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## Wokenell Interview

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**Bucknell: Occupied**  
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**Jennifer Thomson, interviewer (JT)**  
**Wokenell Representative (WR)**

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**JT:** ...there has been a very interesting campaign kicking up over the past two weeks calling itself Wokenell. It has primarily targeted issues of sexual assault on campus, and I have a representative of Wokenell here in the studio with me. So I would like to first say welcome to the studio.

**WR:** Thank you, happy to be here.

**JT:** Thanks for joining us and one thing that I'd like to say is that although she's here as a representative of Wokenell, she'll also be speaking in terms of her own opinions and interpretations as well. If you have any questions at any point, you can give us a call here in the studio, the number is 570.577.3489. So I'm wondering if we can just start by thinking about what is Wokenell.

**WR:** Alright. My experience is that it came together as just a group of people who wanted to be more proactive about what's going on on campus and what's being done about the things that are going on on campus and in the culture surrounding. We're just trying to see... We know that there's more that can be done and we're not seeing it happen, so we're trying to just take it into our own hands at this point, I guess.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** What else can you do [LAUGHS]

**JT:** What are some of the issues that the members of the group are concerned with?

**WR:** I can only speak for myself, and what I've heard from my peers. But we're still seeing a lot of issues with sexual assault and harassment not being addressed. We have Title IX at this school, but that lays so much of the burden on the victim, and just to highlight with recent events how that affects our academic life, hearing students who have not been comfortable going to classes the last few days as a result of actions by professors, and things like that. So we're trying to see what the University is willing to do about things like that. There is still so much open, blatant racism on campus, all of the time. Food insecurity, things like that. Everything, like you had said earlier, originally started to try to make noise about inaction concerning sexual assault, harassment, rape culture, but we really want to make this more inclusive, because obviously divisiveness is not helping any of us. We see that on a greater scale, too.

**JT:** Yeah. Thanks, that's kinda, that's a really great way of thinking about what your group is interested in, right? So even though I think a lot of people became aware of you all through your ongoing work around sexual assault, you're seeing the way in which sexual assault on this campus is connected to all kinds of other?

**WR:** MmHm.

**JT:** issues that students and other community members are facing.

**WR:** MmHm.

**JT:** So I wanted to kind of think about this a little bit historically, and just think about the way in which Wokenell introduced itself to Bucknell's campus. And really, one of the first actions, to my knowledge. Was a poster that went up in most buildings around campus about two weeks ago.

**WR:** MmHm.

**JT:** And some people listening might know what I'm referring to, but for those of you that don't, I'll read this over the air. So this poster said: "T-shirts did not stop my rapist, neither did" -- and then it provides a list -- "Take Back the Night, Speak Up, Greek Life meetings, Sober drivers, Title IX, Public Safety, my friends, the Senate. Victims of sexual assault want real action, we want real change, if the administration won't make it happen, we will." Can you talk a little bit about that position?

**WR:** Yes. I think a lot of us feel like all of these efforts are great, but they all seem to be really retrospective. And there's a wonderful event going on right now, on the Smith Quad. People are being so strong and sharing their stories to try to raise awareness, but it seems every year more like a memorial when we're trying to be proactive about stopping things before they happen. That list, the T-shirts, the Greek Life meetings, all of these things are happening, but we're not seeing any action,

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** just conversation. And intentions without action are just not worth anything.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** So we want more. We demand more for everyone. We deserve it.

**JT:** So what is your sense of why the existing -- both policies in terms of Title IX and the grievance procedure, but the practices, the bystander training, the Greek Life meetings, etc. -- why aren't they working?

**WR:** I think, in my experience, just walking through the hallways of buildings. Students don't take it seriously. The majority of students don't take it seriously. A lot... If anyone was present Friday morning on the Malesardi Quad for the open protest sort of sculpture garden that we had put together. Students were laughing and pointing, making fun of the signs, while at the same time, a few other students were in tears telling us about their own assaults and how they are not being appropriately handled by the University, by Title IX. They weren't handled properly by public safety at the onset. And again, as I mentioned earlier, students who were not comfortable going to classes with the particular professor who had posted something so egregious on his door.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** Last week. So it's affecting our academics, it's affecting people in so many other ways. But it's not the majority of people, and the majority of people who haven't experienced it can't, I think, just can't empathize. And the culture is really that it's all a joke. And it's not fair for one person, and there are hundreds of people here who are dealing with this.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** Dealing with just being marginalized and not feeling safe on campus. Not feeling like they can ever let their guard down.

