

Raped woman becomes more than just silhouette

Reading Eagle Times 8-30-91

Sarah Overstreet



When I arrived at my friend's house recently, I found him engaging in a regular activity: A newspaper reporter and not much of a four-food-groups diner, he usually has his dining-room table covered with newspapers from which he's clipping articles with a large pair of scissors. But while the motions were familiar, the look on his face wasn't.

"I can't believe these animals," he shouted, slinging a clip and the scissors onto the table. "They kidnapped this poor girl — right in front of her house — after she'd been out to eat with her girlfriend, and they raped her, all four of them, for several hours!"

"She just got out of her car at her house, saw some headlights and couldn't make out who it was, thought it was maybe the girlfriend who'd forgotten to tell her something. By the time she figured out it wasn't her friend, they had her.

"She was right in front of her HOUSE, for God's sake! Right in FRONT OF HER HOUSE, with her PARENTS INSIDE ASLEEP!"

I knew he was thinking of his own daughters, 17 and 19, who drive all over town late at night with their friends. "I'm going to make copies of this and give it to both of them," he said, waving it in the air. "Then we're going to talk about it."

On more than one occasion I'd heard him lecture his daughters on the 1,001 Terrible Things That Can Befall Young Women Out In Cars After Dark, but I'd never seen him like this. He's read countless articles about brutal rapes and seen them reported on TV, but none before had received more than a troubled look, a shake of the head.

What made this story so different? There on the front page of the newspaper was a color photo of the 20-year-old girl in the article, looking like one of his daughters or their friends, walking alongside the creek bed where the assault had begun a year ago. In a horrifying story, she recounted the repeated attacks: what they did to her, what they said to her, how she survived it.

Pointing to the place beside a little waterfall she had focused on to keep her sanity while they repeatedly raped her, she told the reporter, "Right here is where I decided it was all right for me to die."

The difference in this account was that Kim Jackson revealed her name and told her own story. She wasn't a silhouette, a "name changed to protect the identity," a voice disguised by editing equipment, one of those shadowy images we are able to distance ourselves from.

My friend is a sensitive, kind man, a guy who sweeps the snow off elderly neighbors' porches without them asking. Yet none of the rape accounts he'd read in his 41 years had made him feel the pain and terror of such an attack, until this one. Like stories that use anonymous sources,

anonymous victims always leave room for doubt, and room for fooling ourselves a while longer that maybe bad things really don't happen to good people.

For decades the conventional wisdom has been that rape victims should hide their identities in order to prevent society's callous attitudes from further victimizing them. You won't find an argument from me, because I know that has happened.

But in February 1990, a rape victim named Nancy Ziegenmeyer broke tradition and insisted *The Des Moines Register* use her name. When reporters helped her tell her story, they won a Pulitzer Prize. You don't win a Pulitzer Prize unless you grip people's hearts and minds and give them information that can change their lives.

While anonymity has protected some victims, it has also helped keep in place the ignorance that spawns destructive attitudes. Until we see these victims as whole persons like our mothers, daughters, sisters and friends, they remain victims of our old stereotypes.

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Sarah Overstreet is a syndicated columnist for Newspaper Enterprise Association. Her column appears periodically in the Reading Times.

REVEALING RAPE VICTIMS' IDENTITY IN THE MEDIA: THE CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

After the New York Times and NBC News released the name of the woman accusing a member of the prominent, political Kennedy family of raping her, a heated debate was rekindled. The controversial issue of freedom of the press vs. a victim's right to privacy, once again, has captured the public's attention through constant, copious media coverage.

Following the identifying of the rape victim, there was an influx of calls to PCAR and sexual assault centers across the state. Most of these calls were from people who are concerned about the

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Newsweek poll

consequences of the media's decision to disregard their tradition to refrain from publicizing the names of rape victims. Some of the callers were recent rape victims who feared that their names might appear in local newspapers. Overall, the callers wanted to express their anger and the need to put this controversy to an end.

