

Submission 32

I am an outgoing [REDACTED] woman, confident, strong and independent. I grew up in [REDACTED] and consider myself to be thick-skinned and street smart. Even so, whilst I have experienced a lot of sexual harassment in my time at work, these 3 incidences stand out as particularly harrowing.

It didn't take long for me to experience sexual harassment. My first job. I was 16 and had a Saturday job at a supermarket in the UK. My Manager, over double my age, made me go to the liquor cupboard where the alcohol and cigarettes were stored. He locked the cupboard and proceeded to touch me inappropriately and kiss me. This kept occurring. I told the boys at work and they did their best to protect me by offering to go to the cupboard to help him in my place. It didn't always work. It was stressful for all of us and I still remember the looks in their eyes, looks of helplessness when they weren't able to save me from him. Their looks haunt me and hurt me to this day. Just as much as the assaults. My heart breaks for those boys because they really tried to save me from it. They suffered from it too. Eventually I told my mum who then came to my work and threatened him with violence if he ever touched me again. He got himself a transfer to another store when my mum threatened to tell his bosses.

Another incident happened 10 years later, in [REDACTED] Australia, at an office Christmas party held at a venue local to the office. This venue was unusual as it didn't segregate or assign the sexes to the bathrooms, it was a shared facility. A colleague from the accounts department followed me into a bathroom cubicle and locked me inside. He told me he wouldn't let me out unless I kissed him. Thankfully, he didn't have the use of both of his arms so I felt I was able to fight him if need be. After what felt like hours but was probably only 10 minutes I was able to talk my way out of the situation unharmed. It was frightening and intense and still haunts me to this day. I had enjoyed many conversations with this man and considered him to be a good guy. I learned that bad guys can look like good guys.

Finally, my most haunting experience was the most recent and still makes me feel sick to my stomach to this day. This happened in 2013, [REDACTED]

I was at an [REDACTED] public venue for another office party. In broad daylight. In a packed bar. Farewelling our CEO who was leaving our organisation. He had always been a bit sleazy to all the women in the office. On this occasion, not the first though, he proceeded to get extremely drunk and then started hugging me and grabbing my breasts. He then shouted in a very loud voice derogatory comments about my breasts. Despite others pulling him off me and trying to stop him shouting, he continued. I was so humiliated I couldn't move. I remember being ushered away gently by an incredibly kind man who I worked with and sat in a chair where I tried to sit as still and as small as possible. I didn't want to leave as I felt that would draw more attention to the spectacle and might somehow validate the things he was saying about me. Bizarrely, this was the worst experience of the three and it still brings tears to my eyes just thinking about it. After a while I left and as I walked home I decided to get some food from a takeaway restaurant. As I got my food I saw the CEO with his one of his male executives and another woman we worked with. She ushered me over. Stupidly I walked over to them. I cannot believe I did this but I did. This seems so bizarre to me now. I honestly thought it would be rude not to go over and I didn't want to be rude. I also thought he might be wanting to apologise. How wrong I was. Both the CEO and his executive proceeded to make derogatory comments about my breasts again. This time I stood up

and walked out.

I never made any formal complaints to HR for any of these incidences. I never took any leave. I have rarely talked about them. I have tried to communicate these things in the metoo movement but I lack the courage. It is hard to explain why. I feel so much shame. And ultimately, still to this day, knowing what I know, knowing that I shouldn't, (I work in HR and I specialise in [REDACTED]) I still blame myself for these 3 instances. I was too friendly. I didn't check behind me to ensure I wasn't being followed. I wore the wrong dress.

The place I work now is wonderful and I have never experienced any sexual harassment in the five years I have worked here.