

Information for Jon Ralston
From Bonnie J Ashley

Dear Jon,

Until today I have held my tongue, but since the record has not been straightened out as far as my part in all of this, I would like to fill you in on what actually was the course of events over the past few weeks.

If the media had referenced the way I was characterized with the word alleged or expressed the statements made about me weren't proven, I would not write this. However, because they have stated some characterizations as fact, I feel I do need to defend myself. Here is the story.

David and I were at a luncheon with Jim and Beverly Rogers several weeks back.

He brought up the fact that he thought it was very interesting that regent Ron Knecht and I were friends. I told him that Ron and I had very different views on things, but what I enjoyed about him is that we could sit and have a good debate, present our cases and walk away friends. Jim absolutely flipped out that I would actually have any respect for a man like Ron Knecht, saying I should choose my friends better as he is a horrible individual whom Jim wouldn't even share a room with...that I should background check my friends like he does. He then said I should ask Ron why he didn't write his bar exam. I told him I didn't care about that, that Ron had always been kind to both David and me, and I respected that he would always give me a good debate. Jim was so distraught that I actually would not check him out more.

We all agreed to have dinner together at Jim's favorite restaurant in Lake Las Vegas, as he liked to come out here often. (Amazing since now according to him it is so far out that it detaches us from the University, especially since he had been here himself for social events twice in the past few months). Jim had a favorite dish at this particular restaurant, so I called ahead and made sure they would have it for him the night we came in.

About a week later, on May 20, we had that dinner. It was actually lovely. We discussed many things including our histories in Montana, taking trips including our upcoming trip to Singapore of which he was very excited about us taking, and wished he could come along. I told him he should, but he said he couldn't since Bev didn't like to travel.

I brought up the fact that I had been continually asking to meet with him or the regents and him together, so we could determine what they want from me. I told him there had been some cases where there were individuals that had been very disrespectful to both David and me, and that I really thought it would help if he and the regents would outline my position as the Association of American Universities had recommended. He totally agreed, and said he had an article he had read that he wanted to share with me, and thought this was very important. He believed the University should have a fund and some benefits to support the first ladies. We finished the dinner with a walk to the cars, thanked each other for a very lovely evening and shared hugs.

On May 22 I got an email from his office stating he had the article he was talking about and wanted to fax it over. I gave him my information, and his office got it to me. I emailed a reply to his office saying I had received it, and wanted until the following Tuesday to respond. On Tuesday the 26th of May I responded, saying I wanted to get the articles and information I had compiled at the Spousal meetings to him, so we could compare notes and be sure we were on the same page. I inquired as to the fax number he wanted me to use.

The following morning, on May 27th, his office received the correspondence and materials I compiled. Jim went over it all and had Tina email me to request for me to call him. I did so, and we had a fabulous conversation on the materials we sent each other and determined we were absolutely on the same page. I know this because at the end of the conversation, I said, "Now, Jim, I really want a complete evaluation of everything we spoke about and everything I sent you. It's important for me to know how you feel overall about everything we have discussed". He responded with, "I absolutely agree with everything you have said, you are 100% correct". We have sent each other almost the exact same information, with the exception that yours has more detail, more figures and so on. This is really important and I think it's great. I want to make this a priority". He then asked me if I could contact the other spouses of the presidents in the system and ask them if they are needing anything, if they are lacking in any way of either support or funds, and if there is something they would like seen pulled together for them. I told him I could do that, but I currently only converse with a few of the other spouses from time to time, and he responded with telling me to call

them, and "tell them I asked you to, and talk to them about anything they may need". I told him I knew that Karen Maryanski was also paying a great deal of the party expenses held at her home out of her own pocket. He seemed to be shocked to hear this, and said, "Oh no, we need to do something about that". We said a very cordial goodbye, and that was the last I had spoken to him that day.

A few days later, I got a call out of the blue from Charlotte Hsu from the Las Vegas Sun newspaper. She asked me to respond to the fact that Jim Rogers had said I was a detriment to David's career. I told her I was not going to respond to her as that could simply not be true, and I didn't believe her. There was no way Jim would say that as he and I were currently working together on something that was very positive and I would not believe for a minute he would say something like that. I told her I would talk to her after I spoke with Jim.

I then called David, as I knew he was meeting with Jim, and requested he ask Jim to call me right away.

They did, and when I asked Jim if this was true, he said that it was, he indeed had spoken with the press and told them exactly that. I asked him how he could do that, considering our relationship and past conversations, even in very recent days.

