

from-secret-to-superpower-the-unsealed-with-lauren-brill

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SPEAKERS

Lauren Brill, Jennifer Malcolm

- J** Jennifer Malcolm 00:10
Calling all women who are curious and called to be women warriors are rising in this day and age to heal and grow together. I'm your host, Jennifer Malcolm, self made entrepreneur, women advocate and life balance expert. Well, Welcome to the next episode of the Jennasis Speaks podcast The Transformative Power of Women's Stories where every woman has a story and every story matters. And yes, if you're listening, that means you you matter and you're important. And today I have with me, Lauren Brill. She's coming in from Miami. So a little jealous. We're we're having some warmer weather in Cleveland, Ohio, but it's not going to outshine Miami's weather. Welcome, Lauren.
- L** Lauren Brill 00:48
Thank you for having me.
- J** Jennifer Malcolm 00:49
You're so welcome. And I'm going to read a bio about you and then we're just going to jump into your amazing and powerful story.



Lauren Brill 00:58

All right, sounds great.



Jennifer Malcolm 01:00

Lauren Brill is Chief Executive Officer at the unsealed a platform for people from all walks of life to share open and personal letters and by sharing letters to create communities. Lauren launched the unsealed in 2019. Following strong public response to her own unsealed letter, a letter she wrote to comfort and encourage other sexual assault victims. Lauren's letter was posted on the ABC Network website and quickly became one of the most read and shared posts on the site. Prior to creating the unsealed, Lauren had a successful career as a sports reporter nominee for seven Emmy Awards, and winning Associated Press awards. So how did you get into the sports arena? What about that? drew you either with journalism and getting into the sports you know, cuz that's a very unique and especially for a woman and going into NBA what what started that journey for you?



Lauren Brill 01:52

So I was a really good athlete. As a child, I was always competing in the backyard with my older brother, I played soccer, I played every sport, and I was good. So I quickly grew a passion for sports. And then when I was about six years old, my dad bought my brother a present for his birthday or for a holiday. And it was tickets to go see the New York Rangers play. And I looked at him and I said, death, do you think because I'm a girl that I don't want to go? Okay, because he was just, I was so mad. So then he had a buy. Good. Take me to me. And then my he actually bought season tickets with a friend. So we had lots of tickets. So he would switch off taking my brother and then taking me. And then after a while, my brother's like dad, I don't really want to go like Lauren could go. So I went to all the games, and I loved it. I love the energy. I love the atmosphere. And then around the same time, my dad used to tell me stories about athletes to motivate me. So he would tell me, you know, Michael Jordan got cut from his high school team, you told me that they told Michael Jordan he'd never play over bud Peterson. I'm like, boothbook. Peterson. Like, that's my point. And so he used sports as a way to motivate me and inspire me through school and through my own athletics and through whatever I was doing. And then when I was in fifth grade, we went to it was the year after the Rangers won the Stanley Cup, and it was the playoffs. And this woman saw me at a game with my dad looking for our seats somewhere high up, and she said she had front row seats. And she had one extra, and we remind her of my dad, uh, her dad taken her to games. And so she was like, do you want to sit with me? And I said, Sure. And turns out, she was a VP at ABC. And she started talking about her career. And I was like, wait, I could be on television and

talk about sports. That's what I want to do. And so from fifth grade on, I was like, I'm going to be a sportscaster. And I was so determined for all of middle school and high school and college, to just realize that dream. And then I did it for 10 years, and I started to develop other passions and other interests. And I created this company, I would say that my company is everything I loved about sports casting, and then other passions that I developed along the way, including social justice, women's empowerment, fighting against, you know, racism, and all of the inequalities that we have in this world. And then also just this, these stories of resilience. I love telling stories, that of people overcoming adversity, just like my dad told me stories about resilience to motivate me as a child, so I'm kind of really coming full circle.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 04:28

That's amazing. And as we were chatting before we start recording that piece of women's advocacy, women's empowerment, unleashing your voice uncorking Your voice is such a passion of mine, and we've done it through multiple mediums through this past year. And the one that keeps resonating and that we get the most response to is around sexual trauma, sexual abuse, realizing how women and it's not just women, it's men and women, but our silence and us and our shame. And we keep quiet. And through your work through our work through the me to movement through shame booth with Paul Williams. And in California, there's a lot of us that are trying to strip away that stigma, to release the voices to release the stories, because on that other side of fear is freedom.

