Michele Storms:
Welcome everyone. Good afternoon. It is always such a pleasure to see a room full of people here to celebrate justice with us and to really do deeper inquiry and examination into what justice means for all of us as lawyers and law students and people who care about the law.

My name is Michele Storms and I direct the Gates Public Service Law Program along with the Integrity of Justice Project. We are so happy to bring together two really extraordinary individuals to talk with you this afternoon. I'm going to just tell you a couple of things about who we are and what we're doing. Then I'm going to turn over to Theresa Connor, who's the director of the Integrity of Justice Project, to more specifically introduce the program.

The Gates Public Service Law Program is a wonderful program here at the University of Washington School of Law. It's only about three years old. We provide scholarships to students who are going to pursue a public service law career. We also engage in programming to broaden the horizons of our law school university and broader communities about what public service is, how that's fulfilled by lawyers, and what all of us can do to make our justice system a better system. That is something that we take great pride and pleasure in.

We have a speaker series. We have seminars. We collaborate with student groups to provide a social justice Tuesday lunchtime seminar. Every Tuesday there are 60 to 80 law students in here just thinking about various aspects of the justice system, whether it's about poverty law, school, segregation issues, fair trade, whatever that might be. We are having those conversations here. It's a very rich place to study law and to be a part of this community.

So, to get to the Integrity of Justice Project, speaking of things that are new and exciting and absolutely wonderful. This is a project dedicated to fostering a partnership among Washington's law schools, state prosecutors, law enforcement, defense lawyers, courts, and others in the justice community in order to identify best practices and procedures that can help ensure accurate determinations of guilt or innocence. This is absolutely critical. No one innocent should ever serve time, and those who are guilty should be dealt with in the system in an appropriate way. We have a lot to learn and do as a community to do the best work in that area.

The director of the project, Theresa Connor, is going to introduce the program. She is a 2006 graduate of this law school. We are very proud of her. She was an active student in the Innocence Project Northwest Clinic. Before that, she was a public policy director for Planned Parenthood of Washington. She has an extensive background in public policy and education as well as having
worked as an investigative journalist. So, it is my great pleasure to turn the microphone over to her. Thank you Theresa. [applause]

Theresa Connor:
Thank you very much for coming in on one of the best days in Seattle so far this year and joining us. I am very pleased to bring Jennifer Thompson-Cannino and Ronald Cotton as part of the Integrity of Justice Project to Seattle. Actually, they just spoke earlier today in Tacoma at the Evergreen State College, Tacoma Campus. Jennifer will continue on tomorrow to Spokane. So, it truly is an outreach across the state and a collaboration between the three law schools.

One of our advisors, John McKay, is here today. He is the faculty liaison and representing Dean Testy today here at this event in a moment. So, he'll say a few words from the advisor's perspective about the project and the collaboration and the involvement of law students. I do want to let you know that we will have copies of their book, "Picking Cotton," after the event today if you would like to take a look at it. They will be signing books.

Also, to thank the advisors who had volunteered to help lend their wisdom and their experience in guiding this project. They include the three deans of the law school, including Dean Hicks, former state supreme court Justice Robert Udder, Judy Mailing, Judge Thompson from Spokane from the court of appeals division two, our own Jackie McMurtrie director of the Innocence Project representing the faculty for the University of Washington School of Law, Brooks Holland who is the faculty liaison for Gonzaga, Jeff Robinson who you may know as a defense lawyer here in Seattle and former president of the Washington Defense Lawyers' Association, Jose Giaton, Charles Mandigo who is the former FBI special agent in charge for Seattle, Joanne Moore who is the director of the office of public defense in Olympia, and another UDUB alum Ralph Jefferson who's a former police chief of the Lummi tribe.

We have a great group of people with a lot of experience, various perspectives across the justice community. I believe that we finally have an opportunity to have the type of community conversation and public policy conversation that can lead to the type of change that needs to occur.

With that, I will say thank you. Please turn your cell phones off if you haven't already. And at some point, we will encourage those who would like to stay involved and receive information about the Project to sign up on one of the sign in sheets so that we can keep you informed. Thank you, again. I'd like to introduce John McKay, our faculty advisor from CLU. [applause]

John McKay:
Thank you, Theresa. You may be wondering why in the world, at an event like this, a prosecutor would be standing here. The reason is that the message that Jennifer and Ronald have is one that is felt very dearly by everyone who believes in justice, and prosecutors above all. The worst nightmare that a prosecutor can have is of a wrongful conviction and that someone is serving time unjustly.

So, we are now in an amazing place, I think, in this state, maybe just on the dawn really, of looking anew at our justice system to find places that we can all agree. Maybe agree is the word
to note as we start here. I want to thank Jennifer and Ronald for their courage in coming and for their energy and for helping us come together and see that even in an adversarial system, we can identify what is right and have the courage to discuss that and have the courage to bring change.

We're not sure exactly what road lies ahead of us, but we know that we have a wonderful example and we intend to follow it. There will be many opportunities for collaboration. But first, I want to just mention is of course the collaboration of the three law schools of this state who are very much involved and the three co-chairs, being Dean Hicks here at the University of Washington, my dean, Kelly Testy, and Dean Earl Martin at Gonzaga.

We expect teaching opportunities, scholarship opportunities. We're very excited about the prospect of our students at all three law schools participating as we move forward in this discussion. You can tell by the list of advisors that Theresa mentioned that we have a number of folks from law enforcement, from public defense, and really all of us who hunger for justice and doing the right thing, coming together. So, again, my thanks to our speakers and authors and the main attractions today, to Jennifer and Ronald, thank you very much. [applause]

**Theresa Connor:**
It is my pleasure to introduce to you Jennifer Thompson-Cannino.

[applause]

**Jennifer Thompson-Cannino:**
Good afternoon. I am, too, very impressed that so many of you are in these walls on a day like today, because I think if I'd been your age I'm not sure... I might would have made a different decision and been outside. I thank you for coming today and being willing to listen to Ronald and I share our story and our journey that we have been on.

If someone had told me 25 years ago that I would be in Washington State talking about the integrity of justice, I wouldn't have believed it. Second, I wouldn't have had any thought that the justice system didn't work just fine the way it was. I mean, I was 22 years old and, frankly, bad guys went to prison and victims received justice and that was the way it was. So, you can imagine, the path that I have been on and the journey that I have been on has taught me many, many things.

This began, for me, 25 years ago. I probably was the age of some of you in the audience today; I was 23 years old. I was going to college at Elon College, which is now Elon University, in Burlington, North Carolina. I lived alone in an apartment that was about three and a half miles off of campus. I liked living alone because I liked setting my own schedule, and I liked studying. I was a 4.0 GPA student. I was going to be graduating summa cum laude in my degree. And I was dating a young man at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who was in graduate school, and he was going to be highly successful.

