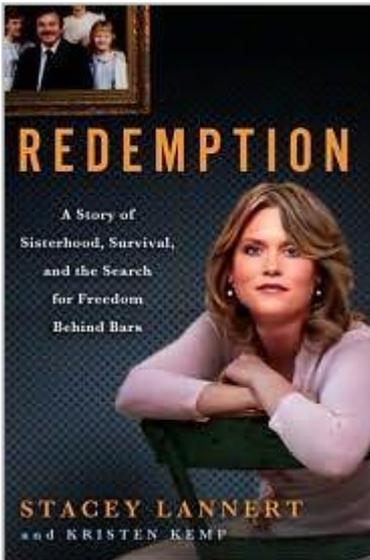


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“I ask you guys — use your voice. Please make that difference in someone’s life...help others,” said rape survivor Stacy Ann Lannert at Radford University’s Bonnie Auditorium on Thursday, March 24.

Lannert, a victim of many years of molestation and rape by her father, spoke out against sexual abuse and about spreading awareness of this “sickness.”

“I thought I was a bad person because bad things were happening to me,” Lannert, 38, said.

Rape survivor Stacy Ann Lannert co-wrote a book about her story. (healingsisters.org)

Her father began an abusive sexual relationship with her when Lannert was only eight years old.

“I knew it was wrong because it hurt and he was mean,” Lannert said.

As the years progressed, so did the abuse and rape. Lannert spent many dark years of her childhood being tormented by her own father.

Sexual abuse statistics are high in America. According to Lannert, one in four girls and one in six boys are the victims of sexual abuse.

“Sixty-eight million are survivors,” Lannert said.

Ninety percent of sexual abuse victims are abused by someone they know, forty percent are by family friends and fifty percent are by family members.

When children are abused they show warning signs of being a victim. Most of the signs are physical. This could include headaches or gastrointestinal problems.

A majority of abused children also resort to self-mutilation and shoplifting as a way to reduce pain.

"I stood up to him when I was 18," Lannert said.

On July 4, 1990, Lannert, who had recently become an adult, bought a pistol.

Lannert told her father that she was leaving and was going to take her little sister, who was 16, with her. He didn't like that.

"He shoved me against the door and raped me again," Lannert said. And then he raped her sister. Lannert, sick of years of abuse, took her pistol and shot and killed her father. "I regret it every single day of my life."

Lannert and her little sister were both arrested.

Lannert was charged with first-degree murder for the death of her father. Her sister was arrested for conspiracy and remained in jail for two and a half years. The week Lannert went to trial, her sister was released.

"Nobody cared why I did what I did, they only cared that I did it," Lannert said.

Lannert's defense was not strong enough, and in Missouri, they did not take the battered woman's syndrome into account. Since she was his daughter and not his spouse, she did not qualify for the battered woman's syndrome. She also did not qualify because she used the term "molest" in her defense, which does not show that she was in "immediate danger."

Lannert received a harsh sentence; life without parole, and remained in jail for the next 18 years. But the entire time in jail, she was fighting to be released.

The governor of Missouri at the time promised her executive clemency, which means mercy, but died in a plane crash two months before her clemency was granted.

"What about me?" Lannert asked when she heard the news of the governor's death.

The next governor who took office never granted any clemencies or pardons. He left the paperwork on the desk and never took her case into account. The third governor to be in office during her jail time, Bob Holden, told Lannert's public defender that she must go public if she wanted out of prison. Lannert did not want to go public.

"I had to stay tough in prison," Lannert said.

When Lannert felt that she should just give up, her public defender got a call from Kirsten Kemp, a freelance writer for Glamour Magazine to see if Lannert would do an interview.

"I said 'no, I'm not doing it, because I have to be tough in here, because I'm in prison. I have to fight for everything,'" Lannert said.

But Lannert realized that this interview could be the only way out of prison.

When Kemp published her article, Lannert began getting phone calls to go on television.

Montell Williams called her public defender and asked if she would do an interview on TV.

"That man, that man changed my life," Lannert said.

Williams did three shows about Lannert and the district attorney's office began receiving phone calls.

"They got so many phone calls from the Montell Williams show that they had to put in a special hotline just to take calls about my case," Lannert said.

"I went public and it was the hardest thing I have ever done," Lannert said. And after four years in office, Gov. Bob Holden never answered her plea. "He left it sitting on the desk."

After the Montell Williams show, Lannert received tons of mail. They were letters from women who had been abused or letters just saying that they were rooting for her release.

"These people reached out to me and gave me something...they showed me kindness, they showed me mercy," Lannert said.

While in prison, Lannert began training dogs. They helped her to realize that "in order to be successful, we have to fail first," Lannert said. "I became healthy, I found love through the dogs and I found a sense of purpose through outreach."

When Governor Blunt came into office, Lannert was excited. He was pushing for the death penalty for child molesters, so she knew he was on the same page. He had told her that he would grant clemencies on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve, the news showed a list of people who were granted clemency, but Lannert was not on the list.

After Lannert had felt another hard blow, she began to give up.

“On Christmas day I did that, I hung up my hope and I was miserable,” Lannert said. But after a week, her public defender called her and said that the district attorneys office was investigating.

“On a Saturday they called me and said, ‘he commuted you and not only did he commute you he made an immediate release’...and I walked out the prison gates a week later,” Lannert said.

Lannert continues to spread the word about prevention and awareness. She now tours around the country to spread hope and to teach people what they can do to help.

“Stacy’s story taught me that no matter how much adversity a person experiences, they can still have hope and overcome anything,” said senior Jonathan Sledd.

Along with the help of Kemp, the woman who had first interviewed her for the Glamour Magazine article about child abuse, Lannert wrote a book called “Redemption,” which is based on her life.

She also created healingsisters.org, a website that is an open forum for survivors or anyone who has known someone in their lives who was sexually abused.

“We need to find our voices to make it okay for victims to tell their story,” Lannert said.