

**Excerpted from *Warrior: My Path to Being Brave* by Lisa Guerrero. Copyright © 2023.
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As Dustin Chauncey waited to hear his verdict, he turned around and scanned the crowded courtroom until his eyes landed on me. He knew who I was— we'd met when he thought he'd gotten away with murder and I'd stuck my microphone in his car window to let him know he hadn't. A shiver raced through me as I returned his glare—it was like staring into the eyes of the devil. But I didn't look away.

I was part of the reason he'd been arrested and charged with the murder of two-year-old Juliette Geurts. For more than six years, he'd escaped justice. In a few minutes, he'd finally receive it.

As Inside Edition's chief investigative correspondent for more than a decade, I've covered hundreds of stories—consumer scams, crooked politicians, corrupt televangelists, rapists and predators, child, women, elder, and animal abuse, and, well, the list goes on.

But I'd never solved a murder.

It began two years earlier when I received a message on Facebook from Monica Hall, Juliette's aunt. She'd grown frustrated with the incompetent police investigation of her niece's death and had reached out to the media for help. But her pleas to the networks, the cable news stations, and television personalities such as Dr. Phil and Nancy Grace had gone unanswered. It had been four years since Juliette had died, and I was her last resort.

She begged me to look into it.

"It's been years of hell for our family. I don't know where else to turn," she wrote.

In the early morning of July 11, 2008, Juliette had been brutally beaten in her home just a few feet from her identical twin sister, Jaelyn. Juliette had suffered a lacerated liver from a kick to the stomach as well as cerebral hemorrhaging and a badly bruised lung. Even her crib had been broken during the assault. Yet none of the three adults—two men and Juliette's mother—who had been in the tiny ranch-style house that evening drinking rum and smoking weed had been arrested. The murder had not only remained unsolved, it had barely been investigated. Worse, the cops had bungled every aspect of it.

It had taken five days after the toddler's murder for the cops to seal the home as a crime scene. It was a year before her clothes were sent to a crime lab. The police never separated the suspects before they interviewed them—so they had time to coordinate their stories. The cops never charged anyone, even though they called Juliette's death a homicide. And when the principal witnesses and/or suspects left the state, law enforcement threw up its hands and just moved on. The more I read, the more furious I became. This was a little girl who had never had a chance, even in death. Juliette's aunt had been leading a petition drive that would compel a grand jury to be convened and a special prosecutor to be appointed to investigate the unsolved crime.

But Juliette's story needed national attention to help Monica garner the necessary signatures. I couldn't stop thinking about this tiny victim whose horrible death had been treated so callously by law enforcement. "I have to look into this," I said to Bob Read, the senior producer for our investigative unit.

He told me what I already knew. “You have nothing to go on. There’s no one to interview. There’s no one to confront. The suspects have disappeared. There are no leads. This case is cold.

What could we do that law enforcement couldn’t?”

I wasn’t sure yet. But I told him I’d like to meet and interview Monica and see where the story would lead. When Charles Lachman, our executive producer, gave it the green light, I headed to Gering, the remote town in Nebraska where Juliette had lived and died. I met with Monica, and we toured the home where Juliette had been killed. Then Monica played me the tape recording of her conversation with Doug Warner, the district attorney handling the case.

“I hope for Juliette’s sake you will find justice for her,” Monica pleaded.

I could hear the anger in the DA’s voice when he replied, “Don’t give me that ‘for Juliette.’ Do you know how many dead babies I’ve worked on?”

This recording was impossible to listen to without becoming emotional. As Monica and I talked about that awful conversation, about the sloppy investigation, and about the beautiful little girl who had been known as the louder, more rambunctious twin, my eyes welled with tears.

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I decided to write a book about bravery because every day I receive messages from viewers asking me how I’m able to fearlessly investigate and interview bad guys. They want to know where my courage comes from. And my answer contradicts everything journalists have been taught. But I’m not a typical journalist—I was never trained in a traditional newsroom. I didn’t receive a journalism degree. I didn’t even finish college.

My route to journalism has been unconventional. I’ve been a cheerleader. A corporate executive. A Barbie doll. A sportscaster. A soap-opera vixen. A sideline reporter. A Playboy cover model. A Diamond Diva. A red-carpet correspondent. An investigative journalist. A disrupter. I made Dennis Rodman cry. I interviewed three presidents and hundreds of professional athletes in dozens of locker rooms throughout the country. I costarred in a viral video that has one billion views. I sued the New England Patriots—and won. I tracked down a murderer. I butted heads with Barbara Walters. I even played myself in a movie starring Brad Pitt.

But my proudest moments come from helping people find closure and seeking out justice.

My bravery stems from pain. I feel the victims’ pain so acutely that I absorb their sorrow, rage, and frustration. Little Juliette was not another “dead baby.” I felt as though she were my niece too. Monica’s despair and anger were my despair and anger. I connect easily with survivors, no matter who they are and what they’ve gone through. Once that happens, I’m filled with empathy.

Empathy is what makes me brave.

Where does my empathy come from? I’ve been building it brick by brick during my lifetime. When I was a little girl, my parents—Dad, a social worker; and Mom, a Chilean immigrant—taught me compassion for others by taking me to homeless shelters and nursing homes. Then, when my mom died when I was eight, I was overwhelmed by a pain so fierce that it has helped me understand others’ pain. When I became an actor, I was trained to channel the suffering, rage, and love that my characters possessed

into my performance. And then when I was older, I endured harassment and abuse that led me into severe depression and suicidal thoughts. When I hear about someone's pain, I not only absorb their suffering, I remember my own.

I'm often approached by people who tell me they love my confrontational style. I race into dangerous situations, armed only with a microphone, and I demand accountability from those who hurt others. I've been struck by cars. I've had knives and guns pointed at me. I've been punched, pushed, kicked, and stalked, and I've received death threats.

But there are some who criticize me, saying a journalist shouldn't show emotion or take sides in a story. They'll tell me that I'm doing it wrong, that I'm not "objective." I reject the idea of being blindly unbiased. There are bad guys and good guys. A monster is a monster.

"I'll help you find justice for baby Juliette," I told Monica.