**JT:** And do you see that there's very specific institutions or practices on campus that are maintaining this culture?

**WR:** I mean, just today we were able to read a memo from one of the frats, and I have no problem calling them out -- KDR -- is that... can I read it, is that...

**JT:** Yes. As long as it doesn't mention any specific names.

**WR:** Not at all. I'm sorry, give me one second to find it.

**JT:** No you're good. You're good. For those of you who might have tuned in to join us since we started, I am sitting here in the studio with a representative from Wokenell, talking about sexual assault here on campus.

**WR:** So this was a memo issued by one of the frats to members "For people who are attending Take Back the Night, you should be prepared for a protest from Wokenell. We always encourage brothers to wear letters at these events and this protest changes nothing. However, if Wokenell protests Greek culture on campus, do not react. They are doing this for attention and to make people angry, so do not respond to them. Once you put on the letters, you speak for the frat and Greek life, and none of us have the authority to speak for every member of Greek life. Despite this challenge, I strongly encourage everyone to attend. This is an important event, and I hope every one of you stand behind its purpose." And half of that is great -- don't resort to any kind of violence or harassment, this event is important, it's a really important thing on campus -- but to call out people who are actually really trying, putting themselves out there to actually get proactive change to call them out for being attention-seeking.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** And trying to make people angry. I mean, as far as I can see, everyone's just been complacent. Maybe we all do need to be a little more angry about what's going on.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** And the groups that are the most powerful on campus, that have their nearly guaranteed affinity house, and their own safe spaces. I thought it was really interesting, I listened to the interview with John Bravman earlier from 2015. After that really horrible incident of racial discrimination and calls for violence, really. And he talked about how the burden should never be on the victims and that we have all these new safe spaces that were created, or common spaces.

**JT:** MmHm. MmHm.

**WR:** Like the south apartments and MacDonald Commons, and that's all well and great, but all of the strongest organizations on this campus have their own spaces.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** They have their own places, where they obviously do -- I'll say, whatever they want. Anyone that's driven down 7th street or St. Catherine on a Friday or Saturday night. Saturday, during the day, starting at 10 am, they do whatever they want, and they have their own spaces to do that. And there are groups on campus that deserve the same respect, the same support, the same space. And common areas just don't cut it. We're losing Fran's house, it's been left to just kind of crumble. And it's being torn down for a management building. I can't speak to the need on that, but that's fine. [LAUGHS] And C.A.L.V.I.N. & H.O.B.B.E.S., as well, the drug-free, alcohol-free spaces. They're just not supported here, and it's outrageous. I can't understand why whole groups of people are just being ignored.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** On a campus that allegedly prides itself on its diversity. I thought that was very interesting as well. All the diversity hires that happened in 2015. Best year. [LAUGHS]

**JT:** So I'm hearing you talk a lot about the relationship between Greek culture, and the way in which Greek culture's almost learned to support a certain form of intervening against sexual assault, right? So supporting events like Take Back the Night, participating in Greek life meetings, or maybe perhaps in speak-up kind of bystander trainings. But then seeing anything outside that mold as being damaging, destructive, and then the phrase you used -- attention seeking.

**WR:** Right.

**JT:** Can I ask you to talk a little bit about something that you mentioned when you were speaking before. So Wokenell brought attention to a poster that was on a professor's door. I won't be naming the professor or the department. But this particular professor had posted an image taken from Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation ceremony. And in this picture, Kavanaugh is placing his hand, presumably upon a Bible, which is being held by his wife. There's a white male judge there as well, and his two daughters are also there. It's quite a gendered image. All three of the women in the image are clearly in subordinate positions to the two men in the room. And the caption on this particular picture reads "He persisted" or "Nonetheless, he..."

