

December 5, 2014 is a day that will haunt my memory for as long as I live. It was on this day a stranger made a decision to violate my body and my mind when I was incapacitated and could not stop him. Mr. Bennett committed a heinous crime against me and his actions that evening continue to have a lasting affect on me and my loved ones.

At that time I was 21 years old and living in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I was grieving the loss of my mother and doing everything in my power to help my family through this extremely difficult time. We had all watched her fight tirelessly against the cancer for two years before she eventually lost her battle. Losing her took a big toll on all of us. Personally, I had fallen into a depression that was hard to manage. I was on antidepressants and I spent a lot of my time distracting myself and trying to keep my mind busy. I was working part-time at two establishments and even started cleaning houses on the side for more work hours. I met Joel Bishop by the fall of that year. We spent one or two evenings a week getting to know one another over casual dinner dates. I was offered a full-time promotion at one of the jobs I was working and was then able to turn my attention towards building a career for myself.

Joel's birthday was coming up and he suggested getting out of town for a weekend to celebrate both that and my promotion. It would be the first time we had an opportunity to spend a weekend together. I had stayed at the Hard Rock Casino for my birthday months prior and had a pleasant experience, so we made plans and booked a weekend trip. We arrived at the casino around 5 pm on Friday evening and had a bottle of champagne waiting for us in our room. We were both very excited to be able to spend some quality time with one another and enjoy a fun weekend. We went down to one of the restaurants at the hotel and ate dinner followed by gambling and drinking. My next memory is Joel waking me up Saturday morning telling me there were people outside who needed to speak with me. It took me quite some time to get out of bed and get myself together. I walked out into the hallway and was met by detectives of the Catoosa Police Department along with hotel security and was immediately alarmed. The moments that followed our introduction are burned into my memory. I sat at a conference table while the detectives questioned me about the events that occurred the night before. It was in this line of questions I realized I had no recollection of how I got back to my hotel room or even how the evening ended. It was at this time the detective told me they had reason to believe I had been sexually assaulted by a man "I wouldn't know from Adam". I will never forget how I felt in that surreal moment, like a part of me had been taken and would never be

returned. I had been attacked by a stranger and had no idea what happened or why it did. Following Joel being told of the events, I was taken to a nearby hospital where an intrusive Rape Examination was performed and articles of my clothing were taken as evidence. I left the hospital to return to my "usual" life with little idea of what was going to happen next.

I spent the first 72 hours after the incident in a stunned state. The idea that someone would harm me in such a gruesome, unsolicited manner was too much for me to bear. I had no recollection of the events, which was incredibly disturbing to me; a stranger had control over my body and I had no idea what he had done to me. I couldn't look at myself in a mirror. I felt dirty in my own skin and no amount of showering could wash away the pain I was feeling. The worst part of it all was not being able to form the words I needed to tell my family what had happened to me. I knew my father would never be the same after knowing a stranger caused harm to one of his daughters and he wasn't there to keep me safe. I couldn't bring myself to break his heart this way. I knew my sisters would be shaken with fear and outrage that something like this could happen to me, I knew they would all spend time questioning their safety. I had convinced myself that isolation was the only way to face this hell.

I spent two weeks on that couch, unable to perform basic human functions. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes to sleep I saw the detective's face as he told me what happened. What he told me replayed in my mind over and over. I missed time away from work during our busiest time of the year when I was needed the most. I finally picked up the phone and made the hardest phone call to inform my family of what had happened to me. I listened as my father broke down on the other end of the phone, I could hear his heart break as he told me that a crime had been committed against me and it was not my fault. He wanted me to be brave and stand up for myself. This has directly affected those around me. My family members carry a tremendous amount of pain and fear for my safety because of what happened to me.

Not only have I been a victim of Mr. Bennett's crimes once, but I have been further victimized throughout the process of the trial. Some people want me to believe that this is my fault, and that I asked for this to happen to me, but I reject that. I did not ask for this to happen to me and being intoxicated does not give someone the right to commit a sexual crime against me, or anyone for that matter. I did nothing wrong that evening, I thought I was safe in the place I was in.

I have now seen the video evidence of what happened that evening and am confident that Mr. Bennett is a threat to society. It took him less than 9 seconds to make sexual contact with me. Even after my attempt to exit the elevator and get away from him, he pressed on. When he was finished with me, he carried my limp body to the 7th floor and abandoned me there.

Mr. Bennett had an opportunity that night to be a hero. Any decent human being would have seen me in the state I was in and made a choice to help versus harm me. Because of the choice he made, my way of life has been compromised. The trauma of this event brought on even more depression. I began intensive therapy to work out what little I knew of the events. I feel as if I am no longer safe. I used to believe that people are inherently good and care about others. I used to place trust in people. I now fear that people are out to cause harm in my life. I no longer feel comfortable in social environments; I constantly scan my surroundings and never sit with my back towards anyone. I never walk anywhere alone; the fear of being harmed again is too overwhelming. Personally, I don't look at myself the same way. I am self-conscious and feel ugly inside.

Mr. Bennett made a clear choice to commit a crime against a vulnerable young woman that evening and he needs to be punished for that. Any punishment that allows this predator to be free and clear is a horrible injustice. He is a criminal and needs to take responsibility for his actions and not be allowed to harm another innocent young woman.

I have told myself since December 5 that one day he will suffer serious consequences for what he did, and that one day I will know I made the right decision in pursuing this case for justice not only for myself but for the safety of others. Today is that day and I urge the court to impose those serious consequences.

I would like to thank everyone from the District Attorney's office who helped bring this case to justice. Mrs. Singer, I know how much hard work you put into fighting for me and I am forever grateful. Thank you to the Victim Witness Coordinators who sat with me and held my hand throughout the process of the trial. Thank you Detective Bates and police officers from the Catoosa Police Department. Also, I would like to thank the court for allowing me to face my abuser and express how these crimes have affected my family and me.