The callers opinions are no different from those of many across the country. A recent public opinion poll published in the April 29 edition of Newsweek magazine reported that 77% of respondents believe the news media should withhold the names of rape victims. The same poll found that 57% of the respondents felt that people tend to think negatively of a woman if they know she was raped. 86% felt that if the woman knows the media will make her name public she will be less likely to report the crime.

Although the general public seems to be in agreement over this recurring issue; attorneys, judges, legislators, journalists and victim advocates continue to struggle to resolve the conflict.

PCAR's Public Policy Committee recently met to discuss the pros and cons of revealing victims identity in the media. The arguments for each side of this issue are listed on page 6. PCAR members are encouraged to examine both sides of the issue in preparation for establishing policy and strategic action to protect the identity of sexual assault victims.

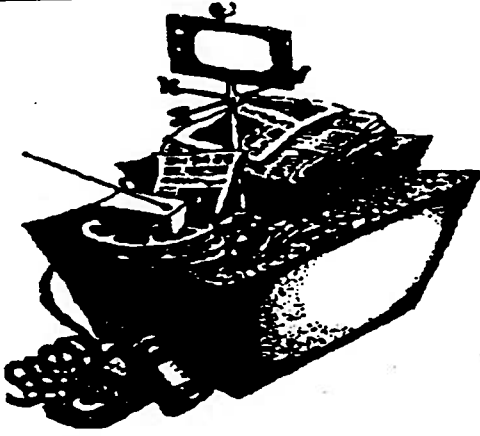
RAPE TOTALS RISE ACROSS THE NATION

The United States Senate Judiciary Committee released a report showing that there were more reported rapes in the U.S. in 1990 than ever before. The report, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE INCREASE OF RAPE IN AMERICA, compiles rape statistics from state police departments. The following is a summary of the findings:

- * In 1990, more women were raped than in any year in U.S. history.
- * In 1990, the number of rapes in this country reported to authorities exceeded 100,000 for the first time ever.
- * There was more than a 6% increase in the number of rapes last year; nearly 3 times greater than the 1989 increase.
- * In 1990 there were up to 12 rapes per hour -- nearly 300 every day.
- * The rape rate has increased four times faster than the overall crime rate over the last 10 years.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE ...

- 2 Ruling Gives Children Disadvantage in Court
- 4 Aids Task Force Completes Training Project
- 5 Take Back The Night
- 7 Small Centers Are Big On Community Outreach
- 8 Legislative Action Working For Change
- 10 COVE Project Provides Services For The Disabled
- ... And More News



QUESTION: SHOULD THE PRIVACY OF RAPE VICTIMS BE COMPROMISED BY THE RELEASING OF NAMES OR OTHER IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OR CONSENT OF THE VICTIM?

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF RELEASING RAPE VICTIMS' NAMES

1. The media is in the business of disseminating, not suppressing, information. Names and facts add credibility and round out a story. According to Michael Gartner, President of NBC News, "Names and facts are news. ...They give the viewer or reader information he or she needs to understand issues, to make up his or her mind about what's going on."

2. Rape victims should not be treated differently than other crime victims. Once again Gartner states, "...I oppose...the general belief that we should only print the names of rape victims who volunteer their names. In no other category of news do we give the newsmaker the option of being named."

3. By not naming rape victims, the media perpetuates a conspiracy of silence. Rape is a crime of violence. Rapists are horrible people, rape victims are not. One of the roles of the press is to inform and one way to inform is to destroy incorrect impressions and stereotypes.

4. It is only fair to name the accuser if the press names the accused. A suspect isn't necessarily a rapist. The alleged rapist is thrust into the news, rightly or wrongly Gartner argues. "But so was the alleged victim, and we should treat her the same way journalistically. We are reporters; we don't take sides; we don't pass judgement."

5. The media should not be subject to censorship by the courts, legislatures, or public opinion. Citing the public's right to know and the freedom of the press as granted by the First Amendment, the decision to print or not to print news should be left up to producers, news directors and editors to decide on a case-by-case basis.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO RELEASING RAPE VICTIMS' NAMES

1. Control has been taken away by the rape victim. The ability to trust one's self and others must be relearned. Therefore, it is critical to the healing process to begin to exercise control over one's own life through decision making. The victim must have the right to decide whether to disclose the rape to authorities, friends, family and the media. Speaking about one's own experience to the media should aid not hinder the healing process.

