


Survivors, prosecutor discuss sexual abuse at LaCASA luncheon

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 Comments (No comments posted.)

GURNEE – Dawn Radcliffe-Snell took small breaths in between sentences as she told the story about a relative who, she said, was a sexual predator.

Radcliffe-Snell spoke clearly and forcefully to those gathered at the Lake County Council Against Sexual Assault annual luncheon and fundraiser. She hadn't told this story often.

The relative abused her, family members, friends of the family, and other females, Radcliffe-Snell said. He liked to take the women for car rides to secluded places, she said.

But Radcliffe-Snell said she had never known about these tales until she was much older.

She recalled one her own incidents from when she was a child.

"He drove me out to that dark countryside, and basically demanded sex," Radcliffe-Snell said. "I didn't have a lot of words to fight with, but I fought."

That time, she was left alone as she begged, Radcliffe-Snell said. But that was only the beginning of her battle.

Organizers of the June 15 Women Helping Women luncheon said they invited Radcliffe-Snell to address the crowd because she embodied this year's theme; "The Courage of Our Convictions."

LaCASA, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary next year, is an organization dedicated to healing victims of sexual abuse and assault, and preventing more from being victimized.

The luncheon, silent auction, and raffle raised money to help LaCASA continue its countywide services.

Many who sat under a large white tent that day listened as Radcliffe-Snell explained her battle to stop the relative.

He continued to stalk her into adulthood, she said, even making threats against men she dated.

While in college, Radcliffe-Snell said, she happened to have a conversation with a woman who said she was a victim of Radcliffe-Snell's relative. Radcliffe-Snell called the meeting a miracle.

"All of a sudden the pieces fell into place," she said. She learned that her relative said and did all the same things to other women that he did to her.

"I knew I had to stop him," Radcliffe-Snell said.

She finally learned the whole truth of his dark past, Radcliffe-Snell said, and eventually found an attorney willing to take the relative to court. But the judge dismissed the case, and her lawyer never returned her phone calls,



Dawn Radcliffe-Snell, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, sings a song she wrote during the annual LaCASA Women Helping Women luncheon and silent auction in Gurnee. Radcliffe-Snell shared how she got past her childhood abuse. (Sandy Bressner photo)

Radcliffe-Snell said. Alice Vachss said she also knows how difficult prosecuting sexual abuse cases can be. Vachss once served as a sex crimes prosecutor and was chief of a special victims bureau in New York City.

Vachss earned a reputation for being a trailblazer, taking on cases that no other attorneys would. One judge said she "drank blood for breakfast," one speaker said.

"I didn't set out to be aggressive," Vachss said. Her principle, she said, was to investigate a case thoroughly, prosecute, and convict.

Vachss, who has written several books about her experiences in New York, speaks around the country.

"I want tougher standards on prosecutors," Vachss said. "I want people to think about what they can do."

COMMENTS

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