

**Andrew Jenks (00:00:06):**

If you have any tips about Jerry Falwell Jr. or Liberty University, you can contact us at [tips@gangstercapitalism.com](mailto:tips@gangstercapitalism.com) or our tip line 347-674-6980. We can ensure anonymity.

**Amy Sharp (00:00:26):**

Fear is such a powerful thing, especially on a campus like Liberty's. This school uses the fear of judgment and the fear of shame and the fear of not fitting into their perfect cookie-cutter picture. I decided a long time ago that I was not going to be a victim of fear. I am happy to tell my story if that helps somebody else. I'll talk to whoever will listen if it means that it's a better environment for everybody. The fear of so many people that are not ready to tell their story is why it's taken this long for anything to happen in the first place. And I think I just kind of saw that cycle and just thought, "Well, I'll do something about it," because Liberty administration isn't doing anything. That's another thing that Liberty tried to do, especially with me is silence me and silence others on campus to keep people from knowing the truth. And the truth of it is, for a school that preaches pro-life, it's almost easier to have an abortion than it is to choose life on Liberty's campus.

**Andrew Jenks (00:02:25):**

From C13Originals, a Cadence13 Studio, I'm Andrew Jenks, and this is Gangster Capitalism, season 3: Jerry Falwell Jr. and Liberty University.

**Amy Sharp (00:03:03):**

I didn't have the best home life. My mom, she's a single mom. I didn't have the greatest relationship with her or really anybody else where I came from in Arkansas. I had heard about Liberty and thought, "This is my saving grace. I got to get myself there and then everything's going to be okay."

**Andrew Jenks (00:03:30):**

This is Amy Sharp. As a high school senior, Amy had saved up enough money to be able to pay her own way at Liberty University. And so, she moved from Arkansas to Lynchburg and enrolled as a freshman at LU in the fall of 2016.

**Amy Sharp (00:03:51):**

Freshman year was awesome. It was so much fun. I made so many friends and I really started believing like, "Okay. This is like my family. I really feel at home here."

**Andrew Jenks (00:04:04):**

Amy's boyfriend from back home, Colton, followed her to Lynchburg looking for a new start as well. They'd been together for almost two years and had discussed getting married one day in the future. Colton got himself a job and a small apartment and Amy would leave her dorm on the weekends to be with him.

**Amy Sharp (00:04:26):**

And then it was Christmas break and I had started to feel nauseous and wasn't too

sure what was going on and then I realized, "I think I might be pregnant." I took three tests and all instantly came back positive. And a million things kind of went through my head at once.

**Andrew Jenks (00:04:52):**

One of those things was the Liberty way and the honor code that all students are required to sign.

**Amy Sharp (00:05:00):**

I did sign the honor code, which said you can't have premarital sex, but it didn't say what happens if you do. All it said was if you get an abortion, then that is grounds for expulsion. It didn't really say anything as far as getting pregnant goes, but I was terrified and I was just like, "Okay, I'm going to be cast out. I'm going to be kicked out. Everyone's going to think of me as just a rumor and that girl that got pregnant and now she's not here anymore." I remember thinking like, "This is it. This is the end of everything."

**Amy Sharp (00:05:38):**

So, I was like, "You know what? I'm going to finish out this semester. I'm just not going to tell anybody and everything's going to be fine and I'll figure it out later." The first trimester's the worst because you're raging with hormones, you're nauseous. You're kind of starting to glow. Everything's uncomfortable. And as an 18 year old who's never been through this before, doesn't have a mom to ask questions, I was freaking out. I would run through these scenarios of, "Okay. What would happen if I told this person?" Every scenario ended with me being kicked out of school and having nowhere to go.

**Andrew Jenks (00:06:21):**

Amy had paid for her dorm and meal plan for the semester. And she and Colton had tried to figure out how to hide her pregnancy at least until the summer. She was due in August, but the secret became too much. And she decided to finally tell her roommate.

**Amy Sharp (00:06:41):**

It felt so good to get it off my chest. And this person that I've been terrified to tell for so long was happy for me. I felt like the sense of weight lifted off my shoulders. And she was like, "You can't tell anybody." She was like, "They're going to kick you out. There's no doubt about it. You'll be out." That also made it really hard because my entire life is being taken over by fear and secrecy and this overwhelming sense that it's not going to be okay. And that's something that, I mean, everybody says that whenever something hard is going on is someone always says, "Oh, it's going to be okay." Nobody told me it's going to be okay. I was slipping into a depression. It wasn't just the scenario that wasn't okay. It was like, "I wasn't okay." I finally came to a point where I just couldn't lie anymore and I needed to know what was going to happen.

**Andrew Jenks (00:07:58):**

Amy approached one of the prayer group leaders on her dorm and asked her if they could talk.

**Amy Sharp (00:08:06):**

I told her that I was scared and that I felt like I could talk to her because she was a prayer group leader. And I was like, "I know that you have the group's best interests at heart and that you care about us." And she was like, "As long as you're not a harm to yourself or to others, then you can speak freely. We're friends. I promise I won't tell anybody." So, I told her everything. I was like, "As someone who's on leadership, is there anything that you can tell me as far as what's going to happen?" She was like, "No, I don't know what's going to happen." And she was like, "I'm glad that you told me and this is a safe place." She was like, "But I feel like you need to tell somebody that would know." And I said, "No, let's just keep this between us. I'll let you know if I decide to tell somebody."