[CROSSTALK]

**WR:** "Nevertheless, he persisted."

**JT:** So can I ask you to talk about the meaning and the significance of that image, and why Wokenell really tried to bring attention to it?

**WR:** I don't think anyone is stranger to awful and drawn out and dramatic, I guess, is maybe a diplomatic way of saying [LAUGHS] the confirmation hearing of Brett Kavanaugh. And it was a devastating process for so many of us. When those things happen, no matter how much you try to avoid the news, it's in

your face constantly. Victims of sexual assault and harassment just being openly knocked. Dr. Ford being accused of being in it for the book deal, when she had to flee with her children. No amount of money would ever motivate. I actually have a child, and I just can't imagine what she went through. What they're all still going through. But the entire ordeal was just really, really damaging to anyone who has ever had any experience with sexual assault or harassment. And then on top of that to co-opt the phrase from... that women had taken back when it was used to belittle Elizabeth Warren "Nevertheless, she persisted." Women took that and made it their own, and then to be co-opted for something like that. And my understanding is that the defense for the picture was that it was in support of the right to due process.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** And I can't understand how a professor would try to apply such a thing. Due process is for trials, when someone is in a criminal trial being accused of a crime and on trial for that crime. If you had a job interview for any other position, and you were suspected of assaulting someone and then behaved the way Brett Kavanaugh behaved. That's fine. That doesn't apply to due process. That is a job interview. You would never get a job behaving like that in any other situation, but I don't want to get political [LAUGHS].

**JT:** For those of you just joining us, you're listening to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. I'm speaking with a representative from Wokenell. Right now we've been talking about a particular poster which was noticed and brought to the attention of the rest of the campus by Wokenell. Can you just talk a little bit about what kind of message the presence of that poster sent to the students, and in fact other faculty and staff on the floor.

**WR:** Conversations that I've had with so many people, so many of my friends, people that I have never met that just from my involvement we've had conversations and have been introduced, that everyone felt like they were being made a joke of. That their experiences were being mocked by that professor and to try to defend it with such a moot argument, really was just that much more insulting. I mean, you're a professor, you're a PhD here, you're full tenure, you're not an idea. You knew what message that image sent.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** And you put it up anyway, and you left it up and you're stubborn. Students were not comfortable going to your class after that because of what they had been through. Your job is to promote a safe, unbiased learning environment. That's your job, that's what you're here for. And this university takes very good care of you to do that. And it's really unfair, and I think you owe the entire University community an apology, first and foremost, but that's my personal [LAUGHS] at the minimum.

**JT:** So throughout the first poster campaign and then the subsequent rounds particularly dealing with this poster, Wokenell was pretty much doing a lot of stuff on social media, right? A lot on Instagram as well as Twitter, and then putting up posters on the physical campus.

**WR:** MmHm.

**JT:** But last Friday, it expanded its range of actions a bit. And again, you mentioned this very briefly in your prior comments, but I'm wondering if you can talk to us in a bit more detail about what Wokenell did in front of the library last Friday morning.

**WR:** Yes, so, we had put together... we did our very best to do a very quick response to what was happening. We put together a set of three scarecrow type sculptures, and if anyone had the chance to kind of check them out up close.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** There were three girls who were dressed in maybe typical party outfits. They might've been a little dated, but... Girls with faces that appeared to be passed out or, just like running makeup, something like that. The question that we tried to challenge people with was "1 in 3, which do you think it was."

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** And it was really just to challenge the stereotype and all of the typical arguments that, you know "I was drunk, she was drunk, we didn't... how could I have known..." and all of the excuses about how when someone is intoxicated they can't give informed consent. And 700 Nos and a Yes doesn't mean Yes. One No and a Yes doesn't mean Yes. And all of the things that happen when typical situations on a college campus when students are drinking.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** And things get out of control. And that's not to say that it doesn't happen without alcohol either, because it does.

**JT:** Now I mean, one of the interesting things -- so for those of you who didn't get a chance to go see it, just as she's described there were these three figures -- but there were also some very interesting signs that I actually wanted to ask you about. So the signs weren't only thinking about sexual assault in terms of gender. But in fact they brought some very real elements of race and class into it. So I'm wondering if you can talk about how Wokenell sees these three issues as intersecting when it comes to sexual assault.

