

May 13, 2017

MY PERSONAL MISSION TO COMBAT SEXUAL ASSAULTS ON CAMPUS

THANK YOU, DR. KAPLAN. AND THANK YOU TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN FOR THIS WONDERFUL HONOR. I AM DEEPLY HUMBLLED TO BE RECEIVING THIS HONORARY DEGREE ALONG WITH SUCH DISTINGUISHED HONOREES –

- MR. (JAY) WALKER,
- AMBASSADOR AND
- MR. (LOU) TAGLIATELA, JR..

PLEASE ACCEPT MY SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS. I AM ALSO GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT MY WORK HERE AT U.N.H.

AS SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW, I AM A RAPE SURVIVOR. IT WAS AN EVENT THAT CHANGED ME FOREVER, BECAUSE MY ATTACKER DID MORE THAN BRUTALIZE ME THAT AFTERNOON IN FORT WORTH – HE STOLE A PART OF MY LIFE. NEARLY 35 YEARS LATER, I CAN STILL PLAY THE MOVIE IN MY MIND, MOMENT BY MOMENT. I CAN EVEN HEAR THE SOUND TRACK, WITH THE CHIRPING OF BIRDS IN THE DISTANCE.

IT WASN'T ONLY THE ATTACK THAT CHANGED ME. IT WAS ALSO THE BEHAVIOR OF POLICE OFFICERS AND MEDICAL PERSONNEL WHO CLEARLY HAD NO TRAINING IN HOW TO DEAL WITH RAPE VICTIMS – WHO HAD NO SENSE AT ALL OF HOW DEVASTATED THEY CAN BE. I CAME TO REALIZE AT A TIME WHEN RAPE WAS RARELY REPORTED, MUCH LESS OPENLY DISCUSSED, THAT WHAT WAS MISSING WAS ANY SENSE OF EMPATHY OR COMPASSION.

AND SO I HAVE MADE IT MY MISSION EVER SINCE THAT DAY TO TRY TO CHANGE A CULTURE OF INDIFFERENCE AND EVEN TOLERANCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT TO A CULTURE BASED ON EMPATHY AND COMPASSION.

MY WORK HAS FOCUSED ON YOUNG PEOPLE, SINCE THIS IS A LESSON THAT MUST BE ACQUIRED EARLY IN LIFE. BUT AS WE'VE GONE FORWARD, I'VE LEARNED SOMETHING ELSE: IT IS NOT JUST SEXUAL ASSAULTS THAT WE MUST DEAL WITH, BUT OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE LIKE HARASSMENT, HAZING AND BULLYING.

THEY, TOO, ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNFEELING CULTURE. AND THEY, TOO, MUST BE

COUNTER-ACTED BY A CULTURE OF EMPATHY AND
COMPASSION.

I SUSPECT THAT THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS
AUDIENCE WHO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M TALKING
ABOUT. STUDIES SHOW THAT ONE IN FOUR WOMEN
BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 32 HAVE BEEN
ASSAULTED IN SOME WAY.

I WAS PROUD TO BRING THE JENSEN PROJECT TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN. AND I HAVE BEEN
INSPIRED BY THE RESPONSE.

DR. KAPLAN WAS A STRONG BACKER FROM THE
START. FACULTY MEMBERS ARE NOW COMING ON BOARD
AS THEIR STUDENTS HAVE URGED THEM TO PARTICIPATE.

AND THE STUDENTS WHO JOINED US HAVE BEEN JUST AWESOME AS WE DEVELOPED PROGRAMS TO PREVENT ABUSE, BULLYING AND VIOLENCE.

I'M ESPECIALLY PROUD OF THE **STAND UP AND SPEAK OUT** PROGRAM, BECAUSE IT IS ONLY WHEN WE LEARN TO TALK OPENLY AND HONESTLY ABOUT THESE ISSUES THAT WE CAN CHANGE THE CULTURE.

THERE WERE TIMES WHEN MORE MEN THAN WOMEN WERE TAKING PART, WHICH IS TRULY ENCOURAGING. AND I WAS TOUCHED WHEN ONE YOUNG WOMAN WHO TOOK PART IN OUR DISCUSSIONS REACHED OUT TO ME AFTERWARD AND TOLD ME THAT I WAS A *MAMA BEAR*. I'D

NEVER THOUGHT OF MYSELF THAT WAY, BUT NOW I WEAR THE TITLE PROUDLY.

THE PROJECT WE'RE BUILDING HERE AT U.N.H. IS ONE THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO ANY CAMPUS IN THE NATION – OR THE WORLD FOR THAT MATTER – BECAUSE THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF INSPIRATION, COURAGE AND COMPASSION ARE UNIVERSAL.

THERE IS CLEARLY A LONG WAY TO GO. BUT IF WE CAN REACH ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE, IT *WILL* BE THE START OF A MOVEMENT.

WHEN THAT HAPPENS, DR. KAPLAN AND EVERYONE HERE AT U.N.H. WILL BE ABLE TO LOOK BACK PROUDLY AND SAY, *WE WERE THERE AT THE BEGINNING.*

AS YOU LEAVE THIS UNIVERSITY AND ITS
WONDERFUL PROGRAMS I WOULD LIKE TO ASK THAT YOU
PAY IT FORWARD AND REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF
INCLUDING COMPASSION AND EMPATHY IN YOUR LIVES.
IT'S A SMALL GESTURE WITH A BIG IMPACT, AND ONE THAT
WILL MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF AS WELL
AS EVERYONE AROUND YOU.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY, AND MY
WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE GRADUATES
AND THEIR FAMILIES. IT HAS BEEN MY HONOR TO JOIN
YOU ON THIS WONDERFUL DAY.

Janet Jensen is the founder of The Jensen Project (www.thejensenproject.com), which is committed to curbing harassment, hazing, bullying and sexual abuse among young people.