

OBSERVATIONS

Triumph Of The Spirit

By John Murray

While never very good at math and science, I do remember a few laws of physics. The one that sticks in my mind is Newton's Third Law of Motion. It states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Action is followed by reaction. In more basic terms, when someone pushes you, you either fall down, or you push back.

This law applies to everything in the universe. The outcome of the situation is determined by which force is stronger. If you push against a massive white oak tree nothing is going to happen. The tree is stronger. If you push against a corn stalk it will bend, and eventually snap. The stronger force wins out.

When you apply this law of physics to human interaction the same conclusion can be drawn. But with humans we have to calculate the intangibles of emotional strength and the will to survive. Strength cannot be measured in muscle mass and force alone.

Consider the remarkable story of Donna Palomba.

The initial action was violent and reprehensible.

She was raped in 1993 by John Regan, a powerfully built former high school wrestler. Regan entered her bedroom in the middle of the night overpowering her with strength and brutal force. While Donna's two children slept in their bedrooms down the hall, Regan, who was armed and wore a mask, bound and sexually assaulted her. Regan, a childhood friend of Donna's husband, John, knew John was out of town attending a wedding, and seized the opportunity to act on a depraved animalistic urge.

Regan threatened to kill Donna. He jammed the barrel of a gun into her mouth. On that night Donna Palomba was powerless to stop the attack. John Regan had all the control. After the assault Regan fled into the night and he took a part of Donna Palomba with him.

In the week ahead Donna slammed head first into another force of power and male testosterone – the Waterbury Police Department. After the rape she called the police for help, and bizarrely, days later, Waterbury detective Doug Moran accused her of fabricating the story and threatened to arrest her and take her children if she didn't confess to the lie.

Moran might as well of cleaved open her chest and yanked her heart out. Psychologists later determined that Donna had been more emotionally damaged by her confrontation with Waterbury police than by the rape itself. She entered the police station vulnerable, and trusting. An hour later she left shattered.

This jarring detour in her life happened so suddenly. Donna's life had been bountiful and blessed, and now moments later she was a survivor of rape and under threat of arrest. At this point Donna could have collapsed and spent the remainder of her life as a victim. Instead, her reaction to the double assault on her body and mind was to stand up and fight back. She had done nothing wrong. With the total support of her husband, John, they started pushing back against the madness that was overwhelming their lives.

They sued the Waterbury Police Department for its outrageous behavior, and won. But that was just the start of Donna Palomba's reaction to John Regan's violent assault. She had bigger plans.

For the past six years the Observer has followed the case of Rachael, a survivor of a violent sexual attack that occurred in her Overlook home on September 11th, 1993. Two months ago Rachael appeared on the Today Show and shared her real name with a national television audience. Rachael was Donna Palomba.

Donna is a managing partner at the WORX Group in Prospect, and is one of the most visible and successful businesswomen in greater Waterbury. Last month she was named the Outstanding Businesswoman in Connecticut. Two days after her appearance on the



a civil suit against the Waterbury Police Department, but was frustrated and angry at the local media coverage of the trial.

She was determined to set the record straight. Throughout her trial she had been referred to in court, and in the daily newspaper, as Jane Doe. But when she came to the Observer she was so frustrated with the innuendo swirling through the community that she was ready to let her name go public. She was ready, but her husband wasn't, and her two children



Donna Palomba

Today Show, Donna, and her husband, John, shared their emotional story with 8 million viewers during a two hour special on MSNBC Dateline.

"It's been surreal," Donna said. "And the response and support has been extraordinary."

The impetus for Donna stepping out into the harsh glare of national television is simple – she has launched an initiative called Jane Doe No More, and is determined to help future survivors of rape.

"My hope is to create more awareness about the crime of sexual assault," Palomba said. "There are a lot of stigmas and myths surrounding this crime and we want to try and ensure that victims get the proper treatment."

Donna first approached the Observer in February 2001 and wanted to tell her story. She had just won

were still too young to comprehend the complexities of the crime. So she requested continued anonymity, and we agreed.

Instead of referring to her and her husband as Jane Doe and John Doe, we called them Rachael and Bob. It was an attempt to humanize them. And in April 2001 we published one of the most in-depth stories in the Observer's 14 year history – an eleven page, 10,000 word story that detailed the attack, and Donna's struggles with the police and the legal system.