**Amy Sharp (00:09:04):**

Literally an hour or two later, I get a text message where she sends me this long paragraph about how I put her in a bad position and that she is mandated to tell somebody this sort of situation and that she's going to go tell leadership. She was going to give me till the end of the day to say something myself or she was going to go say something. And I just remember thinking, "You just told me I could tell you something in confidence and not even two hours later, you're going back on that." I just remember thinking like, "Okay. Well, all this God stuff is a lie. I don't have friends here. What good is a prayer group if you can't be open and honest with the person who's leading it?"

**Amy Sharp (00:09:56):**

All of a sudden, I just saw everything that I had planned for everything that I worked for starting to sweat. So, I went home that night and I was in the shower. There's a knock on the door and my roommate answered and she kind of peeked her head in the bathroom and was like, "Hey, our RA is here. She says she needs to talk to you." And I just remember saying, "Just tell her I'll see her whenever I'm out of the shower." And I sat in the shower for another hour, literally just on the floor and sobbed.

**Amy Sharp (00:10:36):**

I held my stomach and I just remember thinking like, "Nobody else is going to tell us it's okay, so I'm going to tell you it's okay." And I just remember thinking, "I'm just going to be like one of those girls that amounts up to nothing and got pregnant right out of high school. And I'm going to be everything that everybody told me I was going to be. And I came here looking for a second chance and an opportunity to make myself better, and I'm sitting on the floor of my shower right now holding my pregnant belly waiting to get kicked out because of another life that's growing inside of me."

**Andrew Jenks (00:11:25):**

Amy's RA had been told about her situation and brought her to speak with the resident director.

**Amy Sharp (00:11:32):**

So, the next day I went and met with the RD. She was like, "We don't really know what to do with you. All I know is you can't stay here. You can't live in the dorms." She said that she didn't want the other girls on the hall to be influenced by me. And I remember literally begging saying, "I promise I won't tell anybody. I promise nobody will know. Just let me stay. Please let me stay."

**Andrew Jenks (00:12:06):**

Amy was sent to the LU shepherd's office, which is part of the office of spiritual development.

**Amy Sharp (00:12:13):**

These are supposed to be the staff members that put your health and your spirituality and everything first. And she was so degrading to me and made me feel like just a mistake on their campus like the woman from The Scarlet Letter. All of a sudden my health, my happiness, my success didn't matter just as long as nobody knew. So, it looks good on their part.

**Andrew Jenks (00:12:49):**

Amy was presented with two options if she wanted to stay enrolled at Liberty. One was to move into a residential maternity facility called the Liberty Godparent Home. But Liberty Godparent wouldn't allow Colton to visit Amy or to speak with her unsupervised.

**Amy Sharp (00:13:10):**

I just remember thinking, "This is not for me. It's great for women that are coming from abusive situations, but that's not me."

**Andrew Jenks (00:13:18):**

The other option given was for Amy to marry Colton and move in with him.

**Amy Sharp (00:13:24):**

I remember calling Colton. He was like, "Well, let's go get some Chinese food." I remember sitting in the booth thinking like, "This is it. I guess we're going back to Arkansas." And he was like, "No, no, no, we're not going back to Arkansas. You're going to finish your education." And he pulled out a ring out of his pocket and he showed it to me and was like, "This isn't a proposal because God forbid I've proposed to you at a Hibace Buffet, but just look at this and just know I'm trying to figure it out for us."

**Andrew Jenks (00:14:09):**

Colton told Amy that he had already booked a trip to Virginia Beach for the

upcoming weekend where they would celebrate their two year anniversary and he could give her a proper proposal. So, Amy went back to the resident director to tell her the plan.

**Amy Sharp (00:14:27):**

I sat down in front of her and I was like, "Listen, he showed me this beautiful ring. He told me these plans that he has for a proposal. Is there any way you'll give me just a few days left in the dorm so he can propose? We'll lope on the beach and at least that way we'll have something that's ours and all of this." And she sat right across from me, looked me dead in the eyes and said, "Why on earth would I let you go to the beach with your boyfriend knowing what you do?" I just remember sitting there like, "Excuse me." She's like, "I know you. You now have sex and all this stuff, why would I let you go to the beach if I already know that's what you do? No, absolutely not. You have one day. 24 hours."

**Andrew Jenks (00:15:24):**

Amy was told that a proposal wasn't enough. She needed to be married if she wanted to stay enrolled at Liberty. In effect, she was being forced to have a shotgun wedding. And the school was holding the gun.

**Amy Sharp (00:15:42):**

That next morning, it was a Friday. And I woke up, I went to class, I took two back to back exams and left from class at 2:00 PM and we drove straight to the courthouse and we got married. I had instructions from the shepherd's office to have a marriage certificate by the end of close of business that day. And that if they didn't have a copy of the marriage certificate, then I just didn't go to Liberty anymore. So, at five o'clock on the dot, we rolled right up and the first thing that we did as a married couple was turning our marriage certificate so I could stay at Liberty.

