

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 was five. She was 15. She told me we were playing a game and she told me if I told anybody else about the game, my mom and dad would die. This continued for years until she finally moved out. So when I finally came forward at the age of 16 I was called a liar or told that a woman can't rape a woman. I was told that they were serious accusations that could ruin her life. I never heard. Are you okay? How does that make you feel? I've never heard had nobody say I believed you except my mother. I never had nobody else say, well, I stand with you. It was always, it ruined her life, this can ruin her life. Are you sure you want to tell people about this? This could ruin her reputation, but nobody cared about my feelings. Nobody cared about what I went through and the years of therapy I still have to go through because of what she did to me, nobody cares about what she was [inaudible] on me. Nobody cares when she was choking me for years. Because we shared a room for years and nobody knew. But I'm no longer silent. Never again.

SPEAKER 2: Uh, so when I was 16 I had a boyfriend who was 20 and I went over to his house, the club there. And I fell asleep and woke up to him on top of me and we hadn't ever had sex before. And I told him to stop and he wouldn't. So then I started having a panic attack, like what did I do? And he finally stopped. But the next day I basically went home. I've never told my parents. I told a select few friends, I take this as statutory rape. I got pregnant and I had a miscarriage, but it, it's okay because I have a severe anxiety disorder anyway, but this hurts. Thank you.

SPEAKER 3: I was raped when I was 14, uh, hanging out with a older girlfriend of mine who went to visit her boyfriend and somebody there, um, is who did it. The worst part of it is I didn't tell anyone besides the one male best friend of mine who then ran into the same person who had raped me and confronted him about it until they were actually fighting, uh, physically fighting. And then the person who raped me shot my best friend and he died.

SPEAKER 4: Hi. Originally, I'm from Cameroon where right now there is a genocide going on ladies, children, girls. They're being raped by the soldiers and people are being killed on random basis. People have escaped from their homes. We have lots of refugees in Nigeria and neighboring countries. People are displaced from their homes. Houses are being burned by it's military. And we don't, we looking for every opportunity for somebody to speak out for us. Our families are displaced. Our youth are being killed, everyone is just being killed at random by the soldiers that are meant to protect the citizens and I really appreciate it. Opportunities for you to speak up on that behalf. I will be glad for you to cry out so we can have help regarding this genocide that is going on in Cameroon. We have a president that has been in power for 36 years and it's still going on and doesn't care about the people that people have been marginalized. The people of Cameroon have been marginalized for so many years and they crying out for their independence because of how they've been treated and how they are being killed at the moment. We need your help. We really need your voice at the moment. We need somebody to speak for us. Our girls are being raped by the soldiers. They're being killed. They'd be in ditches everything is just chaos at the moment. I really need you to speak out for us. So we really need the help that we can get at this point. Thank you so much, thank you thank you for this opportunity.

SPEAKER 5: Hi Dakota. My name is — . This, um, October actually marks four years since my rape in college. Um, I did come forward, but I was met with a lot of backlash and a lot of, uh, people not believing me, which is okay. You know, whatever it happens, but that's not okay anymore. Um, I pursued a case with the police. It was dropped because there was a rape kit that was done improperly. And I pursued it with my college and I filed a complaint with OCR. And just this last year I found out that the college is willing to settle and changed their sexual assault policies. And that's a huge step around here. Very close minded and in general. And a lot of girls came forward after I did. So I'm very happy with what I did and um, I began to make a difference. And it's unfortunate that a lot of women don't have these circumstances to come forward and it's amazing that you're wanting to make these changes as well. So thank you so much. Um, let's make voices heard together.

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 theleftear.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.