

2010 Celebrity Walk



Taking aim at abuse

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CTC Celebrity Walk and Breakfast raises \$236,000

By Melissa Di Costanzo

CORNWALL – Professional public speaker and a former Miss America Marilyn Van Derbur said people need to sit down with their children and talk together about sexuality in order to help youth avoid being victims or offenders.

"I'm not asking you to be paranoid. I'm asking you to be an educator," she said. "Most children don't tell. Most adults don't tell. You have to ask."

Van Derbur, a victim who was sexually abused by her father for 13 years, spoke to a crowd of roughly 600 at the annual Celebrity Walk and Breakfast, held in support of the Children's Treatment Centre on Wednesday.

The Children's Treatment Centre supports local kids who have suffered abuse as well as their families.

While she acknowledged sexual curiosity as a teen is normal, Van Derbur said education is key to preventing the unthinkable from happening.

"We do not know how to stop a man like my father, but we do know how to stop the tide of 14 year olds inappropriately touching by talking to them," she said.

Van Derbur opened her speech with a narrative written in an email from a New Jersey woman. In the email, the woman, a hospice worker, explained how a 94-year-old woman wanted to tell the hospice worker a story. The story was that this woman had been molested when she was seven years old.

"I had to tell someone before I died," relayed Van Derbur to a hushed audience. "There is still so much work for us to do."

A victim of "unending sexual violations as a child and teenager," Van Derbur said the impact of sexual abuse is unimaginable. Van Derbur said she suffered severe trauma, feelings of shame, rage and anger, and was also debilitated by spontaneous crippling paralysis.

The first person Van Derbur told of her abuse to was the youth minister at her church, followed by her now-husband, Larry (they weren't married when she told him).

"Two men saved my life," she told the audience. "But like red dye poured into a white can of paint, incest has coloured every part of my life."

Throughout her narrative, members of the audience sniffed and openly cried, tissues clutched in one hand, eyes fixated at the front of the room, on Van Derbur.

But the moving part of the speech came when Van Derbur gently asked survivors to stand, if they were comfortable with doing so.

"There are always survivors in every room," she said. "It took me 53 years to get here, but I did."

When asked to rise from their seats, close to 20 people stood: some slowly, others more quickly.

"Thank you. You're not alone. There are others in the room who are standing," said Van Derbur. "How can we ask a child to speak if we're not role modeling over and over and over again? If someone stood at your table, please don't leave without saying something to them."

Van Derbur closed by asking the attendees "who is going to protect the children in this community and the adults?"

"I have no hands but yours. Who is going to support children and adults in the healing process? There are no hands but mine and there are no hands but yours. Please support the children's centre," she said.

Over 1,200 celebrities participated this year in the largest fundraising event for the centre.

In total this year, the breakfast raised \$236,000, an increase of \$28,000 over last year.

The top single fundraiser was Sean Adams, the event's honorary chair, who raised a total of \$53,350.

The runner-up was Bishop Paul-André Durocher, who raised \$19,800.

Diane Dupuis, team leader of Scotiabank–Team Scotia Community Program, raised the third-highest amount at \$12,854.00.

The fourth-highest total was raised by Mike Despatie with \$6,600.