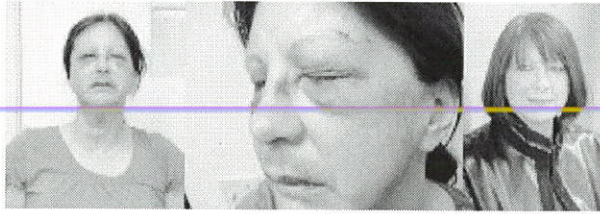


Plea deal upsets beating victim



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The photos on the left show Carol Williams the night of her beating. The photo at the right was taken this week. Zane Tewalt will be sentenced Friday for the attack on the St. Maries woman.

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By Summer Crosby/St. Maries Gazette Record

A picture may be worth a thousand words.

It cannot, however, guarantee a long jail sentence.

Carol Williams says she's furious that the man who savagely beat her may walk away with what she describes as a "slap on the wrist."

Ms. Williams feared for her life when she was attacked by her live-in boyfriend of two years, Zane G. Tewalt, 45, Sept. 1.

A seemingly harmless request to retrieve a cell phone prompted the attack, which lasted more than three hours.

"I returned home from work and he said he had left my phone at a friend's house and I wanted to go get it," Ms. Williams said. "He got upset with me and started asking me 'why do you need your phone?'"

The situation quickly escalated.

Ms. Williams said her boyfriend started to threaten her. When she realized she may be in danger she tried to escape.

"He saw me open the screen door and he tore down the hallway. He slammed his fists through the screen door and grabbed ahold of my throat," she recalled between sobs. "He said you're going to die tonight. It was out of nowhere."

Ms. Williams said she knew Tewalt had been drinking when she came home from work that night. She said he had recently started abusing drugs again as well.

Prior to the Sept. 1 attack, there had never been physical violence in the relationship.

"There had been a few times when we'd gotten into arguments and he'd block me from leaving the room. But he'd never actually laid a hand on me. I'd never been hit in my life prior to that night."

She said she decided to stay with Tewalt when he started abusing drugs and alcohol because she believed she was in a committed relationship.

"I thought we could work through it," she said. "I wasn't willing to throw it away."

After Tewalt grabbed her by the throat, Ms. Williams said he took her into the bedroom and threw her on the bed.

"I was able to scratch him in the face and I rolled off the bed and landed on the floor. He got on top of me. He was accusing me of cheating on him and lying and stealing from him."

Ms. Williams said she tried to tell him the truth that she hadn't done any of those things, but Tewalt wouldn't hear it.

"He started slugging me. All I can remember is that it hurt so bad. I'd plead with him not to hit me again and he did. He continued to ask me questions and he kept telling me he was going to make me ugly so no one would ever want me again."

Ms. Williams said he also made threats against her life.

"He told me he was going to kill me and bury me in the deepest darkest forest where no one would find me. He then said he was going to kill himself so no one could do anything about it."

Fearing for her life, Ms. Williams started to lie and tell Tewalt what she thought he wanted to hear. The beating finally stopped. Ms. Williams told Tewalt that she needed to go to the hospital.

"I finally got near the door with my keys and I asked him if it was still okay for me to leave and he said go. I was very careful. I didn't want to set him off again."

Tewalt was arrested the same night and charged with attempted strangulation or choking a household member, a felony, and false imprisonment, a misdemeanor.

Ms. Williams had to have reconstructive surgery to fix the fractured bone underneath her left eye. Medical bills totaled approximately \$16,000 and will be paid for by the Victims of Violent Crimes Center.

Tewalt entered a guilty plea to the charge of attempted strangulation Sept. 21.

As part of a plea bargain, the false imprisonment charge was dismissed. Doug Payne, prosecuting attorney, will recommend an underlying sentence of three years, with one and a half years fixed.

Mr. Payne will recommend the rider program, which is a rehabilitation program for convicted offenders while they are in jail.

Ms. Williams said she is frustrated and angry that there was a plea deal offered in the case.

"The maximum for a crime like this is 15 years. With a rider, he could maybe get a year if that's what the Department of Corrections chooses. It could be as little as three months," Ms. Williams said. "As much as I hate to say it, it's all about me right now. I feel like the court is going to victimize me again by doing this. I feel like there is an agenda there that doesn't include me."

Ms. Williams is angry by the fact that the county doesn't seem to be taking these types of cases seriously.

"To me, it seems to have become an increased problem. Last year, that poor girl (Stefanie Comack) was shot in the head by her boyfriend."

Ms. Williams added there needs to be a message sent to the community that a crime like this will not be tolerated.

"This community shouldn't allow its people to be battered and abused," Ms. Williams said. "There has to be something that says we will not allow this even if it means spending every penny to make that message clear."

Ms. Williams said she thinks the rider program focuses more on rehabilitation than punishment.

"My feeling of safety is gone and there's no real way for me to get that back. He could have killed me. Both doctors I saw told me I was lucky to be alive. I don't understand why they would have to make a deal with him when they have all the pictures."

Mr. Payne said he feels the sentence he will recommend is appropriate. He added he believes the outcome would have been the same had the case gone to trial.

"It takes a lot of resources to take a case to trial and why try the case when it was unlikely there would have been anything gained," Mr. Payne said.

Mr. Payne said he was insistent that Tewalt plead guilty to a felony. He noted Tewalt does not have any prior charges of domestic violence on his record. Mr. Payne said he is confident in the system.

"The rider is prison time. But then there's an educational component that goes along with that," Mr. Payne said. "The likelihood of reoffense is lower for those who are coming out of a rider program than prison. The goal is to keep these people out of prison later."

The sentence he recommends for Tewalt meets the legal goals of sentencing: deter the individual, deter the general public, rehabilitation and retribution.

"According to Idaho code, retribution, the fact you did something and know you should pay for it, is the least of these factors that is considered," Mr. Payne said. "It is a factor because there is a price to pay when you break the law, but it's the least emphasized factor in Idaho."

Ms. Williams hopes to convince the judge to impose a harsher sentence other than what is outlined in the plea agreement when Tewalt is sentenced at 9:30 a.m. Nov. 16. She also hopes her voice will be heard in the community.

"I went out into public with my bruises after it happened and someone told me that they wouldn't want to go out into public after that looking like I did. But I didn't want to be ashamed because I didn't do this," she said. "I'm tired of when this kind of stuff happens it's just brushed under the rug. People have to be willing to step forward and we have to deal with this. It has to be out there somehow so people know that it's happening."