

## VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT OF AVERY SMITH

Your Honor,

Before I begin, I would like to thank the Choctaw Police Department, especially Officer Cox and Officer Bosse, as well as everyone else involved for their hard work on my case, and for reassuring every question, doubt, and fear that I had throughout the waiting period during their investigation.

Thank you.

I would especially like to thank Attorney General Drummond who met with me, took a personal interest, and assigned Mr. Gieger and Ms. Galaviz to the case.

I am so very grateful.

I would also like to thank my wonderful parents, family, friends, and my boyfriend for their endless support, kindness, and love that they gave to me during this time in my life.

I am not sure how I would've been able to do this without knowing that I had such a strong backbone of support waiting behind me.

Your Honor, I appreciate that you have given me the opportunity to speak.

From the moment I decided to come out with my story, I knew that at some point I would be right here today. It has been so important to me that I would have a chance to stand up here and present what I am feeling into words.

However, there are no perfect words to capture the kind of loss that doesn't show up on the surface, the kind of pain that lives in silence, in the places that no one sees.

But today, I will try to put words to the hurt that I've carried for the last 2 years.

Because after almost 2 years of forced silence and hiding, my story deserves to be heard, and the weight of what Samuel Melton did to me deserves to be seen for exactly what it is.

(Direct comments at and look at Melton)

What YOU did to me wasn't an accident. YOU did not make a mistake. It wasn't a moment of weakness. YOU made a decision, a decision that altered the course of my life and my being. It was a deliberate abuse of power.

You trained for a position that required only two things: Protection and guidance. You took a position where society automatically trusts you with the well-being of their children, the same automatic trust that my parents had for you and that you chose to abuse.

You were supposed to protect and guide me, but you did neither of those things.

You were the darkness that crept into the place that was meant to be safe. After months of pretending that you cared about me to instill my trust, you made a decision that shattered every part of me.

You did not just take advantage of a moment, or a day, or a year of my life - you took advantage of my trust, my admiration, and my innocence that I had held tightly.

You turned your highly trusted position of power into a weapon, and aimed it directly at me.

You made me believe I was special — not because you cared about me, but because you cared about what you could take from me.

I didn't understand it all at once. I wish I had. But abuse doesn't always scream at first — sometimes it whispers. Sometimes it hides behind smiles and compliments and the kind of attention that feels special when you're too naive to know it's wrong.

You knew I was vulnerable, young, and naive. You manipulated me. You stole from me under the illusion of love and care.

You took my care for you as a human being, my adoration of you as a teacher, and my vulnerability as a young teenage girl as your green light to do whatever it was that pleased you.

You took my trust in you as a teacher as your go-ahead to rob the last two years of my childhood with no remorse, all while simultaneously convincing me that what you were doing was okay and making me believe you for so long.

You made your theatrical act of care for your students very clear at the beginning of every year, such as offering your time outside of class to allow students to open up to you about anything they may be struggling with. To an outsider, this appeared as a caring attribute that all teachers should have, but in reality, this was your way of interrogating me and finding my weaknesses.

You used that to find out everything about me that would make me an easy target.

You did not actually care about being an outlet for a struggling teenager, you only cared about figuring out if what I was struggling with made me fragile enough to be the right fit for your next victim.

You are a predator, and I was just one of your prey.

Somehow, there were parts of me that checked all the right boxes for you.

Coming to the realization of how calculated, cunning, and infuriatingly smart you were disgusts me.

I am not sure that it ever crossed your mind that one day I would grow up and likely come to realize the damage you had done to me.

Maybe that thought did cross your mind, but you were heavily convinced that you had done such a good job at isolating me and keeping me under your wing of manipulation, that you reassured that thought by thinking I would never say a word. Well, here I am, saying my words right in front of you.

I think the most asked question I have gotten is “why now”? And the answer is this: I could no longer deny the twisting ache in my gut knowing that after I graduated high school, I was no longer there to be the punching bag for your abuse.