2. Rape victims are not like other crime victims in that society has traditionally viewed the victims of rape with skepticism and doubt. The woman is judged by her dress, her drinking and dating habits, who she kept company with, etc. Women who are victims of sexual violence crimes are often made to feel guilty until proven innocent. Additionally, the media does not routinely report the names of all crime victims.

3. The media routinely prints stories in which they choose not to identify the source of their information (i.e. "a government official", a White House source). These names are withheld for a number of reasons but primarily for reasons of self-protection. Since the media routinely protects the identities of individuals when reporting information, it is clear, the media does not need to print the names of individuals to give credibility to a story.

4. The accused becomes the subject of public interest once allegations of criminal conduct have been made. The victim of rape is not charged with breaking the law or harming another. The media argues that the accused is innocent until proven guilty under our system of justice. Keeping that in mind, the media chooses to print the names of individuals suspected of criminally only once the arrest has been made or charges filed. Gartner states that the accused is thrust into the news, rightly or wrongly; therefore, the victim should be treated the same. Two wrongs do not make a right.

5. The release of name, address, place of employment, etc. strips away all privacy and instills a greater level of trauma and fear. In the case of a stranger rape, the media supplies critical information to the rapist prior to the completion of the investigation, prior to an arrest. Releasing such information puts the victim and persons closely associated with the victim at risk. This factor coupled with the fear of public ridicule will in all likelihood make victims more reluctant to report the crime to authorities. Without reported crimes, without convictions, the rapist will continue to prey on society. While the framers of the constitution wanted to protect our freedom of speech, including freedom of the press, the First Amendment should not be called upon to defend irresponsible and potentially dangerous actions by the media.

The rape victims often are blamed

By VICTORIA BROWNWORTH

When the young men convicted in the notorious Central Park jogger rape case were sentenced, the victim was mercifully absent.

But if she had been in the Manhattan courtroom that day she would have heard what rape victims often hear. That the punishment, no matter how lenient, was too much. And that she, the victim, was at fault.

Because despite the acknowledgment of rape as a violent crime, there remains a stigma attached to sexual assaults. The burden of "proof" often falls on the victim, who may be accused of "provoking" the attack or lying about it.

This was perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the Central Park case:

A rape occurs nearly every six minutes. The number of reported rapes has risen nearly 100 percent in a decade.

that a woman could suffer the extremes of violence that this victim suffered and still be challenged as a "worthy" victim.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, rape is one of the three most common violent crimes in the United States, with one occurring every six minutes. The number of reported rapes has risen nearly 100 percent in the last decade.

Law-enforcement officials estimate that more than two-thirds of all rapes go unreported and the most common reason is the censure accorded the victims.

Rape remains the only violent crime where the victim often receives more public condemnation than her attacker. In the Central Park case, friends and family of the defendants repeatedly blamed the victim, chanting her name in front of reporters in an effort to break her anonymity. (Most newspapers do not print the names of rape victims, however. In the Central Park jogger case, one community newspaper did publish her name — along with an editorial questioning whether a rape ever actually took place.)

