

His bed was to the left when she entered his room — plaid sheets laid in no particular fashion with a gray comforter resting at the foot. His alarm clock read a time that was well into the night. A typical setup for a teenage boy — not clean by any means. There were clothes on the floor, and the bathroom door was on the wall to the right — adjacent to the back wall where there was a fish tank.

Then sophomore Linda Daniels* dissected the boy's room in an attempt to stall the awkward conversation and direct eye contact. She didn't want to be in his room.

She sat on the edge of his bed. He started to flirt with her.

'Why are you sitting so far away?'

She had told him as they left the basement to go up to his room that she didn't want to do anything with him.

She had said that before they even snuck over.

Daniels's friend was in the basement with the boy's friend. The girls had only come over for Daniels's friend to be with the boy's friend at the house, so Daniels was awkwardly left with the other boy.

In his room, Daniels still denied any advancements from the boy, however, he still tried to flirt with her. Flirting quickly turned into convincing. And convincing quickly turned into aggression.

She continued to say no. He continued to persist.

After time, Daniels questioned if she was overreacting. She questioned if her denial was too harsh or too upfront as he got frustrated.

He tried to kiss her.

She pulled away and tried for an easy out, 'Let's go back downstairs'.

He tried to get on top of her.

'I don't want to do this.'

'It's fine, no one has to know.'

He tugged on her shirt and tried to take it off.

'I need to go to the bathroom' — the only remark that took effect.

Daniels shut the sliding door of the jack-and-jill bathroom the boy had with his younger brother. She sobbed. Quietly. Careful not to wake anyone in the house, especially the boy's brother a wall away.

She couldn't scream. She couldn't cry for help. She was alone. Terrified.

She looked at herself in the mirror, in disbelief of her current situation.

Daniels managed to exit the boy's room and house with her friend — catching a ride with an upperclassman, telling them the story in the car while still coming to terms with the events that had just occurred.

When she got home, Daniels became physically sick — repeatedly throwing up in her bathroom toilet. She was almost grossed out with herself and still in disbelief of what had just happened to her. The words sexual assault kept replaying in her mind.

The 20 minutes now-senior Daniels spent in the boy's room that night altered the rest of her time in high school.

She was accused of making the whole story up by some people she told. She had friends who still hung out with the boy. She still saw the boy within the halls of SM East — forced to act as if nothing happened. She would see his younger brother too.

Daniels still gets flashbacks of moments from that night that she didn't black out of her memory. She will still sometimes get emotional in intimate situations. But being able to come to terms that it wasn't her fault, with her then-therapist and time, has helped Daniels heal.

She never told her parents. She told a small group of her close friends, some reacting positively and some disregarding her and almost taking the boy's side.

Daniels tried to spread awareness for sexual assault through small social media posts and school projects. But she was reluctant to share her story more publicly because she didn't want it to consume her reputation. She didn't want it to take over her life more than it already had. She didn't want her experience to become her identity. She didn't want to be 'the girl who got sexually assaulted'.