L

Lauren Brill 05:18

Well, I think there's a lot of problems that we have in our culture around sexual assault. First, we don't have enough conversations, and we don't have enough conversations before sexual assault happens. So if you don't have the conversation before, when it does happen, you're like, what was that? Also, we don't have consistent verbiage show, federal law says that any sort of penetration is Wait, but from state to state that's different. So some states, penetration is rape, in some states only, you know, what we conventionally think of sex is, is great. And that's a problem because we don't know the right words to use to describe what happened to us. And then if you describe it wrong, then people will say, Oh, she's lying, or it makes me when you don't have consistent wording for things. It makes it harder to communicate with people. And then we are already fighting this whole idea of women not being believed, or people saying that you're not telling the truth. So I think it's consistent verbiage. And, you know, one thing for me that this is something very personal that nobody talks about. But I think I've read a lot about it. And it causes a lot of shame. And it causes a lot of harm for women, because nobody talks about and they don't know what's normal, but women can get turned on during right there are women

who can orgasm during right? And then but then if they verbalize that people say, well, then you you wanted it. And there isn't enough education about that. And I think that's really important, because that's when women start to self harm and hate their bodies, because they resent their bodies for reacting that way, not realizing that it was purely a physical natural response to someone touching you. And it doesn't mean you invited it, it doesn't mean you want it, it doesn't mean you were okay with it. And I think those things need to be talked about as uncomfortable as awkward as embarrassing as you may feel about it. It's normal, and it needs to be talked about. So people know that when it happens, they don't feel anger toward themselves for their body reacting in a way that they could not control.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 07:08

And I think that's beautiful. Because at that point, you feel like your body is betraying you, you feel like your body is responding in a way that betrays but then you already are, you're already traumatized. And so this piece of betrayal from your own physical body, then put that extra layer of Alright, I'm going to keep silent because no one's going to believe me. Yeah. And I think that piece of education from a young age, we do you know, sexual education from a young age, but educating on sexual trauma, what is it? What do we do and bringing it to the forefront, even as embarrassing as it is, I have a 16 and 18 year old daughter's a 20 year old son. And the more that they're comfortable having the conversation, the more I want them to feel safe, insecure with their friends, their family, to talk about the uncomfortable things, and to be vulnerable in a way that actually protects them long term.

L

Lauren Brill 08:02

It does protect you when you're able to have these conversations because you know what's normal and what's not. When I finally told my mom, what happened? I told her I said mom during my assault, my body got turned on and I'm confused. Why did that happen? Did I ask for it? And my mom who is just you know, Superwoman mom, like she's a great mom. And she also happens to have a master's in psychology said no, no, no, that's normal. It's a it's Pavlov's dog. It's a physical response. You tell the dog that foods come in your mouth, water, someone touches you, your body reacts. And as soon as she told me that, it was normal, I had lost a lot of weight. For the years following myself gain the weight back was healthy, like my whole life transformed. And I didn't realize how much I was holding in trying to control my body control my life. Because, um, because there was something that happened and I didn't control my body, you know, and I didn't realize how that was manifesting my in my life. And it was such a, it was such a defining moment, or a turning point for me to have that conversation with my mom, and realize that this was

something that was normal. And I think that it needs to be taught. I've never heard anyone talk about it. Never. And I didn't, I had to do research on my own. And one thing I found, which I don't know, they don't, they haven't done a ton of research on it. But one thing I found was this idea that women's bodies react that way as a form of protection. Because if you're assaulted and your body doesn't react, that way, you'll get injured. And so I kind of now see it as like, Oh, my body was protecting me. And so I think but I think these conversations are so important because otherwise you feel that shame and you feel that blame and you feel at fault. And then you don't want to tell anyone because you're afraid like they'll just be like oh, then you wanted it. And so and I think again these conversations need to be had young so that if a girl or boy is assaulted, they know what's okay and what's not okay they know what's normal and what's not not all they know that they can say something and still be believed and still not be and not be judged. And, and I mean, I said that like one of these kids But I do public speaking, a child had asked me, when do you think you should start educating kids? And I said, it's such it should start four or five years old to say, hey, if someone touches you, they're telling me if someone touches you here, because I hear about children getting molested at very young ages, and the the only influence they have is their abuser and the abuser saying, Don't tell anyone that you're being bad. No one's gonna believe you. So they need another voice that says, If anyone does this, you can come to me. Absolutely. I think those conversations need to be started at a very young age and then continue to evolve as people get older.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 10:34

And I 100% agree with you because the to Amy Stack and Laura Steinbrink episode that we did in the fall, Amy was talking about at a young age, she was sexually abused from age eight to 13, from a family friend, and the grooming process that this man did, which was Don't tell anyone because and gratitude showing her gratitude, thank you for helping me through this hard time and not having the tools or the or the words, to express to other people safe people that something's happening. And I something about it, I know is wrong. But when someone else is telling you the exact opposite, don't tell anyone the same thing. Thank you for you know, helping me through a difficult time, we have to change the narrative at a young age where kids are educated and equipped with enough language to know that these, this behavior is inappropriate, and their safety mechanisms and people around to help advocate for you,

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Lauren Brill 11:31

and that people will believe them and they're not in trouble.