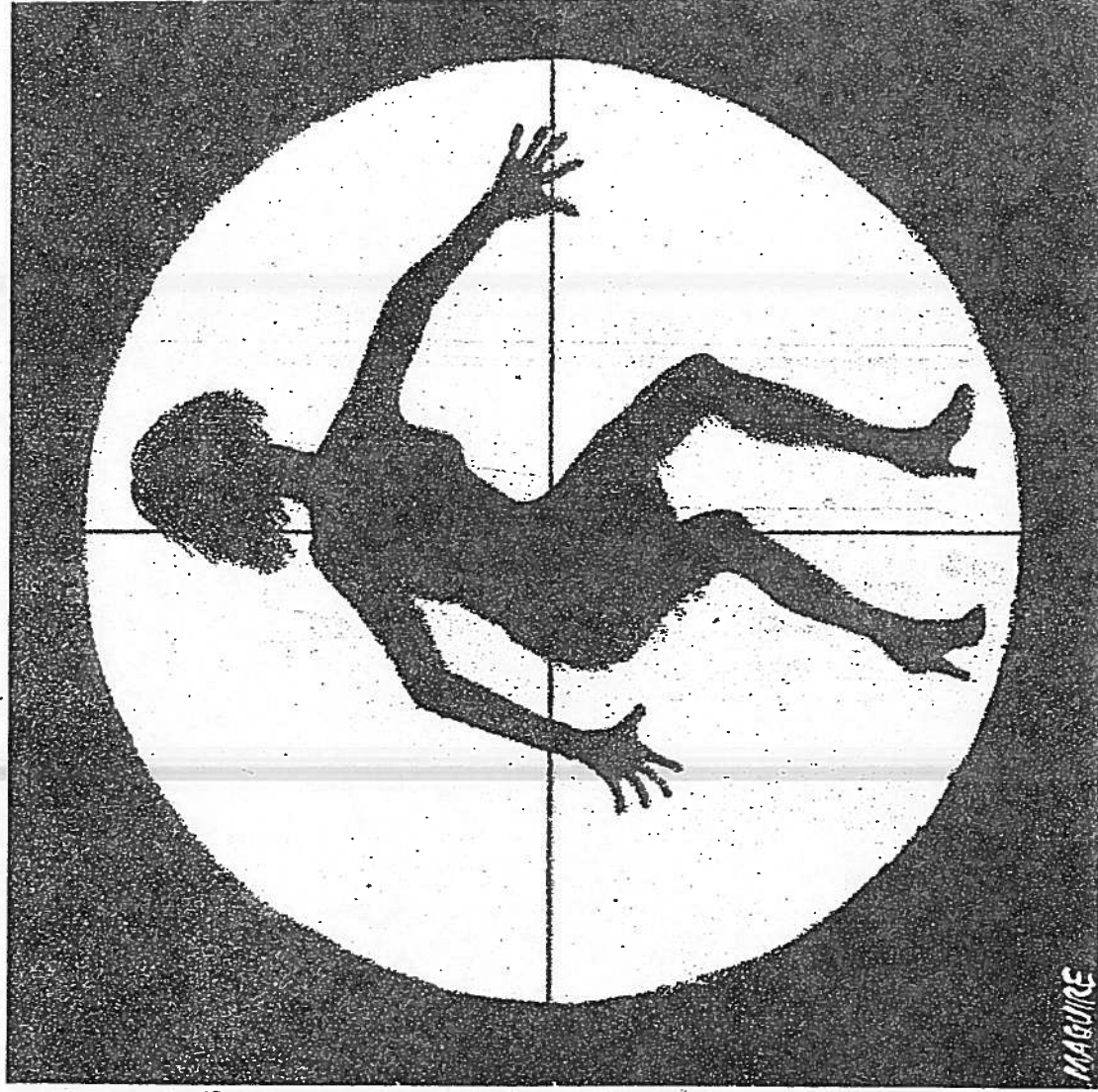
According to Vanessa Grant, instructor of Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR), tactics like these make women reluctant to report rape.

"Women are afraid of being victimized again," she said. "They have no sense that they will be supported by the court system. They know that they will be blamed."

Grant believes part of the problem stems from misinformation about rape and who the victims and perpetrators are.

According to the FBI, one in three women will be raped; the majority will be between the ages of 15 and 35, and more than a third will be raped by someone they know. High school and college-age women are most likely to be raped by a friend or a date; the phenomenon of acquaintance rape is sweeping campuses nationwide.

A woman is also most likely to be raped in her own home, sometimes



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during the commission of another violent crime or a burglary. According to the FBI, nearly 40 percent of all rapes take place in the home of the victim.

Women are also frequently raped in cars (theirs or someone else's), in the home of the rapist and in fraternity houses. In the last decade numerous fraternities have been cited or closed because of gang rapes perpetrated during parties.

Rape is also one of the most recidivist crimes. The U.S. Justice Department statistics show that the majority of rapists rape more than once and over 50 percent of convicted rapists are rearrested within three years.

