



**SANTA BARBARA RAPE CRISIS CENTER**  
**CENTRO CONTRA LA VIOLACION SEXUAL**  
**VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER**  
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**PRISONER RAPE IN THE NEWS**

**Kevin Johnson, *Prisoner-abuse case scrutinized*, USA Today, February 1, 2005.**

For nearly three years, Roderick Johnson has been the focus of one of the most horrific stories of prisoner abuse in U.S. history.

In a lawsuit filed against the Texas prison system in 2002, Johnson alleged that during his two years as an inmate at a crowded, violent prison in north Texas, he was raped hundreds of times by other men. Johnson, who is gay, said he was forced to become a "sex slave" who was traded among gang members, and that his pleas for help were ignored or mocked by prison guards.

Johnson's story is particularly poignant to the American Civil Liberties Union, which is representing him in the lawsuit that seeks an unspecified amount in damages.

The ACLU has cast the case as not only a tragic violation of Johnson's civil rights, but also as a consequence of crowding problems plaguing state prisons across the nation. A photograph of Johnson, 36, is on the ACLU's Web site, where he is portrayed as a national symbol for the organization's campaign against prisoner abuse.

**Letters raise questions**

But as Johnson's case moves toward a court date this summer, a different portrait of him is emerging: that of an inmate who had consensual relationships with several of his alleged attackers, and whose claims might be part of a scheme to profit from the lawsuit.

An investigation by the state prison system's inspector general's office has found that two of Johnson's 49 alleged attackers were in high-security areas that were inaccessible to Johnson when the assaults allegedly occurred. Investigators also found a series of intimate letters Johnson exchanged with two more of his alleged attackers. In one of the letters, Johnson tells a gang leader, "I really wish you were here, Baby. I just miss your touch."

And in a separate letter to an inmate who was not accused of rape, Johnson describes how his lawsuit could make both of them "very rich," and then signs the letter, "Your Wife, Coco." In that letter, Johnson offers to help the prisoner's family build a similar legal case against the Texas prison system.

About 140 pages of documents from the investigation, obtained by USA TODAY, also include statements from a dozen of Johnson's alleged attackers, who deny that he was ever forced to engage in sex.

The findings by state investigators have changed the dynamics of a case that has raised questions about how inmates are treated in one of the nation's largest state prison systems.

Texas officials such as John Moriarty, the prison system's inspector general, now are calling Johnson a fraud and signaling that they will aggressively fight any suggestion that he was abused.

Moriarty acknowledged that Texas' prison system — which has more than 150,000 inmates — has many problems, notably with crowding and an increasing number of sexual assaults. Last year, 522 sexual assaults were reported in state prisons, a 41% jump from 2003.

"I'm not denying for a minute that sexual assaults and other offenses are occurring in prison," Moriarty said. "But ... the time spent investigating these false allegations we could have used to (catch) true sexual predators" in state prisons.

### **A rough environment**

Margaret Winter, the ACLU's lead attorney in the case, said the findings by Moriarty's office reflect an attempt to "whitewash" Johnson's claims.

Winter said that because of Johnson's sexual orientation and his inability to defend himself, he should not have been put into the general population section of the James Allred Unit, a 3,500-bed facility near Wichita Falls that is known as one of Texas' roughest prisons. In that environment, she said, Johnson was like "catnip to a pack of wolves."

Winter said she believes Johnson's claims. But she said, "Do I know that Roderick Johnson is telling the truth? No, I don't. ... Nobody knows but God what the truth is."

Much of the ACLU's evidence is based on Johnson's word. Johnson, who was imprisoned at Allred after violating parole on a burglary conviction, was released in 2003. He now is back behind bars, at the Travis County Jail in Austin, for another alleged parole violation.

In an interview at the jail, Johnson acknowledged writing the intimate letters. But he said he wrote most of them only to curry favor with his attackers so they would protect him from others. Johnson said his reference to profiting from the lawsuit was "way premature."

"These were things that were being told to me," he said, adding that his attorneys and local news media had suggested that he could become wealthy if he won in court. "It's not about the money. My main goal was to get ... protection" from violent inmates.

Winter, the ACLU attorney, said she never told Johnson that winning the case could make him rich. She said his reference to money was part of a "fantasy, a dream, a happy, happy dream" that has no bearing on the merits of his claims.

The intimate letters, Winter said, reflected Johnson's efforts to boost the egos of those who could shield him from additional abuse. "It was like sleeping with the enemy," she said.

Johnson entered Texas' prison system in January 2000, after a parole violation from his burglary conviction. The sentence violation called for an automatic prison term of nearly three years. His lawsuit says that at Allred, Johnson entered an "underworld" in which gay men and the weak must fight for their lives.

### **Lawsuit details abuse**

The worst of the abuse, the lawsuit says, began nine months after Johnson's arrival, when he was sold into

"sexual slavery." Prisoners paid gang leaders \$5 to \$10 to have sex with Johnson almost daily, the lawsuit says. Winter said prison guards ignored Johnson's pleas for protection at least seven times.

