

Lori Robinson: A rape survivor takes back her life

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Lori Robinson was relieved to find a parking space right across the street from her apartment building in Northeast Washington, D.C., near the Catholic University of America. She walked toward the building near midnight, thinking of the dishes in the sink and a work out video.

A little startled when she saw two men, she reminded herself there is no need to fear just because they were Black. She dismissed the thought of them until, suddenly, she heard a threatening voice behind her and turned to face the barrel of a gun.

"You better not look at me," said the gunman.

She was weak with fear as they ordered her to open the door of her apartment. She struggled with the key until the door finally opened. After answering their questions about whether she lived alone, whether anyone else had a key, and whether she was supposed to call anyone when she got home, they led her to her bedroom, still asking questions and demanding that she speaks softly.

"Then I was ordered to lie face down on my full-size bed. They tied my feet to the bottom corners of the bed, and my right arm to the upper right corner," she wrote in *Emergence* magazine. "When one asked me for something else to use to tie my left hand, I told him where my belts

were. Then they wrapped thick duct tape around my head, covering my eyes and mouth.

"Are they doing this so they can shoot me? Maybe they just want to make sure they have plenty of getaway time.' My thoughts raced. What was about to happen hadn't occurred to me. Then, with a knife from my kitchen, one of them sliced up the back of the right leg of my black stretch pants. Then it became clear. I'm about to be raped."

They both raped her. After that, they stole all of her electronic equipment from her one-bedroom apartment. An hour later, they were gone, never seen again by her, never arrested for the crime."

That horrific evening 10 years ago is still vivid in the memory of Lori Robinson.

"I really do feel like I'm a walking miracle. I'm so deeply healed. I feel very detached from that incident," Robinson says in an interview. She quickly clarifies, "That's not to say that I don't ever think about it. If I were to meditate about it, it would make me sad."

An associate editor at *Emergence* magazine at the time of her assault, Robinson turned to her spiritual faith for healing.

"From the very beginning, I remember thinking, 'I don't know how I can feel better, but I believe God can make it happen.'"

Gradually, with counsel-



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—Lori Robinson

ing, her healing deepened, and the sadness began to recede.

Sadness is the same emotion that she has tried to help eliminate from the lives of other Black women who are victims of sexual assault. Robinson, now a freelance journalist, has used her writings to help with her own healing and the healing of others.

Her life has taken a new turn since she wrote the *Emergence* story in 1997, two years after her assault. Now, her book, "I Will Survive, The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault," published three years ago, has led to nearly 100 book-signings and speaking engagements in 20 states.

"The positive side is that it's been very fulfilling for me to feel that I am helping people. And just based on things that people have said to me after my talks, that this is really helpful to have a survivor to be able to share this kind of information," she says. "A lot of what I talk about is the intersection of

racism and sexism."

By this, she means racist, gender-based stereotypes associated with African-Americans.

The 357-page book covers how African-American women and men suffer from sexual stereotypes dating as far back as slavery, such as the Black woman being loose and the oversexed Black man. The book also offers safety tips for rape prevention, other stories of healing after sexual assaults, and reasons that Black women are believed to be sexually assaulted more often than Whites, but are not as likely to report it.

One in six women is sexually assaulted during her lifetime, according to a 2004 of National Violence Against Women survey. The U. S.

Department of Justice estimates that only 37 percent of all rapes are reported. Black women make up only 18 percent of those reporting the attacks.

"For a lot of these Black women, it's just in our culture that idea that we're supposed to take care of everybody else first, the stigma in the Black community about getting professional help, just not having enough time, not having enough money," Robinson explains.

"As difficult as it is, it has been completely fulfilling to feel that in this unique situation, as a rape survivor who is a journalist. I don't know if I've taken myself too seriously, but it feels very fulfilling," she says.

As the 10th anniversary of the May 19 rape approaches, Robinson is beginning to think it's time for her to take a new approach to her life. Her post-rape life has been fulfilling and physically draining.

"It's changing now. I'm speaking less," she says. "It's kind of been emotionally overwhelming. The hardest part for me, I think, was generally when I speak, people want to tell me their

stories...I think that because they see a healing in me, they want to be able to talk with me and share with me...I have taken in too much of other people's stuff, I guess. That's been the hardest part."

She speaks two to three times a week and as any frequent traveler can testify, even five-star hotels are no substitute for your bed back home. And it can be even more taxing when someone is home waiting, as is the case with Robinson. She is happy to return to her husband, Ollie Johnson, who was her boyfriend at the time of the assault.

"Right after I was raped, I don't know what I thought they would possibly do, but just the idea that these people knew what I looked like and I didn't know what they looked like and I couldn't see them, well that just petrified me," she recalls. "In the years after the rape, I was scared a lot. I would park my car, look around me a lot and sprint to the door."

Ollie Johnson helped anchor Robinson then, and now.

"I remember I couldn't wait 'til the weekend would (See Rape, Page 14)

Howard law students top Harvard in competition

By Christopher Wall
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The Howard University School of Law Moot Court Trial Team participated in the American Bar Association Criminal Justice and John Marshall Law School competition and placed first in the event, the first Black college to do so.

"The confidence that we had in ourselves created a command in the courtroom like no other," Errick Simmons said, team captain and third year law student.

"We submitted a declaration of interest last summer," Simmons said. "The national committee selects teams based on prior success records."

Eight weeks prior to the competition, each team is given a fact pattern written by a problem drafter who is also one of the judges in the final round. The fact patterns are based on real life cases with the parties and witnesses changed. The competition is structured around trial advocacy, a component of law where advocates represent their clients under the rule of law in a trial format. Each team

was graded on speech advocacy, opening statements, direct examination, cross examination, objections, closing arguments and the presentation and use of exhibits.

"Our preparation was independent of endowment or funds and rested primarily upon the fate we have in ourselves," Simmons said, who assisted with the preparation of the team. "We are social engineers." The four-member team consisted of Derrick Simmons, Adonna Bannister, L. Chris Stewart and Nisha Brooks. The history-making team was coached by Professor Monique A. Pressley.

Membership on the team is selective and began with an inter-school competition with an estimated attendance of 80 to 100 students. After selections were made, there was an intra-team competition in the fall to determine the representatives for the spring.

The Howard University School of Law Moot Court Trial Team participated in four competitions this school year: the National Trial Competition, the National Black Law Students Association Competition, The

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Expertise Student of the Month

Twenty-six-year-old, Tamequa Williams, was recently selected as Expertise School of Beauty's April Student of the Month. This Cheyenne High School Class of 1997 graduate, who is known for her famous short cuts, outstanding ability to work with clients, and the fabulous grades she earns, will add another title to her life this August: Licensed Cosmetologist. Williams has had an interest in hair most of her life and plans to work at an area beauty shop after she passes her State Board Exam. "I've been doing hair since I was 9-years-old, so choosing a career as a Cosmetologist was a natural choice for me." Just as natural, was her choice to acquire her training at Expertise, according to Williams. "The teachers here go that extra mile for their students to ensure that we have all the advantages they can offer us, so that we can obtain whatever level of success we desire." Williams' long term goal is to own a shop here in the Valley.



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