



Being sexually assaulted as a young teen and as a young adult still in college has hindered my ability to trust the people in my life. I second guess good intentions, I put other peoples needs before my own, I put my own pleasure and desires on the backburner, and I carry the weight of my trauma in addition to those around me. I never reported my experiences. In fact, I didn't even know that what I experienced was a sexual assault the first time it happened to me. The second time, when I did reach out for help from my family, I was greeted with "well why didn't you fight back?" and "no, we won't come pick you up. You have a savings account for a reason, use it to rent a car or buy a different flight home." I felt defeated, unheard, and broken. I still question my sexuality, my intimacy, and have had to completely change the way I view and experience sex. It no longer requires emotions or affection for it to be a pleasurable experience. I've had to completely distance myself from the emotional piece of sex in order for it to be an experience I enjoy anymore. And that isn't okay, but I don't know what else to do because of the way my experiences have affected me. It's the only way I've learned to cope in a moment of intimacy, and I've become content with that.

I grew up being educated on sex, what a penis and a vagina are, how heterosexual sex works, oral, hand stuff. You know, the basics when it comes to your normal sex education. However, I was not taught consent. I was not taught pleasure, masturbation, or what an orgasm was. My dad was huge into pornography - we used to search for the playboy bunny on the cover of the magazines in my dads subscription every month. I remember scrolling

through his pictures on his phone one day as a child and coming across a woman giving a man a blowjob. I remember my dad listening to podcasts about sex and pornography – that’s actually how my brother was introduced to sex at the ripe age of 7. I’m the oldest person in my family to have yet to have a child (I’m 22). I was put on birth control by my parents at the age of 15 and my dad runs a pornography page on several different social media platforms. I have been exposed to sex, pornography, and have been talked to about condoms and birth control for as long as I can remember. And yet I was still the victim of a sexual assault, twice.

My first kiss, you know, the one you are always told to remember, the one you hear about and prepare for your entire adolescence until happens. That was the first time I was assaulted, and I didn’t even know it until much later, let alone how it would affect me in future relationships, friendships, and eventually be a deciding factor in my career choice. It was the unhealthiest relationship I’d ever been in or experienced. I believe I was 13, but honestly I don’t remember exactly as I’ve worked very hard to block that part of my life out. I don’t even remember the year, the date, or what grade I was in. But there are details I do remember, very vividly. We talked for at least a month leading up to the assault. We texted daily, had gone on a few dates, and I felt like I finally found a person I could trust. Little did I know I was being manipulated, controlled, and emotionally (and soon to be physically) abused within that short timeframe. I remember going to the movies and having to lie to my parents about who I was with. We

sat in the back row, furthest from everyone else in the theater, and had to enter and leave separately. In order for me to even hold his hand (a big deal for a 13-year-old girl) I had to promise no one would ever know. I do not remember if I ever actually told anyone about this piece until much later in my life. This went on for several weeks – the lies, sneaking around, and grooming behaviors he used to win me over. I still don't know how I fell for it. The only times we were ever together were in secret and required me to be dishonest with those around me. When he kissed me, we were in his home – his bedroom, specifically. I remember his front door, the staircase, and the moving company that came and went so quickly, clearing out the oversized box TV he had in his room. The house was now empty besides the two of us, despite my mom having made it a requirement with his mom (I'm still surprised to this day he allowed his mom to even know I'd be there). On the walk to his home, he made me walk on the opposite side of the street, talking exclusively through text, at one point giving me different directions than he took so if anyone saw us they wouldn't know we were going to the same place. As soon as I arrived, he took me straight to his bedroom, kissed me, and threw me onto his bed. He said, "That was your first kiss, right?" knowing damn well it was. "Yes," I said. He continued to kiss me, his breath and tongue tasting like Everything Pizza, the lingering stench of tomato sauce and onions sticking to his lips as he continued to kiss me and my body. He threw me onto the bed, sticking his hands into my pants and under my thong – one he specifically requested I wear. He expected sex, from the 13-year-old middle school girl who had never kissed anyone before.

He actually had asked for both oral and vaginal sex prior to my coming over. I said no to both requests, but he didn't care. He made me touch his erect penis until I cried. He eventually left the room, giving me a moment of privacy – probably to eat another onion covered slice of pizza. I texted a friend – the only person other than my mom who knew where I was. He walked in on me sending the text, took my phone, read the message, and threw it at the wall. I think that text saved me from whatever else he has planned for that evening, because now he knew someone else knew where I was and who I was with. He screamed at me until I left the room crying, but when his mom finally came home he found me and apologized, convincing me to come back into his room until my mom picked me up. I didn't know that what happened wasn't okay. I didn't know this was abnormal. I didn't know about consent. I thought “this is what it's like” and I went with it. I grew up dating and expecting this type of behavior from men when it came to relationships, and boy was I terrified of sex and whatever that was expected to look like.

I still thank God for my friend that day. We are estranged now, and I don't think she even knows what a saving grace it was for me to have been able to send her that text. Someday's I'd like to reach out and thank her, but others I decide to leave this part of my life alone.

