

DAKOTA: In September of 2018 I was asked by Global Citizen to speak at the Central Park Festival on behalf of the She is Equal campaign. It was a global initiative to bring awareness and reform to women's healthcare and put a spotlight on the magnitude of harassment and assault women and girls experience around the world.

*It is 2018 and the rights and the dignity of women and girls are under attack as much now as they always have been. For too long. Women and girls in every corner of the world have faced extreme violence and sexual harassment on a daily basis. For too long, women and girls have struggled to receive safe and reliable reproductive health care. Women and girls, and especially those restricted by their socioeconomic means, too often have little to no power to decide whether when or how many times they become pregnant. Over 800 women and girls die every day because they don't have access to reliable contraceptives and basic maternity services. That's 800 deaths that should and could be prevented every single day.*

Something struck me as I was on my way to New York preparing my speech. I didn't feel comfortable speaking on behalf of the people who had endured these experiences. I wanted to hear from them. I didn't want to speak. I wanted to listen. So I got a phone number linked to a voicemail box. I presented the phone number on stage and I asked women and girls around the world to call me and tell me their stories. I promise that I would get their voices heard.

Within 30 minutes of releasing this phone number, I received 8,000 voicemails and no, not all of them were legit and not all of them were women. Some people were calling to say hi and see what this was about. A lot of hang-ups, a lot of interesting comments, but then there were the real ones and there were many.

What I found listening to these messages was an unbelievable level of honesty and humanity. The temperature changed. Something about having no one on the other end of the phone to judge, diagnose, guide, criticized, or pacify, created a space where these women could just speak. There was a noticeable freedom and urgency in their voices because of the bravery and the honesty in these voicemails. I wondered if there was a way to allow the listeners to be just as brave and honest.

Your left ear is the ear that is closest to your heart. I want to imagine that just by thinking of your left ear, you automatically, maybe subconsciously, slightly dismantle your armor. I want to imagine that you can then lean in with an awake candor. In this podcast you will hear compilations of the voicemails I received. The voices have been pitched and identifiers removed in order to protect the individual. Other than that, these are real stories from real people around the world. Please allow yourself some time to absorb the forthcoming information as it can feel quite intense, but it is important that you are here.

Thank you for being here. And on behalf of the callers and of all the people in the world who have not had the opportunity to speak. Thank you.

*Thank you*

*Thank you*

*Thank you very much for listening.*

*Thanks.*

*Thank you.*