But the level of violence against women is increasing at a far greater rate than services to help the victims.

"The problems are many, but the major problems are lack of funding for programs and lack of education," said Grant. "WOAR sees more

are committed by men under 21 and half of all rapists are under 25.

Though there is little a woman can do to prevent a random attack such as in the Central Park case, Grant says women should educate themselves, about potential rape situations, particularly on dates, so they can avoid them.

But more important, Grant sees the need for a societal re-examination of rape. "Society shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the victim. And most people agree with that. No one wants to look at the real issue: Why do men rape? We have to provide services and support for these victims. And we have to realize that this crime is not going to go away just because we ignore the women victims of it."

Victoria Brownworth is a Philadelphia writer. She has written on women's issues for The Nation, The Advocate and Philadelphia Magazine.



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COMMENTARY

Publish the names of rape victims

BY VICTORIA A. BROWNWORTH

Since the April 16 NBC *Nightly News* broadcast, many Americans have known the name of the woman who has accused William Kennedy Smith of raping her in Palm Beach on Good Friday. Those who didn't see the newscast could see the tabloid version of her life the next day in the *New York Times*.

The release of her name by the press has ignited feminist and journalistic controversy over when — or whether — to print the names of rape victims. Feminists are calling it a second rape, journalists are citing the First Amendment. The unwritten code of ethics that has kept rape victims anonymous is now being questioned.

NBC News president Michael Gartner called his decision "agonizing" but said the name was news. Victims would help remove the stigma of rape. The incidents — both the initial release and the *Leary Times* follow-up — point out the moral dilemma in publishing names. The woman's name was released not to remove stigma, but to place blame; the *Times* piece, which paints her as a decidedly "bad" girl from the wrong side of the tracks, is definitive on that score. Publishing the name of only one woman merely victimizes that woman. Publishing the names of every rape vic-



Rape should be demythologized and shown to be the vicious crime that it is.

tim begins to erase the stigma.

In suggesting that such names be published, it is essential to examine why those names have been withheld when the names of victims of all other crimes are routinely published. Rape is viewed differently from other crimes. It is the only crime in which the victim's integrity, her "right" to be perceived as a victim, is questioned.

The most compelling reason to print the names of the victims is to demythologize rape and acknowledge it for what it is: a vicious crime second only to murder in the damage it does to its victim.