I had two jobs. I worked very hard to pay for my own way and take care of myself as an independent young woman, so life was really great for me, and I had this track that I was on. It was planned. I knew exactly where I was going, and little did I know that in the early morning
hours of July 29th, that my life would become a train wreck; that everything I had planned, everything I'd worked so hard for, everything I had thought was going to be - my life was tragically and violently taken away from me.

I had gone to bed early July 28th. I had gone out with my boyfriend, and I had gotten a terrible headache and decided to go home. And the last thing I remember was him rubbing my back making sure that I was going to sleep. And the police report showed that he left around 11 PM, and I was fast asleep.

And I lived in a small apartment that had been built many, many years before, and it was old and there was no such thing as central air when these apartments were built; and so, therefore, every room had its own little window air conditioning unit, and the deal was if you wanted to be cold in the summertime, you couldn't watch television. And if you wanted to watch television, you couldn't run the air conditioner. The air conditioners were very, very loud, so I didn't hear the sirens between midnight and three o'clock AM in my apartment complex.

Someone, a woman across the street from me, had an attempted break-in, had called the police, and the sirens were everywhere, and I didn't hear any of it. It's become clear to me now that my apartment became a safe haven for the rapist that night. He had broken into my apartment and spent quite a long time, actually, there, going through my wallet, taking my money, reading my driver's license, reading postcards that had been sent to me from my brother, who was traveling around Europe.

He had a couple beers out my refrigerator, smoked a few cigarettes in my den, and just waited it out until three AM, when I felt a brush against my arm. Having sensed there was someone in my room, but not really clear if I was imagining this, or if it was real, when I looked to left side of my bed, I noticed there was someone's head sliding beside my mattress. And the first thought in my mind was, oh, this is just my boyfriend. He fell asleep and he's trying to quietly leave and go home, and then I thought well, that wouldn't be accurate because he was a Greek young man, and his mother needed to know where he was all the time.

So, he wouldn't have been in my apartment at three o'clock in the morning. [laughs] And so I knew that that was inaccurate. And so then the next thought was I'm dreaming this. And as I tried to will myself to go back to sleep, that's when I felt the brush against my arm. And I screamed very loudly and very quickly. He pounced on my bed and put a knife to my throat and muffled my mouth with a gloved hand. Now, I'm straining to see. This has got to be a joke. This has got to be some frat boy thing, and I've startled him, and this is... But, no, that's not right.

This is happening very quickly, and I thought, well, he's tried to rob me. That's what it is. He's tried to rob me. I've startled him and if I offer him everything I own, he'll quietly leave and not hurt me. And as I pulled my mouth away from his hand, I said "Don't hurt me. I'm not going to call the police. You can take everything I own, my car, my wallet, everything. I won't call the police, I promise." And he said "I don't want your money." And I knew at that moment what was going to happen; I knew that I was going to be raped.
I didn't know if he was going to slit my throat. There was a knife to my throat. I didn't know whether he was going to beat me so badly that I wish he had slit my throat. I had no idea the outcome of what was going to happen to me. But, I knew I wanted to survive. My survival instinct was so strong. I didn't want my mother to have to identify my body later that day when she came to the hospital. I didn't want my parents to have to come in and say "Yep, that's her." So, I wanted to stay alive. I wanted to see one more sun come up. I wanted to be able to see my family one more time.

I knew that I physically couldn't defend myself. I'm a small woman. I had never been in a fight in my life. There's a man on my chest. There's a knife to my throat. I can smell alcohol on his breath. I had no idea if he was under the influence of drugs, and I knew better than to try to physically defend myself. But, this much I knew. I knew I was smart. I knew that if I paid attention and I made a plan, that I had a chance to survive, and that became the thing that drove me over the next half an hour.

There's, I'm sure, some of you young women in this audience today that have been a victim of rape. I'm sure of it because I know the statistics. And one of the hardest things to do when this is happening to you is the stay present. What you want to do is leave. So, I willed myself to stay there in my body as he assaulted me. But, I began to try to pay attention. I thought to myself, I'm going to survive this, and when I survive it, I'm going to be able to take everything that I remember about your face, and I'm going to tell the police. And they're going to find you, and they're going to convict you. And you're going to spend the rest of your life in prison, and this is what kept me there, present focused.

I began to study this face when I could glimpse at it, and I decided I needed to know his eyes. What were they shaped like? What about his nose? Was it large, was it small? What about his teeth? Were there any missing? Was there a tattoo, was there a scar? What about his hairline? Listen to his voice, Jennifer, pay attention. Maybe he would say something that would give me a clue.

As the next 15 minutes went by, he tried to come up and kiss me, and it revolted me so badly, I turned my head to the side in an effort to not throw up. And he said to me, "Relax, I'm not going to hurt you." And I don't know why I've often said this, I believe that God was very present with me at this moment, because I looked at him and said "I'm afraid of knives. If you'll get off of me and take your knife and go down the front steps of my apartment and drop the knife on my car and I can hear it, I'll let you come back in."

And he believed me. Because I knew my first job was to get him off of me, and he did, and I quickly wrapped a blanket around myself and actually stood close enough to him to study how tall he was. I knew that was going to be important. I'd seen enough police shows, you know, how old is he, how tall is he, how much do you think he weighed? These were important details and I needed to know them. How long were his arms? Were his feet pigeon-toed or duck-footed? What kind of shoes was he wearing? What kind of pants did he have on? Every detail mattered. Everything mattered to me. My life depended on this.
He didn't take the knife down the front steps, he simply pretended to drop it out the front door, and grabbed my arm and said "Let's go." I wasn't going back in there. I mean, I knew that he would have to kill me in that hallway. There was no way I was going back in that room, so I told him I had to go to the bathroom, could I please go to the bathroom? And he said, "Yeah, make it quick," and as I went into the room, I turned the light on, and I looked at him just a moment, a second. And he told me to turn it off, but it was just enough light. I knew they were going to ask me, what was the conditions of light.

As I went in the bathroom, I began to pray. What am I going to do? How am I going to get out of this? Then I remembered he had told me he had come through my kitchen. And I realized, his way into my apartment was going to be my way out. As I came out of the bathroom, I said "I'm really thirsty. Could I get a drink of water first?" And he said, "Yeah, make me a Seagram's and we'll have a party." He bent down and turned on my stereo, and at that moment a light emanated, a blue light. But, again, it was light. It was a profile. It was important.

And I went into the kitchen, I turned my light on knowing that light was now my friend. It would give me space. It would give me distance. It would give me an extra second, two seconds of a lead.

And I began to make noises in my kitchen with ice and water and cabinets and drawers. I slowly opened up my door and I began to run. And I went right next door to a neighbor, thinking this is good. This is next door, not knowing he wasn't at home. As I looked over my shoulder, he was coming out after me.

And I took off through the neighborhood. I didn't know where I was going to go. I had no shoes on. I had nothing but a blanket. It's now starting to rain. And it's 3:30 in the morning. Not a good plan.

