

June 11 2017 altered the lives of many people in our community. The psychological impact of someone harming a child in such a severe and intentional fashion was not limited to our small family of four but felt quite literally across the entirety of the United States, and beyond. I don't believe that this is the appropriate platform to go into great detail as to what our experience as a family has been over the last 6 years. I am not here to vicariously traumatize the state of Kansas further by telling you about the absolute terror that my family endured for five days knowing there was someone out in the community who may or may not know who we are as people, who may or may not know where we live, who may or may not have some friends or family who are just as deranged as the person who attacked our child, who may or may not be hiding in the bushes somewhere ready to spring out and "finish the job" and kill us all. The only description of the individual that anyone had at that time was that there was a white man with no beard in blue jeans who was out there to murder our children, on the loose in the city somewhere. The crime occurred sometime around 2AM on a Sunday morning, and by 8PM Sunday evening a detective had sat My Husband and I down to express to us that "This is going to be in the news tomorrow". My only words in response to this information was, "Why?" To me, in that moment, it seemed absurd that tomorrow morning my community was going to wake up to hear that my seven year old child had been assaulted in the middle of the night, no one knew who did it or where the perpetrator was, we can barely describe the individual we are looking for...and my heart and soul utterly sank at the thought of what these news stations would do to get whatever kind of story they were after. I will continue to say that as it turns out, i was not mistaken in my concerns for the privacy and security of our family at that time.

From my understanding, one of the first things that happened immediately after first responders arrived to the scene of the crime was an officer called my husband, woke him up, and started asking him the location of his daughter. This sent my husband straight into defense. Who would call in the middle of the night asking where your daughter is? Another officer had to get on the phone and tell my husband that this is not a prank call, this is real, now What hospital do we take her to? By the grace of God I happened to be on my way home as my husband was heading to the hospital. It would later be proven to me by law enforcement that some people did try to call me, but reception must have been bad that night because my phone never physically rang. I got out of my car and into his car, and even though we have only 3 major hospitals in our area we managed to get turned around, almost went all the way to the wrong hospital with the state of mind we were in, just wondering and hoping and praying that someones mistaken and our daughter, the light of our family and the literal glue that holds us all together, surely wasn't raped. Surely this couldn't have happened. Surely someone is mistaken somewhere..

Turns out, they were not mistaken. Nothing could possibly prepare anyone in this world for what we were about to walk into.

My husband pulled up to the emergency room, i hopped out and quite literally ran inside as he went to park the car. He came in about the time that the receptionist confirmed that our daughter was indeed in the emergency room and I took his hand and we walked passed the same emergency room where i last spoke to my Grandfather who unfortunately passed in January of 2017, and toward the group of officers and nurses standing near one room in particular. I walked up to this officer, who was standing at the door between me and my daughter and i asked, "Is she in here?". Im not sure if the officer even said yes. It was obvious. I pushed open that door and i will never in all my days forget what i saw in front of me. What i saw was a grey child, MY CHILD sitting upright on a gurney with nurses, doctors, cops, and an advocate in the room. Time stood still. It was as if the Lord himself had come upon me and said, "You can walk in there and BE this child's mother, or you can turn around and run away." I took this to mean that no matter what i do in this moment, everything will turn out the way its going to turn out. So i took a breath, i stepped into that room and kissed her on the forehead, said something to the effect of hey babe, are you in pain? Have they given you any medicine?/Have you given her any medicine? I put my left hand on her shoulder and prayed that she get oxygen. She needs to breathe! She is literally grey. She looks dead. Shes got blood in her mouth, her eyes are bloodshot, theres blood under her fingernails, blood all over her legs and feet...I closed my eyes and i prayed so hard to just fix it..I opened my eyes, and she had changed color. She was a bright red color. She had spots of dark red from the neck up all over her. Her scalp, her eyes, her face, neck, and even inside her mouth. These spots i would later learn are called petechia. These spots are often found on victims of strangulation. From my understanding petechia are caused by blood vessels bursting under the skin and usually appear hours after a body expires.

Immediately two nurses on the other side of the hospital bed leaned over my daughter and were looking at her face. I tried to hear what they were whispering to each other but all i made out was, "did you see that?" .."did you see that?" .."her complexion"...more whispering and then one of them came over to me and told me they need to get her into a scan this minute. She was indeed rushed off for a scan. As the nurses took care of her, other nurses, doctors, and officers began explaining to me, looking me in my eyes and very seriously telling me that "There is no medical reason your daughter should be alive right now." They started asking us about our faith. What I could not comprehend in that moment was that they were preparing us for her death. They did not believe she was going to make it. There was no reason this child should be able to talk to us right now with the injuries she had sustained, but all i could say to this was, "Okay, but you guys just saw that. She is alive. She shouldn't be, but she is. She is alive though." I could not accept nor comprehend that it were still possible that she may have passed.

