

Victim Impact Statement – Denise Huskins

March 16, 2017

Your honor, thank you for allowing Aaron and I the opportunity to have a voice, and a role in this process. As you know, I have sent the court a more detailed account of the events of my experience with this man. For healing purposes, please understand that moments during this statement I will speak directly to the defendant.

Matthew Muller. The voice has a face, it has a name. Now we finally meet, face to face, eye to eye. I am Denise Huskins, the woman behind the blindfold. The woman you drugged, tortured, raped and attempted to manipulate; the woman you repeatedly apologized to, repeatedly complimented for the strength in dealing with this life-threatening situation that you helped inflict upon. Remember the times you acknowledged and said to me that you could see that Aaron and I were good people, and we didn't deserve this. Before you put me in the trunk of Aaron's car, taking me captive, you told me that this wasn't meant for me, and you named Aaron's ex by her first and last name. However, your group made the decision to continue with it because you needed the practice. You later went into detail about your group, the "start-up" organization of "gentleman criminals" that you were a part of. You explained that the members of your group had a unique set of skills, some, including you specifically, were highly trained in military, technology and the psychological effects of victims of kidnaping and other violent crimes. You described how you had followed through with threats made on other prior victims and their families. You explained to me how you had staked out Aaron's home for months, saw old mail of his ex-fiance's, and thought I was her. Her mail stopped coming over three months prior to the kidnaping, which gives an idea of how long this was premeditated, how long you could have decided to not follow through with it. You even said to me that if you had looked closer, saw my identification in my purse before that night, seeing that I was not her, your group never would have attacked us. But, here we are.

You promised not to "dehumanize" me any more than you had to, yet, for the next two days you treated me like an object, a toy, an animal to fulfill you and your associates' selfish, evil needs. You acknowledged the pain and suffering I was going through from the very beginning, telling me at times that I was clearly in denial from what was happening, explaining to me—the person suffering—how I would struggle to heal from this for a long time to come. You know that I was convinced that the decision ultimately would be to kill me. We discussed that many times. You attempted to reassure me that wasn't the plan. Even if that was decided by your associates, you wouldn't follow through, that if it were to come to that, you had an "escape plan" for you and your family which you would use before killing me. Well, I'm glad you have some code of conduct, some ceiling measure of how far you'd go. Gentleman criminals? Lucky me. Somehow, you reasoned to yourself that you weren't all that bad. You were staying professional, following procedure and protocol. What did one of those emails say? You became my advocate? You still

made sure I was well cared for, right? For two days, you followed through with the drugging me, holding me captive, raping me and forcing me to record a proof of life, still hinting at all the ways I would be punished if I didn't comply. You had an "escape plan", you had every opportunity to do something different. Yet, you were able to follow through with two days of physical and psychological torture, watching me suffer, explaining to me how it would be an endless road to recover from. But, you didn't kill me. So, you're not all bad, right?

I understand that character letters were sent in by individuals who had known and spent time with you. I understand they had positive experiences with you, and noticed how you had struggled in your young adulthood. I am not surprised that you had, at some points, a positive impact on people's lives. I can see how much your family supports you, and are at your side through all of this. I do not believe that any one person is all good or all bad. But when you use the "good" that people receive to inflict terror, that's where the real deception lies.

I had also struggled in my young adulthood. You know that. I shared that with you. I told you about being molested as a child, how that impacted me and that it had been hard to heal, but therapy helped. I shared that most personal information with you after you claimed to be suffering from PTSD and insomnia. I was trying to connect with this voice who was hardly human, in hopes it would spare me from more torture, spare my body, spare my life.

After sharing that, you still made the decision to rape me, and not just violating my body, but forcing me to perform, act, and have it recorded. I was heavily sedated for a 48-hour period. You and your associates did an excellent job at making your threats clear. I saw flashes of lights and heard the electric shocks of tasers. I felt the sharp edge of a knife as it grazed my skin when you cut off the zipties. I was outnumbered, you were armed, you were trained, I was helpless, defenseless. If I fought or not, the rapes would still happen. So, I lessened the blow and complied. And of course, it didn't just happen once, but twice. What an elaborate excuse you gave as to why, and why it had to happen again. It didn't matter what you said, it doesn't change the things you did to me. The second time you forced me to kiss you and say things to make it seem like we were a legitimate couple. You couldn't just take my physical body and let me be detached from it, like I was in the first rape as you flopped me around the bed like a rag doll. This second time, you made me perform, "let's pretend like we are with other people, the people we love, to get us through it", as if this were happening to the both of us. I saw right through all of this, but knew I had to appease you. The only way I got through it was to picture that it was Aaron that I was with, and that will haunt me for the rest of my life. I know you did that on purpose, to leave your mark on me in the most special and intimate moments of my life.

I knew that every moment of expressed remorse was nonsense, an attempt to manipulate me to trust you. I never trusted you, and was convinced until the drive down to Southern California that you would kill me, that it was just a matter of time before my life would be over.

