

## Isabel Odom-Flores

College was going to be hard to pay for. As a graduating senior the number one factor of attending college was the cost and how I was going to pay for it. Being 18 and thrown into the "real world" was a scary concept, I was going to take any help I could get. About a month before I was done with my senior year, I was offered a full scholarship to play at my local community college. The coach that offered me the starting position was older, yet charismatic and confident. He made me feel as if I was the missing part of the team he was putting together. At this point, I was happy to accept the position on the team and the full scholarship.

As my first semester of college flew by, my coaches confidence and charisma turned in to creepy, handsy and inappropriate remarks. Each week boundaries were being pushed and my teammates were becoming weary of our coaches intentions. While we were becoming weary, we were also growing with excitement for the season to start. Most of us were there on a scholarship to play but also to play the sport we loved as well. Our actions of our coach were not talked about. We were guilty at turning a blind eye. We put up with his behavior for one reason only, to keep our scholarship or "promised money". Not all of our teammates were on scholarship, some had been promised money at the end of the season.

My coming of conscience struck me at random. I was on my way to practice with a car full of teammates when I just mentioned that I was going to report our coach. At the time I was signed to be on full scholarship my next upcoming school year, I was promised sophomore team captain and a starting position. I knew all of that was at jeopardy if my coach were to lose his job. My teammates were hesitant to support me. Their reasoning being, they can put up with him, if it means scholarship money. I was done with the harassment and the bullying. Realizing that he was promising us money towards the end of the year in hopes of keeping us quiet about his behavior. I had worked hard to be the next team captain, I had worked hard the last ten years in hopes of being a student-athlete in college. Now that I finally had the things that I wanted, I was realizing that putting up with inappropriate behavior is not something I should have to do at my school. Harassment in the workplace is wrong. Harassment in schools is wrong. Harassment everywhere is wrong.

I hope to obtain my masters in speech-language pathology. This would put me in a school setting or maybe even a hospital work setting. Either way, I will be an advocate in my workplace. I will advocate for anyone who is experiencing harassment anywhere. Spreading knowledge on what qualifies as harassment and what does not. Spreading knowledge on how to file a harassment claim under the equal employment opportunity commission. Spreading knowledge will break down the barrier that separates people from staying quiet to finding their voice. As for my coach, he was investigated by our title nine officers. The investigation came back and there was not enough evidence to support my claims. So, I filed another claim this time with pictures of texts he had sent, other faculty members who had seen harassment first hand, and with intent to go to the media if the school decided not to take action. After the second investigation, he was fired. A new coach did get hired, I did lose half of my scholarship, but the softball program was sent in the right direction. As for me, I have grown to have a firm voice and use it when there is an injustice. I especially feel compelled to advocate for other women. Equality and harassment in the workplace or anywhere is something to be taken seriously. I will never turn a blind eye ever again in any setting.