**Andrew Jenks (00:16:35):**

Amy moved in with Colton and continued school. And throughout her time at Liberty, she fought to change the school's policy, which they eventually did two years after her ordeal. Allowing pregnant students to stay in the dorm. She's still happily married to Colton and their daughter, Aribel, is almost four years old, but Amy's experience left her questioning the foundational belief of the school's.

**Amy Sharp (00:17:08):**

If this school just supported me the way that I needed to be, then it wouldn't be hard to choose life in this situation. But instead I hated myself, I hated my choices. I wish that none of it had ever happened. That's a terrible place to be in. When you're thinking about bringing another life into the world is like, "I don't even like my own life. How can I be responsible for somebody else's?" There was no reason for me to feel any shame and the fact that I felt that about bringing my daughter into the world makes me even upset about it because I should have been celebrating and excited. Everything that was going on during that time just made me feel fear and

shame and sadness. And that's just not how it should have been.

**Amy Sharp (00:18:09):**

Those thoughts are all rooted in this university that prides itself on champions for Christ and support and family and love. And I felt all of that beforehand, but after seeing those two pink lines, it just felt very fake. And it baffled me just laying there. My first few weeks of knowing that I'm pregnant thinking, "I could go get an abortion right now, nobody would know. But if someone was to find out, there's a clear cut policy saying I would get kicked out," but there is nothing to state what happens if I choose life.

**Andrew Jenks (00:19:02):**

Jack Panyard was a junior at LU, and the news editor for the Liberty Champion, the school's newspaper. And after hearing about her story, Panyard began to work with Amy to write an article about it.

**Jack Panyard (00:19:17):**

She was telling me her entire experience and it was awful. They treated her so terribly and she was so gracious and it was infuriating to hear it. And it caught Liberty in so many lies. I wrote an article, we sent it up to Deborah Huff and Huff knew it was going to be trouble. Deborah Huff is the faculty advisor for the Liberty Champion, and she had been for about 30 years. She'd been there for so long, she had a lot of history with the school. And so, her job was to oversee the day-to-day operations of the Champion. And she was trying to edit it already and then that's when we submitted my article to the senior vice president of student affairs, Mark Hein. And Mark Hein apparently saw the article and said, "Who does he think he is? CNN?"

**Jack Panyard (00:20:11):**

I mean, come on. I'm doing my job here. I'm doing what you guys taught me how to do. I mean, this is a legitimate concern. This is something that's a problem. Nobody here wants to see pregnant women fall into some sort of dejection, some sort of rejection. That's the antithesis of the Christian message. It's inhumane. I mean, anybody, whether you're religious or not can agree. Do not deject pregnant women. It's so easy. And they weren't doing that. And they were fighting against it and trying to save themselves instead of helping these really helpless people. It was awful. And they cut the article. It never ran. And within two weeks, I was fired.

**Andrew Jenks (00:21:13):**

You've probably realized by now that the culture at Liberty has been one of covering things up at all costs and judging from the people we've spoken with, this has seemed to go across the board through all facets of Liberty business. And that stemmed from the top.

**Dave Alison (00:21:34):**

I was specifically told by the command staff of the police department, we will have

no direct interaction with the “first family”.

**Andrew Jenks (00:21:43):**

Dave Alison is a veteran of the war in Iraq, and he’s also a former Liberty University police officer.

**Dave Alison (00:21:52):**

The freezing of the first family of a university, I’d never heard of such a thing. I’m like, “The first family of who?” There was a certain arrogance when it comes to being called that. The mentality there, it’s a family business. So, I started talking with my colleagues on the down-low and I’m like, “What is going on here? Why is there no such thing as professional descent here?” And the story I was given was, “Oh man, guys who challenge the family tend to be gone.” “What do you mean?” Before my time, there was a chief of police who refused to do the bidding of Falwell on a specific case and was pushed to the side and eventually shown the door.

**Andrew Jenks (00:22:40):**

Alison is referring to a story he’d heard about a former LUPD chief, who was asked by Falwell Jr. to intercede with the Commonwealth Attorney in the felony arrest of a student on campus. When he said, no, he was demoted. And as a result, he then resigned. We spoke directly to the former chief and he confirmed the story to us. He said, “Falwell never wanted crimes on campus reported.” Although he couldn’t remember if the call came from Falwell or from Laura Wallace, the head of HR.

**Jason (00:23:18):**

Everything started and ended with the president’s office, but any interactions we had with the students or staff or the public that were coming on campus, all that day-to-day stuff, was handled or eventually supervised by Laura Wallace, who was the executive VP of human resources. The way the university was structured, they organized the police department underneath human resources. So, our police chief answered to human resources and Laura Wallace.

**Andrew Jenks (00:23:54):**

You heard Jason, also a former LUPD officer, in episode three, speaking about how sex crimes were handled on campus. Jason is also a veteran and he says the way the chain of command was set up was unusual.

**Jason (00:24:12):**

I had prior service in the military, so I had a general idea of how things should be done, but it’s like, “Oh, so this is corporate America. We notify human resources of problems before we notify courts and compliance or the courts or anything like that. Okay.”

**Andrew Jenks (00:24:29):**

It wasn’t always like this. Back in the early aughts, the chief of police reported directly to Jerry Falwell Sr’s office, but then we’re told an arrest was made on two

high school kids for drunken disorderly conduct. And those students happen to belong to a mega church, which was a feeder for students to Liberty. Mark Tinsley was the officer who made the arrest.

