



Celebrating the Five Freedoms: Loyola Marymount University's First Amendment Week A Submission for the Associated Collegiate Press Innovation Pacemaker

First Amendment Week began in earnest as a shadow of the event it would become. Founded in 2003, the week was designed to celebrate the five freedoms enshrined in the very first item in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights: the Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, Freedom of the Press, Right to Assembly, and Right to Petition. Over two decades ago, First Amendment Week consisted of just a few small events.

It wasn't until 2006 that Loyola Marymount University (LMU), primarily through its student-run newspaper, [The Los Angeles Loyolan](#), would introduce First Amendment Week's inaugural keynote speakers. That first year, political commentators James Carville and Ann Coulter — an unlikely pairing, to say the least — came together to speak about the importance of the value of those First Amendment rights. And the rest, as they say, was history.

Over the next decade and a half, LMU would host a wide range of speakers with strong connection to the First Amendment: actors like America Ferrera and Jesse Williams, political figures like Karl Rove and Monica Lewinsky, writers like Ariana Huffington and Jon Lovett, and even Academy Award-winners like Common, John Legend, and Mark Boal. Though their speeches demonstrated their differing perspectives in life, and each brought their own experiences to the table, the common thread between them all was a respect and a reverence for the First Amendment.

First Amendment Week was championed by both students and staff of the University — with special mention to retired Senior Vice President of Student Affairs Lane Bove, who [won](#) the College Media Association's Louis E. Ingelhart First Amendment Award for her work championing the First Amendment and this annual event. But when LMU was driven online for over a year thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, First Amendment Week was forced into a reduced form, with questions about whether it would return to its former prominence.

An online-only event was held one year, with keynote speakers invited to appear via Zoom. The following year, despite being back on campus, a rapidly evolving situation regarding the Omicron variant meant executing an event at our typical scale was effectively impossible. When the time came to plan 2023's First Amendment Week, effectively all student institutional knowledge of the event was gone — and the event as a brand had to be broadly reintroduced to the LMU community.

To do this, the Loyolan, in collaboration with LMU's student government, the Associated Students of Loyola Marymount University (ASLMU), aimed to find a keynote speaker who would directly connect to the mission of the event and appeal to this generation of students. We found that in Jennette McCurdy, former child star and author of the New York Times-bestselling memoir "I'm Glad My Mom Died." Thanks to her time on Nickelodeon shows like "iCarly" and "Sam & Cat," Jennette was a prominent figure for our students as they grew up. In her memoir, she wrote about her battle for her own mental health and her struggles with her toxic relationship with her mother. Her relevance, both as a figure and in what she wrote about, made for an ideal speaker to open up First Amendment Week's new era.

But a relevant speaker could only take First Amendment Week so far without audience awareness. So the Loyolan and ASLMU set out to produce an ambitious, assertive marketing plan. Across social media, in-person promotion, and

collaborations with other organizations, we did the work of reintroducing First Amendment Week to LMU. We had to innovate in how we thought about such marketing, and our Managing Editor, Jennifer Woo, and Business Director, Jillian Caforio, took the lead. Their comprehensive plan thought about where to find not just students in general, but where to find this group of students. From partnering with the on-campus coffee shop to bringing back an iconic bobblehead giveaway of our campus mascot, Iggy the Lion, the Loyolan and ASLMU did all they could to increase public awareness of the event.

Additionally, we rethought what the events surrounding the keynote would be. While the bobblehead giveaway at that week's men's basketball game was a returning favorite, we also partnered with Campus Ministry's Interfaith Council for a panel event exploring religious freedom and human dignity. But it was Editor in Chief Chris Benis' collaboration with LMU's event planning organization, Mane Entertainment, that proved most fruitful. The Loyolan and Mane encouraged students to perform protest-oriented acts at an Open Mic Night, with the winner [getting the opportunity](#) to open for Jennette at the keynote event. This proved to be one of our most successful innovations with this year's First Amendment Week, and we're already hoping to make it a staple moving forward.

By the time the keynote event itself came to be, we had done all we could — but we were still nervous. Will students show up for what is effectively a moderated discussion in a time when such events can be found online at the click of a mouse? Was First Amendment Week something that the campus would still value? In the end, our fears were unfounded: Jennette McCurdy's keynote event brought hundreds of students out to pack the room. It was a standing room only event as Chris and ASLMU Chief Academic Officer Riya Beri talked with Jennette. Multiple times during the event, Jennette stopped to compliment just how professional the moderators were, and students on site [eagerly raved](#) about the event.

