

The Lovelight Stories

PODCAST

Ep: 2 - Surviving "Survivor's Guilt" with Jessica Rasdall | SHOW TRANSCRIPT

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00:01.80

lovelightstories

Jessica thank you so much for joining me today on the love light stories podcast. It is just a pleasure to finally meet you and get to hear a little bit about your story I know um I can't imagine it must have been in the moment.

00:17.11

Jessica Rasdall

16 years.

00:17.19

lovelightstories

What you said sixteen years ago that yeah that it um was a really really hard thing to walk through. I'm just going to let you start by sharing a little bit about what happened and we can go from there.

00:32.47

Jessica Rasdall

Yeah, Thanks so much for having me, like such an honor. I was a college freshman and I think like most college freshmen, you know you're at a season where it's this fresh start and you have your whole world and life ahead of you and while I didn't know exactly what my plans are going to be for the future I I knew I was going to do something right? I was focused I was a college freshman. Was there on scholarship I was I was ready to do big things and it was until one Friday night My best friend and I who I had known since I was 5 years old went out one Friday night and we never made it home 5 minutes from her dorm room. Less than a mile from home. There was an accident and my car spun off the interstate rolled into a tree and Laura was killed on impact and I was inches from my own death The only reason I'm talking to you today is because i'm. So short and when the roof caved-in, I was severely injured but was able to make it out. Um, you know in a matter of moments I went from worrying about midterms and what I was going to major in and writing my next paper to am I going to make it out of this drama unit like. Am I going to be able to walk again and when I found out that my friend who I thought was a stranger next to me at the moment did not make it out of the car like how would I ever go another day without her. How would I ever. Look in the mirror again or wash the blood off my hands they saw everything was a question and there were no answers to be found.

02:24.87

lovelightstories

What was it like...did you wake up in the car or was your first moment waking up in the icu unit? What was that like?

02:37.15

Jessica Rasdall

You know for most people who have a severe traumatic experience like that You don't remember most of it for some reason I do and I woke up in the car right after the accident. I could see the cars speeding past on the interstate and and nobody was stopping I was there as they cut me out of the car. Um, like I was awake through all of this and once they got to me they kept me awake because I had a very very bad head injury. Um, and I had to stay awake through that and none stitches to reattach my ear and close the gash on my head and I found out that I that Laura was in my car when I was in the trauma center and I found out that she didn't make it. I overheard the officer telling my mother he was getting ready to explain to her. You know that he had done a forcible blood draw on me and as he begins to tell her about this paperwork right by my bed I heard him say the words because this was a fatality.

03:51.19

lovelightstories

Mmm...

03:53.37

Jessica Rasdall

And it was like instantly all the dots were connected. She was the one who'd been in my passenger seat. He said she was the fatality. She didn't make it and I crumbled I was hysterical like trying to pull the ivs out of my arm screaming hysterically you know. Not Laura I killed my best friend you know, just hysterical. Um, and you go to this place of just like out of body moment just losing it and then an instant shock.

04:25.70

Jessica Rasdall

Obviously they they came and they medicated me and they restrained me because I was now at risk to myself. Um, but it was almost like this Cloud came over me and I remember laying there lifelessly for 4 hours as they administered the stitches and it was just like. Nothing was real. None of these people moving around. Nothing was real I was just in this cloud at this point and the the way that we grieve and deal with traumatic experiences as humans is very strange and doesn't feel sometimes like there's much rhyme or reason. But you know moments of complete denial to moments when I would pick up the phone and try to call her and then it would hit me like a ton of bricks that she'll never answer that phone and and you know reality hits and hysterical Again. It was just this roller coaster of me. My body trying to process what it could while my body was still trying to block out so much because I couldn't I was trying to physically heal. Let alone trying to emotionally even Grasp. What was going on that was going to take some time.

05:35.64

lovelightstories

Right? Your body was almost protecting itself from what it couldn't handle the overwhelm and not to mention you were in the icu trying to heal physically as Well...and probably that affects your ability to think and and grieve and all that too. I can't imagine you were just at your absolute max physically emotionally all of that. I did a little research and stuff too on your story and it seems as though her parents were pretty upset as well like what was that like to deal with a miss

your own personal grief but also trying to deal with you know her parents who of course loved her so much too were so upset over it.

