Criminals’ Rights vs. Victims’ Rights

After 17-year old, Savannah Dietrich, was sexually assaulted last year, the two criminals who attacked her circulated the pictures they had taken of her to their friends. After the assault, she did the right thing. She reported the incident and these guys were arrested.

What happened next is not surprising to me.

They cut a deal and pleaded guilty to first-degree sexual abuse and voyeurism. The terms of the plea bargain are not known but Savannah felt the agreement was too lenient and a mere “slap on the wrist.” So, when the court ordered her “don’t talk about it, or risk 180 days in prison and a $500 fine,” she, in my mind, again, did the right – and gutsy – thing.

“First, Dietrich cried. Then, she logged online. ‘There you go, lock me up,’ she tweeted to a couple hundred Twitter followers, outing her assailants by name. ‘I’m not protecting anyone that made my life a living Hell.’ These men had made their assault on her public. Now, they had convinced a court to keep it all under wraps. ‘If reporting a rape only got me to the point that I’m not allowed to talk about it, then I regret it,’ she wrote in a note on her Facebook wall. ‘I regret reporting it.’”

Yes, she violated a court order; yes, she knew what the consequences would be. Of course, charges of contempt were brought against her but were eventually dropped. But, I say, “good for her!”

I’ve represented hundreds of kids, who were victims of abuse and neglect over my 8-year stint as an attorney in dependency court, but I see absolutely no reason – and, believe me, I’ve
heard all the arguments – to protect the identity of teenagers who commit these type of heinous crimes.

Anyone so concerned about concealing the identities of these criminals can explain to me why Savannah’s identity is allowed to be published all over the internet by her assailants but theirs are cloaked in confidentiality.

The attackers’ attorneys allege that Savannah had no right to name her attackers in public.

Why shouldn’t other young women in Savannah’s school and community know the names of these men who attacked her? Why aren’t women – potential victims – being informed? Don’t they have a right to know they could be living next door to a rapist or that one of them is actually a classmate?

Here are Savannah’s own words: “The laws that protect criminals shouldn’t cross over and take away victims’ rights. Victims’ rights should come first. And thank you.”

Protecting criminals’ identities – I don’t get it, but if you do, God bless you.