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SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

Finding Light in a Dark Place

I was just seventeen (17) when I was arrested for Female Impersonation and Prostitution. I was placed in the county jail for adults and gang-raped. As a male to female transgender (pre-op), the juvenile detention center would not allow me entry there, stating their concern for the effect of exposure to my alternative lifestyle on the other boys I would have to be housed with.

As I entered the cell block at the county jail in all female attire, the men became silent, for a moment you could hear a pin drop. This was 1970, transgender wasn't even a word yet. We were just considered half male/half female. Freaks of nature. As I laid in bed that night with the man that promised to protect me from all the others, I felt hands gripping my ankles and pulling me out of bed toward them. I started to kick, scream, and struggle. My protector was out numbered and there was nothing he could do. I was took to another cell where I was placed on the floor and raped by twenty or more men.

I was eventually able to throw a note at the feet of the turn key making rounds on the cat walk with just my name and "HELP ME" written on a piece of paper. I was moved in another cell block, a smaller one. I only had to service one man who was the cell boss. He sexually abused me whenever he felt like it. In return, I was protected. I felt like I deserved no less than the treatment I received. I was confused and so ashamed. I didn't know or understand why I was born so different. The sexual assaults in my life started occurring long before the county jail incident. I was first raped at age nine (9), and then again at twelve (12).

In 1975, 1976, and 1977 I was raped by inmates and a staff correctional officer. Again, I experienced an on-going sexual abusive arrangement for protection. I became dependent on marijuana use every day in order to rise above my circumstances. I had to numb my emotions to survive. In 1982 I was removed from the Indiana State Prison and placed into federal prison for protection.

In 1991, at a Federal Correctional Institution in Memphis, TN while in segregation, an officer let an inmate into my cell to rape me. I was placed in the hospital after reporting the rape. The investigation conducted by Internal Affairs concluded that I was raped and video tape showed the Officer letting the inmate in and out of my cell. The dismissal of the officer was recommended. I was transferred to another facility. It seemed by then that rape had become a normal part of my life. I continued to experience feelings of worthlessness and shame.

In 1997, my marijuana usage landed me into the web of another predator. A prisoner drug dealer. I accepted his gifts of free joints knowing better,

but allowing my weakness for the weed to influence my actions to act against my better judgment. When he came to me for sex and I refused, he threw me on the floor and raped me. After this sexual assault I started to really look at the choices I had been making. Wondering, if my choices were different at times, would the outcome have been different? I began to seek help with my dependence on marijuana through substance abuse counseling. Today I have been drug free since 1998.

The last time I was raped was in 2006 at the Pendleton Correctional Facility, Pendleton, Indiana. After the 1997 rape at the Federal Correctional Institution in Jessup, GA, I was later returned to the state facility. I have continued to be celibate since 1998. When I returned to Indiana, I met a man at the prison who I became inmate friends with. I explained to him that I was no longer sexually active while we dated and courted each other. We eventually became roommates.

On the night we moved in together, we were laying in bed together and relaxing. He forced himself on me and raped me. Afterwards, he begged my forgiveness. I cried and hold him I hated him and would never forgive him. I kept telling him that I trusted him and I had grown to even love him.

He continued to beg for me to forgive him, and not to move. He promised he would never touch me again. I forgave him, and he kept his word and never touched me again. We became best friends.

The memory of that night was always coming back when I least expected it, so the forgiveness process was always starting over again. I remain celibate to this day. I never want to even think about prison and sex together. I much rather share in a loving marriage in a real relationship in a home sweet home that is really ours.

As a pre-op transgender Christian, in here my faith is tested sometimes. I, however, continue to have faith and hope for a better future.

My life as a survivor rape victim in and out of prison on multiple occasions has been a powerful testimony that has touched the lives of some inmates that were like me in a way, mad at life, and living. I've gained a light of wisdom from the pain of abuse. A light I want to share with others so that they can "see" the better choices they can make, even in the dark places.

- Valjean Royal, Indiana

additional stories

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*Also for submission, letter to Oprah from VR, on Transinjustice
website "Supporting Document" tab. And any other
material there that CCWP wish to publish.*
Valjean Royal