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Weinstein accuser: What silence does to your soul

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By Jessica Barth

Editor's note: Jessica Barth is an actress, writer and producer. Follow her on Twitter @_jessicabarth_. The views expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author. (CNN) – It has taken me a few days to process the sudden explosion of allegations of sexual harassment, abuse and assault made against Harvey Weinstein. Each woman who steps forward leaves me with a mixture of emotions. On the one hand, I feel an overwhelming sense of relief and pride when I see women joining together to share their stories. On the other, I experience a sense of horror over the staggering number of accusers. Women stripped of their power, silenced and shamed.

I was one of them and recounted my own experience publicly last week.

In my own experiences with sexual harassment and assault, I have been made to feel as if I had to compromise my own convictions for the advancement of my career. I was made to believe that my talent and experience should take a back seat to my physical appearance. I was manipulated into believing I

had “asked for it.” And I was made to feel that if I spoke out or fought back, the repercussions would make me regret it.

So, what now? Now, women – and men – must get to work finding solutions. With women standing together en masse, and the media shining a spotlight on just how rampant behavior like that alleged of Harvey Weinstein has become within the entertainment industry, we have gained unprecedented power. Together, we have toppled a Hollywood titan.

The days of turning a blind eye must end. An air of confusion seems to have settled over Hollywood. A common question from people who were long aware of the accusations leveled at Harvey Weinstein has been, “What were we supposed to do?” The answer was simple. If everyone who knew about Weinstein’s allegedly predatory behavior had refused to work with him, he would have been rendered powerless, incapable of inflicting pain for 30 years.

I’ve heard people dismiss allegations against Weinstein because they believe the victims are confusing sexual harassment with compliments. This type of ignorance is common and dangerous, and can only be cured through proper education and awareness. We must get better at educating both men and women about what constitutes sexual harassment and assault. This type of education should be provided in schools, corporations, and every institution in between.

We must implement zero-tolerance policies for sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. According to TMZ, Weinstein’s company reached an employment contract with him that said if he got sued for sexual harassment or misconduct, all he had to do was pay a fine and he could keep his job. Bob Weinstein has refused to comment on what the company knew about his brother’s settlements with women when that contract was negotiated and renewed in 2015.

When harassers and abusers have positions of power, is it any

wonder that victims are afraid to come forward when they seemingly have nothing to gain and everything to lose?

For me, a recognition of the financial and emotional drains that would result from my coming forward and taking legal recourse gave me significant pause. The fact that I felt completely alone in my shame made keeping quiet seem like the only option. And worries about negative effects on my career didn't necessarily make me want to shout it out from the rooftops.

My career did take a sudden and unexpected slowdown after I spurned the advances of Harvey Weinstein and others, but to me, the question for victims isn't what sort of damage coming forward may cause to your career. It's what your silence may do to your soul.

These past few days have given me the sense of empowerment I have craved for years. My goal now is to make sure that no other woman goes through what far too many of us have endured already. My heart simultaneously swells and breaks with each #metoo post that I read.

I am working on setting up a foundation that will provide funding for legal fees for victims of sexual harassment and assault. I want to help alleviate the financial pressures that some women face in taking their harasser or assaulter to court. I hope that in the future, organizations and politicians who benefited from Harvey Weinstein's donations might want to contribute to this cause.

Sexual predators exploit the hopes and dreams of their victims. When I allow myself to sit with that, it hurts my heart. I have cried myself to sleep wondering if the dream that had grown in my heart since I was a child was worth breaking it.

And this is where my desire to fight on lies. It lies with every little girl accepting a hairbrush as her Academy Award

in the bathroom mirror, and the hope that she may never know the horror of these monsters. The hope that she will be free to pursue her dream without worrying whether she is in danger of being raped during a “business meeting.”

These are the little girls that I am fighting for; the ones who are out there right now, the ones who are still living in our hearts and mostly, for the ones I am raising at home. And, I will tell you this: It makes me want to start a revolution that doesn't end until the mightiest of these monsters fall.

It begins now.

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