



We Will Be Your Trojan Horse

The Mounting Threats Against Independent Media



1,192, 369, 345

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Trigger warning: FBI 302 interview with description of sexual assault of a minor

I've spent the last two or so weeks riding a roller coaster of different emotions—anger, fear, paranoia, depression—all based on social media posts that one person wrote about me. They went on day and night, as if I'd won some sort of lottery of threatening behavior. It started just after my daughter had a seizure in the car on the way home from the baseball picnic. Not unusual, but not a time to mess with me. In so many words, I told the man to leave me alone, get a job, find a hobby, and focus on something that matters (i.e. not me).

He didn't stop.

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narcissist_survivorsss@proton.me

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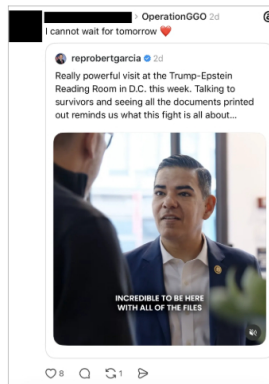
Eventually I reported his behavior to Substack, hoping I could just get a break. I could block him, but he had other accounts, other people screenshotting my work and sending it to him. And the bullying just wouldn't stop. Substack, to their credit, reviewed my report and banned his accounts. But this made it worse. He blamed me for somehow having the power to remove him from Substack. I don't, to be clear, and that would become more apparent as he continued to spout off about me on other platforms.

I will not be silenced by criminals, fake survivors, or sexist grifting journalists like Ellie Leonard. 1/3

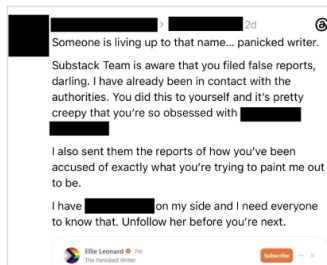
30, 7, 6, ...

Most of it was reputational, calling me sexist, that I'm a grifter, that I'm a "plant" in the Epstein space. He said I was swatting him, filing false reports, illegally getting Substack to boycott, that I'm unhinged, a pathological liar. He threatened to sue me, said he had connections, claimed I had harassment charges against me, said he was launching a website to "out" me, had recorded phone calls, text messages, everything to take me down in some way or another.

I really, really wanted to respond. I wanted to call his bluff and say, "Okay, show me these calls and texts." Is it me telling my husband to grab milk on his way home from work? Or the three Marco Polos I send to my best friend every day to tell her that my kids are driving me crazy? I wanted to embarrass him for lying and choosing me as his target over and over again. I didn't know this man, couldn't remember ever chatting with him at any point, and had to go into my hidden DM requests to find more letters from him.



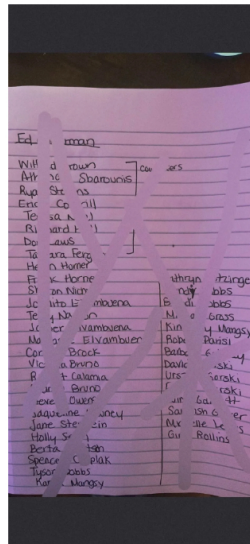
But then it began to get a little frightening, hints of showing up at the Epstein Reading Room that were picked up on by the people who work there. Extra security was put in place. He again threatened publishing some kind of damning information about me, of what I wasn't aware. He pulled in people I worked with, mad that they, too, wouldn't respond to his messages. He used our graphics and small business names to create mockups, tweaks of our hard work, indicating that he was going after each of us specifically. And when I tried, again, to reach out and report, he reposted screenshots of my requests, laughing at the "Panicked Writer" for living up to her name





I'd seen more things offline, text messages he'd sent to other people, including a list of names.

"I have so much time on my hands to research now. Which one are you?"



But when he claimed someone had reached out to his place of work with an IP address he says was very near my location, I knew he knew where I lived. He didn't name the town, but he didn't have to. And for me, that was the final straw.

I hadn't told anyone on Substack at this point what was happening. I work with a lot of bigger journalists who have had a lifetime of smear campaigns and death threats, and I didn't want to be dramatic. Maybe I was overreacting. I'd talked to a woman from my kid's baseball team whose husband is a local cop. She said, "Go down to the station. My husband and brother are on duty. Show them everything." So I compiled the posts, DMs, and letters, and read through it again.

