

# 'Local Legends' will address the loss of loved ones

By **Laura Mancuso**  
IVN Staff

"Losing loved ones tends to be a lonely experience that has many of us stuck with an ache we feel few, if any, understand. My hope is to see community members who understand this come together, share some of what made our loved ones special to us, and bring these loved ones out of the quiet corners of our hearts and into the honored space we create," said Healthy U's Executive Director Nicole Rensenbrink.

And that is why the special

program, "Local Legends" will be presented at Lorna Byrne Middle School (LBMS) Thursday, March 23 from 5:30 - 7 p.m. This program is collaboration between LBMS, College Dreams and Healthy U.

This free community event will be a gathering for Illinois Valley residents to celebrate the loves they've lost, because, according to program coordinator, Rensenbrink "in a small town, no one is famous in the world at large, but we're all famous to each other."

During the program, dinner will be gifted by the LBMS

kitchen service and there will be a presentation called "Coping with Loss through Support, Education, Music and Movement" by Rensenbrink. Also the LBMS choir will be performing along with some musical and dance performances by students and dancefarm.

The main event will be the displays created from LBMS and I.V. High School students, as well as community members, about local loved ones who've died. The community is invited to put together a display honoring his or her lost loved one. Displays will be shown

on the LBMS cafeteria tables and are limited to the width of a three-fold with a small area in front where a notebook, memory box and or some other small items can be placed.

According to LBMS Principal Scott Polen, "Anyone is welcome to come and share memories. It will be an open house format like a science fair where people can walk around and look at displays and have discussions."

When Polen was asked why this program was created, he said, "Nicole and I had this idea over the summer to put on this program

because we thought kids needed some closure when their loved ones died. In middle school it is often the time when grandpas and grandmas start passing away," and added, "It is also an opportunity to help them keep memories alive."

"I'm so happy with this community and it pleases me to celebrate our community with this program. It is another way we can pay it forward."

For more information or to participate in the Local Legends program please call Healthy U at 541-592-4888.

## Healthy U News: by Nicole Rensenbrink

It was always the same: our parents would get ready to go out while I hung on my mother's legs, crying and pleading for her to stay. She'd eventually shake me off and leave, frustrated, without understanding the root of my whininess. After a while, it'd be my bed time. I'd lie in my room frozen, wanting to shut the door all the way as an added block against him, but terrified of the dark. I'd try to sleep. If I could really sleep, maybe I wouldn't know what happened. But I was too tense to pull that off, so, lying in dread, I'd pretend. Then he'd come to the door, "You want a back rub, Nik?" he'd ask. Like it was really a back rub he offered, like it was really a question at all.

He shaped my life. He carved a pathway in my brain of what reality was: a place where I couldn't say no, a place of dark secrets, a place where guys could do what they wanted and girls had to protect them, or else. He taught me who I was: a girl without virtue, cheap, perverse.

I remember seventh-grade health. The innocent teacher had a diagram of a woman's uterus on the wall and was talking about menstrual cycles. My face got so red I had to go to the bathroom. The safe place school had always been was no more. It was the year I started failing.

I'm blessed I had enough early education so that I

could make up for it when I was grown, safe and ready. It took a long time for my brain to quit being flooded with stress chemicals and settle down from its heightened arousal state to a state in which my frontal cortex, the part that thinks intelligently and can make good choices, could take over. I'm blessed it turned out (not my initial plan) that I became a clinical social worker, trained to advocate for underdogs, to understand the many ways people are victimized by trauma or oppression.

No one likes the victim word, but victimization occurs. I see child victims (whether or not they ever think of themselves in such terms) grow up to be adults whose brains remain so flooded with stress chemicals that their potentials remain out of reach. As a social worker, I've learned how entire classes of people have experienced trauma and can even pass on to their children the subsequent heightened arousal states trauma leaves in its wake (Google "epigenetics"). I've learned that the brain stem of a black grandson of a lynched man can easily switch to experiencing threat around white men in authority, whether or not he was ever a victim of overt racism by them himself, and the daughter of a holocaust survivor can feel faint when seeing a Swastika.

Pity doesn't help anyone and healthy victims know that. But, if we want to have a more functional populace,

it would help if we learned how our words and actions can have more extreme reactions than we might have intended. Perhaps, if those of us who aren't operating from active states of trauma understood the brain better and paid close attention to the reactions of others, we'd develop tools to help the overstressed calm down and communicate effectively so that all parties moved forward. Perhaps, then, we could start to build a community safe enough for all brains to thrive, and perhaps, then, we would create a truly brilliant world, a world in which all potentials are reached.

The staff and volunteers of Healthy U present this column as part of their mission to promote health in the Illinois Valley.

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