

## PAIN DOESN'T END WITH RAPE

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Editor's note: This is the second of a three-part series on the Feb. 4, 2005, rape and beating of a woman who police say survived one of Evansville's most brutal rapes. The case remains unsolved. The series, reported with the help of the victim, is based on police reports, numerous interviews with the victim, her family, her friends and the police .

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"Sexual assault turns you into both a victim and a survivor. You were victimized once when you were rendered helpless in a situation of great danger. Then, if you received any rejecting, callous or impersonal treatment from others, you were victimized again" – The Rape Recovery Handbook.

Penny Mitchell lay on the cold office floor and begged for someone to cover her body. Her clothes were ripped, her hair covered in vomit.

"We're going to get you out of here. OK, Penny?" a male officer said. "We're going to get you covered up."

He left, and a female officer came in to interview Mitchell privately.

According to Mitchell's account of what happened, she asked the officer for a coat to cover her body, and the officer said no.

Mitchell asked for help to untie her left foot, still bound to the door. Again, the officer said no.

"Did he finish?" the officer asked.

The question caught Mitchell off guard. "Instead of trying to ask details that I could remember, she just said, 'Did he finish?'" Mitchell said. "And I said, 'I don't know.' I didn't know."

"She kept saying, 'What's wrong? You and I are both women ... did he finish?' She said, 'Come on, you know what I'm talking about: Did he (ejaculate)?' At that point, I just lost it and started bawling and bawling."

While police searched the restaurant for evidence, paramedics lifted Mitchell onto a stretcher and carried her to an ambulance.

At Deaconess Hospital, a nurse trained to deal with sexual assault victims prepared a rape kit, a lengthy and sometimes traumatic experience in itself.

The kit can last anywhere from two to 10 hours, depending on the assault.

The victim is placed on a bed covered by a large sheet and asked to remove her clothes, one item at a time. The sheet catches any debris or hair that falls off. Each item is stored in an individual plastic bag and given to police. A nurse then combs the victim's hair for evidence.

Nurse remains in room

A collection of individual hairs, 50 from the head and 25 from the pubic area, are pulled out by the root for DNA samples. A nurse swabs around the vagina for semen, and a doctor performs a gynecology exam. The nurse who started the kit must remain in the room with the victim until it is finished to preserve the evidence, said Brandi Watson, sexual assault program coordinator for the Albion Fellows Bacon Center.

When a rape is reported, the Albion Fellows Bacon Center sends someone to be with the victim. The nurse already had started the rape kit on Mitchell when Watson arrived. She introduced herself and explained to her why she was there.

Mitchell looked terrible. Her cheeks were swollen, and her left side had a red bruise nearly eight inches wide. Her kneecap was dislocated, and a nurse was still searching for some teeth that had been knocked out during the rape. "I'll never forget that part," Watson said. "That was a new one for me."

Whoever attacked Mitchell "wanted to create as much injury as possible for her," Watson said. "She had more injury than I'm used to seeing."

Police and hospital staff contacted Mitchell's family. They told family member she was in the hospital but didn't provide details.

Mitchell's fiance, Mike, didn't know whether she was at Deaconess or St. Mary's Medical Center. He frantically dialed both hospitals but couldn't get any information. Finally, he reached Mitchell's brother-in-law, who told him what happened.

Feelings described

Mike described his feelings as "shock, denial, anger ... When I finally saw her, all that just went away."

Mitchell's sister, Robin, stayed by her bedside the entire time she was in the hospital, caressing her hair.

"I was shocked at the brutality," she said. "It was just beyond my comprehension. I was appalled."

Mitchell didn't discuss the rape. She was still upset with the female officer who interviewed her at the restaurant, her sister said. The officer came to the hospital but left after an argument with a detective, Mitchell said. She never saw her again.

Mitchell was released from the hospital on a Friday morning. On that coming Monday, she went to the Police Department's Internal Affairs with her fiance and sister to file a complaint.

Mitchell said she met with Sgt. Rick Reed, shared her story and asked, "If that were your wife or daughter would you have wanted her treated like that?"

Reed said in an interview that he didn't recall Mitchell's complaint, and he declined to answer questions about it because he said it was confidential.

Mitchell said Reed called her a few weeks later and said the female officer had been punished and could no longer investigate sexual assault crimes.

The lead investigator in Mitchell's case, detective Jim Harpenau, acknowledged that Mitchell was upset with the way an officer handled the investigation and said "it had been addressed." He did not know whether anyone had been disciplined, and he declined to comment further.

#### Sensitivity training

A few weeks after the incident, the entire Police Department received rape sensitivity training from the Albion Fellows Bacon Center. Harpenau said the class was scheduled before Mitchell was raped and not because of her case.

Mitchell said she filed a complaint because she didn't want anybody else to experience what she did. Mitchell still has nightmares about the officer, who never apologized. "I didn't want her to lose her job ... but I would like an apology."

Mitchell stayed with her sister for five days after she was released from the hospital.

She couldn't eat, sleep or be in a dark, closed room. She sat in a green leather recliner most of the time in her sister's living room, with fiance Mike by her side on a foot stool. "All we could do was pray and listen to Christian songs," her sister said. "We were rebuilding our relationship at that point."

The pride and independence Mitchell developed through her job had been stripped away. And no one knew whether she would ever get it back.

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#### TOMORROW

Tuesday's story will examine how Mitchell has been affected, how she has left Evansville to be with family and how she has struggled to rebuild her life.

**Caption:** Photo Information box  
Courtesy Penny Mitchell

A nurse trained to deal with sexual assault victims prepared a rape kit  
Evidence is recorded at Deaconess Hospital after Penny Mitchell's attack on Feb. 4, 2005. Mitchell's assailant has not been captured. HOW TO HELP

\* Anyone with information about the rape of Penny Mitchell can call Evansville police detective Jim Harpenau at 435-6072. \*  
The Albion Fellows Bacon Center recommends the following Web sites for information on victims of sexual assault –  
www.incasa.org, www.rainn.org, www.albionfellowsbacon.org and www.missingkids.com \* The Albion Fellows Bacon Center has counselors available 24 hours a day. To speak to someone, call 424-7273.

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