Jennifer Malcolm 11:35

Absolutely. That's huge. So let's go a little bit specifically into your story because you were a teenager, feel free to share with the audience what your experience was,



Lauren Brill 11:46

I was 16, I went to a party with my two best friends. It was a party at someone who went to my school's house. And kids from another school showed up. And they offered me and my two best friends drinks. And I was driving that night. So I called my parents and asked if I could stay over the person whose house I was at. And I only remember having one I actually remember seeing them all go into the kitchen that the kitchen was within eyeshot of the room where we were all hanging out in and they were went around an island and I remember thinking seeing them all collectively go to make these drinks and I'm thinking what's the commotion? There, but I didn't go there drugging me like I just you know, you're 16. But I just thought I thought something was odd about nine kids moving over and like, kind of congregating around this table to make a drink. But I didn't really I obviously didn't put it together that they were about to drag us. But I remember having one or two sips of that drink. And my next memory was being on a bed with two boys that I did not know in a dark room. And they were assaulting me and I could not scream, I could barely move my arms and legs. They were my muscles basically, were I was completely sedated. And I was able to say no and stop. But it was like in the voice of a whisper. It was very low. And I remember praying to God, and I'm not particularly religious. And I remember praying, God, please help me Don't let me lose my virginity this way. And I fell off the bed. I fell off the bed, I hit the floor facedown. And I remember thinking just like let your body go. And because I thought it'd be harder to write me if I was completely flat on my stomach. And they just ran out of the room right there. So that so by New York definition at the time, I was sexually assaulted by New York definition today I was raped by federal definition that was raped. So again, the words aren't consistent, because there was connotation but it wasn't he wasn't intercourse as I conventionally would think of intercourse. It was attempted intercourse and other ways of penetration. So again, I don't have the exact words whether I was raped or was that whether I was sexually assaulted, it's different from state to state. In the state that I was in, it would now be considered, I believe, right? Um, but I fell to the floor. And when I hit the floor, and I kind of just was laying there, I had thought at the time that they thought I died. I mean, it could have also been that the thump was so loud that they freaked out and we're like somebody might have heard us, but they ran right out. One of their friends came in to check on me and helped me get dressed. And then the he left me there. And then I crawled out of the room looking for my friends. My friends were locked in another room with the same group of friends and I woke up in a bed in the middle of the night and a classmate that I went to school with. Who did not know what happened was asking me if I needed water. And that

was and then the next morning I was safe. The kids who did it were from another school. Nobody knows who it was they robbed the house they stole a computer watch. expensive stuff. Um, years later, I called the kid whose party it was and said to you Do you know who stole the stuff? Like, this is what happened to me and he was like, Oh my god, I'm so sorry. And the town that he thought they were from was my town. I said, they're not from my town, I would have known who they were just like I thought they were, I thought you knew them. And because I knew they were upstairs with you, I thought you knew them. And so he thought he always assumed that they that I knew them. And I said to him, if someone stole something from your house, and you thought I knew them, why didn't you confront me and say, Hey, like your friends doing my stuff. And he goes, his parents were so embarrassed that they had drinking teenagers drinking at the house, they didn't want him to talk about it. They didn't want it to, you know, get out any more than it was it was, you know, I went to a prestigious private school with very, you know, well off families. And so they didn't want their they didn't want their reputations tarnished in any way. So they didn't talk about it. They never pursued finding their stuff or anything. And he didn't know what was going on. And he obviously felt horrible. When I told him what had happened. And he had no idea he had no idea. He knew I was upstairs. But he didn't know that I didn't know them. And they didn't know that they were insulting me, obviously.



Jennifer Malcolm 15:56

And it's interesting, the different facets and different layers of what happened and what you just described. First, I want to say I'm really sorry that that happened to you. And as women, you I'm looking you in the eye and saying I believe you. So that's the important piece in this community, of creating safe places for people to use our voices is really, genuinely relate with you and to say, I'm really sorry that that happened to you.



Lauren Brill 16:22

I mean, I never had the issue of people not believing me because of a couple of reasons. One, they robbed the house. So it wasn't there ready to the people we knew. We were ready. What we knew about them was not a good character. So that was one thing. The other part was I wasn't accusing, you know, your son or Johnny, you know, Sally's nephew. No, I didn't know who did it. So nobody was like, Oh, I know that person, he would never. So there was nothing for people to push back on. So I never had the situation where people questioned the truthfulness of my story. And then, unfortunately, my two other friends were drugged that night, too. And we didn't find out till years later when we talked about it. So I never had that. And my feeling with the whole like, believe women, I more say take women's accusation seriously. And the reason I say that is because there are instances where people aren't honest. And those cases are very, very dangerous to women

who are assaulted. When someone isn't honest. It's very, very dangerous, because then people don't believe women. But if any other crime if I say I was at the store today, and someone robbed me, you would go to the store and he would investigate. And so that's where I think the real focus should be on if a woman makes an accusation, investigate. It does. It doesn't I don't know if you just presume everything happened exactly as the person says. But you investigate and you take them seriously. And for a long time, a woman would make an accusation, and ns colleges would dismiss it, people would brush it under the rug people didn't investigate. So my thing is, take women's accusation seriously, we shouldn't just believe people. And that's it. And then, and there's no other sort of, you know, checks and balances. Because if somebody isn't honest, that hurts the entire movement that hurts all the women who are honest, because then people Oh, look, this person lied. So then you all must be liars. So I my thing is take women seriously. woman says something, take it seriously.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 18:22

Do your due diligence. Yeah, when you were so you were 16 when this happened, you didn't immediately start sharing your story. It kind of took you a while to find that safe manner. And we were talking about this during the pre show. What was that timeline of being you being silent and just kind of managing to start telling your story and why was it that you were able to start telling your story.

