



I Believe in the Healing Process

By Cece Fontaine, Crisis Intervention Therapist for the Sex Abuse Treatment Center

I wake to the piercing summons of my pager. I learn that a 20 year old female was just brought to the Kapi'olani Hospital by the police, following a sexual assault. I quickly tie up my hair, brush my teeth and dart out into the night...complete silence on the rain-slicked streets at 3:15 a.m. I wonder if I'm the only one awake; but no, I pass one or two cars — other than that, Honolulu appears to be sleeping peacefully as I make my way to the hospital.

After parking, I stare at the automatic doors into the ER, reminded that behind them sits a broken, shattered victim of sexual violence. We (she and I) will spend the next several hours together in an exam room that will offer both physical and emotional healing; suddenly, my mind clears of everything else and all of my focus is on her...

The silence in the room is absolute; somehow it almost seems rude to speak, so I receive her emotions respectfully and wait... her face remains half-hidden from me as she stares at the ground and tears roll down her cheeks. I sit in the chair next to her, listening and learning from the sound of silence.

"I'm sorry, I'm so dirty—and I smell like him. Tell me how he could have done this to me." Those first words from her start the journey and I am honored to be the recipient of such trust.

There are many details I have to attend to: notify the on-call physician, contact the sex crimes detective, prepare for the collection of forensic evidence ... but nothing is more important at this minute though, than being there for her; just to meet someone's pain without feeling the pressure to fix it, for truly I can't.

Bits of her story begin to emerge: just beginning her sophomore year in college, new to the islands, and so excited to have the opportunity to experience the culture and tropical beauty of paradise. She shares how

the anxiety her parents felt at her coming alone to a far away place was tempered by the knowledge that her Dad's friend lived here. There was someone to call if there was an emergency... but how does she tell them that *HE* is the emergency? How does she tell them that *HE* is the one who hurt her?

Going through the examination, she shares more and more...how he picked her up from the airport and raped her before dropping her off at the dorm...she speaks of the betrayal and shock she felt... she hesitates and starts to sob....

Our doctor is kind and very professional; he listens carefully, documenting her assault and commending her for her bravery in coming forward. We explain together that the medical equipment she sees around the room will not

hurt her, that we can stop if she is uncomfortable in any way. Collection of forensic specimens and clothing worn, cultures taken for infections, photographs of the forming bruise on her cheek, administration of medications...and finally the doctor is finished. She is relieved to learn that I can arrange for her to shower and get into some clean clothes.

I contact our staff on the day shift and ask them to find a safe place for her to stay until her parents arrive later today, and to provide a meal. I inform them that soon the detective will pick her up and take her to the police station for her interview. Our staff will accompany her to the police station, and later arrange for the entire family to receive support and counseling at our Center.

As I gather my things at the end of a long shift, I am reminded that others often think the energy handed to me in my job, is negative; I don't see it like that at all. In the aftermath of trauma, my job is to gently nurture a broken spirit and to diligently believe in the healing process - and I consider that, a gift!

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