

Debbie – sexual assault

I was carrying on, doing routine housework, and I had gone outside for a few minutes to check a dryer vent. I had come back in, left a door unlocked just for a matter of moments, and before I could go back to close that door . . . to lock that door, a man came in through that door, came up from behind me, threatened me, took me out to the woods behind my home, where he robbed and raped me.

I really feared that I'd never see my husband or children again. But he did let me go—but with the words, “you remember that I know where you live, and if you tell anyone, I'm gonna come back and I'm gonna kill you.” And in a small town like we live in, to relocate would have been of no use at all. Especially, . . . my husband's a police officer . . . he'd been upstairs asleep during that time that the man came in, but he'd been up for over 30 hours, and I knew that if I screamed . . . Then I was afraid—that it would—the end result would not only be my death, but his death as well.

[Debbie's husband speaks] “I'm the protector, I'm the husband. And I felt like I had failed . . . and as a police officer especially, and here this happens not only in my own town, but in my own home.”

My husband called the police. I begged him not to. I . . . I knew that this man meant what he said, that if I had told anyone, that he was going to come and kill me. Of course, I went into immediate shock. I was like a zombie. It was like, this can't have really happened to me, you know. I've got to be dreaming, and I just can't wake up. I couldn't sleep. When I did finally sleep, there were nightmares. I couldn't eat. I couldn't think. I couldn't focus.

[Debbie's husband speaks] “The kids and I would be having dinner with Debbie in the evening, and she would just explode, seemingly for no reason, and it would shock us. Then we'd realize, okay, something was just said. There was some reference that flashed her back, and we had to learn how to accept that and deal with it.”

Anytime I was in a crowd, I was looking, wondering, you know, “Is he following me? Is he looking at my children?” When I would kiss my children goodbye in the morning, I'd wonder, “Are they gonna come back through that door in the afternoon?” Because I just really and truly thought that if he couldn't get to me, that he especially would probably grab my daughter.

A lot of people told me after I was attacked that, “Debbie, at least you're alive” and I remembered thinking, you know, I'm not alive. I felt like I couldn't trust anybody, especially, of course, strangers. I never felt comfortable anywhere. I never felt safe anywhere.

You never get over this. I see an anger sometimes in my son whenever he hears about a woman . . . this happening to another woman . . . because he knows firsthand what it does to the entire family. It's not just the primary victim that's involved here; it's each and every person that touches her life.

And my husband, of course . . . He felt guilty because here he felt like he was able to protect the whole city of Williamsburg, but yet he laid asleep while his own wife was taken out of her home in the middle of the day. So the guilt was phenomenal.

There's multiple victims. I was a victim. Both of my kids suffered. My daughter was afraid to go out from the house to the car at night. My son—both of them were actually bullied at school over this because we did go public with it.

It was 6 1/2 years after the rape that he was found, and he was found because he had robbed two other women. Virginia has a law where they will take a sample from all convicted felons. They do a DNA typing on them . . . testing on them, put it in the databank. The computer immediately does a crosscheck with other evidence that has been entered, and because he was there for another robbery, he got caught.

I want to be able to meet face to face with him. I guess in some ways, it's like facing your fear. I want to look at him and I want to tell him, "I'm not afraid of you anymore." I need to be able to look at him eye to eye and say "you can't hurt me anymore; it's over, and it's done." And I need that for me.