

Stephanie's Survivor Story

You never truly know how you are going to react to a situation until it actually happens to you. Imagine you at 16 in the school gym with your PhysEd class waiting for what you assume is going to be another boring talk about something that's never going to happen to you. You sit in the back with all of your friends gabbing about what you're going to do this weekend, not knowing that the next hour could and would help save your life.

A few months later it was summer vacation and one night after my parents went to bed I decided that I wanted to go out to my car to grab a CD. Once I got about halfway to my car someone came up behind me and lifted me off of the ground. My initial thought was "Ha ha. This is a joke, right?" I'm going to turn around and it's going to be one of my buddies from down the street. I couldn't have been more wrong!

My panic started to ensue once I realized this person had no intentions of putting me down and was taking me away from my home. Knowing in my mind there was nothing I could do to get away my mind switched to "Ok, we just have to make it through this. We just have to survive."

Flashes of information from my class in school started to flood my mind. Through my tears and fears I started to take in every last bit of detail I could. I knew this would keep me alive and keep my mind off of what was happening to me. Eventually he left me there after he was done "using me" and I ran back to my house after I thought he was gone.

I curled up on my bed for what seemed the longest time. Disbelief, shame, and grief washed over me. And the fear was overwhelming. What do I do from here... Do I tell anyone... Will anyone believe me if I do... Will he really come back... Will he really kill me and my family if I tell?

All I knew was that I could not do this myself. I could not keep this secret to myself. I don't remember how much time passed, but my sister eventually came home from being out with her friends and I went to talk to her.

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I felt so dirty. So scared. Was I putting her life in danger as well? “We have to tell mom and dad. We have to tell mom and dad.” That’s all I can really remember from our talk. I don’t know how long it took her to convince me but eventually I let her wake up my mom. I could hear the disbelief in mom's voice while my sister told her what happened. I have to imagine in her mind she was going “That’s not possible. We have been home all night. She hasn’t left here.” But once my sister said look at her feet and my mom saw the grass clippings, she knew she was telling the truth.

We, as a family, went to the state police post to make a report. I was scared out of my mind! After all, this guy told me he had friends on the force. Was I doing the right thing or just putting my family in more danger?

Trying to tell the trooper what had happened was hard. I mean really hard! Having to re-live the whole thing just hours after it had happened. I just remember having this huge bath towel that I was crying in the whole time or hiding behind when I didn’t want to give an answer because it made me feel ashamed.

Why didn’t I fight? Why didn’t I fight? That’s all I could think about. Even what I said to myself in the class was “This will never happen to me! If any guy touched me like that I would kick him in the balls and run!”

But I know I did what I did to survive. So I could make sure this person never got to do this to another person ever again. Thanks to my class I knew that most cases never got reported and most of these criminals were able to still walk around freely because of this.

Well not this guy! Or at least that’s what I told myself to keep going. The state troopers were amazing to talk to. They reassured me that nothing was going to happen to me or my family now that they were on the case. Because I reported the rape so fast the troopers were able to canvas our neighborhood before people left for work. And within 24hrs they had caught the guy. Relief washed over our whole family. Well, that was until he was released on bail.

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Even though he was told not to come anywhere near me or my family within a few days he appeared at my sister's job. A second panic ensued our family. My sister and I had to quit our jobs and my parents temporarily moved us to another state. It was really hard for me to leave everything behind. I felt like I was being punished for this happening to me. But in the end, it was for the best.

Eventually we went to trial. It was hard enough to tell the troopers what happened and now I was going to have to tell a whole room of strangers. But I was determined to never let him do this to another person ever again.

By this time, I had been to two different shrinks to try and help with the issues I was having. The fear was impossible to manage. The flash backs were paralyzing and it was almost impossible for me to sleep at night. Over and over it would play out in my head. What if I hadn't gone outside that night. What if I could have fought my way free or screamed loud enough for someone to hear me. My shrink told me I had to stop doing this. That it happened and nothing was going to change it! She went on to say if I kept going "What if?" I was just going to make myself worse. Her actual quote was "The What Ifs will kill you if you let them." She also made me feel more confident about the path we were taking going to trial. She said it would help give me the closure which most people never get because they don't report.

The trial was full of emotions. While they were doing Jury selection two of my teachers were initially chosen but asked to be excused because they both couldn't look at me as anything but their own child. Days moved like molasses. Some full of tears other days nothing but anger. And after sentencing, guilt. While my family celebrated I went back to my bedroom and just cried. What had I just done... I felt like I just tore a family apart. This guy had been married and had two kids. I just put a father behind bars for 33 to 55 years.

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My parents sat me down and said this. "You did not commit this crime. Nor did you ask for this crime to be committed against you. HE made these choices and now HE has to deal with the consequences. You didn't rip his family apart. HE DID!"

So, trying to keep that in mind I tried to move forward. It wasn't easy. My name had been in the local paper so everyone I went to school with knew what happened. Since I couldn't hide from it, I decided to own it and take some of my control back. I approached the teacher whose class helped me get through the whole situation and asked if I could speak the next time she offered the class. She agreed and I was able to begin to heal.

I was terrified my first class. What would people think of me? Was I doing the right thing? Was anyone really going to listen to me. About half way through my speech a girl got up and had to leave the class because it was just too much for her. Right there I knew I was doing the right thing. If I could let just one person know that they weren't alone, let one person know that it can get better, keep one person out of a bad situation, give someone the courage to talk to someone, it was worth it. It was worth being uncomfortable and vulnerable to open up and say "I survived and so can you." That was so worth it!

So, every time I spoke I healed a little more. Eventually I got my mom to come and speak. And then my sister. We all started feeling better and eventually started healing and moving on.

Thank you for reading my story and feel free to share it with anyone.

