

# Speaking out empowers women

By Tessa Castor  
Staff reporter

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following are excerpts from interviews of four women on Southwestern College's campus. Those interviewed include three students and one staff member. The interviewees were given the option to withhold their names, with one choosing to do so.

If you have a story you would like to share, you may email the reporter.

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**Q: How old were you when the assault took place?**

**Bobi Muldrow, payroll and benefits administrator:** "I was about 25."

**Jenni Warren, music theatre freshman:** "I was abused the first seven years of my life, from the time I was born to when I was seven, close to eight. It happened numerous times."

**Respondent 3:** "I was 16 years old."

**Respondent 4:** "Second and third grade."

**Q: How did you know the assaulter?**

**Muldrow:** "I had seen him before, but I didn't know him."

**Warren:** "I did know my attacker. It was my own birth father."

**3:** "It was a friend I had met. I was on a cruise, and I had only known him for a few days."

**4:** "Teacher."

**Q: Were you able to tell someone at the time? Did it help?**

**Muldrow:** "I told my roommate. She was a deputy with the sheriff's department, but I also told her not to tell anyone."

**Warren:** "I told my mom about a month after the last incident. The last incident was the biggest for me, and I kind of just went into a shell for about a month and it finally just came out one day. I had told her, and as soon as I told her, she put in action and got my brother and I away and started filing for divorce and custody."

**3:** "No. I didn't tell anyone for a few days."

**4:** "No."

**Q: What made you feel powerless to report?**

**Muldrow:** "The fear of people's reactions. I had been the party girl and I would have probably slept with him had things been different. So, I was afraid it would blow up. I was living in a really small town."

**Warren:** "I think children don't understand as much as an adult or even a teen would understand, so being the age that I was, my mind was still being shaped and

I didn't understand any of it. I don't know if it was feeling powerless or numb – I didn't know if it was normal. I didn't know if it was okay. That was what I knew at the time. It plays a big part in how a child's mind develops, and it still has affected me today."

**3:** "I was intoxicated when it happened. I knew my parents would be really mad. I didn't know how much of that they would focus on. I didn't have proof, and I knew it'd just be my word against his. I didn't even know his last name, so I didn't even know how to do anything about it."

**4:** "This happened to all of us in the class. None of us realized it was inappropriate. We felt weird about it, but we didn't realize it was inappropriate until we were older."

**Q: What is it that gives you the courage to talk about it today?**

**Muldrow:** "Having been through 40 years."

**Warren:** "I have always wanted to use my experience and my past as a way to help other people, and knowing that no matter who it affects, no matter who is assaulted, it does not define who you are. I have some great achievements, I have won a full scholarship to this school, I have won an international singing competition for teens, I've done some amazing things – and yet, if I were to not ever tell someone, they probably would never suspect that I was abused the first seven years of my life. I want to show that no matter what you go through, it's not a limit. If anything, it should help you to get stronger."

**3:** "I think it's been something that's been in the back of my mind with the whole Me Too movement and so many women coming forward about their experiences. It's not something I've really shared. I just felt like it didn't happen to very many people before, so being able to hear it is common has helped me to feel more empowered to talk about it."

**4:** "When I was a senior in high school, my friend and I were talking about elementary school, and we ended up bringing this topic up. The two of us realized we weren't the only ones, and we just talked to all of the girls who were in that class. For me, knowing that all of us experienced it and that he no longer is a teacher. We did a lot of background searches on him and can't find him anywhere."

**Q: Are you working towards healing now? How?**

**Muldrow:** "There were things that happened before this, too. My father had been sexually abusive to the girls in my family from when we were babies to teenagers, so I have been healing from that all my life. I went to counseling when I found myself doing more crying than smiling. Counseling was important. I did several group counseling as well. I didn't want to dwell in it, I didn't want to live in it. I wanted to get over it. Telling people one-on-one, quietly helped. When people are in the middle of a crisis, I can at least let them know someone else has been there and survived."

**Warren:** "Yes, I still am. I started my healing process a long time ago. I've taken counseling. No matter how much progress I have now, I'm still working. There are still effects that I'm going through, and I don't think it ever really stops. I don't think I'll ever be 100 percent just happy, better, like it never happened. But, in a way, I'm glad because I'm always striving to overcome it, to get better, to help others."

