

A story of resilience from Independence House

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Independence House is welcoming Patrisha McLean next month as keynote and survivor speaker at its 19th annual Domestic Violence Awareness Month Community Breakfast on Friday, Oct. 4, 7:30 a.m., at the Hyannis Doubletree by Hilton.

The ex-wife of singer Don "American Pie" McLean, Patrisha is a photojournalist and founder of the multi-media exhibit Finding Our Voices: Breaking the Silence of Domestic Abuse. The exhibit launched in February and is now touring Patrisha's home state of Maine. Described as "brave, beautiful, sad, scary and inspiring," the exhibit consists of photo portraits and audio of 20 women of all ages and from all walks of life – including Patrisha – standing up and speaking out about the domestic abuse in their lives.

Patrisha started Finding Our Voices after the arrest of her husband of 29 years in 2016. Don McLean plead guilty to an array of domestic violence and criminal charges but made a plea deal with set conditions that were met, and while a number of charges were reduced against the singer, by 2017 he was still convicted of domestic violence criminal threatening, criminal mischief and criminal restraint, according to the Lewiston Sun Journal.

Patrisha said, "In January 2016, his mugshot and my written statement for a restraining order were splashed in news around the world. It was the worst thing that could have happened to me. But this airing of a 29-year secret ended up being the best thing in the world for me because the breaking of the silence was like the breaking of a spell. I realized how pervasive domestic violence is as women all around me started whispering to me about the domestic abuse in their lives. This led to my understanding of what I had been going through, and ultimately my freedom."

Patrisha divorced her husband five months after his arrest.

"After my ex-husband's arrest, I, the victim, was in deep turmoil, and I didn't understand why, for the perpetrator, it was business as usual. Then I read that a group of high school teenagers from a program facilitated by Independence House were protesting his upcoming performance at their high school in Barnstable, saying he was not a fit role model. Young people, including boys, standing up and saying that what he did to me was not OK was incredibly comforting and validating. This is why I am honored to be part of the agency's 40th anniversary, and happy that it is this event that marks my first domestic abuse presentation outside of Maine."

Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, executive director of Independence House, notes, "As we mark the milestone of our 40th year, we are firmly committed to being a force in amplifying survivors' stories of resilience, courage and healing from the devastating impact of partner violence. During domestic violence awareness month, our annual community breakfast serves as a pathway for the general community to join with us and learn from survivors about effective strategies and responses which support and aid them in their journey. We are striving to reach that day when there are no more stories to be told because domestic violence is ended; until that day comes we will continue to partner with survivors like Patrisha, who generously shed light into the darkest corners and offer hope and solutions by sharing their important stories of pain, courage, and triumph.

"We are deeply grateful to our partners, allied agencies and supporters who come together each year to support survivors and take a stand for a safe, healthy and resilient community," Hurge-Putnam added.

Patrisha will share her own story during her presentation, and will take questions from the audience. She will also share the stories of the survivors in her project. Her hope is that people who encounter it, asking "Why does she stay?" will walk away asking "Why does he abuse?"

This signature event hosted annually by Independence House during Domestic Violence Awareness Month is in part sponsored by Cape Cod 5 and The Lawrence-Lynch Corporation Foundation for Charitable Giving of The Cape Cod Foundation as part of Independence House 40th Anniversary Sponsorships.

Attendance to this community breakfast is free by reservations only. Due to the high volume of attendees expected, reservations are only being accepted online while seats are available, by visiting www.indhouse.ejoinme.org/DVAM. Voluntary donations also are welcome online.

Following the Oct. 4 breakfast, the community is also invited to attend a SHE-SHED Open House from noon to 2 p.m. at the Independence House, Hyannis Office, 160 Bassett Ln., and view a SHE-SHED being raffled. Tickets for the SHE-SHED, which was designed, built and donated by Cape Associates in Eastham, are available through Nov. 16, when the winner will be chosen at the Independence House 40th Anniversary Gala. For more info, visit www.independencehouse.org/she-shed.