

James Rabe (00:00):

You may have heard of Danielle's story. She was raped and held captive for hours and hours and hours. One morning in St. Charles and her attacker is in prison for 21 years, at least. And she said, James, I'd love to come on the show. And I would love to talk about my story. Welcome to the show. I appreciate you taking time and talking with me Danielle, before you go any further, what is the thing you want everyone to hear you say today?

Danielle Leukam (00:29):

Um, you know, my, my vision of what happened and how I'm going to move forward is taking something so awful and making good out of it. I feel like that's what I have to do to move forward. Otherwise I'm going to be stuck in a hole. So, um, I think helping other people and being an advocate and providing resources, um, has helped me feel good over the last couple of days anyways. Um, so I think that's what I'm going to do.

James Rabe (00:57):

All right. You want it, you want to, uh, take back all your power

Danielle Leukam (01:02):

Exactly, right? Yep. Take back my power. Yep,

James Rabe (01:06):

Absolutely. And this is all about your story and, uh, so you, you feel free to tell your story how you want to tell it if we need to beep something or whatever. That's absolutely fine, but I know people, I know people have seen the headlines about, about, about your rapist going away for 21 years or so, but they don't, they don't, I don't think they know your story. So what would you like to tell us?

Danielle Leukam (01:29):

Yeah, so the story in the media is pretty similar to what actually happened. Um, basically on November 18th of 2018, I heard a noise at the end of my bed and I have two cats. So I thought it was my cats. Um, but I grabbed my iPhone and picked it up and shined at the light of my phone at the end of the bed. And a man stood up with a gun at my head in a matter of seconds. Um, he yelled at me to lay down, to not move and to roll over. And a couple of seconds after that he is at pay my hands behind my back, um, and just kinda stood there for a minute. Just kind of looking at me, um, after that it was five hours of basically him tormenting me, um, from, you know, at one point he said, um, what's in this cup, I had a water cup by my bed.

Danielle Leukam (02:29):

And he said, what's in this cup? And I said water. He said, okay, well I need to take some or I need you to take something so I can get out of here. Um, and I said, no, I can't take anything. I have my son to take care of. I didn't want him to drug me. And so he didn't end up making me take anything, which I was thankful for. But then that, then I said, I have a son. So now he knows that there's somebody else in the house. Right. So that scared me after I thought about it. Um, but over the next five hours, he, um, lots of things happened. He talked to me, um, three times, two times, and then, um, he let me go to the bathroom and he tried to make me go to the bathroom with the door open. I couldn't do that.

Danielle Leukam ([03:17](#)):

So he shut the door. And when I opened the door, I was looking at him and I said, um, do you want me to go lay down now and yelled at me? Um, he was mad that I had looked at him. And so, um, when I got on the bed, he basically, um, very aggressively raped me again. Um, and I think this was at one part that he video recorded himself raping me. Um, there were a couple of videos as far as I'm aware that were found on his phone. So, um, and part of my victim impact statement, I said, I know my story. I told my story. And then it was validated by videos that I didn't even know existed. Um, you know, and I don't know how many people watch those. I don't know if he's still a Bose, there's so many questions.

Danielle Leukam ([04:07](#)):

Um, I forgot to mention I was zip tied for a while. Um, and then probably after a couple of hours or an hour, he did cut the zip ties off. Um, but you know, with my son sleeping in the room next door, he used that against me, um, saying, don't move, don't go anywhere. Um, for a lot of the night, he was not in my bedroom. He was going through my electronics. Um, he had my phone, he checked to make sure I didn't have anything that I could call nine one, one or anything like that. He had found my two guns and he made me lay down with my face down and he was, um, doing something with the guns. And he said, so if I kill you with these guns, they're going to think it's your ex husband, right? Because there were his guns.