**3:** "I think it's a process every day. I think I'm in a much better place than I was whenever it happened. It will be five years in March. It's something I think about all the time and it still affects me a lot."

**4:** "I wouldn't say actively or due to this particular incident, but it's taken time."

**Q: Do you feel comfortable telling me about the circumstances?**

**Muldrow:** "I had been out at a

bar with some friends. I worked at a hotel and I had an apartment at the hotel, and I went to the bar and my friends dropped me off at home. I had met this guy at the bar – I never talked to him, but I knew his face. They dropped me off at home, and I had just taken off my coat. I didn't even turn on the light, and there was a knock. I figured it was one of the girls, that I had forgotten something in the car. I went and opened the door, and he pushed in, he pushed me down on the floor, he started pulling off my pants, and there was nothing I could do. I didn't even think of screaming. When he was done he got up and left. I did see him one more time when I went to the same bar. I saw him, and my roommate was there, and I said, 'There he is,' he saw me point at him, and he took off."

**Warren:** "It was my birth father, and not only did he abuse me sexually, he also physically and mentally abused me. The last incident was probably the worst, and it was defined as rape. I don't know if that was the only time it was considerably "rape" or not. It definitely did not just happen once. There were other things my mom had found. There were things on our computer that he had searched. Since it was about a month or so after I told my mom, there was no more physical proof. He was not sent to prison or jail, even though my mom had been told by the police and the counselors and investigators that they could tell it had happened – they knew it was true, they just couldn't convict him because there was no physical proof."

**3:** "I was on a cruise, and it was the last night. I had decided that I was going to drink a little bit, because I was on spring break and I thought it would be fun. I had met some people throughout the time on the boat, and I thought we were friends. I don't remember all of it super well, but there was this guy I was friends with. He convinced me to come back to his room, and I didn't

# Listening provides support

By Cale Eirich  
Staff reporter

In any significant trauma faced by an individual, there is a time of healing that is crucial in restoring their life and taking back control. Healing allows the individual to move on from a traumatic experience. The overwhelming trauma victims of sexual violence face is unique to the individual, as well as the time and resources it may take to heal.

Headlines within the news and the unavoidable statistics of sexual violence prompted Lora Andrews, pastor at Grace Methodist Church, to hold a special sermon for members of the community to tell their stories and also for others to lend a listening ear. The sermon showed the importance of

really think anything of it. I just remember going in and he just started assaulting me. He raped me. I blocked out a lot of the details. It just happened, and I just remember after it happened he kicked me out of his room. I just walked back to my room and was kind of in shock. I don't think I really knew what was going on necessarily. I just remember waking up and it all just really hitting me."

**4:** "It started out as just shoulder rubs. I guess I would say, whenever we were in class. Then it was hands underneath the shirt shoulder rubs, and it just got further and further. Never below the waist, but it was for those whole two years we were in the class with him."

**Q: Do you have a message for your assaulter now?**

**Muldrow:** "I'm sorry I opened the door without checking. That was my main focus, was it was my fault because I wasn't smart. But it's not my fault that he hurt me. If there was a way I could have caught him before, I would have."

**Warren:** "I finally got the courage to speak to him this last January, and I tried to see why he did it. I was told that he was

listening to one's story and being a person others can confide in.

"With the last couple years in national media, the 'Me Too' movement has come forward a lot because people have had the courage to come forward and speak up against abusers," said Andrews. "People are crying out to have their voices be heard."

Andrews began the service by sharing her own story, one that she had only shared with a handful of people in her lifetime. She then listened amongst the dozens in attendance sharing their own stories and experiences. By the end of the service, around ten people had shared their story of sexual violence with the church, using the platform to forward their own healing process and be heard. Some stories were decades

also assaulted as a child, but that obviously doesn't make it right. I am strong enough to have overcome it and put a stop to it, so in no way is being abused a right to abuse someone else. I know I'm strong enough because, while I'm able to see that everyone makes mistakes and I forgive him and I know that it was a mistake, at the same time he's not ever going to be in my life again because of what he put me through. I guess not to him, but to assaulters in general, no matter what you put someone through, they don't deserve it, and even if they can forgive you, that doesn't mean that you get another chance in their life. You made one of the biggest mistakes you could possibly make as a human being."

