



The Republican.

Painful past points way to life's mission

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WARREN - A 39-year-old Warren woman has turned a painful past into a mission to serve others.

Madeline A. Wheeler has intensified her fight against domestic and date violence by writing and performing a one-woman play, "Revealing Frankie." The show, which debuted before a select audience in the spring at the Molly Bish Center at Anna Maria College in Paxton, had its public premiere on Oct. 24 at Palmer High School.

The free event in Palmer was presented by the Family Violence Intervention Coalition of Eastern Hampden County. It was funded by Zonta of Quaboag Valley.

Born in Spokane, Wash., and raised in Granby, Wheeler said the five-character play is autobiographical. She said her life has included physical and emotional abuse, as well as being the victim of a rape and attempted homicide as a college student.

"The purpose of my survival is to speak out and help others," she said. "I kind of think it's my purpose in life."

Happily married and the mother of two children, Wheeler described her teenage years as those of a high-achieving perfectionist, who excelled in academics and extracurricular activities. She was valedictorian and president of her high school class, a National Honor Society member and an honored scholar-athlete.

She was an artist and writer. She was accepted at, and later graduated from, Harvard University, where she majored in psychology.

But less prominent in her resume was the pattern of abuse at home, which, she said, began in her infancy and continued into early adulthood. She noted that although some people, including friends, knew of her troubled home life, there was no intervention.

Despite her accomplishments, she said she grew fearful, developed nightmares and an eating disorder, and suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and other problems. She eventually had a breakdown and was hospitalized.

Wheeler is school liaison for the Warren Domestic Violence Task Force and coordinator of the Palmer Domestic Violence Task Force. In January 2007, she was honored as Warren's Citizen of the Year by the Board of Selectmen, which cited her task force work.

She said she hopes through "Revealing Frankie" to stir other abuse victims to seek help and spark into action others, who have witnessed or know about such violence.

"I know through statistics that I'm not the only one, who has survived this (abuse)," she said. "You don't have to live a lifetime of abuse."

Wheeler said it is exhausting to act and write about the trauma she has endured. She said she relies on her training as an actress and her belief in God and prayer to cope.

And her current life is far better than her past.

"I'm blessed that I live in a loving marriage with children that are loved," she said. "That really keeps me going."

Wheeler has lived in Warren for five years. She is studying criminal justice and psychology in pursuit of a master's degree at Anna Maria College.

She spent four years working in theater and dance in New York City. She later worked for Deana's Fund in Stoneham, a nonprofit organization that promotes healthy relationships, including performances of the one-woman play "The Yellow Dress." The fund and Deana's Educational Theater were started in 1994, after the death of Deana Brisbois, of Topsfield, who was a date violence victim.

Wheeler traveled nationally performing in the plays "Remote Control" and "The Yellow Dress," including, in the latter case, a performance in Washington before Congress. She also spent five years teaching theater, Shakespeare and playwriting in an after-school program in the Shrewsbury public schools. Wheeler also has written children's books and is at work on a memoir.

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