06:24.94

Jessica Rasdall

It was not an amazing time. I had known Laura since I was five years old we'd gone to school together since kindergarten and in the weeks prior to this accident I was actually...I helped with their with her younger sister. So I'd be at they were both teachers and I'd go to their house every morning at six o'clock what they had to leave to go to school to work for them and I would take her younger sister to school and drop her off like I had a key to the House. We were very very close. And so in this moment to not just lose her but to lose every connection to her was was hard but I had I should say they had have let's be honest I have. Ah, very very very extreme case of survivor's guilt. So for me, there was this constant juggle of like the human emotions of wanting to be upset and sad and angry and not understanding why other people feel the way they do or what they're going through.

07:38.30

Jessica Rasdall

In that exact moment being consumed with guilt and feeling like of course they should not want. It's talked to me of course this and being incredibly understanding of that and I looking back on and and even in that moment I don't know how it's so young I was eighteen years old when this happened um. You know we always say like oh I could never do this I could never do that I would never handle something like this like you truly have no idea how you will handle something until it happens to you and I could have never told you that should a situation should an accident like this happen to me that I would go out and speak to hundreds of none of people and. And to share this story in a way that hurts so much but helps at the same time I would have told you absolutely not I will go hide in my little hole and not do that. Um, but you truly you don't know how you're going to handle something until you're in the thick of it and. As much as I could say I would never do that if you know my child was in a situation like that I could never never you know detach or disown or act as if there was no relationship to this person but we don't know and everybody handles things in their own way.

08:46.99

lovelightstories

Mmm...

08:51.72

Jessica Rasdall

And on their own terms and in their own timeline and for a very long time I really really waited for their approval, forgiveness, to connect...something, you know. I tried.

09:03.41

lovelightstories

yeah.

09:08.33

Jessica Rasdall

I would try to reach out but I really had to be understanding of am I hurting or am I helping you know am I helping them heal or am I making things harder on them and ultimately for me I made the decision to just take a step back. Not push or force or try to guide their own timeline. And if

they were to ever come around and want to have a relationship with me that I would be here with open arms if they ever wanted to come around and have a conversation even if it was just to get out Anger or frustration that I would be here that I would happily. You know, be that for them. But I can't spend my days waiting for someone else's timeline that doesn't do any good for anyone.

09:53.40

lovelightstories

Right? And what perspective at 18 years old to have, because that would be very very hard I mean you're still supposed to be maturing at that point right?

10:03.95

Jessica Rasdall

But that blows my mind constantly though like looking backwards now as an adult like eighteen year olds are babies! But so much of my decision making during that season came from a place of knowing that I was at peak conflict within myself within my body with others with the court with everything that I knew that I was at the peak and it would not always be like that. So with every decision that I made for anything I always try to think about okay, in 10 years how am I going to feel about this decision and that I did not make that decision on my that on my own day was I had a therapist. My parents were very helpful I had legal counsel. Had plenty of people in my corner helping me um, but helping me get outside of the moment that I was in because even though I was navigating that season I wanted to make moves and decisions and impact based on the long term so I would ask myself like in 10 years am I going to regret that I went out and spoke because people didn't want me speaking about this I when I started speaking to youth because I couldn't fix this right like I could not change anything that had happened I could not bring her back. I could not fix it and I'm a fixer so I started speaking to prevent others from repeating my mistake to keep Laura's memory alive and to maybe just maybe find a reason to wake up every morning but a lot of people did not want me speaking they thought I was doing it for the wrong reasons. I like they just they wanted me to face play. It. They wanted me to give up and a lot of days I was like well maybe they're right? Maybe I shouldn't maybe I like should not be doing this. This is not for me and I would get to that place where I would think in None ears am I gonna look back and wish I had done it instead because I can't get the time back and I'm never gonna be as relatable as I am right now 1 year older than you know, high school seniors which is like my prime speaking audience it's like I'm never gonna be as relatable as I am right now. Um, and that. Decision making like that perspective of looking at things from like how will I feel about this when this season and not that it's going to ever pass but like on the other side of this help me navigate it in the difficult times.

12:47.26

lovelightstories

Wow. So that's really what kept you going and kept you moving forward and in those moments of just despair because I'm sure it felt like your life was out of control in a lot of ways at different times to. To realize that you are making the best choices that you could every day to move it forward and move through the experience and not just try to put it on a shelf and crawl into your hole like you mentioned, right? And that is just um...I think that would be hard to do at 18 years old.