In short: it was a smash success. But it took real effort to bring the First Amendment Week brand back to LMU. It mattered not just for this year, but for the many years to come. The event is arguably more important than ever before in the wake of the pandemic, with our world more polarized than ever. By promoting understanding of the First Amendment, we are encouraging students to learn all they can about the power of their own voices. Be it in their right to speak freely, their right to practice any religion they choose, their right to protest, and so on, these freedoms are vital for students to learn about in these modern times. First Amendment Week may not be on any syllabus, but we consider it crucial to any LMU student's experience. It would be a great loss for campus if we couldn't find a way to make First Amendment Week work in 2023.

Now, with 21 years of First Amendment Week behind us, LMU and the Los Angeles Loyolan are eager for what comes next — how we can continue to innovate and keep this event relevant. This is such a unique opportunity, and it's an honor that the University puts so much effort behind it. First Amendment Week's perseverance gives us confidence that it will be here for many years to come.

Marketing Materials

- FIRST AMENDMENT WEEK 2023 -

OPEN MIC NIGHT

presented by
the Los Angeles Loyolan & Mane Entertainment


THE LIVING ROOM

Feb 13th 2023
@ 9 PM



Use your voice, speak out, share your story and celebrate our right to free speech!

FIRST AMENDMENT WEEK



LOS ANGELES LOYOLAN
ASLMU ASLMU ASLMU
GSLMU GSLMU GSLMU
LOS ANGELES LOYOLAN
ASLMU ASLMU ASLMU
GSLMU GSLMU GSLMU



FIRST AMENDMENT WEEK 2023

FREEDOM OF RELIGION: HUMAN DIGNITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

A STUDENT-CENTERED CONVERSATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

7:30pm
Monday February 20, 2023
The Cave (Below Sacred Heart Chapel)



FIRST AMENDMENT WEEK WELCOMES
Jennette McCurdy



When: Tonight at 6pm

Where: Burns Rec Center, Backcourt



LMU ONECARD REQUIRED FOR ENTRY



https://www.laloyolan.com/news/jennette-mccurdy-discusses-the-pains-and-triumphs-of-writing-i-m-glad-my-mom-died/article_03a54993-e53e-5951-9ef6-bb49be1f6eab.html

Jennette McCurdy discusses the pains and triumphs of writing "I'm Glad My Mom Died"

Julia King, asst. news editor
Feb 16, 2023



Jennette McCurdy joined outgoing editor-in-chief Chris Benis and ASLMU VP of Academic Affairs Riya Beri on stage to discuss McCurdy's memoir, "I'm Glad My Mom Died."

Photo: Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

At 30 years old, Jennette McCurdy had been in therapy for six years and without her mom for nine. During this time, she recalled thinking, "there are elements of this that could be really interesting and could connect with people; it could be worth people's attention." That's when she started writing, "I'm Glad My Mom Died."

McCurdy, New York Times bestselling author and the keynote speaker of First Amendment Week (FAW), joined outgoing Loyolan Editor-in-Chief Chris Benis and ASLMU VP of Academic Affairs Riya Beri on stage at Burns Back Courts to discuss McCurdy's memoir, "I'm Glad My Mom Died." The event, which warranted a crowd of over 500 people, also attracted members of the LMU community who protested unresolved contract negotiations with Sodexo outside of Burns Recreation Center before McCurdy went on stage.

McCurdy dove into the emotional turmoil she faced in her childhood and what it felt like the revisit those feelings to write her book — all without sacrificing her humor.

Students may have first known McCurdy as Sam Puckett, her breakout role on the Nickelodeon show, "iCarly." While this catapulted her into the public eye, it only increased the narcissistic and controlling behaviors of McCurdy's late mother and pushed McCurdy through years of restrictive and belittling treatment. In sharing a story so vulnerable, McCurdy has promoted authenticity above all — a crucial element of the spirit of FAW.

Though McCurdy's childhood was built around her acting career, she always felt a desire to write. She was drawn to reading books and writing her own. This interest was quickly diminished by her mother, who believed that McCurdy grew to enjoy writing more than acting.

"She really sort of drove home that acting was the goal and the purpose, and that was what was going to help her and my family," said McCurdy. "I got it. I got what she meant by that. Her goals were my goals. So, I put writing to the side."

At 24, McCurdy quit acting, not out of desire to pursue a different career, but because acting had become a burden for her. When she decided she wanted to start a writing career, the process was depleting.

"I didn't have any experience of feeling like giving up during the writing of the book. But giving up on a writing career was something that happened monthly for me..." said McCurdy, laughing. "It's so hard and feels like you're going nowhere for so long."