He said there were a few people that had come to him after the evaluation who wanted to express their concerns about the way I had interacted with them. *He said he had not contacted them previously, but thought he should, as we were working on this project. (*This clearly contradicts what he said in the press and at David's Evaluation Meeting of how he had "been talking to David for months about this problem"). He apparently spoke with someone who was supposedly very insecure of their job, and they told him I had threatened to have them fired (incidentally, I have an email where she admits I had indeed not threatened to have her fired)...and made all kinds of false accusations and claims. She was a person who was treating me disrespectfully. She was the person that was assigned to assist and work with me by the Vice President of Advancement, William Boldt, who was the person in charge of my activities. When I spoke to Bill about everything, he said he didn't understand why David was keeping her on at all. I told Bill I believed David needed to be able to remove her on her work ethic with him only. When it was clear she was not going to change her attitude, I requested she work with David peaceably and I do things entirely sans her assistance. She continued to be in my face, harassing me, getting involved in my private affairs, calling my private line when David would not respond to her calls on the blackberry or emails immediately. (This was a line which I had ordered and paid for, set aside strictly for family and security). She continued sending me very cutting and condescending emails. At that point I had enough. She continued to email me, and it got to a point where I responded to some of them line by line, showing her where she was way off base.

It again was clear she was not going to leave me alone and continue to harass me, I sent her a "cease and desist order" against sending any further correspondence to me or trying to contact me in any way. She immediately responded with another email, and insisted she was going to ignore my request to quit calling my private line or listen to anything I said. Somehow she got to Jim. He apparently didn't have the governor to beat up on right now, so it was clear to him he had a new subject to batter around. It came back to me that Jim then began calling others, referring to me with expletives, calling people and now falsely referring to the dinner we had as a horrible evening where I did nothing but complain about the university. His memory had now apparently been altered. He was no longer calling people to ask them if there were any lingering problems, but rather to stir some up.

Now in the meeting with David, he told David the only way he could keep his job was to divorce me! Since I was on the telephone for most of this meeting, Jim then asked me 3 times if we had a "prenup agreement". David told him that had nothing to do with anything.

I asked Jim if he could calm down long enough for me to give my side of the story, as clearly I should be able to tell my side and his response was simply, "you would think so, wouldn't you, but it's not my job to listen to your side".

Jim continued to verbally abuse me by calling me a monster and many other things. He said if David kept me around he would have to quit his job. Jim tried to tell us how to run our marriage, and then that we should end it. We told Jim that David and I were just fine, that the problem was merely with Jim and his current cohorts.

He brought up the title that had been used of "university first lady". First of all, I was not the person that started that trend, both donors and faculty had referred to me as that long before I had said it. In addition, since I was new to the university system I asked other President's spouses as well as researched it online, and it was confirmed to me it was the correct terminology.

I reminded Jim that I had faxed him 29 pages from other university websites as well as copies of business cards other first ladies had given me, to show it was indeed the accepted terminology across the country, the same day we had earlier discussed how we were going to move forward for all the spouses of our system. When using generalizations we call it "the spouse", as there are gay and straight, male and female university presidents, but when being specific to the wife, it is the correct terminology for the role. There sometimes is an additional job title added if you are given other specific duties, but the role is given that name. (I have a 2 inch thick folder on information I have compiled). Frankly, I wish someone would apologize for mocking me on this, that it was actually this university that had not educated itself on president's spouse's issues. (More on this later).

However, I told him at that point that I really didn't even care, as I had told everyone that I really just preferred to be addressed as simply, Bonnie. I told him of a conversation I had with many, how I believed Walt Disney was the greatest role model as a business leader, and one of the things he was known for was having a name badge with just his first name, just as the rest of the employees did. I continued that his reasoning for this from what I knew was that all men are created equal, to which Jim replied, "I don't believe that philosophy". I knew what kind of man I was dealing with at this point.

I told Jim there was actually a large group of people who appreciated what I had done for the university and had become friends along the way. Jim responded with "even Hitler had friends".

I got very upset with this and told Jim he had no right to equate me with someone as horrible as Hitler, all I had done was give of myself and my means for the university. He responded with the fact that he was the reason David made the wage he did, and that half of that was mine...so it was him who was giving me my means. I told him that simply was not true in any way, that I had supported myself just fine, thank you. He then proceeded to badger again with the prenup question.

Jim then brought up a dinner that I had not attended with David. He said that David had told him it was because I didn't want to go to anything that a certain regent was attending. First of all, that was said to David in private at a moment I had been hurt, but it was just a momentary thing. I actually hadn't gone because it was at the time the newspaper had done a request to see all my email to and from the University, and felt my privacy had been infringed upon as anyone would. I really needed a night to myself to unwind from that. Jim started pounding on me for not going to that event and brought up an event where that regent and I had a misunderstanding. The reality was that regent and I had worked it out, and even shook hands and hugged the last time I saw him. I had never told anyone about that event nor passed on any information about it to anyone...and here Jim was trying to stir it up. He apparently went to that regent later and told him I was trying to cause problems again, which I was not, and have no need or desire to as we worked out the misunderstanding between ourselves like adults, just as we should have. It now is making the regent defensive against me unnecessarily.

Jim Rogers had broken almost every harassment and employer/employee rule in the book. He threatened that he could make my life very difficult, and I told him if he continued on this path I would not let him get away with it. He threatened me if we fought him in any way and if David didn't quit, then I would be dealing with the "Big Boys", and continued to tell David that if he didn't quit, that he really would make life very difficult and uncomfortable for me. I told Jim I did not like to be threatened. I then told David, "So, Jim thinks the only way to keep your job is to divorce me, huh", and David said no worries, I'll see you at home...then I hung up. That is the last time I spoke with Jim Rogers.

