her books. I like when I hear somebody I order all of their books, I'm very, very impressionable that way. And she uncovers really deep stuff that I had never really processed through like, and here we go. I mean, this is like, this is vulnerable stuff, okay. Your body is designed to respond to touch. And even when you are being abused, there can be pleasurable responses from your body. Do you have any idea how many years it was for me? Not to feel like my body was betraying me every time. You know, it's so hard to kind of navigate those feelings because you don't understand them at all. There's just no grid at all. Um, so it was her that really kind of busted open that door for me going, that's okay, that wasn't your body that betrayed you. That was the way God designed your body to react. And somebody stole that piece from you, you know, so that was that was actually only five years ago that you know, that started healing for me and I've been married for 17 years. So I think about that. Yeah. So you know, this is an over the the healing that comes from all of this is not over I know I know of a few Victor victims who were victimized later in their either like later teen years or adult years. And they have different things to walk through that I have never had to walk through with regards to their healing. But I also have spoken to a few childhood survivors and it's very hard for us to understand a healthy worldview of people trust relationships, and just basic biological reactions to be honest with you because our whole our whole perspective has shifted When we were victimized when we were abused,

J

Jennifer Malcolm 20:02

sure. So as this abuse is going on, and you don't feel like there's, there's no one in your world right around that time to speak this to you're learning your own body, you're you're learning about sex and sexuality in a way that was never meant to happen. How, what broke the cycle or what changed to pivoted through through the abuse

A

Amy Stack 20:25

Sure, so a few things. One was, substance abuse was a big part of this too. I mean, this man was very rarely sober. Again, at the time I, you know, you you kind of just grow up

thinking certain things are normal. So I didn't realize that people didn't live like this. But he definitely had a problem with that. So he was taken to jail a few times in and out for, you know, different alcohol related or drug related offenses. And that would always press a pause and my story, which was fantastic, but I knew it was never over. Simultaneously during the season. There were a lot of other things that were very off and bad in my worlds. And so there was actually quite a few things that have happened. But my sister filed for custody of me when I was I think she filed when I was 12. With a lot of, you know, different allegations going on. And it we were in about a year and a half custody debate, court court case over where I should go, what you know, what's going on, I had a guardian ad litem, which is an attorney, you know, who's given to a child to kind of see what's best for that child. And I was conflicted constantly about whether to tell her about this abuse or not. I knew the environment I was living was not good. But I knew that if I had spoken, I'd be taken for my mom. And that's a tough decision to make, it was really tough. And again, lots of different players in my store, lots of different moving pieces, a lot of guilt, a lot of neglect a lot of things going on. And I chose at that moment, when I was 12. And at the ripe old age of 12. Very wise, in my day, I chose not to say anything. But the evidence about my life was so overwhelming that on January 12 1996, which I was 13 freshman year of high school, I came home one day, and I was told that I wasn't living there anymore, the courts had removed me. So I went to live with my sister, I thought that that was going to be temporary. But a few short months later, my mom stopped coming for visitation. And I realized she had moved I kind of heard through the grapevine that she had moved to North Carolina. So that was that I'd never went back to my childhood home. I never was able to really have closure there. But the actual abuse stopped. I don't know when he would have gotten out of jail that last time. I never, I never had to figure that out. So that's a good thing. That's a good thing.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 23:07

So as you're now going into teenage years and puberty, you know, going into how did that affect, you know, dating, not dating. One, wanting to have a, you know, wanting to be seen, but realizing, you know, what you experienced as a child was so devastating and harmful and scarring, like how did that, you know transpire as you're getting the years that you you should be a teenager.

A

Amy Stack 23:38

It literally changed everything, it changed. I was not the vibrant, happy person anymore. I was very withdrawn. I didn't trust anybody. Like let me just be clear, like nobody, I did not let anybody get close to me. I started this kind of journey through my teenage years of nobody, I don't need anybody. They certainly don't get a piece of me. I had kind of

