

Take Back The News

Emily Brandt's Media Revolution

By Jennifer Chen

Emily Brandt, a full-time New York City public school teacher, started Take Back the News (TBTN) as a print project in an independent Boston-based newspaper in response to local misrepresentation of a highly publicized sexual assault case.

TakeBacktheNews.org publishes rape survivors' autobiographical stories as well as confronts the misrepresentation of rape in mainstream media and the skewed public perception that results.

Emily explained the impetus for starting Take Back the News: "I always recognized the power of media in affecting public opinion. It wasn't until I saw a two-page spread about a rape told entirely in the survivor's own words, that I realized the potentiality of the media." Her goal was to provide victims of sexual assault a chance to tell the public what really happened in their own words.

The TBTN website, takebackthenews.org, was launched in March 2002. In the summer of 2005, Take Back the News became an official non-profit organization with Brandt's three sisters taking on roles as Board Members.

A powerful component of TBTN is the "News" page where survivors post their stories. Several survivors have written gripping accounts of their assault and many have written that they have chosen to share their story in hopes of helping other victims speak out.

In the "Current Issues" section, readers dialogue about recent news headlines. In a response to a November 2006 news article about a Maryland court ruling that if a woman consents to sex before intercourse, she can not accuse her partner of rape, TBTN reader Anastasia Webb of New York commented the news was, "Absurd, horrific, soul-crushing."



Currently, TBTN is working on a New York City Media Response Project in conjunction with the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault. The NYC Media Response Project involves TBTN volunteers tracking *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, and *The New York Post* and responding to misrepresentations of rape. TBTN has opened up dialogues with reporters at these papers, while also getting a clear vision of the problems with how rape is represented and how much detail is too much when reporting a rape case.

Brandt envisions TBTN growing into a strong resource for community activists and mainstream media. She hopes "that once the media takes more responsibility for accurately covering and contextualizing rape, real change in public perception will occur, and ideally rapes will be prevented." Δ