You expressed your belief in how I was handling all of this. Why was I not acting hysterically, begging and pleading for you to spare my life, spare my body? I didn't react that way because I knew that's what you wanted, what you were looking for, what thrilled you, motivated you. You wanted to have that type of power over another being's life. That's why you had practiced and prepared, planned these types of scenarios for as far back as 2009, your conduct escalating until you finally succeeded in taking me.

When I was laying on that floor before you brought me inside, you said you had to prepare and clean the place before having me enter. I could hear you scrub a bathroom floor, a bath tub. My wildest imagination flashed images of what you were cleaning, possibly the remains of prior victims, what was to come, what torture you and your associates would put me through. I had no idea what to expect, and knew that this was probably it for me, my life was coming to an end, and made peace with that. I told myself no matter how much they tortured me, I would not beg and scream, I would not plea for mercy just so they can shut me up and put me in my place. If that was what they were in this for, I would not give them the satisfaction.

If I were to die, if this was my last moment, hour, day on this Earth I would not live it screaming, panicking, crying in terror. I would go out proud and grateful for the life I lived, the family and friends I have, the grievances I have overcome, the amazing career that I loved, the patients and colleagues I had worked with, the loves I had experienced, especially in finding the love of my life, Aaron. I didn't know what was to come, but I did know that I had all those people there with me, their love and energy, to give me strength to survive. I wouldn't let myself see the terror, all I focused on was them. That is how I survived.

I know that you have made countless excuses, from military to bipolar disorder to even vaccines. Be a man, the so-called "powerful" man that you try to fool yourself into being by tormenting others. Own up to your actions, take accountability, tell the truth. You finally pled guilty here, but what about the others? I know you think you have the public and the system fooled, but not Aaron, not me.

Your Honor, Matthew Muller is an incredibly intelligent man, that I won't deny him. I have no doubt that every decision he made was strategic to help prevent him from being caught. He told me that even if he didn't get the ransom this mission would still be successful, because it allowed he and his associates to practice. Even if there was a lot of media attention, it didn't worry him. He said it would be good PR for the group. It blew my mind how arrogant he was, how so sure he was that he wouldn't get caught. But he was right.

Before releasing me, he had the nerve to say to me how he wished we could have met under different circumstances, that my strength was admirable. I asked if he was being honest in the

times he had told me that he wouldn't do this again. He had said that putting a human being through this "wasn't what he got in this for", that the pain it inflicted was more real than when they were planning, and that he was "done" after this.

Yet two short months later, he attacked again.

Beyond the nightmare I endured with this man, I couldn't fathom what was to come. Once released, all I could do was focus on putting one foot in front of the other, trying not to stumble from still being heavily sedated and immobile for days. Everything was overwhelming, sights, sounds. Everything was a threat. Were they still watching me? All I knew was that I was in a familiar neighborhood, almost home to my family. That's all I could focus on. I felt like a little girl scared, confused, hurt and wanting, needing the warm loving embrace of my parents, to hear their voices tell me "It's okay sweetie. You're safe. We got you. We love you. Thank God you're alive."

I hadn't known what was going on in the outside world except half an article the voice had shown me the night before. I read a few lines, the article naming a cousin of mine, then naming my father and how he was saying that I was a strong woman, and pleaded for these people not to hurt me. I couldn't finish reading. My eyes reflexively shut, tears streaming down my face, I curled into a ball, sobbing in my hands. I hadn't let the voice see me cry yet, I didn't want him to. I believe that's why he showed me. He wanted to break me.

As I cried for my parents, my family and friends for what agony, horror and confusion of the unknown they must be battling, I felt him put his hand on me to console me. What a joke, consoling me for the pain that he was putting me through.

Within an hour of my release, the police questioning began and I very quickly learned that they did not believe me. I was a suspect accused of making this up and then publicly shamed after a press conference by an officer from the Vallejo Police Department who stated that I owed the public an apology. I had to retain a criminal defense attorney to fight for my innocence, I lost my job and I lost my health insurance at a time when I most needed care.

When speaking with law enforcement, there were two things the voice warned me that I could not discuss: That he was former military and that he had sex with me. If I were to disclose either of these pieces of information, he would come after my family, and I believed him.

When I was 12 years old, I was molested. It took over a decade for me to tell my mother. Years after that man molested me, he molested another little girl, and was caught. Had I told my

mother at the time, the horror that little girl had gone through could have been prevented. I lived with shame and guilt because of that most of my life, and am still forgiving myself.

So, despite the threat to my family, I needed to tell the police about the rapes. A sexual assault exam is the most vulnerable thing a woman can do so soon after a being assaulted, but you go through it in hopes that the information they collect could help find the perpetrator and prevent other women from this horrific experience. You hope that by making that sacrifice and opening your legs to strangers to pick, prod, examine and picture you, it could possibly save others from the same fate.

