

Chesapeake Commonwealth's Attorney  
Girls and Young Women's Empowerment Conference, Oct. 26, 2013  
"The Dating Game: Princes Only, Please!"

Thank you for coming today.

My name is Kate Loring, and I'm here today in honor of my 22-year-old daughter, Claire Cucchiari-Loring, who was shot to death by her ex-boyfriend on Friday, December 8, 2006, outside a restaurant in Greenbrier. After he killed her, he immediately killed himself.

At the time of her death, Claire was a jazz singer and a senior music major at ODU, planning to graduate with honors. I want to start by showing you a little video of Claire through the years, and in the background you will hear Claire singing an old jazz song called "Mean to Me."

[show video]

That was my daughter. An ODU friend said that even though she only knew Claire for a few months before Claire died, she had already learned that Claire was "kind and fierce and compassionate and fiery."

There are two sides of Claire that stand out for many people who knew her: kindness...and a determined independence and strength.

- I want to talk about her strength. When she was in high school, she loved Xena, Warrior Princess, and like Xena, Claire was a

powerful personality. In high school she was chosen to be the band drum major and captain of the color guard. She tended to take charge of things in her own life, and help her friends take charge of their lives— She was the one who reminded her friends to register and helped them figure out graduation requirements. She helped me learn how to sell things on e-Bay. She was great at fixing things and putting things together and solving problems.

- She took self-defense classes for two years in college because she wanted to be physically strong, too, and know how to protect herself.
- She worked hard. She got good grades. She wanted to be a success in life, and she knew that meant she had to work at it. While she was going to college she got a job at a motel as a desk clerk, and in a couple of years, even working there part time, they had promoted her to manager.
- She was very independent and pretty comfortable just being herself, even when that meant being different from other people. For example, she carried a Xena backpack even in college—and sometimes when people kidded her about it, she just said, yeah, what of it, I LIKE Xena!

- She wasn't just smart, but a good student and an independent thinker. Some of her professors told me that when they would see her hand go up again in class, they always knew Claire would have a really interesting question.

So with all that going for her, how did it happen that she was victimized anyhow?

I've thought about that a lot since she died, and here are some of the things that I think made Claire vulnerable. When you listen to these things, I hope you will think about yourself and your life.

1. She didn't feel good about her body. She was beautiful, but I don't think she knew it, especially because she struggled with her weight. This made her insecure in that way.
2. When she became a teenager she really wanted a boyfriend, and she was such a forceful personality that I think she kind of intimidated high school boys her own age. Rob was 3 years older, and when he came along, the day after her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, her senior year in high school, she was so thrilled to have a boyfriend. I think she put up with some things he did just because she was insecure around boys and she wanted a boyfriend so bad.
3. When she was a little girl, while her father and I were divorcing, there was a lot of yelling. After her father moved away, for a while

he was not very accessible to her, and though eventually that changed, still he was always the one to decide when they would see each other, and she always had to go to where he was. So when Rob started yelling a lot, which seems to have happened in the months before she broke up with him, I think she already was used to a relationship that included yelling and having a man she loved in control. She didn't like it, but it was comfortable to her because it was familiar, and so she tolerated some things she shouldn't have tolerated.

4. She was a teenager when she met Rob...and they had quite a few things in common...and he could be a lot of fun...and he took care of her in certain ways and taught her things...and he was her first love and she was crazy about him physically...so she didn't realize that some of the things he did were real warning signs that he was NOT a prince:

Claire and Rob were together almost 5 years. I didn't like him much, but I understood why she did at first. I was concerned about some red flags I saw in their relationship but I believed she would eventually grow out of it... and eventually she did. She broke up with him. There was no physical violence in their relationship until the last two days of her life, but I believe there was emotional abuse.

Here are some of the things that had begun to happen in their relationship (some of these things I didn't learn about until after her death): Rob always wanted to know where Claire was and what she was doing, and he wasn't happy about her hanging out with friends unless he was

there too. I saw him tease her several times until she got upset, and once he did that to me also. He had begun to yell at her over stupid little things. He also seemed to enjoy shocking other people. He would "hit on" her girlfriends right in front of her, and sometimes he cheated on her; eventually that made her girlfriends uncomfortable and not want to be around them. Rob seemed to feel that what he wanted was more important than what Claire or someone else wanted. I had noticed that if Rob had a problem, it was never his responsibility—it was always somebody else's fault.

Some of those things, by themselves, may not seem like big deals, but they are warning signs that this was not a healthy relationship and that Rob was troubled and not a healthy person to be with—not a prince. I believe that he did care for Claire in his own way, but *because he was damaged and troubled himself*, he wanted or needed to have power and control over Claire to make himself feel big. And because she was such a caring person, Claire wanted to help him, and Rob was able to manipulate her and use that against her. Rob would do something thoughtless or cruel that upset her...and then he would be sorry...and they would have a talk...and she would forgive him...and they would start up again. That's a real common pattern, and it's not a good one.

All of those things finally led her to break up with him, but after 5 years of being together, she still cared for him—even though, as she said, she was no longer "in love" with him and was becoming somewhat afraid of him—and I think she thought she could handle him, and she still couldn't really believe he would attack her. He began to stalk her and to threaten suicide. But I

think she overestimated her own strength and we both underestimated what he would do. You just don't believe it's going to happen to you...or that someone you know would do such a thing.

I want to say a few more words about unhealthy relationships and what to do if your family or your friends are telling you, "hey, this guy is no prince." A relationship can seem okay at the start and then gradually grow abusive, and you can gradually become used to behaviors that are not acceptable or healthy. When you love someone, you may tend to give them the benefit of the doubt, but it's important to know danger signs of an unhealthy relationship, and if they occur, force yourself not to keep giving the benefit of the doubt, but seek help immediately. Likewise, if you find yourself acting abusively towards a partner, it's important to seek help in understanding and changing your behavior. As we learned in Claire's case, a somewhat abusive relationship can escalate with terrifying speed into tragedy.

Before I close, I want to say a few words about the signs of a good relationship—whether it's with your mother or with your prince. Since she died I've thought about how my relationship with Claire was fundamentally healthy.

- (1) We usually were pretty open with each other—often remarkably open. Both of us tended to get flustered in verbal arguments about emotional things, and not always think or speak clearly, so over the years we learned together that when we disagreed sometimes it was better to communicate first by letter or e-mail, then follow up in person.

- (2) I took care of Claire sometimes, and she took care of me sometimes—on the day she died, I sat protectively beside her as she worked through the criminal justice process, and she tried to protect me from hearing some upsetting things she had to relate in court.
- (3) For a mother and a young adult daughter, there are tricky issues of dependence and independence and boundaries to negotiate, but I think we did pretty well.
- (4) Something I miss a lot now is that I felt I could just be myself with Claire—she was restful to be around that way—and I think she felt the same about me.

....Many of these mother-daughter issues are key in the dating game as well: being able to talk openly and honestly, negotiating dependence and independence and boundaries, balancing the needs of yourself with the needs of your partner, respecting yourself and respecting your partner, and being able to be truly and fully yourself with the other. When Claire called on Thanksgiving morning to tell me she had broken up with Rob, she said, "Mom, I just want to be myself again." I was so glad.

Thank you so much for coming.