

A TRIUMPH over TRAGEDY

Northside
Resident
Lin Seahorn
Shares Details of
Her Struggle as a
Survivor of Child
Abuse and the Work
She Is Doing Locally
and Nationally to
Change the Statistics

[WRITTEN BY SARA SHELTON]



Lin Seahorn

When I MET Lin Seahorn for the first time at her Alpharetta-based office, I was overwhelmed with the amount of comfort with which she welcomed me. She greeted me with a hug as she ushered me into her office, striking up conversation with a genuine ease. She eagerly shared stories about her husband Bill and their menagerie of pets, grabbing pictures off the wall and out of desk drawers to provide me with a visual of the cast of characters in her life. Hers is a home of warmth and laughter, an inviting and welcoming asylum from the outside world — and a stark contrast to the home she knew as a child.

“I don’t remember a lot of happy times,” Seahorn explained. “I didn’t have books or dolls or things like most little girls. Times that should’ve been happy like Easter or Christmas were always scarred by domestic violence.”

She waits a beat and adds matter-of-factly, “I don’t remember a time when there wasn’t severe abuse in my life.”

Seahorn was one of the estimated 9 million children who suffer from child abuse each year. The fourth of six children, she grew up with an absentee father and a mother who she believes struggled with addiction and rage.

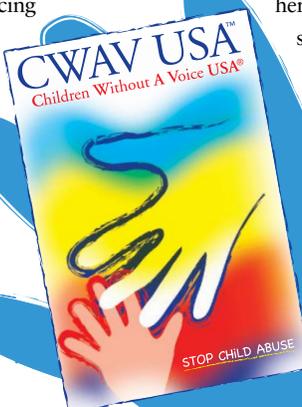
After her parents’ divorce and mother’s subsequent remarriage, the family began a series of moves that kept them bouncing between housing projects, subsidized housing and more suburban areas. Seahorn and her siblings lived under the constant fear of the verbal, emotional and physical abuse from their mother.

“There wasn’t a day that went by that our house was not filled with screaming or

madness,” she said. “This would always escalate from shouting into throwing things which led to the physical, the punching and kicking. My mother would turn her rage on us and she was just brutal.”

A Not So Safe Haven

For the duration of her childhood, Seahorn endured this abuse on a daily basis. Around age 11, her mother abruptly booted her from the home, directing her to the bus stop and sending her to live with the father she had never known. What could have been a safe



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CHILDREN WITHOUT A VOICE

Lin Seahorn



CWAV Founder Lin Seahorn with child abuse survivor, Katie, during a pie eating contest.

Child abuse survivors Dalton and Seth at last year's CWAV golf fundraiser.

to realize she was not alone in her circumstances, and it was here that the seeds of her current work were planted.

haven from the abusive home she had left behind was instead a return to the fear and vulnerability she had already known.

"The violence and sexual abuse began almost immediately," she explained of her time living with her father, "I was horrified."

Soon, Seahorn mustered up the courage to tell a teacher what was happening behind closed doors at her home. As a result, she was taken out of her father's custody and introduced into what she calls "the revolving foster care system." Initially, there was no place for her in this system and as a result, the state placed her in a juvenile detention facility. Here she found no haven from abuse.

"I was put with these girls who were in trouble for stealing or doing drugs and they beat me up on a daily basis. I knew I

didn't belong there. I wasn't delinquent, I was just unwanted and that was the worst feeling I had ever felt," she said.

Eventually, at her stepfather's imploring, her mother consented to take Seahorn out of the center and back into their home. But upon her return, she found no reprieve from the abuse she had previously known. She was continually berated and beaten and on the worst nights, she was shut up in the tiny crawl-space attic of their home. Here she was left all night, and instructed not to move for fear she would fall through the floor. This particular experience Seahorn recalled as "one of the worst emotional abuses I ever endured."

Her life continued in this cycle until her mother, again, made the abrupt decision to have Seahorn out of the house. "She just decided she didn't want to deal with me anymore," she recalled. "With my little brother crying in the backseat, my stepfather dropped me off on the front steps of a local orphanage and left me there to stay."

In this Ohio-based orphanage, Seahorn was one of 500 other unwanted children, many of whom came from more troubled backgrounds than hers. She began

The Beginning of Recovery

In time, Seahorn completed enough high school course work to graduate at the age of 16. (She is the only one in her family to boast the accomplishment of graduation.) She traveled to Tennessee, where she attended college and set about the work of overcoming her past. This was a task easier said than done.

"I had now had a taste of good things in my life but still, I was plagued by so many feelings — emptiness, loneliness, constantly wondering why no one wanted me. I struggled with insecurity and trust issues. I entered into my own cycle of addiction and abusive relationships because this was all I knew."

She sighed and continued with confidence, "But then I rediscovered a faith in God. I realized one day [that] I deserved better things and I just knew I would not let anyone else control me or abuse me anymore."

