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Local news

March 5, 2006

Author touches GL students with tales of bullying

By **SCOTT REES**
Staff Writer

GRAND LEDGE — When best selling author Jodee Blanco paid a visit to Grand Ledge High School Wednesday, her message was loud and clear.

"You have the power over other's lives, believe me," she said to a packed auditorium of students.

Students at the high school spent time getting to know Blanco on an intimate level through her book, "Please Stop Laughing at Me," a first-hand account of Blanco's experiences dealing with bullies from 5th grade through high school.

The presentation came in two parts, with Blanco recreating her experiences as a social outcast through a dramatic monologue. She ended the assembly with a question and answer session with the audience.

Shifting seamlessly from one character to another, she graphically recounted scenes from her young life where

she was consistently shunned, teased, and even physically assaulted at the hands of her classmates.

Eventually Blanco — now a successful publicist — came face to face with her tormentors at her high school's 20th class reunion.

She remembered being astonished at a rival's response when asked about the bullying.

"She said, 'We did that to everybody, we were just joking around.' Just joking around?!" said Blanco.

In truth, it was far from a laughing matter, said Blanco, as she discussed how her experiences at school made her suicidal and contemplating violence against classmates.

To make a point, she had every student in the room close their eyes and think of one moment in their lives when somebody they looked up to humiliated or belittled them.

That's how some students feel every time

they walk into school.

The students were encouraged to reach out to somebody they wouldn't normally talk to, offering a few words of kindness.

Gestures count

"That one tiny gesture can save somebody's life, and maybe yours... If you don't think Columbine can happen here, then you are so wrong," she said.

She encouraged victims to stand up for themselves, talk to a trusted adult, and find alternative social outlets outside of school.

The high school reunion proved to be a turning point for Blanco, as she was led to forgive her former classmates. The evening became the "prom I never had."

Students were obviously touched by the message, as several hands were left raised for questions when Blanco had to end it.

Afterwards, about sixty students lined up to talk to Blanco.

Blanco said out of the hundreds of high schools she had spoken at, this was the first time she had given "one-on-one intervention" to students for three hours straight. She said she spoke with principal Richard Pochert and is confident he will take all steps necessary to rectify any issues.

The high school saw some immediate change.

"One girl said, 'I just wanted to let you know that there was some change in the lunch room today,'" said Blanco.

High school student Molli Templin said the message applied to everyone, regardless of their social status.

"I thought it was really good and I thought a lot of the people in our school could connect with it and she made some good points," said Templin.

"I think in general everyone has insecurities

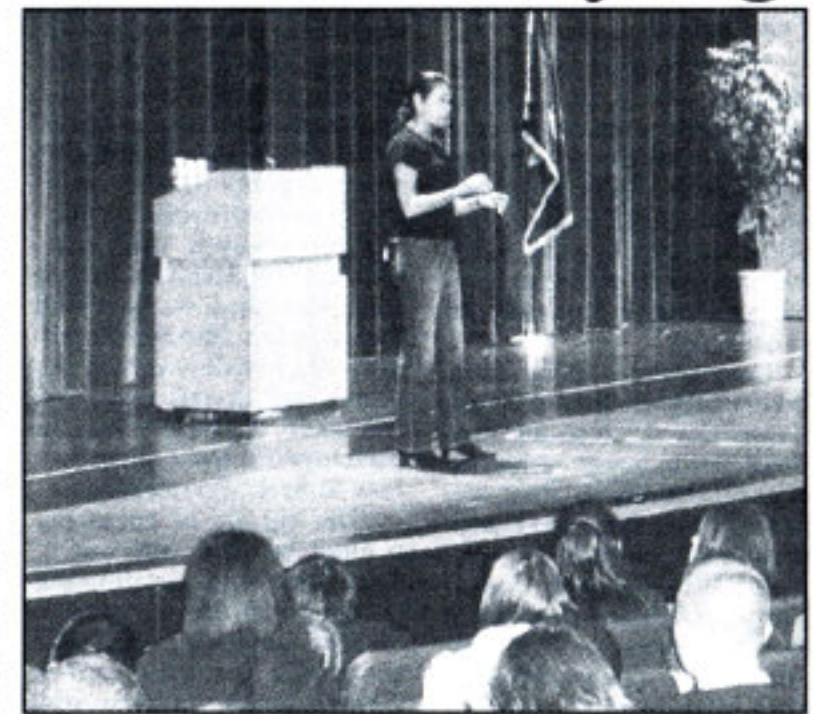


Photo by Scott Rees

SAVING LIVES — Author and anti-bullying activist Jodee Blanco speaks to a packed auditorium of Grand Ledge High School students about their power over the lives of one another. Afterwards, a student told her, "there was some change in the lunch room today."

that somehow relate to her experiences and it sort of brings everyone on the same level and on the same page."

Blanco also conducted a teacher workshop in the afternoon and held a special community session in the evening.