

Date Rape

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Most people think of rape as someone jumping out from behind the bushes and overpowering you. Forty-two percent of rapes that happen, however, are date rape, where the rapist is known by the victim. I was only fourteen years old and didn't know anything about date rape. I am part of that forty-two percent. I knew my attacker. We'd gone roller skating, to movies and parties, played tag in the streets, and he also came to church with my family and me.

Some rapists prefer to know their victims, so that they are able to get closer to them or trap them in a vulnerable position without arousing any alarm or fear. He asked me to follow him to his house to get his basketball; we were going to the park. He invited me in and I was hesitant because this was my first time ever going to a boy's house. My older brothers always told me never to go to any boy's house, but I trusted this person. He lived with his older sister. Within five minutes after we entered his house, his sister and her friends left. Then for some reason I felt uncomfortable standing in his living room. He never yelled at me, he was never aggressive towards me, we were always laughing, he showed no signs. He turned on the TV and told me to sit; he'd be ready in a minute; so I sat watching TV. He came and sat next to me, then in a split second he jumped on me saying, "How long you think a man can wait." He proceeded to unbuckle my pants, it wasn't easy for him, I put up a fight, he didn't expect that. He got irritated and before I knew it, there was a box cutter on my neck. In his Jamaican accent, he said, "Take off your pants." I still said "No." He placed the blade on my leg and pressed. Tears rolled down my cheeks not from the cut of the blade but because I knew I lost; I gave up. It didn't last long but it felt like hours. When he was finished, he told me to stop crying. With the blade in my face, he said he knew I wanted it too and I better not tell anyone. He got up and went to the bathroom. I don't remember putting on my pants, but I do remember running the four blocks to my house. On that hot summer day, July 14, as soon as I reached my house I immediately jumped in the shower. I scrubbed my skin until it started to burn. For the next couple of months I confined myself to my room. I allowed no one to touch me, I felt dirty.

Ninety-five percent of date rapes are not reported; I'm a part of that percent. I didn't report it; I believed it was my fault. I was ashamed and I blamed myself. Why did I go to his house? My brothers had warned me. My social life died. I stopped going outside, I was afraid of running into him. We all had the same friends. My friends wondered why I stopped going outside, no more skating, no more jumping rope. They said I'd gotten boring. I wasn't boring, I was just ashamed. I stopped play-fighting with my brothers, which we'd done so many

times before, because it reminded me of fighting him off. I didn't want to remember that moment.

About a year passed, and my cousin convinced me to go to a party with her. As soon as I walked in, there he stood looking at me with a smile on his face as if nothing had happened. He walked over to me and touched my hand. I instantly started to shake. He still had a hold on my life. Then I realized that he was with a young lady that I knew. I walked over to her and in front of all of our friends (now was my chance to get my life back), I yelled as loud as I could, "HE RAPED ME." His reply was, "She wanted it." In that moment I felt I got my life back. No more hiding. No more blaming myself. No more feeling ashamed. Every one moved away from him and I walked out of the party with my head held high and a smile on my face. I was free. It was not my fault.

Now my son and I play-fight, I speak to women in shelters, and I've spoken to my daughter and her friends about this crisis. I am able to share my experience and let them know that it is never their fault. Don't be ashamed, you can get your life back; I did. Even though I am still a loving caring person, I am more conscious about the friends I choose and the people I allow in my inner circle. The scar is fading but the memory lives on in me.

So I leave this with you. Always be alert whenever you're feeling nervous or your date's mood suddenly changes. Be firm and straightforward in your relationships. When you say NO, say it loud and clear and make sure he understands your resistance. Trust your instincts! If the situation makes you uncomfortable, be calm and think of ways to remove yourself from it. First and foremost, examine how you behave with men, especially those behaviors that could be misinterpreted and leave you in a risky situation.

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