Three years later, in November 2004, Waterbury Police Chief Neil O'Leary cracked the case when a perfect DNA match linked John Regan to Donna's rape. While the case awaited trial in Waterbury Superior Court, Regan was arrested for trying to abduct a high school cross-country star on

Halloween night in 2005 in Saratoga Springs, New York. Almost immediately the national news media descended upon the story. The Observer fielded calls from Geraldo Rivera, MSNBC Dateline and CNN's Nancy Grace. Two of the media outlets wanted to talk about John Regan, but Dateline wanted to talk to Rachael. Dateline producer Sue Simpson had read the Observer stories on our website and wanted to interview Rachael.

I contacted Donna who agreed to meet with Sue Simpson at the Observer office on Bank Street in downtown Waterbury. The meeting lasted several hours long. Donna didn't tell Sue her name, but Simpson later confided that she learned Rachael's identity from seeing a full page ad in the Observer from Donna's business, The WORX Group.

Donna had reached the point where she was ready to tell her story, and the opportunity to launch the Jane Doe No More initiative on national television was appealing. But in January 2006 Donna was muzzled by state's attorney John Connelly who advised her that it was unwise to talk about the case before Regan had gone to trial. The Dateline show was placed on hold and Sue Simpson kept in contact throughout the next year. After Regan was found guilty in New York, and sentenced in Waterbury, the Dateline interviews proceeded. The first interview had to be rescheduled when Donna came down with a nasty cold and was barely able to speak.

Dateline crews conducted lengthy interviews with Neil O'Leary at police headquarters, and they took over the Observer office to interview me about my experience covering Donna's case. When Dateline arrived at the Observer in early February they came loaded for bear. Two vans of equipment pulled up to our office on Bank Street and four cameramen and assistants took three hours setting up cameras and lighting. While the crew set up I headed to the YMCA to workout my impending stress and take a long steam bath. The actual interview with correspondent Sara James lasted ninety minutes. A week before the show was broadcast a Dateline crew visited my house in Morris for additional footage. I was filmed for another ninety minutes working at my computer, looking through files, talking on the telephone with my daughter, and hiking across a neighbor's horse farm with my nine-year-old Labrador Retriever, Dakota.

That was three hours of filming for 90 seconds of footage on the Dateline show.

Donna's interview was more impactful and vastly more dramatic. She was the story. But her experience had several unexpected twists. Her husband had steadfastly refused to be interviewed for the show, but at the last minute John decided he would do it. For the past 14 years John has suppressed his emotions about the rape and refused to talk about it. He would tell Donna it was a horrific act, but they had to let it go and move on. John had not been supportive of Donna taking on the Waterbury police in open court. When a settlement offer arrived days before the trial was set to begin, John wanted to accept it and move on. Donna, however, was geared up to fight and she demanded her day in court. When the local media mishandled the coverage of the trial Donna came to the Observer, a move John did not support.

"John wanted us to move on," Donna said. "I wasn't

ready to move on. It was part of my healing, and he eventually understood and supported me."

But when John stepped before the Dateline cameras he opened up. As Donna sat next to him, John told of the night he decided he had to kill John Regan for violating his wife. John's voice was filled with anger and hurt and devastating pain. The words that tumbled out of him were words he had never shared with Donna. By the time John finished his emotionally charged interview Donna said you could have scrapped her up off the floor.

"I was a wreck," she said. "John poured his heart out."

rape - that started as an attempt when I was 6, successful when I was 11, & continued until I was 18. But I am SO not a victim! I am a survivor."

Donna wrote on the website that "My careful decision to come forward is a personal one and is certainly not right for everyone. It has taken me a very long time to get to this point and it is through the support of my family and friends and my faith in God that I am able to do so. Remember that you are in control of the decisions you make and you must do what is right for you. I will tell you that taking positive steps to help turn something evil into something good has become part of my healing process and has been deeply rewarding. No matter what path you take, always remember that it is not your fault and it does not diminish who you are."

The Jane Doe No More website contains Donna's story, expert advice from forensic specialist Dr. Henry Lee, legal advice from Atty. Maureen Norris and Saratoga Springs D.A. James Murphy, medical advice from Dr. Peter Jacoby and Dr. Santo Sampino, help from Chief Neil O'Leary on police matters, and Nancy Kushins on victim's services.

Dr. David Read Johnson of Yale University also provides advice online about post traumatic stress. He wrote "Many victims of sexual abuse and assault, like Vietnam veterans, have received negative receptions, and have suffered intensely as a result. What is remarkable about Donna, is that she did not give in when accused of lying about her assault; she continued to fight with the help of her family, and her assailant was found with the help of a police chief who believed her."