The next thing I knew we had landed in Singapore for the graduation, and when David turned on his cell phone there were messages to go online and check the newspaper articles that Jim had put in motion to come out while we were away. When I saw what was being printed, I was shocked. I could not believe that Jim Rogers would stoop to the level he had. He was bringing out old news, things that had already been dealt with, and now innocent parties were going to get hurt. People who had already fixed relationships, had readjusted to improving their work, and moved forward. Jim didn't care who he hurt, or care about the university now. It was clear that once again, he only cared about Jim winning a game.

I read some of what was being written, and tried to find a way where everyone could move past it, explain, and answer questions without bringing innocent parties into the mix. I wrote an apology letter to the Regents and Chancellor so

they knew my heart. I was apologetic for the tone of the emails, but quite frankly, those things had been previously handled.

The exception was the recent harassment I was receiving from someone in David's office. I had begged for her to just stop and leave me alone. It was getting to an elevated point where I was considering all options available to me to handle it, but David stopped me. As he pointed out, we didn't want more drama for the university. I agreed to just ignore it, and even sent her a note asking if we could go for lunch, clear the air, and move forward. I also had sent a note to Tori and Betty, acknowledging again how much I appreciated all they were doing, and was sorry all this was happening. When Jim heard about this, he yelled at David that my making amends with anyone was completely inappropriate behavior. As far as I was concerned, I was carrying out the promise I had made to the regents. Since this time, you have all seen the newscasts and newspapers. They have called me everything from rude, abusive, vicious, and so on, to saying I have a vile temper. None of this is true, and coming from Jim Rogers just makes it ludicrous.

Incidentally, I have sent literally hundreds of emails praising the work of the staff. This was simply a very small cherry picking of emails during some very intense planning. When I asked for things in an hour, it's because I needed particular information right then for someone or something else, and always gave days leeway prior to finally saying it had to be done right then. When I was clearly frustrated in a few emails, it was because these people were told by their authorities to be sure to do what I needed, and they were messing up almost everything they were involved in, and had been abusive to me. I was being treated in a way which would have been unacceptable to any volunteer at the university.

I will add, what the regents and chancellor have aired in the press is just more of the same disrespect and abusive behavior to me that I have been dealing with, and up to this point, I had stayed totally silent, trying to protect the university from the drama. I think that speaks for itself.

I believe if you have a problem with your brother, you go directly to him to try to work it out...not behind his back, but directly with that individual. That is what I did. If after that point they continue to be offensive or abusive, it is on them. If someone is intentionally trying to harm you, you have every right to defend yourself. That is exactly what I did.

It was stated in an article that I "resigned" from my responsibilities and cut off all ties from the university at that point. That was not true, either. I had asked the regents and chancellor on numerous occasions to tell me what they wanted from me, to tell everyone else what that meant to them. Since they had not done so, I had been winging it on my own, and now they wanted to smack me around for actually stepping up and taking what I considered an honor and privilege seriously. Therefore, in light of the situation I had said in my letter to the regents and chancellor that I would "take a step back until such time the regents and/or chancellor would give me instruction on what they would and would not want from me as the spouse of the president". That is in not a resignation.

In another article, Jim stated that David had put a request in for a vehicle from the pool supplied to the University, and that he had immediately denied the request, as it was "obviously" for me. The funny thing about this is I had just told Jim that I had recently bought myself a new car that I was very excited about. It was clear he was trying to paint a picture of me that I was a certain stereotype, which could not be further from the truth. I have worked since I was 13 years old and always taken care of myself. This kind of picture was completely unacceptable to me.

I have been criticized by the regents for not signing the waiver for them to talk about me at David's evaluation meeting. The system waited until the very last minute to notice me. If I had signed it or been noticed, they would be able to talk about me as much as they wanted, but I would not be able to defend myself. It was clearly set up to be a lose-lose situation for David and me.

I am sad for Regent Jack Schofield because he is a very honorable man stuck in with this group. I pray some really great people join the ranks as regents. I thought it very ironic the regents said we had not tried to spend time or get close to them. We had actually invited all of them to our home on several occasions and the majority never showed up.

This group accused me of not respecting them, which was ironic as when we were socializing some mocked each other openly. They were completely irreverent and condescending, yet now try to appear that they stand together. Such fair weather friends they are. This is all so sad.

During the dinner David and I had with Jim and Beverly, Jim told us a story that he thought was humorous. He has a home in Montana, and one time when there, he went boating on the lake. He noticed as he went speeding down the lake some people standing on either side were staring at him. He couldn't figure out why everyone was stopped, just staring, and continued full speed ahead. What he soon came to realize was that he had been going so fast that he didn't notice the bottom of his boat was being torn out. There was nothing left of the boat, and he just left the mess for everyone else to clean up.

I find the analogy almost scary. I tried to be someone standing on the shore, waving my hands to warn Jim, but he just went full speed ahead and once again, left the mess behind for everyone else. It's so sad when someone doesn't learn from past experiences.

Bonnie J Ashley