



# *This Founder Wants To Make Every Trail In America Safe For Women*

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Theresa Gonzalez · Sep 03, 2021

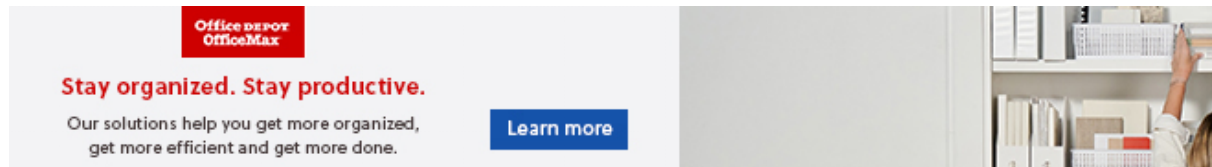


Welcome to Selfmade Stories. We're partnering with [Office Depot](#) to spotlight emerging entrepreneur and [Selfmade](#) alum Jesca Pilar, founder of the nonprofit [SAFE+Happy Trails](#). Jesca's mission is to help empower women to run/walk/hike/bike for fun and not in fear on our public trails. The artist turned activist, who was attacked near her home while hiking, shares how she was inspired to shift her direction and follow her purpose in the middle of her Selfmade experience.

**Can you share a little bit about your personal story?**



when I was attacked by a stranger. I was tackled, assaulted and nearly beaten to death. Four years later, I still deal with severe physical pain on a daily basis. On bad days, my hands tremor so it's difficult to draw, but I keep working at it. Getting SAFE+Happy Trails off the ground has made my life so much more meaningful. It gives me purpose. It's like, "Okay, I can do this. Breathe deep. You can do this. Keep going." All the people SAFE+Happy Trails will help protect are too important to give up.



### What motivated you to take action from your experience?

Shortly after the attack, my dad was like, "We need to do something, set up drones on the trails, protect people. We could call it Happy Trails!" (My family has been so supportive to me in everything.) I was like, "Yeah, Dad. No one is going to listen to me." In March this year I found out that another girl was attacked on the same trails. I was so angry, I cried.

But I wasn't ever angry that it happened to me. I wasn't ever mad at God, because things happen and you can't control that. In the beginning I was angry that everything that I was told to do didn't work. I did everything right. I was like, "I'm calling 911," and he took my phone and threw it in the river. It didn't deter him at all. All the self-defense moves you're taught didn't work. He was stronger and bigger than me. After several months I lost the anger and was just kind of numb and hopeless. But when I found out about the other girl, it sparked that anger in me, the good anger. The anger that drives you to make changes. It was really amazing I was in the midst of Selfmade when that spark ignited.

I started researching and found a *Runner's World* survey that 84 percent of women out for a run have been harassed — 84!!! That is not OK in any way. And if I had to go through this to change it. I can accept that. I can be that spark.

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## How would SAFE+Happy Trails help protect hikers?

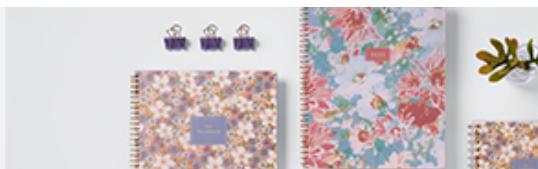
SAFE+Happy Trails is designed to drastically reduce or eliminate the statistics of assaults on public trails, starting out by placing emergency posts, each equipped with a distress button and a surveillance camera with tracking capabilities every quarter mile or less, and adding in surveillance drones over the trails to set off a distress signal if a person in need of assistance is unable. Eventually we will have an app connecting directly to these posts so that a person can be tracked immediately by 911. An app alone will not work because your phone can be taken from you. AND when you call 911 your phone must be on the call for TEN MINUTES before you can be tracked! Since my phone was only on with 911 for like 15 seconds before it was thrown into the river, police went to my parents' house 45 minutes away from where I was because that was the address on my phone service. And then when someone who helped me called 911, it took them nearly 30 mins for them to arrive. The posts would also make sure police would know how to get to a victim immediately and show up to the address of the phone calling.

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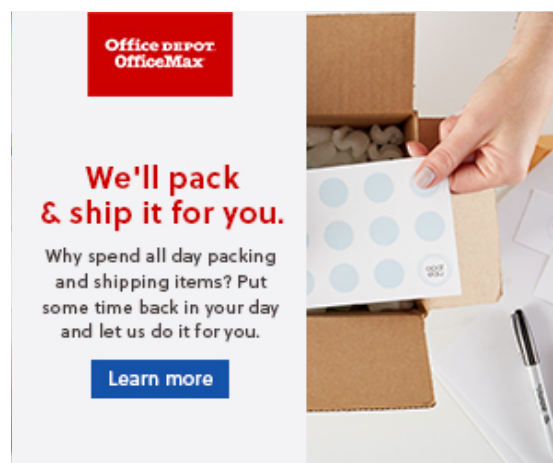
SAFE+Happy Trails wants to give the power of fearlessness to women, to lift the burden women and vulnerable individuals have to always protect themselves. Women are always told, "You need to take self-defense. You've got to be aware of your surroundings. Carry mace." The list goes on. They'll even go as far as to tell you what to wear, which is ridiculous. It makes me so angry that "What were you wearing?" is one of the first things police ask a female victim of assault.