resolved to just getting through and living my life completely on my own. I threw myself actually early and I threw myself into achievement. So that was how I coped. You know some people, I heard statistics all through growing up were like people who are sexually abused are more likely to be promiscuous and whatnot. And I think there's a lot of validity to that. But I think the vast majority of people kind of go and start coping in ways that make them feel worth you know, worthy. And I think the more I read the more I've researched the more I've talked through and work through this. It's it's almost a persona like a abuse victim. Either goes that way the premier, you know, promiscuity, rebellious way, or they overachieve, and I was definitely in the overachieve. I don't know what is worse, to be really honest with you. overachieving is like a drug addict. So I threw myself into every activity, every anything that you can get a grade or an award, that was me. And I wanted to do it. The motivation was not necessarily to draw attention to me, I actually did not want any attention drawn to me, it was to prove to myself that I still had work. And you Yeah, I wish I could say that. I'm totally healed of that. But you find yourself in these cycles. And you go, why am I doing this? Why am I trying to achieve this? Why am I trying to, you know, go in it, it kind of comes back up that, oh, yeah, you're, you're still worthy, even if you don't have to run, you know. And so I found myself during high school years. Definitely withdrawn. I mean, I had friends, like, don't get me wrong, I was in the popular group. And I definitely, my best friend was homecoming queen. And, you know, we, we went to the parties and everything, but I didn't date. This. The only time I kind of tried to date was because there was rumors going around about me that I wasn't dating, and I was like, oh my god. So I would go out with a football player or whatever. But I was extremely uncomfortable. I was labeled the ice queen, you know, physically, it was like, Don't even touch me, don't go near me, I don't want anything to do with you. And again, it was like this, I didn't dress I dress very, like baggy clothes, dark colors, just I had, you know, one, I didn't want attention. I started getting curvy, you know, and I started getting attention. And that scared me so much. And so I tried to hide that. And I had the lowest self esteem probably out of everybody. In my school, I had the lowest self esteem, it didn't matter what I look like on paper. I just walked around thinking I was worth absolutely nothing. And part of that came from the last maybe few months of my abuse, where, you know, nobody talks about after the abuse happens, you know, there's, we talk about abuse, almost like in a in a box, like, Oh, I was sexually abused or this happen. But your abuse is made up of moments, seconds, and minutes. And hopefully not hours, but sometimes hours. And it's made up of more than just actions. It's made up of words, and it's made up of like heavy feelings. And so the moments after he was satisfied early on, you know, you got the good, the good words, affirmations from him. later on. It was I can't believe I'm doing this with you. You're so Derby kind of words, you know, those are the, that's what you took on? or, um, you know, I was really, I was really small and scrawny. And it was like, I can't, you know, I can't believe I'm doing this kind of thing. You just feel like, wow, if I'm going to even worth it to him, you know, hey, how can I be worth it to anybody

else? And so I just stayed away from that I didn't want anything to do with anybody. And that's how I live my most of my high school year. Got involved with church, and I did not like anybody. either. No, not fit in. I didn't, um, my whole world right now, God,

J

Jennifer Malcolm 28:12

I think part of it like, would you talk about the achievement, it's something you can control. It's something that you know, you don't want the attention, but I am in control. You wearing baggy clothes, you wearing dark clothes you isolating you choosing, I haven't got for a football player to check the check the box, and then moving. But it's that sense of I am in control of my body and who I am. And even if it's a little bit of power, that little bit of you know, this is this is me being taking back what someone stole from me, even in my new face, I'm sure at some level was healing and courage. Yeah. And and you still have a long journey to go of how this unfolds.

A

Amy Stack 28:58

Right. And I needed to do that. Right. I needed to, I think there's a season of you know, the actual time of abuse was over. And the next phase of healing for me from my story had to be, I needed to figure out who I was, you know, and I'm thankful for that opportunity that I got to go. I have. We talk a lot about in this day and age about privilege. I have an enormous amount of privilege, even despite what I went through. And I was in a fantastic school, private high school where I had opportunities left and right to go figure out who I was and what I was good at. I do not discount that. You know, I think that was very huge. I mean, that was my saving grace. I can't imagine walking through a walk through and not having what I had. I don't think I recognized that at the time, you know, but definitely looking back. I'm really thankful for that. Right for sure.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 29:53

So as your now you know, you said you started getting involved in the church. So how did that next season No. Did you press further in academics? Did you confront your abuser? How did that next season of life look for you? You know, coming out of high school?

A

Amy Stack 30:10

Sure. No, I avoided all everything I had to do with me. Even, you know, all through high school people knew that I did not live with my parents, but nobody knew why, I didn't say a word to anybody. My best friends didn't know why. Very, very, very few like I can kind of want to have had an inkling of what had happened. And so I was really okay with that.

