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## Public Forum 2

Dear Editor:

Alisa Wilson, daughter of Avon and George Wilson, long-time residents of Lafayette, now a resident of Southern California, has sent her expression of outrage over the Richmond gang-rape via email to her family and friends "up north." Alisa grew up with our three children and attended the Lafayette schools. I believe that what Alisa has said here is extremely important and needs to be read on a broader scale. I asked Alisa if I might submit her letter (immediately below) to you in order to stimulate discussion of the very important issues she addresses in her piece. Although the occurrences of which she writes never hit the papers within the AUHSD, I can verify that she knows about that of which she writes.

Lynn Hiden  
Lafayette

As a society and a nation, we have failed. We have failed in the most fundamental of responsibilities, and that is to raise our children to be human. Before dismissing this as something that does not affect you, the reader, this happens in every neighborhood, at every economic advantage or disadvantage, two-parent and one-parent houses, white, black, Latino, Christian, Muslim, etc. . . . It happens in families that go to church or temple. And yes, it even happens in your tiny conservative little towns - that includes Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda and Walnut Creek. It has been going on for decades.

Three weeks ago, the nation watched as a senate bill was introduced to stop taxpayer-endowed contractor attempts to cover up employee-on-employee gang rape. This bill apparently had to be introduced (who knew such a thing would be necessary) after a female contract soldier endured a beating and gang rape by her fellow soldiers who then locked her up in a shipping container with no food or water and threatened her with reprisals if she reported the incident. The corporation she contracted for, KBR/Halliburton, actually has a small print clause in their contract (again, who knew such a thing would be necessary) that says sexual assault by fellow employees must be dealt with in private arbitration and not through the nation's courts. Our nation watched further as 30 male senators, most married, some with daughters, voted against this bill passing. To their minds, and in front of the nation, they declared the corporation was more worthy of their protection than our daughters and we should not get involved. We voted these people into office. They won by majority, therefore we did it.

Our failure smacked us yet again last week after the horrific beating and gang rape of a fifteen-year old girl who was at a at her school dance in Richmond, California. This act of horror occurred over a two hour period of time with witnesses who failed to come to her aid, to call the police or run for help. They watched. Some joined in. Others took photos. At least 15 boys and young adult males participated in brutalizing her. Her injuries were so severe she had to be airlifted to a hospital in critical condition. This was our daughter this happened to. These were our sons who did this thing. And when our sons did this horrible thing, they let the world know what value they gave every female person in their life - mother, sister, friend, school mate, teacher, neighbor, etc. That act was about inflicting power and hate and humiliation. Anyone who wants to say it was about the act of sex has been watching the wrong movies.

To those that would place the blame on the girl "Well, I hear she was drinking . . ."

So what? A person experimenting with alcohol, or fighting for our country, or walking down the street, or naked at a beach - NONE of these people deserve to be brutalized. If it happened to a boy we should be equally outraged. But it didn't. Do we know any boys that we went to school with who got drunk at a dance and were subsequently gang raped by their fellow students? For two hours? While pictures were taken? Boys and girls experiment with alcohol in high school. It is done. It has been done for as many years as there have been high schools and as many years as there has been alcohol. Don't pretend it is something unusual and that she is somehow to blame for experimenting with alcohol when most of us did as well.

"Not MY son," you might say. Really? Are you sure? I grew up in one of those little protected towns in the East Bay. I went to two different high schools, Del Valle, and then Acalanes. Date rape, or situations where two or more boys ganged up on a girl was something that happened during the time I was in school back in the olden days that were the late 70s and early 80s. I knew girls it happened to and watched how they changed over time as a result of those assaults, and it wasn't for the better. We would hear about goings on at Campolindo and Miramonte as well - but you never heard reports about it - it wasn't like the cheerleader murder that got all of the attention and a movie starring Tory Spelling - this was the stuff that went on during football games or dances that no one talked about.

Most of us knew at least one girl it happened to and we sat in classes with the boys that did it. It happened to girls before I got there, and it happened after I left years later -- to a girl I used to baby-sit. They went unreported. In terms of occasions with two or more boys assaulting a girl? Those never went reported because of the fear of what might happen to them later that would be worse than the original beating. Or their parents would try to hush things up due to the shame. In terms of "date rape," that term did not yet exist, nor was it considered a crime, so in

those cases the girls were taught that they were inexplicably somehow at fault if that happened to them.

Why did I not come forward to avenge my female friends? We were all young - and afraid. The boys that got away with this sort of thing were usually the popular boys who were untouchable. We were not taught by our adults what to do in such a situation, nor were we taught that there was anything we could actually do. I did not come forward because I was sworn to secrecy and I knew that my telling anyone in authority would result in no action. Those boys would still graduate, they would still go to college, they would still show up at high school reunions as if nothing ever happened.

There are more laws in effect now, however the crimes seem to have only increased in intensity and brutality. The principal of the school in Richmond is offering unacceptable excuses and had the audacity to say that they had appropriate security at the school. They did not. That poor girl, if she lives, will be scarred forever and I hope her family obtains the resources necessary to move her far away from here.

We did this. This is not something we can dismiss because it happened in Richmond. We did this because we chose not to pay attention to the most basic of lessons with our children and each and every one of us can claim responsibility. We have failed to teach our children that we respect and protect each other and that the people in our neighborhood are our extended family. We have failed to teach our children that respect and protection includes the kids our parents don't want us to hang around with as well as the ones they do. It includes that mean lady that lives at the end of the block. She might be mean, but she's ours and no one messes with her. Instead, we remain animals, who raise other animals. Am I being harsh -- condemning all of society like that? Well, if it seems to be happening in pockets all over and our own senators seem to think it is okay -- you do the math.

This happened to one of our daughters. What can we do for her now?

Alisa Wilson

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