Danielle Leukam ([04:59](#)):

Um, and I just kind of made something up on the spot. And I said, no, he's out of state working, which he was. So just everything through the night, I just tried my hardest to do what he wanted pretty much. So he wouldn't kill my son. Um, that was one of the worst parts of the night is him repeatedly threatening to kill my son. He said, if you tell anyone I was here, did you tell anyone what I did? I'm going to go to your son's school and kill him. I will kill your son and kill you. And that was a huge part of the night. Um, him repeatedly threatening me at one point, he took his gun and he dragged it across the bedroom door when he was out there doing whatever. Um, at the end of the morning, um, he did let me go lay in bed with my son.

Danielle Leukam ([05:47](#)):

And that's when he opened my garage door and just walk down my driveway. At that time, there was a little bit of snow on the ground. So we were able to see his footprints, um, in the morning after he had left, um, my son and I eventually went out into the kitchen, basically, um, took the house to make sure he wasn't there. And then I came up with a plan of how we were going to leave. So I didn't know if he had put cameras in the house if he was still watching, if he was outside watching. So I kept saying out loud, like, like I was in a play or something. I said, why don't you want breakfast? Mommy needs coffee. Let's go get coffee. Let's go get yogurt from the store. And I was like putting on a show that we needed to leave the house just in case he was watching rather than me picking up my phone and calling nine one one.

Danielle Leukam ([06:43](#)):

So I went to Mike's grocery store in St. Charles. And from there I borrowed somebody's cell phone, a lady. Um, and I called my mom because the five hours he was there, he threatened us so much that I, I didn't want to call the police right away because I was afraid to, I thought, I thought that my mom and I were going to come up with a plan as to how to not tell the police, but keep me safe, which obviously wasn't an option. So she called the police and things kind of rolled from there. So

James Rabe ([07:17](#)):

You often hear people that are too scared to call the police even for a decade or so. Um, how do you tell other people that you found the strength to do that or how

Danielle Leukam ([07:27](#)):

Absolutely. So there are some amazing sane nurses at the Mayo clinic. So that's a sexual assault nurse examiner. And they told me, I remember this clearly. They said, they all tell you, they're going to kill you. All of them. They're going to threaten you in some way to not report them. So they all say that, um, and the police officers are here to keep you safe. Right. Um, I know, I wonder too, you know, say a little bit, um, about reporting. There are so many people that don't report and there's so many reasons why they don't report, whether it's because they feel like they're not going to be believed because of their rates, their sexual orientation, um, social, socio economic status, um, and then fear of retaliation. So, you know, even if a survivor chooses not to report, I still think it's important that they reach out to advocates and network. Um, the almost say County victim services is an amazing resource. They have amazing advocates and they kind of got the ball rolling for me being here and being okay today. Right.

James Rabe ([08:37](#)):

Right. Well, that's, that's incredible. And so that even if you don't report, if you decide to later on it's, it's, there's a paper trail and all that stuff, but mostly it's about being able to heal, I assume.

Danielle Leukam ([08:50](#)):

Right? Yep. Um, and the people at honestly, County services are going to validate their feelings. They're going to believe you, they're going to listen to you and they're going to validate you. So even if you feel like reporting it, isn't going to do anything. There are people that will believe you. Um, and I think that's a really big step for healing, um, is talking about it.

James Rabe ([09:15](#)):

All right. This is James Ray B, along with Danielle Leichman. She is a woman who was raped and held captive in her home in St. Charles. And today she's taking her power back sheet is flipping the script and she is telling us the story, her story. This is Rochester's news talk 1340 Korosi AMN 96 nine FM. Oh, between the time that you reported and the trial, what was going on with you?

Danielle Leukam ([09:39](#)):

Holy Molly boy. So it took me three weeks to go back to work. Um, the person that raped me was, um, at the time he was masked, he was disguising his voice and he was fully clothed. It didn't know who he was. Um, so I was afraid to leave. You know, I was staying with my mom and my aunt. I was afraid to leave the house. I was afraid to do anything. I was afraid to drive the same path for fear that somebody was following me. Um, but I eventually went back to work and, um, thanks to my job, the security department and my job. Um, they helped to facilitate me feeling safe at work, which was huge. Um, so thank you to you guys, Missy specifically. Um, so I've been just working and taking off when there are hearings. Um, you know, he sexually assaulted a vulnerable adult in Willmar and that's how he was found because, um, he gave consent for DNA in Willmar, Minnesota. Um, and then it pinged to my rape kit down here. So that's how he was caught, um, was, was because he has halted somebody else. And he was the main suspect in that case. So

James Rabe ([11:00](#)):

On TV, they make it sound like everyone's afraid of being in court. Did you have that same kind of feeling?