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Lauren Brill 18:47

So I couldn't process the assault right away. I woke up the next morning, I was like, what was that that's it just didn't process I didn't wake up the next morning, I was assaulted, I need to go to the doctor. I should do this. It was like, but I remember driving home and thinking my life was never gonna be the same. I knew something bad had happened. I knew I knew this was bad. I knew I was hurting. I just couldn't fully process it at the time. And I tried to just focus on school as a distraction. And I ended up I was in a situation where my senior year really mattered. I transferred schools. I did pretty well my junior year, but I needed to do even better my senior year to get into the schools that I really wanted to get into. So I just went full focus and I buried myself in work. And I ended up getting into Columbia University which was my top choice, which was you know, so such a gift in life. And I went there and for the first I had a lot of issues with fear. So I was very scared to walk a lot you know, alone at night in the in New York on my campus. I had a boyfriend my freshman year and he would block me everywhere after it's not dark. I would say when I was 27 Once that I mentioned something to them, I don't really remember. But I don't think they would say I mentioned it if I didn't. And then I was in a relationship with somebody, and I was with him for four years. And we're very close. And I

just told him one day, I think I was sexually assaulted. And I told him what happened. And then it was another year before it opened up to my family and really started telling people. And I think it's, I think sometimes we our branches take time to process things, it takes time to be ready to deal with things. And it took me time for it to come to the forefront of my brain and be ready, I don't think I can really articulate or explain like why on that date, I said something or why it after nine years, I had to tell my family and friends, it just was a process. And it took time to process what happened, it took time to want to face it. And I don't have a clear goal. This happened. And this happened. And that's why I spoke up on that day, it was just my brain healing my brain healing over time and doing it on its own much.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 21:04

And that's good because I have a very similar experience. Because mine, I feel like we go into that shock. So you do notice that you realize that something bad happened. And you also jump back into your studies and your the things that you were committed to. And six years ago, when I had a 1012 and 14 year old, I still had to get up the next morning and pack lunches for my kids, I still had to run, I saw the so I realized that there was something but it was easier for me to compartmentalize and not deal with it. And then and then I found that there were triggers. I didn't allow, you know, any my refrigerator broken. And I would I would have people over if I had to have a vendor in my home to fix something like that, too. And so that piece of just creating safety barriers, and then realizing that it was coming out sideways in unhealthy ways. And it did take me a long time to share. But when I did the response of kindness, understanding compassion, when I expected rejection, judgment, shaming, actually added added layer of healing and desire to continue to push through into that healing piece.

L

Lauren Brill 22:13

I think for me, too, as a 16 year old, I was drinking then I shouldn't have been drinking. And I was someone who was a straight A student star athlete. So I didn't want to be known as setting a bad example. So I was doing something I wasn't supposed to be doing. So there was that piece of it. And then it was two boys, I didn't want to be in even knowing that I was assaulted, I felt like there would be a perception of promiscuity. And that's very scary for a teenager, like they don't want their reputation ruined. So um, so those things also added it added to it. And by the time I told people what happened, I wasn't worried about people's perception about me drinking people's perception about promiscuity, I was in a different space. I don't know, if I ever worried about shame or anything, I'm more worried. I never wanted to be perceived as a victim. And I don't know if your Gabrielle Union was raped, and she always seems so strong to me, and her being able to talk about her

situation. But all coming from a place of strength and inspiration and helping other people made me want to talk from a place of strength, inspiration, and give my story of purpose that was bigger than my own. So that's why I wrote the letter to other survivors because it wasn't about me, it was about helping someone else. It wasn't just about getting it off my chest, it was about using my story to help other women and I always had this guilt of I never found out who did this to me. And statistics show us that most people who commit sexual assault, do it repeatedly. It's not a lot of people committing assault, it's the same people doing it over and over. So for me, I felt like Well, I didn't do anything. So there might be other victims out there. Because I didn't stop them. So I felt and whether this is right or wrong, that's ever someone else to be the judge. I don't think you know, women should know as a bit as a victim survivor. I don't owe anyone anything. But at the same time, a part of me felt like I needed to help other women. I needed to give back. So that was part of me wanting to I think that was the piece of me wanting to tell my story publicly. I think me telling my parents and my family was me needing to express what I went through. But me writing a letter and publishing it and have it for the world to see was about helping other people and feeling this unshakable urge to help other people.



Jennifer Malcolm 24:28

So let's talk about that letter. Because we're you're on the four year anniversary, April 2017. And let's talk about the process of you writing and releasing that letter, how you did it, what Avenue you went through to release it and the response that you receive from it.



