

## SENTENCING THE VICTIM

*Making an impact...  
changing lives*

**W**hen producer Liz Oakley met Joanna Katz in 1995, all Oakley wanted was a haircut.

**"I needed a new hair stylist and a mutual friend sent me to Joanna. In the middle of my haircut, [Joanna] asked me if I 'knew of any good producers.' I knew," jokes Oakley, "I had been set up."**

**The two women became a powerful team. Through a seven-year collaboration, they co-produced SENTENCING THE VICTIM, a 90-minute documentary with the ability to change minds, even laws, regarding sexual assault and victims' rights.**

### Background

On the night of June 17, 1988, at the age of 19, Joanna Katz and a female friend were abducted at gunpoint from a parking lot in Charleston, SC. The women endured five hours of assault, rape, torture and death threats from five men in an abandoned apartment. Few women survive an assault on this scale. Joanna Katz recovered, became a vocal advocate for victims' rights in South Carolina and grew interested in making a film about the kind of support victims of assault need—from their families, law enforcement officers and counselors—to heal.

Oakley was not initially drawn to producing a film on rape, but the day she attended a parole hearing with Katz and her parents and saw the unnecessary burdens the system places on victims she said, "That's it. We're getting the camera." With limited funding from local foundations and a tremendous in-kind contribution from Oakley's employer, Ed Bates of IVS Video, Oakley and Katz completed the film in 2002.

From day one, Katz wanted to use the film to change how parole boards treat victims both in South Carolina and beyond. Katz's attackers were eligible for parole after a few years though they had received 30-35 year sentences. Despite repeated requests by Joanna and the district attorney who prosecuted the case, the South Carolina Parole Board refused to combine the bi-annual parole hearings of the five offenders into one event. For Katz and her parents, this meant enduring the trauma of revisiting the assaults and traveling more than 200 miles several times a year to oppose parole in person.

## Outreach Campaign

In South Carolina, outreach around STV evolved naturally from Katz's role as an activist and her relationships with local nonprofits. She and Oakley arranged for the film to premiere at the annual statewide conference of the South Carolina Victims Assistance Network (SCVAN) in April 2002. A few weeks later, Laura Hudson, SCVAN's Public Policy Coordinator invited Katz to a key strategy meeting. Katz articulated the specific changes she sought in the law. Hudson could make no guarantees but agreed to push for Katz's goals in the South Carolina legislature.

Momentum began to build when the film aired a few months later on South Carolina's public station, ETV, and the state parole board was inundated with letters. Katz and Oakley were invited to present the film in Washington, DC to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women. Then came invitations to present the film at state conferences in New Mexico, Minnesota and Wyoming. The film aired on Justice Network Television (reaching 90 U.S. Attorney's offices nationwide). In March 2004, the film aired nationally on PBS and was the highest rated single episode of that year's *Independent Lens* series.

Jim Sommers, Director of Broadcast & Communications for the Independent Television Service (ITVS), believed ITVS's Community Connections Project (CCP) could do much to expand the conversation about victims' rights around the country. ITVS-CCP transforms independent media into tools for community education and action. Aware of the sensitive nature of the material, he felt the project required just the right national coordinator. Through Katz, he found Melissa Hook, a veteran journalist with extensive experience writing on victim-related issues who is also Deputy Executive Director of the national nonprofit Victims Assistance Legal Organization.

Given just four months to implement the campaign, Hook quickly brought on board nine national non-profit partners (see sidebar.) "This is a small field," says Hook. "People meet together a lot. They are activists and when they care passionately about something like this, it's pretty easy to get them together to say, 'Yes, let's get behind this.'"

Hook collaborated closely with ITVS staff and CCP field organizers in six cities to draw target audiences to the broadcast, develop educational materials and build partnerships with organizations who would use the film in an on-going way to spark dialogue about victims' rights issues. Hook knew from experience that "victims groups have no money for cocktail parties" and that she'd have to use another approach to draw people to the film.

"We engaged people in the process, reviewing the film and evaluating the discussion guides," she recalls. "This was done at the state and county level in various states and it involved 20 to 30 people at each event. That quickly became a dissemination tool. It got into the background beat of the field that the film was out there."

Hook collaborated with CCP field staff and with Katz to place the film in workshops and trainings at state conferences and other settings. (See HIGHLIGHTS on page 4 for details.) A few weeks before the national broadcast, Hook organized a meeting with directors of victim services offices in corrections departments from various states. (These individuals serve as liaisons between parole boards and crime victims). The group was so impressed (and alarmed) by the film that they sent out messages to their regional offices preparing them for a rush of calls after the film aired. The national partners helped get the word out to their memberships via email the week prior to broadcast.



