THE WOMEN WHO TESTIFIED AGAINST HARVEY WEINSTEIN HAVE COME TO LEAN ON EACH OTHER AFTER TAKING DOWN THE DISGRACED MOGUL

BY ELIZABETH WAGMEISTER
Dawn Dunning first met with the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office in early 2018, nearly two years before she testified in the Harvey Weinstein trial. During a private meeting, Dunning, a former aspiring actor and mother of two small children, revealed a story she had never told.

"I TOLD THE D.A. EVERYTHING that hap-pened because I honestly just didn’t know what would come out of the defense, so I thought it was best to tell them the whole truth. But I didn’t think it would come up in the trial," Dunning says of the time she alleges Weinstein stuck his hand up her skirt during a business meeting. Rotunno questioned the mental health of Weinstein’s defense attorney, Donna Rotunno, attack-Dunning’s credibility. "Wait, wait, I forgot about the time he threw his finger in my vagina," Rotunno said during her closing arguments, mocking Dunning in front of the jury.

"My dad had to read about my vagina in The New York Times," Dunning says. "That was one of the hardest parts for me, aside from being followed and having to look over my shoulder constantly. I have two small kids, so I wondered if they were in danger or if it was in danger." In the courtroom, Weinstein’s lead attorney, Donna Rotunno, attacked Dun-nings credibility. "Wait, wait, I forgot about the time he threw his finger in my vagina," Rotunno said during her closing arguments, mocking Dunning in front of the jury.

Rotunno also challenged Lauren Young’s accusation that she was trapped and assaulted in 2013 at a Beverly Hills hotel bathroom, where she was hired under the guise of a business meeting. Rotunno questioned the mental health of Jessica Mann, a hairdresser whose testimony revealed in Weinstein being convicted of rape in the third degree. Rotunno called Annabella Sciorra’s "the daring of the movement" and claimed that the actor raped the benefits of a negligent career by saying she was raped by Weinstein in the early ’90s. Weinstein’s attorney also asked that Tarale Wulff and Miriam Haley obtained civil attorneys Douglas Wigdor and Gloria Allred solely to squeeze money out of her client in anticipation of a “pot of gold” at the end of the trial.

"Justice is a weird thing. I’m not even sure what that means," says Haley, a former “Project Runway” production assistant, who was in court throughout the trial. Haley believes the verdict and sentencing during a sexual assault case, sending a message about the direction society is headed. She says the jury and the judge allowed themselves to be educated in a highly complicated case of he said, she said, with very little hard evidence. "They were formed. They under-stand. They heard us," she says. Haley, Wulff, Dunning, Sciorra, Mann and Young are just a few of at least 150 women who have publicly come forward over the past three years to accuse Weinstein.

Together, they did the impossible. They took down Hollywood’s kingmaker, who counted Bill and Hillary as friends, and was com-mitted to God by Meryl Streep at the Oscars. The week following the 2020 Academy Awards, as Weinstein shuffled into prison, he would be out there … and he was going to be free. Rotunno also questioned the mental health of Weinstein’s defense attorney, Donna Rotunno, attacking Dun-nings credibility. "Wait, wait, I forgot about the time he threw his finger in my vagina," Rotunno said during her closing arguments, mocking Dunning in front of the jury.

"Weinstein — now, a convicted rapist — was sentenced to 23 years in prison, he still awaits a trial in Los Angeles, where he faces a maximum sentence of an additional 28 years. "Sciorra was the first woman to testify in the trial. She says she was afraid of Weinstein and his friends, and she felt like she had to be silent. "She kept calling me and telling me to help her," Wulff says. "She was afraid of her life." Wulff also challenged Lauren Young’s accusation that she was trapped and assaulted in 2013 at a Beverly Hills hotel bathroom, where she was hired under the guise of a business meeting. Rotunno questioned the mental health of Jessica Mann, a hairdresser whose testimony revealed in Weinstein being convicted of rape in the third degree. Rotunno called Annabella Sciorra’s "the daring of the movement" and claimed that the actor raped the benefits of a negligent career by saying she was raped by Weinstein in the early ’90s. Weinstein’s attorney also asked that Tarale Wulff and Miriam Haley obtained civil attorneys Douglas Wigdor and Gloria Allred solely to squeeze money out of her client in anticipation of a “pot of gold” at the end of the trial.

