

Woman details alleged assault
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Georgia Rule did not meet Lt. Howard Watson under the best of circumstances.

Accompanied by her young daughter, she was at the Beckley courthouse in [Oak Cliff](#). A computer check by a clerk showed that she had outstanding warrants for bad checks. And a deputy with Precinct 5 Constable Jaime Cortes' office had told her she needed to find someone to take care of her daughter because she was going to jail.

A short time later, Rule said, she was brought to Howard Watson, one of Cortes' top deputies. Watson, she said, let her go home. But she found out later that he expected something in return. And what he expected, she said, ultimately led to criminal charges against him.

Rule is one of two women who have accused Watson of threatening to arrest them on warrants if they did not "submit to sexual contact," according to indictments that were handed up earlier this year amid an investigation into suspicious activities in the offices of Cortes and Precinct 1 Constable Derick Evans.

In a recent interview, Rule gave the first detailed account of some of the allegations against Watson that led to his indictment on criminal charges earlier this year. She also described how [FBI](#) agents sought evidence against Watson for several months, the involvement of the Dallas County district attorney's office in her case and the fear she and her daughter have lived with since Watson was released from jail on a greatly reduced bond.

"Georgia Rule" is the pseudonym used to identify her in the indictment. The Dallas Morning News does not identify victims of sexual crimes.

Rule said she met Watson for the first time after another deputy had escorted her from a clerk's office in the Beckley courthouse to the Precinct 5 constable's office in the same building.

Watson, she said, first began asking her questions about the kinds of jobs she had and how she might be able to pay back the \$3,000 she owed. She said she told him that she was on disability and had a very limited income.

Then the line of questioning veered into the bizarre. Rule said that Watson started asking intimate questions, such as "does it hurt when you have sex?" He wanted to know whether she was married and whether she had oral sex.

Rule said she was taken aback by the questions. Her daughter was sitting a short distance away. Other deputies, she said, were nearby.

Watson, she said, wrote his phone number on the back of a card and handed it to her.

"He said, 'I'm going to call you ...' " she said.

True to his word, Rule said, "He called me in a couple of days, and said, 'What are you going to do about these warrants?' " She said he claimed that she was going to be picked up and that he had the warrants. And he asked if he could come over to her house.

"When he got to the apartment, and he came in, the first thing I asked, 'Well, where are the warrants?' " Rule said. "And he goes, 'They're in the trunk of my car. But I'm not going to let anybody arrest you.' "

Rule said Watson wanted her to perform oral sex and she complied. After he left the apartment, she noticed that he'd left his billfold behind. She said she caught up with him, and he again told her that he wasn't going to let anybody arrest her. And then he left.

Seeking help

Watson's last known attorney, Knox Fitzpatrick, said he no longer represents him and does not know who does. Court records do not list a current attorney for Watson.

Watson, who as a condition of his bond is allowed to live in Titus County in East Texas, could not be reached for comment.

After her encounter, Rule said, she didn't want to deal with Watson ever again and later contacted the district attorney's office to arrange a payment plan for what she owed on the checks.

Later, she went to Justice of the Peace [Luis Sepulveda](#) to tell him that she'd paid off what she owed and to make sure she no longer had to worry about any warrants. She said she also told Sepulveda about what Watson had done.

Sepulveda confirmed that Rule raised concerns about Watson with him. He said that he urged her to contact Dallas County Judge Jim Foster and the district attorney's office.

Sepulveda said he had concerns about Watson as well. He said his clerks saw that Watson was seeking to have warrants dismissed for attractive young women without going through the normal procedures. And he heard rumblings that people named in warrants "could do an exchange - you could do something for that ticket."

Rule said she was put in touch with former FBI agent Danny Defenbaugh, who investigated alleged wrongdoing in constable offices on behalf of Foster and county commissioners. Defenbaugh directed her to the FBI.

Rule said she agreed to cooperate with FBI agents investigating Watson's activities. Over a period of months, she said, she attempted to make contact with Watson, hoping that he would say something incriminating or suggest another sexual encounter, but nothing came of that.

An investigator with the district attorney's office also tried to contact Rule, but Rule said she avoided her. Rule said she'd been asked by an FBI agent not to let anyone else know of their investigation.

She said the FBI later told her she could talk with the DA's office. She said she was interviewed by the investigator about her allegations against Watson the day before he was indicted in late January.

Rule said she has not been asked to discuss her allegations against Watson with anyone in the DA's office since then.

She remains angry that she was not notified when Watson was released on a dramatically reduced bond - just weeks after a prosecutor had successfully argued to increase his bond because he posed a "substantial flight risk." Watson was released on March 23, a few days after his bond on charges ranging from sexual assault to bribery was reduced from \$281,000 to \$71,000.

Rule said the DA investigator promised her that Watson was not going to get out of jail, and that if he did she would personally call her. Instead, Rule said Defenbaugh found out Watson was free and told her.

Taking a toll

Rule said she and her daughter, now 7, are afraid that they may be retaliated against. She said she hasn't yet been able to move to another location so she would be harder to find, and she has asked a friend to stay with her for protection.

Rule said the stress had taken a toll. Rule said she has developed [high blood pressure](#) and suffers anxiety attacks and that her daughter also has developed physical symptoms since learning of Watson's release. Both she and her daughter have sought counseling. She talks regularly with Brenda McAfee, director of victim services at Victim Relief Ministries, a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting crime victims.

McAfee said the district attorney's office referred Rule to her organization and has tried to help Rule get assistance in other ways.

But she said she also understands Rule's concerns.

"I wish there was more we could do to calm her fears," she said. "But they are legitimate fears. That's normal. And she's probably going to feel that the system has failed her. The system has done a lot ... but nothing is perfect."

Victim rights are always a top priority and the district attorney's office has done everything it is supposed to do, said Jamiie Bradfield, the DA's spokeswoman.

The district attorney's office took the initiative to set up Rule with crime victims' assistance, Bradfield said. To date, she has received \$1,535 to move to a new residence and will receive additional relocation funds as she is eligible for up to \$2,000 in relocation assistance. Also as a result of the district attorney's efforts on her behalf, she is eligible for up to \$1,800 for rent.

The [Dallas County Sheriff's](#) Department uses a notification system specifically designed to provide victims information such as a defendant's release or court dates. Bradfield said that Rule apparently was not notified in this instance.

"The DA's office did not provide us with the victim's contact information," said Kim Leach, a spokeswoman for the sheriff. "If that information is provided to us ... we make notification."

Foster questioned why it took the DA's office so long to investigate the case.

He said the victim came to him last August alleging that Watson sexually assaulted her and that he immediately passed that information to the DA's public integrity unit.

Five months later, Watson was indicted by a grand jury.

Special prosecutor Ted Lyon, appointed two weeks ago, confirmed that he will be responsible for handling Watson's case.

"I'm going to be prosecuting him with great vigor," he said.