

Former Freeport resident named one of Time magazine's 'Silence Breakers'

By Derrick Mason

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FREEPORT — A former Freeport resident has been recognized as a trailblazer for women's rights.

Kelly Martin, 54, is one of about 60 "Silence Breakers" named Time magazine's 2017 Person of the Year for her role in speaking out against sexual harassment.

Now the chief of fire and aviation management at Yosemite National Park, Martin first experienced sexual harassment in the workplace early in her 33-year career with the National Park Service and United States Forest Service. She dealt with a "peeping Tom" incident at Grand Canyon National Park in the 1980s.

In September 2016, Martin testified in front of the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform that at least three times she had been harassed during her career and detailed gender biases and a hostile work environment prevalent at Yosemite. She also mentioned that women are often forced to report incidents at professional, personal, emotional and financial expense.

"I just thought, 'If it's not me, then who?'" Martin said. "'If not now, when?'"

Martin joins celebrities such as Ashley Judd, Taylor Swift and Selma Blair who were recognized as what Time described as "the voices that launched a movement."

Marsha Mulligan, a neighbor and family friend when Martin lived in Freeport wasn't all that surprised that Martin took a stance against harassment.

"She has just always been an independent, fierce, strong woman," Mulligan said. "I'm proud of the woman she's become. She's not afraid to stand up for herself or others." Martin lived in Freeport through her junior year at Freeport High School. She received a bachelor's from Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, in 1986.

Her parents, Pat and Mickey Martin, still live in Freeport. Kelly Martin said she's drawn inspiration from her mother, Mickey, a former Freeport City Council member and township trustee, as well as her grandmother, who came to the United States from Ireland at age 16 and raised her family in Freeport.

"I look at those women, the generations before me, what they've had to persevere through," Kelly Martin said. "All the while, they never really called attention to themselves, but I think they all in their heart and soul, believe with each successive generation, things will get better."

President Donald Trump was runner-up for Person of the Year, while Chinese President Xi Jinping came in third. "To imagine that somebody from Freeport is one of the women honored was just amazing," Mickey Martin said. "I think it gives women the courage to say that it was not acceptable what happened to them and it was not their fault. They get a new perspective on coming forward."

Since coming forward, Kelly Martin said she's seen improvements in awareness, education and communication when it comes to harassment.

"I'm inspired and hopeful because of the national conversation," she said. "I'm not bitter, I'm not defensive, I'm not blaming anyone.

"My hope is that when you do something like this, there will be a greater good. This was never about me."

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