Because my choice was throw myself in academics and achievement. I wanted to go to law school. I wanted to be the woman who was my guardian Litem, to be quite honest, she saw through my brokenness and did the right thing and advocated for me, she had the courage I didn't have when I was 12, to get me out of a situation that I couldn't get myself out of. And I felt like I had, I owed something to the world to do the same for somebody. And so that was kind of what I wanted to do. I wanted to just go and pursue, you know, becoming a lawyer and helping people I really wanted to do some something great. I just I did, I wanted to be this like, Great contributor to the world. And I burnt out pretty fast. To be really honest, I took on too much. This is kind of my story. I like, I take on a lot, I do really well, when I take on a lot. And I went out you know, and so went through high school. Church was a huge part at first, I absolutely hated it. Like I can't even begin to tell you, your sister is gonna listen to this, and she's gonna be so mad.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 31:45

That's okay. You can love her and the experience that you had,

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Amy Stack 31:49

yeah, yeah, no, I would look around and there was all these perfect people in my head. You know, everybody has a story, everybody. But in my head, I look around and think, well, of course, they're smiling and singing because they haven't gone through the hell I've gone through, you know. And it was really years and years and years of letting God chip away. And go, yeah, there's ton of hypocrisy here. That's the church, right? But knowing that God is real, and his word was real, and it always had been, you know, the funny part of my story is, despite all of what was going on in my life, we had to look right in the eyes of others. So we went to church every Sunday, and every Wednesday, and I was in mission as we went to an Assembly of God church. And the saving grace of my entire life was the fact that mission, so if you're not familiar with it, it's almost like a Christian Girl Scouts, okay. And you have this book that you have to if you accomplish all these things in this giant binder, you get a crown at the end. And that was like, the epitome of achievement for me, like, crowned me. And so I found myself in this season, where I'm literally living through a hell. I'm also memorizing scripture. And it wasn't because I was as good Christian and girls because I wanted to, I wanted the frickin crown,

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Jennifer Malcolm 33:08

you know, on the badges.

A

Amy Stack 33:11

Right. But God works in mysterious ways. Because I still have all of that scripture that I memorized back then it bubbles up all the time at me. And so going through high school, I had this basis. And I really wanted to know, is he real? Is he in this? You know, Who is he, apart from the church, but unbeknownst to me, I actually met my husband's there, which I'm really angry about I I had this this plan, I was not going to get married. I was not going to have a family. I was going to go to law school. I was going to move to Manhattan. I mean, I was like, I would tell everybody, yeah, I just I would tell everybody and the second youth group event that I had gone to my husband who is one of the most introverted people you will ever meet in your life, he was speaking that night, which was very strange, about how he had lost his mother. His mother had passed away when he was 16. And the words that he spoke literally like connected to my heart, and all of a sudden this little tiny part of my heart that I am pretty sure it had died, you know, started you sparking a little bit and I set that aside for years. But, and the one girl in the whole youth group that I thought, Oh my gosh, she's the most annoying, she's like sickeningly perfect You know, there's, she's my best friend. So like, you don't know what life is going to do. These two people that I just thought there was no way there's my two acts in life, you know, here but

J

Jennifer Malcolm 34:46

I love the distinction because because when I went through my dark time, 1213 years ago, and I'm starting to share this a little bit more on the podcast, but it really went through a really dark season and made some harmful choices. Made some Powerful choices made some difficult choices. But through that I hated, hated the church hated church. But I didn't hate the people, some people, right. And I didn't hate God. So I was able to distinguish the institution has people and it's full of hypocrisy. And that's not the nature of God. So right. And to be able to, you know, growing up in the church growing up as a pastor's kid growing up with, you know, my sister and her husband are youth pastors, and, you know, being on that pedestal of being a PK and, and, and needing to be perfect, I do have a Yeah, a battle of perfection. And I love Rene Browns work of the gifts of imperfection, and you know, how it brings shame and all of that, and, but through that, being able to distinguish, you know, and identify, like, the church is fallible, the church is human, and to still allow faith to arise and to a small beating of heart. You know, that little that little thing? When Dan spoke that little bit of my heart isn't dead. There's something Yeah, that can and, and unexpected people who give you the drinks of cold water, the Yeah, kind smile, the flowers unexpected that you're like, that's human kindness. And that's, you know, unconditional love from heaven. Through people as powerful.

A Amy Stack 36:31
Yeah, yeah.

J Jennifer Malcolm 36:33
So you didn't end up in Manhattan?

A Amy Stack 36:36
No, I did not. You didn't react.

J Jennifer Malcolm 36:40
But you did end up as an attorney. So tell the audience a little bit about your success there? Because that is that's a huge achievement.