I never went.

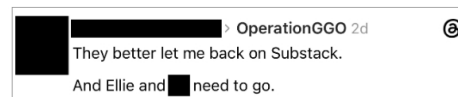
I didn't want to look like an idiot, upset over a small, stupid social media tiff that I hadn't even participated in. After all, he said some pretty bad stuff about me. Who was going to believe me?

I held off, queasy about turning on my phone in the mornings, and distant with my friends and family. But the posts wouldn't stop.

I tried again.

I searched up the guy's local PD and sent them an email with all of the evidence, hoping a written report would make more sense than me sputtering in an office chair. And when the threats kept coming and I hadn't heard back, I reached out to the police again. The officer on duty finally called back, and reiterated what I already knew he would: there was nothing they could do. It's just words, not *real* threats. In summary, even if the guy were to threaten violence, it's not enough. He has to show he's going to act on it. "So, like, actually come hurt me? That's what it takes?"

"Yes...sorry."



It was at that point that I finally reached out to friends and coworkers. Again, the little voice in my head said "why should they believe you?" But they all stepped up immediately. One told me to go file an FBI report, get a record that this had occurred. Another showed me how to wipe my personal info off search engines and locator websites. Some of the most threatened journalists I know called me up and said, "I've got a person for that. I'll have them call you." Everyone paid attention and validated the way that I felt. They didn't ask if I was believable; they just believed me. That's it.

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And then I got a phone call from Marilyn Thompson, a journalist whom I've looked up to for a very long time. We'd never really talked before, except for a couple small emails when we'd written about the same story a few months prior.

"I have a feeling you're getting harassed," she said. I told her yes, actually I was. Her response was the same as everyone who reached out to help: "I'm not surprised."

"I have a feeling you're getting harassed. I'm not surprised."

Marilyn Thompson is an award-winning journalist, whose career has spanned the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, Reuters, POLITICO, and ProPublica. She was part of Pulitzer-Prize-winning teams for public service and reporting on gun violence. In 2024, she returned to her roots as an investigative journalist at the Post and Courier out of Charleston, South Carolina. It was there that

we'd cross paths, both working on the story of Jane Doe 4, the young Epstein survivor hidden from the American public until her missing files were **discovered** by journalists at NPR.



"Three years on Hilton Head leave trail of mysteries in alleged Jeffrey Epstein affair"
- The Post and Courier

Thompson and her writing partner, Mitchell Black, would go on to write many articles about the Hilton Head Island survivor, documenting names, places, and unique details that made it hard to understand why, if she were lying, the Jane Doe would go to such effort. And because this was the 1980s, it was that much harder for investigators to track down records to verify anything Doe said. But they *did* exist.

And while Thompson did the bulk of the work, I and a team of crowdsourced Substackers were able to track down one of the men Doe accused, Jimmy L. Atkins of Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. Atkins, she said, was a friend of Epstein, and the "money guy" involved in some type of educational endeavor. Turns out, she was right. Atkins ran the for-profit Betz College Inc. out of Cincinnati, but also invested heavily in vacation communities on the Island where Doe's mother worked. At one point they even began dating.

13 Year Old Jane Doe 4 and the Missing Donald Trump Files

ELLIE LEONARD - MAR 29

Continuation of FD-302 of Interview with [REDACTED] (PROTECT SOURCE), On 07/24/2019, Page 5 of 9

her mother may have said his name on any number of occasions back then. Her mother may have also learned his name if he filled out any real estate paperwork. With respect to the last name EPSTEIN, [REDACTED] possibly heard JEFF's last name during the time she had contact with him. Her friend, [REDACTED], also mentioned the name JEFF EPSTEIN to her recently, and she recalled hearing the name EPSTEIN on a movie starring Barbra Streisand and Nick Nolte some time ago.

A few months ago, [REDACTED] told her close friend, [REDACTED] (whom she has known since both lived on [REDACTED] some of the details regarding her contact with JEFF when she was young. [REDACTED] recalled she made a statement to [REDACTED] regarding JEFF, and [REDACTED] responded with words to the effect of,

Trigger warning: this article contains descriptions of sexual abuse

[Read full story ->](#)

When the stories broke, Thompson and Black included my research in their article, giving me credit. Believe me when I say, this rarely happens. And when the piece came out at the Post and Courier, and was subsequently picked up by the Daily Beast and The New Republic, I felt for a moment like a real reporter.

