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Star-Telegram

Monday, April 18, 2011



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By the time she was 19, Linda Armstrong Kelly was divorced and had a 2-year-old son, Lance.

Courtesy of Linda Armstrong Kelly

# Will to win

Like her famous son, Linda Armstrong Kelly doesn't know the meaning of the word 'lose' when it comes to life's setbacks

By Mary Rogers  
Special to the Star-Telegram

She was a 16-year-old kid dreaming of a father-knows-best kind of life and living in a cramped, low-rent Dallas apartment complex. Pretty, smart and industrious, she had marched into yet another new school and become part of its prestigious drill team.

She was even crowned a homecoming princess. Wearing a pretty dress and a tiara, she made a loop around the ballfield waving to the crowd. On that night in 1970, surrounded by the most popular kids in school, it must have seemed as if all her dreams of happiness would come true.

The boyfriend changed everything. He had a devil-may-care attitude, a fast car and an irresistible gleam in his eye.

More on KELLY, 2C

## Building Strong Families: A Lunch With Linda Armstrong Kelly

Noon Thursday  
Colonial Country Club,  
3735 Country Club Circle,  
Fort Worth

**Event benefits:** The Parenting Center

**Individual tickets** \$85  
(benefits 2 children)

**Luncheon package** \$125  
(benefits 3 children) includes one luncheon ticket, one autographed copy of Linda Armstrong Kelly's memoir, *No Mountain High Enough: Raising Lance, Raising Me*

**For tickets:** 817-632-5507;  
hhanna@theparenting-center.org

## Teens are putting dibs on perfect dress online

Web sites and Facebook help to minimize the potential for embarrassment on prom night.

By Samantha Critchell  
The Associated Press

Teenage girls largely live in a look-alike culture, wearing the same styles that they got in the same stores as their friends. On prom night, though, the idea is to stand out, making sure no one arrives to the big dance in the same outfit.

To ensure their uniqueness — after they've shopped in faraway malls and tapped into store registries — girls are using social media to claim dibs on their dresses.

A photo of Ashley McGowan's floor-length black gown is on the prom Facebook page for her school in suburban Somers, N.Y. She's relieved that only one other class-

mate has posted a black frock.

"There's an unwritten rule: The moment you buy it, you post it so it's 'your dress,'" explains McGowan.

A fashion advice website, Fashionism.com, has even launched a Facebook-based registry called "Got Dibs" that allows users to track who's wearing what to which high-school event, and get feedback on their outfit before they wear it.

Amy Avitable, senior vice president of marketing for Lord & Taylor, which is partnering with Fashionism.com on Got Dibs, says the project is a way to give girls an insurance policy that they'll have something special, while making sure they won't be second-guessing their outfit at the last minute.

More on DRESS, 4C



There are plenty of times when teen girls want to dress alike, but prom night is not one of them.

Lord & Taylor via AP

# Kelly

Continued from 1C

She was pregnant by New Year's. Valentine's Day found the gossip mill grinding. Friends deserted her. Her mother recommended an abortion, but she was frantic to keep the baby.

Who could have guessed that the baby would become the world's most celebrated — and sometimes controversial — cyclist, seven-time Tour de France winner and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong? His mother would become his most ferocious advocate and cheerleader — and, at last, a woman with her own mission.

In a recent phone interview, Linda Armstrong

Kelly talked about her choices, her book and the trip that she will make to Fort Worth as the keynote speaker for the Parenting Center's benefit luncheon April 21 at Colonial Country Club.

## The beginning

"In those days if you got pregnant, you got married," she says. "It was hurtful. People turned their backs and talked. . . ."

The experience left a lifelong scar. "I've never had any more children. It made an indelible impression on me, but the ability to have my child was based on the fact that I had to get married."

And so there was a wedding, but no high-school diploma for her and certainly no loving husband eager to spend time with a child wife.

Linda's view of marriage was clearly tempered by television's unrealistic view of the all-American family, always happy, always financially sound, with a mother who wore pearls to cook dinner every night and a father who read the paper after work while perfect children did their homework.

Maybe she thought she could have that life. After all, she had seen her own father change. He had been an alcoholic who beat her mother until the woman was emotionally unavailable, isolated from the world beyond the grind of work. They divorced, but just before Lance was born, Linda's father got sober, and when Linda needed him most, he snatched her out from under her husband's angry fists and moved her into his own home.

Forget the dreams. By the time she was 19, Linda was a divorced woman with a 2-year-old. In her book, *No Mountain High Enough: Raising Lance, Raising Me* (Broadway Books, \$24.95), she writes candidly about those early financial struggles, the frustration, the abuse, the questions about the bruises on her own childlike nose,

home, even the emotion-charged break with her loving mother-in-law. But she calls her husband "Ed-die Haskell" after the brown-nosing, über-polite character in the old *Leave It to Beaver* sitcom of the 1950s and 1960s.

"I gave most people in the book fictitious names because it was my choice," she says.

## Family matters

She calls her second husband "Salesman." He was a charming womanizer. "I even confronted one of his women," says Linda. That meeting quickly escalated into a shoving, scratching catfight. In the end, Linda left him, but not before he had adopted Lance.

After the divorce, she didn't want to keep his name, but by then it was Lance's name, too. "I took ownership of the name," she writes in her memoir. "The Armstrong family tree starts here and now, I decided. Me and my son. Whatever Armstrong sons and daughters come after us, we are their root."

She probably thought that she was through with love, but that was before the man she calls "Richard Kimbell" showed up. Think of the hero of *The Fugitive*, she says. He was kind and supportive of Lance, who even as a teen was already making a name for himself in the biking world. But in the end, Kimbell's drinking was too much for her, and they went their separate ways.

## Life goes on

She was shaken — and baffled. Without a formal education and against all odds, she had kept her baby and climbed out of certain poverty to become a global account manager with Ericsson Microelectronics, a telecommunications company. She had helped her son tap his talents and reach his highest ambitions. She had been there for his fight with cancer. She had helped him to build a house — and a life.

Since the day she had



Barbara Lamsens, executive director of The Parenting Center, left, talks with Linda Armstrong Kelly during Kelly's visit to the center in March. Amy McLarty

## About the Parenting Center

The Parenting Center, 2928 W. Fifth St., Fort Worth, serves approximately 18,000 clients a year; 600,000 since it opened in 1975.

Dedicated to helping build strong families, the center offers a number of classes including those addressing anger management and co-parenting. Counseling by licensed therapists is also a cornerstone of the agency work. Individual, family and couples counseling, as well as play therapy for children, is available.

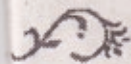
The Parenting Center serves a wide range of ages, but 42 percent of its clients are under 18; 58 percent are over 18; and most are women.

Each year 1 million teens become pregnant. The children of teen moms are more likely to have lower school achievement, drop out of high school, have more health problems, be incarcerated during adolescence, give birth as a teenager and face unemployment as an adult.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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**A:** Yes, so many claims are confusing. But, after over 14 years in the

had always put him first. She hadn't prepared herself for the day that he would leave, but what did it matter? He was a winner.

She says she knew she was a winner, too, in many ways. So why couldn't she win at love? Finally, she consulted a therapist and began to understand her choices.

In 2002, she married Ed Kelly, the man she calls "the love of my life." She admits that it has been a long road. "Hard work

did. I was always afraid of not having a job," she says.

Now her job is public speaker. "I have a story to tell, and I'm the only one who can tell it," she says. She has plenty to say to those who have lost heart who can't see any way over the mountain.

"I think about me being 16 and pregnant. I had no where to turn. Nowhere. If I had had something like the Parenting Center maybe I would have made different choices earlier