Brenda Tracy Visits Portland State University

On April 5, Brenda Tracy, a survivor of sexual assault, visited Portland State University. This day long visit was the culmination of a six-month long collaboration between Portland Branch members and Portland State University (PSU) administrators to bring Brenda Tracy to the campus to kick-off Sexual Awareness Month with a series of meetings and a community presentation. An all-female planning group included Portland Branch members, Diane Winn, Judy Holt, and Barbara Spencer, as well as PSU administrators from the Women’s Resource Center, Illuminate, the Athletics Department and Global Diversity and Inclusion. Oregon AAUW supported this community event with a $450 grant.

Brenda’s day at PSU began with a luncheon with AAUW and PSU staff and students from the sponsoring offices. Here Brenda took questions – with no boundaries – from those present who wanted to know more about her personal feelings as a survivor, her work with coaches and students from athletic departments across the country, and her legislative advocacy work in Salem. Then she spent two hours speaking individually to students and staff on interpersonal violence, providing support and empathy. Finally, at the community event she shared her story, hopes and proposals for solutions and received the 2017 Visionary Voice Award from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center from Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum.

That evening Brenda Tracy told her powerful story to over 400 people, including over 200 student athletes who were required to attend. Brenda told the story of being gang-raped by four men in 1998, two of whom were Oregon State University college football players. Her gut-wrenching story cycled through despair, embarrassment, hope and determination. Her talk was an emotional account, but also with an important message, that men, particularly those involved in athletics on a big stage, can make a huge difference by advocating for sexual assault awareness and helping shift the culture. She challenged all to "be leaders and change the culture of violence against women."

Now a registered nurse with an MBA, Brenda has dedicated her life to this cause, becoming a lobbyist for sexual assault awareness and serving on the NCAA's Committee to Combat Campus Sexual Violence. That week Brenda has created a "Set the Expectation" campaign. It includes a student-athlete pledge that coaches, teams and schools can use to create awareness, commitment, and involvement to the cause.

It was a powerful day and evening, and one that the Portland Branch, in collaborating with Portland State University, an AAUW university member, was proud to be a part of.