

Rape survivor shares tales of recovery after an assault

By Dave Wischnowsky
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Anne Ream is a rape survivor, but she's also much more.

Brutally assaulted nearly 16 years ago when she was living in Washington, D.C., Ream has not let the experience define her.

"I'm a writer, an activist, a music lover, a rape survivor," said Ream, 41, a Chicago native and a former senior vice president for Leo Burnett Advertising. "I'm many things."

She has spent the last three years traveling the country collecting the stories of other sexual assault victims and helping them realize that they, too, can live full, rich lives after an assault.

On Friday, Ream, the founder the non-profit organization The Voices and Faces Project (www.voicesandfaces.org), will be the keynote speaker during the Lake County Council Against Sexual Assault's Women Helping Women luncheon.

The event, expected to attract more than 400 people, will be held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at LaCASA, 4275 Old Grand Ave., Gurnee.

When Ream was raped in 1990, she found no one who could tell her how to survive the aftermath of her assault, no examples of how to begin rebuilding her life.

By seeking out fellow rape victims and asking them to share their stories, however, Ream is turning tales of personal tragedy into messages of hope for others. Currently, she is writing "The Voices and Faces Project" book, which she says puts a face on women and men who have been sexually assaulted.

"I've heard from hundreds of survivors, and I'm struck by each of their stories," Ream said. "I look at myself as a conduit to other survivors' stories, and what I really like to do is share the stories that I'm hearing and what I'm learning."

During Friday's event, Ream will speak about some of the women she has interviewed,

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including a woman in her 90s who survived a sexual assault.

"She experienced barriers that I can't even imagine," Ream said.

Ream said the more people speak up about rape outside the legal system, the bigger the difference that can be made in our culture.

"The most important thing to communicate to [survivors] is all that's still possible," Ream said. "We as a society too very often hold the key to helping women and men rebuild their lives. We can change a life.

"I remember myself desperately needing to hear that message... Now I wake up every day so grateful to be alive."

Anyone needing help regarding sexual assault can call LaCASA's hot line at 847-872-7799. Callers can remain anonymous.

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