

HB2536.Samantha M.2-8-22.Pro

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At the age of 22, I was raped by a police officer in the city in which I was attending college. The layered betrayal that I felt was overwhelming and is something that, to this day, is hard to describe. As a young girl, my parents instilled in me that officers were there to protect you. Growing up in a military family, I truly believed this until I was raped and physically abused by someone in power. Unfortunately, that violence was filmed and distributed among his close friends and the worst night of my life became something that others watched. I was left with physical injuries, but most devastating was the mental anguish that refused to lessen due to a level of pain I never imagined possible. I stopped eating, could not get out of bed, was scared to go out of my house, and constantly mourned for the life I knew I had lost forever. Between therapy appointments, medical appointments, and police and Title IX interviews, I lost my full-time job and, subsequently, my apartment.

I had to accept that I would not ever be the same person as I was before that night, because that person is gone. The pain that I experienced physically and mentally was truly unbearable. My trust in our law enforcement diminished. I was not provided a trained sexual assault nurse examiner at the hospital, as my rural county had no such thing. I was forced to pay for the entire emergency room visit, even though I had just lost my job. I was never told what rights, if any, I had. I was never provided an advocate at any stage of the investigation. I realized early on that I had to physically, mentally, and financially function to survive at a time that I could not bear to get out of bed.

Much like too many survivors, I never got justice for what happened to me. However, I consider myself one of the “lucky ones,” as my university stepped in and protected me when nothing was being done criminally so that I could finish my education protected and cared for. The perpetrator was also forced to resign from his job as an officer. I find some solace in this outcome, because it means that he no longer has the position of authority to victimize someone else while remaining above the law. However, that does not change the lasting effects that a rape leaves on someone.

I am truly disheartened to this day that most survivors I meet are still not receiving the proper care and justice that is long overdue. Ensuring a victim’s basic human rights after such a personal and violent attack, both physically and mentally, must finally be a priority. This perpetuation of ensuring the perpetrator has more basic rights than the victim is no longer acceptable. My lawyer at the time told me, “there is no justice in the justice system.” I will never forget those words and I cannot accept that as the standard any longer. We as a society cannot accept that as the standard any longer. Victims deserve so much more than the ways in which they have been treated and we owe it to the next generation to provide a society and system that protects the vulnerable and criminalizes those who abuse their power or status to take advantage of others.

Healing for me comes from stopping the traumatic cycle of victims not being protected or believed and changing our broken justice system into something we can all be proud of. We cannot stop this fight and settle for the “status quo” while those who are left without a voice continue to suffer in silence. We at least owe it to these men, women, and children the basic dignity every human deserves.