Danielle Leukam ([11:06](#)):

That's a good question. Um, I went to a support group for survivors and one of the ladies in the group said going to court, made me ready for, um, giving my victim impact statements. So I went to every hearing for two reasons. So I would get familiar with being in the courtroom, seeing the back of his head. And then also, um, because I was in the dark for five hours that morning, I was in the dark or three and a half months when I didn't know who it was and I didn't want to be in the dark anymore. I wanted to know everything and I wanted to be just aware of everything that was happening with regarding this case, because I didn't want to be in the dark anymore.

James Rabe ([11:50](#)):

Gotcha. How are you doing by the way? Good. Okay. It sounds like along the way you met a lot of angels, a whole lot of,

Danielle Leukam ([11:59](#)):

Oh my gosh, absolutely. Yep. Um, it started at the women's and children's resource center in Wynonna. I was set up with an advocate that, um, gave me a ton of resources. My phone was taken as evidence. Um, so she got me set up with a prepaid phone that I could use. And then I linked up with Olmsted County because that's where I was living. Um, and everyone's just been super awesome and supportive. There are so many resources that I didn't even know about. Um, and that's why I think it's important for people that don't report to just reach out to somebody. Um, there's so much help that is out there and available. It's amazing. And then, you know, I don't, I don't have their permission to say this, but a couple of doctors that I work with have been so amazing. They got me set up with a place to stay for a few months, um, because my house was at the crime scene. So I had to pay my mortgage, pay my bills, but I couldn't live there. So I got set up in a place, um, for a few months before I found my house that I bought.

James Rabe ([13:07](#)):

If, if there's a woman listening right now that is dealing with trauma from having been attacked, having been raped, sexually assaulted. Do you have words?

Danielle Leukam ([13:17](#)):

You've probably heard this before, but you are not alone and you are stronger than you think that you are. We can do hard things. And if you feel like nobody believes you and nobody will listen to you, I will listen to you. And I believe you it's scary feeling alone. And I did sometimes during this whole process, my support, um, outside of advocates was not consistent. Um, I lost support often because it's been a long two years. Um, and I felt alone. I just don't want anybody to feel like that.

James Rabe ([13:50](#)):

That is Danielle Leichman. She is joined me today to talk about her experience, surviving, rape, and being held captive while her son was in the next room more next on Rochester today. Have you seen what's happening with the stock market? Hey, welcome back to Rochester today. I'm James Ray be joined by Danielle [inaudible] via zoom. She is the woman you've read about many times in the paper. A man was just put away for 21 years because he attacked her. He raped her repeatedly and he held her

captive in her home while her son was in the room next door. And we're continuing our conversation. Now she's continuing to flip the script to grab her power back. And, uh, you know, how do you, how do you compare your life now to just a year?

Danielle Leukam ([14:37](#)):

It's a good question. I think the thing that I struggle with the most right now is how it affected my son. So that morning, um, he, he heard the man come to the door and then he thought it was his dad. Um, and so he, it was like five 30, six in the morning. And, um, the guy came to the door who now, now I know his name Peterson. He came to the door and said, Hey, are you still in there? Don't try to leave. And I said, we're on the second story. I'm not going to leave. And, um, so I had to tell my son that it was a man fixing our shower that was in the house. I didn't want to tell him the truth. I couldn't tell him the truth for the longest time I had to pretend like we were grocery shopping when we were in the grocery store. We just couldn't go back to her house. After that,

James Rabe ([15:35](#)):

Let's just take a few deep breaths it's okay.

