

Survivors share their stories

“It doesn’t go away. The trauma that’s with you, like, it stays with you. You have that forever.” - Clare Stephenson



Art piece by Shanela Ranaraja

Senior Clare Stephenson talks about her experience being sexually assaulted twice as an Augustana student. This art piece is standing in for a photo of Stephenson.

1. What happened?

The first time it happened to me, I was a sophomore. It was winter term, right before break. I walked into the basement of a frat house and I saw someone that I knew. He handed me a drink so I wouldn’t have to pay for it. I didn’t think anything about it. Looking back, I don’t really remember a lot of the things that happened that night. I was in and out. I remember being in the basement and him being around me and then him telling people like, “Oh, she’s really drunk. I’m gonna take her back to her dorm,” and I don’t know how long we stayed there.

I don’t really know what time it was. I remember feeling we were going in the wrong direction, kind of telling him that, and all of a sudden, he was grabbing me tighter, keeping me in the direction we were going.

The next thing I remember, I was in his bed and he was in the middle of assaulting me. Then the next thing I remember is waking up at 3 in the morning. My phone was dead and I didn’t know where I was until I walked out of the house, but I couldn’t find my shirt, so I grabbed a random sweatshirt, grabbed all of my stuff and ran. I didn’t want to tell anybody because my friends were friends with him and I didn’t want to have to go through having to justify it to other people or having my own friends not believe me.

Then when I reported it to the school, the faculty that I reported to told me that because it happened off campus, there was nothing that they could do. I could report it to the police, but it was probably already too late to get the drugs out of my system if I thought I was drugged. They

thought it was already past that time, so they told me essentially there were not many options for me. That one, I think, that hit me really hard – that feeling of like there’s nothing that’s gonna happen to this person and I had to see him all the time.

I remember for the weeks following that we were at school I was showering five, six, seven times a day sometimes because I just couldn’t get the feeling of his hands off of my body. I couldn’t get rid of it. I have my own mental health stuff, but I ended up attempting suicide a few days after Christmas with a large part of it being because of the assault that I went through and how the experience was handled.

So when I came back to school, all of a sudden I had these survivor resources. I was like, where were these when I talked to you weeks ago? They kind of half made me start seeing the counselors here. Well, it was “strongly suggested.” Ultimately, I found good support through that, but it was kind of their first attempt to do anything. It was because of what I tried to do.

The second time I was assaulted was the beginning of junior year. Again, I was at a frat house. We had been drinking throughout the day and I knew everybody that was there. They were my good friends except for like, one guy who I had met that day. They introduced me to him. He was on the football team. He wasn’t in the fraternity though.

We were all drinking all day long and I was really really intoxicated by the time we left, but I called ACES and they were going to take 30-40 minutes like they do on busy days. He was like, “Oh I’ll walk you home. It’s not a problem, I’ll walk you home, I’m leaving too.” I was like, “No, I’ll wait,” but he just kept insisting. I was really drunk, so at this point, I just wanted to get back to my bed, so I just agreed. But I didn’t know that we had to pass his house to get to my apartment, and right when we got to the entry, all of a sudden, he

had this strong grip on my arm and was pulling me inside... he’d been asking for me to come home with him and I said “No.” The whole time I was like “No, I don’t do that.”

So he started pulling me into his house. I’m a relatively strong person and I’m a trained fighter, but I was drunk. Nothing I was gonna do was gonna be able to have any effect on this football-playing, large man, so I didn’t know what else to do. I was in this situation and I couldn’t stop it.

The second it was over, I got up, got all of my stuff and left. Then I reported to the school again, and again, it was an off-campus house. Again, they told me there was nothing they could do, but insisted I see the counselors again and go through that process.

Both guys graduated. They were in the same class. Both guys graduated and got their degrees with nothing on their records and they’re living their lives like nothing ever happened. Laura Ford offered to have me re-evaluate my cases but, you know, that’s not the case in front of a room full of people. That was kind of the icing on the cake with my experience with sexual assault.

2. When did the school offer you resources?

They didn’t offer me anything. After I filed, they sent me an email the beginning of week six. I returned to campus because I had to report my hospitalization for the school’s mental health policy. When I returned to campus, I was sent something about some generic Do Not Reply email of ‘here, resources for survivors.’

And then because of the mental health thing, I got a new email from the counseling services basically saying ‘you need to come see us’ and that was kind of how that went.

3. What do you want to come from this interview?

I just hope that the administration stops treating survivors of sexual assault on this campus like a PR stunt. I feel like they

pick and choose certain things that happen and use it as a way to be like ‘See, look how good we are’ but there are so many cases that are going unnoticed. Right now, people are calling out the administration for this one case which almost exactly mirrors what happened to me the first time I was sexually assaulted and nothing happened.

No one knew. There was no incident report. There was nothing, so having as many people being able to tell their stories on this platform I think is so important.

The administration clearly, as we saw yesterday [in Jan.], is saying ‘Oh we don’t know, we don’t know that this is happening.’ Yes, you do.

[I want this to be] for as many people who have reported or have tried to disclose this kind of information and to be able to be like no I tried and you shut me out. For them to kind of see publicly what the problem is and for people outside of Title IX that have influence on this campus to see how our Title IX is failing because I think just having Title IX just fix themselves isn’t going to be enough.

4. Anything else you would like to add?

I think the most important part is that this is a serious issue and people keep writing it off. I think men or women, people who haven’t experienced it themselves or have someone really close to them experience it don’t understand how much turmoil having that experience puts you through.

I think that’s what’s most important, which is why people are so focused on just believing what they’re saying. It’s so difficult and it’s such a long process to even come to terms with where you’re at with yourself and then just getting over the physical stuff that comes with it.

Oh and it doesn’t go away, like the trauma that’s with you, like it stays with you, you have that forever. It’s still a huge thing for me and it’s been like a year and a half since the second time it happened. It’s just there.