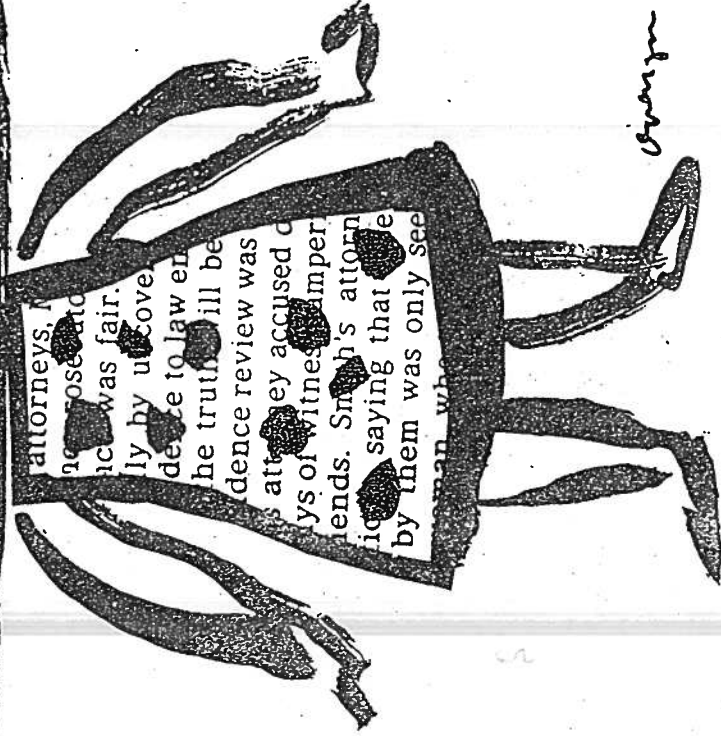
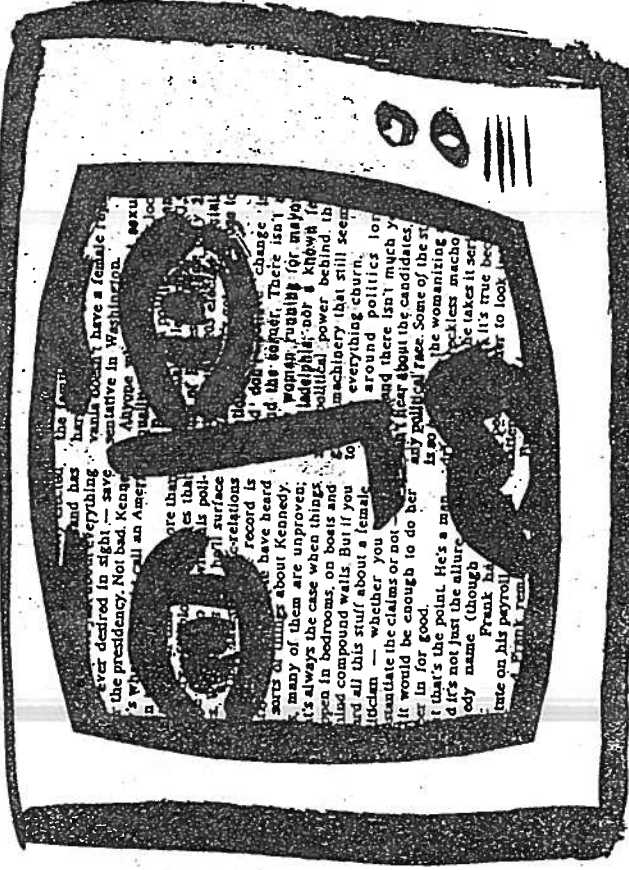
The U.S. Justice Department lists rape as the second most frequent violent crime (after domestic violence) in America: A rape occurs every six minutes and one-third of all American women will be raped in their lifetimes. Rape is also the most recidivist of crimes: More than 50 percent of convicted rapists are recharged within three years.

But the Justice Department also notes that most rapes — as many as 90 percent — go unreported. Only 10 percent of rapists are charged, and of those fewer than 20 percent are convicted.

Twenty years ago rape juries were routinely admonished that rape was an easy charge to levy. The law has changed the language, but not the implication. Most Americans — and many judges and juries — believe that women either falsely accuse men of rape or are somehow implicated in the crime of violence against them. The publication of the woman's name and intimate details of her life shows with painful clarity that even the edited decision-makers at America's most prestigious newspaper hold this view.

The protectionist philosophy toward women and rape sends a diabolical double message: Women are told to report rape because it is a crime, and then are kept silent and anonymous, as if they have made a false accusation or as if they are the criminals.

When we withhold the names of rape victims, we destroy their identities. In making them anonymous



Special to The Inquirer / JOHN OVERMYER

ous we also make them amorphous: What we don't see we don't have to acknowledge. Rape is a crime of violence, not a crime of shame. Rape is treated separately from other crimes, but not equally.

Anonymity protects society from the truth: that every single American knows at least one woman who has been raped. "Protecting" women by withholding their names silences them and implies that they are helpless without such "protection."

There is additional danger in the concept of anonymous accusations. Traditionally, charges of rape have been levied by white men against black men under the guise of protecting women. The notorious case of the Scotsboro Boys is only one scandalous example.

Advocates for rape victims suggest that publish-

ing names would contribute to low reportage. But withholding names has not brought increased reportage. Low reportage has to do with the lack of serious application of the law in rape cases, not with threat of exposure.

Women victims/survivors of rape have nothing to be ashamed of; they have survived a horrific assault. Printing their names would force the public to acknowledge the sheer numbers of women who have been victimized: wives, girlfriends, sisters, daughters, mothers, grandmothers. Our outrage should be directed at the ineffectiveness of the laws protecting women's bodies from violation. Rape victims should not be willing to trade justice for anonymity.

Victoria A. Brownworth is a "victim/survivor" of rape.

