

On the evening of November 8th, 2015, at approximately 2300, while on an assignment with the National Wildland Firefighter Apprentice Program, I was standing at the bar at the Lion's Gate refilling my water and closing my tab. I had been sharing a table with WFAP staff, observing the Apprentice and Americorps students. I was not intoxicated, and was the most modestly dressed woman in the bar. As I was leaning on the bar waiting for service, a man (later determined to be an Apprentice, [REDACTED]) came up behind me, groped my buttocks and vagina, leaned over me, and said "What's up, baby?" I immediately felt threatened and surprised, and was thrown into a full blown PTSD reaction stemming from previous sexual assault experiences. I panicked, turned around, and asked him who he was, and clearly stated that he had no business touching me. He stated that he thought I was somebody else. I returned to my table, found [REDACTED], the acting Duty Officer, and told him what had happened. I asked him to accompany me to talk with the perpetrator. We confronted [REDACTED], and he was apologetic. At this point, I still had not realized he was a student, and was not thinking clearly. I remained at the establishment, and engaged in a conversation with an Apprentice I had attended Engine Academy earlier in the spring with. I told him about what had just happened, thinking [REDACTED] was a random member of the public. When I pointed [REDACTED] out, I was informed that he was one of our students. I went back up to [REDACTED], and told him that I was the Logistics Coordinator for his Academy, and reiterated the despicable nature of his behavior. At that point, another student who was quite inebriated tried to get involved. At this point, I removed myself from the situation, and left the establishment in the company of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

This incident was mishandled from the beginning. The behavior that Mr. [REDACTED] demonstrated is by California Law considered sexual assault. Law Enforcement should have been called right away. I was in the midst of a severe physiological stress reaction, and did not have the presence of mind to request law enforcement, and no one else present considered that as the necessary course of action. After leaving the Lion's Gate, I was left to manage my PTSD reaction alone. I could not sleep, and could not stop crying.

The following day was Academy Graduation. This is a one day planned event with type 3 complexity. As Logistics Coordinator, Graduation is a huge undertaking, which requires a high level of engagement and coordination. I showed up to the training Center the next morning, and told my superiors [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] what had happened. They assured me they would find the perpetrator, and handle the situation. I dove into the task at hand, which was to coordinate graduation. There was difficulty and confusion in locating the perpetrator. Once he was found, notifications were made, and he was sent home. I was assured everything was handled. I continued with my day. Once graduation was over, I had a complete mental and emotional breakdown. The stress of the previous night and day debilitated me that evening.

In hindsight, I see the second failure in the way this situation was handled. Once I reported the incident, my superiors should have relieved me of my responsibility and insisted that documenting and reporting the incident was now my priority. I had a trainee, and should not have had to continue fulfilling Coordinator duties that day.

On November 20, 2015 I reported to duty fully exhausted. I had been working 10-12 hr shifts in a high paced environment for 5 weeks. I had just endured a full blown PTSD reaction prior to coordinating Graduation, which was a highly stressful event on its own. I was at the end of my rope, and managing all of the tasks necessary to close out the Academy for the season. The Program Manager at

the time, [REDACTED] came into the logistics office and asked me to type my statement. It took 45 minutes to write 3 paragraphs in a crowded office, due to the constant questions I had to field, and guidance I had to provide.

I wrote my 3 paragraph statement under the duress of multiple causal factors. I wrote my statement under the assumption that I would have an opportunity to speak with someone in more detail about the incident. At the time, I was embarrassed to write that while he grabbed my buttocks, he also made contact with the rear portion of my vagina. I was really hoping to be able to convey the events verbally, and I was never afforded this opportunity.

Upon leaving the Academy, I was assured that the situation had been handled, and that Mr. [REDACTED] would be removed from his position. In hindsight, I realize that while my managers were hopeful of this outcome, they were speaking out of place. This was another failure.

I didn't hear anything more about the incident until December, when I missed a call from a Region 5 Civil Rights representative. Upon hearing her voicemail, I returned her call and expressed that I was looking forward to speaking to her. I never heard anything else about it. I figured no news is good news, and left it at that. I assumed that Mr. [REDACTED] had been removed from his position once he substantiated his actions.

