

# FINDING COURAGE

By Carolyn Stransky, Upsilon-Beloit

It started like any other weekend would. My roommate, Anna, and I were getting ready, blasting techno music and taking way too long to decide on outfits that were both festive enough for the mixer and warm enough to combat the Wisconsin winter. We rolled up to the event 30 minutes late but ready to make the most of it.

A few hours later, I was stumbling down the halls of the fraternity house when I ran into Scott\*. Our previous interactions had been limited. I remember him asking me about the tattoo of the Seattle skyline that I have on my shoulder. That was my last memory of the night.

I woke up completely disoriented. My head was throbbing, my body was sore, and I did not recognize the couch I was on or teal walls that surrounded me. I was still wearing my shirt and scarf from the night before, and my lipstick was still intact. I assumed that after a few too many vodka cranberries, I had just passed out somewhere and everything was fine. That was until I realized that my shirt and scarf were the only things I had on.

The panic set in as I scoured the room for the remainder of my clothing. “Shhh, it’s fine, you don’t have to rush out ...” It was Scott, lying in a bed across the room. There was a knot growing in my stomach, working its way up my throat until dizziness set over my entire body. I did not say anything as I pulled on my jeans and rushed out the door.

The cool February breeze helped me settle down on my walk home, and I convinced myself that I was overreacting. That afternoon, as I was heading to a KD event, I received a text from Scott. “Just remember, it’s a small campus and people are going to talk ...”

I was a total mess at the event. Having no recollection of the night before made me nauseous. My vision began to blur, and I ran outside to get some air. Fortunately, Anna and two other sisters followed me. They offered to text him from my phone so that we could string together what had happened. It was disturbing how honest he was. He recalled every detail, mentioning that I said I was uncomfortable and that I had been shaking my head, which he had interpreted as opposition to a condom. According to him, there was no kissing; the sex “just happened.”



Carolyn Stransky, Upsilon-Beloit, shares her story to inspire others to find the courage to take a stand against sexual assault.

I attempted to chalk up the experience as a bad night, and I tried to move on. Sometime during the next couple of weeks, I shut down. I traded weekends of events and mixers for nights alone. I distanced myself from anyone who did not already know about that night because the potential reactions did not seem worth the risk. While some were supportive, many people countered my story with responses such as “Maybe you shouldn’t have gotten so drunk.” I was told that it was “just sex” or “a miscommunication” and that I should get over it. What those people failed to realize is that this is not about the physical act of sex. It is about experiencing a complete loss of your own power and control because someone else believes they are entitled to your body.

I finally decided to report Scott following an incident that occurred at the end of April. It was the night of his fraternity’s initiation, which meant that after ritual, they would open their house to the rest of campus to celebrate their new members. I was leaning against the wall in the hallway, sipping on a glass of water and waiting for a sister who was using the restroom, when I felt someone come up behind me. It was Scott. “I’m so lucky you’re chill; that all could have been really bad for me,” he said. When I told him that I could still report him, all he said was, “Yeah, but you

**“ALCOHOL IS THE MOST WIDELY USED DATE RAPE DRUG; 89 percent of assaults occur when the survivor is incapacitated due to alcohol.” — American Association of University Women**

won't. I mean, it's not like there's any evidence.” In a conversation later that week, he also mentioned how “sh\*t like this happens when people get too drunk.”

That was when I realized that I needed to speak up and make certain that no other girl had to go through the doubt and self-blame that I had struggled with for months because of his careless actions. I reported Scott to campus officials the following week, which sparked a long, stressful investigation process. He was eventually found in violation of multiple campus assault policies, resulting in a suspension from the college. After an unsuccessful attempt to appeal, Scott decided to withdraw from Beloit completely.

Throughout the process, I found strength in knowing that I was supported by many of my KD sisters. Sisters who saw me that night were willing to testify and others offered to wait outside my meetings in case I needed anything. I was temporarily banned from Scott's fraternity house, which limited my social calendar for the remaining weeks of school. Despite this, I never felt alone because there was always a sister available to have movie nights, go to Starbucks or just listen when I was upset.

During the 2014 fall semester, I participated in an off-campus study program in Washington, D.C., where I also worked as an intern for the Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN). The work was emotionally taxing, but I discovered that helping others handle and overcome their assaults taught me what steps were necessary for my own recovery.

Near the end of September, I was notified that my case inspired another survivor to report her assault to school officials and to the fraternity's national headquarters. The fraternity chapter is now on probation and working to reform the way their members address sexual assault and interpersonal violence.

Some days are harder than others. I still have nightmares occasionally, and new relationships seem nearly impossible to navigate. But through it all, I have had the opportunity to forge connections with survivors who have inspired me

to raise awareness of this vastly underreported issue. While what happened does not define me, it has undoubtedly changed me. My hope is that by sharing my story, I can help inspire courage and contribute my voice to the reformation of rape-culture in our country.

*\*Name has been changed.*



**TO STOP  
SEXUAL  
ASSAULT**

I took the pledge  
to be a part of the  
solution and you  
can, too, at  
**ItsOnUs.org**

**#ItsOnUS**

**Ashley**  
Kappa Delta



The *It's On Us* campaign at the University of South Florida includes a poster, pictured at right, featuring Delta Eta collegian Ashley Justice.

Photo: Aimee Blodgett, University of South Florida