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The Sisters Who First Tried to Take Down Jeffrey Epstein

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By Mike Baker

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As more women have come forward in recent days to describe assaults at the hands of Jeffrey Epstein, [REDACTED] finds herself distraught, wondering what might have happened if someone had taken her seriously.

Twenty-four years ago, Ms. [REDACTED] was an artist who had entered the unorthodox life Mr. Epstein lived behind the doors of his luxury estates. Mr. Epstein had offered to help her painting career, but it all came to an abrupt end one night in the summer of 1996, when she says Mr. Epstein and his companion, Ghislaine Maxwell, began violently groping her.

She learned later that her [REDACTED], [REDACTED] had been subjected to a troubling topless massage at Mr. Epstein's ranch in New Mexico.

Ms. [REDACTED] contacted the New York Police Department, and said she then went to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, offering to share what she knew about Mr. Epstein and the parade of young women being brought to Mr. Epstein's houses. Though the bureau has never acknowledged such a contact, Ms. [REDACTED] said the F.B.I. must have had a record of it, because agents came back to her — years later — with questions. She also went to leaders in the New York art world that Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell frequented, and the sisters tried to tell their story to a national magazine.

In each case, their reports went nowhere.

Finally, facing what she said were threats as a result of the sisters' claims, Ms. [REDACTED] abandoned her [REDACTED]

"I did not want another young lady to go through what [REDACTED] went through," [REDACTED] said in a recent interview. "I could handle what happened to me. I could not handle what happened to her."

Mr. Epstein would continue to lure vulnerable girls into his predatory circle for another nine years before investigators began diving deep into his world. After being arrested on federal charges of sex trafficking of minors in New York and Florida, Mr. Epstein died earlier this month in what the authorities said was an apparent suicide.

Other women have come forward in recent years with more serious claims of rape and child abuse against Mr. Epstein, but the [REDACTED] reports — made 23 years ago — are the earliest known allegations about Mr. Epstein's troubling physical contact with girls and young women. In their detailed accounts, told here for the first time, they offer a glimpse of how Mr. Epstein managed to avoid significant scrutiny for years, even as concerns about his conduct began to pile up.

began rubbing [REDACTED] hand, and then her lower leg, she said.

“It was one of those things that just gave me a weird feeling but wasn’t that weird + probably normal,” Ms. [REDACTED] wrote in a diary entry dated Jan. 25, 1996. “The one thing that kind of weirded me out about it was he let go of my hand when he was talking to [REDACTED].”

Mr. Epstein offered to send [REDACTED] on a trip to Thailand, and invited her to his New Mexico ranch for a weekend. Under the impression that the gathering would include a number of students chaperoned by Ms. Maxwell, [REDACTED] said she allowed [REDACTED] to go. But when she arrived in New Mexico, [REDACTED] said, it was just her and Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell.

There were more uncomfortable interactions that weekend, she said. She recalled Ms. Maxwell persuading her to give Mr. Epstein a foot massage and then giving pointers as she performed it. They went to another movie, where Mr. Epstein continued another round of his petting touches, she said.

Then, when she woke up in the house one morning, she recalled him coming into the room, saying he wanted to cuddle, and getting into bed next to her.

[REDACTED] also recalled Ms. Maxwell repeatedly asking whether she wanted a massage. Eventually relenting, [REDACTED] followed directions by taking off her clothes and bra and getting under a sheet on a massage table. Ms. Maxwell performed the massage, at one point having [REDACTED] lie on her back as Ms. Maxwell pulled down the sheet to massage her chest.

“I don’t think there was any reason for her to be touching me that way,” [REDACTED] said.

Mr. Epstein didn’t participate, but [REDACTED] said she could sense that he was in the area and possibly watching.

The First Reports

At the time, [REDACTED] was unaware of the interactions her [REDACTED] had in New Mexico. She went to Ohio around that time, utilizing Mr. Epstein’s large estate there to focus on her paintings.

Later in the summer, Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell paid a visit. One night, she recalled getting an unusual request: Mr. Epstein needed his feet massaged.

The foot massage was brief and awkward, [REDACTED] recalled, as Mr. Epstein groaned with what seemed like exaggerated pleasure, followed by a yelp of pain. Then he invited her to sit on the bed, where he was watching a PBS program about math.

Ms. Maxwell joined them on the bed, [REDACTED] said, and the night took a sudden turn: Both Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell began groping [REDACTED] over her clothes, rubbing her body, commenting on her features, and twisting her nipples to the point of bruising. She said they did so in unison, mirroring each other’s movements. Fearing that she was about to be raped, [REDACTED] eventually fled the room and barricaded herself in another part of the house.

She soon discovered that three nude photographs she had kept in a storage box were missing. The photos were of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] modeling for Maria’s figurative paintings.

[REDACTED] said she began phoning people in a panic, looking for help. One of the people she reached was her art mentor, [REDACTED]. In an interview, he recalled [REDACTED] describing a physical encounter in the bedroom, fear for her sister and outrage about the missing photographs.

“I just kept telling [REDACTED], ‘You’ve got to get out of there. You’ve got to get out of there,’” [REDACTED] said.

