

Case Study: ECO Resident

Resident is a 28 year old, African American mother of two. She has a nine-year-old daughter and a four-year-old daughter. She is currently serving a 73-97 months structured felon sentence for assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury. She was sentenced on March 31, 1998. She will actually serve 73 months and has a projected release date of April 28, 2004. She will be released under post-release supervision for a period of nine months.

Background

Resident was raised in a single parent family in Plymouth, NC. Although her father was present until she was 3 years of age, her mother and father were never married. Her mother married when resident was four and had three more children; two boys and one girl.

Inmate says that she was raised in a domestic violence situation until the age of 15. Her stepfather left the home at that time. Even though she was raised in a domestic violence situation, she states that all of the abuse was directed towards her mother. She states that she has vivid memories of intense altercations between her mother and stepfather. Her most disturbing memory was watching her stepfather kick her mother in the stomach when she was pregnant. She has also witnessed the couple stabbing each other. Her stepfather had to be hospitalized after one incident.

Coupled with the domestic violence she was also raised in a depressed socioeconomic situation. She states that her mother was disabled and the family subsisted on government assistance. Although her family situation was difficult, she says that she always had positive experiences socially and did well academically. She states that she was a solid B student throughout school.

Situation Leading Up to Her Crime

Resident started dating the victim of her crime when she was 16. She states for the first several months the relationship was typical. Four months into dating he became possessive and dominating. She became pregnant for the first time at age 17. During an argument, he threw her up against a wall, which knocked the breath out of her. She was having difficulties and went to the emergency room. Consequently, she had a miscarriage. The couple reconciled after this episode. She stated that he was apologetic and showered her with gifts. She said that she believed he was sorry and she wanted things to work between them.

Three months after she miscarried she became pregnant again. When she was three months pregnant he threw her up against a wall again. They broke up, but decided to have equal responsibility in raising the baby. She did file charges against him for the above-mentioned incident, but the charges were dropped because it was his word against hers. Resident states that after their daughter was born, the situation became progressively worse. The day after the baby was born the victim visited her in the hospital, showed her a gun that he had in his pant waist and threatened to kill her since he knew that she was dating someone else. After this, hospital staff put resident in seclusion and kept her and the baby separated for protection.

When her daughter was approximately five months old, she moved out of her mother's house and continued working the two jobs she had held since graduating from high school. She was also pursuing an associate's degree from the local community college. At this time the victim's behavior changed from being physically aggressive to playing more mental games. She states that she never knew where he was or what he was going to do. He would come to her job and sit and just watch her. He was eventually banned from her job. She had to take out a restraining order on him so he resorted to sitting in an adjacent parking lot until she would get off work. He would proceed to follow her home. When resident's mother was taking care of her child, the victim would walk in her mother's apartment and take the baby. Resident states this happened on several occasions, which would entail her having to leave work and get a police escort to his house to take back the baby. The victim would also come to her apartment at night and tap on the windows and follow her everywhere she went.

The Crime

It was September 5, 1997; resident dropped her daughter off at her mother's while she ran a quick errand. On this day, her youngest half-brother, who was seven at the time snuck out of the apartment. Her daughter, who was three, followed him out the door into the parking lot and out into the street. The victim happened to be driving by at the time and saw his daughter in the street. He stopped and picked up his daughter and carried her back in the apartment and told resident's mother what had happened and that he was taking the child up to his godmother's house. When the resident returned from her errand her mother explained what had happened. The resident then went to the victim's godmother's house to retrieve the child. The victim refused to give her the child. Resident states that she

threatened to call the police, but victim said that it would do no good. At this point she said that she became very upset.

She returned to her mother's home without her daughter. She called the victim's sister and asked if she would call him. During the conversation, resident stated that she told his sister that he better not put his hands on me today. Victim's sister said that she would call her back, but never did.

Resident said that something clicked and she decided to go back and try to get her daughter. Her mother was frightened for her and jumped in the car with her. Resident's oldest half-brother, who was 17, jumped in the car also.

Resident stated that she kept a knife in her car under the driver's seat for protection because she and her daughter lived alone in a high crime area. When she arrived at the house, she said that she tucked the knife in the right side of her pants when she saw victim. At this time she said that many people had congregated in the yard. Victim put child in the house and walked over to meet her. She asked for daughter again. He proceeded to yell at resident and her mother. Resident's mother was begging him to give the child back. Resident said that she made a final plea to no avail and then experienced a "flashback or something". She pulled the knife out. Her mother was to her left. The victim knocked the resident's mother on the ground and then kicked the resident in her chest and she fell on the ground. He straddled her and repeatedly punched her as she was trying to cut him.

The resident's brother tried to pull him off of her unsuccessfully. The victim sustained a couple of deep cuts in his thigh, and then the blade broke. Even though many people stood around and watched this take place no one tried to pull the two apart, finally a cousin of the victim arrived at the scene and pulled the victim off of resident.

