

# HELPING GIVE BACK THE NIGHT: A MALE PERSPECTIVE

DAVID JAFFE\*

By the time a man has reached the age of 27 years, he has more likely than not encountered a situation of rape or sexual abuse. Often he is unaware of the unfortunate history of the woman he is with, and thus does not understand the responses he receives, or the emotions revealed, which appear at odds with his expectations. Until and unless explained to him, he may plod along uncertainly, trying to be "good," and becoming even more confused at his lack of success.

In another scenario, a woman in a relationship may be prepared to talk about the incident with her male companion, yet fear his response, or whether a response will be forthcoming at all.

Tonight, I offer this message. I offer it to any woman who fears confiding in her male companion when she does not know what the result will be. It is my hope that if she trusts him, she can trust that his response will be along these lines. And I offer this message to all of the men who are listening, that when they are confided in by their companion, regarding an episode of sexual abuse, they might consider responding along these lines, in a manner that reflects their concern. The message I offer is the following:

Last night, when you told me about the time that you were raped, I felt sad. I was sad, because you had to carry the pain of this incident inside you all this time, and I thought about how difficult that must have been. I was sad, because I could not be there to tell you that you had done no wrong, and that you were still the same good person that you were the day before. I was sad, because you were sad.

Last night, when you told me about the time that you were raped, I was scared. I was scared, because I did not know if I would know what to do. I was scared, because I did not know whether to hold

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\* Director of Alumni Relations, Washington College of Law at the American University; J.D., Washington College of Law at the American University, 1993; B.A., Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, 1987.

you, or not. I did not know whether to try to say something meaningful, or to say nothing at all. I was scared, because I did not know what you were thinking about me, or whether you were thinking about me at all. I was scared, because I thought you were telling me the relationship was over.

Last night, after starting to sort out my own emotions from when you told me about the time that you were raped, I began to feel better. I felt better, because I realized that you trusted me, and you cared enough about me to confide in me. I felt better, because when you told me, you allowed yourself to be vulnerable with me, and when I cried, I was able to be vulnerable with you. I felt better, because I knew that with patience and understanding by both of us, we were going to get through this, together. I felt better, because I started to believe that with our love, nothing would get in the way of our working this out. I felt better, because I realized this was not the end of our relationship, it was merely the beginning. I felt better, because I felt closer to you than I ever had before.

Thank you for trusting in me last night. Thank you for sharing something with me that is too hard for me to imagine. Thank you for believing in me. I promise I will be here for you to do whatever I can to help you through this. You are a good person, and nothing you have told me makes me feel any differently about you, except that I feel closer to you than I ever have. Thank you for believing in me, and please know that I will never stop believing in you.