"I AM CONVINCED THAT IF HARVEY WEINSTEIN WAS NOT BEING CONFINED IN PRISON, HE WOULD BE OUT THERE … AND HE WOULD HAVE FELT EVEN MORE EMPOWERED." — MIRIAM HALEY

Working with the D.A.’s office for two years, in preparation for the trial, forced the women to relive the trauma they experienced at the hands of Wein-stein, but they chose to sacrifice their anonymity, their reputations and their personal relationships. "I didn’t prepare for what would come after my testimony — there was a lot of grief that came out of it, but me, personally, the hardest thing that I’m still dealing with is losing a friendship because of it." Wulff says through tears. "Some people don’t want to be associated with me coming forward. I think it’s important for people to know that. It’s the last person I thought I would lose as a friend, and I never thought that would happen, but everyone is entitled to their own opinion." All these women who spoke to Variety for this piece in the month following Weinstein’s sentencing say they do not regret taking part in the trial. They rec-ognize the value of their testimony and are hopeful for future generations of women. But now, they are learning how to navigate their lives post-trial, wres-tling with media attention and the pressure to use their new platform — not to mention continuously coping with their trauma.

The six women who testified were not allowed to meet one another until the day of the sentencing, when lead prosecutor Jessica Hessel brought them together in the early morning. Now, with a shared experience that no one else can understand, the women are on a group chat and text each other daily. "Even if our conversation dies down in a year or two, I know I can call them in 15 years. Regardless of how we were brought together or why, we created something from that," Wulff says of her new support system. "Having them has helped me keep validating what I’m feeling. It’s really easy to move on because you feel like you have to, but these girls, their ears will never wear out." The newfound friends have found a sense of comfort and healing as they navigate their new reality. "It was hard to not feel like you were losing a friendship because of it," Wulff says through tears. "Some people don’t want to be associated with me coming forward. I think it’s important for people to know that. It’s the last person I thought I would lose as a friend, and I never thought that would happen, but everyone is entitled to their own opinion."
my full voice come back into my power.”

Noting the rape myth that people believe an attack only occurs by a stranger in a dark alley at gunpoint, Wulf says: “I was really uneducated, even though I was a witness in the trial. I was still trying to figure out what I thought rape was or more into it. Right before the trial, I was still trying to figure it out, and I had been judging myself based on antiquated ideas of what rape is.”

The outcome of Weinstein’s trial is symbolic. The vast majority of sexual assault cases do not end up in a courtroom, so let alone make their way into a courtroom.

According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, the country’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, 995 out of 1,000 perpetrators walk away free.

“I think it’s going to change the way that the legal system looks at these cases and prosecute these cases, but I also think it will change the way that things are reported,” Dunning says of the verdict. “When what happened to me with Weinstein happened, I didn’t even know what he did was illegal.”

I WAS MEPHISTOPHELIC, Dunning says, “I was more like a private investigator. I thought rape was a year or more into it. The trial ended, she has received a torrent of messages on social media from strangers thanking her for giving them the confidence to stand up for themselves in the workplace when they are faced with inequality. “I hope that this has brought forward more of a feeling of confidence, in terms of being able to set boundaries and not accept unacceptable behavior. Things take time. Laws don’t change overnight. But when the awareness is there, that gets the ball rolling and gives people more confidence,” Haley adds. “A lot of this went on because people got away with it, so they didn’t think twice. Harvey Weinstein got away with decades of raping people — he obviously thought he was entitled to do that. I think people will become a lot more conscious in the workplace, both in Hollywood and outside of Hollywood.”

Dunning says that behavior like Weinstein’s is old news, and as the workplace continues to diversify, tolerance for harassment and abuse will lessen. “The younger generation is not going to buy into that,” she says. “Men and women are just over it. Enough is enough.”

Wulf, a model who says she was raped by Weinstein in 2015 when she was called in for a nonexistent audition that ended up with Weinstein assaulting her, says she doesn’t know the inner workings of Hollywood firsthand, but hopes that the trial will change the entertainment industry’s culture.

“There might be other people like Harvey who manipulate power, so I hope his void is filled with something better, and Hollywood doesn’t allow that to come back in there,” Wulf says. “Our eyes have really opened and we all have been given a golden ticket to call out what we see, and there’s room now for people who have been suppressed to take their moment, but it starts at the top; maybe, in some odd way, even in prison.”

Dunning, too, calculates the advantages of privilege, but now can find a different revelry. “When you see what happens in politics or business, I just had the opinion that money and power, you can’t beat them, no matter what,” she says. “To be in this, this was a real example of strength in numbers and power to the people. If you come together and fight something huge, you can win.”

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— Tarale Wulf, of Weinstein and his behavior