Moriarty said investigators first opened a review of Johnson's treatment in March 2002, shortly after the inmate reported that he had been raped by several inmates in a shower area of the prison.

The inspector general's report says the prison's medical staff found no evidence of a sexual assault. State prosecutors declined to seek charges, citing a lack of evidence.

The following month, the ACLU filed its lawsuit on Johnson's behalf, alleging hundreds of rapes. The lawsuit led Moriarty to reopen the investigation into Johnson's case.

### **Accounts inconsistent**

Charles Montgomery, a corrections expert hired by the ACLU to review Johnson's treatment, said prison officials disregarded Johnson's sexual orientation and "effeminate demeanor" when they assigned him to Allred's general population. "The defendants' approach toward Roderick Johnson virtually guaranteed that he would be victimized," he said.

Tanya Perry, who led the inspector general's investigation, says Johnson's claims don't ring true. In four interviews with him, Perry said, investigators found his accounts to be inconsistent on key points such as the locations of some of his alleged attackers and when the attacks occurred.

Meanwhile, Johnson's claim against the state is headed to court. "Justice will prevail," he said. "I wasn't out for financial gain."

## **VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER: SUZANNE KALJIAN**

SBRCC is proud to honor Suzanne Kaljian as our Volunteer of the Quarter. Suzanne has served as a member of the Board of Directors since May 2000. She started as a volunteer on a benefit concert committee, Mermaid Café. Since then, she has served as the secretary of the board and as president. As a result, when you ask her what impact her volunteerism at SBRCC has had on her personal or professional life she will tell you that SBRCC has made both very busy. However, she has learned to be more efficient with her time. She tries to bring into the SBRCC circle people who would otherwise not know about the work of the rape crisis center. In doing this she sometimes faces some disappointment with friends or business associates who have very little understanding about sexual violence. On a positive note, she is able to tell friends and colleagues about the wonderful work done at SBRCC.

Suzanne's inspiration to work on behalf of survivors of sexual assault comes from knowing that people depend upon us to make sure that the services we provide are available. She doesn't take this for granted because she grew up in a community in California where there were no services. A friend and a family member both needed services similar to those provided by SBRCC and they weren't available. Suzanne is not shy about spreading our message to the community. Whether in casual conversation or in making a fundraising pitch, she tells those with whom she comes in contact that SBRCC has wonderful people providing services to survivors of sexual violence and their significant others. She educates people about the services and those who need them, emphasizing how Santa Barbara needs to be a caring community. Suzanne has been with SBRCC for about seven years and speaks about those working with survivors on the frontlines with great respect.

Suzanne's vision for SBRCC in five years is to find a new location, establish an endowment and build a larger, stronger board of directors. She would like to see sexual violence eliminated and the doors closed, but doesn't think this would be a realistic five-year goal, so she would be satisfied with being part of drawing in adequate resources so that the agency can provide its vital services to the community.

One social or cultural change Suzanne would like to see occur is the greater acceptance of gays and lesbians in our society. She doesn't understand why our society would not allow them to get married and extend to them other rights.

Suzanne is currently planning her wedding to fiancé, Mike. She has fun with her two cats, who she describes as a couple of cuddly, fuzzies living around her house. Her hobbies include painting (she was an art major in college) and likes painting with oils and acrylics. Her favorite piece of work is a sketch she made of Mike on Valentines Day. Suzanne likes to read and belongs to a book club. Suzanne loves cake with white frosting. Nothing fancy so you may see her at the supermarket check out line with a cake box in her hand.

Suzanne is proud of her relationship with family, friends and her fiancé. She would like to travel more to places like Bora-Bora or the Caribbean where she sees herself laying on the beach, drinking rum and coke with Mike; perhaps taking a romantic kayaking trip. This is fresh on her mind as she recently took a trip bought at an SBRCC Shining Star Auction. They got a good deal and were treated very well. She will be bidding on the trip that will be offered at the Shining Star Luncheon this May and advises everyone to bid on the trip because it will be something you don't want to miss out. She also wants other volunteers to know that any contribution; big or small is going to a good cause so she urges all volunteers to write a check to SBRCC.

Suzanne is no stranger to writing checks to SBRCC. She sells real estate and is serious about her fundraising responsibilities as a member of the board. She has started a tradition we hope other realtors pick up. Each time she closes a deal based on a connection made through SBRCC, she makes a contribution to the organization. She dreams of the day when all of her friends own a home and will do what she can to help make it happen.

