

Rape victim meets attacker to forgive him



A rape victim has met her attacker in prison to tell him she has forgiven him - and called it a "great" experience to seek "peace and forgiveness together".

Katja Rosenberg, 40, from London, said she felt she could forgive soon after the 2006 rape, believing things must have gone wrong in her attacker's life. *Katja Rosenberg*

"You wouldn't ever do that if you felt happy," she told BBC Radio 5 live.

Of their meeting last year, she said he was "completely" remorseful and "so focused" on no longer being violent.

Ms Rosenberg was cycling home from a drink after work when she was attacked by a 16-year-old stranger.

He was jailed for 14 years after admitting that attack and another rape of a 51-year-old woman shortly afterwards.

"I realised very much straight away or after the incident, it hadn't really or would not traumatise me the way it usually traumatises people," Ms Rosenberg told 5 live's Victoria Derbyshire.

"It had a very strong impact on my life but not so much in the way that I couldn't make peace with that having been done to me, strangely more about life being very sad or things going wrong in life.

"I felt very, very sad, but I didn't feel attacked."

It's just great to go to a place that overrides or reaches beyond what happened"

Katja Rosenberg

She continued: "Life deals very different cards to all of us, and why somebody does something which is not applaudable - it was more about thinking, something's wrong with society.

"Some of us don't know where to go. You wouldn't ever do that if you felt happy."

Ms Rosenberg, who was also punched in the face, chest and stomach before being raped, said she had always felt in the years since that she should meet her attacker.

She finally visited him in prison last September, for a meeting arranged through the restorative justice scheme with the support of the Probation Service.

Partly, this was motivated by a wish to assure him "life's not hopeless, that he knows he's got a future", she said.

"I just felt I could give that. I also thought the exchange would be good for me to somehow get some kind of closure - I mean, I didn't really need a 'Sorry', but it was somehow just good to see that you walk into the same direction of peace and forgiveness together."

She added: "He was in no way looking for excuses or explanations. He was very, very self-effacing - and I thought that was fantastic in itself.

"He just really is very, very upset about his past."

'Unique response'

A spokeswoman for the Restorative Justice Council (RJC) said rape was a particularly sensitive and complex offence to handle with restorative justice, and that it was quite rare for rape victims to meet their attackers.

"In a rape case, it's vital that the victim doesn't get revictimised by meeting the offender," she said. "Similarly, if there's any danger that a rapist - or other sexual offender - is going to achieve sexual gratification from the meeting, it's likely to be inappropriate."

She added: "It sounds like Katja Rosenberg had a very unique response to her attack."

In the Daily Mirror newspaper, columnist Alison Phillips said Ms Rosenberg's story was "incredibly inspirational" and that she had "taken control of what happened to her that day".

The RJC spokeswoman said restorative justice "meets victims' needs in a way that a court process alone can't, by giving them the chance to tell offenders the real impact of their crime, to get answers to their questions, and an apology".

"Hearing from the victim they've harmed holds the offender to account, helps them understand the real impact of what they've done, to take responsibility and make amends," she said. "Many victims want to see the offender turn their life around and stop offending, because they don't want anyone else to go through what they have been through."

While Ms Rosenberg has waived her own right as a victim of rape to anonymity for life, she has insisted that her attacker not be identified in media coverage to allow him to start to build a new life.

She told 5 live: "It's just great to go to a healthy place together. It's just great to go to a place that overrides or reaches beyond what happened."

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