After the altercation, they all went to the emergency room. The victim was released and received no stitches. She was interviewed by the police before being released from the hospital and was told that she was going to be charged. Resident received three or four stitches and was released. She, her mother and her brother proceeded to the magistrate's office after leaving the hospital and were all charged with assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury. The intent to kill charge was added due to resident telling victim's sister that "he better not put his hands on me today". All three were released on a \$1,500.00 bond each. They were told that the bond was set so low due to the fact that no serious injuries were sustained.

The Hearing, Trial and Sentencing

Resident appeared in court in October 1997 for her hearing and met her court-appointed attorney. He advised her to let this charge go to trial because he thought that the jury would return a verdict of not guilty. Resident went to trial on March 30, 1998 and received a guilty verdict. On March 31, 1998 she was sentenced 73 to 97 months. She was also required to pay \$1,041.13 in restitution and \$50.00 in attorney's fees.

Resident states that this sentence came as a complete shock to her. Her attorney advised her that she would probably get parole time. She was completely unprepared for this. She had just been accepted to the nursing program at Beaufort Community College. She told her grandmother that she would be back later that day, and had made no preparations for her daughter.

Prison Experience

Resident states that she was immediately transported to North Carolina Correction Institute for Women. She said that initially she was mad at the world and mad at the system. It took her approximately five months to accept that this was "her reality". When she entered prison she was three months pregnant. Her case manager put her in the "Baby Ready" program, which prepares you to be away from your baby and to keep you positive. Resident's case manager gave her a diagnostic test. After receiving her results, her case manager put her in the cosmetology program. Her case manager actually had to fight to get her in the program because resident was eight months pregnant.

Resident's cosmetology schooling was interrupted when she had her second child. When resident had her baby, she was not allowed to have any family members present. She was escorted to the hospital in shackles and hand cuffs while she was in labor. Two days after her daughter was born, the baby was taken away. Resident states that it was so hard to watch them roll her baby out of the room for the last time.

When she returned to the facility she was put in the infirmary for three days where she was completely alone. She states that she thought that she went crazy for those three days. Resident said that on the third day "something hit her". She knew that she had to go back and finish her cosmetology school. She said that everyone was excited and very supportive of her return to school. She finished cosmetology school with a 4.0 and 1,700 hours, which is 100 hours short of being able to sit for an instructor's license.

After completing cosmetology school she enrolled at Shaw University to obtain a four-year Sociology degree. She obtained her Associates degree in Business Management with a GPA of 3.9. After completing her degree she was transferred to Raleigh Correctional Center for Women. She had to stop her education because Shaw no longer allowed inmates on campus. She could have continued taking classes remotely, but chose not to do that.

In October 2001, resident began working at the Women's center in Raleigh as a receptionist. She had discussed several options with the Chaplain, one of which was to go to school full time. They looked into other area schools, but they were too cost prohibitive. She said that she knew that she had to work and get an education because one day she was going to get out. She applied and was accepted to Wake Tech's Information Technology program.

During this time she was actively involved in the drama group, "Chains". This was a drama group that traveled to various churches in North Carolina and acted out their lives. It depicts a story of hope. Resident auditioned and earned a place with this group.

ECO

Resident states that she had put her name on the list to come to ECO. When the offer was extended for her to come, she said her decision to accept was "a spur of the moment thing". In January 2002 she began working at "My Brother's House", which is a group home for boys. In the time that she has been employed there, she has been promoted from residential counselor to a Behavioral Modification Technician with supervisory responsibility over four staff members.

Regarding her education, she enrolled at Central Piedmont Community College in August 2002 and is working towards a degree in Human Services. She has maintained a 4.0 GPA.

Future Plans

Upon release she will relocate to Raleigh, NC and be reunited with her two daughters, now nine and four. She is also engaged to be married and her wedding date is set for May 15, 2004 in Raleigh. Regarding employment, she has already made arrangement to transfer with her present employer and will work at one of its homes in the Raleigh area.

She plans on transferring to Wake Tech to finish her Human Services degree. After that she wants to transfer to a four-year program to obtain her bachelors degree in Psychology. After completion of her bachelors, she intends to go on to graduate school and

eventually obtain her doctorate in Clinical Psychology. She wants to specialize in the treatment of battered women.

Her Motivation

Resident states that on New Year's Eve 1998 she attended her church. She said that she felt compelled to stand and speak. She told the congregation that she felt like the Lord was getting ready to take her on a journey and did not know how her family would deal with it. She said that a few minutes after she had sat down an elderly woman in the church stood and turned to her and said, "Trials *are* coming to you to make you stronger, but hold on to your faith".

She feels that God has truly lead her through this journey. She states that no matter with what she has had to deal that she knows there is someone bigger than we are. She also attributes her success to her fiancé. She states that he has always been her "rock and fortress. She maintains that she will have to stay ahead of the game because she will always have three strikes against her. She said, "I'm a woman. I'm black, and I'm a felon. I will always have to plead my case to somebody. I must prepare and equip myself for whatever comes".