

BRITTNEY

FINDING PURPOSE

Date of incident: June 23, 2014

When I was seventeen I was raped by my then-boyfriend. Honestly, before he did it I hadn't known how sex worked. It sounds silly now, so many years later, but I just didn't understand the mechanics of having sex. My heart breaks thinking about my seventeen year-old self being so harshly and so abruptly robbed of my innocence.

I hadn't been taught about sex, so it should come as no surprise that I hadn't learned about concepts such as consent or coercion. I didn't know how to report it or even explain what was wrong with what had happened to me. So I didn't tell anyone and I suffered in silence.

For years, this moment defined me. I carried guilt and shame. I blamed myself and this took me to very dark places mentally and emotionally.

I felt broken inside and looking back, I recognize the dark cloud that hung over me during that time.

It took years, but I began processing my assault and seeking help. I talked to a trusted friend about it, then to family, then to medical professionals, and more. I felt empowered and was able to recover. I even reported this attack and others I had experienced. I realized that what happened was not my fault, and that it never would be.

I used to let my rape define me, but now, I let it fuel me. My rape defines my life only because I want to use my experiences to help others. Using this moment to fuel who I have become has helped me work in this important cause. I have found purpose as I have healed from my assault.

Because I have healed from my assault, I have started a nonprofit which prevents sexual assault and helps mitigate the harmful effects of assault that survivors may feel. I have advocated for sexual assault prevention and survivor support on national and international levels. I have worked with organizations ranging from local to international to help support survivors. I have conducted nationwide studies to help influence policymakers. I have written research papers which find that sexual assault is preventable. I plan to do so much more and continue using my assault for good.

I can live with the fact that I have been sexually assaulted. I have healed. What I can't live with is myself if I know there is something I can do to prevent this from happening to others, but I choose to do nothing. I will help others. This is my purpose.

