

I Know Jane Doe

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<http://www.capecod.com/entertainment/know-jane-doe/>



White Ribbon Day is March 5. This year it fell on a Thursday. Aside from the extra snow, it's a day that passed with very little fanfare. Except in my mind, I am thinking about Jane Doe.

What is White Ribbon Day and who is Jane Doe?

White Ribbon Day is a relatively quiet movement where men are asked to wear a white ribbon (no different in fashion than a pink ribbon for breast cancer awareness or a yellow ribbon for a missing loved one). White is the color of peace. On White Ribbon Day, men are asked to wear a white ribbon to show they are against violence towards women. There was a breakfast at the Irish Village in Yarmouth, coordinated by Independence House, where men were asked to take an oath to support the stand against violence towards their sisters, mothers, daughters, wives, neighbors and strangers. Yesterday I saw Yarmouth Deputy Chief Steven Xiarhos wearing a white ribbon pin. I am pretty sure it's not a one-day-a-year kind of thing for him. I am pretty sure he has seen some of the worst things that men can do to women. White Ribbon Day is a quiet day –quiet is good.

This brings me to Jane Doe. Jane Doe is a cloak given to a woman who is too scared to be identified. In the worst case scenario, Jane Doe is the name given to a woman who cannot speak to identify herself. For now, we will go with the earlier definition. The courts and agencies will name a woman Jane Doe to protect her privacy in cases of abuse where giving her name could cause further emotional or physical damage to her as a person. I know Jane Doe. Unfortunately, by giving her this anonymity, it is also easy to lose her as a person. A woman. A sister. A friend. It is also easy for her to lose her reality. Jane Doe is a character in a very unhappy story. Most people don't like to read unhappy stories, so most people don't know Jane Doe.

Would you mind if I take your hand and walk you through a night in the life of Jane Doe? It's not the worst night in the scope of things. In perspective, I am sure it's quite tame by comparison, so I think you can live through it. After all, Jane did. It changed her. I do not know if it will change you. Perhaps it will only change the way you look at Jane. I am willing to take

that chance. I will try to bring you through as directly as possible. If you don't care about this story, please stop reading and go about your day or evening. These things don't happen to everyone. If you are of the philosophical belief that if you don't see something happen, it isn't real, you probably sleep better at night than I do. If you are willing to walk with me, I'd like to tell you a story.

Jane came home from work on the night of January 8, 2012. It was a cold Sunday night in another town in what seems like another lifetime. He started to carry her work things into the house, but quickly something changed. There was an argument. She was moving out the next morning. She was very clear that he was not welcome to go with her. The volume increased from both sides. Then threats were made: "I am going to drive up to the highway and push your boxes out of the trailer all over the place! Your clothes. Your work stuff. All of it." A dash was made to the trailer. Jane tried to pull her boxes out of the open trailer door and onto the lawn. An inaudible sound and full body force slammed the door shut. Jane threw herself out of the way of the heavy door just before it caught her arm. More yelling. Shrieking. Profanity and insults the likes of which this quiet rural neighborhood was not accustomed to. Direct verbal assaults like none Jane had ever heard directed towards her before. Fight or flight? Either would have been a better choice, but she chose to try to calm the situation. It was now approaching midnight. This was not the first time she was verbally beaten down. He would not break her tonight. She would not back down. If he moved with her, she would never be free.

Jane watched as the taillights of the trailer danced out of her immediate reach with a peppering of gravel kicked up from the tires on the driveway. An echo of profanity and insults carried down the street. She could see brake lights through the bushes. Then a door slam. More profanity. But now there were threats. "Let's just go inside and go to bed," she pleaded. For whatever reason, numb and cotton-mouthed she went into the house. He flung the front door wide open.

Phone. Cell phone in pocket. Who is awake? Who understands what is going on? Who will help? Jane dialed the last number she had called on her phone that night. A friend. She was darting from one room to another. He answered. It was his birthday and he was too drunk to realize why Jane was calling so late. From behind her she heard, "Are you calling the police? You know if you call the police I will never see my daughter again!"

"I didn't call the police"

"Give me the phone!" More threats and expletives.

"No."

A mad dash through the house and up the stairs. Shouts and threats follow her every step and she cannot outrun them. Or him. This is her house! This is the one place in the world where she was supposed to be safe! This doesn't happen, does it? A dash through an open bedroom door. A hard shove from behind that doubles her momentum and sends her face first onto the bed. A

pounce and a knee on her back between her shoulder blades and the cell phone is wrenched from her hand. Her phone-a-friend. Her possible life-line...gone. More threats are made. Against her reputation. Towards her dog. Insults. Fear. Panic. Keep control...

The next day Jane's friends came to her house to help her pack and move. He helped move her things into her new home alongside her friends. Threats were made if she discussed the events of the previous night. She tried to tell one of her friends. They didn't seem to care.

The following days and weeks were filled with unannounced appearances, more threats, pictures posted on social media and constant anonymous texts. Jane felt like she was losing her sanity.

She blocked him from her social media page and somehow he was banging on her door within a matter of minutes.

She was losing sleep. She was getting reprimanded at work for her loss of focus. She wasn't talking to her friends. On her way to work on a rainy Friday, Jane stopped at the state police barracks. She calmly described her situation and repeated over and over: "I don't know what to do." She was told she had to go to court.

Her time in court stretched out over nearly two years. Jane told her story and her fears to a judge in order to earn a restraining order. Jane re-told her story and fears again and again to judges in order to earn extensions on restraining orders. Jane told her story to lawyers who had heard similar stories from other Jane Does so many times that every Jane looked and sounded the same. Jane researched cases at other courthouses that he was named in that dated back over too many years for him to still be treating women like this. Jane pushed. Jane put security cameras on her house. Jane bolted awake at every sound in her new home. Jane's friends and family grew weary of the topic.

After months and years of postponements, Jane was finally put on the stand in criminal court. Jane was a witness in a criminal case against a man whom she no longer recognized. Jane relived every fight, every argument, every embarrassing moment and every poor decision she felt she had made. Jane felt as if she was standing before a courtroom filled with strangers who, in Jane's mind, would decide if she was a "vindictive ex-girlfriend looking to settle a score" (as the defense attorney had labeled her).

After what seemed like hours of re-telling stories and correcting versions of stories the defense attorney threw at her, after swallowing her embarrassment and reliving the night with the knee between her shoulder blades—a night when she thought she had reached a mental breaking point, Jane was asked to step down from the witness stand. I don't know how she managed the strength to keep her head high and her shoulders back as she walked past him and his lawyer. She walked to the back of the courtroom and took her seat. She waited. She went numb. She waited. A verdict of "Guilty of Assault and Battery" was returned in less than an hour. Faster than anyone expected. Well... Under an hour and nearly two years.

Jane learned over the years that his friends knew he was violent. Jane learned there were other women, including the mother of his daughter, who he had attacked. No one told her. No one said anything until it was too late. No one felt it was “their place” to speak up.

I know Jane Doe. Every year Jane Doe and I stand in court and retell this story to a room full of non-interested strangers and a judge who has seen dozens of Jane Does come and go. Every time I wonder if I will get the extension on the restraining order.

I look for white ribbons on White Ribbon Day. They let me know I am safe.