

# local woman

Cheryl Ring uses her experience to educate others

By Kamron Dearborn  
Staff writer

Cheryl Ring thought she had finally met her Prince Charming.

He wooed her, bought her gifts, slipped a ring on her finger and swept her off her feet. But after following a gut instinct and checking his criminal background, Ring realized she had fallen victim to a criminal sociopath — \$30,000 worth of family valuables and a broken heart too late.

As it turned out, Ring said, "This one person affected 25 people in two years. I thought I had known who I was dealing with."

A private investigator for Consumer Detective Corp. in Maryland Heights, Ring said she was blinded by the promise of love whispered in her ear by no ordinary criminal. He exhibited an antisocial personality disorder, making him a person better known as a sociopath or psychopath.

Ring grew up around the corner from this man, whom she met again through a credible dating service in 1999 and had no reason to suspect him of past or present criminal conduct. Ring knew other women he had dated and their mothers.

The relationship took off with fury and within three weeks, they were engaged. However, she began to feel uneasy. Her suspicion of him was sparked by "little sick jokes" he began playing on her family. When she noticed items missing from her home and her family's home, her suspicions heightened.

Ring estimated he stole about \$30,000 from her and her parents, grandparents, brother, aunt and other family members.

After intense background research, which revealed a background file full of past crimes and victims, Ring staged an undercover operation with local police and captured him. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to five felonies.

The harsh experience gave Ring a new love for the world around her.

"I really learned how to appreciate life," Ring said. "It makes me sad to know that these people will never know what it is like to love and to be loved."

Dealing with the past took time for Ring as she worked through phases of shock, acceptance and regret. She has now somewhat made peace with the experience and is working to better educate and inform past and potential victims.

She is working to start a business offering Missouri criminal background checks to local St. Louis-area small businesses at lower rates. She said she wanted to start with businesses because they touch a larger

number of people. The man who victimized her, she said, had stolen from every one of his employers.

Many owners of small businesses she has contacted said they do not do criminal checks due to high expense. Those that do run criminal checks do not run fingerprint criminal checks, so many crimes remain unknown.

She said studies show one in every seven employees has an unreported crime background.

"He didn't always steal from all his victims," Ring said. "But they tend to always leave broken hearts and messed-up lives in their trail."

She also plans to take a dollar from the fee for every criminal check to begin the Nelson N. Berger Family Foundation for Crime Victims in Need. The foundation, she said, would offer many forms of support for those whose lives were left in upheaval.

In addition to these business endeavors, she recently finished writing a book, called "Bouquet of Lies," about her experience. She said she hoped the book would inform others about sociopaths.

To write her book, Ring did extensive research into the traits of people with antisocial personality disorders.

According to Ring, traits of a sociopath include self-confidence, a lack of fear, high intelligence, a love of manipulative mind games, a lack of guilt or remorse for their actions, disloyal relationships and promiscuity.

"They are thrill seekers" who use the ordinary people they meet, viewing them as pawns to manipulate, Ring said.

A psychopath would be an example of the most dangerous sociopath. However, Ring said unlike the Hollywood stereotype, most do not commit violent crimes.

Statistics show one in every 25 people is a high-risk sociopath and everyone will have at least one encounter with a sociopath in his or her lifetime.

Ring said most contact victims through dating services, clubs or private social gatherings.

The best thing to do when you come into contact with a sociopath is stay away, she said. The problem is, you may not spot the person until it's too late.

"I'm not trying to scare people," Ring said. "I'm just trying to bring public awareness to the table. The only thing we can do is educate people."

She recently joined the Maryland Heights Chamber of Commerce to get the word out.

She encourages those interested in finding out more about her services to call her at (314) 653-0106 or (800) 708-0101.