So, I saw a light. Again, light became very important to me that night. I ran to a carport. Didn't know who lived there. Had no idea who owned the home, but it was a light. And I thought to myself if he kills me, I'll be under a light. Maybe somebody will see it.

And I began to pound on the door. The man that owned the house came around the corner. Now, it's 3:30 in the morning you can imagine you're living in your home. Your children are there. And there's a woman at your door in a blanket, screaming, please let me in. I've just been raped and he's after me.

How frightened could you have been? He of course screamed and his wife came around the corner and say, oh my God, this is a student at the school. I recognize her. Let her in. I fainted.

And he began to circle the house. We could see him through the window until the sirens came and then he took off. The dogs chased him, the police chased him, but they lost his scent. When they came to me at the house and they said, do you think you got a good look at your assailant. I said yes I do.
An African-American young male, light complexion, close cropped hair with a pencil thin moustache, smaller nose, but almond shaped eyes. He's 20, 22, 23 years old, about 175, 185 pounds, five foot 11, maybe six foot, six foot one. He's got on a navy shirt with white stripes on the sleeves and dark fatigue pants I think with canvas boat shoes.

He had white gloves on his hand. It was clear. I knew what he looked like. I went to the hospital. My body had become the crime scene and they needed to collect evidence off of my body and you can imagine the humiliation that comes from that to now have to submit to 12 different combings and pluckings and swabs.

But, I heard a woman crying right down the hall from me. It was a cry that I knew very well, because it was a broken, pained, scarred cry. And I asked the detective, the woman who's crying, who is that and what's wrong, what happened to her?

He said, she's just been raped. Then I said, was it the same man who raped me and he said yes. Her life was over. Who I had gone to bed as, Jennifer Thompson, in the wee hours of July 28 was no longer there. Everything I had planned was gone, my spirit, my soul was broken. I hated him with a blind hate.

If I could have killed him that night, I would have shot him in the head and walked away smiling. That's how much I hated him. So, I was very, very eager to help the police. I went to the police station and I gave my description. And it was very clear that I had gotten such a good look at him that I could do a composite sketch.

So, sitting with a detective, with an Identi-Kit, I begin to put together the face of this horrible human being. I picked out his eyes out of a series of 50 eyes. Picked out his nose out of 50 noses and hairlines and chins and eyelashes and eyebrows and bridges of your nose and your ears and your cheeks and everything.

And they looked at me and said, does this look like the man who attacked you and I said, yes it does. And it ran in the newspaper.

I was frightenened that he was still out there. He knew my name. He had read my driver's license. I was scared. The sooner they picked him up, the better.

But, a phone call came into the police department. One very important phone call from a woman who said, you know, that composite sketch looks like somebody I know by the name of Ronald Cotton.

As a matter of fact, I think Ronald Cotton was seen on a bicycle around 3:00 in the morning around Brookwood Garden Condominiums. And you know what, he was wearing a navy blue shirt with white stripes on the sleeves and white gloves and dark pants and boat canvas shoes.

It was him. It was my attacker. Ronald had had some brushes with the law. He had been in and out of some trouble and when they called me on August 1st to come down to the police station to do a photo lineup I was more than eager. I wanted to do this.
So, I was taken into a room and the detective looked at me and said, "Now, Jennifer we're going to show a series of six photographs. Take your time. Do no feel compelled to choose anyone. He may or may not be in there." But come on, I'm 22. I'm in a police department. One of these six is him.

It's my job to find him. I was a 4.0 student. I could do this test and I could pass it. And it knew I could. And one of them was him. And I held up the photograph and I said, "This is him."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm positive."

"Good job, Jennifer. We thought that was him."

I had passed the test. I was a good witness. Several days later, I was asked to do a physical lineup. Again, I was given the same instructions. "Jennifer, we're going to have seven men come in front of you. They're going to take three steps forward, three steps back. They are going to turn to the right. They are going to turn to the left. They are going to say a few lines that you remember your attacker saying. Don't feel compelled to choose anybody. He may or may not be in there."

But again, I know it's my job to find him. So, I was taken into an abandoned school house, into a school room that had a table between me and the seven men. No windows, no mirrors, just me and the seven men. And I was scared.

See, he knew my name. He knew where I lived. He knew what I looked like. He was looking at me now in broad daylight. I had to find him. And it was number five.

"It's number five." It was Ronald Cotton.

"Good job, Jennifer. That's the same person you picked out of the photo lineup."

I did it. I mean, I did it for me. I did it for the second victim who had not gotten a good look at him. She was my mother's age. She had screamed. She had fought. He had punched her, bitten her, slapped her, tried to smother her with a pillow. I was carrying this for me, for her, for you, and for you.

It was important. I wanted him to go to prison forever. So, I waited months until the trial. State vs. Cotton in January of 1985. It was two weeks of my life. It was two days on the stand, having to tell every disgusting, horrific thing he had done to me, while my mother and father listened.

It was humiliating. It was awful. I was asked ridiculous questions from the defense attorney. I was having to tell very detailed over and over and over descriptions. I was determined I was going to do this.
Two weeks later, 45 minutes the jury deliberated and found Ronald Cotton guilty, first degree rape, first degree sexual event, first degree breaking and entering and Ronald Cotton received life and 54 years. And ladies and gentlemen, it was the happiest day of my life.

I went back to the DA's office and we had champagne. And we toasted to justice, to justice working. Here's to you, Jennifer, justice worked. Go and live a good life. Now you can move on.

And I tried. I graduated. I didn't graduate summa cum laude, but I graduated with a 3.89.

Didn't marry my fiance, we just couldn't weather the storms of a sexual assault, but I married another man a few years later. And life began to take on some type of a pattern and normalcy for me, until 1987 when the appellate court overturned the decision. And we had to go back to court.

See they thought that it was really important that the second victim had not gotten a good look at him and could not make an identification. And if she couldn't, perhaps I had made a mistake. But, you don't forget the face of the person who destroyed your life. Ever.

So, it was OK, we could go back to court. This time we were going to try both cases. And fortunately, the second victim now remembered, "It was Ronald Cotton, I remember now. It's clearer. I was just scared, I was frightened, but I remember very clearly it's Ronald Cotton, and I am willing to put my hand on the Bible and swear to that."

So, we went back to court. Oddly enough, Ronald had said that somebody had been bragging that he had committed the crime that Ronald was serving time for, and he was innocent, and this guy was guilty, and blah, blah, blah. It's what they all say in prison.

I really wasn't concerned. So, under voir dire, they brought this mystery man - Bobby Poole - in, that had supposedly confessed to the crime. And they asked me, "Do you recognize this man in front of you, Mr. Bobby Poole?" And I said "No, sir, I've never seen him before in my life."

"Do you see the man in the courtroom today that raped you?" And I said, "Yes, he's sitting at the defense table. His name is Ronald Cotton." And that's all they needed to hear. Ronald Cotton was convicted, two first degree rapes, two first degree breaking and enterings, and two first degree sexual assaults. Ronald Cotton received two life sentences and 35 years.

