

C.V. man acquitted of rape charges

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A 30-year-old Carmel Valley man said he's gotten his "life back" after a jury acquitted him last week of charges he sexually assaulted a woman inside a Carmel apartment — charges that could have landed him behind bars for a decade.

On February 5, Trafton Chandler was arrested by Carmel police after a 28-year-old Cayucos woman visiting Carmel with her girlfriends told police Chandler had tried to rape her in an apartment at San Carlos and Sixth.

After his arrest, Chandler was booked into Monterey County Jail, where he spent two days before posting 10 percent of the \$100,000 bond. Prosecutors charged him with oral copulation and digital penetration with an unconscious person and sexual battery.

But after a week-long trial in a Salinas courtroom that pitted his word against his accuser's, it took a jury only 45 minutes May 31 to acquit Chandler of the charges. Chandler, a general contractor who graduated from Carmel High School in 2000, said he feels vindicated.

"It feels like I got my life back," Chandler told The Pine Cone Tuesday. "If I had been [convicted] of these crimes, it would have put an end to everything I have worked for."

It started at a bar

On Feb. 4 at around midnight, Chandler and three of his friends met three women — including the alleged victim, Jane Doe, and her friend who lives in the apartment — at a Carmel bar. After visiting three other bars with the women, Chandler and his friends went to Doe’s friend’s apartment, where Chandler, who was intoxicated, decided to crash on the floor in a sleeping bag.

Sometime after 3 a.m., Chandler said he and Doe became intimate on a couch.

“They engaged in some sexual, consensual acts, but not sexual intercourse,” Chandler’s attorney, Tom Worthington, said.

At 6:15 a.m., when Chandler’s phone alarm went off, the tenant of the apartment — Doe’s friend — noticed Chandler on the sectional with Doe and said, “What are you doing on the couch with her? She’s engaged,” according to Worthington.

Doe then said “Yeah, I’m engaged. Did you rape me?” Chandler told The Pine Cone. “That was when I was like, ‘Oh no, what are you talking about?’”

The woman, who immediately became hysterical, grabbed a knife from the kitchen and tried to stab Chandler but was held back by one of his friends. She then called 911 and told a dispatcher Chandler “tried” to rape her.

Police interviewed Chandler, who was arrested. But Doe’s story — which included her contention she was unconscious when Chandler allegedly assaulted her — didn’t add up, according to Worthington.

Inconsistent statements

During her testimony in the courtroom, the woman said she woke up to feel “this pressure in the vaginal area,” Worthington said. “She essentially alleged attempted rape,” he said.

And Doe also claimed to be drunk, though a test the next morning showed she had no alcohol in her system, Worthington said. “Her testimony was inconsistent with the forensic evidence,” he said.

Friends of Chandler’s and Doe’s who were at the Carmel apartment the night of the alleged sexual assault also testified.

“Two girlfriends tried to support [Doe’s] version of things,” Worthington said. “But they were inconsistent with statements she made to police and the district attorney.”

For instance, Chandler testified that before he and Doe engaged in foreplay, Doe performed a striptease for him and his friends, taking her clothes off down to her bra and panties, — something Doe denied.

It was also revealed at the trial that Doe offered the men much more than a peep show. “She propositioned every one of the men there to engage in sexual activity,” according to Worthington, who added that one of Chandler’s four friends left the apartment shortly after Doe’s offer of sex, which the woman also refuted.

Chandler’s accuser also denied that panties taken from her that were tested for bodily fluids to help determine if she had been sexually assaulted were hers, according to Worthington.

The woman’s motive for claiming Chandler assaulted her was simple, Worthington said: She needed an alibi to prevent her fiancé from finding out she cheated on him. “She had had to have a story for her boyfriend,” he said.

Chandler came up with his own tale during his initial interview with police officers about the incident, something he soon regretted. “At first I told them nothing happened,” he said. “This is where I think I went real wrong with everything — not being honest with them right off the bat and telling them what happened.”

But Chandler also blames the Monterey County District Attorney’s Office for not hearing his side of the story. “I don’t feel like my side of the story ever got out to the prosecution until trial,” he said.

Monterey County Deputy District Attorney Mike Breeden declined to comment on the specifics of the case, saying “We respect the jury’s decision.”

Chandler said news of his arrest, which was published in *The Pine Cone*, stunned his friends and clients. But they stood by him during the past few months, which Chandler described as being “emotional, stressful and scary.”

“All my friends stuck with me, and my customers as well,” he said. “They knew it wasn’t true.”

Though Worthington said he’s represented numerous clients in which a jury found there was reasonable doubt they committed a crime, he said Chandler wasn’t one of them.

“This is not a case of reasonable doubt,” he said. “This is a case of an innocent man falsely accused. Every single one of the jurors looked him in the eye and shook his hand” after the verdict.

“That was huge,” Chandler said.

While his personal and work life is back in full swing, Chandler said he’s walked away from the experience with a couple of lessons. “I’ve learned, No. 1, that nothing good happens past 12,” he said. “I shouldn’t have been staying over at that girl’s house. I didn’t know anything about her or her friends. I should have left when I had the chance.”