

JEN'S STORY:

My son is the oldest of three boys. He is a very funny, eager to please, beautiful young man. He is diagnosed with autism, ADHD, and anxiety. He has been in therapy since around 1st grade. He has always struggled to "fit in".....having friends is something that he has always wanted. In August 2016 when he was 17 he met a girl and they began dating. She appeared to have some issues of her own but she seemed nice and my son was so happy. Neither had a license so they relied us and her parents for transportation. I honestly have never seen my son as happy as he was. He was going out, hanging with friends and finally living that life that he had always wanted. I found out that their relationship had become intimate about two months after they started dating. I spoke to the both of them about this to make sure that they were being safe and taking precautions. They both assured me that they were. The next several months were great...movies, football games, shopping trips...she spent Thanksgiving & Christmas with us and he went away with her family. Life was good. Then after six months of dating they broke up. My son was devastated....it broke my heart. We were getting ready to leave on a two week vacation days before they broke up. When we left on vacation they were still talking and seemed like they were back together...sending hearts and texting. My son then told us that the reason that they broke up is that the last time they were together they were intimate and she was now saying that she did not want to and that he had forced her. Then seven days into my trip our world crashed. My son received a text from a school friend of hers asking if he had raped her because that is what she was telling others at school. My son responded that he didn't do that. A little while later he received a message from her asking how he could do this to her. He got scared and blocked her on social media. When we returned from vacation my son was served with a restraining order. In the order she claims that even though she said no he forced her to have sex and that he had done this on two other occasions during their relationship.....sometime between November 1, 2016-January 10, 2017. We contacted an attorney and waited.

Months went byFour to be exact ...then in the middle of the afternoon one day the police came to our home. When we had first contacted the attorney he advised my son to not talk to the police.....we even practiced a statement almost daily as to what he would say if he was approached "while I have nothing to hide on the advice of my attorney I am not giving a statement. Please contact my attorney". When I came home and he told me that the police had been there and that he spoke to them I asked him why he did not say what we had practiced...his response to me was "I don't know why you are upset mom he wasn't a police officer he said that he was a detective" and "don't worry mom...he said I wasn't in any trouble at all he just needed to hear my side of the story". I have read some of the interview that my son gave and it is the same story he has been saying all along. They were at her house watching TV in the living room with her mother...they started fooling around in the kitchen and she did say no in there but was still kissing him and he did not stop...he thought that she was saying no because her mom was in the other room...he went back to watching TV with her mom and she

went upstairs to take a shower...about 10-15 minutes later he went upstairs to go to the bathroom ...even hollering upstairs before going up....when he came out of the bathroom she was standing in the doorway to her bedroom in a towel...he went into her room and they had sex...even saying she told him that they had to get on the floor because the bed was too squeaky....when they were getting dressed her mom yelled up the stairs to see what they were doing....they went downstairs and they brought him home....including sitting together holding hands in the car and then kissing goodnight at the door. A few weeks later my son received a letter in the mail saying that he was being charged with three felony counts of sexual assault as an adult. Even though he was 17 when they were alleged to have happened in our state if they wait til you are over 18 to charge you (my son had turned 18 two months prior) then they can charge you as an adult.

The world as we had known it is over and it will never be the same. I don't know how to describe how this is impacting our lives except to say that this will forever be one of those moments where I say "before this happened" and "since this happened". I wake up every day and this is all I think about....I am a mom and I am scared out of my mind for my son. The emotional, physical, mental, and financial impact this has had on my life is overwhelming. It has strained almost every relationship that I have with the people in my life...including my son's and my husbands. My son may be legally 18 but he has the mentality of a 12 year old. While I am crying uncontrollably in bed he is watching Spongebob with his little brother. I have always had to fight for my son so that he is able to get the supports that he needs. His disabilities have been well documented since he was little. He has had many evaluations, assessments, and exams done by experts hired by the school, clinicians, teachers, and therapists. Not one of these assessments has ever described my son as violent or do they support the claims made against him. Some of the terms that have been used are "passive", "unable to be assertive with peers", "eager to fit in", and "lonely". I have contacted most of these people who have offered any support needed to assist my son. We even had an independent Psychosexual Risk Assessment completed by an expert who works with the courts in our area. His assessment also did not support these claims against my son and found it highly unlikely for him to do anything that would jeopardize his relationship with this girl or to do anything that would upset her. Our attorney has told us though that all of these people and information cannot be used unless we go to sentencing....basically none of it matters. This makes no sense to me.

We are still currently wrapped up in the nightmare of the legal process....our attorney has put in a motion for a competency evaluation which was granted. While our attorney believes that our son will be found competent he believes the evaluation will contain some very useful information. So now we wait for the evaluation which is scheduled for next month.

So how has this changed our lives? It has taken over our lives....everything we do or don't do revolves around this. This is supposed to be an exciting time for my son...a wonderful transition from graduating school and becoming an adult....but there is no celebrating....there is a cloud...a dark scary cloud of uncertainty that hangs above us at all times and we have no idea when it will get better or if it even will. There are no resources in our small rural area....NOTHINGWe wait and we pray. To get out of bed everyday takes effort...the sick feeling in my stomach never goes away....I have to consciously choose to be happy and find things to make me smile...they don't happen naturally anymore....when I do feel happy I then feel guilty. My relationship with my husband has changed....I have changed. I used to always tell my children to trust the police and as long as they told the truth they had nothing to be afraid of. I will never tell them that again. I feel such a sense of loss realizing that the justice system that is in place and the people who were supposed to protect us I can no longer trust. I miss being able to sit on my porch in the morning and enjoy a cup of coffee. I miss fantasizing about my son's future and the things he is going to accomplish and all of the adventures that he is going to take. All because someone made an accusation....that's it. He said/she said....an accusation.

But I get up....every day and we fight....we move forward...one step at a time...we live. I try to talk to my son and teach him to have faith in the truth and no matter what happens we will all be together and we will be okay....no matter what. We love him and we know him. None of this makes any sense to him at all ...he doesn't understand it. He thinks very black and white. The legal system makes no sense to me and there is no support, no advocate sitting with you explaining things, nothing when you are on this side. You are alone and as a parent you are scared like you have never been scared before....and for me also helpless. I am afraid of the weekends because I don't have work to keep my occupied. This is a nightmare.....How could anyone think jail or prison would be an appropriate place for an 18 year old autistic boy? Why is his diagnosis not being considered? I always believed that I had surrounded my son with an amazing team of professionals who knew him and could support him....but now they are not important? Why is my son and who he is not important to anyone but us? The Justice System and the legal system are supposed to protect everyone....why isn't is protecting him? Why is he guilty until we can prove him innocent?