On October 20, 2016 I was back at the Academy, coordinating once again. We had brought [REDACTED] and some other Civil Rights representatives in to speak with the Crew Bosses. Since they were in house, I figured this would be a great opportunity to follow up on the outcome of the incident from last fall. I caught the Region 5 Apprentice Coordinator in the hall, and asked if he knew what ended up happening with Mr. [REDACTED]. I was informed that, to [REDACTED] knowledge, the determined outcome was a 7 day suspension. This information deeply upset me. Following the Crew Boss briefing, I approached the Civil Rights ladies, and asked them about the incident's outcome. They informed me that all they could tell me was that the behavior was substantiated, and nothing else. I then stated: "So you're telling me I could still run into this man on an incident?" At this time people began coming back into the class room. I started to feel myself getting upset, and ended the conversation. Upon returning home that night, I began to imagine running into my perpetrator while on an incident. I imagined him doing this to other women. I began to feel unsafe. Once again, I relived that night, and all the other nights that I have been victimized by sexual predators. Again, I had a PTSD reaction while having to show up for work the next day.

When I returned to work on the 21st of October, I composed an email to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], outlining my concerns in regards to the Agency's resolution, and asked to have a private audience when they returned for Orientation the following Sunday.

My concern is not with revenge. My concern is the message that we are sending to the perpetrators and victims who are employees of this Agency. We are effectively saying that it is acceptable to demonstrate sexually predatory behavior, and still be an employee of the USDA Forest Service. We are also telling the employees who are on the receiving end of this behavior that they need to anticipate PTSD reactions and facing their perpetrator throughout their career. The Agency is telling us that they are NOT concerned with our safety, wellbeing, and mental/emotional health, and that they will not protect us.

Following orientation, I caught [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and the other women, and asked if they had seen my email. They said yes. I asked if we could have a closed door meeting, and if we could revisit this issue. [REDACTED] said she "wasn't sure what needed to be revisited." We went into the learning library. I shared my experience with the incident and how it has affected me. I shared my concerns about what we are saying to our employees by essentially condoning this action. I shared that I did not feel that the Agency was providing a safe work environment for myself, and my brothers and sisters. I shared that I was disappointed that I never had an opportunity to verbally convey my side of the story, while my perpetrator did have that opportunity. I shared how deeply disappointed and disheartened I was by how the situation had been handled by the Agency. Following my statements, [REDACTED] addressed me. She shared that she too had experienced sexual assault in her life, and the subsequent affects. I will paraphrase, but in essence, stated that "There is nothing else that can be done, stop acting like a victim, don't give him power or control, if you run into him keep your head held high, and let us know" There were 3 other women in the room who witnessed this statement: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]

Following [REDACTED] advice, I realized that she had completely missed the point I was trying to make, and basically said: you're on your own, deal with it. While I'm sure this wasn't the intent, that's the message I got. I felt myself becoming infuriated, and ended the meeting.

This incident is a demonstration of the pervasive misogyny that is imbedded in our organization. The outcome is a demonstration of the Agency's acceptance of this behavior. This acceptance is precisely why these incidents continue to occur. Following these incidents, the Agency will not even dignify victims with the knowledge of whether or not they will have to face their perpetrators again in the work place. This is one of the reasons we are unable to retain women in the upper echelons of Fire Management.

I am not seeking revenge or restitution. I am simply asking the Agency to appropriately respond to these incidents. I am asking the Agency to revisit the nexus of discipline, and to consider a simple solution: If an individual displays sexually predatory behavior which is substantiated, they are NOT fit to be a federal employee. I'm asking the Agency to provide a safe work environment for myself and my brothers and sisters.

The entire foundation upon which I have built my 13 year career with the Forest Service has been shaken. I no longer feel like the Agency that I have sacrificed so much for, that I have risked my life for, and shouldered the burden of other people's lives for, cares for me as I care for my employees. I don't feel advocated for. I don't feel valued. I don't feel safe. As USDA employees, we should never have to worry about facing our perpetrators at work once their behavior has been substantiated. We shouldn't feel scared to come forward to report. We should know resoundingly, as USDA employees that sexually predatory behavior is unacceptable by law, and Agency policy, and is grounds for immediate removal.

Melissa Moore

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