### National Campaign Partners

*American Probation and Parole Association (APPA)*

*Justice Solutions*

*Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center, Inc./Stephanie Roper Foundation*

*National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators (NAVAA)*

*National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina*

*Security on Campus*

*Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAIN)*

*Victims and the Media*

*Victims Assistance Legal Organization (VALOR)*

## Impact

In South Carolina, the combination of lobbying in the legislature and increased media awareness achieved significant results. On July 28, 2004, 16 years after her assault, Joanna Katz stood beside South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford as he signed into law Senate Bill 935, putting into place the three major changes she had sought. The new law requires that:

- parole hearings for multiple offenders of the same crime be held on the same day
- creation of a new closed circuit two-way television system, making the hearing process participatory for victims who choose not to attend in person
- review information on offenders must be provided to victims prior to hearing dates

“The law would never have changed if I hadn’t made the film,” says Katz, “because when the media decides to take interest in something that makes people uncomfortable, especially lawmakers, that’s when things start to change because the public sees it and gets incensed.”

“Joanna pushed in the political arena, she plugged into our committee system, she contacted her state representatives,” says SCVAN’s Laura Hudson. “So many victims internalize their tragedies and are not able to do anything positive for themselves or others. Joanna’s resolve to fix the system is really unique and the film had the role of laying the public groundwork to make passage of the legislation easier. The parole board knew that we had public sentiment in our corner, so they didn’t fight what we did in the General Assembly.”

Through ITVS’s efforts, the film has been and continues to be used as a resource to sensitize law enforcement, probation and parole officers; to educate juvenile offenders about the impact of crime and to train journalists to report on crime with consideration for victims.

While Katz achieved her goal of changing the law in South Carolina, she and Oakley hope to see the film help bring about awareness and new legislation for victims’ rights around the nation. Carl Wickland, director of the American Probation and Parole Association (a national outreach partner in the campaign) says the film can continue to have impact with parole boards, judges, policymakers because it “puts a human face to what victims go through regarding the parole process.”

“Just showing the film has an impact on the room,” says Wickland. “You want to have impact on people outside the room. To do that, you have to present it in a way that helps people develop strategies and objectives.” Wickland feels the ITVS Discussion Guide is a great first step, but that using the film to create lasting change in other states will require developing curricula and trainings tailored to specific audiences.

The potential for this film to continue opening eyes to victims’ rights is extraordinary. Through tape sales, currently managed by IVS Video, departments of corrections, victim assistance organizations, correctional facilities, and universities in 25 states have already purchased copies.

For everyone involved in the campaign, the outpouring of emotion generated in the viewers’ Talkback section of the film’s companion Web site was unforgettable. “What was so gratifying was the public response,” says Melissa Hook. “So often we find that people turn their backs on crime victims because they can’t handle the tragedy. The medium of television seems to create enough distance. People can see it and respond even if its 4 a.m. I was moved over and over again when I read the letters to Joanna.” (See VIEWERS RESPOND on back cover).

“A woman called me looking to get a copy of the film,” Oakley recalls. “She had been abducted and raped and was now married. She felt her husband never really understood that part of her life. He was flipping channels one night after she’d gone to bed and he watched our film. In the morning, he hugged her and said he was so sorry and that he finally got it. For me, it is so wonderful knowing the impact on one individual was so significant.”