And again, we toasted with champagne, because the system worked. That's the way it's supposed to be. Ronald Cotton would never get out of prison. He was never going to spend another holiday with his family. He was never going to get married. He was never going to have children, and that was what he deserved. Well, I got married in 1988. I got pregnant in 1989. I gave birth to triplets in the spring of 1990 - two little girls and a boy.

And you can only imagine that that was my blessing. That was my gift from God because I was good person. And I would tuck my babies in at night and sing to them a song and I would pray a prayer for their safety and their health for them to grow up and be good, strong people.
And then I would end my prayer with, "I pray that Ronald Cotton is killed today in prison. But, before he leaves this earth to Hell, let him know the horror of what that night was for me. Let him experience that incredible loss of control and power, and then I want him to die."

Every night I prayed this prayer; it was important.

Until the spring of 1995 - The triplets were now five, and I was a busy mom, as you can imagine. My life revolved around pounds and pounds and pounds of laundry and Band-aids, and preschool, and peanut butter and jelly, and toys and toys and toys.

And I got a call from Detective Gauldin and the assistant district attorney of Alamance County. They needed to talk to me. "See, Jennifer, there's this thing called DNA. You ever heard of it?"

Well, yeah, the O.J. Simpson case was everywhere. Yeah, I knew what that was." "Well, Ronald is still maintaining his innocence, but Jennifer, we know - he wants a DNA test run, though. But, we know what the results are going to show. The problem is, your blood sample has disintegrated from the rape kit from all these years, and we'll need a new blood sample."

And I said, "You know what? Let's go do it right now." I knew what it was going to show. I did not have time to go to court. I did not have time to go through the court system again. Take this blood sample, run it to the SBI lab, and let's be done with this.

And I didn't really think about it a whole lot until June of 1995, a few months later, when I got another phone call that they needed to come and see me again. This time, standing in my kitchen, they looked at me and they said, "We were wrong. It wasn't Ronald Cotton's DNA. It belonged to Bobby Poole."

And so I thought, if I could be wrong about something like that, what else am I wrong about? Maybe Morgan, Blake, and Brittany really aren't my kids. Maybe they were swapped at birth. Or maybe this God that I've prayed to all my life is really not there. So, what else in my life is wrong?

It was like somebody took my life like a snow globe and shook it, and then laid it down said, "Here's your life, and you get to move in it. And this is how you get to live."

I'd love to be able to tell you all that I was a brave and courageous woman that day, and I went and met Ronald in the courtroom as he was exonerated, or I immediately went and asked Ronald for forgiveness, but I didn't, because frankly, I was afraid.

I was afraid because I knew that Ronald had to hate me, and he was seeking revenge and retaliation, because I would. I would hate you if 11 years of my life had been taken away from me. See, I was 22 when I was raped. Ronald Cotton was 22. I'm 33. Ronald Cotton's 33. Dang, that's a third of his life, and I can't give it back. And there's nothing I can say or do that's going to make up for it.
But, I was afraid, and over the next year, I began to suffocate and die of shame and guilt, fear. And then that summer a man by the name of Ben Loeterman came to see me. He sat with me, and he said, "Jennifer, I'm going to do a documentary about the fallibility of eyewitness identification, and I wanted to know if you would tell your story in front of a million, jillion people." [laughter]

**Jennifer:**
And I said, "No.-uh. No. No, I'm not going to do that." And he said "Well, Ronald's going to tell his story." And I thought, well, then who's going to tell mine? And how accurate will they be? And will they make me look like an idiot and a bad person? And so, "OK, tell you what. I'll do this if Ronald Cotton and I do not meet each other at all." Because I knew behind every alley and every corner, he was waiting to kill me. And they said, "OK, we respect that."

So, over the next six months, we began to put together what Jennifer saw. And they would come to my house and they would go, "Oh, we had lunch with Ron," and "We hung out with Ron, and he's so nice. So, quiet and gentle and sweet." And I thought, it's a setup. [laughter]

**Jennifer:**
He's going to kill me, and I know it. And I didn't want to see him, and I didn't. I didn't; and it aired on February 27th, 1997, and I couldn't watch it. I was too afraid. So, the next morning I sat by myself in my den, and I see myself being interviewed, and the last thing I say is, "I know Ronald Cotton is not my rapist, but I cannot get him out of my nightmares. He's still in my memory."

And when I heard that, I realized, it's wrong. Maybe Bobby Poole's face should be there, I don't know. But, not Ronald's. And how do I remove that? I have to see him. I have to talk to him. I needed to know Ron the man.

And so, on April 4th of 1997, in a small church about a mile and half from where I had been raped, I waited for Ronald. I had gone to my minister prior to that meeting and said, "I don't know what to say. I don't know what to call him. I mean, my God." And he said, "You know what, you're going to get the words. They're just going to happen."

And I thought, that's easy for you to say, because you're going to be back in Winston-Salem, and I'm going to be sitting in a church in Elon. [laughter]

**Jennifer:**
But, I sat in this church, and when I saw his truck pull up outside the window, what really, really struck me was when he went to open the door for his wife. His wife is about 5'1." I'm 5'1." And I realized, Ronald was too tall. He could not have been my rapist. He was just too tall. How had I made that mistake?

Ronald came around the corner and stood in front of me, and I couldn't physically get out of the chair, and I started to cry. And I looked at Ronald, and I said "Ronald, if I spent every moment of every day of every week of every month for the rest of my life telling you how sorry I am for what happened, could you ever forgive me?"
And Ronald Cotton, with all the grace and mercy and love and kindness and humility in the world, took my hands, and with tears in his eyes, said "I forgave you years ago. I'm not angry at you. I want you to be happy, and I want to be happy. And I want you to live a good life, and I want to live a good life. And don't look over your shoulders thinking I'm going to be there to hurt you. It will not be me."

Over the next two hours, I got to know Ronald, Ronald the man. What he had endured, what he had suffered. What had happened to the two of us. How a system had failed us. How Bobby Poole had victimized us. And not only us, but the seven other women that were raped that summer while Ronald was awaiting trial.

We ended up that meeting in each other's arms in the parking lot. We vowed nothing would ever come between us ever again. And it's not. For the next few years, Ronald and I began to form a relationship, a friendship, a trust in each other. Ronald became my teacher, my healer, the one person that could take me to a place where I could forgive Bobby Poole. Not because Bobby Poole deserved it, not because Bobby Poole asked me to forgive him, but because had I not forgiven him I would have been trapped in my own personal prison forever.