So when Marilyn called me out of the blue this week, I was a little nervous about what she had to say. Maybe they'd found a new piece of evidence. Or maybe something to the contrary.

Ellie's Coffee Fund

But it wasn't anything to do with the little girl from Hilton Head Island. It was simply Marilyn asking if I was being harassed, like she'd just felt something was off. Because, as it turned out, just after writing those breaking pieces for the Post and Courier, they'd let her go, a 50-year investigative journalist.

Now, neither she nor I will make claims as to why that happened. They'd asked her to move to Charleston in order to keep her position, and after some back and forth, she and the paper went their separate ways. Mitchell Black took a job elsewhere. Marylin began working as an independent journalist. And the Post and Courier has done no follow-up on the young Jane Doe.

But Marilyn, just like me, has dealt with harassment, including people discovering and posting Doe's identifying details online. And when she chose to write a story about missing files and the young Epstein victim, with just one more important detail that mattered to the American public, she took a risk. Because that one more important detail is the President of the United States, also accused of raping a young child. It's not the first time he's been accused, and certainly not the first time a 13-year-old Trump accuser was interviewed four times by the FBI, but it was the first time all of us realized that no one wanted us to know.

The interviewing agents asked [REDACTED] to provide additional details regarding her first interaction with DONALD TRUMP when she was approximately 13 to 15 years old, in either New York or New Jersey, and while also in the company of JEFFREY EPSTEIN. [REDACTED] clarified that when she previously said TRUMP struck her after she bit him on the penis, she provided further details that he, "pulled [her] hair and punched [her] on the side of [her] head."

From the Hilton Head Island Survivor - EFTA02858491

I am not the first journalist, independent or otherwise, to be harassed for the work I do. I'm not the first to be smeared, or lied about, or certainly approached by men in ways meant to make me feel uncomfortable or afraid. And I know I don't work in an environment that takes reporting threats seriously, especially for women. I'm grateful Substack listened and paid attention. But I've reported everything to Threads (Meta) and was met with silence. Other women I know have done the same for far worse.

Country Code:
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[666-6666](tel:666-6666)

Comment:
Heather Ashley's face just got a bullseye attached to her forehead.

You'll get your fucking ugly ass soy-latte encrusted jaw kicked in repeatedly before getting

disposed of behind a dumpster.

Punk ass little faggot Leftist shithead.

You lost, get over it.

Better yet, kill yourself with a fucking shotgun slug to the temple.

LOOOOOOOOOOOOOSERRRRRRRRRR

With permission from gishHeatherAshley

But here's the thing—independent journalists, men, women, and non-binary, have been protected by the Trump Administration's hatred for legacy media. The disgusting, leering, provocative comments towards those in the press rooms have ironically made a safe space for us to quietly do our work without much attention. But that time and space is limited, and the clock is ticking. The day will come when they figure out it's not CNN writing about them, it's us. And we won't have the overhead, the backing, the legal teams, the money, or the notoriety to stand in the way of a justice system that is no longer just.

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And so what will we do when they come knocking, looking for us at our quiet computers, livestreaming with our friends, hunting through the Epstein files at 3am on a school night just to find that *one* document that we know proves what someone did? How will we do our best to protect survivors now and in the future, with just our proverbial pens?

It remains to be seen. But I think that unknown gives us power. Those shadows give us strength. And the anonymity of a world of independent news will be the Trojan Horse they never saw coming until it's too late.

So I'm done being afraid, angry, paranoid, or depressed over those who want to threaten me. I'm done gaslighting myself that I'm overreacting when I tell my kids to be wary on their walk to school, "Mommy has a cyberbully."

Maybe it's just boredom. Just threats from men who have nothing better to do than go after women online, from the safety of their cold basements. Or maybe it's someone in their ear telling them they're important, that this mission is theirs too. I don't know. All I know is that "Mommy" is pissed, and ready to close this chapter of history—I and a thousand, or a hundred-thousand, or a million new journalists at my side, marching into battle against an unsuspecting king.

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Ellie is an author, editor, and independent journalist focusing on survivor justice. She lives with her family just outside of New York City.

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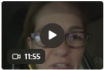
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