I knew that the chances of what you did to me happening to another child were likely, because abusers never stop abusing, and I would sooner die than allow another young girl to be forced under a cloud of confusion, guilt, and hurt just like I was.

So many parts of me screamed not to say a word, for I feel like a small part of my mind will always be afraid of the constant control you had over me. But the parts of me that longed for my own justice, and for the protection of the girls you would’ve hurt in the future of your teaching career screamed louder.

My intention with this speech is not to stand here to slander and curse you, or read off to you every little thing inside of you that is evil and sick, because I believe that you already know that.

I believe you have known that all your life.

Instead, I am here to finally have my turn for the upper hand and the last word, because its finally time that I do the talking, and not you.

The pain you caused did not end when the abuse stopped the day that I graduated. The most obvious loss was my sense of safety and my ability to trust, but you also stole my ability to confidently create healthy relationships. I have had to learn to tear down all of the walls that you built that surrounded every part of me. It became clear very quickly that you did all of the damage and left me to pick up the pieces.

You took away my belief that anyone would protect me, because how can I trust anyone when the person I was taught to trust used that as a trap?

YOU stole my love and passion for music. Ironically enough, I dreamed of being a music teacher just like you. Music was one of the things that brought me the most joy and made me feel most like myself. YOU took that from me.

Those four walls where I and other students spent rehearsing and learning and loving music were the same four walls that became my prison cell where I was held captive by your sick sexual fantasies for 15 months. And because of that, you poisoned the simple idea of my dreams.

At just 16 years old, you created within me a self-hate that I didn't know could exist. Anytime I looked in the mirror, I was disgusted with me instead of you. You had a family that loved you and relied on you, and somehow you made me constantly feel like I was the one who tore that apart, even though I know now that it was always you. Not only did you do a phenomenal job of manipulating me, but you also made sure to do the same to them. You did this so that they would never believe you could do the things you were doing.

And even when they and others confronted you about what you were doing to me, you manipulated me further to make me feel as though it was my fault.

No wonder I didn't have the courage to speak up then, because I had been shown time and time again that no matter what, you were never going to stop.

Any part of me where there was confidence, you turned it into doubt. You distorted every part of my mind and soul, and for the entirety of my last two years of high school, the same place where I was meant to figure myself out, you made me question daily who I was. I lost every part of my identity because you had it so tightly held in your hands, and molded it into what pleased you; but now, I am taking back what is rightfully mine.

I could go on about everything you stole from me, every piece of me that you held between your fingers and crushed right in front of me. But with every part of me that was lost, YOU .... Samuel Melton were not able to take everything.

You never took my strength. You may have made me believe that I never had it to begin with, but it was always there. A small seed of determination and power that was always instilled in me was the reason I survived and is the reason I am standing in front of you right now.

You never took my ability to love with all that I am, even though you made backhanded smirking remarks that you felt I would never be able to love again after what you did to me.

You did not take my fire for life no matter how hard you tried to extinguish it with guilt and shame.

You did not take away my fight. And even though you tried to scare me beyond measure to use it, you never took my voice to speak out loud and clear as I am doing today.

You saw and robbed a young, vulnerable, and naive girl, but now you are looking at a woman.

A woman who decided that what you did will follow you forever, but it will not follow me.

A woman who won't let your actions dictate who I become, for I am worth far more than what happened to me, and I will move on to live a happy and successful life.

And you are looking at a woman who refuses to let you win.

I may have survived those last two years of high school that were filled with so much confusion, shame, and fear, and gained scars that will never completely fade, but I still wake up each morning and keep going. Still, I choose to live.

You may have stolen years of my childhood, but you have not stolen my forever.

I speak today for my 16-year-old self, the girl who never deserved a single thing you put her through. But I also speak for the many women who were never able to have this moment. The moment to take back and reclaim everything that was robbed from them by a man who felt that he had the right and the power to steal her innocence.

I also speak for the woman I am becoming. One who is brave. One who is healing. And one who is finally free.

Your Honor, thank you for providing me this opportunity to share and thank all of you who have been so patient as I have spoken.