

Man Boasts of Sexual Assault, Later Inaugurated 45th President of United States

By Tara Haelle, Contributor (January 20, 2017)

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Eighteen years ago, while I was taking the number 9 subway train home from Midtown Manhattan to 121st and Amsterdam, a man “grabbed my pussy.” That is, while I was locked into the rush hour crowd, unable to move and with my arms around a large box I was carrying, a man reached under that box to stick his hand through my sundress into my vagina to fondle it. I tried to wiggle away, but I couldn’t actually get away until the next stop, when I darted for the doors as soon as I could and then sat down to cry with the shame washing over me. I was “lucky”—though it’s telling that I use that word—because I haven’t been raped. But I have been violated, intimately touched without consent, that time and others.

I never imagined that nearly two decades later, that subway experience would be the part of my history that dominates my thoughts on my birthday. But since my birthday is also inauguration day, I have a lot of company with other women, and men, trying to push away the memories of sexual assault that intrude upon them when they see the face or hear the voice of the president-elect, a man who is [on tape describing](#), in his own words, sexually assaulting women. Too many who heard that story remembered his boast that he could do whatever he wanted—grab women “by the pussy”—but they missed the rest of his quote, which was more explicit about what he said he did to women:

“I did try and fuck her. She was married... I moved on her like a bitch, but I couldn’t get there. And she was married. Then all of a sudden I see her, she’s not got the big phony tits and everything... I’ve got to use some Tic Tacs, just in case I start kissing her. You know I’m automatically attracted to beautiful. I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.”

He never apologized. He never showed remorse. He never acknowledged that “grabbing them by the pussy” would be sexual assault.

It will be a long four years for millions of sexual assault survivors who must reckon with the fact that someone just like their attacker will now lead the country. His image will hang in the classrooms of our children, showing our boys and girls what consequences await those who violate another person’s body, what (doesn’t) happen when they tell someone.

Shauna M., a 41-year-old graduate student in California, was once one of those girls sitting in a classroom with the president’s image on the wall, and it was the boy she liked at school who held her down when she was 13 years old and took her virginity without her consent. Six months before that, “a different boy held me by the hair and tried to

force his penis, unsuccessfully, into my mouth while the other boys there laughed and the girls stood there in open-mouthed shock,” she told me. She never reported either incident to anyone in authority, and she has a lot of company: Every 98 seconds, [another person](#) is sexually assaulted in the U.S., but less than a third of rapes are reported to the police. Only [6 out of every 1,000 rapists](#) will ever see the inside of a prison cell.

A cutout of President-elect Donald Trump wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat is seen at a souvenir shop in the airport terminal at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia, December 22, 2016, ahead of the Christmas holiday. (Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images)



Shauna’s assaults led her down a self-destructive and promiscuous path that took years of therapy to recover from. The president-elect is not a trigger for her today, but she has thought about and talked about her assaults more since his ascension, and she worries about how much progress he will reverse in the fight to end sexual violence.

“I think he is normalizing sexism and rape culture, and we can’t afford to let that become the norm,” she said. She hopes the strong online presence of survivors coming out and telling their stories

will raise more awareness about the issue and show other survivors that recovery is possible. “Recovery from the mental and emotional damage that assault causes is painful, difficult and takes time,” she said.

And the presence of a sexual assaulter on the news every day, making decisions that affect every American, can damage some of the progress survivors make.

“When I watched the [Summer Zervos press conference](#), I was shaking,” another survivor, Rebecca, a nurse and mother in New Jersey, told me. She has been assaulted several times but has been married for years now and moved on from that pain—until it returned. “The details she included...the persistent passive-aggressive moving about the room, herding behavior, the non-consensual kissing...every detail was like a drop of ice water down my back and it felt like a panic attack,” she said. “I was raped by a man who tried to use his wealth to impress me. When that failed, he tried alcohol—which I refused—and when that failed, he bullied me, whined and manipulated, isolated me, persistently touched me and eventually threatened me, and then pinned me down in his son’s bedroom, on his bed, and raped me.”

It happened 14 years ago, but it felt like “last night” while she was watching the Zervos press conference, she said. “I can’t look at Trump’s face without seeing a rapist, without thinking about my rape.”

While only the Access Hollywood comments were caught on tape, other credible accusations were reported throughout the campaign—too many, from too many diverse sources, to dismiss, despite Trump’s denials. (See below.) And they’re costly. The man who claims he will trim down the national budget has already done more than his share to add to the public health burden of sexual assault. And in fact, one of the items on the [chopping block](#)

[of his budget](#) is funding for the Violence Against Women Act, which actually [saves the U.S.](#) an estimated net \$16.4 billion a year.

