

MESSAGE OF HEALING

Greeting card line targets victims of sexual abuse

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Just months ago, Beverly Boykin Robinson stood before a crowd of more than 300 strangers, preparing to reveal a secret she had spent more the past four decades trying to hide. She remembers how her voice quivered as she took the podium at Beacon of Joy Seventh Day Adventist Church in Chicago, Illinois, but she squared her shoulders and powered through. The time had come to tell her story.

"When I walked out, I was so full, it was almost like I was about to explode. I had to pause because I was so emotional ... it was just overwhelming," related Robinson, an account manager for Wachovia Bank who has traveled the country for the past 20 years speaking to women's groups and in various other venues. "I didn't know what type of reaction I'd get. I was thinking, 'This may be my last speaking engagement.'"

Robinson, 48, told the audience she was sexually abused by a family member from the time she was four years old until she was a teenager. The abuse had many ramifications in her life long after it ended, she related. Though she put on a brave face, the shame of the act had long held her captive, she said.

"I was so imprisoned for years keeping this secret," she commented. "It's always something that's at the back of your mind. You know something's wrong ... it's just this lingering feeling."

The impact of her statement was swift and apparent.

"It pretty much sent a shock wave over the congregation," she related. "...After the sermon, the coordinator of the program ... couldn't even talk. She just started weeping. When she found her words, she thanked me for being so courageous to bring this out ... It had happened to her (too)."

Following the conference, emails flooded Robinson's inbox, full of tales not unlike her own, letters of thanks and congratulations for taking a chance and speaking out about her abuse.

"It was just eye opening; it's almost like taking a strong drink too fast and your head is just spinning," she said of the experience. "It tells me to continue to talk because if I continue to talk ... somebody who is listening is going to begin to heal."

The effects of telling her story were far reaching. As a result of her sermon, Robinson was invited to speak in Kalamazoo, Michigan for an Abuse Prevention Day.

"I felt so empowered to tell this story," she said. "When I finished with it, I felt so liberated. I felt like I was on my way to healing."

Husband Ted Robinson says he has witnessed a



Beverly Boykin Robinson holds the prototypes of some of the cards she has designed.

transformation in his wife since she began speaking publicly about her abuse.

"She's always been a very empathetic individual, but now it seems that people are drawn to her because of her strength," he declared. "It's incredible that all of that is born out of and in spite of what she has endured."

Not everyone has embraced Robinson's mission. Many of her family members have rebuked her for speaking publicly and tarnishing the family name, she says.

Nevertheless, Robinson says she felt compelled to keep reaching out to victims of sexual abuse. To this end, she has created a line of greeting cards that speak to the emotional turmoil fraught by the act.

The cards are produced by Robinson's company, Patmos Greetings, named after the island where the Biblical Disciple John was exiled. The Robinsons say they hope to entice major retailers to carry the products someday.

Also under the Patmos name are greeting cards for prisoners and military personnel, but Robinson says the sexual abuse cards are the closest to her heart.

"It's like I'm writing from the island of Patmos myself ... and encouraging others to be free," she commented. "Somebody is going to heal from these cards. Somebody is going to speak out and some perpetrator is going to be stopped in his or her tracks."

For more information about Patmos greeting cards or to order direct, email patmosgreetings@yahoo.com or call Robinson, at (336) 747-0713.

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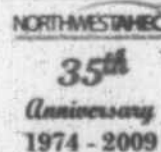
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