



The Republican.

Palmer students told story of domestic abuse

Monday, February 11, 2008

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PALMER - Madeline A. Wheeler brought the story of her life, "Revealing Frankie," to Palmer High School on Thursday, revealing a gripping account of a childhood marked by abuse.

Wheeler, coordinator of the new Palmer Domestic Violence Task Force, said her mission is to reach other sufferers of abuse.

In the dark auditorium, Wheeler, 39, stood on stage, detailing statistics like "every 15 minutes a child is either neglected or abused" and "a woman is assaulted every 1.7 minutes."

She recounted memories of her childhood, of her father beating her mother over a barrel being moved. Of her possessive high school boyfriend throwing food and a butter knife at her, leaving a mark under her eye. That same boyfriend criticizing her body, threatening to kill her when she said she wanted to leave him.

Wheeler disappeared from the stage as music played. The students whispered.

She came back in a white hospital gown, shaking, saying she weighed 88 pounds and was 5 feet, 4 inches. She talked about her father doing things to make her cry, throwing food at her and choking her because he didn't get a joke she told. Then about a college party, where a teacher choked and raped her. How her mother tried to keep everything in the house perfect to escape the wrath of her husband.

"He would beat her when she was pregnant. He would say, 'You made me do it,'" Wheeler said.

"No one deserves to be abused," she said.

Wheeler said she believes there is a reason she has survived.

"I feel my life's purpose is to share my story, so people will either get help for themselves or someone they know," Wheeler said.

Today, Wheeler, who lives in Warren, said she is a happy person, married with children. She has a restraining order against her father so he cannot contact her. She said her mother left her father when she was 23.

She brought materials that students could take with them about domestic violence, including hotline numbers. She also went over relationship warning signs, such as controlling behavior and extreme jealousy.

Through the Domestic Violence Task Force, Wheeler said her goal is "to try and make a difference in this town."

"Do not make my life a waste. If you know somebody or this is going on in your home, I hope you'll take the

opportunity in the following days and weeks to try and get help," Wheeler said.

Only juniors and seniors attended the performance. Senior Jeffrey L. Brodeur said Wheeler's story was a difficult one to tell and that he thinks her message reached students.

"It was pretty intense," said senior Melissa A. Kindberg. "It was someone's real point of view."

Junior Jordan E. Ochs and senior Caitlin E. Lynch both said they thought of people they know in relationships like the one Wheeler described.

Wheeler said anyone who wants to get involved in the task force can e-mail palmertaskforce@msn.com.

Anyone experiencing domestic violence can call 1-800-799-7233, she said.

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