## NATIONAL CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

### Washington, DC—July 2002

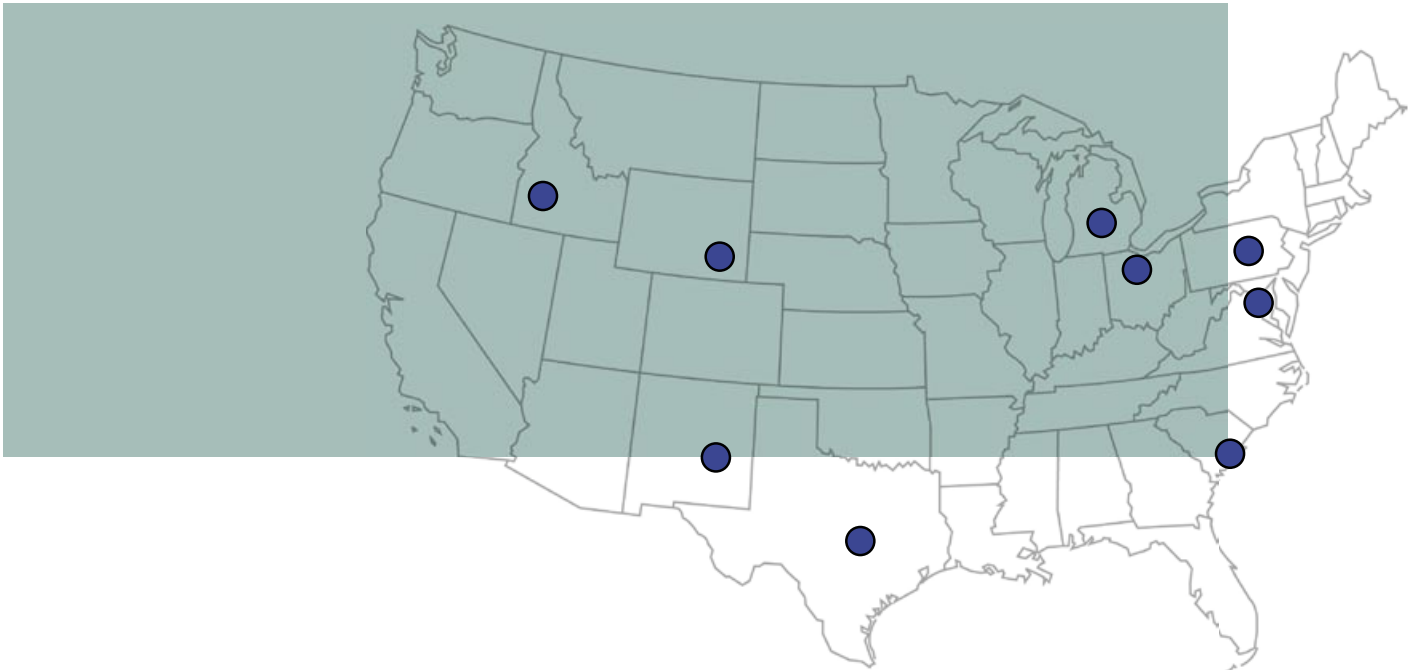
After seeing SENTENCING THE VICTIM (STV) at a sexual assault conference in Chicago, Sarah Deer of the U.S. Department of Justice's Violence Against Women Office invited the filmmakers to present the film to her fellow staff members in Washington, D.C. News of the film quickly spread to Justice Department offices around the country and the film aired on Justice Network Television, reaching 90 U.S. Attorney's offices nationwide.

### Albuquerque, NM—October 2002

The "STOP T.A. Project" (STOP Violence Against Women Grant Technical Assistance Project) is a national program that provides technical assistance to states in their efforts to combat violence against women. Katz and Oakley were invited to present the film at the project's annual conference. Katz recalls that the audience did not want the workshop to end and that conversations spilled over into meals and hallways. "It was clear," she recalls, "that among state and federal administrators across the country, there existed a hunger to hear the victim's personal story—to remind them why they do what they do."

### Cheyenne, WY—May 2003

Katz was invited by Shirley Martinez, Victim/Witness Coordinator with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Cheyenne to present STV at Wyoming's Annual State Law Enforcement Conference. Governor Dave Freudenthal, U.S. Attorney Matthew Mead and State Attorney General Patrick Crank all attended the screening. Matthew Mead told those in attendance that STV was "the best victim impact presentation he'd seen." Katz was invited as a presenter to the state conference again the following year.



### Cleveland, OH—August 2003

One of the key partners in ITVS's outreach campaign was The American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), whose membership includes thousands of probation, parole and corrections professionals as well as members of government, academics and research. Katz presented the film at APPA's Summer Institute in 2003 and later APPA members reviewed the discussion guide at the Winter Institute. In July 2004, APPA honored STV with its Community Awareness Through Media Award, recognizing outstanding reporting that "contributes to a better understanding of the American criminal justice system." APPA Executive Director Carl Wickland says STV is "so powerful" because it "helps probation and parole officers gain a better appreciation and empathy for victims."

### **Boise, ID—February 2004**

Lynn Allen, ITVS's CCP representative in Boise, worked closely with the Women's Center at Boise State University and local law enforcement organizations to organize a highly successful pre-broadcast event for "first responders"—police officers, social workers, victim advocates and others who serve victims in the first hours after a sexual assault. The Ada County Sheriff's Office arranged for officers in attendance to receive continuing education credits from POST (Police Officers Standards Training) Academy, which boosted attendance among officers.

### **Chambersburg, PA—Spring 2004**

The nonprofit Women in Need (WIN) serves victims of sexual assault and domestic violence in two Pennsylvania counties. After learning of the film from ITVS's national outreach campaign coordinator, WIN began using STV as part of in-service staff trainings, volunteer trainings and in its classes for juvenile offenders about the impact of crime on victims and their families. "I think the legal system should see this film, the police, advocates – anyone who has any involvement with sexual assault should be required to see this film," says WIN's Volunteer Services Coordinator Celeste Snively.