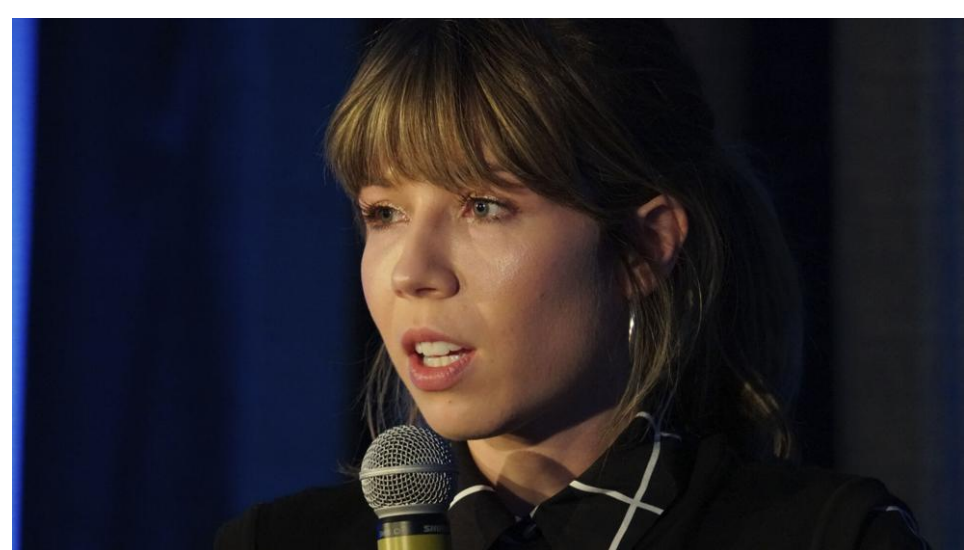
McCurdy emphasized that writing about her childhood experiences came naturally to her, despite how disturbing they could be. Still, some memories held a weight that was difficult for McCurdy to overlook. One of the most difficult parts to include was an instance of assault by her mom that McCurdy experienced in her teens.

"I didn't know how to approach it. The subject matter of that particular event was so inherently dramatic," recalled McCurdy. "I didn't want it to be too heavy-handed. I didn't want it to be melodramatic. I didn't want it to be long-winded. But then it eventually came out when it was ready to come out."



In sharing a story so vulnerable, McCurdy has promoted authenticity above all—a crucial element of the spirit of First Amendment Week.

Photo: Adam Goldstick | Loyolan



McCurdy is inspired by the conversations that have started because of her book, but is also saddened by how many young women have also experienced parental abuse.

Photo: Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

This part of the book, to McCurdy's surprise, is what many readers would relate to the most. She finds it "heartening" that certain conversations have started because of her book but also laments that so many young women have experienced similar abuse.

However, "I'm Glad My Mom Died" is also a story of growth — McCurdy has acknowledged her mental obstacles from her past and now face her emotions with a new perspective. She noted that this is not without difficulty; addressing and healing the damage her mom created was a gradual process. Only recently did McCurdy learn to experience "simple grief" when her grandfather died and dismiss the "complicated grief experience" she used to have over her mom's death.

"It's so fulfilling to have that experience. It's one that I will take full credit for. I think that I earned that experience of grief. I don't think that's one that she gave to me," said McCurdy.

Amidst all the heavy emotions "I'm Glad My Mom Died" possesses, McCurdy often opted for a humorous tone. "There's the way of having a sense of humor about life and ourselves. For me, a big part of it is not taking myself too seriously. I can be very serious."

McCurdy remained playful even when discussing her mother's abuse. She joked that she would pose for photos with a double thumbs-up during the most tragic period of her life, or that in between mental breakdowns over her career she coped by watching "Girls." The audience laughed as much as they grieved.

At one point, McCurdy shifted toward the audience, surveying the room of students in front of her. She acknowledged that college age "is the age I felt the most lost. I felt the most confused and overwhelmed ... I knew I was unhappy in my life, but I didn't know how to get to a life that I would be happy with... This is an age where things can go in a couple different directions, and I hope things go in the direction that serve you the most and that it's most fulfilling for you." She added that when students are trying to navigate what direction they go in, "If it's not a 'hell yes', it's a no."



McCurdy turned towards the audience and acknowledged that college age is often a confusing and overwhelming time.

Photo: Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

"Being able to kind of connect and share [a] message makes it feel worthwhile. If you're just processing in a void, at a certain point it feels like you just got to connect," said McCurdy. "I want this to mean something to someone other than just me."

Julia King

Asst. News Editor

Julia King ('26) is a journalism major from Woodinville, Wash. She enjoys watching 2000s rom-coms, having picnics and going on (easy) hikes.