My Experience in Jail: A Birthday Arrest and Its Lasting Impact

On my birthday, I was arrested in a way that felt both surreal and deeply unjust. What should have been a day of celebration turned into a nightmare when I was pulled over and profiled based on my name and the appearance of my car. The officer claimed he was returning with a tint meter, but instead came back with a drug dog. The dog alerted, and officers found THC gummies in my vehicle. In a state where cannabis is legal in many forms elsewhere, possessing these edibles was treated as a serious felony. The experience highlighted how arbitrary and outdated our drug laws remain, punishing people for something that is increasingly accepted and safely regulated in other places.

The hours that followed were dehumanizing. I was placed in a cold holding cell from approximately 9:30 p.m. until around 4 a.m. The fluorescent lights never dimmed, and the metal bench offered no comfort. I had my first court hearing that same day and was approved for bond, yet authorities refused to release me promptly. Instead, I endured the facility's daily lockdown policy — from noon until whenever staff decided to end it, often stretching late into the evening. This arbitrary control over basic movement added layers of helplessness and frustration to an already traumatic situation. I was finally released on the third day, but the psychological toll had already taken root.

As a woman who has survived childhood molestation, an abusive relationship, rape, and sexual assault, being arrested and detained proved to be one of the most traumatic events of my life. The loss of autonomy, the cold isolation, and the systemic indifference triggered deep feelings of powerlessness that surpassed my previous traumas. The experience left me with severe PTSD, forcing me to seek trauma-focused therapy to process what had happened. What should have been a minor legal matter became a profound violation of my sense of safety and dignity.

Today, I channel that pain into purpose by volunteering with a non-profit organization advocating for criminal justice reform and safe, legal cannabis access in Georgia. I attend legislative sessions at the State Capitol, speaking with representatives about the human cost of outdated laws and the need for better re-entry support for those impacted by the system. However, progress feels like an uphill battle. Many of our elected officials appear more influenced by donations from big medical, pharmaceutical, and alcohol industries than by the stories of constituents like me who have suffered under prohibition.

My time in jail was a harsh reminder of how broken our systems can be, but it also ignited a fire for change. I refuse to let that trauma define me. Instead, I use it as motivation to push for reform, protect my peace, and build a better future — one where no one else has to experience what I did simply for possessing a plant that is legal and safe in so many other places. My story is not just one of survival, but of resilience and advocacy.