

MAN CLEARED OF RAPE TELLS OF PRISON ORDEAL

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Sex charge man calls for change in law

A MAN cleared of raping and indecently assaulting a young girl has told of his ten-month prison ordeal while waiting for the case to come to court. Mark Butler, 31, of Withycombe Drive, Banbury, was held on remand accused of offences alleged to have happened more than five years ago. During that time he missed the birth of his daughter, was called a paedophile and had threats sent to him while he was in prison. Now he is calling for a change in the law which would mean defendants in sex cases were not named until the end of the trial. A jury of seven men and five women at Oxford Crown Court deliberated for almost four hours before returning verdicts of not guilty on two charges of indecent assault. Earlier in the hearing Mr Butler had been cleared of an allegation of rape on the direction of judge Francis Allen. Giving evidence through a video link at Oxford Crown Court last Thursday, the girl alleged Mr Butler had taken her into a church-like building near People's Park and indecently assaulted her and committed a more serious offence. On a later occasion she claimed he indecently assaulted her at Spiceball swimming pool. Asked why she had waited five years before revealing the alleged attacks, the girl told the court: I was scared my mum would have told me off and smacked me. Mr Butler told the jury: I did not indecently assault her or rape her and I have no idea why she made these allegations. I think she is talking rubbish. I didn't do anything like that. Tonia Chesterman, from Banbury, told the jury she had known Butler for 14 years and regarded him as a nice and happy man. She added: I have two children and I would trust him with anything. After the case Mr Butler said: Ten months is a long time in prison for something you haven't done. It is an experience I wouldn't like to go through again. He told how the support of family and friends helped him through the ordeal. He said: I missed the birth of my daughter Leah when I was in prison. The first time I saw her I cried. I was in the magistrates court a couple of weeks after she was born and my girlfriend, Debbie Lydiatt, brought her along. But they wouldn't let me hold her. I have a son, Kyle, who is 11. I only saw him three times in ten months. It was my first time in prison and I found it hard, but you have to be strong for yourself. Something inside you holds your tears in. You can't cry in front of other prisoners because they would think you were weak and take advantage. Mr Butler thinks the law should be changed so that a defendant is anonymous throughout a trial until the verdict is given. My girlfriend was shopping with her 12-year-old son, who bumped into one of my friends. They said that when you see Mark tell him from me that he s

going to get a good hiding . It is out of order to go to a young lad and say that. I lost quite a few of my friends as they read the story in the newspaper and believed it. The defendant s name shouldn t be printed until he or she is found guilty or not guilty. People think, I know that geezer I didn t know he was like that. His sister, Marie Bailey, of Withycombe Drive, Banbury, said: It will take all of us a long time to get over this. In prison he looked very ill, it was heartbreaking. At the trial it was an horrendous feeling, it made me feel absolutely sick. She said neighbours and friends had been 100 per cent behind us . They didn t believe he did it, she said. It kept us going, We had to be strong for him and never gave up. At every court appearance we were there, he needed someone.

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