**Mark Tinsley (00:24:58):**

I got a call from the vice president of human resources, Laura Wallace, who is asking me to divulge portions of the case, to tell her things about this case. Well, I proceeded to tell her that according to Virginia code, it's unlawful to influence a law enforcement officer or anyone in the court system in any certain way. You have to let the system play out. And so, I explained this to her, which led to very much a confrontation on the phone that ended with her hanging the phone up in my ear. I suspect she wanted the information because she was getting pressure from Jerry Falwell senior's office to find out who these kids were so that they could get the charges dropped or altered. Of course, you can imagine I was pretty fearful that I might lose my job at that point, but I was right and I stood on principle, but it was soon thereafter that we got notification that the chain of command was changed so that it did go through human resources at that point. So, the chief of police did then report to the vice president of human resources.

**Andrew Jenks (00:26:14):**

Or to be clear, the police chief would now report to Jerry Falwell Jr's first cousin, Laura Wallace. We asked Liberty why their police department reports to the HR department. They did not respond. We asked Jerry Falwell Jr. the same question. Becky Falwell provided a shocking response on her husband's behalf saying, "Jerry has no recollection of how, when or why different departments were assigned to different administrators." But once that restructure happened, even more barriers went up. Here's Dave Alison again.

**Dave Alison (00:27:00):**

When it came to HR, we had to be summoned there. We weren't allowed to go in there and have direct dealings with them. Everything had to be passed through our chain of command to be able to get to HR, even if it was an HR matter that dealt with us. It felt like you had to be blessed off to approach the human resources. Why that sort of stiff arming when it comes to your own employees, it boggles the mind. There was an institutional asymmetry there that felt at best unprofessional and at worst, purposefully inept, and to tilt the power structure in one direction. Why is that necessary at an institution that preaches Christian truth, academic truth and morality? It's to compartmentalize everything away from Jerry so that there is no blow-back.

**Jason (00:28:06):**

They had that system all set up to control the narrative, control the image. And if you wanted to discuss something or expose something that was not in line with their projected narrative, you were now the enemy.

**Andrew Jenks (00:28:26):**

Dave Alison says that working in Liberty's police department was so demoralizing that it created a turnover rate he still finds hard to believe.

**Dave Alison (00:28:36):**

People get hired. They figure out what's going on, go, "Hey, wait a second. This isn't exactly right. This doesn't make any sense." The turnover rate at the university is so unbelievably high. People are constantly rotating through these jobs. Rarely can somebody stay there long enough to be an expert at anything. And so, everybody is there just doing their best, trying to figure it out, but they're new and it degrades services to and for the students. And I could show you on my phone. I made a list of everyone that left the police department, my three years there. A police department of 70. And I think that's 40 some odd names that in three years of people who had moved on. It was because, "We'd see what's going on. We didn't like it. We would leave."

**Jason (00:29:30):**

So many of us, we use the phrase "We got out". If you're able to leave the university and get gainful somewhere else, doing what you want to do without having to sign a non-disclosure form to get out. "Hell yeah. High five. Next round is on me. You got out." We all joke about it, but the reality is that we suppress so much of the stress and the anxiety and just the bull shit that went on there, and the longer you were there, the more and more there is that you just don't want to think about anymore. I did a lot of just memory shut down, try to forget everything that happened.

**Joel Schmieg (00:30:38):**

My first story was on the new cheerleading coach. And so, that was my first newspaper story. And it said, "Schmieg is a sports reporter." That was crazy. I saw it there in print for the first time. I am a sports reporter and that was really cool.

**Andrew Jenks (00:30:56):**

This is Joel Schmieg. He's speaking about his time as a freshman at Liberty back in 2014 when he got his first article published in the school newspaper, the Liberty Champion. By the time Joel was a junior in the fall of 2016, he had become the sports editor of the Champion. Jerry Falwell had endorsed Donald Trump earlier that year and the election was fast approaching.

**Joel Schmieg (00:31:27):**

And then the Access Hollywood tape came out.

**Donald Trump (00:31:28):**

That this was locker room talk. I'm not proud of it, but it is things that people say.

**Joel Schmieg (00:31:37):**

And so, I decided to write a column on, what does locker room talk mean? And are these words that Trump used really locker room talk or is it something worse?

**Andrew Jenks (00:31:50):**

But just before the paper was going to print, Schmieg got called into an office with the editor in chief and the faculty advisor to the paper, Deborah Huff. He was told that president Falwell was cutting his piece out of the issue. So, Schmieg decided to post the piece on his Facebook page, along with a quote Falwell had said about promoting the free expression of ideas. The post went viral and was picked up in outlets like Politico, Sojourners and the Washington Post.

**Joel Schmieg (00:32:25):**

As soon as you put censorship on something, it blows up. If it had just ran in the newspaper, our normal usual following would have seen it, but because Jerry cut it from the newspaper, it reached worldwide audiences. I read about it in different news outlets all over the world. And then Jerry responded on Twitter and he just started lying. He said it was a space issue. "We cut it because we didn't have enough space for it." "Dude, I'm the editor. I'm the one who had to fill space because you cut it."