A Amy Stack 36:47
Sure. Yeah. So I went to Baldwin Wallace in Berea. And you know, that's a whole story in of itself. I had a full ride elsewhere, but I chose for another reason for my dad really, to stay near. And so I kind of begrudgingly went through the four years at Baldwin Wallace. And all the while, you know, Dan and I had started this really strange relationship of, I guess, I we never dated, like we just I told him early on, like, I just, I if, if you like me, you're gonna just distance you're like, this was social distancing, because of our social distancing was cool. Okay, so I told him stay six feet away. Don't touch me. I mean, I for real, so for four years of college, that's how we pretty much were, um, and then my last year of college, well, my junior college, no senior year sorry. He proposed. I finished college a semester early graduated in December. We got married in March and I started law school then in September, August, September then next year. I love law school. It is a world unto itself. Like it is a you know, you can go do really well in school, and then like just totally dive nosedive in the law school. They make you feel like you are the worst human in the whole world. Somehow I stayed in and survived. I loved learning about it. I love writing. So yeah, I pass like with flying colors all through I did really well. I'm really shockingly, honestly. And then pass the bar on the first try. So I became a licensed attorney. Officially up the bar in July, you find out in November, so I officially became a licensed attorney one month before my son was born. So that's, you know, I'm jumping around in the story a little bit. But yeah. So november of 2006, I was officially licensed. Wow. And

J

Jennifer Malcolm 38:46

did you practice because I know you were also pregnant. Did you practice? Yeah. Practice like how like with this degree, what have you done? Or what's the last, you know, 10 plus years look like for you in that regard?

A

Amy Stack 38:59

Sure. Yeah, I did. I I'm in law school, I clerked for the city, a local municipality for two years. I love that I started working with the prosecutor there love that got an independent license from the state bar to start actually prosecuting cases before I was bar certified. So that was fantastic. I adored that I really like I, those were happy days. And then I had gotten a job with the Ohio Attorney General before I had graduated. And so yeah, I was for the for your listeners. I know you notice, but I wasn't supposed to have any babies medically. So when I started interviewing my last semester of law school, I had a lot of job offers and I, you know, was going back and forth and trying to decide what I'm going to do and then once I committed to the Ohio Attorney General, I found I was pregnant, very miraculously. So this was like, this is like x three of my life. Right, like, a little curveball. And I think In order to do that, again, I can't even emphasize more that like, I was not healed and hold at this point. I still, I wanted to be a mom. But I had major reservations. And so I started with the attorney general's office. When Michael was born in December, I took a maternity leaves. And I think God just did something in my heart, which was part of my healing journey. And I kind of felt like, if I was going to do this mom thing, which was totally foreign to me, and it just scared, the socks off me that I was gonna do it. My terms, and I was going to do it my way. And I was going to try to do it well, and again, I'd like to achieve right, so I was like throwing my entire self into being a mom. And I think that disappointed a lot of people that I walked away, I ended up quitting my job to the attorney general, I worked in private practice part time for a number of years following so gosh, that was 2007. I quit. And then from 2007, to really 2011, I was in private practice on and off part time, I own my own practice for a little bit of time, it actually grew really, really big, and I couldn't handle it. So I kind of started shuffling that off, and, you know, started working for other people again, but since 2011, I've really been doing things kind of off the grid. So I've been arranging adoptions. I, I arranged the very first Ohio adoption and Ashtabula that was done without an agency, because adoptions are really expensive. And I tried to cut out a huge chunk, and it was a huge battle, but I did it. And so I've been doing things kind of hush hush, you know, and pro bono. I mean, I hate that term for free. I mean, I'm serving people, I'm using what I'm doing what I want what I said I wanted to do, I wanted to help people. And when you're in full time, it's it's easy to get caught up in the rat race, and I became a different person. So I'm happy to be where I'm at now, although I'm not making any money.

J Jennifer Malcolm 42:09
Yet yet, or now, who knows? Yeah.

A Amy Stack 42:13
That may change. Yeah.

J Jennifer Malcolm 42:16
So tell the listeners, Mica. Yes.

A Amy Stack 42:23
Yeah. Yes, seven kids. Mica is 13. No one just turned 12. Sam turned 10 this week. Emma was our first girl. She's eight. You're quizzing here, Eli. Eli's gonna turn six next week. layout is our two year olds. And then we have an almost six months a little baby Aria.

J Jennifer Malcolm 42:48
Wow. And so again, for the listeners. I know, Amy's story that you know, she was due to, you know, medical stuff. She was you know, told she couldn't have kids. seven kids later. You know, and and you showcase your kids all the time on Facebook and social media is so different that they are? And wait, and you homeschool?