Lauren Brill 24:44

So initially, what happened was I kind of reached a point that I knew that I wanted to share my story. I had done a story with a woman in Cleveland gap Cruz who was speaking about domestic violence and she kind of inspired me to share my story and I was just a matter of how and when And then I had a mutual friend with Sheryl Sandberg the I think she's the CEO of Facebook. She's an executive, very high executive for Facebook, she wrote the book lean in. She was working on her second book actually be that resilient people. And we had a mutual friend on our mutual friend was in the book, and he knew my story because he was a product of rape. And so we I connected with him over his desire to be an advocate against rape. His mother, unfortunately, started using drugs after she was getting raped and got pregnant. And that's how he was born. But we became friends. He introduced me to Cheryl and told to my story, and Cheryl asked me to do something with her book for option B, she was doing a promotional promotional stories online of people's stories of resilience hurt her, of course, I said, Yes, it's Sheryl Sandberg, no one's gonna say no to Sheryl Sandberg. But there were parameters. And I was like, if I'm going to tell my story for the first time, I want to make sure that I say

everything I want to say. And as a writer, I wanted to say it the way I wanted to say they had a ghostwriter. And so I did it with them. But then simultaneously, I went to my boss and said, I want to share my story, in my own words with my own writing, can I do it for on my blog on our station site, and he gave you the okay. And I spent three months writing this letter. And when I say three months, I wrote one didn't like it, I wrote, one didn't like it. And then I wrote one again. And I kept working on it and working on it, because it was really important to me, that I communicated my story effectively, and in a way that was impactful. And I had written a book. Prior to that it was a book that I've never published, it was simply for myself about my life, it was a place to express myself. And it was a book of open letters. And it was dear Miss ambitious, dear Miss scared, and it was different versions of myself. And I say that my letter that I ended up publishing is basically a culmination of everything I wrote in that book. So it was kind of like a long time coming, I think. And it was something I was really proud of. And when I press send to post it on Twitter, I just started crying, I got so emotional, it was such a release and such a lift off of my shoulders. And then to see the response from athletes and from people from my childhood, just the support, the love the kind words was really empowering. It really lifted me up in so many ways. And then that's what made me decide I needed to help other people share their story in a way that made them feel empowered, and in a way that also inspired other people.



Jennifer Malcolm 27:28

So good, and I printed off your letter, and I added a few few experts and I wanted to share it with the audience. Lauren addresses the letter to sexual assault survivors. In one place, she you braid, I feared my career would be negatively impacted, or that people would judge me unfairly. Even more distressingly, I worried I torment my parents as I would no longer be able to shield them from a war I endured. And they go on to say, however, today, I'm officially done being a victim, and I'm trying to be more than just a survivor. It wasn't only the sexual component of the assault, that was so traumatizing, but also that for a moment in time, my own body didn't belong to me. And I think that goes even back to the response that you were talking about your physical response, and what what happens during rape. And then the big shout out was, I want you to know, I am what another survivor looks like, I am what another survivor sounds like, my attack was not my fault. And you are not to blame for your assault either. as no one is immune to sexual violence, or responsible for someone else's predatory behavior. Like this, this letter keeps going goes on and on. And it was, it was so powerful, impactful. And I'm reading this four years later. And the heartbeat, the emotion, the beauty, the sacred space, the vulnerability that you shared in this letter, four years later, is still resonating. And as I read it, to get fresh, freshly in tune with your words and your heart, and your desire for that advocacy. So through this, then you you started your business. Yeah, let's share with the

audience what your passion project is now around these letters.



Lauren Brill 29:11

So I help I actually go straight most letters and I tell people tell their stories. And it doesn't have to be stories of sexual assault. We tell stories in the form of open letters. And we do stories about all different topics, whether it be sexual assault, race, racism, stories of young girls who have a stutter, or you know all different types of stories about overcoming adversity, about creating about different situations that people struggle with or go through. And giving people that insight and perspective into other people's lives and the experiences they go through. And they're all stories are emotional. All the stories are real stories about people's lives and they're opening up and they're trying to inspire or enlighten other people with their story with their personal journey and create that compassion and create that show that humanity. I mean, I want you to That when I was assaulted, those boys didn't see me as a young girl that was helping other kids at school with their academics or young girl who was really close with their parents or whatever they didn't, they didn't see me as a person. And through these letter, I'm trying to show the world that there's humanity and everyone, whether it's somebody who was in prison for 28 years, just a story with, or somebody who is a famous athlete, or famous singer or famous comedian, we're all there's humanity and all of us. And if we can understand that, and see that I think we'll treat each other a lot better. And, and will also treat ourselves a lot better. I would say you can't be kind to others if you're not kind to yourself. So yeah, so that's the letters are meant to empower ourselves and inspire ourselves, but also empower and inspire others.



Jennifer Malcolm 30:44

Awesome. And I'm going to base on that I went to, I had two more passages highlighted from your letter, you write, I feel confident and encourage, which is bestowed upon me in an unshakeable sense of responsibility to be a leader for those of you still trapped inside your own silence. I've learned that truth can have many different effects. And both the people receiving it and those revealing it, truth can be freedom, truth can be changed. truth can be inspiration. And it's powerful to see the diversity of your work, that it's not just for sexual assault, advocacy or voice, but that you are going out wide in and that's the heartbeat of Jennasis Speaks is that every woman has a story and every story matters. And that could be a woman that just deals with day to day and securities, body image, dysmorphia. Confidence, it could be trauma, it could be I had an abortion I faith issue so that all these the spectrum of what we deal with, and that and bringing that to a humanity piece, that we're all human, we all have shit we deal with. And it's through compassion and through collective vulnerability that we grow and heal together. And it

sounds like that's exactly what you're doing through expressing people's voices and their stories, and allowing them to show their humanity and that piece of bringing people together through compassion.



