**Harassment: A True Story**

**Sexual Harassment Podcast**

***Disclaimer:*** *This is a true story; however, names have been changed to ensure anonymity and protect the privacy of employees.*

**Guillaume Wildgust (host):** Hi everyone!My name is Guillaume Wildgust, and I am an advisor in the Harassment Centre of Expertise. In collaboration with ESDC’s Office of Values and Ethics, we are releasing a series of podcast episodes that we are calling “Harassment: A True Story”.

Often times when we hear this 10-letter, three-syllable word it invokes thoughts of angst, confusion, or even, for some of us, fear. Too often however, we reduce harassment to a word, a statistic, or a fictitious concept. But we hear about harassment in the news through the “Me Too” movement, such as the high profile case of Jian Ghomeshi, or more regularly through such things as the Public Service Employment Surveys.

This series of podcasts is meant to shine a light on harassment, the impact it can have, and to provide you with resources should you encounter it. We will be sharing four true stories of individuals who have experienced harassment first-hand but from very different perspectives: we’ll talk about harassment from a manager towards an employee, harassment from an employee directed at their manager, sexual harassment, and a person who has witnessed harassment. Our hope is that by hearing four true stories of what harassment can look like and what its impact can be on real-life individuals that we’ll not only reveal how devastating it can be, but encourage you to play an active role in exposing and possibly resolving any incidents that occur in the workplace.

Please stay tuned! At the end of this story, an advisor from the Harassment Centre of Expertise will give you advice and guidance on what to do and where to go when facing, managing or witnessing a harassment situation.

And now, a re-enactment of a true story of harassment in the public service. The names have been changed but the story is real.

**Emily (victim):** So, my story starts during my first job working for the government, where I had experienced what I would now consider harassment. It all started when a male colleague who was about 20 years older than me was hired into my three-person all-female team.

Before our office had always been just us three girls— we had always had a good working relationships and had gotten along quite well together. We all respected each other, would help each other and had a good team dynamic. When this new colleague arrived, the dynamic of our office immediately changed. Right off the bat, you could tell that he was the “type of person” that would say whatever was on his mind, and he would do so in a rather loud and arrogant way. He started off by initially making negative comments about women, for example when he told my female manager that he should hold her position because a man would be able to run the office better.

Every morning when coming into the office, he would make inappropriate comments about my appearance. He started off by commenting on my behind every time I wore a dress to work and walked by his desk, but he would try to say it in a joking way to make something that my colleague and I would “laugh off”. At the time it was the summer, and I would wear dresses to work because it was hot outside, not that that should be justified. After a few weeks Chris got even more comfortable in our office, he escalated his comments when he said that my name was similar to that of an adult film star he liked. After that, every once in a while he would greet me in the morning by using that film star’s name as a supposed “joke”. He would also make comments about my lips, and even said to my colleague that the size of my mouth was good for certain acts…

Even though Chris never tried to make any physical advances on me, it got to the point where I didn't feel comfortable being alone at the office with him. I would joke with my colleague and say things like “make sure you’re at the office at exactly this time so I don’t have to be alone with Chris, or “are you really not going to be at the office today? I don’t want to have to be alone with Chris”. This comment first started off as a joke, but it became more serious of a statement as we realized that it wasn’t a joke anymore. Still, it wasn’t until I left that job that I realized how serious this situation was.

**Guillaume Wildgust (host):** Although jokes are often welcome in an office environment, it’s important to be respectful. Chris’ jokes and comments are clearly inappropriate and in no way funny. His actions are considered harassment, and unfortunately as we’re about to hear, had a lasting and negative impact on the workplace.

**Emily (victim):** Both my young colleague and I got new jobs after a few months of Chris being hired. It would be false to say that the only reason I left was because of this person, but his behaviour and what it did to my experience at work definitely played a role. I can blame it on being young and naive for not having taken action in this situation, but I would say there were more factors than just that. I really did try to justify his behaviour at the time. We would say things like “he can’t be that creepy, he has a wife and a kid”, or “oh, it’s just Chris, it’s just part of his personality”. I had never been in a situation like that before, and didn’t know how to react other than to “laugh it off”. I wanted to believe that his comments were jokes, even after they would happen on a regular basis and I began to realize how creepy he really was. I also didn’t know what resources were available for me to resolve the issue and didn’t want to bother my busy boss especially because it didn’t involve any physical sexual harassment. It wasn’t until I left that office and reflected on what had happened that I started to realize how unhealthy, disturbing and seriously inappropriate that behaviour was. Again, I was a young adult and about 20 years his junior.

**Guillaume Wildgust (host):** Although in this case the inappropriate comments were not addressed, it’s still important for us to hear what lessons Emily learned from this negative experience.

**Emily (victim):** I learned that it's not okay to laugh off inappropriate comments or justify inappropriate behaviour. Also, the sooner you face the problem, the easier it is to stop it from escalating out of proportion. I also learned that it's important to reflect on the situations that happened instead of assuming it will get better or trying to convince yourself that it's not too bad, that it's tolerable.

Looking back I would have told my boss about the situation or tried to find other forms of help. A lesson for me is that people will try to take advantage of others when there’s a power dynamic involved, and in my case that power dynamic was age.

**Guillaume Wildgust (host):** Thank you Emily for sharing your true story with us today. We will now welcome an advisor from the Harassment Centre of Expertise, Julie, that will give us advice on what to do when facing a harassment situation like this.

**Julie (HCE advisor):** Hi everyone, thanks for listening and thank you, Emily, for sharing your story.

I guess I’d like to start by highlighting that making repeated comments and inappropriate jokes with a sexual connotation can be considered sexual harassment in the workplace even if there’s no physical contact. Like Emily mentioned, if possible, it’s best to deal with situations like this as soon as possible by speaking with the person and clearly expressing, in a respectful manner of course, that these kinds of jokes and comments make you uncomfortable. Ask them to stop.  I do realize that for some of us, it can be really difficult to speak out in times like these.

We’ve probably all been in a situation where we tell ourselves to shrug it off or just go along with things rather than make waves. But if you can’t speak to the person with the offensive behaviour, I strongly urge you to talk to a supervisor, either your own or any other manager you’re comfortable with. If that’s not possible, you can reach out to one of the many departmental resources, like our office, the Office of Informal Conflict Management or the Office of Values and Ethics. And don’t forget that union representatives are another helpful resource to turn to for support. Remember that you are not alone and that help is here for you. If you are experiencing or witnessing harassment, whether you are an employee or a manager, you can contact the Harassment Centre of Expertise. We offer neutral support and services to everyone. Talk to someone on our team and they’ll help you find a solution appropriate for you. You can look us up on iService for more information and you’ll also find the contact information if you want or reach out to one of our advisors for a consultation. Above all, speak up in whatever way you can.

**Guillaume Wildgust (host):** Thank you for listening, I think we all agree what happened in this re-enactment was unacceptable. If you experience a situation like this, we encourage you to speak up and remember, don’t suffer in silence.