Ronald taught me that love and hate don't live in the same human heart. They can't coexist. That the only way that you can heal is to lay it down. I couldn't have done it without Ronald. He's been my teacher for the last 13, 14 years. We've written a book together. We travel together. Every conversation on the phone ends with I love you, I love you too. He is my best friend. So, at this point I'd like for you all to meet my friend, Ronald Cotton. [applause]

Ronald Cotton:
Hi, how is everybody today? It's a pleasure to be here. I'm kind of tired. I didn't get much sleep, but I decided I wanted to take the town and do a little karaoke last night, but I managed to do... Anyway, I'm Ronald Cotton and my story began on August 1, 1984. I had been out, me and my girlfriend and her family, in another part of North Carolina, Orange County. It was hot that morning, and I told them, "Just take me home." I took my shirt off, threw it on my shoulder and I said, "Well, I can't drive my car because the transmission's out." The only thing I had to travel was a bicycle. For me, it got me around where I needed to go and back.

She let me out, I kissed her. I proceeded to the apartment I was living in at the time. My mother's boyfriend was standing outside. He said, "Ron." I said, "Yeah." He said, "The cops are looking for you." I said, "For what?" He said, "For a rape." I said, "Man, I hadn't done nothing like that." He said, "Well, they came here, searched the apartment, took a pair of your shoes, your sister's shoes, and your mother's shoes." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah. Well, you ought to go down there and try to get this matter taken care of." So I said, "Well, I'm not riding no bicycle to no police department." [laughter]

Ronald:
I said, "Well, I'll just go over and ask the neighbor, can I borrow her car." I noticed she was outside sweeping her porch. I walked over and I said, "Excuse me, Patricia." She said, "Yeah." I said, "You remember that crime that took place in the community about two weeks ago?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, now they have me as a prime suspect in this trial, this case going on.
I'd like to know if I can borrow your car to go down and try to get this matter taken care of." She said, "Sure. Make sure you have my car back before three o'clock because I have to go to work." I said, "OK. Well, or else I'll get one of my sisters to drive for me." I had eight sisters and four brothers. I said, "Well, I'll just ask Tooty would she go."

I said, "Tooty, would come and go with me?" And she said, "What." And I said, "Well, you know the cops are looking for me for a crime I didn't commit. Therefore, I want you to drive the car as I read this paper and find out what's going on." So, we got in the car, headed to the police department. I said, "I'd like for you to make one stop for me." She said, "What?" I said, "Let's go over to my girlfriend's house and find out if she knows what's going on."

When we arrived there she came running to the car crying, "Ronnie, Ronnie, the cops are looking for you for a rape and I know you didn't do that." I said, "No baby, I didn't have to do anything like that. I'm going to the police department." She said, "I'm going to ride along." So she hopped in the car with us. We proceeded on to the police department.

As we arrived in the parking lot, looks up at the building, notice a bunch of officers looking out the window. They recognized me and they come running to the door. As I got ready to open the door the detective met me, identified himself. I told him who I were and he said, "Yeah, we know." I said, "Well, I heard you all have some serious charges against me that I did not commit. That's why I'm coming here, to find out what's going on." He said, "Sure, come upstairs."

So, we go upstairs in a room. He interrogated me, he offered me a cigarette, soft drink. I said, "Sure, give it here." I smoked a cigarette, accepted a drink. You see that in movies and on TV nowadays. So, I went ahead on and I told them where I was at, I thought. I didn't keep up with my weekends, partying. I loved to party. I partied every weekend, you know, going to the bars and clubs, and getting my groove on.

They swore up and down I was telling a lie. I said, "Officer, you're wrong. I did not commit this crime upon Ms. Thompson." He said, "Well, are these your shoes?" He presented an evidence bag, and I said, "Well, they look like my shoes, but they weren't in that condition." They had taken my shoes and cut them from the toe to heel, like they filleted them. I said, "No. My shoes wasn't like that." He said, "Well, you see this piece of foam cushion?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Well this was found in Ms. Thompson's apartment." I said, "Really? Well, if it did, they [inaudible 41:38] that shoe and put it there because I don't know Jennifer. I haven't been in her apartment. You have the wrong guy." They said, "No, Mr. Cotton. We have your ass." I said, "Well, whatever."

He said, "Well, you see this flashlight?" I said, "Yes." He said, "This is the flashlight he took and held in the other lady's face while you raped her." I said, "No. I had a flash like that, but it wasn't mine. It was a friend of mine." He said, "Well, we have your ass Mr. Cotton. You think you're mister big stuff going around town screwing white women, but we have your ass." I said, "Well, you can say what you want to say. I know what you're saying from what you're doing here." He said, "Officer, come and lock him up."
A uniformed officer comes in and takes me, fingerprint me, photograph me, handcuff me, put me in a cruiser and take me to the Alamance County Jail. Put me on a $150,000 bond. I'm sitting in my cell trying to figure out what's going on. What did I do to deserve such? As time went by, my parents had come to visit me, bringing me personal hygiene things that I needed. I go to court, try to get a bond reduction. The judge refused and jacked my bond up 100,000 on each account. So now, I'm setting in a $450,000 bond. I said, "Well, you know, you just set a millionaire bond for me. I can't make it. I'm a poor man." I was struggling, trying to survive.

I sit in jail until my attorneys come over. He told me, "Ron, I was out to lunch the other day. I ran into the district attorney. He said he has a plea bargain for you." I said, "What?" He said, "A life sentence." I said, "No, man. I'm not going for that. I was born at night, but not last night. You tell that district attorney that he got to get that judge and that jury together because, it was like, we going to war. I'm not tolerating, I'm not going to set up nothing like that. Which I wouldn't have set up no plea bargain anyway. I'm an innocent man."

I went to trial and got found guilty. The judge, he said, "Mr. Cotton, stand up. Do you have anything to say to the court?" I said, "Yes, your honor. Can I have your permission to sing this song?" I used to do a lot of writing, poems and whatnot. So, I composed a poem. I switched the words around to a gospel song and that's the song that I sung for the judge and the court, whoever ears that was opened to listen.

It was a poem titled "Until You Come Back." My girl, you know, she was out in the world. We had become to be engaged, but since this incident happened, there wasn't going to be no wedding. So, I was just expressing myself "Until she come into my life." But, I switched it and said until God came into my life, because that's what I needed. I needed His hand to see me through.

But the judge, he handed me down a life sentence that day. I went back to the county jail. The guys and ladies in there that knew me - or became to know me as I was in there for the year that I were - they said, "Cotton, what happened?" I said, "I was found guilty. The type of sentence you get - I received a life sentence."

"Well, you don't act like it." I was smiling. I was smiling to keep from crying because I was hurting inside. My family, my loved ones, I knew I was going down the river for a crime I didn't commit. What was I supposed to do, jump for joy?

No, not me. My hair grew so long, plaited it up. I didn't have no comb. And the only thing I had to use to comb my hair was with a fork that I used to eat my breakfast with.

I went back to court the very next day. The judge sentenced me to 54 years. I went back to jail. Called my family. There wasn't anything they could do. They gave their support and showed it. You never know but I said, well here we go.