**Andrew Jenks (00:33:02):**

The next day, Schmieg was called in to Deborah Huff's office.

**Joel Schmieg (00:33:07):**

She sat me down, just the two of us, and she made it clear that I was to fall in line or else. I was to respect Jerry by never speaking ill of him. I decided that I couldn't just not speak out on the things that Jerry did. I couldn't just stand by as Trump said things that were anti-Christian, the antithesis of what we believed as Christians. And I can't do that, not in good conscience. And so, I quit. That was so hard. I mean, first off, I'm quitting a job that I've worked for for three years and I'm quitting a job with friends that I've spent every single day with over the last two, three years. I'm quitting a job that pays me almost five grand in scholarship money that I have to give back if I quit. It's a big deal, but I have to. It felt humiliating. So, I just left and thought, "I'll come back tonight when no one's in the office and get all my stuff." But less than three, four hours later, my key card no longer worked on the office door. They'd already locked me out of the office. If you had any position at Liberty and you spoke out about anything, you can say goodbye to your position at Liberty.

**Andrew Jenks (00:34:42):**

Schmieg wasn't the first person to step down from a position at Liberty University in 2016 over a political disagreement with Jerry Falwell Jr. And he certainly wasn't the most prominent. Mark DeMoss served on Liberty's board as chairman of the executive committee until April of 2016 when he resigned after being stripped of his chairman position. He'd publicly disagreed with Jerry Falwell Jr's endorsement of Donald Trump. And that was not tolerated. Here's Dustin Wahl, a Liberty graduate and co-founder of Save71, an alumni organization seeking reform at Liberty.

**Dustin Wahl (00:35:29):**

DeMoss, by speaking publicly was exposing himself to retribution from Falwell. But DeMoss was speaking for people like me at Liberty who didn't support Trump. And it was very, very important that he stood up and did that. I felt frankly protected by it and honored by it and respected by it. And I think that is what any rational chair of a board would do when their president goes rogue and makes a political endorsement. You say, "Hey, hey. This doesn't represent the university." But Falwell saw that as an attack on him. He and the rest of his allies on the board asked Mark DeMoss to resign his position as chair of the board. And that was a bigger moment because then that represented what would happen if an academic figure at the school stood up and challenged Falwell. And it said Liberty is Falwell's to do what he wants with. His ousting meant that Falwell had total control.

**Andrew Jenks (00:36:37):**

One week after Mark DeMoss resigned, the sign on DeMoss Hall was amended to read only his father's name, Arthur S. DeMoss Hall.

**Mark Tinsley (00:36:50):**

Liberty has a culture of absolute loyalty at all costs. And if you show any measure of disloyalty, you run the risk of being fired.

**Andrew Jenks (00:37:04):**

This is Mark Tinsley again. By the fall of 2016, Tinsley had transitioned from the LUPD to Liberty faculty and had worked his way up to becoming an associate dean.

**Mark Tinsley (00:37:19):**

There was a lot of pressure at the university leading up to the 2016 election to be pro-Trump. I mean, not only were the convocations veritable Trump rallies, but at one point, we were given a two question survey from the provost office. We were told that everybody had to take it and the survey was so soft-mark.

**Andrew Jenks (00:37:47):**

Tinsley shared the survey with us. It asked participants to quantify their stance on political and social issues on a scale of one to five, one being very liberal and five being very conservative.

**Mark Tinsley (00:38:03):**

It was an intimidation tactic because it was so poorly written. It was obviously not a legitimate survey. The only thing that I could figure, and this is what most people thought, is that it was just the university's way, Jerry Falwell Jr's way of saying you better vote for Trump.

**Andrew Jenks (00:38:20):**

Several people we spoke with said the survey was a loyalty test. At the time, Mark Tinsley reported to the vice provost, Emily Heady, who was in Tinsley's mind, the epitome of loyal.

**Mark Tinsley (00:38:37):**

Emily Heady was one of the best leaders that I've ever worked for. She is a rare combination of high intellectual capacity and high levels of common sense and a high level of integrity. So, here you have the perfect storm for a great leader. Everyone who worked for her, loved her, and she was in line as a vice provost to be the next provost, the next academic leader of Liberty University.

**Andrew Jenks (00:39:15):**

It was November of 2016 when Tinsley says, he emailed Heady as he did on a daily basis.

**Mark Tinsley (00:39:23):**

I get a automatic reply on the email that says something along the lines of, "I am unavailable to answer questions right now. If you have any questions, you need to ask the provost directly." That was odd. She's not the type of person to pass the buck. So, this was very odd. So, I called her up. "What's going on?" She goes, "I can't talk about it, but you need to talk to the provost." "Okay." That was doubly odd. So, I got off the phone. Immediately called the provost. I said, "What's going on? I'm getting these weird messages from Emily." So he invited myself and one of the other associate deans up to his office and we went up to his office and he proceeded to tell us some of the craziest things about Emily. Things about illicit relationships that she was having with people that are on campus and all this immoral activity. And I remember looking over at the [inaudible 00:40:24] associate dean, even in the meeting, we were both thinking the same thing. This is a bunch of crud. There's no way that any of this is truthful.