**WR:** Yeah. Obviously, when students of color, students who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are not the majority are already being marginalized, and then to experience things like harassment and assault. They're even less supported, not just by their community but by the school who has already left them. I mean it's exhausting here to try to just get through everything. Just because it's so overwhelming, the majority here. We talk about diversity all the time, and it's not fair. I don't really know what application numbers are, but I can't imagine anybody really being attracted to this school who isn't the majority if it's not a situation with like athletics or other kind of academic scholarships.

**JT:** MmHm. So then you're saying that a certain kind of environment gets created here where certain communities are much more likely to be victimized by the majority.

**WR:** Right. Right.

**JT:** Yeah.

**WR:** And it just compounds almost exponentially when that intersectionality comes into play. And I think at least for me personally, one of my, I guess disappointments with Speak-up is that it doesn't seem to reach out in a more inclusive way for the different experiences that students of color are dealing with and LGBTQ+ students. It really, it represents the majority. It doesn't feel like it represents all of us.

**JT:** MmHm. And before we move on to another thing to think about, you mentioned when you were describing the three scarecrows, that there was a statistic one in three, right? And the question. Can you just talk about that number, and what does that mean and what is the significance of that number?

**WR:** That one in three students experience assault or harassment during their time on a University, and that includes our campus. I mean, you're standing with three people, with three women all the time here, and to be... to have someone who is going through that right next to you. And I see so many just blatantly ignore it and laugh and students that maybe want to do something about it and can't because they don't feel comfortable. Because, I mean, they're literally just laughing, standing on the Quad, pointing and laughing, and making fun of the signs and making a joke out of an effort that a few students were driven to. We don't have time for this. We're trying to get through with good academic standing. We're trying to be involved in our communities in positive ways, we're trying to graduate and move on, and get out of this school what we're putting into it. And we did that anyway, because obviously things are that bad.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** So...

**JT:** Yeah.

**WR:** I want to shout out to my awesome professors for being really supportive. Thanks.

**JT:** There's no need for you to answer this question if it doesn't seem strategically wise, but are there any future campaigns that Wokenell's considering that you would be willing at this point to talk about?

**WR:** At this point, we're actually... and we think this is really important. We're collecting anyone who is willing -- anonymous or not, whatever, anyone's comfortable with -- we're trying to get a collection of stories together from students of color, LGBTQ+ students, students experiencing food insecurity, international students.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** Anyone who has ever dealt with Title IX and just been let down. Any kind of marginalization or just total lack of support in a really hard situation on campus that has not been addressed that you want to share. We would love to hear it and put it together. We're trying to really show the real experiences of the people here who are not the 80% who are not the majority. I'm sure there's plenty of students who are even in that majority that want to speak out and can't that have been through horrible things as well. We're trying to help everyone here. We all deserve a better environment and it's not impossible. Everyone just has to try harder. We're all responsible for this.



**JT:** For people who might be listening who would like to share stories, is there an e-mail address that they could send it to?

**WR:** Absolutely. Wokenell@protonmail.com and whatever email you would like to use, you don't have to use your Bucknell email. Whatever you're comfortable with. It doesn't have to be anything detailed, just a line. Something that you've experienced. That a friend has experienced. We're... We're happy to... We hear you... We want to hear you. So, please share if you're willing and able.

**JT:** We are going to take a very brief break for a public service announcement and then we'll be right back.

[INTERLUDE] CUT 00:25:20 to 00:26:24

**JT:** Welcome back, you are listening to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. I am here with a representative from Wokenell. We spent half an hour so far talking about what Wokenell's been up to over the last really over the past two weeks since it made its presence felt. And it certainly caused quite a bit of a stir here on campus just in those two weeks. If you have a question, you can give us a call here in the studio. The number is 570.577.3489. So before the break, we spent quite a bit of time talking through the kind of very specific actions that Wokenell's taken and why. What the different ideas were. So I'm wondering if we can back out a little bit and start to think about some more general issues about political action, and the effects that your activism has had on campus so far. So do you think you've had a bigger presence on social media? Or physically around campus?