A Amy Stack 43:13
I do. I do. Because remember everything I do I pour my whole self into it right? Yeah, well, no, that came. Mica my oldest is extremely intelligent. And I we went through all of this, like, what do we do with this kid, you know, and homeschooling became an option. And again, not knowing that we were going to have more, I have endometriosis, a grandmother of uterine fibroids and polycystic ovarian syndrome. And we had, I was diagnosed with all these things. And as a teenager, we had gone through a whole bunch of different interventions. I actually had a hysterectomy scheduled my last year of law school. My my health was so poor at that point that that was kind of the last option. And I begged for it to be postponed until after the bar exam because I couldn't imagine taking the bar exam and having hysterectomy and I was 20. I don't know 2324 or something like that. Or 25. I don't even know and blurt out. And it all is really it this way. And so they postponed it. And I found out I was pregnant with mica. So it was just this complete miracle. And then it was like boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. So here we are. It's like I

haven't even had a chance to kind of catch my breath and think about I often say in my moments of frustration, like this is not my plan. This was not my plan. Let's be really honest, it's still hard and I'm not your homeschool mom that makes cookies and my home. You know, I want it to be the home where you walk in and you feel like a hug just happened but it's there's gonna be shoes you trip over and I have, you know, for boys. It's loud and wallpapers, you know, coming off the walls and it's just how it is like, it's real.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 45:01

And, and then through the journey to you also became a special needs mom. So yeah, share a little bit about your special girl.

A

Amy Stack 45:09

Sure, yeah. So again, um, you know, when we were talking about ever having kids before the end and I got married, um, you know, he was aware that I likely was not ever going to be able to have them. And we talked about adopting and, you know, Dan is not a planner, I remember what our first big fight was when I had asked him like, what his five year goal was, and he was like, What the heck is that? Like I? How can you? How can you predict what you'll you know, what's gonna, what life's gonna look like in five years. And it's funny, because you feel Thank God. But we had talked about it. And I told him, like, really early on, you know, I kind of feel like it was almost God's plan not to give me kids because there's just no way I can't. It wasn't like, I didn't want kids because I don't like kids. It was I don't want kids because I didn't know how to be a mom. And I felt so broken, that I didn't feel like I could nurture, you know. And the other thing that attracted me to Dan is, he's a very independent person, you know, he is not needy, and he's not codependent, we are best friends, you know. And so that's what made like marriage doable, but I could not imagine for the life of me having a child. You know, and God changed my heart. And we went through a series of things to where, you know, I actually then desire to have kids, but still had this fear. And I remember praying, like, every day, while we were trying, just don't need a special needs kid. Like, I know that sounds terrible. Let me just, I am quite aware of how terrible that sounds, right. But I just knew coming from where I came from, just being a mom was going to be hard enough, right? I definitely questioned whether I could just nurture a mom, or a child as a mom, right? I couldn't fathom a special needs child. And honestly, through the years of parenting, I thought the same thing we've had challenges, you know. But in 2018, so just a little over two years ago, we went into the hospital to have our sixth child, our second little girl, beautiful labor and delivery. Actually, my oldest was there. He wanted to be there. And so it was just a beautiful labor and delivery. And, you know, he got to hold her like, as soon as she was out. And I saw immediately I looked at her and I knew that she had Down syndrome, and who there's so much to say. So the last

the next 2448 hours became really hard. It was a lot of interventions. What I had known of Down syndrome was what I realized is very little, you know, I knew very little, um, they have a ton of health issues, they have the potential, you know, to have a ton of health issues, it literally can affect every system and every organ of their little bodies. And so she was taken really whisked away. And I can I realize I'm privileged to have had five beautiful healthy children before her to where you have this moment where you're snuggling, you're bonding, the pictures, you know, you see daddy hold, wouldn't have that with her. It was you know, we had some moments, but it was very hard. And we then, gosh, it was just intervention after intervention doctor after doctor hospital after hospital and at 10 days old. She was also diagnosed with what's called transient myeloproliferative disorder, which is a blood disorder that is pre Luke, pre leukemic. Her body has the ability to basically produce leukemia cells, different strains of them. And so then they tested to see if she did in fact, have leukemia, and she did so 10 days old, you know, 10 days before this. I was prepping to have bring home this baby. My stress was about how to transition from five to six kids. Do I have meals in the freezer? You know, do I have the one Z's watch. And 10 days later, we were sitting in a hospital room and you know, oncology, pediatric oncology, just broken, just absolutely broken. We actually received the official Down syndrome diagnosis at the same time as we've received the Leukemia diagnosis in it. I mean, that was the only time I've seen my husband lose it like he's so study. But he cried and you know, just needed some time, which we all did. But I've never seen him. I've never just I call my carebear He's my optimist and I've never seen them needed to have a minute like that. But you know, we decided like that Okay, this is the journey we're on, we're gonna do this the best, we know how. But it's hard. I mean, so, you know, what I thought would be life of trying to, you know, figure out how to handle a new baby in this big family became who's going to watch the other kids while I go down to oncology and because she had to go every, you know, two times a week, and who's gonna you know who's gonna hold her down while we take her blood this time? And you know, mica wouldn't my oldest, he was 12. No, he was 11. At the time, he would go down with me, he was such a good kid. He packed his backpack full of schoolwork, because it was hours long. And we would go down and he helped me. And if nothing else, he was my emotional rock. My dad went the early days, too, you know, and the emotional part of it all was just so overwhelming that and you're recovering from giving birth, for goodness sakes.



