

The Sun

**Man ordered to jail despite victim's pleas
He's given 12 years for sexual assault, beating of girlfriend
She asks judge for leniency
Strict sentence praised by advocates for battered women**

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A Howard circuit judge sent a man to prison for 12 years last week, despite the objections of the woman he beat, choked and sexually assaulted behind a Columbia church.

The sentence handed down by Judge Diane O. Leasure on Thursday was considerably longer than the state average last year for defendants convicted on similar charges, drawing praise from domestic violence opponents and family members of the victim.

But until the very end the victim fought to keep Alvin E. "Jody" Crook out of jail.

The woman -- Crook's girlfriend -- first recanted allegations that Crook had raped her, telling the jurors in Crook's June trial she fabricated the story because she was angry.

The jury acquitted Crook, 31, of rape and convicted him of a lesser, third-degree sex offense and battery, and she wrote a letter to the judge in December saying sexual contact between them had been consensual.

On the day of his sentencing, the woman -- who had bruises on her right side and lacerations on her neck -- testified that she did not want the former carpenter to spend time in prison. She wanted him to get help, she told the judge.

But Leasure ignored her pleas, though she will recommend that Crook be placed in the Patuxent Institute in Jessup, a treatment-oriented facility in the state prison system, court records show.

One of the reasons for the lengthy sentence -- the state average last year was about 6 1/2 years in cases where the third-degree sex-offense charge is the most serious -- may have been Crook's criminal record.

He had been found guilty twice in Prince George's County of beating another woman, his estranged wife, two years before this incident, according to court records.

In those cases, Crook pleaded guilty to reduced charges and was given suspended sentences, probation and a total of six days behind bars, court records show.

Judy Clancy, executive director of the Howard County Domestic Violence Center, applauded Leasure's move.

"For too long, batterers have known even though they get arrested, even if they go to trial, they are given mild sentences," Clancy said. "What we know is battery on women is a recurring crime. It's something these men do over and over."

Added the victim's 25-year-old daughter: "If {this incident} hadn't happened he probably would have continued. I couldn't believe it when I found out he had done this before."

(The Sun does not identify the victims of sexual assaults. The daughter of the victim is not being named because her mother might be identifiable if her name was used.)

The victim's daughter said her mother, 48, and Crook had a troubled relationship.

The daughter, who lived near her mother in Landover where Crook often stayed, said she often called police when Crook "was acting crazy" because her mother was afraid to.

She said her mother felt sorry for Crook when the trial came up. That's probably why her mother recanted her original statements to police, the daughter said.

But even after Crook was convicted of charges of battery and sexual assault that day, the victim wrote a letter to the judge appearing to ask for leniency in sentencing.

"Jody committed no sexual offenses against me," the victim wrote in the December letter. "We have both admitted that physical abuse occurred. Even that it is mitigated by the fact both of us were under the influence of alcohol at the time."

Victims' reluctance to go forward against their companions is a situation that happens all too often, Clancy said.

"When the person is someone who you have been in a relationship with -- you have feelings of love for -- is saying 'I'll never do this again,' it's so complicated," Clancy said. "The community has to understand, and the system needs to understand, there are always going to be victims who recant because they feel they just can't do this."

During the trial, Crook's attorneys criticized the state's attorney's office for prosecuting Crook on the rape charge after the woman had recanted her statements.

"It was feminism gone awry," Crook's attorney, Richard J. Kinlein of Ellicott City, said of the prosecution.

"Apparently the victim wasn't heard," he said of the sentencing. "The victim testified she did not want him to go to jail, that she wanted him to come home with her. I guess if the victim says something favorable to the defendant, they don't count it."

But Assistant State's Attorney Mary V. Murphy, who prosecuted the case, said feminism had nothing to do with it.

"I don't think that it is feminism gone awry when someone is victimized to the extent this woman was," Murphy said. "The violence exhibited upon this woman in this case cried out for vigorous prosecution."

According to charging documents in the case, Crook drove the woman in August 1995 to the parking lot of Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Columbia and dragged her into nearby woods by her hair. Court documents say Crook, who had been drinking heavily, accused her of having an affair and then beat her -- throwing her onto the ground and picking her up by her neck. He then took her to his house on Cedar Lane in Columbia.

Pictures of the victim's injuries show bruises on her throat, chest and legs. One eye is red and swollen shut and she has numerous bright red abrasions.

"I don't think that's anything I'll be able to forget," the victim's daughter said of the injuries.

Prosecutors said the victim's family strongly supported the prosecution of Crook, who also was charged with drunken driving while awaiting sentencing in this case.

"I didn't think {Crook} was going to stop, and I had no way to protect {my mother}," the daughter said of her reason for working with prosecutors. "She didn't want to protect herself."

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