



Bullying expert Peggy Moss presents evening seminar at Tawingo College

Gillian Brunette

May 21, 2008

College launches new speakers' series for parents, educators and professionals

Peggy Moss has worked for more than a decade to eradicate bullying, first as a hate-crime prosecutor with the attorney general's department in Maine, and later as an educator and curriculum developer at the Centre for the Prevention of Hate Violence in Portland, Maine.

Moss has written two award-winning books for elementary school-aged children on bullying, *Say Something* and, most recently, *Our Friendship Rules*, co-authored by her niece Dee Dee Tardiff. She also gives seminars and bullying awareness workshops to health-care providers, educators, students and parents in the United States and Canada.

Moss, who now lives in Toronto, will be presenting a seminar to address the issue of bullying and teasing at Tawingo College on Wednesday, May 28 at 7:30 p.m.

"We are hoping that Peggy is the first of several folks who will present in a speakers' series being hosted by Tawingo College throughout the upcoming school year," said Tawingo's co-owner and operator Tia Pearse.

Moss is no stranger to Muskoka or Tawingo College.

"My mother is Canadian and my mom's family always had a cottage here. I went to Camp Tawingo for 13 years and now my two kids, Emily and Anna, will be going to Tawingo for the first time," she said.

The Moss family recently spent a year living in Sri Lanka and decided to move to Toronto from their home in Freeport, Maine, last fall. They have purchased a cottage in the Burk's Falls area and expect to spend a lot more time in the area.

Moss is a graduate of Princeton University and the Washington College of Law at American University, where she was head of the Juvenile Justice Association. As an assistant attorney general in the civil rights unit in Maine, she spent years working with children and adults who were harassed, threatened, or assaulted on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or class.

She saw firsthand the deep emotional and often physical trauma that bullying inflicts on children. Eventually Moss decided to develop a more proactive solution to hate crime and in 2000 resigned from her position as prosecutor to work as associate director at the Centre for the Prevention of Hate Violence. There, she conducted workshops and gave speeches on how to prevent hate crime in schools. Today she still works as a consultant for the centre.

Drawing on her experience defending and protecting victims of violence, Moss wrote the award-winning children's book, *Say Something*, which was published in 2004. The story is about a girl who sees her classmates getting bullied and teased on a daily basis at her elementary school. She doesn't say or do anything until, one

day, she's also taunted. While her peers watch in silence, afraid to speak out on her behalf, it occurs to the girl that together they could discourage the bullies if they summoned up the courage to say something.

Moss and her niece Tardiff started thinking about writing *Our Friendship Rules* when Dee Dee was only 12 years old. They wanted to write a story about how hard it is when friendships go wrong, and how, if they do, it is possible to help them go right again. It took two years to complete the book, which was published in 2007.

Moss continues to write articles about the stresses that face children in schools today.

"There's a good chance your kid won't walk up to you and say, 'I'm getting teased and bullied at school; the kids are calling me names.' Instead, it's going to manifest itself by your child saying, 'I don't want to go to school today.' If this seems to be happening a lot, consider the possibility that bullying might be the reason behind the sick days," she said.

"Also, look for signs that kids are hurting themselves. Self-mutilation can be a sign. For boys, one classic symptom is that they are teased so much about being gay or being atypical that they're terrified to go to the bathroom. Since there's only one way in and one way out of a bathroom, it's an ideal place to tease other kids," said Moss.

As a parent, teacher or health-care worker, bullying should be a factor to consider when trying to figure out what's going on with a child, Moss said. "The injury is real when kids get teased — unchecked, it can be devastating."

Bullying, teasing, the impact they have on kids, and what parents and professionals can do about them, are just some of the issues Moss will be dealing with in her presentation.

"I'm really excited that Peggy is coming to Tawingo and I'm hoping it is well-received. Peggy is highly qualified and a lovely person. She talks common sense, which I love," Pearse said.

The evening at Tawingo College is offered at no charge and all are welcome. Tawingo College is situated at 1844 Ravenscliffe Road. For more information dial 789-5612. For more information on the author visit www.SaySomethingNow.com, or www.empoweringparents.com and search Peggy Moss.

This article is for personal use only courtesy of cottagecountrynow.ca - a division of Metroland Media Group Ltd.
