

Good afternoon.

My name is Allison Winfield Kalloo.

I would never have expected to be speaking before you in any capacity, let alone as a victim. I considered myself immune from it. I simply wasn't raised "that way," nor do I engage in a lifestyle that would dictate or imply that kind of vulnerability, or so I thought. I am a different kind of woman, with high self-esteem, accountability, independence and different values from what might be considered that of the stereotypical victim, yet I sit before you with my own story.

I never imagined waking up on a cold floor to find the face of a maniac staring back at me. After being rendered unconscious, it took me an undetermined amount of time to even comprehend what was happening. My assault was—and still is—very surreal. I had never been the victim of a serious crime. I always prided myself on being very aware of my surroundings, and on being an excellent judge of character.

Before the night of my assault, I was completely unfamiliar with what sheer terror feels like. During my attack, I really thought my assailant, whom I knew, would actually take my life. In my haze, I still recall being concerned that this monster was also in the midst of destroying my son's life, too. I was angry and frightened and perplexed. "Why was this happening?" This was quickly overtaken by thoughts of "How do I survive this?"

My primary goal became getting away and getting help. I am grateful and overjoyed to say that I managed to get help that night and thereafter. The police, the hospital staff, counselors and several layers of victims' advocates were all exemplary. All stood up for me—and with me—at my time of greatest need. They all helped me navigate through the mire of my assault when I was not equipped to help myself.

What happened next took me by surprise and shook my beliefs to my core. My advocate informed me, after the fact, that the psychotic bastard had entered a plea and was offered a

deal. The prosecutor's office had not even bothered to inform her of the impending hearing. She was angry and clearly embarrassed that they, those entrusted to represent my interest, had in fact betrayed me. Later, prosecutors claimed that when my file was duplicated, my statements went missing from their copy. He had actually gotten away with it. How does this happen?

To say that I remain shocked at the outcome of the criminal case is the understatement of a lifetime. The prosecutors—through professional ineptitude or mere human error—overlooked my rights in favor of offering my assailant a deal that included no jail time, despite the fact that he is a convicted felon. Further, the judge ruled on the case without any acknowledgement, or canvassing, of my wishes. I had been interviewed at several different times, submitted several statements, I was canvassed by the court-appointed advocate, and had written multiple letters to the court along the way. All indicated my unwavering position that “Señor Psychopath” should be penalized to the fullest extent of the law. He walked without so much as a trial. How does this happen?

My court-appointed advocate reminded me that victims often recant statements or undermine protective orders by communicating with their assailants; she said she made it abundantly clear from the beginning that this was not a possibility with me. Anyone who read the case file would see that I was reliable. It never crossed my mind to punk out. I still want to know why he wasn't charged with attempted murder. I was never the least bit interested in reconsidering my position or letting him get away with it, and I was steadfast in writing and in action. How does this happen?

For a long time I felt like I lived on a different planet. It was as if law and order and my cooperation had been non-existent. Months of continuances and legal process amounted to absolutely nothing. It is clear to me that the judge and prosecutor's office—swamped with cases—did not bother opening the file or reading the contents. Victims are apparently no longer people. We're numbers. Just expedite, they seemed to say. They either did not review my file, or the facts and my life simply didn't matter enough. The implication, even now, is

that the rights of the felon outweigh that of the victim. That our rights would even be on par at all is barbaric to me.

I consider myself an intelligent person, but I found I knew next to nothing about the judicial system when I was thrown into the middle of it. As self-empowered as I like to think I am, I was overwhelmed by the process and the language. Not having a law degree or a copy of the state statutes at my disposal, I was not aware of exactly what my rights are and what the next steps might be. And it's still confusing to me. I do know that the system needs an infusion of accountability and a better way to communicate. And in this technologically savvy and consumer-driven age, this kind of lapse cannot be allowed. There is simply no excuse.

I can't help but feel further victimized by the system. Like insult added to injury. I am outraged, but thankfully I am not alone.

I am heartened to know that significant measures are underway—in this legislation before you by the state's advocate—to prevent this from happening to someone else. I will tell you that this proposal is a giant leap in the right direction. So that this kind of residual or secondary “crime” does not happen to someone else, please:

1. Put in place a standard form, something akin to informed consent for the legal system, that must be included on the record and in every case;
2. Make it mandatory for all victims to be made aware of their rights, in their native language and in culturally relevant terms, and to acknowledge this awareness via signature;
3. Grant victims the systematic courtesy of being offered the opportunity to speak out (in person or on paper) or to waive that opportunity;
4. Keep victims informed of the legal proceedings in their cases at every juncture, and especially give advance notice of any “deals” and an opportunity to object;
5. Make it mandatory for prosecutors, defense counsel and judges to make reference to the contents of this form, and mandatory to sign off on it. (I would go so far as to make it mandatory for victims to receive counseling if they decline to press charges or

if they allow violations of their protective orders. Some of us clearly need a little extra help, but all of us need our basic rights protected in a way that means something.)

In my case, I was not aware until police interviewed me in the hospital that my assailant actually had a criminal history. He'd physically assaulted, threatened and restrained others before me. I consider myself lucky I was not sexually assaulted, as he'd done to other victims in his past. I am truly happy to be alive. I can say I really never saw it coming, but frankly I did know that something about him creeped me out. I am also creeped out by the handling of this debacle, or lack thereof, when the court's own missteps came to their attention. Mistakes, once acknowledged, can often be corrected. But only if we try.

My take-home message to other women:

1. Hindsight is a bitch. We have the responsibility of listening to and following our instincts. There's usually a good reason that our gut tells us "there's something's not quite right here."
2. We have the obligation not to presume that our help and good intentions are enough to overcome someone's instability. We must be more selfish. We simply cannot afford to give men the benefit of the doubt where our lives and children are concerned.
3. We owe it to ourselves—and to the people who love us—to stop the madness of going back; to not expect someone (who has already demonstrated what they're made of) to change. Period. Dig deep, if you have to, for the emotional fortitude and self-respect to stop giving criminals further access to our lives. Once is more than enough.
4. Reach out but not back. There are many people who will come to your aid in your time of need. Some are strangers. Many wear uniforms. This vulnerability takes even greater strength of character, I think, than trying to manage a crisis on your own, and I promise that you will never regret doing so.
5. Don't settle for the status quo—in your relationships, your current situation or in the system.

My take-home message for the system:

We victims are, largely speaking, not a bunch of people who don't give a damn about our lives. We have hopes and plans for ourselves and our children. We have actual lives. Many of us are just trying to make it. In the meantime, protect those of us who aren't capable of protecting ourselves. Put into place a system of communication that lets people know what their rights are, in layman's terms, and helps to enforce them. Keep victims abreast not only of what has already happened in our cases, but also what the next steps are all along the way. And don't you dare say that the budget will not support such a thing. Be resourceful if you must, but make it happen.

Every moment in life should serve a purpose. If I come away from this nightmare with nothing more, I do have my life, my self-respect, my resolve to not let this happen again, and my conviction that every one of us can make a difference. You are in positions to do more. Pass this legislation. Do it for the women who contribute to their communities, who have positive goals and who strive to set good examples for their children. Do it for the little boys who are taking hints from all of us about what is acceptable behavior and what isn't. And last but not least, do it for the first responders who often break their own necks trying to protect ours. Give us more tools to make it better. I implore you to do at least that.

Thank you in advance.