One of the proudest moments in her life is being honored as Volunteer of the Quarter by SBRCC. She also enjoys small successes like when a friend or colleague notices her name in connection with SBRCC and acknowledges the good work being done by the center. She wants other volunteers to know that they can call or email her if they need something.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **JOIN US FOR THE NEXT ADVOCATE MEETING: MARCH 14TH, 6PM – 8PM**

This month's meeting is the MANDATORY Human Relations Training, which will focus on the Transgender/Genderqueer (TG/GQ) community, how sexual assault affects TG/GQ individuals, barriers to receiving adequate and effective services, and how we can better our services to provide a safe place for people who identify as TG/GQ. This training will take place on **Monday, March 14 from 6:00pm - 8:00 p.m.** We have a number of fantastic presenters lined up to lead us in discussion and exploration, so we look forward to you joining us. See you on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **UPCOMING ADVOCATE MEETINGS IN ENGLISH**

The next meeting dates are: Monday, April 11, 2005; Monday, May 9, 2005; and Monday, June 13<sup>th</sup>. See you then!

### **VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION BRUNCH**

We hope to see you at Saturday's Volunteer Appreciation Brunch! This event is a chance for us to show our appreciation for the outstanding work you do on behalf of survivors of sexual assault and towards a community free from violence. Please join us for brunch on Saturday, March 12 at 11am at Cafe del Sol, 30 Los Patos Way in Santa Barbara. If you haven't already, please RSVP by calling Ofelia at 963-6832, ext. 21.

### **POETRY WORKSHOP: USING WORDS TO HEAL, EMPOWER, AND CHANGE**

After brunch, we hope to see you on Saturday, March 12 from 2:00-3:30 p.m. at SBRCC for a workshop to help you create poetry for the Believe Me Campaign. This workshop will take you through the process of getting words on paper and refining them into poetry. No writing experience is needed to participate, and writers of all levels are encouraged to participate. Just bring your journal (or any old notebook will do) and a pen. We'll focus on the theme "Believe Me: *Celebrating the Courage and Resilience of Sexual Assault Survivors.*" The workshop will help you express your reflections on overcoming sexual violence and your desire to build a safe, inclusive, and just society. Participants will be invited (but not required) to share their work created during the workshop to the Wall of Witness. The Poetry Workshop will be led by SBRCC advocate Debra Guckenheimer.

### **WALL OF WITNESS CONTRIBUTION DEADLINE IS APPROACHING!**

The deadline to contribute artwork, poetry, crafts, photography, or testimonials to the Wall of Witness is coming up on March 15! If you would like to make a contribution, please contact Alena Donovan at [alena@sbrcc.net](mailto:alena@sbrcc.net) or 963-6832 ext. 29 for guidelines and an application. All are invited to contribute. Your creative work should explore the theme of "Believe Me: *Celebrating the Courage and Resilience of Sexual Assault Survivors.*"

### **WALL OF WITNESS OPENING RECEPTION**

Please Save the Date for the Wall of Witness Opening Reception on Monday April 4, 4:00-7:00pm at the Channing Peake Gallery, located in the County Administration Building, 105 E. Anapamu St. in downtown Santa Barbara. Please help us unveil the Wall of Witness and kick-off the Believe Me Campaign for Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

### **SHINING STAR LUNCHEON**

*Some people are as bright as the moon: their hearts shine with the light of a million stars.*

Please Save the Date for **SBRCC's Annual Shining Star Luncheon!**

Help us celebrate SBRCC's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on Wednesday, May 11<sup>TH</sup>, 11:30am to 2:00 pm. The luncheon will take place at La Pacifica Ballroom, Coral Casino, Four Seasons Biltmore. Please call (805) 963-6832 to reserve tickets.

### **WHAT ABOUT A NEW CELL PHONE?**

When does your plan expire? Did you switch to a new carrier? Did you receive a new cell phone as a gift? Woo hoo, you're stylin' now. Please don't let your old cell phones go to waste. Don't leave them in your closet or garage to take up space. Don't put them in the trash to go to the landfill. Instead, donate them to Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center and if you have the accessories and manual, even better.

Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center participates in a program where the cell phones can be reused/recycled. For each one we turn in, we get \$\$\$\$. That's right! Help stop sexual assault today by donating your cell phone. As an added bonus, we will give you a tax-deductible receipt for your generous contribution. You know this will come in handy on your visit to HR Block.

SBRCC participates in this program year-round; so don't be left out if you get a new cell phone at any other time. Please, tell your loved ones, buddies and coworkers; the more phones, the more cash. So please drop it by SBRCC at 111 N. Milpas St, Santa Barbara.

### **SBRCC NEEDS MORE ADVOCATES – HELP SPREAD THE WORD!**

- The next **English Crisis Intervention Training** is scheduled for **April 18, 2005 – June 6, 2005**. Classes will meet on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. and one Saturday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. If you know individuals who may be interested, please have them call Heather at 963-6832 or send an email to [heather@sbrcc.net](mailto:heather@sbrcc.net)
- The next **Spanish Crisis Intervention Training** is scheduled for **August 2, 2005 – September 20, 2005**. Classes will meet on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. and one Saturday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. If you know individuals who may be interested, please have them call Maria at 963-6832 or send an email to [maria@sbrcc.net](mailto:maria@sbrcc.net).

**WE ESPECIALLY NEED VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE SPANISH/ENGLISH BILINGUAL!**



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:**



- Katie Murray            March 24
- Yaneth Camacho        March 26
- Leo Caporal             March 30