**Andrew Jenks (00:40:37):**

The provost told Tinsley that Emily Heady would no longer be a member of the faculty at Liberty. According to Tinsley, none of the allegations were true and he felt that Heady was being pushed out. But to this day, he doesn't know why, but Gangster Capitalism is in contact with a former high ranking Liberty official with direct knowledge of the situation who told us that around the time Liberty issued the political survey to the faculty, Heady was instructed to tell her employees not to post anything on social media that was critical of Donald Trump. So, she communicated to her staff that "They're watching what we do. So lead with kindness."

**Andrew Jenks (00:41:27):**

Heady was also vocal in her opposition to Trump's Access Hollywood scandal. And so, according to our source, Liberty accused Heady of having an affair with a coworker and told her to sign a nondisclosure agreement and resigned or else people she was close with would be fired as well. So, she did.

**Marybeth Baggett (00:41:53):**

Non-disclosures were a requirement for getting a severance. So, there are a lot of

people out there who probably would love the opportunity to talk about Liberty and their experiences, but they are completely barred.

**Andrew Jenks (00:42:07):**

This is Marybeth Baggett, a former long time Liberty English professor.

**Marybeth Baggett (00:42:14):**

It's still is an extremely unhealthy environment to know that you are completely expendable, that you could easily step out of line and not even realize it. I knew many people who were never given a reason why, but there's sort of this conversations, whispers of people who would say, "They pushed back in a meeting," or something like that. You had this perception that you could easily be next.

**Andrew Jenks (00:42:48):**

The toxic and controlling environment that seemed to be pervasive at Liberty under the leadership of Jerry Falwell Jr. was the subject of a 2019 article in the Washington Post called Inside Liberty University's Culture of Fear. It was written by a Liberty graduate named Will Young who as a senior in the fall of 2017, became the editor in chief of the Liberty Champion. The year after Joel Schmieg's locker room talk article that he posted to Facebook, put a spotlight on the issue of censorship within the school newspaper. Here's Will Young.

**Will Young (00:43:31):**

What Joel did was extremely brave, but it made a lot of trouble. For that moment on, it was much harder to do our job. After that, it was made clear to us that we were not allowed to talk to the press ever again, otherwise, we would end up like Joel, off the staff. Every week articles were given much greater scrutiny by not just Falwell but by other administrators. Any administrator who was mentioned in an article got jurisdiction to edit, not only their own quote, but to edit any part of the article.

**Andrew Jenks (00:44:06):**

Stories about local politics, and the LUPD were blocked from publication as was Jack Panyard's article about Liberty's policy on student pregnancy. A column about Title IX issues and sexual assault at Liberty was published, but quickly got pulled from the website. Then in April of 2018, a liberal leaning religious group known as the Red Letter Christians planned a two day event in Lynchburg to protest Falwell's support of Trump and they invited Liberty students to participate. So, the Champion's assistant news editor, Erin Covey was assigned to cover the story.

**Erin Covey (00:44:53):**

Even itself was not that large, but it was attracting a fair amount of national media interests. There was a reporter from the New York Times, an NPR, Religion News Service. I talked with the leaders of the events and they mentioned Falwell by name.

**Andrew Jenks (00:45:10):**

So, Covey reached out to Jerry Falwell for comment.

**Erin Covey (00:45:15):**

And then he emailed me back and said, and this is a direct quote, “No, let’s not run any articles about the events. That’s all these folks are here for, publicity. Best to ignore them.” And that was it. I was disappointed, not surprised. We knew that it was going to be difficult to run the story in the first place, but this was actually the first time where Falwell was trying to block us from reporting a story before it had been written.

**Andrew Jenks (00:45:46):**

Covey informed the event organizers that she would not be in attendance.

**Erin Covey (00:45:52):**

I started getting emails and texts and phone calls from the national reporters who were there and had heard through the grapevine that a student reporter was getting blocked from covering the events. The fact that I was getting censored by Falwell, it was now a part of the story. And it was now something that they were going to cover because it’s newsworthy.

**Andrew Jenks (00:46:17):**

Covey agreed to speak to the press on the record. And the Religion News Service published an article with her quotes.

**Erin Covey (00:46:26):**

I knew that I was putting my job at risk and there was various ways that the school could retaliate against me. And so, it wasn’t an easy decision for me to make. I prayed about it a lot. I felt very torn, but I believed it was the right thing to do.

**Andrew Jenks (00:46:51):**

Shortly after, the entire Champion staff, along with then dean of communications, Bruce Kirk, and the paper’s faculty advisor, Deborah Huff, were all called into a meeting to join Falwell Jr. via teleconference.

**Deborah Huff (00:47:10):**

... 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:47:12):**

Hello.

**Deborah Huff (00:47:13):**

Hello. How are you?

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:47:15):**

Fine. Fine. Debbie, who you got with you there?

**Deborah Huff (00:47:17):**

We've got about 15 students and we have Bruce Kirk and [Stuart Shawt 00:47:20] from deans.

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:47:21):**

Okay. Bruce, how are you doing?

**Bruce Kirk (00:47:23):**

Good, Jerry. Thanks. How are you?