From that point, Seahorn never looked back. With this newfound faith in God and a renewed sense of self-esteem, she moved forward to achieve the success and peace she now enjoys. She became a successful entrepreneur and, later, an executive sales trainer for a Fortune 100 company. She met her husband Bill some 12 years ago and together, they embarked on the most important journey of her life: the development and growth of her organization, Children Without a Voice USA.

Changing the Statistics

Seahorn, now 52, has no children of her own, but takes her job of helping children

TEE IT UP FOR KIDS

Join Children Without a Voice in their efforts to prevent crime against children this month at "Tee it Up for Kids." The golf fundraiser takes place April 25 at Bear's Best Golf Course in Suwanee and includes lunch, dinner, auctions, raffles and awards. Call 404-474-4020 or email email@childrenwithoutavoicemusa.org to sign up, or simply to donate money.

all around the United States to heart. In 2007, she founded Children Without a Voice (CWAV), a national organization dedicated to raising the awareness of and preventing crimes against children, child abuse and neglect through advocacy and education. She and her staff of nearly 70 volunteers work diligently to raise awareness about and advocate against crimes committed against children. Together they provide classes as well as offer educational materials on all subjects affecting children ranging from neglect and hunger to sexual abuse and bullying.

“There are four types of abuse: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect,” she explained. “Typically, one form does not occur without another and it is our goal at CWAV to educate parents and children about each of these in an effort to prevent them from occurring.”

Along with education, the team at CWAV serves as advocates for abused and neglected children around the United States. Just last year, they followed close to 400 cases of crimes against children, e-mailing state prosecutors and judges on a regular basis to appeal for tougher sentencing on the abuser.

“People who commit crimes against children in the U.S. typically face about 25 percent of the sentence of someone who commits a crime against an adult. We appeal to the prosecutors, the judges, anyone involved in these cases to fight against such a light sentence. And almost always, we get a response,” Seahorn said.

When she speaks about CWAV and the work to change the child abuse statistics in this country, she does so with an infectious passion. When asked why she wanted to start the organization she stated simply, “One day I just knew that this was the purpose of all I’d been through.”

“I am proud to know Lin and to have worked with her,” CWAV endorser Robert Orange stated of working with Seahorn in her endeavors. “She is inspiring ... and

makes everyone else a better person.”

Former board member Adam Bowen echoes this sentiment and passion. “Throughout my time with this organization, I have seen Lin accomplish tremendous things in the name of CWAV’s cause. Her tireless dedication to the cause of protecting children is infectious.”

The main goal of the organization is to break what she calls the “bubble of silence” that exists in communities and neighborhoods in our country today.

“My neighbors always knew what was going on in our house when I was a kid and no one ever said a word,” she said. “Nothing has changed today. People are living in their own bubbles. We don’t want to know our neighbors, we don’t want to offend or insert ourselves in their business for fear of awkwardness. It is very uncomfortable to accuse someone of child abuse, but consider how great and uncomfortable the cost of not reporting [it].”

CWAV’s emphasis on abuse prevention through education extends from inner city neighborhoods into the more affluent, suburban areas where many think this kind of abuse and neglect of children would never occur.

“Child abuse crosses all socio-economic lines. It’s not just in the projects or in the impoverished, struggling communities. It is a silent epidemic, hidden all over our neighborhoods. Almost all the social ills we see in society today can be traced back to some form of child abuse and these have no geographic, financial boundaries,” she said.

Looking Ahead

Seahorn and her team at CWAV are hoping to raise an even stronger team of volunteers to take on the work of fighting the war against child abuse. Through this combination of education and advocacy, they are training adults to recognize the signs of child abuse and encouraging them to speak up, to shatter the silence that covers

NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE HOTLINES

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month so remember, help can be just a phone call away. Calls to these hotlines are anonymous:

National Hotline For Children
800-999-9999

24 Hour Crisis Hotline for Parents
800-422-4453

National Domestic Abuse Hotline
800-799-7233

this epidemic. In 2011, they are looking to obtain much-needed additional funding and recruit more volunteers across the nation to serve as a voice for the vulnerable children in the States.

“We need more voices, more advocates,” Seahorn asserted. “We are failing our kids in this country by not raising our voices and not doing our job as adults to protect them. Imagine what our country could look like in the future if we started taking care of our children and speaking up for the vulnerable rather than ignoring them.”

Though she has come so far from the vulnerable child she once was, Seahorn is quick to state that the effects of child abuse still linger and will undoubtedly last a lifetime. In her own life, she looks to her faith as an anchor and tries to actively exercise the compassion to others that was lacking in her own childhood.

“Every day I wake up and am thankful. I want to focus on the positive, on what I do have instead of what I didn’t have for so many years. And I want children and families to learn about values, what it means to truly care for others and what compassion looks like in action,” Seahorn related.

Looking around her office littered with pictures and stories of the children she has helped, I think it’s safe to say Seahorn is doing just that. **PN**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Children Without A Voice
www.childrenwithoutavoicusa.org