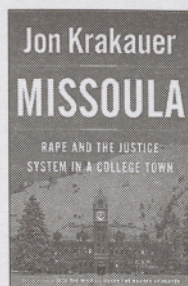


Rape's relentless toll



"Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town"
by Jon Krakauer

The emotional well-being of the victim gets short shrift, and, as Krakauer describes in great detail, she is often subjected to a second form of abuse by police and prosecutors insensitive to the trauma of rape.

Jon Krakauer's 'Missoula' examines sexual assault in a Montana college town

BY JOHN BARKER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It was non-stranger rape. It was a non-stranger rape of a college student by a classmate she had known from first grade, her neighbor growing up who referred to her as his "little sister," a person she trusted deeply.

The physical and psychological injuries to University of Montana student Allison Huguet, "little sister" of Beau Donaldson; Donaldson's confession to the rape; and his eventual conviction are the starting point for Jon Krakauer's "Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town." He follows five female students who have reported being raped. In some cases, the accused were convicted. In others, they were not.

Krakauer works, albeit necessarily from a male frame of reference, to describe the ambiguities in the conduct of the participants in a friendly relationship ruined by a violent sexual encounter. What is not ambiguous is the post-traumatic stress disorder that often results from non-stranger rape.

The book discusses the differences in the roles of a student court and the criminal justice system when there is an allegation of rape. The delay and brutalization of all parties that is inherent in the adversarial criminal system is contrasted with the less formal campus disciplinary procedures that can lead to permanent expulsion and exclusion from campus.

In either system, the emotional well-being of the victim gets short shrift, and, as Krakauer describes in great detail, she is often subjected to a second form of abuse by police and prosecutors insensitive to the trauma of rape. He quotes victims who have been told that the perp's confession on video isn't sufficient evidence to prosecute, that the

fact that she had been drinking makes the case unwinnable, that the status of the defendant as a member of the football team will make the case too hard to win.

Krakauer is merciless in his criticism of how a Missoula County prosecutor handled the job, and, assuming he has the facts right, his criticism is justified. Kirsten Pabst was the county attorney's chief deputy for all but the last year or so of the five years Krakauer focuses on. Pabst left the county attorney's office for private practice and shortly thereafter defended another student in a hard-fought rape case. She then ran successfully for the county attorney position, where she will decide whether to prosecute rape allegations. She has promised she will take the office in a new direction that will better align it with the more enlightened approaches of the Missoula Police Department, which has embraced new protocols for investigating sexual offenses.

As for Krakauer's work, there are two legitimate criticisms.

First, beware any author's sentence that begins "It is estimated that ..." followed by statistics such as "85 percent of all rapes are in fact committed by assailants who (are acquainted with their victims)." Couple this with allusions to studies showing that a very small percentage of rapes are reported, and one has to ask, How does he know this? How does anyone know?

Second, Krakauer recites reams of statistics but doesn't always cite a source. The book has an extensive bibliography at the end, but it has no footnotes, so if one were interested in learning more about a statistic — author, methodology and the like — it's not there.

Men need to better understand the emotional damage done by those of our gender who commit sexual offenses. We need to start, as does the Missoula Police Department under its new policies, by believing that the report of a sexual attack is a sincere one.

Illena

by Avendor

It's a breezy grey day
And we walk past pale green trees
As a gentle rain begins to fall.
Illena and I,
Take a seat outside a café by the Rhine
And order a pint of beer,
Along with fish and chips.
She takes my hand
And clasps it in both of hers
Telling me how much she loves me.
A homeless man comes by
And asks us for some change.
We give him some money
And ask him if he would like to sit with us,
For food and drink...
But he says he doesn't want to interrupt us.
So he thanks us, and goes on his way.
My girl Illena,
Looks so pretty in her blue petticoat,
And tousled red scarf.
I notice one of her shoes is untied,
So I crouch beneath the table and fix her up,
And she caresses my cheek as I do this.
A child jumps around in a puddle nearby
Much to the displeasure of his mother
Who orders him to stop,
But his jeans are already wet up to his knees.
I light up a cigarette
And Illena and I head to my apartment.
We pick up a paper on the way
For we might go to the movies tonight.
At home she takes off her coat,
And pours herself a whiskey;
I put on Coldplay
And read up on current events.
We'll change the world one day,
She and I, I think to myself
And go back to my reading.
Interrupted only by a glance at her arresting beauty
And at the black crow
Perched quietly
On the crimson red fire escape
Outside the window.
Which is half open,
And dripping with rain.

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