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## Survivor of rape, we will be your voice

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Jessica Labenberg

Written by Jessica Labenberg

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Dear Survivor,

I believe you. I may not know you, but I know it is not your fault.

I understand the strength it took to put your name out there. To stand in the public eye and state, "I was raped." To have your reputation questioned and your words twisted. Your strength inspires me.

I support your decision to keep your identity private. I admire your fortitude to remain anonymous while those who so violently and sexually violated you demand one last thing of you — your name. Your identity is yours to keep, and I sincerely respect that decision.

I know that when you said the words, "I was raped," friends and family may not have believed you. Or those who believed did not

support your decision to step forward with the truth. I will stand by your side when others have walked away.

I will not avert my gaze or change the subject when you say the word "rape." My mind is open and I am ready to listen. I will not ask what you were wearing or how much you had to drink. None of that matters. I know that 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls will be sexually abused. I know that no amount of alcohol equals consent. I know that no length of skirt equals consent. I believe our community will be free from sexual violence when we join our voices and let abusers know that their actions will not be tolerated. Survivor, I promise mine is not the only voice.

I am an advocate at the Sexual Assault Center in Nashville. The resiliency of spirit of the survivors who walk through our doors and the dedication of our therapists amaze me every day. Survivor, we are here for you, as are many others in our community. If you have

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carried the burden of sexual abuse from childhood into adulthood, we are here whenever you are ready to talk.

Call our crisis and support line at 1-800-879-1999, 24 hours a day. At the SAC we proudly say: "The healing starts here." To that mantra, I add: "The silence stops here." Whether at the SAC or out in the community, we are talking about sexual violence. We are talking facts and we are speaking with compassion. We are not just fuming internally when we read victim-blaming

coverage of rapes in the media. We do not quietly roll our eyes in disgust when we hear victim-blaming statements. We are standing up and speaking out.

Survivor, if you have not heard us, we will speak louder. We believe you. And we will keep talking.

**Jessica Labenberg is advocacy coordinator for the Sexual Assault Center.**

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