██████████ father, ██████████ also recalled getting a call. He did not know the specifics of what transpired, but said his daughter was upset enough that he drove to the estate in Ohio from Kentucky to get her.

After speaking with ██████████ and learning that ██████████ had had her own troubles with Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell, ██████████ said, she returned to New York. She recalled getting a phone call from Ms. Maxwell, saying she planned to burn all of Ms. ██████████ art and that her career was over. Frightened, Ms. ██████████ said she went to a local police precinct to report what had happened to her in Ohio, and about the art.

Officers at the New York Police Department precinct took a report on the purported threat and on the art theft allegation, a copy of which was obtained by The New York Times. But they referred her to other agencies, including the F.B.I., concerning the assault allegation, because Ohio was outside their jurisdiction, Ms. ██████████ said.

██████████ said she telephoned the F.B.I. and spoke for about half an hour with the agent who answered the phone. The agent did not say what would happen with her report, she said. She asked if she should phone other law enforcement officials in individual states, like Ohio and New Mexico, and was told that was “up to you,” she said. She recalled contacting at least one other jurisdiction — she did not remember which — and making no progress.

An F.B.I. spokeswoman declined to comment on whether the agency had a report of such a call from ██████████ in its files.

In recent days, the art collector ██████████ said he recalled running into ██████████ at a flea market around that time, and hearing her discuss serious concerns about Mr. Epstein that she said she had reported to law enforcement.

██████████ said she also raised her concerns about Mr. Epstein with leaders in the art community, including Ms. ██████████ who had first put her in touch with Mr. Epstein. But she said Ms. ██████████ did not seem to take the issue seriously. Ms. ██████████ said in an interview that the details she was aware of at the time did not rise to a level that would require intervention.

The ██████████ made another run at telling their story in 2003 to Vicky Ward, a reporter for Vanity Fair, which had commissioned a story about Mr. Epstein’s complicated finances that would also mention his proclivity for young girls. The article was published with no mention of ██████████, and they felt they were left badly exposed.

Ms. Ward wrote on her personal blog in 2011 that the article went in a different direction because of “not knowing quite whom to believe.” The editor, Graydon Carter, said in an email that Ms. Ward’s sourcing on the ██████████ account did not meet the magazine’s legal standards. But Ms. Ward indicated on Twitter recently that she believed Mr. Carter had succumbed to pressure from Mr. Epstein. John Connolly, a former contributing editor at Vanity Fair, said he recalled Mr. Carter talking about the efforts Mr. Epstein had made to influence the article.

When word got out that the sisters had given a detailed interview to the magazine, the angry phone calls to her resumed, ██████████ said.

“Better be careful and watch your back,” she said Ms. Maxwell told her. “She said, ‘I know you go to the West Side Highway all the time. While you’re out there, just be really careful because there are a lot of ways to die there.’”

The Aftermath

██████████ said the threats led her to abandon her life in the New York art scene, where Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell still held considerable sway. While ██████████ has moved forward with life, obtaining a Ph.D. and working as a psychotherapist, ██████████ struggled to move past the year she spent with Mr. Epstein. She felt sickened by her own paintings, which she realized Mr. Epstein had apparently appreciated not for their artistic value, but for their depiction of nude forms of girls.

Unable to forget the comments Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell had made about her breasts, ██████████ said she underwent breast reduction surgery.

It wasn't until 2006, when F.B.I. agents knocked on her door in ██████████ that ██████████ found renewed hope that Mr. Epstein would be held accountable. New allegations about Mr. Epstein had surfaced the previous year, when a report by a teenager in Florida spurred an extensive investigation that uncovered a wide range of young girls who had been recruited to visit Mr. Epstein's lavish home in Palm Beach.

Heavily redacted records released by the F.B.I. appear to show handwritten notes from November 2006 interviews with ██████████ outlining key details of their stories, including ██████████ visit to the New York police and her referral to the F.B.I.

But though the investigation progressed, a widely criticized plea deal eventually quashed any federal prosecution. To ██████████, the 2008 plea agreement, which allowed Mr. Epstein to plead guilty merely to much less serious state charges, was deeply demoralizing.

██████████ was starting to put some of it behind her when the latest news about Mr. Epstein began to emerge, and more victims began coming forward. She found herself crying when she saw those accounts, wondering what it would have taken to stop him when she first tried. Though the time for a lawsuit has long passed, she has been working with a lawyer, David Boies, to support other victims of Mr. Epstein.

"Every time I hear one of the girls tell their story, it devastates me," ██████████ said.

██████████ who recently received a diagnosis of ██████████ said she still has some fear about coming forward to tell her own story, even after Mr. Epstein's death. She recently moved to a new home ██████████ to improve her privacy.

In her new residence, she has laid out an art studio in front of windows that offer a peek-a-boo view of a nearby lake. She has started painting again, for the first time in years, and new pieces are stacked up against the walls.

One day, she said, she will try to bring artistic shape to her experience with Mr. Epstein. But for now, she has been focused on a series of paintings of families and children.

They are not like her earlier paintings, the ones Mr. Epstein liked. All the girls are clothed.

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Public Affairs

U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York
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