I wrote a letter to the head jailer and I told him, "I've been locked up for a crime I did not commit. I've been tried, found guilty, been sentenced. I said next time I need to do is go on to the
penitentiary." I said, "Look if you don't get me out of this jail, I'm going to start tearing it apart." I meant that I was tense, frustrated. I got into a fight in jail from laying in there.

They tried to offer me a plea bargain for something I didn't do. And I said I can't take it no more. So, things were building up inside. So, the next morning the deputy sheriff comes to my cell. He said, "Cotton pack your stuff. You are going to prison."

I got dressed, grabbed my belongings, handcuffed, shackled, put in a special wagon and got on the interstate to the penitentiary at about 90 miles per hour. And on the radio someone was playing Michael Bolton, "Tell me how I'm going to live without you."

It was rough. I'll tell you.[laughter]

**Ronald:**
I started taking my hair lose as we was traveling down the highway with a fork that is, no comb. But, I managed to get it loose and as we arrived at the penitentiary I noticed the officer put his gun in a little box and I grabbed my belongings and took me inside, as the gate slid back.

And they rambled through my belongings looking for contraband and then gave me a set of sheets and clothing. I guess you call it a penitentiary uniform. So, I proceeded on and went to my dorm with another 21 other inmates. They assigned me a bunk.

I went in and made it up. The guys coming around, "What you in here for?" But, as I was walking, they were hollering "fresh meat, fresh meat." And I'm looking at them, fear I buried, but let them know, "Whatever." I went on and tried to get settled in. I was going through the process of becoming an inmate again.

I was finishing up my process and as I was going through the chow every day I was like a little string bean, couldn't grow no facial hair. And guys looking at me like, "You're a sexy guy. What's your name?"

I told them I don't play those games. So, they kept telling me, well, we're going to fatten you up. Put a pile of food on my plate. I knew what kind of games they were trying, but it wasn't going to work. So, they told me the guys in the dorm, "Cotton, whenever you get a job, don't go in the kitchen. The guys say they're going to rape you."

I said, well, "They can talk that talk." I said it's easier said, but as I finished my process, they offered me a job. And they said, "Where would you like to work? The sign plant or the kitchen?"

I said, "I want to go to the kitchen." I chose that job. They gave me my whites. I went to work at 4:00 in the morning. And I had to go in a little early to prepare the food for the people in the population.

And this guy was very muscular, from out of New York. I never knew his name and never cared to. I just wasn't going to play his game. One morning I went in and he came over to my table, put his plate of food and sat down. He looked at me, "What's up?"
I said, "You need to get up." So, I told him take his tray and go somewhere else. I wasn't playing those games. So, we exchanged a few words and we about had a confrontation. We got separated before we really got into it, so after that, I didn't have any more problems with him.

And by that time as time went on, I moved up in the kitchen to become the dietician in the kitchen. There was another guy named Kenneth Herman. He's been in like 10 years for rape and crime. He didn't call me by my name. He always called me Red, because of my skin complexion.

I said, "Well, my name is not Red. My name is Cotton." I said, "You can't call me by my name, let my name taste like crap in your mouth."

So he's been walking around the prison unit bumping his gums talking junk. I tried ignoring him. I get on the speed bag, mighty bag, working out my frustrations that had been building up during my duration in prison.

So, I decided I wanted to confront this guy and he tell me, get out of his face or he's going to kill me. So, I said, "You want to fight." And we fought. I broke his jaw. I went into segregation for 30 days and come out and apologized.

But, before that I recognized another inmate being escorted into the prison and I glanced up at him and I said he looks familiar. So, I go to my dorm. And I had the drawing of a composite sketch of the crime, the guy from Jennifer's. And I compared it with him and I saw some resemblance.

So, two days later I approached him out in the population. I said, "Excuse me, where are you from?"

He said, "Burlington."

I said, "I am, too. You kind of resemble the drawing, the sketch of a crime that they have out that I have sort of been the suspect of." I said, "You commit the crime?"

He said, "No," but this guy tells me that come back later apologize right in the front. He said Poole told me, confessed that you serving time for a crime he committed. So, that night right about 3:00, I gets up out of my bunk and I get my legal pad and go to the table.

I start writing my attorney, informing him what had been brought to my attention. And by then, Poole had been transferred to another unit. But, before he was transferred, my father came to visit me and I told my father, I said, "There's a guy on this camp committed the crime of which I'm in prison for." I said, "I want to kill him. He's going around bragging."

My father said, "Ron, you tell me you're innocent. I believe you are innocent. But, if you take this man's life you can be guilty this way. You are going to spend the rest of your life." I mean, I had made a weapon, like this mic here and I slept with it in my chest, holding my hand on it every night after I got off work took a shower and laid down on my bunk. I actually told this guy because he slept in the same dorm as I.
Ad when he walked by my bunk, I looked at him. I told him, "Man, when I get an opportunity you're mine."

And by thinking about what my father told me, he said just let his conscience eat him he will eventually confess. But, that wasn't good enough. He's in prison with life and 30 years while he pled guilty to other rapes. And I couldn't find it very easy to deal with, accepting him knowing that he's in there bragging about this and here I am an innocent man, and I'm suffering being away from my family when I shouldn't have been.

And I was telling my caseworker; she knows about the situation. The caseworker tells me well, it's not my problem. He said my job is to keep you here not to let you go. That's what they get paid for. So, eventually they shipped this guy out to another unit. I took that weapon and dropped it down an open drain in the bathroom and let it rattle until it hit the bottom.

I could have easily sold it for $30 or $40, ate many Moon Pies off of it, but it wasn't worth it. [laughs] They transferred me a year after to this next unit that this guy was on. He was always watching me from a distance. Prison guards getting us confused, calling me, him; and it irritate me very bad. I told them, "Look my name is not Poole. My name is Cotton."

So, that's what everybody called me, Cotton. But, when they did I always tell them 100%, polyester is my cousin. [laughter]

**Ronald:**
So they tried to put me in the same side of the prison this guy was on. And I went to the lieutenant and I said, "Look, lieutenant, this guy Poole over here in the school side. He was a ground maintenance worker. I said, he has been in prison here for a crime I didn't commit."

I said, "I heard that you all are going to try to transfer me over on that side." I said, "But, I'm informing you ahead of time that if you put me on that side, I'm not going to be responsible for what happens."

They said, "Well, what do you mean?"

I said, "The guy, he committed the crime. I'm serving his time. If I be put on the same side with him, it's not going to be a pretty picture that's being painted."

He listened and he said, "Well, I'll just keep you over there."

And by then, he was walking around the unit and I'm working out on the bags, trying to get this frustration and tension out of me. Hitting the bags with no gloves, hands bleeding. Guy that's standing around, "Cotton, your hand is bleeding." I didn't care, it's just that frustration and tension built up that I took out on the bag instead of taking it out on other inmates.

