Thank you for allowing me to speak today, Your Honor. My name is [Annie], and I am the victim in this case.

I started trying to write this statement so many times over the last several days. It's been incredibly difficult. I struggled to find the right thread, the right point of entry, the right way to tell this story -- my story. That's ironic for a few reasons, not least of which is that I make my living as a writer. But also there's this: I've had over 30 years to figure out what I want to say today.

Of course, I never thought this day would come for the vast majority of those thirty-plus years. In fact, it wasn't until the summer of 2019 when I found myself talking to a detective of the Louisville Metro Police Department that I even allowed myself to entertain the possibility we'd ever be here one day. Even then, I was reluctant to hope. But the detective and his LMPD colleagues, together with the Commonwealth Attorney's office, handled this case with sensitivity, dedication and tremendous skill, and I am and always will be grateful to them for their efforts.

Still, I find it odd that I struggled so much to find the words to tell a story that no one else is more qualified to tell. Certainly no one is more familiar with it than I am. So why was it so hard for me to begin to tell it?

The fact is that I've never shied away from telling the story of how I was raped in my home by a stranger, whose name I never knew, on December 7, 1990. I'd moved into that apartment on Main Street just a few weeks before, and it was the first apartment I'd ever had on my own. It was sparsely furnished with the spare pieces and parts I could borrow from my employer, a children's theater company. I barely had a chair to sit in, or a pot to cook spaghetti in, but it was mine and I already loved it. I was 24 years old. After [the defendant] forced his way into my home and my body, where he had no right to be, I counted myself fortunate in one respect. I never once felt the shame and stigma that far too many rape survivors experience. I knew I'd done nothing wrong. I'd opened my door. I had every right to do that. Everything damaging, harmful and violent about that night came from him, was solely his responsibility. I had no reason to feel ashamed, and so I was open about my experience when others asked.

I even worked for a while as a volunteer rape crisis counselor after I left Louisville. I was the person the crisis center directors called in when they needed to teach new trainees how to listen actively and empathetically while traumatized survivors told them every excruciating detail of the sexual violence they'd experienced, because I was a safe resource to practice on. I could get through my story without breaking down. I still don't know why that is.

It's certainly not because I wasn't impacted by the defendant's crimes, which inflicted a great deal of physical and emotional pain on me for years to come. He physically restrained me, threatened to cut me, forcefully gagged me with my own scarf, raped and sodomized me and then, when I had the scarf in my hands, hesitating for only a second about whether I could actually strangle him and kill him to stop him from hurting me, he shoved his fist inside me, threatening to "rip out my womb." That's a direct quote. This stranger, to whom I'd never done wrong, believed he had the right to permanently disfigure and render me infertile, unable to have children.

The irony of that is that just three weeks later, while on a brief trip home to see my parents over Christmas, I discovered I was pregnant as a result of this rape, despite the medication I'd been given in the ER that night to prevent it from happening. That, too, is a direct impact of the crimes this defendant committed that night. He forced me into a situation where, at 24, broke and broken down, a pregnancy was forced on me as the result of his profound violence, his criminality, his evil.

So he'll be sentenced today to a handful of years for that violence. Meanwhile, I've served over thirty years. I actually added it up. It's 11,258 days. 16,211,520 minutes, since I began living in fear as my world began painfully contracting around me. There's another irony: I am both housebound, in many respects, and simultaneously afraid in my own home.

That's not to say that I've lived in misery all that time. There have been moments of which I am proud, moments of accomplishment, even moments of joy. The most singular joy of my life is my daughter, now just a little younger than I was when I was raped. Yet she's already experienced sexual violence at the hands of selfish, evil, and weak men.

And like my mother before me, I was powerless to stop it.

When I realized how difficult writing this statement was turning out to be, I did what I always do: I researched the topic, then I called [a dear friend of mine], who is the smartest woman I know. That conversation revealed something to me I'd never known.

[She] told me that when she and I first met in 1993, just a few years after [the defendant] raped me, she observed what she called "Amazon warrior energy" about me. She said she noticed the alarm system in my home, the large dog I owned, and the gun I kept beside my bed. "Why do you have a gun?" she asked. "Because I was raped," I said, "and that stuff is never going to happen again."

I didn't actually say "stuff." I used a different word, one I'm sure you can figure out from the context. (NB: Shit. I said "shit.")

She reminded me of that conversation and then she said, "I don't know if you understand how much your clarity and openness meant to the women around you. Because you were open about what had happened to you, and you carried no shame about it, you empowered every woman around you to feel the same. I can personally name at least six people that we knew then who specifically cited you as their inspiration for coming forward with stories of their own experiences with sexual violence, sometimes years after the fact."

I had no idea any of that was happening at the time. But I think about those women now, and I think about my daughter and her friends. I think about survivors of sexual violence who have claimed their own space and time to bravely tell their stories. So while this may be my personal impact statement, I'm not the only one impacted. Rape and sexual violence never simply affect the victim alone. It's a chain reaction of terror, powerlessness and fear that keeps expanding like the ripples after you throw a heavy stone into a pond.

The parties have agreed on a sentence recommendation for [the defendant] and he's accepted that as part of his plea, and I accept that. After today, he will begin serving his sentence, and I will do my best not to think of him again. My life can finally start again, after almost 31 years. This is my rape case, but it's not the last rape case the professionals in this courtroom will ever work on.

So I want to use my final moments here to respectfully urge this Court and everyone who plays a part in the criminal justice system to take sexual violence cases seriously and to treat its victims with respect. This is the worst crime you can live through. It leaves permanent scars. Worst of all, every time a rapist is sentenced leniently or evades prosecution altogether, it emboldens yet another rapist down the line while it simultaneously discourages their victims from coming forward. Please remember that. Our children are watching how you handle these cases and you are the ones responsible for seeing justice done. Even if it takes thirty years.

Thank you for your time.