Let rape victims decide if names should be public

A newspaper's role is to reveal, not conceal, so the decision to keep information out of print — for instance, the names of rape victims — is not taken lightly.

We Americans take our open system of justice for granted. But in much of the world, citizens have no right to confront their accusers. In much of the world, police can make secret arrests.

Formal accusations. Public arrests. Open courtrooms. These are rare and precious — if sometimes under-appreciated — qualities of our court system, even our way of life.

So newspapers — such as The REPUBLICAN — that do withhold the names of rape victims do so not because secrecy is a virtue, or they have no right to print them, or people don't have the right to know. The opposite is true.

Still, rape continues to be one of the most under-reported crimes. Victims feel traumatized, embarrassed, humiliated — none of those words describes the impact sufficiently.

Admit it, rape victims are still blamed, however unfairly, as we try to distance ourselves from heinous crimes — “It couldn't happen to me, because ...”

So the names are kept out of print for a very narrow, strictly practical reason: By protecting the victim, it is hoped more will have the strength to confront their accusers, to insist that justice be done. No more, no less.

Does that mean names of victims should never, ever be printed under any circumstances? Certainly not.

More and more, rape victims insist their names be used. Having done nothing wrong, they refuse to be intimidated. Last September, Mindy

EDITORIAL

Adams — who was raped in her home in Schuylkill Haven six months earlier — told her story to The REPUBLICAN.

“If people don't hear the victim's name, they say, ‘It happens, but why think about it?’” she explained, adding at another point, “I need to feel good about myself again.”

Bravo. That took guts.

Further, once the name of a rape victim is widely known, is there any point in not publishing? Probably not. So it is with the celebrated victim of alleged rape by the Kennedy nephew in Palm Beach — the woman's name has hit the tabloids, the NBC Nightly News, and even the staid New York Times.

One spinoff of the current debate is that it bestirs politicians eager to trade away everyone's free-speech rights for a few votes.

In Harrisburg, one legislator is proposing to make it a crime for anyone in law enforcement to reveal the name of a rape victim.

Since the press, almost universally, is already protecting the name of the accused, this sounds like a solution in search of a problem.

A more positive spinoff: Florida's law prohibiting the reporting the names of rape victims may be tested and revealed for what it is: Prior restraint.

These laws throw the baby out with the bath water.

The media should continue to exercise restraint. Rape victims and women's advocates should continue to battle society's prejudices. And lawmakers should stay clear.

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SATURDAY COVERAGE DAY

Schuykill Haven rape victim tells her story

Held at knifepoint, young mother believes others must know anyone can be victim of crime

By Karen Hube
The Republican

If she hadn't been talking about the night she was raped, Mindy Adams' vitality and humor might have seemed less extraordinary.

But only six months after a man held a knife to her throat and raped her repeatedly for 2½ hours, Adams has emerged from her ordeal with strength, determination and a cause: Helping victims like herself.

"It was so tragic, I just want to make something good out of it," said Adams, 27, sitting in the near-empty kitchen of her former home on the Parkway in Schuykill Haven — the dream house she and her family immediately abandoned the day after the nightmare turned real.

Mindy Adams was awakened in her bed around 3 a.m. Saturday, March 17 — six months ago next Monday — by a strange man sitting on her back.

His hand was clamped over her mouth, he was heavy, and she could feel the blade of a knife on the side of her neck.

He would kill her, he said, and ordered her to be quiet and not to look at him. The room was pitch black, but he held her face away from him anyway.

The memory of what happened to her over the fol-

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the gripping and sometimes explicit story of Mindy Adams, a 27-year-old mother who was raped in her Schuykill Haven home on March 17, six months ago this evening Monday.

Inspired by the case of Nancy Zeigener, a rape victim in Iowa who related her story to the *Des Moines Register*, Adams came forward and told her story to **REPUBLICAN** reporter Karen Hube.

