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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 17, 2017

Domestic Violence Survivor Is Empowered with the Help of A Safe Place

LAKE COUNTY, IL – “I remember the day my grocery delivery man told me, ‘You know Meg, you can call the police.’” Meg Dhamer had a husband, a beautiful home in Lake Forest, two children, a decent financial portfolio with enough money to retire, and regularly shopped at Neiman Marcus. She never dreamed that one day her husband would try to kill her and her children.

When the abuse began, Dhamer lived in fear and shame. She wore long sleeves and pants to hide the bruises and worried what her friends, neighbors, and even her family would think. For weeks after that day with the grocery delivery man, she practiced running to the family room phone to call the police. But when she finally did make the call, the violence did not stop.

“I remember overhearing the Sergeant on the porch telling my husband, ‘Yeah, my wife gets a little out of hand sometimes too.’ I remember learning they drove him to the ATM to bail himself out and later giving him a ride to his parents’ house after giving him a ‘good talking to.’”

One Fourth of July, during an argument, her husband picked her up like a linebacker and rammed her spine into the corner of a marble table in front of their children. Soon after, she borrowed money from her mom, sold her jewelry, and filed for divorce.

Dhamer was one of the keynote speakers during the A Safe Place Unmask the Violence Gala on Saturday, October 21. During the presentation, she shared her story of domestic violence, how it affected her and her children, and how lucky she was to have help and resources from family and friends to help her get on her feet.

“But, what if you didn’t have the resources I had? What if you didn’t have wealthy friends to get you that good job? What if you didn’t have friends and family to give you their unwanted furniture for a new home? What if you left that abusive hell but had nothing but the clothes on your back, no food, no money? What if you no longer knew what hope was?”

She also shared how grateful she was to A Safe Place and how the case workers at the agency provided her with safety planning information, counseling and therapy, and encouragement to make it on her own and start a new life when she needed it most. “It is in the moments that you can’t think straight, when you feel so helpless it’s hard to breathe, when you’ve lost all hope, that A Safe Place saves your life,” she said.

“A Safe Place made me believe I wasn’t fat, worthless, and stupid as my abuser had taught. They made me realize that I could survive and break the cycle.”

A Safe Place is Lake County’s sole provider of services exclusively addressing domestic violence, serving individuals throughout the Chicagoland area including Cook, McHenry, and Kenosha counties. The organization’s lifesaving programs and services for victims of domestic violence and their children, include crisis support, housing, legal advocacy, counseling, community outreach, and education to prevent future abuse. Last year, A Safe Place served over 14,000 of our neighbors.

A Safe Place has facilities and resources throughout the county. At the Lake County Courthouse, staff assist victims with filing orders of protection and advocate for and encourage those who choose to testify. In Lake County, a 35-bed emergency shelter and 30 scattered houses in the southern part of the county including Deerfield and Winnetka provide safe spaces, food, clothing, and community resources. In Zion, the 40 apartment housing facility has on-site counseling, advocacy, and life skills assistance. In Mundelein, the Family Visitation Center provides supervised visitations and monitored custody exchanges. In Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, Lake Zurich, Round Lake, Waukegan, and Gurnee, satellite support groups in English and Spanish help victims and children share their experiences and process their emotions. And at middle and high schools throughout the county, staff educate teens on healthy relationships.

Because of the comprehensive range of lifesaving programs and services at A Safe Place, 94% of the survivors who left the emergency shelter last year did not go back to their abusers, as of their six-month check-in. Even though, in the United States, on average, a domestic violence victim will return to their abuser 7-8 times before either making it to lasting safety or dying.

It has been several years since Dhamer finally broke free from the abuse, and today, she is the creator and owner of Pigtales Twist, a company that makes organic and gluten free salad dressings and dips in recyclable glass bottles. Her products are made at Lambs Farm of Libertyville and sold throughout the Midwest.

In her speech, she remembered how scared her children were one morning when they woke up to find a man sitting in a chair in the backyard staring at the house. It was a man her husband hired to frighten her and who would later viciously attack her downtown. And, she also remembered the day that, despite having an Order of Protection, her husband broke into her home and crimped the copper gas pipe in her fireplace hoping to poison her and the children.

She is grateful to A Safe Place for empowering her and helping to transform her life and the lives of her children and, although it was difficult to remember what happened, she was honored to share her story to 300 guests at the Gala. “These are the reasons why we are here tonight. To save lives. To heal bruises. To heal battered self-esteem, wash away constant fear, lift children back up, to break these cycles.”

For more information about A Safe Place and domestic violence awareness, visit www.asafeplaceforhelp.org or call (847) 731-7165. Or call the 24-hour Help Line at 1-800-600-SAFE or (847) 249-4450.

Photo 1:

Meg Dhamer gave her first hand account of being a domestic violence survivor during the A Safe Place Unmask the Violence Gala on October 21. Photo by Kelly Silver at Valen Studios.



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Founded in 1978, A Safe Place is the leading advocate for eliminating domestic violence in northern Illinois, and is Lake County, Illinois’ only provider of services exclusively for victims of domestic violence. A Safe Place provides emergency shelter, permanent housing, a 24-hour crisis line (847-249-4450), court and non-legal advocacy, individual, group, and children’s counseling, art therapy, family visitation services, batterer intervention services; and community outreach, prevention education, and professional training. Our service area includes Lake, McHenry, and northern Cook counties in Illinois; however, our clients come to us from across the state, region, and country. For more information about A Safe Place, visit www.asafeplaceforhelp.org, [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).