**WR:** I have to confess, I'm not actually on Instagram [LAUGHS], I'm on Twitter. I know that there has been a lot of outside support from people not associated with the University. Other professors that I know I follow and others follow. @MeTooStem has given us a couple shout outs which is awesome, but as far as I know, the Instagram has really caught a lot of attention. I know on campus, my experience has been people coming up to me all the time and saying they saw the flyers and they saw the signs, and asking what the display on the lawn on the Quad was all about. So it started a lot of conversations just for me.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** So I'm confident that other people are talking about it as well. It was -- I'll say it was really, really hard on Friday when people were laughing and pointing and mocking everything, but what I keep trying to remind myself that the people that have even very quietly just expressed their gratitude for being seen and heard has made it worth it. And really energized all of us.

**JT:** MmHm. So how do you see the relationship between the presence on social media and then, like, what's actually happening in face to face interactions between people. Like how do you see those two things working together?

**WR:** Um. I mean everyone uses social media anymore, so it's a really good way to quickly get around what we're trying to do and hopefully get more people involved. Obviously visibility is what our goal really is; that's what needs to happen for change. So as much as we can get images and our message out, that's gonna be really important going forward.

**JT:** Another question. What has been the reception at least in what you're aware of from the male student body here on campus.

**WR:** That has been... a lot of snickers. A lot of trying not to make eye contact. I guess I shouldn't out a particular building, but the last time I walked through it, no male professor would make eye contact with me. I thought that was interesting. I can't imagine what kind of work environment that must be. So shout out to all the people entering that. But, yeah, the student body, like I said earlier, it's constantly just not taking it seriously. I can't understand how you can listen to people bearing all of their pain, and it's... Why would we put ourselves through this if it wasn't real?

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** Why would anyone stand on that stage in the Smith Quad, right, like 50 feet from us and share their horrible experience retraumatizing themselves if it wasn't real? These are real people, real stories, and I can't understand what kind of a person, let alone so many of the people here can just turn their backs and laugh. My experience at Take Back the Night last year was standing in a crowd of brothers in letters laughing and talking about "this is chick stuff, why are we here, this is stupid." All kinds of language that... yeah. It's... It blows the mind, I can't wrap my brain around such a lack of conscience and such a lack of any kind of empathy. It's a really bizarre phenomenon that kind of ignorance and entitlement.

**JT:** MmHm. I mean, and, you know, I hear you talking about the kind of group think that results from these very intensive group environments. And, I mean, in particular environments that grant a lot of privileges to their members, right? And therefore inspire quite a bit of loyalty. And I think there's one way in which many of the programs not only on this campus but on many campuses target people's individual conscience, right? They call for them to participate in these programs, because they understand that there is something fundamentally wrong with how their campuses are functioning. But that doesn't really go towards breaking down this kind of group think that results.

**WR:** Right, right. One of the things -- oh gosh -- one of the most ridiculous things that I hear from people is that "it's just a few bad apples, it's just a few bad apples." But those few bad apples, as true as that may or may not be, it's the entire house that hosts the party. It's the entire house that -- everyone knows what's going on. Have heard it being screamed down the street at 9:30 in the morning the next day what happened the night before and in detail who was involved. So you can't pretend like you don't know what's going on. Everyone there was complacent in the situation. And even the sober drivers I've heard so many times that party guests are being driven back to their dorms or back to the affinity houses and no one is taking into account anyone's ability to take care of themselves. How coherent they are, in any condition to make -- to give any kind of consent.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** So... I mean, what kind of a program is that if it's not being taken seriously.

**JT:** Yeah.

**WR:** Obviously things are happening whether that sober person is there or not.

**JT:** So I mean, one of the things that I think you've brought up in really interesting ways in this conversation is how there's certain aspects at Bucknell that amplify a larger rape culture in which we live.

**WR:** MmHm.

**JT:** But that that culture pre-dates Bucknell and supports Bucknell, right? So there's this kind of relationship between Bucknell and the larger social climate.

**WR:** MmHm.

**JT:** Do you all see the university as being in some ways a particular to positively intervene in breaking that loop? Are there aspects about the University itself which make it a more ideal place to try to start tackling rape culture?