I got evidence to prove him, but I wasn't no bad guy. I wasn't a good guy either. I was just on the down low. I was like a time bomb walking around. If anybody lit it, I'd be on them like roaches on a meat skin. I'm sorry to say that, but that's just the way it was.
I just went head on, I was transferred to the Hornet County Unit, I stayed there a year. They took me to the classification committee and said, "Mr. Cotton, you've been recommended to be transferred to Tennessee." I said, "But what if I refuse to go?" "We're going to shackle you, put you on a plane, you're going anyway." So I thought about it. I said, "Well, I volunteered to accept that transfer."

I went to the Raleigh-Durham National Airport and was shackled around my waist and legs, and I looked up at the plane. It said Express One. I said, "Well, I guess I'm going one way." And so I get on the plane and that's where I went, the place in Tennessee for the last year. And then the OJ case came available. It wasn't available to me, but DNA came into existence.

So, I was walking by and noticed that they were talking about DNA to blood and it caught my eye and I went to my locker and got my legal note and started taking notes on it. So, I wrote my attorney and said, "Well, I had this done in my case." Wrote the Court of Appeals and mentioned it to them, and they said, "Well, we're going to grant this request and if the results come back saying anything different, that's where you're going to spend the rest of your life."

By then my family, they were constantly in contact. Everybody was waiting because it was just a waiting game after that. Any time you get convicted, in prison, it's nothing but a waiting game. Many, many years and you're somebody with nothing but tears running down your face. So, finally, they did the testing and my attorney wrote me and said, "Well, you're coming back to court."

The Warden came in his office that night. I went in and he said, "Mr. Cotton, you're going home in the morning. I'd like for you to tell me these prison guards who are bringing drugs in." I said, "Well, that's not my job. I'm not going to be your snitch." Even though I did know, and he's like, "That does happen." But, I wasn't going to spill the beans.

So, he got mad at me, told the officer to take him back to his dorm. So, I went back to my dorm. I was kind of excited because I had told him - I thought he was pulling my leg. I said, "Please don't pull my leg, because my leg is already long enough." [laughter]

Ronald:
And I go by I saw it. I had my own little business in prison. I had the canteen help guys working for me. Sending potato chips, soup, whatever you name. Candy bars, but I started that business for $5 and it grew. It don't take long, I couldn't depend on my family to support me. I was in prison without a life sentence, 54 years. And I figure I'm not going anywhere, I'll probably be an old man, so I've got to survive.

But the next morning, the prison guards came and called my name and said, "Pack your stuff, you're leaving." So, I started handing out radios, candy bars, potato chips... [laughter]

Ronald:
... out of money lists that people owed me. So, I spotted this one guy that I knew that didn't get no family support. I walked up to him, his name was Blair. I said, "Excuse me, Blair." I said, "Look, here's a list of people who owe me money." I said, "I'm going to leave it with you." I said,
"Collect if you can. If you don't, don't get in no trouble." He shook my hand, he said, "Thank you, Cotton, thank you."

And they shackle hand cuffed me, put me in a cruiser and down through Tennessee we went. And the Corrections Officer said, "Mr. Cotton, when was the last time you ate at McDonald's?" I said... So, you didn't know?[laughter]

Ronald:
So, anyway, he said, "We're going to let you eat lunch at McDonald's here." So, they took me out of the car, sitting at a table and asked me, "What number?" I said, "What number? Well, I was number five in the line up, but what number are you talking about?"[laughter]

Ronald:
And he said, "The meal." I said, "Well, just a cheeseburger, hamburger, fries would be good enough to me. I don't know the number." And so that's what they did, they went and brought my fries and burger and drink, I was sitting outside at the table. I was eating and I said, "That's pretty good." I said, "OK," so I wiped my mouth, got my hands real good and they got back in the car and took me down the interstate and took me to Alamance County Courthouse, they didn't know which one, so we were riding around like a donut[laughter].

Ronald:
Like you go to race a car, round and round. They said, "Which one?" I said, "I don't know." So, I noticed this officer standing along side the road. I said, "Ask him." So, they pulled over and said, "We have an inmate from the Prison Department come back for trial. We don't know which court to go to." And they directed me to the right one.

So, go inside and get my belongings out and all the news media vehicles were there outside. So, I'm standing back there in the waiting room, waiting, handcuffs on, kitchen clothes and the lady jailer was right there. And the lawyer said, "Well, you can take the handcuffs off of him now." She said, "No, he's still in Department of Corrections custody. I'm Alamance County." So, I'm looking at her. [laughter]

Ronald:
I'm ready to get these things off of me. But, she wouldn't so the judge, he comes out and goes back and said, "I'll give you a direct order to take those cuffs off of Mr. Cotton. He's not in Department of Corrections any longer." So, she took the handcuffs off and brought me some civilian clothes, a black pair of jeans and a burgundy shirt, which is hanging in my closet right today.[laughter]

Ronald:
And every time I look in that closet, it's a reminder. The first set of clothes you had. And I'm going to keep them forever and a day. But, I went into court, my attorneys and their family were there, as well as mine. And the D.A. and my attorney conversed with one another and the judge called the charges out and said, "Mr. Cotton, the charges against you have been dismissed. You're a free man, you can go home."
And everybody embraced one another, and crying and so after that was over, I walked back outside with my family walking behind me. My nephews carrying my belongings and I walked outside the courthouse, looked up into the sky, threw my arms up and said, "Lord, where do I go from here? I do not know." It's like a baby they tossed out into the world. I had to learn to crawl before I walked.

But, it was a good feeling, I went home, took me a good, hot shower, me and my sister and my nephew loaded up the car and went to Golden Corral. And I tell you, I ate like eating going out of style. [laughter]

**Ronald:**
I really did. But, ever since then, I've been married, have a daughter, she's 10, be 11 soon. And meeting Jennifer and her family, it's been a pleasure. It's just like we are all family, like Sisters Sledge said, We Are Family. That's the way it is. It's like when you're in school, you're around each other so much, you feel like you all become family, just in a different way. And that is my story, and I thank you all. [applause].

**Theresa:**
Does anyone have any questions that they're dying to ask these two remarkable people?

**Michele:**
Here's one of them.

**Man:**
I wanted to ask Mr. Cotton, his billing and his take on the first time that he met Jennifer at those places where she described. What were you thinking when you were going in there with the media for the first time?

**Ronald:**
Well, to me I was thinking, I said, "Well, I don't know what she is going to say. I don't know what I'm going to say. I'm going to just take it as it comes to me. And I saw that she was very nervous, and that she really wasn't sure. And I said, well I just feel that she's going to say the right thing.

I didn't go in there, I didn't have any retaliation against her by what so ever. And I just accepted what she had to say because I had forgiven her many, many years ago. Actually, my second year in prison I forgave Jennifer. I was sitting on my bunk, with my legs straddle, writing letters. A vision came over me, of a female and that day was when I prayed to the Lord to give me the strength, wisdom and knowledge, too.