Lauren Brill 32:11

Yeah, exactly. And I mean, the responses I've gotten have been so. So amazing. I mean, people have thanked me for helping them express themselves, because they weren't able to people have what I did a story about a young girl who had a stutter, and she was became class president. And we wrote this letter together to people who will meet her for the first time. And we published it, and the whole thing was behind. And we published this letter, and it goes viral around our town, she's actually I think, lives in orange, Ohio. So as we're on the east side of Cleveland, and her father reached out to me nine months later and said, My daughter is more confident, she lets things roll off her back more easily than before. She doesn't let things affect her when people say something neat. mean that like, writing that letter, made her see herself differently, and made her more resilient and more resistant to other people's negative negativity. And I think the way in which we tell our story matters, like, if you read that letter, I don't, I don't really complain, I don't say woe is me. It's like, this is what happened. This is who I became, became and this is who you can become, too. And so how we tell our story matters. And so I really try to help people tell their stories, from a place of strength, from a place of inspiration, from a place of empowerment from a place of this is my life, but nothing can stop me from from moving forward or reaching my dreams. And I think I end the letter, you know, my hope is that my truth helps embolden you to share your own. And then that was about six months before the meet to movement. So then to see everyone share their truth is amazing. And then also meet then create this company, where I'm literally helping other people share their own stories, is just to be very poetic and perfect, and truly, where my heart lied when I wrote the letter and where my heart lies right now.



Jennifer Malcolm 34:02

So good. So if someone is listening to this, and they feel the urge to connect with you for a short story that they want to share, how does that process work? Do you come in? Do you do a phone interview? Do they try to write things? How does that process work for you for your organization?



Lauren Brill 34:18

For right now, I'm only taking stories from members and the membership, it just means you had to be a business and you had to survive. So we allow people to pick their price. So

they could be a member for \$3 a month or however much they want. So it's it's I tried to make it inclusive as possible. So you sign up become a member, you can submit your story right through the site, or you can just email me directly. And then either we do either you write your own story and I edit it for you. And that goes in our community voices section, or if we do a feature letter, then what I'll do is I'll get on the phone, we'll talk about what you want to write about. I'll interview you. Record the conversation, transcribe your words, and then I use their person's words to write the letter for And then I send it back to them, they can check it all, make sure it's authentic to their voice to what they want to say to the message they want to get across, make sure everything that's in there is stuff that they're okay with being in there. Because sometimes people tell you stuff and then like, Oh, no, I don't do that. So just I get the I get the green light. So, um, so then yeah, and so then we'll publish it after they give us the green light. And sometimes we pairs letters with charities. And so sometimes I'll say, you know, in honor of the first 100, let's shares that this letter, we're going to give \$100 to St. Jude's hospital, whatever the charity is, I try to match the charities with something that's connected to the letter. But we do that sometimes, too. So we've actually either personally have given away or have have had letters, because other people sometimes make the donations. It's I think it's up to like, \$5,000, to the various charities. So somewhere in that ballpark. Yeah. So that's been really cool, too. And that's something that I want to do more of going in the future is really helping connect these letters to charities and giving back and things of that nature. But that's, that's our process. And we also do a weekly conversation with a special guest every week. And it's a zoom meeting. So everyone would come on, ask their own questions, and we've had no professional athletes we've had, and we're a woman that was modeled in Sports Illustrated, she was the first bald woman to model in Sports Illustrated, she's amazing. So we have all different guests come on, and everyone can be a part of the conversation. Everyone can ask questions. And it's really meant to be interactive and inclusive, and inspiring. We had somebody who was on the plane crap that crashed into the Hudson and he talks about the fact that he's always positive now because you know, he's knows no matter how great the situation, there's always hope. Like, I survived a plane crash, and I didn't even get wet. What? Anything's possible.



Jennifer Malcolm 36:44

So good. It's so good. And how is the response? So I mean, that's a lot of interacting with your audience and your members and writing and corresponding, do you have a team of people that help do that? Are you really spearheading this on your own?



Lauren Brill 37:00

So I also speak at school. So my mom helps me with the outreach to school. So my mom

is my go to for her, she'll, she'll help with marketing and stuff. But everything else I do. I do everything myself. And I mean, it's been amazing. I mean, we've been picked up by People magazine, TMZ, be online, New York Post San Francisco Chronicle, pretty much every major outlet you can imagine, has picked up one of our letters. And so it's just been a, it's been a incredibly fulfilling and empowering experience to create something and build something and see it grow and see it get a response that it has. But I mean, I'm pretty much doing it all. But I don't want to say it all myself, I have friends and mentors and a brother that I can lean on and go to advice for and I send my former boss, I still send him scripts, and I send him letters and get his opinion. So so it's my baby. And I'm doing most of it most of the work. But I do have like a team of family and friends that are like, what do you need, I got you. And so I do have lots of people that I bounce things off of now.



Jennifer Malcolm 38:04

That's awesome. And, and that piece of having that support and perspective and insight for you is only going to help strengthen you and encourage you as well.



