

Surveillance Cameras Capture Teen's Assault on Cruise Ship

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NBC 6's Willard Shepard reports on the assault of a teenager while on a cruise ship. A mom spoke out to send a warning.
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Teen Assaulted on a Cruise Ship

It was supposed to be a fun vacation with her two sons, but a mother of two says their fun trip changed abruptly when her youngest son was cornered and attacked.

"The vacation was a kind of celebration," said Tonya, who NBC 6 is only identifying by her first name. "It's been a devastation."

The family boarded the Royal Caribbean's Independence of the Seas out of Fort Lauderdale in 2015. And she says the trip was good until near the end of it.

"The two boys decided that they would want to stay out a little later," Tonya said.

Surveillance video on the ship shows the attack. In it, you can see two passengers entering the library, Arturo Martinez and Jason Lawson, both from Toledo, Ohio. The video shows the men cornering the teenager, whose identity we're protecting, before pinning him against the bookcase.

The victim's older brother appears distraught on the video, rushing out of the library. Another teen is seen running away. The video shows Martinez taking off his shirt while still having the boy cornered. Lawson can be seen keeping passengers out of the library.

The portion that shows what Tonya describes as the worst of the attack was edited out of the video provided to NBC 6 after it was entered into evidence in the case.

"He physically punched him, choked him, smothered his face in the pillow, pulled his clothes off, was on top of my son," Tonya said about the attack.

The boys reported the attack to security, who called Tonya. Broward Sheriff's Office deputies investigated when the ship arrived at Port Everglades.

A detective interviewed Martinez about what happened. In the interview with police he's heard saying, "A lot of trouble I'm in."

Martinez was sentenced to three years in prison for lewd and lascivious behavior with a child under 16. Lawson was given a two-year prison sentence for child abuse.

Both men are now in the custody of the Florida Department of Corrections.

Lawson was angry over what he said was an inappropriate comment the 13-year-old victim made to his daughter, according to Robert Marlove, the attorney who represented both men when they were first arrested.

"While the men got on the ship with no ill intent, alcohol was involved and poor judgment was exercised," Marlove said.

In a statement Royal Caribbean wrote, "We maintain a zero-tolerance policy toward any criminal activity on our ships. We immediately notified authorities about this 2015 incident and we worked closely to assist law enforcement during their investigation."

"It's an unenforceable situation where you have unlimited drinks – a floating city – crimes occur and there is no police," said Ken Carver, head of the International Cruise Victims Association.

Carver's daughter disappeared at sea and since losing her, he has been fighting for better security on board ships.

"A third of all the rapes on cruise ships are on minor, if you can believe that," Carver said quoting statistics from a 2013 cruise ship crime report prepared for Congress. Read the full report [here](#) (PDF).

Since 2016, cruise lines have been [required to report more crimes](#) committed on board to the FBI. In 2016-2017, [69 percent of crimes committed](#) on board were sex assaults.

Miami maritime attorney Brett Rivkind is the 13-year-old boy's attorney. He doubts cruise passengers get a full picture of risks on board cruise ships.

"There's been some suggestion that the reporting and the information is not completely accurate," Rivkind said.

Rivkind is representing the family in a lawsuit against Royal Caribbean.

In legal filings, attorneys for the cruise line said the ship's crew has no duty to monitor the cameras and that they are not responsible to warn passengers about a danger that is not foreseeable.

"A cruise line is not required to supervise its passengers at all times to ensure no harm befalls them," the court record reads.

The Cruise Lines International Association, a trade organization representing the various cruise lines, defends the industry's overall safety record saying that crime is rare on [cruise ships](#) and is a tiny fraction of corresponding crime rates on land.

Tonya says she wants people to be aware of what happened to them and questions what you see in promotions for the cruise lines.

"Definitely a false sense of security because you're given all these fun pictures and fun things to do that your kids can do all you see are people having fun, but there are no warnings that this can happen," she said.

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