

'I smelled men's cologne. I felt terror. I was in my most vulnerable state. I was totally naked. My heart was racing. I knew he was there.'
— Christine Mettert, who was repeatedly raped in her own home last summer



Woman fights social stigma, court system, to seek stiffer prison term for attacker

By SUSAN OPPAL
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Since she was repeatedly raped in her own home and left for dead last summer, Christine Mettert wakes up screaming. She's afraid to be alone in her own room.

"When you go home at night, it's to your haven. For me, it's a war zone," she says.

Mettert, 34, was ready to testify against her attacker. She wanted a judge and a jury to hear, in her own words, what had happened to her.

But her assailant, Kenneth Carter, took that away from her. He pleaded guilty in her case and another similar attack as part of a sentencing deal that leaves Mettert feeling as if she's been assaulted all over again.

Carter, who had worked as a custodian at Ann Arbor's Sluison Middle School, pleaded guilty to eight charges, including five



(Top) Christine Mettert's fiancé, Jim Yip, has been close to her during the past year. They met shortly after she was raped. Together they share her emotional ups and downs.

34 rape in Ypsilanti.

"The rapist, in both cases, searched for and hunted down his victims through no provocation of their own," Farkas says. "He is a predator (who) has no value to our society. A 10-to-15-year prison sentence is utterly reprehensible and a scarriage of justice for the victims, society, and the justice system."

Mettert couldn't agree more. That's why the physician's assistant at the University of Michigan Medical Center has decided to speak out. She's telling her story so others can understand a system that, in this case, could put an admitted rapist back on the street before he turns 40.

Last July 3, Mettert was showering in her apartment when she heard a crash in the next room. Assuming a fan had simply fallen out the window where it was wedged, she finished her shower and walked toward her bedroom.

"I smelled men's cologne. I felt horror. I was in my most vulnerable state. I was totally naked. My heart was racing. I knew he was there," Mettert says.

"I was so afraid to run outside while I was nude, Mettert says. "I was hysterical. I didn't know where to go." Then "he came out from behind the door. I just got a glimpse of him, and I started screaming."

Mettert learned later that at least five neighbors heard her screams and assumed it had to do with holocaust fireworks and never called police. Besides, they told police later, she stopped screaming because he had a knife," Mettert says now.

"He reached up to fend off the blow that had come from her own hand, and cut her finger. Then he looked at the man's face.

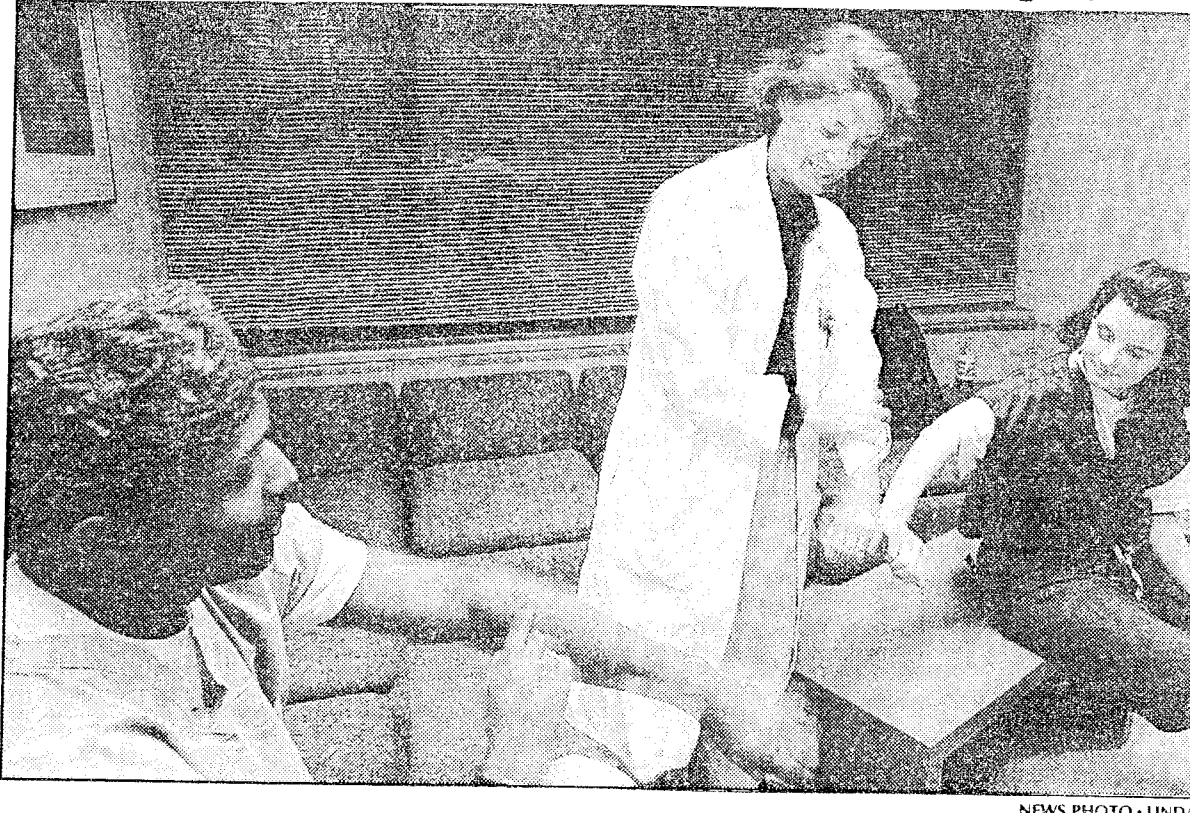
"It was sheer evil. When I looked into his eyes, I could see my life was over," Mettert says now. "I remember shaking, pleading for my life, fighting, but it seemed to excite him."