Danielle Leukam ([15:41](#)):

So, um, I can do a whole bunch of therapy for me. I feel so much better than I did back then, but it's my son that he didn't deserve that he didn't deserve to have to move from his phone to have his life threatened. I mean, he was three years old at the time. Um, so that's been the hardest probably. Um, but now I feel believed because of my support system. And it's really sad that I feel blamed because there was so much evidence and I feel so bad for the people that aren't believed and don't have hard evidence, but I'm thankful at the same time, because I know that if I didn't have this evidence, he wasn't behind bars. He would still be assaulting people. It's a pattern for him. And I'm just thankful that he is behind bars.

James Rabe ([16:34](#)):

Oh, you know, I, everyone here in the building is like, you got to tell her that we're so impressed that she found the strength to stand up and speak out. I hope you know, that you are incredibly fierce and your child sees that your son sees that.

Danielle Leukam ([16:49](#)):

Yes, yes. I'm trying to be strong for him, but my myself as well. And then for all the other survivors that feel like they don't have a voice, um, I am willing to share my story and be that voice because somebody is survival. Story can be another person's survival guide. And I'm okay with that being my story,

James Rabe ([17:15](#)):

A lot of support groups for women that have dealt with sexual assault dealt with rape. Oh, the attempted murder.

Danielle Leukam ([17:21](#)):

Yep. So there is a support group through homestay County for survivors of sexual assault. I don't know about other counties, but I would assume, and I would just suggest that people reach out to their counties to find out about support groups. There's also, I mean, in light of COVID, there's also so much

online now. Um, I'm part of the sexual assault, um, survivor advisory group to the governor and I've been networking. And one of the things that I brought to the governor's office was, um, resources for rural rural areas. So Southeast Minnesota, it's so hard to find a therapist, but now because of COVID, there's so many therapists available online. So that's something I would suggest to survivors. If you can't find an in-person therapist,

James Rabe ([18:07](#)):

That's excellent. And I know that you have plans to be more vocal about it and step out.

Danielle Leukam ([18:12](#)):

Absolutely. Um, so I'm going to be a guest speaker for Mayo clinic, um, and a couple other things that I'm going to tell my story for. So I just hope that, I dunno, I just hope that somebody can take something that I'm saying and use it to help themselves. Um, and looking back at what I told you for my story is so choppy. When you think about five hours where you were shaking and crying and fear and sweating from parts of your body that you didn't even know could sweat and thinking about your son and your child and keeping him alive to see him the next morning. Um, but more of those details are in a book that I wrote, um, at the Mylar that I looked at publish, um, I haven't gotten a publisher yet, but that's my next step. So if I can get my book published, um, I'll continue on that path. I'm already working on a second book. It's, um, I've interviewed about nine survivors so far and each chapter will be their story and their healing journey. So I just think that awareness needs to be raised for sexual assault in our community, um, and healing journeys and you know, everything like that.

James Rabe ([19:28](#)):

When you tell the story or after it first happened, a lot of people are so angry for you. Does that anger help you or is there a better way they could respond?

Danielle Leukam ([19:37](#)):

As I said, in a post I put on social media, I don't want sympathy. And I think maybe anger is sympathy or empathy. Um, I want allies. So I want people that would stand with survivors as well and be supportive of survivors too. So people can react. How are they want to react? And truthfully, there are resources that tell people how to react when somebody tells you that they've been sexually assaulted. Um, there's some organizations that have steps of how to react. Um, but I, I mean, you can't teach everybody that. So I'm open to however, anyone reacts except for victim blaming, which didn't happen to me one time. They said, how can you let this happen to you? How did you let that happen to you? Um, why don't you beat him up? And I was in a position where I couldn't do anything about it, except for just listen. Um, so whoever's hearing this stop victim blaming. It is not their fault. They didn't ask to be raped. They didn't, even if you drank too much, you are not giving consent in is not your fault. The one fault it is, is the perpetrator. They are the person to blame and it's never your fault.