

Finding her voice: Kidnapping survivor speaks out to empower women

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Sharon Muse believes even the worst day of a person's life can be redeemed.

Details about what happened to her on April 7, 2006, haven't blurred in nine years. Neither has her determination to use that day to make a difference.

Nowhere did she learn what to do in the event of being kidnapped, how to piece her life back together in the wake of an assault or how to forgive the man who tried to kill her.

Those events shaped Muse, and she now is on a mission to empower and educate others. She is restoring her family horse farm in Georgetown, Kentucky, as a place where victims of abuse and assault can heal, where women can learn how to protect and care for themselves.

"Christians often are soft targets," Muse said. "We learn how to give, serve and go the extra mile. But we are sheep. We don't think the way predators think. Often we don't learn how to stand up for ourselves. Matthew 10:16 says, 'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.' I think there must be conversations about what it looks like for sheep that live among wolves to be wise as they serve and love others."

Looking back, Muse sees how Frankie Covington outsmarted her at every step on April 7, 2006—the Friday he showed up at her Georgetown law office.

Though she did not recognize the Caucasian, middle-aged, balding man she once represented in a legal matter, he remembered her. She later learned that he spent two years in jail plotting to kill her.

That day, she was on the phone with Jeff Ballard, the former singles pastor at Southeast Christian Church, as Covington waited for her in the hallway outside her office. She told Ballard she would call back later. The battery on her phone was dying.



Finding her voice

Sharon Muse believes God is redeeming the worst day of her life as she speaks to groups about awareness, about protecting yourself, about being wise and vigilant and about forgiveness.

In 2011, five years after the attack, Covington was convicted of kidnapping and being a first-degree persistent felon offender and received an enhanced sentence of life in prison. When he was almost freed because of a clerical error in 2014, Muse made 13 phone calls in an attempt to keep him in jail.

Muse never blamed God for what happened that day.

“Surviving this attack made me feel as if I’m God’s favorite,” she said. “I believe He was there that day fighting for me. I believe He said, ‘Not today.’ I imagine angels with flaming swords surrounding me.”

Muse believes God is redeeming the worst day of her life. In addition to remodeling her family’s farm in Georgetown as a haven for victims of violence, she has a website, www.ownyourmoment.org, which provides education and support.

“I’m not fear mongering,” she said. “I want people to realize that we are sheep. Predators are wolves. They are wired to devour us. We can make it easy for them or make them regret they picked us. We need to continue to reach out, but we need to be wise and to learn how to be vigilant.”

What Muse thought was a gun was actually a butcher knife. She fought back as Covington slashed at her. She felt the cold steel point of the knife blade, then Covington scrambling. She did not know that the tip of the knife caught on her necklace and broke off. For what seemed like an eternity, Muse struggled to get out of the car and run for her life. To this day, she has no idea how she escaped Covington's drug-crazed grip.

She bolted toward a truck coming down the road. By then, blood ran down her shirt from wounds on her chest, her clothes were ripped and clumps of hair hung from her head.

When it looked like the truck was not going to stop, Muse planted herself in front of it and put up her arms. The driver finally stopped inches from where she stood. Afraid the truck driver would leave, she shouted for someone to call 911 when a couple drove up.

Muse calls them her heroes. She later learned that they had never driven down that road before.

As Muse dialed 911 from her dying cellphone, Covington told the couple that he and Muse were fighting over cocaine. As the sound of police sirens screamed ever nearer, Covington ran toward the barn carrying his black bag. Later police found duct tape, a hammer, cash and cocaine.

Handcuffed in the back of the police car, Covington shouted at Muse that he would come after her.

It was a big news story for a week. But when the TV reports ended, Muse's nightmare didn't. She had to deal with fear, her own injuries and the legal system. Every night, she pushed a dresser across her front door and slept with a gun and her charged cellphone. She gathered her own evidence as the prosecutor's office stalled. She called the jail every day to make sure Covington was still in custody. She slept only in church.

Forgiving Covington was another battle.

"Eventually, the only thing that calmed me down and made me feel safe was imagining killing him," Muse said. "What is even more frightening, I believed I was justified in doing so and that God was cheering me along the way. I read about Moses murdering the Egyptian and David murdering his mistress' husband. Hatred became like a vulture sitting on my back with long, deep talons piercing my soul."

She found out where and how they would transfer Covington to another jail. And she waited for the right moment. But as weeks turned into months, Muse knew that revenge was a dead-end road.

Four months after the attack, Muse attended a Faces of Christ retreat at Country Lake Christian Retreat in Underwood, Indiana. There she was freed from her desire to kill Covington.

"Forgiveness is the best gift you give yourself," Muse said. "God saved me physically from Covington in the car. (God) saved me spiritually at the retreat."

Covington seemed agitated as he approached Muse with a story about how much his family loved her and needed her help. He said his wife died and their accounts were frozen. Muse explained that it was the end of the day and she was not seeing clients, but said they could talk the next week.

The day already had been bad. Muse learned that her mother had cancer, and she spent much of the day researching treatment options. What she didn't realize was that the day was about to get much worse.

"All that time, Covington was moving me around the chess board like a masterful player," Muse said. "I heard the words 'need,' 'help,' 'scared' and 'afraid.' I didn't realize he was high on cocaine and had been drinking."

Polite refusals didn't deter Covington.

Fourteen times in the next 62 seconds, Muse ignored inner warnings that she was in danger because she didn't want to appear rude to someone in distress. She tried, "Not today. I'd like to, but I can't. People are waiting for me. Court is closed. I'll see you Monday morning."

As she put her briefcase and a box of files in her car, Covington slipped into the passenger seat.

"I need a ride to my grandmother's house," he said. "It's only three blocks away, and it's going to pour."

As if on cue, thunder rumbled and it began to rain.

Uneasy, Muse redialed Ballard's number and left the phone line open as she tucked her phone and purse in the seat next to her.

"The presence of evil in my car was thick and tangible," Muse said. "The hair on the back of my neck was standing up, but I thought it would be over in three blocks."

But a few blocks down the road, Covington told her to drive a little further until they were 45 miles outside Georgetown on a rural road. She tried to give Ballard clues on their location by saying they passed an airport and a store.

Finally Covington pointed to what looked like an abandoned house, and Muse knew she could die that day. He told her to walk to the rundown barn off the road. Muse said "no." As Covington grabbed her from his seat, Muse screamed into the open phone line, "He has a gun. He's going to kill me."

On the other end of the phone, Ballard thought she had been shot. He called the police but had no idea where to send them.