



“

A woman ought to have babies. That's part of her life plan. It's expected, and her value as a person is being part of a couple or having a family. That a woman has had children, and the children themselves – those are valuable. But that's not the only thing that I have to offer the world.

”

April

My name is April. I'm a thoughtful person. I'm a kind person. I love eating at new restaurants and any kind of live music. You can do both of those things alone, which is good because I just relocated to Apple Valley and I'm still making friends.

My parents don't ask about my life as an individual. They're not trying to be mean; it's just their way of thinking. Because I don't have a family or babies, they don't know how to interact with me.

Last year I asked my dad, "Why don't you ever visit me?" He said, "Well you know, we don't have the money or the time." But they visit my sister, who has children, and she lives in a different state. So I told him, "When you push out a baby I'll come and visit you." He was just dumbfounded by that.

I'm almost forty and people say, "Well, there is still time," as if having a baby is the only thing that I can do in

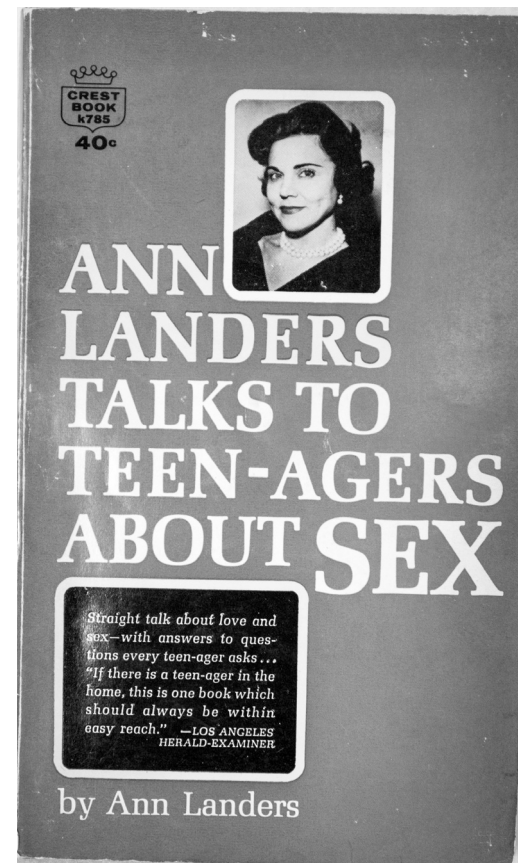
life, or that's a goal. My students ask if I have any kids. No. But do you want any? No. They're shocked. I stand up there and I look like a reasonable person, so how can I not want to be a mother? They can't quite wrap their heads around it.

What's funny about my family though is that, when I was growing up, my parents never wanted me to have sex. They never talked to me about it. My dad wouldn't even utter the word. My mother gave me a book that Ann Landers wrote in the fifties, and that was our conversation about sex. So, I didn't even know how you were supposed to say "penis." I thought it was "*pen-is*," like you write with. As a teenager I had a boyfriend and we would make out and steam up the windows in the car. My mother would call me a whore. That was her point of view – that any kind of sexual activity, even if it is normal, is not okay.

After four years in college, I moved back home for graduate school. I stayed out past midnight one night. My mother told me I had to leave. I was couch surfing for a couple weeks. One of those nights a friend sexually assaulted me. I'd internalized all this stuff my family had told me – you're a whore, if you're sexual you are a bad person – and I thought that what had happened was my fault. I didn't go to the police. I didn't tell anybody. All



"We never had a face to face discussion. I was too young at the time to understand that the book was out of date and reflected values and attitudes of a different time."



April's family chose to leave a copy of this book on her bed when she was 14 years old, rather than talk to her about sex.

I focused on was getting him to say that it happened, because I thought nobody would believe me otherwise. He kept denying it, and I felt like I was going crazy.

He called one night. He was yelling at me and threatening me, saying that he wanted to kill himself. I said, "Fine, do it," and I hung up the phone. I was really mad. My family could hear some of the conversation and my mother asked, "How could you behave like that?" She never asked why I would be so upset with somebody.

All these women who have come out talking about sexual assault or inappropriate touching that happened to them years ago, I totally get that. I get why they wouldn't say anything at the time it happened, because it's a fear of another assault - "You're a liar," or "You're a whore and you're making up stories." It's trauma on top of trauma, and self-protection kicks in.

I'm getting braver in my story telling. One way that I've been doing it is through my teaching. When I mention statistics about sexual assault, girls want to share their

stories. I let them. And then I'll say, "That's right, it can happen to anyone. When it happened to me ..." I let them know it's happened to me, too. Because to understand the problem, people need to see that it happens to everybody.

There is nothing that a woman can ever do to justify violence against her. Even if she is dating a person and making out with them and she says no in the middle of it. That's it! That means we stop.

My classes are filled with people that I can influence, more than just having a child, or two or three or four. I am more than just this little Catholic girl that all she has to exchange for in life is her virginity. I am more than that. That's not what defines me as a person. I am a strong, independent woman.