The second time I was assaulted I was a 22 years old college student, engaged to my amazing fiancé, and was interning at a resource center

for victims of the same crime that happened to me. This time I was in a different state, in an unfamiliar town, in a bar with who I thought was my best friend and her boyfriend, and was assaulted by him, a 21 year old military police officer. I had no one to ask for help, no transportation, and none of my belongings. Before I go into the details of what happened to me, I'd like to say this - I knew something was wrong. I knew with my entire body that something bad was going to happen. I felt it in my stomach. I remember turning to my friend at the start of the night and asking "if someone tries to hurt me tonight, or if someone tries to assault me, will your boyfriend protect me?" She said yes. I shouldn't have believed her.

The night started off rough, us having left Colorado Springs where we were staying (and where all of my belongings remained) to head to Denver for a night of drinking and celebrating as it was my birthday weekend. Her and her boyfriend had gotten into a fight at one of the first bars we stopped. He blamed her for me not having a good time while visiting, making her cry, and leaving me feeling like a terrible friend. We eventually left that bar and headed to a few others in downtown Denver, CO after they made up, and I decided to put my butthurt feelings behind me and embrace what I hoped was going to be a good night ahead of us. I only had maybe 3 drinks over the course of two hours, my friend having about 4 or 5, and her boyfriend having probably double that. He was a big guy, short, but buff, weighing at least 200 pounds at a height of 5 foot 8 inches. We were all dancing in a club, her and I taking turns dancing with

him, each other, and the other crowd of people nearby us. That's when it happened. He went from your typical (yet hilarious) gym-class line dancing with me in the middle of that bar dance floor, to a full fist of my hair in his one hand, his other wrapped so strongly around my waste it left a bruise, and his penis pressed so tightly against my ass that I couldn't move. He pushed me over, dry humped my ass, and then pulled my head back, kissed my neck, swung me around, and grabbed my ass - still while holding me so tightly I couldn't flee if I tried. I remember laughing, to this day I don't know why. I think it was a defense mechanism, the uncomfortable laugh of a woman when a man does something to violate their boundaries. When his grip loosened and my face was close enough to his for him to hear me, I said to him "you need to check on your girlfriend and see if she is fine with everything you just did to me." That's when we realized she left. I found her in the bathroom stall, sobbing at her boyfriend's behavior. I told her over and over again that what he did was not okay, that I did not ask for it, and that I would never have done this to her by choice (that I had done this to her, I thought. Even though this wasn't my fault). At this time, he came into the bathroom screaming for her. I then became in charge of consoling him, giving him water, and making sure he was okay. He eventually was kicked out of the bar for his behavior, and we found him laying on the sidewalk outside being fed water by a female bouncer from another bar. I ordered an uber, and it then became my responsibility to not only get my friend back to our hotel, but also get her abusive boyfriend back as well. While we waited for our ride, he grabbed her, then me, and screamed in our faces. I had

bruises for a week from his grip. We finally got into the uber, my friend sat in front, and I was stuck in the backseat with the man who assaulted me in the bar. He attempted to stick his hand in my pants during this car ride. The only way to protect myself from further harm was to hold the hand of my assaulter, smile, and tell him how wonderful he was to have gotten into the vehicle with us. I was stuck sleeping in the same room as this man, with the door shut, trapped. I have never been more afraid in my life. At some point, I think around 3am, my friend had stormed into the room I was stuck with him in and physically attacked him. My friend is about 5'4" and 120 pounds, and didn't stand a chance. A fight broke out and the hotel room fell victim to their wrath. I recall vividly an empty tequila bottle being thrown at my friend's head, and their screams radiating off of the walls. A noise complaint was filed by a fellow hotel guest and we were asked to leave that morning. I hadn't gotten any sleep. At 7am my friend promptly grabbed me out of the bed I was too physically scared to move from in the last several hours since their fight broke out. She said we were leaving. The immense feeling of relief I had is indescribable – finally, I would be free of this monster I thought. But boy was I wrong. After several hours of his tears, her cries, and his complete and utter manipulation, we were still in the hotel. He convinced her to stay with him, and she had convinced him to apologize to me, even though I did not, under any circumstances, want to see or hear from this man again. He approached me in the hallway in front of the elevator full of people and stated "I'm sorry for my behavior, it's goes entirely against my character and it's not who I am. However, if you weren't dancing like such



a little whore, none of this would have ever happened to you.” I responded with a single word, “Okay.” Standing there stone cold, staring into his eyes in utter disbelief and shock. He became enraged. He charged at me, got nose to nose with me, and screamed with spit and immense anger – in front of an elevator full of onlookers. I turned to my friend and asked to leave, not giving him any satisfaction of having broke me. I eventually convinced my friend to leave Denver and head back to the springs, as my camera, computer, and all my belongings which were necessary and valuable to me were in this mans home nearly 3 hours away. He refused to get into the car for the drive home, and for that I am eternally grateful. I eventually got my belongings and was left at the airport a day before my flight departed home, having not eaten or slept in over 24 hours. I was stranded in a city where I had no one, having just been assaulted, with no sleep, and having lost my best friend. I’m still recovering from this experience; it’s been less than a year and some days are harder than others. I do not tell you these stories for your sympathy or to talk about how bad I’ve had it – surely some people have had it worse. But I am telling you my story, my experience, so you can understand. I’ve chosen to channel my trauma and use as a way to help others. I became a sexual assault advocate. I fight for those who have been in situations similar to mine. I am the support for others I wish I had when I was younger. I am here to educate, inspire, and prove that I am no longer a victim, but a survivor.