Justice of My Own

Felicia Taylor

It was February of 2002. I was 14 years old, and I was sitting in a crowded court room surrounded by my family and staring at the monster who took my soul. Next to him sat the judge, the only man who could give me some kind of justice. Because the monster, albeit with a disgusting grin on his face, pled guilty, the judge sentenced him to eight years probation. “Eight years probation for rape of a child—he had to be kidding!” I thought. My heart felt ripped from my chest by the injustice of it. But there was nothing I could do—or so I thought. I walked out of the Superior Court in New Bedford feeling as though I had been victimized for a second time and this time by a judge. Somehow I found the determination not to let my fears take over my life. I was sick of waking up in the middle of the night sweating from the nightmares and I was sick of always looking over my shoulder, afraid my perpetrator was there. I needed to find my own justice. I would expose both these monsters, the perpetrator and the judge. I wasn’t going to stay quiet anymore. I was going to tell the whole world my story.

By 7:00 pm that night, I had Channel 10 News at my house with all their equipment laid on the floor. Thank God for my mother who handled the meeting, for I was only a child and a scared one at that. I wanted everyone to know that this judge was wrong but I couldn’t do it by myself. As we sat at the living room table, my mother let everything out starting from the night of my attack and ending with the judge’s decision. Then they videotaped my room where this whole nightmare began, thanked us, wished us luck, and said to watch the 10 o’clock news. That night, my story was first on the news. That one report paved the road to my self-recovery.

For months thereafter, my mother was in the public eye, from radio stations to TV talk shows, to every local news station and newspaper. My story had spread everywhere and even the mayor had come forward to speak in my defense. The community had demanded the judge be removed from the bench and the reporters had found out about things from his past that shed light on why he had been so lenient with my attacker. My story brought forth other victims who also believed the judge had treated their cases too leniently. I was no longer in the fight by myself. Now I had other people to stand with me.

But the system had still done nothing about this judge, so I decided I would speak for myself. I held a press conference in my back yard. As I walked to the podium that had been set up, my legs were like jelly and my heart was pounding in my ears. Reading my prepared speech, I tried to keep myself from choking up with all my emotions. I stayed strong, kept reading, and answered all the reporters’ questions.

The press conference was my ticket to justice. That same week, the judge was forced off the bench, and although my attacker was still free, I felt that I had won. I had changed from a scared little girl to a strong woman. I had my soul back and I knew that no other child would ever suffer the pain of that judge’s unjust decision again because of my telling my story and because of the enormous efforts of my loving mother.

Thinking back to my past makes me feel proud. I had achieved something at age 14 that many people don’t in their entire life. I had stood up for my beliefs, taken back my life, and forced the removal of a corrupt superior court judge. And that was very good!

Felicia is single mom to her 1-year-old son, Jacob. They live in Attleboro, MA, where she attends Bristol Community College. She is a rape survivor and wants to say to other survivors, “Be strong and never stop fighting for what you know is right.”