The Vallejo Police and the FBI questioned me for an entire day before agreeing to take me to a hospital for the sexual assault exam. I was scared for my life and my family's life if the media reported that I was going to the hospital. The kidnapers would surely conclude I told the police what I was warned not to. I was paranoid of everyone. Nothing was safe. The nurses examined my body, noting and taking pictures of the bruising on the left side of my back where Muller had dropped me when trying to pull me out of the trunk. They surveyed my naked body with a black light, swabbed my bare chest, neck, stomach and groin where Muller put his lips and tongue on me. They examined me internally, noting and taking pictures of comparatively small lesions in my cervix. I wasn't sure if this information would only be used against me and confirm to the police and FBI that I was lying. And here I was, the victim of a kidnaping and rapes, completely exposed with no loved ones nearby, wishing that I had put up more of a fight, was beaten more, was torn into more so the police would be more likely to believe me.

I am eternally grateful for the Alameda County Sheriff's office who, several months later, who caught Matthew Muller after he attacked the family in Dublin. Aaron and I were finally believed, but we are deeply disturbed that it took him terrorizing another family to get to that point.

I cannot count the times people labeled this kidnapping and actions of the kidnapers as "bizarre". These are not unique circumstances. Not all criminals act in irrational, passionate, foolish, animal-like ways. Some may, but in the case of Matthew Muller, he is calculated, strategic, having spent years, decades, learning, studying, crafting his behaviors so he won't be caught or suspected, so he can continue to be successful in his acts of torture and violence. Criminals like this put on a facade for the people in their life. They are keenly aware of right and wrong, what's socially acceptable and what's not. That's why they keep these actions to themselves and from their loved ones. They appear to be "normal", "kind", "generous", "well spoken", "intelligent", "charming". That's not in their "character", that's not the Matthew Muller we know. He has kept his true intentions and motivations to himself, knowing how awful they are. I could see right through it with every moment I was with him, but developed a rapport with him in hopes that some bit of the "good" in him would choose not to kill me.

Every day I am grateful to be alive. Despite the many hopeless moments Aaron and I have overcome thus far, I still manage to hold out some hope for the future. Because of the aftermath of the kidnaping, and because of the kidnaping itself, it has been a long hard struggle to pick up the pieces of our lives. We fortunately have an amazing support system from both of our friends and families. We have moved cities, started new jobs. It took about 9 months for the shock to subside after the kidnaping before my body could start to feel the horror that I was suppressing from that experience. And once it surfaced, it was so beyond my control. My body finally started feeling the deep terror that I had lived through, and I thought I would have to be hospitalized because of the intensity of it. I couldn't stop shaking and felt like at any second I would lose all bodily functions. Every molecule in my body seemed to be colliding with one another, like they were trying to break free from the confinements of my skin, escape from the terror. I never had felt so removed from my own body, so out of control.

I still have nightmares every night. For over a year if I came home alone, I would grab a knife and looking behind every door, in every corner. I have a hammer by my bed that I reach for in the worst of my nightmares. Sleep is not rest for me, it is a trigger.

There's not a moment in the day that I don't remember this. It's not that I want to focus on it, but the depth of the terror is so deep, I have had to learn how to live side by side with it. I am humbled in that reality, this new reality. I am at that point in my life where Aaron and I talk about marriage and a family. But I am so scared of bringing a child into this world after the horror Muller has put me through, put my family through. I still remember after months of shock my mother finally breaking down, wailing in my arms, sobbing as she stroked my back and hair like a little child, "My baby girl, why? Why do they keep attacking my sweet girl?" My only response was to squeeze her back and say "I don't know." I admire my parents, my father, for finding the strength to get through it, knowing that his only baby girl had to fight for her life, raped, tortured, attacked and accused by police, and how both of them had to stand by helpless.

I thank God for the attorneys Aaron and I were able to find but ask why innocent victims should have to hire lawyers to shield them from the very people who are sworn to protect them?

Above all, I am so grateful for Aaron, standing by my side and giving me strength and support as I continue to struggle. We both still have difficulties, but he had returned to work quickly, selflessly to support us and allow us to move forward with our lives. He knows exactly how to calm me, care for me, how to hold me in the midst of my nightmares. The thought of returning to his arms during those 48 hours helped get me through it, and I never want him to let me go. He gives me peace, love, laughter and hope in humanity.

I still can't make sense of any of this, and I accept that I will never know. But what I do know, is that Matthew Muller willingly, thoughtfully, participated in this hell we have survived. He had every opportunity in that 48 hours to do something different, but chose not to. He said he was

remorseful and would never do it again, yet two short months later, he still attacked another family.

He is capable of acting out the perfect vision of a “changed man.” His intelligence is his most valuable and well-crafted weapon. Hopefully, for the sake of his own soul he will rehabilitate himself behind bars, but I have no doubt that this man should not be free to walk amongst the rest of us. I don’t say that because I believe in revenge, in “eye for an eye,” but because of my experiences with him I know, without doubt or hesitation, that as long as he walks free, there will be more victims.