Rape is the costliest crime for both individuals and the nation, [according to](#) the Minnesota Department of Public Health and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The average cost of being a rape victim is \$110,000, which adds up to \$127 billion in the U.S. each year. That's because every year, [321,500 Americans](#) age 12 and older are sexually assaulted or raped. According to MDPH, "Annually, victims pay about \$44 billion of the \$57 billion in expenses for traditional crimes of violence—murder, rape, robbery, assault and abuse and neglect. Employers pay out almost \$5 billion (primarily in health insurance bills), and the government—and taxpayers—bear the remaining \$8 billion through lost tax revenues and Medicare and Medicaid payments."

Considering that many of these costs are mental health treatment and loss of productivity, the president-elect's ubiquity may actually be continuing to add to public health costs because of those who must relive their past when they see him.

"When his accusers were getting a lot of coverage and there seemed to be a new one every day, I felt like I lived through every assault again and again," Rebecca said. Her advice for others today is to "surround yourself with women who understand you, fight for others in order to strengthen yourself, and heal others to heal yourself."

In order to work toward that healing, Shauna recommends not repressing what you feel after a sexual assault.

"My advice is to let yourself feel all of your feelings—the anger, the sadness, the grief, the betrayal, all of it. It hurts and it sucks but the only way out is through," she said. "And always remember that this is not your shame to bear. You did nothing wrong, none of it was your fault."

But it is the fault of half the electorate that a man who remorselessly boasted of sexual assault was today inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States, sending the message that nothing stands in the way of a sexual predator when others do not fight back against rape culture. The subtext of his slogan might as well have been, "Make America Rape Again."

"I worked in night clubs and bars after college and had my breasts, my ass, my hair, my face and my pussy grabbed by customers," Rebecca said. "I learned to identify the men who were most likely to get out of hand, the men who think they have a right over a woman's body. At the time it just seemed like a workplace hazard but now that I am older, that I am a mother, I am angry. I am filled with rage thinking of men like Trump pawing at me, and it sickens me to think that other men will now laugh it off as presidential behavior."

Below is a list of credible sexual assault accusations against the President-elect. The Trump transition team did not respond to requests for comment. Shauna's reminder to survivors is relevant: "This is not our shame to bear, it is our attackers." Trump has denied any wrongdoing.

- [Jessica Leeds](#) said Trump fondled her breasts and tried to get his hand under her skirt during a flight. "He was like an octopus. His hands were everywhere," she said.
- [Temple Taggart McDowell](#) said Trump kissed her on the lips on two different occasions without her consent, one time in his office.
- [Rachel Crooks](#) was an employee in Trump's building who met him on an elevator. He shook her hand, then would not let go as he drew her in and kissed her mouth and cheek. "I was so upset that he thought I was so insignificant that he could do that," she said.
- [Kristin Anderson](#) told the Washington Post that Trump moved his hand under her skirt and touched her vagina while sitting next to her.
- [Natasha Stoyanoff](#), a journalist for People Magazine, described an encounter with Trump at Mar-a-Lago: "We walked into that room alone, and Trump shut the door behind us. I turned around, and within seconds, he was pushing me against the wall,

and forcing his tongue down my throat. Now, I'm a tall, strapping girl who grew up wrestling two giant brothers. I even once sparred with Mike Tyson. It takes a lot to push me. But Trump is much bigger—a looming figure—and he was fast, taking me by surprise, and throwing me off balance. I was stunned. And I was grateful when Trump's longtime butler burst into the room a minute later, as I tried to unpin myself.”

- [Mindy McGillivray](#) described her experience at Mar-a-Lago: “All of a sudden I felt a grab, a little nudge. I think it’s Ken’s camera bag, that was my first instinct. I turn around and there’s Donald. He sort of looked away quickly. I quickly turned back, facing Ray Charles, and I’m stunned.”
- [Cassandra Searles](#), a contestant at one of his pageants, said, “He probably doesn’t want me telling the story about that time he continually grabbed my ass and invited me to his hotel room.”
- In fact, Trump allegedly [used his pageants](#) as a way to view and touch the naked bodies of teenagers, minors: “He just came strolling right in,” Dixon said. “There was no second to put a robe on or any sort of clothing or anything. Some girls were topless. Others girls were naked. Our first introduction to him was when we were at the dress rehearsal and half-naked changing into our bikinis.”
- [Jill Harth](#) filed a lawsuit in 1997 against Trump which alleged the following: “After Trump business associates left, the defendant [Trump] over the plaintiff’s objections forcibly prevented plaintiff from leaving and forcibly removed plaintiff to a bedroom, whereupon defendant [Trump] subjected plaintiff to defendant’s unwanted sexual advances, which included touching of plaintiff’s private parts in an act constituting attempted “rape.” Trump forcefully removed [Harth] from public areas of Mar-A-Lago in Florida and forced [her] into a bedroom belonging to defendant’s daughter Ivanka, wherein [Trump] forcibly kissed, fondled, and restrained [her] from leaving, against [her] will and despite her protests.”

My book, [The Informed Parent](#), with co-author [Emily Willingham](#), is [now available](#). Find me on [Twitter here](#).

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