Five days. It took five days for our officers and detectives five days to realize via dna evidence who they were looking for. They were able to get a positive match for someone who was already in their system. When i found out what truly Herculean efforts were made between June 11th and June 16th, 2017 to get that offender off the streets i was absolutely dumbfounded. Eventually I would give a speech at the Heroes Gala thanking everyone involved who helped to bring what justice they could to this situation. I borrowed some words from NBA coach Phil Jackson who said, " The strength of the team is each individual member, and the strength of each member is the team." While Jackson intended it for leadership, it was and still is applicable and true in this situation. From the first responders, to the hospital staff, to the detective and advocates, our district attorney and his staff, and so on. Their efforts were phenomenal and words can not do it justice. They so completely applied their capabilities, gifts and talents when it truly mattered most.

Between 2017 and present day i have spoken to numerous law professionals on behalf of what not only one but both of my children experienced that night. Ive spoken to so many that i couldn't possibly count and tell you an exact number of people i have contacted and met with. What i have learned comes down to this. There is nothing further we can do. No one is accountable for that man but himself. I walked myself into the parole office and spoke with his parole officers boss early on to ask them how this happened. They told me "We combed through this with a fine toothed comb and found that we did nothing wrong. I am so sorry this happened to your daughter." Now, being that they investigated themselves, and wont let me look at their findings, i can only hope they are telling me the truth. If they were not being honest with me for whatever reasons, it would not matter because we come against the kansas tort claims act anyway. There is nothing to be done there. We can not legally pursue anything to remedy our children's pain and sufferings over these last almost 6 years because there is no one to hold accountable except Corbin James Breitenbach. The way it was explained to me was that he is an adult, and no one is responsible for him despite the fact that he had been in prison racking himself up 32 write ups, many of which included his being in unauthorized places while incarcerated for committing the same crime of strangling a woman into unconsciousness and assaulting her about four years prior to his attacking our daughter. The woman who was watching my children did not bring this upon any of us. We did not bring this upon ourselves. I found myself coming back to the same questions - Who was supposed to be watching him? This man is on parole for something so awful but no one is actually responsible for him? How? What even is a parole agreement then? Why would someone not be held reasonably accountable in a situation such as this having signed compelling documents and knowingly allowing a proven dangerous individual come to live at their house?

During a break in the Trial in 2018 Corbin Breitenbach's Grandmother, to whom he was parolled in 2017, walked up to my family and handed us a note intended for me. She asked me to call her. I did end up calling her curious as to what she had to say to me. One point that was made that has stuck with me most out of what we discussed. They had to "jump through hoops" signing documents and entering into a process that would allow Corbin to come home to them. The family at that time did not believe he had committed that first crime. They couldn't believe he was guilty and they believed that his first victim just had a drinking problem. In spring of 2022 I knocked on his grandmothers front door in efforts to ask her if she had a copy of his parole agreement i could look at. I have never seen a parole agreement myself having never even so much as had a speeding ticket at this time myself, and there are still burning questions in me as to what was agreed to and i so desperately want answers that i may never receive. I am not allowed a copy of his parole agreement for my own understanding by way of the department of corrections unless Breitenbach himself agrees that i may view it. It has come down to two options for me. I can try to ask Breitenbach in prison, or i could ask his Grandmother. I chose the latter. I do not believe that Breitenbach would ever agree to allowing me to see his parole agreement, let alone speak to me in person at all. I met his mother that day i stopped by. She can not to this day accept that Corbin could commit such a crime. I can not blame her for feeling this way. I believe that his family are also victims in this to a certain extent. What i learned while speaking to his family is that they may not have even been given a copy. They had expressed to me some of the obstacles they had overcome in solidifying his return home such as having their home inspected to ensure there were no substances or alcohol in the home but did not seem to even remember being given copies of the documents they signed during that time. Again, i can only hope that they were honest with me.

It has become my belief that many individuals out there can not accept that their family members, friends, or loved ones could truly be guilty of crimes they have been convicted of here in Kansas. It has been brought to my attention that individuals who offer housing to offenders are not truly required to report to anyone about the whereabouts of an offender if the offender is not home during scheduled hours. I believe it is of no matter whether or not one believes a person committed a crime severe enough to put them in a position to be supervised, because while we all have our own individual opinions on a matter, the facts remain. The person has been convicted of a crime, beyond a reasonable doubt by a jury of their peers, after an investigation process, and has been found to be guilty. Regardless of who we think did a crime, this IS what the court says about the situation therefore the guidelines of parole should be taken seriously by all parties involved.

We hope that by creating a law, in this instance Lailah's Law, we may be able to prevent crimes in the future by creating accountability where there currently is none. By considering Lailah's Law we may be able to enhance the safety and security of our community by ensuring curfews are held to a higher standard in the future than they have been in the past. While not every criminal out there is interested in reoffending, these things can and do happen across the board. This law is not intended to create more work for those who already work hard to keep us safe. Rather it is intended to be a commitment made by all those involved to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those of us who call Kansas home.

Sara Autrey