Lauren Brill 38:14

The support system is huge. I posted a story of video clip from Mike Kelly's the Fox Sports anchor, and he's also on The Real Housewives of Atlanta. He's married to Cynthia Bailey. And he did the he did our unsub conversations last week, the interactive show where we have a conversation with everyone. And on it, he says, I have to tell you, Lauren, that I am so proud of you, you are so talented, and you have so much grit and and your personality and your determination is so admirable, you know, you always have to tell stories that you're gonna get them back. And I watched this interview back and I started crying. And it's just when people believe in you, and they say it, it's like, Alright, I got this and it pushes you harder. And I wrote a whole thing when I posted it just, there's when you have people, when you have a dream, or you have an ambition, no matter what it is, whether it's media, or you want to be a lawyer, there is a steep hill that you have to climb, to get to where you want to go. And when you have people who will do whatever you ask when you message them or text them and are willing to go on that climb with you. It helps you dig a little deeper and push a little harder in the moments that you're tired and the moments that you're exhausted and the moments that you're like, what the heck am I doing? And so when I watched it back, it was like I was exhausted and I was like oh my god, I can do this. And those people really matter on your journey having those people in your corner.



Jennifer Malcolm 39:36

Well it's it's the wind in your sails that and I have that I have a community of women

advocates who believe in me believe in this movement, etc. that I I have down days I have tough days. I have days that I'm like What the hell was I thinking? them to breathe life back in and get perspective or help out it does put perspective back into my heart. It brings encouragement back in And that's a piece of the community aspect of this, that we didn't, we're not doing this alone. And, you know, linking arms with other people, we're going to get through and do so much more impactful work, because we're doing it as a team instead of an individual.



Lauren Brill 40:14

I mean, I tell people, every time someone signs up for the unsealed, if it's for \$3, or \$300, it tells me, I believe in you, it's not about the money. I mean, I obviously need money to keep this company alive. But it's really whenever when I get happy, because that really is telling me that people believe in me, they believe in what I'm doing. And my stories are mattered to people. And that matters to me that they make a difference and that they are affecting people. And then and then when you see like, when I my mom goes on to my email, and I see her sending emails up schools to speak. And when I see her doing that, and I'm laying on the couch, like hanging, taking a break with my dog, I'm like, Oh, no, get back to work. You know, mom can't be busting your butt and you relaxing, like, get to it. And so when you see other people, you know, kind of reach your goal and help you with that fight in that climb. It makes you just continuously push yourself, even in the moments that you're like, I need a break. You're like, No, no, no, no. Get back to it. On my toughest boss.



Jennifer Malcolm 41:15

Aren't we all? Have you had any response or inquiries from people? Who were the ones that committed the acts of violence or the acts of sexual assault? Or they were the perpetrator? And not necessarily the victim? Yeah. That and had it? How was that response with you?



Lauren Brill 41:33

Well, no, you haven't had it. And I'll tell you why I don't put names. And I don't make it clear who it was. And the reason, first of all, it's illegal, unless somebody was convicted, you cannot put out there that so and so, you know, rape you unless they were convicted. Otherwise, it's slander. So the people who so unless you have a conviction, you have to be very careful about that. And that's just the law, right? That's just the law. So I'm not gonna skirt the law. So we don't, and the site isn't a revenge site. It isn't a site out people, the site is about empowering people who've gone through something similar. So I don't need to say, Well, I don't know that it's me. But nobody needs to say a name for them to relate to

their story. So that's what the plate is about. It's relating to the story not about naming names, you name names, the police, not to me. So we don't put names we don't if we don't put like, hey, it was my It was my first cousin, you know, the son of my uncle, Sam, whatever, so it can't be identified. But we still get the point across we don't name names unless the person has been convicted, or we have some sort of hard. We have a situation when we won't be considered slander. So no, we've never had an issue.



Jennifer Malcolm 42:41

I'm gonna end with some popcorn questions for you. Who inspires you?



Lauren Brill 42:46

Everyone inspires me every story? I do, I'll do I did a story recently, about someone who he was homeless and hungry as a kid. And he became a lawyer. And he, he talked about the importance of faith in him. Well, I didn't necessarily relate to being homeless and hungry as a child, I related to the idea of having faith in where you're going, even though you don't know how you're going to get there. Every story I do inspires me every single one. And that's, that's where I draw my strength from.



Jennifer Malcolm 43:14

What do you do to refresh your soul or to put gasoline in your tank?



Lauren Brill 43:19

Rollerblading. Rollerblade. Throughout this pandemic, I've joked that I'm just going to focus on my body and my business. And when I get out of this, I'm going to be sexy and successful. That has been my mantra, and I've, I've rollerbladed until like, my back started hurting. I do lift also, but the rollerblading is really my space where I can just be free, and I go rollerblade by the beach, so I have a view of the beach when I rollerblade. I go about six miles at a time. And it's just it takes me about 35 minutes and it's just my moment of clarity of freedom of just feeling good. Endorphins running through my body and I've rollerbladed since I was three years old, so it's just gone that that's with me.



Jennifer Malcolm 44:07

Don't even hesitate on an answer. That was great.