**WR:** Absolutely. The University gives what seems like... I'm sorry, I'm drawing a blank here... unconditional support to the fraternities and we don't even see that for the sororities, but it's not my place to speak on. But trying to break that up, not... incentivizing them to do more, to be more proactive. But they seem to just be given free reign and what they can't do on campus, they do at their downtown houses. So, um, breaking that iron-clad relationship between the frats and the University, that's a start. It doesn't seem like the administration is ever willing to condemn anything that is done. And that... that's... you're just giving them a pass over and over again. I mean, we know it's particular house and where things happen and when they happen and I don't understand why that connection isn't being acknowledged.

**JT:** MmHm.

**WR:** So that would definitely be a good start to some of it. Holding not just individuals, but whole groups accountable. Like I said before, everyone knows it's happening while it's happening, and it's not OK to just let that continue over and over. The school's not unaware. They don't respond to things, but they're not unaware. I talk to people all of the time. I can't really out who, but I promise they're credible [LAUGHS] that tell me that John Bravman is aware of all of these things, the administration, the deans, they know what's happening. There were flyers under their door. They know what's happening. I'm not really sure why their choice is to not acknowledge any of it.

**JT:** MmHm. You talked a little bit before about how this isn't just... not only is Wokenell not a single issue organization, but sexual assault isn't a stand-alone issue on campus, right? And in fact when you were talking, you connected it to other issues which are quite significant on campus right now and historically. One being that of racism and the second one being of food insecurity. So I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how you see those three issues being interconnected on some level.

**WR:** Absolutely the issue of visibility. The more we can all try to stand up for each other, the better all... the better it will be for all of us. There's strength in numbers and we as a group... It's really hard to see other people struggling for different reasons. Everyone's struggle is different, and when there's groups that are individually struggling in the same way. Why would we not want to try to identify with them and try to help each other? It's that divisiveness that is so encouraged in our society, in our culture, as what I think prevents us from making real change.

**JT:** So you're seeing like a real possibility for coalition between different kinds of groups on campus.

**WR:** Absolutely.

**JT:** Is there... Are there particular things that you can identify at this point that sympathetic faculty and/or staff could do?

**WR:** I mean, we're trying to figure out a way to have like a safe space either off campus. Something that is its own space for people who are not trying to be around the downtown parties that are just filled with trucks and alcohol, that's no secret. People who are just trying to get off campus, get out of the really, really tense and stressful environment and have a place that is safe and that is not... that's their space. We talked about earlier how there's the commons, but that's not... That's a common area, that's not a space for people who need one of their own.

**JT:** Right. OK, so, do you know what it is that faculty or staff can

[CROSSTALK; LAUGHS]

**WR:** Sorry.

**JT:** No, no, it's fine, it's fine. I just wanted to continue with your answer.

**WR:** Oh, yeah. We're... I mean, we're like in really early discussion stages. Like I said, we're still full-time students just like everyone else full-time jobs here, so we're doing our best to try to get something together. Maybe a Go Fund Me. There's been talk about trying to look into a non-profit that could be something on the long-term maintain a space like this.

**JT:** Yeah.

**WR:** So, I mean, professors are really good at writing grants. So that could definitely be some help that would be really appreciated. Any kind of ideas as to how we could make something like that happen. And again, if anybody listening wants to get in touch with you, would you mind repeating the email address?

**WR:** Yes. It is wokenell@protonmail.com.

**JT:** So at this point is there anything else that you want to bring into the conversation or that you would like listeners to know of?

**WR:** [LAUGHS] this is a little sappy. I just want everyone to take care of themselves. I know personally I have to really step out sometimes and take my own time and take my own space. You can't do your school work, you can't be effective at all of your responsibilities if you can't take care of yourself. And it's OK to try to have to block people out and block all of this out sometimes. I know I feel guilty a lot for doing that, but I just... friends of mine that I know are having a hard time sometimes. I just want everyone to look out for themselves... and each other.

**JT:** Well thank you so much for coming on the show, I really appreciate you spending your time with us.

**WR:** Thank you. It was really nice. I appreciate you giving us a chance to get our message out.

**JT:** Anytime.