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A letter to a brave woman who's refuses to be a 'victim'

Published Monday July 11th, 2011

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Dear (name withheld due to court-ordered publication ban):

We've never officially met, but we sat in the same courtroom for almost four weeks and I've written about you dozens of times. We had a couple of exchanges on the courthouse steps when you graciously agreed to speak with media after your kidnapper was convicted of holding you hostage for 26 days.

I just wanted to drop you a line and say I admire you.

I've encountered many people while covering the justice system and I've met a number of strong individuals. I've met parents who've lost their children to terrible criminal acts yet found the strength to face the person who killed their loved ones and through tears described the emptiness and loss left behind.

I've seen family members fight through anger and sadness to tell murderers they will never be forgiven and their evil will never be forgotten.

I've seen victims of sexual abuse face their tormentors, sometimes decades after their innocence was stolen. Some condemn them in a rage that will haunt them until they die. Others forgive and walk away unburdened.

Neither method is right or wrong, but both require courage.

I've seen a little boy stand in front of a room full of sobbing adults and read a letter about how his mommy and daddy were the greatest a little boy could ever ask for, until they were killed by an alcoholic who couldn't resist getting behind the wheel.

The courts see the best of people and they see the worst and we got a taste of both over the last month during the trial of the man who abducted you.

It's impossible for anyone to put themselves in your shoes and know what you've been through, but we can all appreciate it was worse than anything most of us will ever endure.

Seeing your attacker testify in a manic, agitated and erratic fashion about a conspiracy to kill your husband gave the public some idea of what those four weeks must have been like for you.

When you were missing, the police kept looking for you and your family never stopped putting up posters and talking to the media in an effort to reach anyone who knew anything about your disappearance.

Many people thought you were dead, and I can't imagine what an empty feeling it must have been for you as you were held hostage, knowing that hope was rapidly fading in the world outside that one-room apartment you were kept in.

Luckily, you have an amazing family. And while they acknowledged when you were missing that you might be dead somewhere, they never gave up on you. They never refused interviews and they never stopped hanging those posters, even though they openly questioned if it was doing any good.

You've said several times that seeing them on the news pleading for your safe return is what kept you going through your ordeal. And no doubt having them fill bench after bench in the courtroom during your attacker's trial gave you the strength to sit there day after day and face the man who imprisoned you.

It wasn't easy for anyone in that courtroom to hear what happened to you during your time in captivity and it took an obvious toll on your loved ones.

It took great strength for you to explain each painstaking detail, and seeing you at the end of the trial made it clear a weight lifted from your shoulders when you finally told your story.

While you and your family acknowledged after the trial that it will take a while to move past this, there's no question you eventually will.

You were a victim the night he took you, but to me, you're a victim no more. You're a survivor. You're a fighter.

There's a scene in season two of the brilliantly-written drama Mad Men where Peggy Olson, the strongest female character on the show, is hospitalized after undergoing a trauma. She's feeling

hopeless and alone and is visited by her boss, enigmatic ladies man Don Draper.

He tells her to do whatever it takes to get better and get her life back: "Peggy, listen to me. Get out of here and move forward. This never happened. It will shock you how much it never happened."

Forgetting 26 days in hell is impossible. But hopefully embracing your family and the positive things in your life will reduce your time as a prisoner to a memory so distant it will feel like this never happened.

Best of luck,

Craig

* City Views appears daily, written by various members of our staff. Craig Babstock is a Times & Transcript reporter. His column appears every Monday.

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Along the same lines Primetime on ABC showed the story of Jaycee Dugard, who endured years and years of captivity at the hands of a registered sex offender. Despite it all, she appeared to be a very poised lovely woman.

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