

Breaking the Silence

by Sabrina Sadler, Delta Eta-Cal. State, Sacramento



photo by Juliana Ljubicavljivic, Delta Eta-Cal State, Sacramento

After finishing my junior year in college, I went out to celebrate with my best friend. A night out on the town quickly changed when my friends had to report me missing. After several hours, I was found in an empty parking lot, naked from the waist down, my face beaten and I had become a victim of rape.

My story is the typical case you hear on the news, but in reality, most sexual assaults are not like this. Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows and trusts, it occurs in a familiar space and usually there are no physical bruises. Sexual assault is a crime and it often goes unreported.

Soon after I was assaulted, I turned to the Internet for information where I learned an alarming statistic. One in five women will be sexually assaulted during college. Reading this statistic, I knew I needed to share my story to bring awareness. I am a sorority woman and this statistic made me think about the fifth of my chapter who has been or will be affected by sexual assault. Sexual assault is a topic our society rarely talks about but it happens every day.

The first time I publicly told my story was on my college campus at the “Take Back the Night” event. The room was packed with my peers, administration

How to Help a Friend:

Things to say to help a friend affected by sexual assault:

- I believe you
- You are not alone
- It's not your fault
- Help your friend find appropriate resources

“Asking for help does not mean we are weak; it means we are human.” —anonymous

and community members. After sharing my story, it was the first time I truly understood the importance of breaking the silence. A young woman came up to me after I had spoke, tears rolling down her face and all she said was "Thank you." To this day, I don't know who she was, but I knew in that moment I had to continue sharing my story with both men and women across the world.

This was a horrific incident that happened to me, but I believe it happened for a reason. This incident gave me a new passion in life. I share my story because I see how it connects people, it lets victims know they are not alone and it's not their fault. It empowers bystanders to step up to prevent sexual violence. As sisters, as friends, as women, we need to support each other.

Through my work and speaking out, I have learned that each one of us know someone affected by sexual assault. That person may have not told us directly, but I promise you we all know someone.

We need to take a stand together, no longer wait until it affects another sister, friend, daughter or son. Sexual assault has already affected too many women, men, and children. Join me and let's take a STAND today.

On April 1, 2013, nearly six years after my sexual assault, I launched my website telling my story to the world. It was one of the scariest things I have ever done. To learn more, visit www.sabrinasadler.com or www.onestudent.org.

Let's break the silence. •

Sabrina Sadler, Delta Eta-Cal State, Sacramento, hopes to bring awareness, breakdown myths, educate and help each community understand their role in preventing violence. To learn more, visit SabrinaSadler.com or email her at sabrina@sabrinasadler.com.

MY SELF-CARE

Each victim of sexual assault will find their own personal path to recovery. There were many times I felt like giving up, but I made it my priority to stay true to myself and continue to do the things I love.

Here are a few things that have helped me transform into a survivor:

Running

Running is one the things I refused to give up after my assault. Running relieves my stress, clears my mind and makes me feel on top of the world.

Music

Music is my escape and lets me feel my emotions without judgments.

The beach

The breeze from the ocean soothes my soul and allows me to breathe free of stress and harm.

Speaking

Speaking allows me to connect to other survivors and empower bystanders to get involved.

Counseling

Counseling sessions challenged me to face my inner emotions.

MY RESOURCES

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN.ORG)
National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
- Local Rape Crisis (<http://centers.rainn.org/>)
- NotAlone.gov
- OneStudent.org
- College Resources: Sexual Assault Services, Health Services or Counseling Services
- Love is Respect 866-331-9474
Text "campus" to 22522
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233