13:21.78

Jessica Rasdall

Well, it was very very hard to do but I kept coming back to, Laura didn't get an opportunity to quit or give up right? She didn't have that choice. So how dare I throw in the towel because it got hard or uncomfortable or there was criticism? I was given an opportunity to...I want to say...like make it

right? But there's no making it right...but I was given an opportunity to to do the next best thing to prevent her life from being lost in vain. You know to make something good. Come out of something horrible, and if I was just going to throw away that opportunity, how selfish of me.

14:09.10

lovelightstories

Yes, Yes I can totally understand that and just really commend you for taking the reins and making the best out of something that was really hard and really horrible. And you mentioned too...like what people were saying and people didn't want you speaking. Explain a little bit of that and what that felt like or or maybe some of the things you were hearing.

15:35.23

Jessica Rasdall

So in this season when it comes to the criticism like the biggest thing you need to understand to really grasp that moment is I was facing a 10.5-13 prison sentence on the table. My case was very publicized too while I was going through this. It was in all the newspapers it was on international media outlets like it was everywhere and it's not because anything was special about our story. This story happens every single day. What was different about our story is that I, the person who was responsible for this, was out there admitting that they were wrong and that's not something that happens every day so people did not know how to receive that. They immediately assume the worst of, oh she is out here talking because she wants sympathy. She's out here talking because she's trying to get out of her sentence. She's out here trying to make people think Xy and Z. Which is a little wild to me because my lawyer definitely did not want me going out and saying I did this. I'm doing the exact opposite of what I should have been doing, right? None of that makes sense when we look at it logically, but this was a very emotionally charged thing.

16:54.75

lovelightstories

Um, right.

17:06.18

Jessica Rasdall

So I don't know people just could not wrap their mind around the fact that I was just trying to make it right. It all started because I was in therapy and I was getting frustrated, I was diagnosed with PTSD and Survivor's guilt and a whole slew of colorful things and I was getting really frustrated because I'm like I don't want to talk about this anymore. I don't want to talk in therapy. I'd be like I don't want to talk to you about this. It's not changing anything. Um and that's where speaking came from for me. I was like, if talking about it is what it takes to heal I'm going to talk to somebody who it's actually going to benefit because at that time when I was dealing with such severe survivor's guilt, helping myself was not enough. I had zero motivation to help myself. But if I could help someone else that might chip away that guilt a little bit and so for me going out there and being able to maybe prevent somebody else from repeating our mistakes, keeping Laura's memory alive, feeling like her life wasn't lost in vain...is you know that for me was why I was doing this but to people who could not see that perspective all they saw was she's trying to get out of prison like she's trying to sway the court and like that couldn't have been anything further from my reality.

18:38.79

lovelightstories

Right? And that's the thing when you're looking at something from afar that's not affecting you personally - like me as someone watching a story and commenting on that and walking away

and forgetting about it 10 minutes later. we're doing so much harm by being so negative. Because for you, it was deeply personal. This is your life and it just always is going to be but the work that you are doing to try to make good and light come out of something that was very dark. In that person's perspective they were twisting it and taking it in the wrong wrong direction and I don't know why we do that as human beings...I don't know...I think maybe just because negativity is so much easier than positivity. We think so many negative thoughts in a day compared to positive ones and perhaps we just feel like people are ill-motivated.

19:39.89

Jessica Rasdall

And there was a lot of like things I would hear after the fact of like so fascinating but like well I could have never done that so there's no way you're doing it for that reason, right? Like. It's wild that we can just project our own thoughts like that unto other people to think well wow I could never go through something like that and and get up and make something good out of it. So There's no way they're doing that for good reasons. There must be another motive another motive here and it's wild to think that our our brain takes us there but also that we have such slow expectations of ourselves to think that we couldn't do that and again I know I've already said that but you truly do not know what you are capable of and it's that fight or flight mode and I have. No flight in me like I it does do not exist I have no quit in me and um and so the only thing I knew was to keep going and like what are their options were there and I don't know I just...I don't I don't have any quit. Ha!

20:52.99

lovelightstories

Right? Yeah, well clearly you don't and that's that was I'm sure God given in you to make make the best out of the situation. He knew you would stumble into. You know, now that I mentioned God, did faith play a role in this?