Jennifer Malcolm 50:53

Your hormones are over as well. Sure.



Amy Stack 50:57

Yeah. And so there's there's a lot going on. I did have people early on. I had said to

somebody that I was grieving. And I got reamed by somebody. Because like, how dare you grieve a child of God? And, and I say, I still like it's been two and a half years, and I'm still I'm still dealing with this one. Bird. You know, a lot of people say to special needs moms. Oh, but they're so precious. Like, we know that we know our kids are precious, because that has never been a part of the question to my mind. No, no, we don't need the whole Oba God's got a plan in there. We know that like this, this child was part of my body, you know, like, I get that. But there is a grieving that happens. You know, there's an expectation of what you thought life would look like. But there's also an expectation of what you think your child's life should look like. And for me coming out of trauma and abuse. My number one goal as a mom was to try to make my kids lives as normal as possible. And this was a huge blow, you know,

J

Jennifer Malcolm 52:02

right, in that, and I'm gonna ask you a question that was not on the script. In that, do you? Were you dealing with failure? Like, did you feel like you failed? Like, because you're doing trauma? But obviously, this was 100% outside of your control? But do you feel like or I'm responsible? I'm a failure as a mom.

A

Amy Stack 52:21

Absolutely. Well, I think there's the unit Did I do something wrong? Because this there's all that you know, which people talk about, but God that's real, that's so real. You know, there's no, um, the process of having carrying a child with special needs. And then healing from it is a process. It's a process. You can't explain that away for somebody. But yeah, there's this huge. I feel like I feel all the time I cried and cried. For weeks. I tried to explain to my kids that, you know, I, God was so good. You know, I honestly at that point, we didn't know if she was gonna live or die. Um, I didn't know that. I don't know which one would be worse, because it's a time when she was so tiny. And she had all these diagnoses lining up. It's just like your mother's heartbreaks, and goes, Oh, God have mercy. Is she in pain? Is she you know, you don't know. They can't communicate that she wouldn't cry. She didn't cry at all. Like, at all. She didn't. She didn't make a noise. I had to set my timer my alarm to feed her. The doctor said sometimes, babies like this were they would starve themselves to death if they didn't have an attentive mom. Like they would starve themselves. So, you know, life was so different. And I yeah, the guilt was crazy. Hi, I'm trying to navigate which doctor to go to what therapy to pursue, even in like the following months, even now, I'm not I mean, I am by no means I am so new to this journey. It's not even funny. But the guilt is still huge. You know, we had physical therapy come in our house for a number of months. And it stressed our entire family out to the point where like, I knew to schedule out that day to accomplish nothing else. I didn't even make dinner that

night, because it was just so intense. And so I quit physical therapy and dealt with that guilt of like, Am I doing the wrong thing for my kid? You know, we pursued other things, you know, and she, by the grace of God, she's doing great, but um, yeah, it's constant guilt. It's constant. Um, yeah, just mental anguish is really what it is.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 54:41

And then as you had your seventh baby, what fears were you dealing with going into, you know, having another having another girl?

A

Amy Stack 54:53

Yeah, well, number seven was totally a surprise. I was So very much, let me just, I was very much done after number three. And that's a whole nother story for another time. But um, every got every baby that God gave us, it's been a I have had to overcome a lot, especially the beginning of the pregnancy and my pregnancies are not easy. I deal with a lot of chronic illness still. And so it's such a huge sacrifice. So I was just kind of getting used to the idea that maybe I was pregnant when I was taken in January to hospital for preeclampsia. And I had to say that, like I, we found out was pregnant probably about a year ago, maybe a little bit longer with number seven. And yet the the fear that something genetically was wrong was huge. The guilt that I was bringing another child into the world, and layout would not have me as much was actually crippling, to be honest with you that was and it doesn't help that there are other people that have not unkind words to speak like, why didn't you do this? Why you know that this was selfishly like Kate's done, let's move on. So it's hard. And again, the people pleaser in me wants to explain that everybody, this was not my plan. This is not my intention, but it doesn't matter. And we got an early genetic test done with with Aria, about 14 weeks, so I knew genetically on paper, she was good. But she has fear. I mean, you do, I think, I think having five, you know, normal, healthy children, and then layout, you just all of a sudden realize like, Oh my gosh, this, anything can happen. Anything, this baby can have a genetic issue, she could have a, a systemic issue she could have, you know, there's so many things that you just didn't realize you took it, you know, took for granted. So I was definitely really fearful. But I had this this almost like staunch, solid, like foundation for walking through everything with Lael. You know, it was a year and a half, two years of like heavy advocacy for my daughter, finding a different voice that I've never had before. And just not caring what people thought. I mean, just really, honestly, I probably have grown more in the last two years of my life, and the last, you know, the previous 36 inches. So this was interesting. But I did go into the hospital in January with Aria and had to stay there for five weeks and deliver her prematurely because of preeclampsia. So it's like, oh, like, like, just have me, just, you know, give me the blows, but she's happy and she's healthy, and we're adjusting

