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SEXUAL ASSAULT: A VOICELESS AFFLICTION --JOYFUL HEART SPA EVENT Provides Comprehensive Healing for Rape Survivors



In 1999, according to the Department of Justice and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one out of ten women reported being sexually assaulted. By 2002, that number had climbed to one out of six, and the Safe Horizon Rape Victim Advocate Program predicted that one in five girls and one in seven boys would be sexually assaulted by the age of 18.

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Here is what the partnership of two distinctive organizations is doing about it.


About four years ago, **Mariska Hargitay** (Award-winning actor and Emmy Award nominee for her role as a sex-crimes investigator on **Law and Order: Special Victims Unit** and soon to be first-time mother) noticed the content of her fan mail was changing. Instead of the usual, "You're my favorite actress," women were hesitantly disclosing their rape experiences. Through her television role as a detective for sex-crimes, Ms. Hargitay had primed her consciousness, enabling her to perceive the veiled cries for help from these isolated women who transcended all cultural and socioeconomic paradigms.



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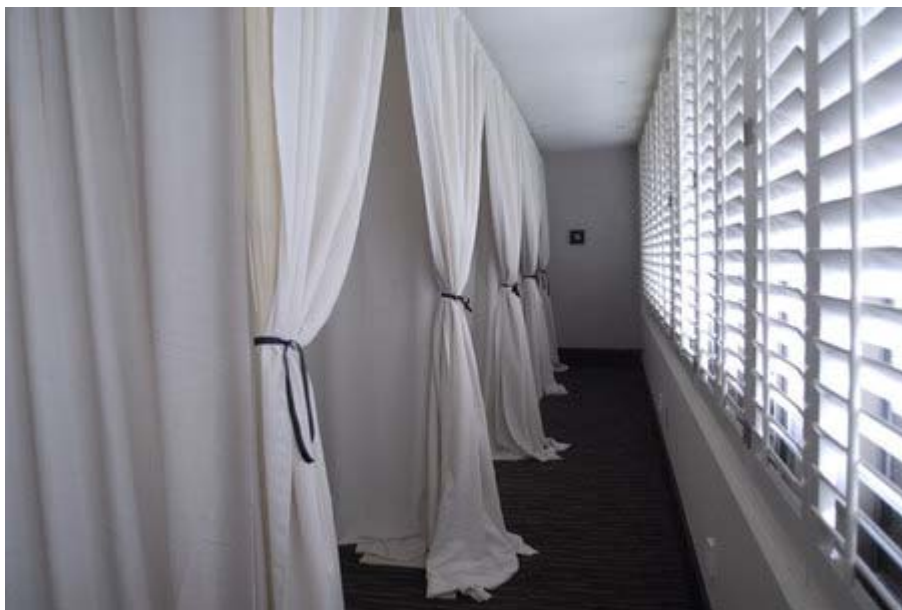
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“I thought, these are a bunch of women who feel, even though it’s not true, that they have nowhere to go. I thought, how could I make them feel safe and give them the information they need? I knew nothing about sexual assault, so as part of my research, I started working with a rape treatment center in NY and became a rape crisis counselor. At the same time, I had an incredibly profound experience sailing off the Kona Coast. Out of these events, I felt my heart opening and the potential for hope prompted my founding the **Joyful Hearts Foundation**. And so it is.”



The Joyful Hearts Foundation’s mission is to empower victims of sexual assault through an interdisciplinary, holistic approach. Survivors enjoy Hawaiian retreats which spotlight swimming with dolphins, art classes, talks on the history and culture of Hawaii, and surfing lessons. The program also sponsors complimentary conferences and gatherings. One such event, “**Joyful Heart Urban Retreat**,” was recently held at the W Hotel in Westwood, where over 40 survivors took advantage of a **spa session specifically tailored to help heal body, mind, and spirit**.



In covering this event, I walked into an elegant, simply appointed room decorated in the Zen tradition. Plants, plush sofas and chairs, magazines, books and photo memorabilia were situated sparingly about the room, while candles gave off inviting light and fragrance. There were intimate areas equipped for beauty care, massage, conversation, and reading, and fresh

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fruit, cheese and beverages were offered. The occasion opened with everyone standing in a circle to introduce themselves, and that means ALL in attendance: survivors, spa professionals, and event leaders. A journalist normally stays in the background, but I was invited - no, firmly encouraged -- to participate with the group. As the atmosphere of enormous power and love threatened to overwhelm me, I found myself sharing the experience of a close woman friend who had long ago been raped and how it had affected me. The assault had not entered my mind in years, and I fought tears as I spoke.



Yvette Morales, owner and CEO of the Y'Sharis Tropical Spa, was the main ingredient for success. The spa is a joint venture between Ms. Morales and her partners, **Sunita Punjabi** and **Jessica Flores**, kindred spirits and of like minds (whom Morales insisted I mention) and has supported the Joyful Heart Foundation since its first retreat.



Sunita Punjabi

Ms. Morales explained that she had been recuperating from an illness and saw a television expose of Joyful Heart and was inspired: “The spa had been in business for a little over a year and its main focus was celebrity events. My partners and I were just diving into out-events and doing celebrity outreach, like the Emmys and Golden Globes and Oscars, and we went to Vegas and hung around luxury lounges and we were there for 4-5 days, and as thrilling as that is, we yearned for dealing with ‘real people.’ We understood that we were immersed in the corporate world and wanted to give back. I thought working with JHF was the perfect opportunity to touch the soul of people. The soul is eternal, and rape tries to destroy it. I appreciated the Foundation’s unique approach and wanted to help in ways that others were afraid of. I felt most people concentrate on the crime rather than the healing, and I resonated with the Foundation’s purpose to help heal the mind, body and soul of survivors.”



Y'Sharis provides an inclusive array of spa services. Among them are aromatherapy, hot stone treatments, facials, make-up artistry and several forms of massage, including deep tissue, motherhood massage and rain drop (noninvasive) massage. The spa also features the advanced skin care treatments of Botox, Restylane and Visage (administered by a board certified physician, **Nicole Balisteri-Garcia, M.D.**). Y'Sharis formulates a line of skin care, bath and body products called, "Young Living Essentials." For more information, visit www.ysharisspa.com and www.youngliving.com.

These dynamic, courageous individuals are pioneers in caring for the survivors of sexual assault. Their program has become the foremost interdisciplinary treatment program for assault victims in the Western world. In the words of Mariska Hargitay, "I looked over my life and realized that what didn't kill me made me stronger. I wouldn't be who I am without those experiences. I want women to own it and not to cop out. We are all survivors and need to be a LIGHT. Nelson Mandela expressed how I feel perfectly when he said, 'Who are you not to be what God has created.' I can't wait to give birth to my son.

He's really my second baby. My first is the Joyful Hearts Foundation." Visit www.joyfulheartfoundation.org or call (212) 274-9862.

And so it is.

Note that the necklaces and the Joyful Heart Bath from Philosophy are for sale through Joyful Heart website and benefit the organization goals.

By Rita Kersteins



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