**3:** "I kind of want to know why. Why it happened, why it had to happen to me."

**4:** "I think the one thing that my friends and I have all talked about is that now, looking back on it, we realize it was a problem. We have all kind of lingered on this feeling of anger. The stage of life we were in was so vulnerable that we couldn't speak out. I think the thing we've said time and time again is, even though it happened to us and

old and others were recent, but the environment of support let those involved know that they were far from alone.

The statistics are telling. Every 98 seconds an American is sexually assaulted, according to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). With the numbers we are facing today, there is enormous support for victims to tell their story and begin their individual healing process. The momentum of the 'Me Too' movement has encouraged survivors to let their voices be heard, but should also encourage us to listen and actively take part in helping survivors piece their lives back together.

"In the two weeks surrounding the Kavanaugh hearings I had four folks come to my office and

we're mad about it. We don't want it to happen to anyone else. That's why we've Googled his name to make sure he's not a teacher anywhere. We don't want it to happen to another kid."

**Q: What is your message to other survivors of sexual assault?**

**Muldrow:** "It's not your fault. First of all, they say that the statistics are one in four, and I don't believe the statistics. I don't know how a child makes it out of childhood without something happening to them that's not appropriate, but it's not your fault. It's the fault of the person who hurt you. Yeah, you might have done something that wasn't smart, and you learned from it, but it's not your fault."

**Warren:** "Don't let it define who you are. It has taken me years to get to where I am today, and I'm still working, I'm still learning how to cope with the effects of it every single day. If you're a child, or an elder woman, or a Hispanic male – it happens to everyone. It's not ever a victim's fault, no matter what you're wearing, where you are, if you're drunk, if you're on drugs. You are not to blame, and you should never, ever feel

share their stories, and others share on the social media of my church," said Andrews. "We decided what we could do as a church is to have a worship service to allow folks to tell their stories. We wanted to have a place where people could come and worship God and find healing in the brokenness."

The most important aspect to consider when someone is sharing their story with you is understanding that it is theirs, and in that moment of vulnerability they are asking to be heard. The priority of a confidant is to listen, not take immediate action.

"If somebody approaches you and discloses sexual assault, the biggest thing is to listen, believe them and not overreact," said Tracey Gay, director of client

services at Wichita Family Crisis Center. "What I mean by not overreact is don't immediately make decisions for them."

Having the ability to tell their own story in a safe environment of understanding and support helped bring closure to the many who opened up during the sermon at Grace. The service highlighted the importance of listening to victims of sexual violence, and the responsibility we all share to help their healing process.

Understanding the reason why victims do not report a large percentage of assaults is vital to creating a positive environment for them to both grieve and heal. The first step when someone entrusts you with their story is to

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story is different than ours. My group of friends that this all happened to, it really did impact us, but we were able to talk to each other about more recent situations, which is good. Realizing you're not alone is the first thing, and connecting with people is the second thing. That can really change how you feel about what happened."

**3:** "You're definitely not alone. There are so many other people that have gone through the same experience. If you feel like you've been assaulted, your story is important. You getting help is really important."

**4:** "I'm not alone, and other people aren't alone, even if their

## If You Are Assaulted:

- Go where you feel safe: Go to a friend's place, RA's room, family residence or a public place.
- Consider calling someone: Call a friend, family member, RA or a coach.
- Consider receiving medical attention: Our closest hospital is William Newton Hospital and they have a sexual assault nurse examiner. The address is 1305 East 5th Avenue and the contact information is 620-222-6231 and [sane@wnmh.org](mailto:sane@wnmh.org).
- Consider filing a police report: Call Winfield Police Department at 620-221-555.
- Consider filing a report with Southwestern College. While the school and police department are separate, one can still file a report for the incident to go through the student conduct process. Please call Student Life at 620-229-6391.
- Consider seeking support: Talking with a friend, relative, RA or counselor could help dealing with the emotions and trauma of the assault.

Source: *The Southwestern College Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures.*