21:10.27

Jessica Rasdall

It was um, definitely a roller coaster relationship is the best way that I can describe it. I grew up um in a church I grew up surrounded by faith. In fact, the one person who visited me at the hospital aside from my family was a priest lwho knew our family. Well um, but there were definitely moments where I was so angry at God and like furious like how could you take her. Why would you know like so many. So much anger and then moments where I would cling to my faith of like he pulled me from that car for a reason he's got a bigger plan for this, you know it was such an up and down relationship depending on how I was processing things depending on like what stage of grief I was in...it was ever changing.

22:11.58

lovelightstories

Right? And coming out on the other side is there a different perspective that you have on that faith journey through that process? And have you seen what God was doing or is that yet to come?

22:27.23

Jessica Rasdall

I Think there's ah yes, yes I would say yes I just I don't think that there's ever gonna be a day where I'm like you know, I forgive myself. "This was all great. It was supposed to happen like this"...never.

22:43.64

lovelightstories

Yeah.

22:46.60

Jessica Rasdall

Never gonna be there but I do understand I do see all of the good that came from it. Do I think she needed to be taken? Absolutely not. Do I wish I could take her place every single day? Yes. But I understand all the great things that came from this. I see the impact that was made. I see the lives that were saved. I see all of that and there's so much beauty in it, but doesn't mean I'm like going to agree with it - still going to buck that.

23:13.57

lovelightstories

Yes, right, right? right? and that that gets at the the fact that there is so much darkness in our world like we do live in a fallen world. There's difficulty and hardship yet. There's so much light and goodness too that you can find and see through all of that and it's wrestling with that darkness and light always and you've taken something so dark and difficult and just in unimaginable ways really just found a way to make good of it. And I'm sure you have impacted so many young people's lives and I mean that's just...God Perhaps knew that you were the one to carry that burden to save so many more lives.

24:01.74

Jessica Rasdall

I struggled with that a lot in the beginning. I'm a very analytical person and all of the data pointed to it should have been me like the car rolled on my side. My side of the car hit the tree. Everything said it should have been me not her. Um, so that there was ah a large season of why like why me? why her? like so much of that and it wasn't until I got to a point where I stopped asking questions and I started just stating what was and accepting this current reality. Truly, speaking was what forced me to do that, because if I was going to have to tell my story I couldn't ask the audience my story. I knew had to tell it and that forced me to create this narrative and accept the story that I was writing...or that was being written. And no longer ask.

24:56.42

lovelightstories

Right? Yes, and and ultimately that has led you into doing what you're doing today right? Tell everyone what you're doing, what your career has been, and just all of that.

25:09.26

Jessica Rasdall

Yeah, and and you know here we are 16 years later, and while I don't speak to high schools as much anymore because, now I'm like their mom telling them what to do, I'm not their cool friend anymore. But I um I now have this absolute honor of working with business owners and professionals and helping them share their stories from the stage. I never thought that a decade of speaking would then in-turn allow me to help others share their own stories. It's wild to see how it's all come together and connected over the years, but yet today I get to help business owners figure out their stories, share it with their audience, use it to make a bigger impact in the world, grow their businesses. It's been so cool to not just see my impact from the stage, but get to see their impact. There's nothing like that.

26:09.48

lovelightstories

Right? It's just beyond your dreams and intentions - how ever many years ago when you were thinking about the long term the fact that it it turned into something so fruitful. Not only for your life, but for all these other business owners' lives as well. It's just absolutely incredible. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us. I can imagine each time you tell it, even though it's so many years ago, that it's still difficult to talk about and I just want to honor that and appreciate you you opening up and sharing again for the sake of others' lives. It's just been such a pleasure to meet you and get to chat today.

26:53.96

Jessica Rasdall

Thank you so much. It's definitely not something that's easy to share. But you never know who's listening you never know who's watching you never know like it's not the person who stands up and it's like thank you so much for. Like I appreciate you. Thank you for thanking me but I know that impact - I don't know what will happen when this is shared with the world I don't know who will listen or who will share it with a friend and that's the stuff that you just have to have hope that when you do do the uncomfortable thing and share your story that it's making an impact even where you don't see.

27:32.45

lovelightstories

Right? Exactly that is so wonderful. Well if people want to stay connected with you to keep seeing that impact where can they find you?

27:43.53

Jessica Rasdall

Yep I'm really easy to find you can find me at jessicarasdall.com online or pretty much on any of the social platforms @jessicarasdall and I'm always available. Come hang out!