still.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 57:53

And it's just amazing that and this is, you know, part of the why this this podcast if people would just keep their mouth shut and be kind

A

Amy Stack 58:01

Right

J

Jennifer Malcolm 58:02

people say some of the stupidest things, some of the most insensitive things. And you know, and I've said this on podcasts in the past is, you know, sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you that's like such the epitome of the word stick the word heat and repeat and repeat and repeat. And, and, you know, it's, you know, as a as a woman going into, I don't even know if I want to be a mom, then being an advocate, you know, that being such a plumb line of your DNA is I'm going to be an advocate and a fierce protector of my kids, for anyone to come into into question. You know, that that bone that that DNA that that you have, that's innate now is so troubling. And it is. It's what people say.

A

Amy Stack 58:52

And I think women have to keep in mind, like and I think this is the power of what you're doing to is, you know, when people meet you at whatever part of your journey, that's who they think you are. So if you've met me, three, four years ago, I'm this homeschool mom of money. If you're on my Facebook feed you right you see my kids, you might see what we do or what you know, and I get comments all the time, like oh my gosh, you're such a good mom. And I'm, I'm gonna just be honest, like I am working it out with fear and trembling, okay, like, this is not easy. For me. There's not one day that mommy has been easy for me. I'm just trying to live the best life that I can. But what they don't see are the many, many years of pain and hurt and frustration and abuse and overcoming that have gotten me to where I'm at. And so everybody has that everybody has these years, where nobody really knows who they are. And we just kind of jump in their story in this timeline and assume that they are, who we think they are. And we set the expectations for them and how they should be or how they should react. But it's so unfair that we do do that to each other. But we do. Yeah.



Jennifer Malcolm 1:00:03

I want to wrap this up with as you're now sharing your story of your abuse. When did that in your adulthood? You know, obviously you you married Dan, you're taking that step of healing to let your guard down and show intimacy vulnerability with someone even from six, six feet apart from before guy. When did you feel empowered to start sharing your story? And that real, that real healing process for yourself?



Amy Stack 1:00:37

Sure. I mean. So the first person I ever shared my story with was when I was a teenager, it was my cousin. She was my very best friend. And I think because she couldn't run away from me, because she was my cousin. I felt safe. So when he was on my dad's side, she passed away 10 years ago, be 10 years this October. And when she passed away, I lost a lot, because she was probably the only other person besides my husband. Who knew everything, you know, and even my husband like he just, I mean, he knows everything, but like in layers and seasons and and phases, where as she was the I just emoted, I let her have everything. And I remember when she was buried, like just feel a part of me was buried with her because she, you know, that was my only real connection to the process of processing through the trauma. But she was wonderful. And then, yeah, Deanna and I, because of our social distancing relationship. We talked a lot. And we wrote a lot. And as things were progressing with us, it was like, Oh, God, if this is going to go anywhere, I have to tell him. And again, it was little chunks. It was like, hey, Jesse, no, I have some sexual abuse in my past. And such an awkward conversation, especially like, when you knew somebody for years and years and years, and you're not even sure like, are we getting married? Do I tell you these things. So it really wasn't until like, we were engaged, that more came out. Let me be perfectly honest, like, I didn't realize the extent to what I what I still had to heal from until after we got married. We very much social distance throughout most of our relationship, and marriage was a huge shock to my system. And it was really hard for me really, really hard to open myself up that way. He has been very amazing and patient, and there's still things I mean, there's we're 17 years in, but there's seasons where if something changes, or I'm triggered, there's still triggers, right. And so, um, there's still things that come up that we have to kind of process through. But he was the second person that I started kind of sharing my story with. And then it really was like five years ago when I heard Nicole Bromley, share and just share very unapologetically. And very just like, this is my story. Like, this is just how it is. And I'm not ashamed of it that I got really brave. Like, I just felt like she inserted courage in me. And she I think was the first person that said the word encouraged means to insert cards into somebody else. And I felt like that I felt like she did that. And so my platform just became, you know, private conversations at that point. And this is really the first time I'm saying it's worth more than one person come here to save time. So I'm a little nervous, I'm

J Jennifer Malcolm 1:03:33
courage.

