

# The healing journey between victim and survivor



Grace Badik is the Jesuit Volunteer for Street Roots. Her work directly supports Street Roots vendors

BY GRACE BADIK  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

What I am about to share is unfortunately not a new or unique story. It is among millions and millions of stories, told and untold, by survivors of sexual assault, abuse, and harassment. That very fact fills me with indignation, not just as a person who is part of that number, but also as a person who knows far too many survivors.

Once I started sharing the story of my violation, it was as if I was given entry to an exclusive club. Story after story of victimization surfaced from women and men alike. I couldn't take it. What I had so naively understood to be something that sometimes happened – and definitely not to people I knew or to myself – suddenly stared at me in the face like a 20-ton gorilla. Because the simple and unequivocal fact is that I am a survivor of sexual assault, now part of an unfortunate epidemic.

I attended an all-girls Catholic high school that prides itself on empowering young women to be "bold, brilliant, blessed and beautiful" as well as instilling the idea that "one girl can change the world." Taught by a female majority faculty and run by those ever problem-causing American nuns, we read empowered female authors in our English classes, learned of those strong, global women leaders past and present in social studies, and held fundraisers to help empower girls like us in other countries. We – the students – knew that we could take on the all-male high schools in the area academically and joked that a girl attended our school to become a doctor, and the other all-girls school to marry one. Despite the emphasis on women empowerment, the history of men persisted in our history classes, (unless you took Contemporary Women's History as an elective), and in our English classes, we read short stories authored by women of sexual assault, abuse, and rape. The message seemed to be mixed: go out and be an empowered woman, but be cautious too, because it's still a man's world.

This piece is not about the mixed messages of my all-girls high school or of society for that matter; smarter people can articulate those messages much better than myself. This piece is about my story of

violation and the new reality created for me because of that experience.

It took me weeks to understand what exactly happened to me on a study trip to Paris. It took me months to understand the impact and change that had occurred to me as a result. Eventually, I came to understand the depth and width of my trauma and how my world had changed. I scrutinized every male relationship and became leery of making new ones. I came to recognize there were certain things out of my control, such as flashbacks and triggers. I had to learn to be gentle with myself especially as I began to unpack the trauma. I had to relearn to love myself, to not blame myself for action or inaction. The mantra of "I did nothing wrong. I did the best I could" keeps me afloat when the triggers and flashbacks become too much to handle.

But as I began to unpack the trauma, I started feeling trapped within its layers. It is hard to accept my reality as a survivor because I don't necessarily accept my reality as victim. I am a victim and a survivor of what? Yet, there is a part of me that does not want to claim either label because I don't want to be part of those awful statistics. I was not sexually assaulted in the way that it is officially defined and yet it was more than just sexual harassment. After the action took place, I knew something not right had occurred. The French professor had crossed a line, but I couldn't understand the line or lines that had been crossed. As a 20-year-old alumna from a high school bent on empowering women, the idea that I had been preyed upon and then violated was too much for me to comprehend. I never thought I would be one of those women who would allow herself to ignore warning signs until it was too late. I wonder how many people are in a similar situation? Like me, they play the game of "Well, it could have been worse..." I was preyed upon and being groomed for a fate probably much worse than I did experience. I stopped it before anymore harm could happen. I should celebrate that and the fact that I prevented others from the same confusing and harming situation.

One in six women in the United States have been sexually assaulted, according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National

Network. One in six. The number may even be higher. I live in a house of eight people, six of us are female, and I know that two of the six females, including myself, have experiences with sexual assault.

I am at a loss for words not because the numbers are so high and I know too many survivors, but because we fail to do anything about it. Silence has become an ally because survivors have been taught that speaking up and speaking out brings more pain, more questions, and more confusion. It seems that it takes an

incident like the shooting by Elliot Rodgers and the subsequent #YesAllWomen campaign to provide a space for survivors of sexual assault to speak. I am glad the conversation is happening, and I am hopeful that good will come from it. But, like

so many social media trends, I see it as a conversation starter and not a finisher.

What appears to be a simple solution of just stopping sexual assault unfortunately is not one. What is simple is how we choose to talk about it among friends, among family, among community—not as some taboo, not through victim blaming—but as an epidemic, as an injustice that needs to be stopped.

I am not claiming to be completely through all the muck and the mire. I continue to grapple, to make sense of my victim/survivor label every day. Yet, I talk about my violation because it is an essential part of my healing journey. For me, talking about it takes power away from my perpetrator and gives it back to me. Many things changed in that instance, but what didn't was my ability to speak. I know far too many people who feel they cannot speak up or speak out about what happened to them. I am not claiming to be the voice for all survivors or victims. But, this piece is for them – those that live with the veil of silence.

**But as I began to unpack the trauma, I started feeling trapped within its layers. It is hard to accept my reality as a survivor because I don't necessarily accept my reality as victim.**



PHC  
NORTHWEST  
*Beyond Limitations™*

**PAID TRAINING  
FOR PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES!**

5312 NE 148th Ave.  
Portland, OR 97230

**REQUIREMENTS:**

- ✓ Pass a drug test
- ✓ Must be at least 18
- ✓ Must be able to provide documentation of a disability
- ✓ Fluency in English
- ✓ Clean background check

**QUESTIONS?**

Please call (503) 261-1266  
or (800) 874-7917

email: [dcherry@phcnw.com](mailto:dcherry@phcnw.com)



... to the  
health care you  
know and trust.

Working in partnership with providers, community health centers and social service agencies to serve people on the Oregon Health Plan, Health Share is building a more accessible and coordinated care system throughout the Tri County area.

503-416-8090 | [www.healthshareoregon.org](http://www.healthshareoregon.org)



Together we are

**health  
share**

Health Share of Oregon

*Vendors are regular contributors to Street Roots' content, as columnists, poets and artists. Look for your favorite vendor's writings in each edition of the paper.*

211 info ★

**2-1-1**™

Get Connected. Get Answers.