Also on the website are links to state coalitions, national resources and sex offender registries. The Jane Doe No More site is packed with helpful information to assist sexual assault survivors in their long journey towards healing. Twenty five thousand unique visitors entered the site in May.

But Donna's reaction to her rape is not finished with the Jane Doe No More initiative. She is leading a charge in Hartford to have the legislature rewrite the laws that prohibit charging rapists six years after the crime. "There should be no statute of limitations on rape," Palomba said. "We use DNA to get people out of prison, and we should use it to put the rapists in prison."

The bill to amend the law got bogged down in the Senate, and while disappointed, Donna Palomba is optimistic it can spring back to life in a special session in the weeks ahead.

And when one stops to consider how far Donna Palomba has come since the attack 14 years ago, there is no reason to suspect she is going to allow political wrangling in Hartford to slow her down.

She was savaged by a vicious act of rape, but her response to that violence has dwarfed the act itself. She has helped change sexual assault procedures inside the Waterbury Police Department, she has impacted thousands of fellow survivors with her Jane Doe No More initiative, and she will ultimately be successful in changing the laws in Connecticut.

Fourteen years ago John Regan had all the power. Now he is locked away in the Big House for the next 15 years, and she is slowly, and perceptively, changing the world. In the end Donna Palomba's reaction to rape is far more powerful and sustaining than anything John Regan could imagine.

Newton and his Third Law of Motion would be proud.

Jane Doe No More

Message to Innocent Victims:
You are to be commended
for surviving.

I am Jane Doe No More.
> Learn More of My Story | > Associated Articles

SHORTENING THE TIME FROM CRIME TO HEALING
Crime happens everyday and it can happen to anyone. Every Jane Doe is an individual with hopes and dreams and talent. Proper treatment of the victim will shorten the time from the horror of the sexual assault to healing. All innocent victims of rape have a future, and it is our responsibility as a society to allow them to heal and give them the best chance for a full and healthy recovery.

DATELINE
The founder of Jane Doe No More, Inc., Donna Palomba, comes forward for the first time in public to tell her story and launch this initiative Sunday, April 29, 2007 from 7 to 9pm EST on Dateline NBC. Read more about the show and learn more about Donna's decision to come forward at msnbc.com.

NEWS
> Rape survivors can be haunted for a lifetime. But new therapies are helping them make peace with the past. SELF Magazine, April 2007
> Detective has seen sexual assault cases increase Fremont Tribune, April 2007

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
What percentage of adult women report their rape to police?
☐ 19% ☐ 32% ☐ 47% **VOTE**
> See Current Results > Submit a Question

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Dr. Henry C. Lee
Distinguished Professor of Forensic Science
It has often been said that crime scene investigation is a systematic discovery and a logical process.
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Dr. David Johnson
Director, Post Traumatic Stress Center
Homecoming Trauma is the experience of being blamed, criticized, or denigrated when one reports a traumatic event to family, friends, healthcare workers, police, the press, or other authorities.
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Law Enforcement
Neil O'Leary
Chief of Police, Waterbury, CT
As a law enforcement official for over 27 years I have seen a great deal of change with regard to the handling of sexual assault crimes.
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> Victim to Victim
> Medical
> Dateline Show

RESOURCE CENTER
WebMD
THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR Victims of Crime
RAIN
NATIONAL RAIN
safety
womenshealth.gov
VICTIM RIGHTS LAW CENTER
NATIONAL SEXUAL ABUSE CENTER

National Sexual Assault Hotline
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Confidential | 24/7
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Help a sexual assault victim now.
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Sign up and get the latest info from JDNM.
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SUBMIT

Then Donna had to tell her story.

"It wasn't as bad as the Today Show," she said. "I could hardly breath during that experience."

And Donna told her story. And on April 29th it was aired to more than eight million homes around America. The response was immediate. Overnight thousands of people clicked into her website www.janedoenomore.com.

And then women began to share their stories on the message board of Jane Doe No More. Dozens of women began to express the shame and guilt they experienced after they had been raped.

"Victimized Twice" wrote..... My story is similar in that I was treated so badly by the police that even now, 35 years later, that is what hurts the most. I was barely 15 years old at the time. I was kidnapped by a man who I later was told was out on parole for rape. He raped and sodomized me. I was able to escape from him and was so happy to be alive that I learned the police didn't believe me because I wasn't hysterically crying."

"Not A Victim" wrote ... "Please, please, erase victim from your minds! We are survivors of a violent and very personal attack. I survived rape - incestuous