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:47:24):**

Good. Good, good, good. I just wanted to pass on to the students. You guys do a great job, but you got to learn... If you don't learn now what the protocols are in journalism, you're going to have some rude awakenings when you get out in the real world. And we're going to have to be stricter in the future if these protocols aren't followed. And so, I wanted Wahl and whoever the other young lady was, who talked to the media and showed emails from the publisher to the media to know that so that when they get out in the real world, they don't get fired in their first job if they do that somewhere else. It's not your job to say, "Debbie Huff didn't let me do this or Jerry Falwell didn't let me publish that." Any questions?

**Deborah Huff (00:48:14):**

I don't see anybody with their hand up or even looking like they want to ask a question unless they're hiding. Thank you very much for your time

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:48:21):**

All right.

**Deborah Huff (00:48:21):**

... and thanks for checking on that.

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:48:22):**

Thank you. Bye-bye.

**Deborah Huff (00:48:26):**

Bye. Guys, that was your opportunity. If you had a question, you should have asked. You can ask me if you want, but he was the authority here.

**Jack Panyard (00:48:38):**

Leaving that office after that meeting, I was so angry. I was so, so angry.

**Andrew Jenks (00:48:46):**

This is Jack Panyard again, who was a junior at the time, and the next in line to be editor-in-chief of the Champion. You heard Jack at the very beginning of this episode, speaking about his story on Amy Sharp being spiked.

**Jack Panyard (00:49:04):**

He was trying to make our expectations that we're just going to be puppets for some media company for the rest of our lives. And that there's no consideration of ethics, that there's no consideration of right or wrong in what you're reporting. And that you're just supposed to bow to whoever's hiring you, which is the antithesis of the Christian message and the journalistic ethics message. In its entirety, who wants to work for somebody like that? I was terrified of next year thinking about this. If he's going to act like this throughout all of senior year, something awful is going to happen.

**Andrew Jenks (00:49:37):**

In a meeting with Bruce Kirk, the dean of communications, Panyard expressed his thoughts on the Red Letter Christian event, and that he thought it was newsworthy. This had also come just after he had his story about Amy Sharp and unwed mothers at Liberty spiked. Then just over a week after the call with Falwell, Panyard was called into another meeting with Bruce Kirk which he recorded.

**Bruce Kirk (00:50:06):**

Thanks for coming in.

**Jack Panyard (00:50:07):**

Yeah, sure.

**Bruce Kirk (00:50:08):**

I'm sure you've been wondering, "What the heck's going on?" Because nobody's talked to you about anything, right?

**Jack Panyard (00:50:12):**

I really don't know.

**Bruce Kirk (00:50:12):**

So, it's like, "Okay. What is happening?" We got some directives from administration that kind of gave us the guidance several weeks ago that we needed to think about a serious restructure of the Champion. So, bottom line is, what it brings us down to is, as we restructure everything, we're doing away with the editor-in-chief position. And so, that's where you come into play. We just don't think that position, as it existed, needs to be in the same format that it was. So, bottom line is, your services won't be needed. We're going to change the direction and you would be free to go do whatever you want to do, but the Champion wouldn't be part of it for next year.

**Jack Panyard (00:50:59):**

So, I'm fired?

**Bruce Kirk (00:51:01):**

Fired is not the right word. We're not firing anybody. We're just not putting you in that position.

**Jack Panyard (00:51:06):**

So, I'm not going to be a part of the Champion at all.

**Bruce Kirk (00:51:08):**

You will not be. Well, I know it's tough. It's not what you wanted to hear, but it's not that you're being fired. That's not the right way to do this. We have restructured this totally and we've restructured assignments. And none of the other folks know this yet. That's what I'm telling you. This is not like you've been left out of the loop. You're actually one of the first people in the loop.

**Jack Panyard (00:51:30):**

To be pushed out of it.

**Andrew Jenks (00:51:35):**

Both Panyard and Covey were fired and their scholarships were cut. As a result, Will Young resigned from his position as editor in chief of the Liberty Champion. Effective the following year, staffers were required to sign nondisclosure agreements and subject to a new set of rules, which precluded them from being sources for outside media companies and restricted them from commenting on social media about any publication affiliated with the Liberty Champion.

**Donald Trump (00:52:10):**

Universities that want taxpayer dollars should promote free speech, not silence free speech.

**Andrew Jenks (00:52:19):**

In March of 2019, Jerry Falwell Jr. was in attendance at the White House when President Trump signed into action an executive order which would require colleges to "certify that their policies support free speech" as a condition to receiving federal research grants. Will Young, Jack Panyard and Erin Covey have each gone on to pursue journalism professionally, but they were shaped by their experiences at Liberty in ways that transcend their career paths. Here's Covey.

**Erin Covey (00:52:58):**

I had always had a pretty clear sense of the reality of the situation at Liberty in terms of how the administration controlled things and how Falwell himself ran the school and the environment of fear that was everywhere on campus. The experience that I had at Liberty as a student journalist really had a profound impact on my career now and the way that I view my career, but I think if anything, it made me want to pursue it even more. As a Christian, pursuing the truth is a really important part of my personal faith. When the apostles were writing parts of the New Testament, they went back and verified everything. There's a verse in Luke that talks about how he followed up with eyewitnesses and that on a very basic level, it's the same way that most journalists think about reporting. Being able to speak the truth and holding people in power accountable was just really attractive

to me. And it's something that a lot of Christian institutions highlight and talk about.

