

The voicemails you're about to hear contain intense and sometimes emotionally challenging material. Listeners are encouraged to attend to their own wellbeing in the service of engaging bravely and honestly with these stories. Voices have been pitched and identifiers removed in order to protect the speaker.

DAKOTA: Welcome to The Left Ear podcast. Before we begin, I wonder if you would be willing to listen from your heart. Can you take what you know and believe and represent and gently set it aside? Can you be a neutral and safe place for these voices to be heard? When you listen to a poem, you don't listen with logic. You listen with your entire being. You let it find its place in you. Here, I wonder if you can attempt poetic listening. To the listener. thank you for being here. To the speaker. we hear you. We witness you.

SPEAKER 1: I'm 35 years old and people say, a boyfriend can't rape you. However, um, I was with someone, well roughly four years ago, who got very, very drunk, very, very mean and um, okay. Definitely a hurt me. I said no, and he responded with, I just want to hurt you more. And you know, without saying I had tearing and was bleeding and uh, he said it didn't count cause he was my boyfriend. But no matter what I say, it absolutely does count and um, I wish people would speak up more. Um, thank you so much. Goodbye.

SPEAKER 2: I know I haven't endured nearly as much as many of women and girls, probably younger than I have, but in the very small town of Alabama where I live, I have been exposed to, um, men and boys younger and older than me, um, call me out because that's things that I wear or just simply because of the fact that I'm a female. Um, I just feel very targeted and sometimes I do take route to different and just to not pass them. And I don't feel like that's fair because boys don't do that. Boys don't have to do that. And I know that's not nearly as much as what a lot of other people have to go through every day mine is not everyday mine is not physical. Mine is just things being called out at me. That made me feel uncomfortable, but it still affects me and I still feel like I'm being looked down just because I'm a girl. Thank you.

SPEAKER 3: My father was sexually assaulted me when I was a child, when he was alive, no one pressed charges and now he's dead and my family just wants to tell happy stories about him and they act like I'm wrong for being angry. I don't think anyone cares about how much that hurts me. I'm alive and he's dead and they still side with him.

SPEAKER 4: When I was 19, I got raped in the bathroom bar. There was this guy who just led me to the men's bathroom and then I didn't know what was happening. And the next thing I know, the next day I was just bleeding embarrassed in the, in my room and my friend just told me not to cry about it. I still haven't told anyone what really happened. This is the first time.

SPEAKER 5: When I was growing up, my twin sister and I were both sexually abused for years by our grandpa, but it took me years to say anything. Um, the only reason I said anything was because I went through a complete downward spiral and I wrote a note, left it under my pillow with the anticipation to leave home and my mom walked in and found it as I was putting it under my pillow. Um, she never once doubted me. And for a while I thought my sister hated me for telling her, but I'm so grateful that I did because my grandpa who sexually abused us was getting ready to go and visit and potentially move closer to my nieces and, or sorry cousins. And um, I never looked at it that way until we went to court. And I am forever grateful that I did say something because I can't even imagine how many people I helped or if I could have potentially stopped him from doing that to my little cousins.

DAKOTA: Thank you for listening. Thank you for your time. And to the speaker, thank you for your bravery. We hear you. We see you. It's hard to not feel responsible for saving the world after hearing these stories, but just by listening with your heart, you saved someone even just a little bit.

Thank you for listening. We'll be back each Monday with more stories. If you or someone you know has a story similar to these, you can find help at the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-675-HOPE. That's 1-800-675-4673. Or visit thelleftear.com, or the link in this episode's show notes for resources. The Left Ear was created by Dakota Johnson and produced by Spoke Media.