"Carter wrapped the towel around her head and she was leaving her blind.

"He was standing there, wondering, 'Where's he going to put the body?'"

"Carter tied Mettert's hands with an extension cord and forced her down onto her waterbed. She couldn't breathe with the towel around her neck and face, pressed into the soft mattress.

"Then, Mettert was nearly unconscious. When Carter pushed her over her head, she blacked out. I could still hear him talking."



Christine Mettert has had the support of understanding friends at the University of Michigan Medical Center, where she works. Here, she enjoys a lighter moment with friends Curtis Freeman, left, and Amy Schoff.

and tied her legs, but she was unconscious and doesn't remember it. When she awoke, "I had a feeling of terror, of 'oh, my God, I didn't die.' I couldn't move, but I told myself to fight."

She says Carter tried to wake her several times, apparently believing he might have killed her, but she played dead.

Carter turned off the lights and the television Mettert had left on during the shower that had ended only 30 minutes earlier. Then, he left.

Mettert worked herself free, then called police.

Seven weeks later, Carter tried to break into another Ypsilanti apartment, but that woman chased him away, according to Ypsilanti police. The same night, he succeeded in breaking into a nearby apartment and raped another woman in an attack that resembled Mettert's.

Ypsilanti police, who knew about Carter's history as a peeping Tom from a dismissed misdemeanor charge, questioned him, "and his story just didn't hang together," Lt. Ron Koehler says. Eventually, Carter wrote out a confession to the second attack.

At first, Carter denied the attack on Mettert but later confessed, af-

Amy Ronayne.

Besides the five counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, Carter pleaded guilty to one count of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, or molestation, which has a maximum 15-year penalty, and two counts of home invasion, a 20-year felony, for both incidents.

Because Carter has no prior felony record, Michigan sentencing guidelines put his minimum sentence somewhere between 10-15 years.

Shelton could go outside the guidelines and increase the sentence. But in Carter's case, Shelton has told defense attorney Shea and assistant prosecutor Amy Ronayne that he will sentence Carter to at least 10 years, but the bottom end of the sentence will not exceed 15 years. Ronayne has no say in the sentencing agreement.

Shelton, who declined comment on sentencing agreements in general and who is prohibited by ethical standards to discuss Carter's case before sentencing, could still choose to impose a tougher sentence, but then Carter can withdraw his pleas and go to trial.

Shea says the deal is no bargain — that Carter is more likely than not to serve all of the minimum sen-

tence or more. That's compared to only 25 percent of the general population that serves the minimum sentence.

That doesn't make Mettert any better. While Carter has no prior convictions, he has admitted both assaults, and that should be enough, she insists, to justify a longer minimum prison term.

Mettert isn't as unhappy with Shelton for making the agreement as she is with the system that allows the agreements, and the sentencing guidelines that led to it.

"I'm just asking the public to know that this stuff is happening every day," she says.

Mettert is speaking out, for all victims who didn't live or don't have the strength to talk about what happened to them.

"This is a cry to other rape victims to come forward, to let people know what happened — it's the only way things change," she says. "I have the power to speak up. I'm not ashamed. I'm still a good person. I didn't do anything wrong — I tried to survive a horrible thing."

Washtenaw County Prosecutor Brian Mackie applauds Mettert's courage for putting a face to the

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