

## PAUL'S STORY

In the eyes of the law, my son is a registered sex offender in Illinois. This is the furthest thing from the truth, a truth nobody has wanted to hear.

Paul at the age of 18 was very close to his 2nd cousin, Heather who was 12. Paul is ADHD and learning disabled (All documented; report dated just weeks before his arrest show his comprehension level at the 4th grade, 7th month. This was an evaluation for special education paid for by the state to determine goals for life after high school). The cousins were together everyday due to Heather's Mom being a caregiver for my mother.

On Memorial weekend, 2003, Heather's family went on a camping trip which included Paul. Heather's Mom noticed them sitting close and wanted to know what was going on between the two of them. Both children denied anything was going on and yet she insisted that the children were lying.

Upon returning home from camping on Sunday, Heather's mother grounded her to her room, with no books, TV or games. She was not allowed out of the room except to use the bathroom until she told the "truth". Regardless of what either child said, Heather's mother refused to let her out of her room until the truth was told. Heather's mom went so far as to take Heather to the emergency room on Tuesday to see if she had been having sex. Finally on Thursday Heather told her Mom that Paul had touched her and was allowed out of her room for telling the "truth". Heather couldn't say exactly when this happened, only that it happened twice; once in February and once in March at my house. I know for a fact that it couldn't have happened in March, because Heather was grounded the entire month for hooking up with a 23 year old on the internet, lying about her age, saying she was 18 and having him call my house so that they could set up a location to meet.

Heather's parents went to the police to file a complaint and until Paul's arrest, Heather continually called him and told him to just tell the police he did it and everything would be over with.

On Sunday, June 15th, Paul was stopped by the neighborhood police while driving one of his other cousins home. My husband and I were at the police station within minutes of the police bringing him there. They refused to let me see him since he was 18. I knew because of his low comprehension that he would not understand what was going on.

Paul was kept there, booked and arraigned the next morning because he "confessed". He told the police "Whatever Heather said I did, I did".

After Paul was arraigned and we brought him home we talked at great length about what happened. When I asked him why he didn't ask for a lawyer when the police asked him he told me that he was never asked if he wanted an attorney. I told Paul that they had to have asked him and he said "no, they didn't"! I said, Paul, did they say "you have the right to remain silent, you have the right to an attorney" and he said "yes". I

pointed out to him that that was the way of them asking if he wanted an attorney. He started to sob and told me he didn't know that's what it meant. He also told me that the police officer told him to just say he did it and he'd be out of there and home in to time at all. I know my son did not understand what was happening; even the police knew he had a disability. The very first thing on the police report is that Paul is ADHD. Someone should have intervened and explained to him. Upon reading Paul's "confession" I knew that a large part of it had been dictated to him.

As the months went by and we went back and forth to court, nobody wanted to listen or hear the truth. No matter the motions our lawyer filed, nobody wanted to listen. At one point, Heather's mother (related through my sister, the grandmother of Heather) that if we gave them \$2500 they would see what they could do about dropping the charges. This was brought to the attention of the state's attorney and again nobody cared. This was all for money.

Paul at this time was 5' 2" and weighed 105. We knew we risked prison time for him if we went to trial and lost because of his "confession"; so when the state's attorney offered a plea bargain in June of 2004 of 2 years probation we took it knowing he would never survive in prison being as small as he was, having low comprehension, and the maturity of a 12 year old. God, I am so sorry that we didn't fight then. Had we known what a "sex offender" label was, we would gladly have even paid the \$2500 to the mother to end this.

For 5-1/2 years we have been in a nightmare and it has now come to a head. Paul has had much difficulty in gaining employment, not only because of his "sex offender" status, but due to his disabilities. He finally gained employment, delivering pizzas and he was the happiest I had seen him since this nightmare started. When his boss found out he was an offender and couldn't deliver to schools he was fired from his job and has not been able to gain employment since.

I am now watching my son slowly die emotionally because of this label. He is appalled that this label has been put on him, knowing he would never touch or hurt anyone in his life and that nobody wants to hear the truth. He's been accused of "touching" Heather and to think that he is now labeled with others who have viscously attacked children. I, and my family have lost ALL faith in our system. Where is justice? When this all started I had faith and believed in our system, that the truth would prevail, that others would see he didn't understand when he "confessed" because Heather and the police told him to just admit he did it. Now I see that it's actor against actor, state's attorney against defense lawyer; the best actor wins.

As of today, my son is in Madden, a state mental health hospital diagnosed as bipolar, brought on by the stress of being labeled a sex offender. He has been there for four weeks (minus two days when he was released prematurely still in a manic state). He has made much progress with the help of medications. He will receive services from Pro Care in Melrose Park after discharge. Pro Care's goal was to have him moved to a respite program for 21 days to help with the transition to home. We are now told that

this is not possible because it is across the street from a school. It's devastating to know that all that has been accomplished in these four weeks can be lost. My son has lost much due to these allegations and his "confession". And now he has paid the ultimate price by losing his sanity. The diagnosis of bipolar is a lifetime sentence and because of his sex offender status resources will be limited to him.

Yes, I'm a distraught mother and I wonder why he just wasn't executed back when he took his plea; these laws are killing him anyway, only in a slow manner.

And to know that there are so many more on the registry just like him is appalling! What has happened to society when so many lives can be destroyed by laws created from mass hysteria, confusion, panic, and the media do little or nothing to make the public safer. They are nothing more than feel good laws designed for the appearance of being tough on crime - especially during election years.

When looking at the registry within my own neighborhood, I can no longer differentiate between the teenager who had consensual sex with his younger girlfriend or who is the violent predator that is capable of committing such a heinous crime.

The broad definition of the term 'sex offender' has devastated so many individuals who are only guilty of a one time lapse of good judgement. Contrary to popular belief, many of these individuals are of no risk to the communities where they live and work.

It is only through education, understanding and the assistance from you - our lawmakers -that we may be able to say 'NO MORE VICTIMS.'

Is there anyone out there who cares enough to help bring justice to this young man? Does anyone care enough to help fight a wrong? If so please email me at [Mineonly54@aol.com](mailto:Mineonly54@aol.com) with the subject heading of Paul.