I forgive Jennifer for what has happened. She's human. She's a lovely woman, a lovely family. And you know, you just can't go through life harboring grudges and holding, thinking about retaliation.
If I had to deal with a lot of people what I've done themselves, I've won't admitted to, I wouldn't be here before you right today. I would be still in prison. I would have committed another crime, that I did. The other I didn't.

**Woman:**
You told the story with such great detail. And concentrated so much on being able to identify your assailant. But, then it wasn't the right guy. Do you feel like you were pressured by the detectives to get the guy and again, I really heard [inaudible 01:03:16] point about I really wanted to do the right thing.

Do you feel like you got pressured?

**Jennifer:**
I don't really think I was pressured, necessarily. The pressure was probably mine. I think more than anything what happened was memory. And since that time I've been able to actually learn a lot about how human memory really works, as opposed to how we think it works.

What I realize was the first mistake that was made was that composite sketch. And although the composite sketch if you go online on our website, in the book you can see the composite sketch looks eerily like Bobby Pool. The problem was the Bobby Poole was not in that photo lineup. And we know now that when a witness or a victim does these composites, well the composite sketch which leads to the photo lineup. If the suspect is not in there, if the person is not in there, what we tend to do is to pick the next best person. We don't know we're doing that, but that's exactly what happened. Bobby Poole was not in that photographic lineup. Ronald Cotton was the closest resemblance to my memory.

And we know now that when a witness or a victim does these composites, well the composite sketch which leads to the photo lineup. If the suspect is not in there, if the person is not in there, what we tend to do is to pick the next best person. We don't know we're doing that, but that's exactly what happened. Bobby Poole was not in that photographic lineup. Ronald Cotton was the closest resemblance to my memory.

The problem was my memory now, the last visual I had is a composite sketch. By the time I went to the physical lineup my last visual I have, which is very subconscious that I'm drawing from, is a photo.

And unbeknownst to me, consciously I'm searching my memory bank. And instead of pulling my memory of my attacker I'm pulling the memory of that photo, which was Ronald Cotton. So, by the time I got to the trial, Ronald had become the rapist.

There were lots of mistakes that were made. They weren't done consciously. Ronald's photograph that I was looking at was taken in 1981. It was not a 1984 photograph. The reason for that was because in 1984, Ronald had a much thicker hair. And in 1981 he had a close cropped haircut. Therefore, he was mostly closely resembled my composite sketch as opposed to Ronald Cotton that day.

And so, the problem is memory and we now know really how memory works. It's not a videotape. The other problem is when I did the composite sketch, you don't compartmentalize facial features. Like if any of you sat down with an Identi-Kit and tried to put together the photo or picture of your mothers, and you have seen your mother's face a million times. You probably, I know you couldn't find her nose.
You couldn't. You couldn't find her eyes. You couldn't find her ears, her cheek, her lips, or any of those things. You might come up with the ears that kind of look like your mother's ears, but by the time you are finished that composite sketch, it's not your mom.

So, when that composite sketch went in the newspaper, it was not my rapist. It was a resemblance to my rapist. And we know composite sketches often lead to really bad suspects. Because now people are saying, oh, that looks like my cousin and I'm really ticked off at my cousin. And so we know these are some of the things that happen. It wasn't necessarily pressure. It was just the fallibility of memory.

**Woman:**
So, for both of you, what changes in the system are you suggesting as resolving this?

**Jennifer:**
One of the things that Ronald and I really try to talk about is first of all is the nature of the adversarial system. If you go into Canada people are appointed. They are not elected. So, they don't have the natural adversarial system as we do in the United States.

So, one of the things we really talk about as best practices. The sequential lineups versus simultaneous. Double blind testing. Audio video taping of all confessions and interrogations and lineups. The other thing we talk about is we need to demand post-conviction DNA. It's just absurd that we don't have it mandatory post-conviction DNA.

DNA tests, biological evidence tests, it needs to be done and there's not excuse not to. So, these are some of the things that we talk about. Oddly enough, North Carolina when Ronald was exonerated became very progressive in this movement. The detective who had become the captain and then the chief of police, automatically mandated his entire department to change over to best practices.

And his movement led to the entire state to mandate sweeping changes in our basic law enforcement training manuals. So, we became the second state behind New Jersey to mandate these changes because we know if there are best practices, wouldn't we want to use those?

And so it just became one of those things where everybody kind of sat back and said, well if it means we have guilty people going to prison and innocent people not going to prison doesn't it make sense to use these best practices?

But, there're only a couple of states that have mandated this. We have little spotty cities and departments that are doing these things, but states aren't taking this on and saying, this is got to be done.

So, what we try to illustrate through our own shared experience of the judicial system failing.

**Woman:**
Let's take one more question. If people can talk to...
Jennifer:
Yeah, we're going to be around. We're going to sign your books.

Man:
A question for you, Mr. Cotton. You are speaking to a group of lawyers and law students here. What is your sense about the effectiveness of your counsel? Is there anything that better lawyering could have done, especially at the trial level that might have changed the result from your perspective?

Ronald:
Yeah, there were certain issues too. The fact that he should have tapped on, because the way the district attorney will be presenting his case. There were issues that he should have spoke up for that he just didn't. He didn't respond.

But, he just didn't... there was one attorney. He really went at it because he told me from the beginning that we know you did not commit this crime but if they want you, they'll get you. So, that right there, right then and there told me a great deal about what was going on, which I kind of figured that out anyway.

I'm not no dummy. I just look like it, you know what I mean. [laughs]

But, it's just the way it was. Other attorneys later on, down the line, that said, if they had taken the case it wouldn't went the way that it did.

Things happen for a reason.

Theresa:
One more question.

Man:
We heard from Mr. Cotton how he forgave you. How have you forgiven you? Have you forgiven you?

Jennifer:
Well, that was a long process, to be honest with you. I think for me, it's just been a time issue. It's just been doing the work I'm doing, knowing that my story and Ron's story and our story can affect change. That helps me understand how and why this happened and what I'm supposed to do with it.

And because, I feel very blessed that I can do this. I feel so blessed that this is something that has been a part of my life. That I meet incredible people across the United States, that I get to sit at the table with exonerees and their families. These are blessings that I have received and so I feel like it's my responsibility to continue doing what I'm doing.

And accept the fact that I'm a human being and I made a human mistake. I didn't do anything malicious. I'm just human. And it's a human system and because it's a human system we're going
to be fallible. And if we're going to be fallible, for God's sake, let's put things into practice that
can insure that the best outcome in our legal system so we don't have Ronald Cottons
languishing and wasting their lives, screaming in the dark, while Bobby Pooles are walking on
our streets so that they can [inaudible]. So, to me, it's a blessing. Yes, I've forgiven myself,
[inaudible] and forgive myself. It's been a journey, a series of events that would help
me.[applause]