

GOOD MEN

JEANA JORGENSEN

I used to cringe when men talked to me. Ben has helped me a lot since then.

When I talk about what I went through with my ex, I'm always quick to say: "At least he didn't rape me." I think a lot of women do the same thing, minimizing our trauma so as to not take up too much space, or be seen as too needy.

When I return home from my shift at the Mars Colonization Project, Ben asks about my day. One night, I complain about the guy who always low-key harasses me, whom I'm still working up the courage to report. Ben says simply, "I believe you." That bolsters me to make it through another day.

I want to go into space more than anything. But I need to finish processing the trauma first. I know gaslighting isn't the worst kind of abuse out there. But I can't be a good spaceworker until I stop getting triggered when men raise their voices at me. It's worse in enclosed spaces, which presents obvious challenges to my career goals. And due to the dangerous nature of the job, I have to trust that my teammates are good men, who'll have my back instead of trying to grope it.

Luckily MCP has a great healthcare plan: top of the line therapists, new techniques and technologies all the time.

It takes another week, but I report my coworker who keeps harassing me. The final straw was when he overheard a conversation with Kathryn, in which I was describing my abuse and my subsequent therapy and self-education about trauma, and he said, "You're too fat for anyone to bother abusing."

Turns out this guy had been harassing other women. I had a long conversation with Ben before reporting this guy, and it was incredibly validating, and reminded me that I could go to my boss – also a man – and trust that he would do the right thing. Most men are not like my abuser. It took a while for that to sink in, but it's true.

The amazing thing is that this boosted my visibility at MCP, and accelerated my path to space. Other women privately thanked me.

I have to say goodbye to Ben now, since he can't come with me to space. But his affirmations kept me calm and cool throughout my healing process, and this whole ordeal.

As I power him down, he keeps smiling at me. He'll be back at MCP's health facility once the groundworkers clean out my quarters.

He can help you, too. Whoever you are, whoever hurt you. Most men don't have the bandwidth to hold space for women with trauma. This is undoubtedly the best way for those of us who've been victimized to reintegrate into normal society, and be able to interact with men without fear. It was worth it for my career, and I imagine it'll help my love life too, once I get settled on Mars.

Please feel free to publish my testimonial in the next MCP health plan brochure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Jeana Jorgensen earned her PhD in folklore from Indiana University. She researches gender and sexuality in fairy tales and fairy-tale retellings, folk narrative more generally, body art, dance, sex education, and feminist/queer theory. While most of her time goes to teaching college courses at Butler University and publishing her research, she also writes fiction and poetry. Her poetry has appeared at *Strange Horizons*, *Liminality*, *Quatrain.fish*, and *Glittership*, among other publications. Her poem “The Witch’s House” was nominated for the 2018 Rhysling Award, and her short dystopian story about reproductive rights, “The book you find when you really can’t afford to get pregnant,” won the Spider Road Press Feminist Flash Fiction Award of 2018. She also teaches dance, blogs at Patheos, and is constantly on Twitter.