Zeigener asked after *Des Moines Register* Editor Geneva Overholser argued in her newspaper column that, by declining to print victims' names, newspapers are perpetuating the myth that being a victim is somehow shameful. *Newspapers* generally decline to print the names of rape victims to protect their privacy.

lowing hours — the words he spoke, his voice, his smell, the sexual violence — is etched in Adams' memory. Often, during daily routines — washing the dishes or at her job with a Berks County knitting company —

thoughts of that night rush back.

The last she remembers of "the old Mindy" was only hours before the rape, hosting a dinner party that Friday evening at her Haven home.

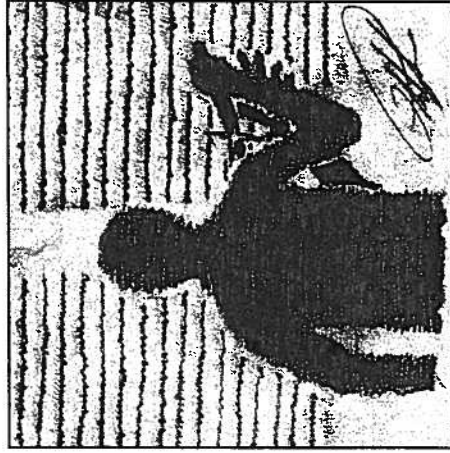
Her 3-year-old daughter was at her parents' house for the night. Her husband, who worked an 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift, left the party early.

The guests followed at 1 a.m. and the hostess tackled a stack of dirty dishes in the brightly lit kitchen at the back of the two-story house. Washing the knives, she remembers now, she got an eerie feeling that she was being watched through the windows of the back door behind her.

Feeling uneasy, she left the rest of the dishes until morning. The old Mindy fell soundly to sleep in her bed upstairs.

Meanwhile, the rapist — Adams later learned — broke a pane in the back door, reached through and released the lock, quietly enough that his victim, in a deep sleep upstairs at the far side of the house, heard nothing. The surprise was complete.

During the time the rapist stayed in her room — 150 minutes that seemed like many long hours — Adams tried to understand what made him angry and what calmed him so she could cater to his erratic mood (Please turn to page 7)



This sketch was made by Phil Sonon, an artist friend of Mindy Adams.

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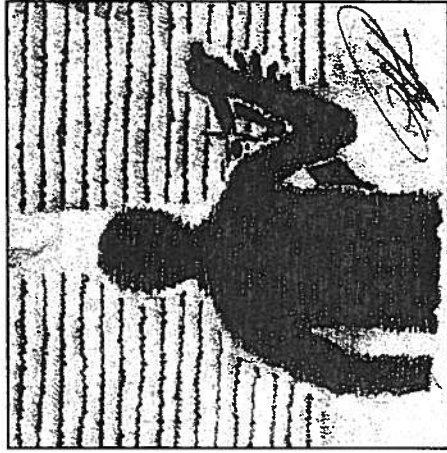
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June 22, 1991

Spokeswoman

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape

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PCAR's Public Policy Committee recently met to discuss the pros and cons of revealing victims identity in the media. The arguments for each side of this issue are listed on page 6. PCAR members are encouraged to examine both sides of the issue in preparation for establishing policy and strategic action to protect the identity of sexual assault victims.

RAPE TOTALS RISE ACROSS THE NATION

The United States Senate Judiciary Committee released a report showing that there were more reported rapes in the U.S. in 1990 than ever before. The report, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE INCREASE OF RAPE IN AMERICA, compiles rape statistics from state police departments. The following is a summary of the findings:

- * In 1990, more women were raped than in any year in U.S. history.
- * In 1990, the number of rapes in this country reported to authorities exceeded 100,000 for the first time ever.
- * There was more than a 6% increase in the number of rapes last year; nearly 3 times greater than the 1989 increase.
- * In 1990 there were up to 12 rapes per hour -- nearly 300 every day.
- * The rape rate has increased four times faster than the overall crime rate over the last 10 years.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE ...

- 2 Ruling Gives Children Disadvantage in Court
 - 4 Aids Task Force Completes Training Project
 - 5 Take Back The Night
 - 7 Small Centers Are Big On Community Outreach
 - 8 Legislative Action Working For Change
 - 10 COVE Project Provides Services For The Disabled
- ... And More News