### **East Lansing, MI—Ongoing**

The Victims and the Media Program at Michigan State University's School of Journalism provides unique training in reporting on victims and victims' issues. ITVS invited program director Bonnie Bucqueroux to contribute to the film's discussion guide and to use the film as an educational tool. Bucqueroux presented part of the film in a special seminar on journalistic ethics for more than 100 students at Detroit College of Law and presented the entire film to another 100 students at Michigan State. The film has become an on-going resource for the program and its participants.

### **Dallas, TX—May 2004**

Ellen Halbert, Director of the Victim Witness Division of the Travis County District Attorney's Office in Austin, TX, is a nationally recognized spokesperson on victims' rights. In conjunction with ITVS, Halbert presented the film in workshop at the annual Texas Crime Victims Clearinghouse Conference. Halbert said the audience was "spellbound" and included at least one member of the state parole board.

### **Charleston, SC—Ongoing**

In 2003, People Against Rape (PAR), the non-profit that provided services to Joanna Katz and her family during recovery, received funding to use STV in three trainings around the state for police officers, victim advocates and staff and volunteers of rape crisis centers. On July 24, 2004, Governor Mark Sanford signed S. Bill 935, putting into law specific changes that Joanna Katz and South Carolina Victim Assistance Network (SCVAN) had lobbied for making the parole process easier on victims of crimes.



*Joanna's story is graphic, emotional and heart wrenching.... Everyone should request that their local legislators view this film.*  
A viewer—Chapel Hill, NC

## VIEWERS RESPOND

*I am a Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy, and have just recently (today) completed a three day Navy Course (SAVI-Sexual Assault Victim Intervention) One of the many topics covered was your horrendous tragedy/film.... My graduating class and I commend your unswerving BRAVERY in stepping forward. I so wish I could offer more than just empathy, I can only assure you that your film has touched many a lives here.*

—Water Survival Div CPO

*I am a student at a Canadian university and as a topic of discussion in my criminology class, we watched SENTENCING THE VICTIM.... You could hear a pin drop in the classroom.... Joanna's story affected me deeply, as it did our entire class, and I will be remembering it for a very long time.*

—New Brunswick, Canada

*I am a Victim Advocate with The NC Dept. of Corrections and today I had the awesome privilege of viewing this film and meeting Joanna Katz in person.... My life is forever changed. I truly believed I was 100% committed to my victims before today, but now I know that I am 110% devoted to them and to the protection of their rights.... All I can say is thank God for you Joanna - your strength, your courage, your hope, your passion.*

—Asheville, NC

*Never, never, never have I gone straight from the television to the computer.... Please know that you have made a positive impact on many, many lives, and through this film will continue to help and heal.*

—Fresno, CA

*My heart broke as I watched this PBS documentary. Joanna's ordeal is every woman's nightmare.... Some years ago a teenage niece of mine was raped—my sister never speaks of it... My heart bleeds for women who have been violated in this way.... Joanna Katz, you are a hero to all.*

—Buffalo, NY

*I am a lawyer practicing municipal law for the City of St. Louis, Missouri.... This film should be standard viewing at all colleges and law schools in several disciplines. To Ms. Katz, keep on keeping on. You have more courage than anyone I have ever seen.*

—St. Louis, MO

*This is quite possibly the most incredible story you have ever told on your station. You must be able to see that by the reactions in the other emails. I have never been so moved, and this is the first email that I have written as a result of a program.*

—Boston, MA

*I truly believe that if more people like Joanna, Julie and Liz came forward, that more lawmakers would be "forced" to do something more to help the victim.... I say, change the law!!!!!! Make the laws more victim friendly. They are in place to protect the innocent, correct?*

—Clarkson, WA

To read more Talkback, go to: [www.pbs.org/sentencingthevictim](http://www.pbs.org/sentencingthevictim).

## Acknowledgements and Credits

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SENTENCING THE VICTIM premiered on the PBS award-winning series *Independent Lens* in March 2004.

To purchase a tape, contact IVS Video at 843-577-0609 or visit [www.sentencingthevictim.com](http://www.sentencingthevictim.com).

To download FREE outreach and educational materials for this film, go to [www.itvs.org/outreach/sentencingthevictim](http://www.itvs.org/outreach/sentencingthevictim). For more information about ITVS's Community Connections Project, go to [www.itvs.org/outreach](http://www.itvs.org/outreach) or contact [outreach@itvs.org](mailto:outreach@itvs.org).

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