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Victim's sister addresses safety

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Just six months after sophomore Lindsey Bonistall was brutally murdered in her Towne Court apartment, Kristen Bonistall, Lindsey's 23-year-old sister, discovered her Boston apartment had been burglarized.

Although Kristen was home in New York when a burglar pried an air conditioning unit from a window and slipped into her apartment, the break-in served as a chilling reminder of her sister's death and her own vulnerabilities.

"For me, after Lindsey, the thoughts that ran through my mind were 'oh my God, what if my roommate was home? What if he was after more than just a laptop?' " Kristen said.

Speaking to approximately 150 people in the Trabant University Center Thursday night, Kristen shared personal experiences, as well as numerous tips to prevent crime in an effort to promote off-campus safety.

The evening was sponsored by PEACE OUTside Campus, an organization founded by the Bonistall family following Lindsey's death to raise student housing safety awareness.

"We want to make sure Lindsey isn't just another statistic," Kristen said.

After black and white home videos traced Lindsey's life from pigtails to cap and gown, Kristen addressed a tearful audience on the importance of investigating window locks and security precautions to investigate before signing a lease and moving in.

To illustrate how easily break-ins can occur, PEACE OUTside Campus members surveyed university students and found a startling amount were careless about locking their doors consistently and knowing who had keys to their apartment. Ninety percent of off-campus students polled did not know if their locks had been changed prior to moving in and 90 percent said they kept their doors unlocked if they were home.

To illustrate her point, Kristen pushed the results of the survey as a plea for students to take action and become educated about protecting themselves.

"I'm so disturbed by how lax so many students were here," she said, "It's not like there should be a

sense of fear, but it's being naive."

The facts Kristen presented made an impact on senior Jessica Lyons. A current resident of Park Place, Lyons said she is nervous about living in an area with a dangerous reputation.

She also said she plans to take some precautions, like finding out exactly who has copies of her keys.

"I've been in my apartment twice when maintenance people have come in," Lyons said. "All of the sudden, there's a 'hello?' from my living room."

The surprise encounters were made worse because both times, Lyons was clad in only a towel when the apartment employees entered her living room.

She said Kristen's pointers on security alerted her it was necessary to ask her building questions about who had keys to her door.

"She was really thorough on questions to ask the landlord," Lyons said, "It's really valid to know."

Although Lindsey's unexpected death last May caused a flurry of questions about campus safety, Kristen said many students at the university are not as aware of risks because, unlike schools like Temple University, students generally fell secure on campus.

"The fact that it appears to be a sleepy, homey and safe environment is more of a reason to have these talks," Kristen said after her speech. "The criminals know that it's an open door community."

But junior Jonathan Little, a former floor-mate and friend of Lindsey's, said he is aware of the dangers on Delaware's campus.

"Personally, I was in Paris last fall and I felt safer there than here," Little said. "But I've been more aware of crime here since Lindsey passed away."

When he returned from Fall Semester in France, Little joined PEACE OUTside Campus to promote a safer environment and help the Bonistall family implement the organization's goals on campus.

The presentation on off-campus safety was its first planned event, but Little said he thought the night went well and hopes more students will sign up for PEACE OUTside Campus after the evening's large turnout. As a recently designated RSO, he said the group hopes to achieve university certified off-campus housing.

In addition to the information Kristen provided on deadbolts and smoke detectors, Cpl. Frank Besaw of university police spoke to the audience about self-defense and how breaking the barrier between public safety and the students was the best way to strengthen campus safety.

"I wish I had a magic wand where I could wave it and all bad people would go away," Besaw said. "I

don't, but I do have knowledge."

Besaw, who has three daughters, encouraged the mostly female audience to enroll in Public Safety's Rape Aggression Defense program.

"So please, give me a chance," he said. "Work with me, I can help you out."

Although one year has passed since Kristen lost her only sibling, she said the pain has not faded.

"Everybody says time heals all wounds, but Lindsey's death is such a scar," Kristen said before she took the podium, her voice cracking slightly.

However, Kristen said educating students about off-campus safety and ways they can avoid dangerous situations has helped her channel the pain.

"We can't actually change people's desires to perpetrate crime," Kristen said, "but what we can change are the opportunities they have to do it."

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