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## Givens Speaks Out On Domestic Violence

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The world marveled at boxer Mike Tyson's ability to knock a grown man out cold in a matter of seconds but barely batted an eye when it was revealed that he was treating his wife to that same brutality.

Tyson's ex-wife, actress Robin Givens, traveled from Florida to the California State Capitol to discuss her personal history with domestic violence. Givens' talk was part of Domestic Violence Month and the Second Annual Statewide Day of Awareness, hosted by the California Partnership To End Domestic Violence.

"I'm so very much in the midst of my healing. I stand before you with so many questions still," Givens said.

The actress married Tyson, the former heavyweight champion of the world in 1988; the couple divorced a year later. Givens' starred in the hit television show "Head of the Class" and went on to tempt Forest Whitaker in "A Rage in Harlem" and Eddie Murphy in "Boomerang."

She was an A-list actress yet she had to find rooms in her home to hide from her husband's rages.

"I don't understand how somehow who loves you, someone you know loves you can hit you," she said. "I don't understand a world where a man, my husband, (says publicly) that the 'best punch I ever threw was against my wife' and no one said anything."

Givens describes her volatile relationship with Tyson in her new book "Grace Will Lead Me Home." She also reveals how her mother and her grandmother were also victims of domestic violence.

She says her own mother's earliest memory is being in her playpen and seeing the wall covered in blood as her father beat her own mother. Her mother left her own husband when she was pregnant with her second child and Givens was 18 months old.

"She wanted something better for us," Givens said.

Ruth Givens singularly raised her two daughters in a happy home. They were safe, content and encouraged to follow their dreams. Domestic violence was a foreign concept to them.

Givens says she used to watch the Phil Donahue show and see women talk about how they had been abused by their mates and swore it would never, could never, be her in that situation.



**Actress/author Robin Givens shared her history with domestic violence at a recent rally in front of the state capitol. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.**

Photo (c) Observer / Larry V. Dalton

"I thought why don't they just leave. I said that would never be me, I'm too smart for that to be me. God has a sense of humor, because I ended up one of those women," she said. "I believe it was because of the silence, where the seed had been so deeply implanted, that I ended up marrying a man very much like my father."

Fellow speaker Elaine Whitefeather agreed.

"Silence is what keeps everything happening," Whitefeather said. Whitefeather, whose lineage includes African American and Native American ancestry, also shared her story of survival.

"While my father kept us safe from the racism of the outside world, my father was also the enemy in our home," she said of the sexual abuse she suffered at his hands. I went on to be abused by my husband, only I didn't know it, because he didn't treat me 'as bad' as my father," she said.

Coming from an abusive home had its ramifications on the entire Whitefeather household. She says her sister was abused and stabbed to death by her husband and her brother beat his children.

The capitol gathering kicked off a month-long schedule of events focused on domestic education and prevention. The rally also featured booths set up by community groups and private agencies that provide resources — and shelter — for those suffering from physical and emotional abuse. Participants included WEAVE (Women Escaping A Violent Environment), My Sister's House, Avon, the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition and the Sacramento Valley Section of the National Council for Negro Women.

The local chapter was represented by members Tommie Whitlow and Labeebah Abdullah. Domestic violence will be the focus of the group's annual Children of Promise workshop on October 27. The California Partnership for Domestic Violence has provided support to the Sacramento Valley Section and will be participating in the workshop.

Experts say 5.3 million women will experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner each year. Last year in California, law enforcement received 176,299 domestic violence calls and Californians placed approximately 20,000 calls to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

According to the California Office of Women's Health, African American women have the state's highest prevalence of domestic violence, with 8.5 percent of them experiencing domestic violence each year. Hispanic women were second with 7.9 percent and White women third at five percent.

Following the program on the West Steps of the Capitol, stakeholders moved inside for a special hearing before the Select Committee on Domestic Violence. Ms. Givens was among those testifying.

Also testifying was Tracie Stafford, the 2007 Mrs. California. Ms. Stafford entered into an abusive marriage at age 19 and left after her 3-year-old daughter witnessed a violent beating. She, like Ms. Givens had a family history of domestic violence.

"The only way to break the chain is to educate not only the victims, but the perpetrators and the community at large. We need to teach our young women to stand in their power and young men to gain their power from within," she said.