Lauren Brill 44:09

Yeah, that is my thing.



Jennifer Malcolm 44:11

If you could do anything on a Friday night besides rollerblading, what would a Friday night evening look like for Lauren?



Lauren Brill 44:18

pandemic or no pandemic?



Jennifer Malcolm 44:21

I guess so we'll do post pandemic.



Lauren Brill 44:24

Good people quality of life is quality of relationships. So if I'm sitting outside my my apartment building, hanging out with someone that's that's a good friend, or going out to a nightclub or a bar concert. If it's good company. It's a good time.



Jennifer Malcolm 44:40

Well, I appreciate your time today and your vulnerability to take this conversation to another level and different facets. As we close up Are there any words of encouragement or leaving parts of wisdom or advice that you would like to leave to our audience, especially those who may have dealt with sexual assault In some way,



Lauren Brill 45:01

Truth is power. Your truth is your greatest power. This powerful truth can take can move mountains. So, believe in your truth. Don't be afraid of it, and embrace it and what you'll realize is that your truth and is your own inspiration. And I was saying my secret became my superpower. And it's a superpower, not because of what I went through, but because of the strength I inspired in myself and others when I faced it and overcame it.



Jennifer Malcolm 45:31

So if you're listening to this story, and you're, you're wanting to know, what are some simple things that you know you can do to get involved or support, you know, start educating our children young and work toward consistent language and being an advocate for those around you.

L Lauren Brill 45:46

And also know that this isn't just a woman's problem, educate your sons to not about only don't committing violence, not committing violent crimes, but they can also be victims. I was shocked when I wrote my letter, how many men reached out to me about being molested by their babysitter, their neighbor, their friend, it is a problem for men and women or boys and girls, this is not a women's issue. This is a human issue. And I didn't realize that I was ignorant to that until I entered this space and started speaking about it so so don't just educate your daughters educate your sons do.

J Jennifer Malcolm 46:22

And and your letter, you had an eight quoted some of the same similar statistics on my podcast on my date rape. But you say that according to rain, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, that two out of every three sexual assaults go unreported. So that piece of using your truth, using your voice, finding a safe space to start sharing, when I shared my story that the flooding of stories, and community of me too, can we talk? Can we grab coffee, I've never told anyone and just starting to bring down those secrets. And I love that you said your secret became your strength and became your superpower. And that's so powerful. So if you're listening to this, and you feel that quaking in your soul have I've never told anyone you know, that is becomes your superpower becomes your strength, it becomes a place that you overcome. And you break through that wall of fear, and then put aside his freedom. And it's not that you forget. But it's it's joy and freedom on the other side that you you at this point, you may say it's unimaginable.

L Lauren Brill 47:24

But here is there. What I tell young girls is to open up to me about their assaults, I go, you have a gift that you don't even realize right now. And underneath all this is the gift that for the rest of your life. You get to go through life, knowing how strong you are. And that's a powerful way to go through life knowing Hey, I went through something really hard. And I got through it. And I kept going. And now let me and you can get through anything. You can go after your dreams, you can persevere no one is going to stop you in life. And you know that because you've already been through something hard. So see it as that as now you get to go through the rest of your life. knowing exactly how strong you are, no matter

what way to go through life. Look at you, you had something terrible happened and you started this podcast. That's powerful. Actually something horrible that happened into something now that is helping so many other women.



Jennifer Malcolm 48:16

Absolutely.



Lauren Brill 48:17

That's turning truth to power that's turning secrets into sacred power.



Jennifer Malcolm 48:20

I love that and we're gonna use that we're gonna use it on your podcast release, it turned your secrets into superpower. That's, that's gonna be a tagline for this podcast.



Lauren Brill 48:29

That's my tagline for my for my company.



Jennifer Malcolm 48:32

Thank you so much for your time today. It has been an honor just to sit here and chat with you. I appreciate you being willing to open up and be vulnerable in a way that a lot of people may be uncomfortable with. And I love that you're, you're comfortable in the uncomfortable, trying to have tough conversations.



48:48

And to think about leaving your comfort zone. But I think being assault survivor, you are you live outside your comfort zone because for so long, you're scared of everything. Every time I've knocked on my door was leaving my comfort zone. And now I can start a business and do everything outside my comfort zone because that's the only space I've ever known since I'm 16. Because being uncomfortable because I've been scared. And now I'm feeling empowered and less scared.



Jennifer Malcolm 49:11

That's so good. Well, I appreciate your time today. It's been an honor to spend time with you. I hope you get to enjoy some Miami sunshine today. And I'm going to try to do some Cleveland sunshine. It's rare here but every once in a while we do get it. Thanks, everyone for tuning in today. I hope that you were inspired by Lauren's story. We will put her contact information when we're releases podcasts on our website, put links to her website, how to get ahold of her. And just join this movement with us to empower and strengthen each other together. Alright, have a good day, everyone. Bye. Thank you for listening to the Jennasis Speaks podcast. If you love the show, one of the best things you can do is to share it with a friend. Tell them what you like about it, how it inspires you and invite them to listen. Subscribe to the Jennasis movement to empower women's voices. reclaim the power over your own narrative.