

has no right."

She curls up tighter on the couch. She looks forward into space. Only she knows exactly what she is thinking.

"He's a nurse," she says. "That's pretty ironic. His job is to take care of people, but he can do something like this." She still wants to move when school begins in the fall. She will not stay in the apartment for long.

Her friend has called. They are both wary of each other's feelings, but they are speaking.

He leaves her alone. He speaks to her on rare occasions, and then as if nothing had happened. He does not look at her; he boldly stares. It is possible he knows what he has done.

Her mother and father have accepted what has happened, although neither approve of how she handled herself. She is happy about that, but cannot turn to them.

Luckily, her relationship with her mother has improved. She understands why her mother acted the way she did. "She feels guilty," she says. "She wants to be able to do something, but she can't, so it turns into anger. I've gotten pretty used to that by now, though."

However, she still does not connect with her father, and barely speaks to or about him to this day.

She has told friends, and a few have been willing to listen. It is what she needs the most.

Every person at least accepts what happened, and for now, it is enough.

Her mood brightens for a moment, although a tear begins to form in the corner of her eye. Again, she holds it back.

"I have this dream of becoming a star performer someday," she says. "I know it'll happen; it'll happen because I want it to happen. It just won't happen the way I want it to. This whole thing definitely wasn't something I'd thought of."

She closes her eyes and smiles slightly. There is a music in the air; not audible, but certainly discernible in her world.

"There are things I want to do with my life," she says, "and if I want to do them, I can't let anything stop me."

"Not even this." ♦

Resources

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"The police will ask the victim at that time if she wants to talk with them and testify later," Gray said.

Unfortunately, if a victim chooses not to receive a rape exam, there's very little recourse for her to take later should she change her mind, she said.

"Rape is very difficult to prosecute because (without evidence) it is very difficult to prove. It's just a matter of his word against hers," Gray said.

Receiving most of the referrals from the Victim/Witness Unit and the Women's Center, RSACC provides single or weekly group counseling, legal advocacy, and a 24-hour crisis line, as well as transportation to safe houses, if necessary.

Judith Kriss, director of the Women's Center on city campus, said the most crucial thing to watch after a rape was the victim's state of mind.

"The important thing is for victims not to blame themselves," Kriss said. Many concerns and problems that appear as a long-term result of being violated may reoccur for several years, she said.

In addition to counseling, legal advocacy, crisis intervention, and referrals, the staff of the Women's Center work hard to help students heal from their ordeal, while still being able to function on a daily basis and continue to attend school.

"Many of the students we work with are facing dismissals from UNL as a result of not attending classes after a rape," Kriss said. "Victims tend to have a lot of fear and there's a lot of avoidance and isolation that occurs afterwards."

In fact, according to Gray, about 25% of RSACC's case-load are college students who reside in Lincoln.

Many counselors also suggest protection orders for peace-of-mind to those survivors who are concerned about coming into contact with the offender.

Svoboda explained that while a restraining order falls primarily under the jurisdiction of the courts, protection orders are a matter for police to deal with.

"Violating a protection order is a criminal offense," she said. "It means that the person violating it will be arrested. Violation of a restraining order

may only mean a judge will hold the offender in contempt of court."

However, according to Gray, many victims do not meet the criteria for a protection order.

"You either have to be married, live together, have a child together, be related by blood, or reside in the same house," she said.

Most students going to parties or out on dates don't fit under any of those criteria.

But prevention is always the best way to deal with the possibility of rape.

Gray said that one answer may be educating the public that "no means no" and that rape is not a way to "score points."

"There's an attitude out there that says 'If I take her out to eat, she owes me,'" Gray said.

Kriss said most rapes by far occur in situations where women already feel safe — with acquaintances or at parties.

National statistics on rape report that one in four college-aged women will experience some form of sexual assault by a date or acquaintance in their lifetime, Kriss said.

However, she said those statistics are taken only from the rapes reported, which is figured to be only 10% of the total rapes that occur nationally.

Gray also noted the high incidence of "date rape" as being a major obstacle to prevention of rape.

"Eighty percent of the rapes that occur are committed by acquaintances or dates," Gray said. "What safety procedures can someone follow to prevent someone they know from hurting them?"

But Kriss said that the Victim/Witness Unit regularly attempts to teach common sense strategies for rape prevention.

Safety tips include going out in groups, not leaving a place with a stranger, never hitchhiking, and avoiding poorly-lit parking areas.

However, Svoboda conceded that even after following every safety tip, little can be done to prevent someone from hurting another person if they really want to, and that the best protection is awareness.

"Use your head to protect your body," she said. "If your partner appears not to be listening to you, or if a situation just feels unsafe, then it probably is."

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