**Erin Covey (00:54:05):**

Even at Liberty, they had engraved various parts of the mission statement across the buildings on campus. And on the library, there is this message at the very top in huge letters. We pursue truth as we pursue knowledge. And I vividly remember coming back on campus as a senior after my experience, the semester before, and that was the first thing I saw as I was walking towards the library. That was very jarring because you read words like that. Words that most Christians and most Christian institutions will say they ascribed to. And you want to believe the best about places like Liberty that represent my faith and represent the reputation of my faith, but my personal experience went so blatantly against the values that the school claim to profess. That in and of itself is going to have a huge impact on the way you see your faith.

**Erin Covey (00:55:01):**

As a result, it's made me hype-aware of the way that Liberty was perceived and the way that I was perceived as a Christian. That's why it was particularly important for me to go on the record in the first place because I wanted to show that for me as a Christian, I really was committed to pursuing the truth even if that put me in conflict with the institution that I was a part of.

**Andrew Jenks (00:55:33):**

Will Young believes that the culture of fear at Liberty is entrenched far deeper than Jerry Falwell Jr.

**Will Young (00:55:43):**

I really think it's important to note that the culture of fear is really not just Falwell himself. It's part of the greater structure that he and his father built. Falwell Sr. set up Liberty to be this politically conservative and culturally conservative powerhouse and a moneymaker, which it is both of those things. He made money off of, in the fundamentalist Christian way, invoking fear into parents that if your student goes to a liberal college, they're going to be brainwashed. And so, you should send your kids here where they will not be brainwashed, which is why parents to this day, will not let their kids go to any other college except Liberty. And so, you still have that going on.

**Will Young (00:56:24):**

[inaudible 00:56:24] success in that way where it became this very conservative institution, which the Republican Party relies on a lot. And Trump obviously relied on a lot. Baked into the culture of fear at Liberty is the same culture of fear that's inherent in fundamentalist Christianity. Those basic fundamentalist Christian upbringing is, we do not question authority. You really believe that your appointed figures, Falwell himself, and all your political figures are appointed by God in this sense. So, to challenge them is to challenge God.

**Will Young (00:56:57):**

For faculty and students and anyone at Liberty, if you're not buying into the mission, if you're not buying into this, what I would call a fake cause, then you're not really welcome. When you're in that culture of fear and when you're into that fundamentalist culture, the way to maintain control over people is not through cooperation or not through getting their side of things, it's through the iron fist and through fear. And so, the censorship we experience was just one piece of a much broader, more violent picture. Even now, post-Falwell, that culture of fear remains. And so, you can really never redeem Liberty University unless it completely burns down and rises up something new.

**Andrew Jenks (00:57:47):**

On the next episode of Gangster Capitalism.

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:57:51):**

I'm calling him right now.

**David Segal (00:57:52):**

[inaudible 00:57:52] this way.

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:57:53):**

Mr. President, we're right here watching your plane come over to [inaudible 00:57:57]. And the plane... Hey, I'm not kidding. You're about to fly right over us. We're standing on the pier and we're going to be waving at you if you look out the right side.

**Jerry Falwell Jr. (00:58:07):**

Yeah, that's great. [inaudible 00:58:08].

**Andrew Jenks (00:58:11):**

The Falwells take family vacations, but wait until you hear who's paying for them.

**Phil Hackney (00:58:15):**

It's a classic case of insiders misusing a nonprofit.

**Andrew Jenks (00:58:20):**

We'll dive into so many of the questionable dealings Falwell Jr. has taken part in. Including one, which has managed to stick around in the news for several years.

**News Announcer (00:58:30):**

Jerry Falwell's personal trainer, Ben Crosswhite says years of scrutiny over a business deal between the two is catching up with him. Now, he wants to set the record straight.

**Ben Crosswhite (00:58:41):**

There is no inappropriate behavior whatsoever.

**Andrew Jenks (00:58:43):**

From nepotism to real estate, to abusing school resources, you'll hear how Jerry Falwell Jr. has treated Liberty like the family business.

**Phil Hackney (00:58:53):**

It's heading for some sort of crash with the amount of conflicted deals, sweetheart deals, transactions with people that have no business on its face doing business with. At some point, when you send all these balls into the air, those balls have to come down.

**Andrew Jenks (00:59:12):**

If you have any tips about Jerry Falwell Jr. or Liberty University, you can contact us at [tips@gangstercapitalism.com](mailto:tips@gangstercapitalism.com) or our tip line, 347-674-6980. We can ensure anonymity. This has been a creation and presentation of C13Originals, a Cadence13 Studio. Executive produced by Chris Corcoran, ZaK Levitt and myself. Written, produced and directed by Zak Levitt. Produced by Perry Crowell and myself. Research and production support by Ian Mandt. Editing by Perry Crowell and Bill Schultz. Mixed and mastered by Bill Schultz. Production coordination by Terence Malangone. Studio coordination by Sean Cherry. Our work and design by Curt Courtenay. Marketing by Brian Swarth, Josefina Francis and Melissa Wester. And PR by Hillary Schupf. Original music by Joel Goodman. And our theme song, Your Sins Will Find You Out is by Eli "Paperboy" Reed.