A Amy Stack 1:03:36
And I hope that that's what happens to other people because we don't have to live in darkness. Because something terrible happened to us. And we don't have to be ashamed because we don't look like this cookie cutter version of what a mom or a successful woman or anybody should look like. I certainly am never have never been cookie cutter. And that's okay. You know, um, you can still feel loved and whole and accomplish things and be a good mom and be a good wife. Not perfect. And that person, you know, and I have to overcome still dealing and I think that's the other truth is, this doesn't go away. But you're nottrapped in it either.

J Jennifer Malcolm 1:04:17
No, that's good. And I and through capturing the stories and and the beginning of the courage being in my soul to share my story, too. It's that piece of I don't know how much more I have to heal.

A Amy Stack 1:04:33
Right.

J Jennifer Malcolm 1:04:34
But I just, I just take a day at a time and I think okay, I think I'm good. I think I think I'm in a hole spot until that trauma trigger occurs again. And when something comes out sideways, you have a physical, emotional, spiritual response.

A Amy Stack 1:04:48
Yeah,

J Jennifer Malcolm 1:04:49
there's still there's still garbage down in there. Oh, yeah. No going down in there. But when you have a partner like damn, I have Chad. I have my finger. I have my kids who are beginning to hear parts of my story. But when when you have a community, who embrace

you, like your cousin did, and, and surround you with love, yeah, and pull in that pain and be a safe space for you to share that. That's the power of healing the healing journey. That's the power of inserting that courage to break the silence to break the shame. And whether it's something that happened to you, or something that someone chose to do. It's still shame, it's still brokenness, it's still that journey of vulnerability, that when we start speaking our truth, and our using our voice, that the power of shame is broken, and that is the bedrock of, you know, advocacy that I am hoping to, you know, continue to convey through this podcast is, it's breaking the lives of shame. And we've made choices. I've made poor choices in my life, people made poor choices in their life. And, you know, I say, it's like failing to open book test, when you know, the right answers, you know, the right answers, and you choose to fail an open book test, the amount of shame that comes with that is unbearable, but with gentleness and kindness, and allowing time to heal. And forgiveness from people forgiveness toward myself. It's just powerful. And, you know, that collective vulnerability here is, is the goal. So, yeah,

A Amy Stack 1:06:36
yeah, it's good.

J Jennifer Malcolm 1:06:38
Any any closing remarks for our listeners, as we wrap this up?

A Amy Stack 1:06:43
Oh, gosh, so many No. I think I think if I were to leave everybody with one thing, it would just be to be open to what God has to use in your life to heal you. And because I thought my healing was going to come one way, and it has come completely another way. And just when you think that you can't handle something, in a gentle, loving way, he shows you he can't, you can, and I am not, I would not be the person I am today, without the very thing I wished away. And that would be my family, you know, my husband and my kids. For years and years and years, I ran from that. And here I am healing the deepest parts of my heart through them, and I'm not using them to do it. But God's using them to teach me in big ways, you know, big ways. That there's hope, and there's wholeness. And when you take these paper and you rip it, open all these tiny pieces, and you stack them back up on top of each other, it was stronger than a whole piece of paper in the first place. And that's kind of what I always look at, if my life is is, I'll never be able to glue it back together. But I'm gonna intentionally piece it back together, stacked on top of each other and be strong, because that's what my kids deserve. That's what people behind me who are going through the same thing or have gone through the same thing deserve. They deserve to

hear people who have come out on the other side and said, You know, I get it, it sucks. And I think that's the only thing you know, say to somebody in those times, it sucks. You know, there's no good cliches to say except for that. But God's good. And there's goodness on the other side, and there's healing and hope. That's awesome.

 Jennifer Malcolm 1:08:31

Well, thank you so much for being with us today and for having the courage to free I know that you did it with amazing courage like you You didn't even second guess that that you wanted to do this, you needed to do this. You wanted to be a voice for other women and on through abuse, and even as a special needs mom and the that's a whole nother podcast they are with that that piece of motherhood and but you you really just said yeah, this is I want to do this. And I honor your courage and honored that you were here today to share your story. So thank you so much.

 Amy Stack 1:09:11

Thanks for having me

 Jennifer Malcolm 1:09:12

You are so welcome. So that's it, and we will catch you next time on Jennasis Speaks podcasts where every woman has a story and every story matters. Thanks so much. Subscribe to the Jennasis Movement to empower women's voices and reclaim the power over your own narrative.