I've been talking to the companies who would supply these security posts and where they put them, such as on college campuses, the crime rate dropped to near nonexistent levels. The cameras are also a deterrent for crime in the first place. The posts are permanent, they're marked, they're tracked, so as long as you're on these trails it's like

## Where are you in your entrepreneurial journey?

I just got my OFFICIAL non-profit status for SAFE+Happy Trails, Inc. last week! Getting that has been a lot of work and very difficult for me because I struggled to understand that BEFORE I had a brain injury, but I did it and I'm proud of myself. Now I can open a bank account for the funds from our [GoFundMe](#) campaign. My dad has been helping me a lot and I'm trying to figure out how to meet the mayor of Fort Worth, which is kind of cool because she's only four years older than I am. She's the youngest mayor in Texas and I feel like our ideals will really align when we meet. Because the trails are all public property and this will be expensive, I do need to have government permission and support.

Because I have been through what I am trying to stop, I know my story is strong enough to gather the support needed through government funding, business sponsorship of posts, fundraising events and races, donations and eventually monthly memberships, so that SAFE+Happy Trails will successfully protect and save countless others. I have all the passion and creativity needed as an artist but fundraising and nonprofits are new to me, so this is a learn-as-you-go and it's-always-ok-to-accept-help journey.



## What was your most valuable takeaway from Selfmade?

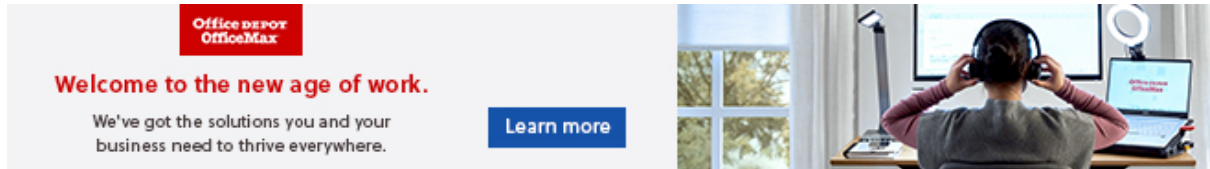
Finding a purpose. Oh, it makes me cry. Selfmade somehow sparked that hope and belief in me again. It gave me the confidence to believe I could do something. That God DID give me a purpose and I wasn't abandoned and I wasn't a waste and a burden. It was the encouragement and guidance I needed at the perfect moment in time, when I was ready to hope again.

## How do you stay motivated to keep going?

I'm taking all these steps. Baby steps. One day at a time. I am a survivor, who wants so



my story even though it is so very hard to do. Because SAFE+Happy Trails will help prevent others from facing what I faced and will empower them to walk and run and hike for FUN and NOT in fear, I can be ok with what happened to me because it has led me to a purpose greater than everything I lost that day.



### What does success look like to you for SAFE+Happy Trails?

First, I want to cover the trails where it happened to me, that would be a success. Then, I want to keep going until every public trail in America has these emergency posts set up. Success would be an attack like mine never happening again.

### How did you hear about the Office Depot OfficeMax scholarship?

I've followed Brit and Brit + Co for several years. Whenever I heard about Selfmade, I was like, "Oh, I really want to do it," but I would stop and think, "Oh, I can't afford that." When I saw the scholarship, I wrote my story and asked my parents and a couple close friends, "Could you maybe please nominate me? Then maybe more people will see it," so they all did! I couldn't believe it! When I got it I was just in shock.



### Did you feel like it was a little bit of a boost for what you wanted to do?

It was an encouragement to help guide me in starting my art-and-design dream business, but then in the midst of Selfmade, in the midst of the course, that's when SAFE+Happy Trails really came to life.

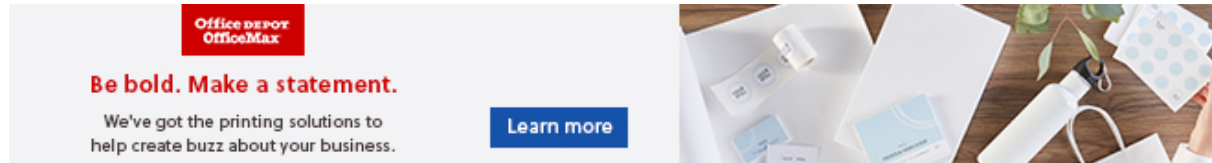
What has receiving the Office Depot OfficeMax scholarship to Selfmade done to help you grow your business?

So. Very. Much. I would haven't been able to afford Selfmade otherwise, and would not have been able to go through the course and learn so much and feel so empowered and guided and supported. I don't think I would have gotten the boost I needed to start SAFE+Happy Trails. The scholarship was like a gift from the universe. Like God saying,

How have Office Depot services/products helped you accomplish more in your business?

As an artist, I have had things printed there often before, and now that I have SAFE+Happy Trails registered as an official nonprofit (woohoo!), I'm going to be printing promotional materials. Also, I am finally getting myself a nice color printer/scanner with the Office Depot gift card from pitch day, I'm excited about that!

It's a really honorable thing that you're doing. I hope you have luck getting a meeting with the mayor, it sounds like you probably will.



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The banner features a background image of various printed items like business cards, brochures, and a printer on a desk.

Oh, thank you. I'm nervous and excited!

*Thank you so much Jesca for sharing your inspiring story. You can learn more about [SAFE+Happy Trails](#) and follow [@safeandhappytrails](#).*

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