

Author and activist Rebick to share personal story at Library

By Brock Weir

Judy Rebick has never shied away from leading the charge for social justice.

A activist by nature, she doesn't skirt controversial topics or miss an opportunity to get people out of their respective comfort zones, particularly the powers-that-be.

But, in tackling the very personal issue of mental health, Ms. Rebick had to tackle some uncomfortable subjects of her own.

She is set to share that personal story at the Aurora Public Library this Wednesday, May 1 at 7 p.m. in an "In Conversation" event hosted by this writer.

Wednesday's discussion will focus not only on Ms. Rebick's storied career as an activist, publisher and television host, but also her new memoir, *Heroes in my Head*, which charts her own experience with clinical depression and Dissociative Identity Disorder, a disorder previously known as "multiple personality disorder."

"I think my story shows a different side of what most people consider mental illness," says Ms. Rebick.

Trauma of any kind can be destructive, she says, and people tend to look at the destructive side of it, but looking back on her own experience she says "surviving a trauma can make you more creative in lots of ways" as well.

"I like to call them mental injuries because, in my case, it is not an illness but an injury inflicted on me," she says. "I fought to change the world for women and children and part of that is because of what happened to me. I find a lot of people who are active are active because it helps them heal their own situation, their own problems, and make them feel better about themselves as they try to change the world to be better for others."

Ms. Rebick says she knew she didn't have an easy childhood. Her father was domineering and had fits of violence outside the home while his "yelling and screaming" was a regular experience indoors.

She says she knew she had issues, but didn't know she had been sexually abused until she started going to therapy in 1980.

Setting down on paper what happened next was a very hard process. While her five previous books took an average of two years to

complete, *Heroes in My Head* took eight solid years start to finish.

'I had to learn how to do something very different,' she says, noting that because she was disassociated, there were gaps in her own memory she had to work hard to fill. 'I trained as a journalist and I have worked as a journalist. In journalism, you're summing up, but writing a memoir is more like writing fiction in the sense that you need to set scenes and get the characters and dialogue, have to have people stay in a scene and not have them slip through it. I also had to explore my own history as a journalist in a way.

'What was hard was showing this other side of myself that I kept hidden my whole life. I am a very public person and I have never talked about any of this. I don't think I even talked about any kind of sexual violence. I had to face that people's ideas of me would be changed by this.'

There was a risk, she said, that people would think less of her but, in the end, the reception *Heroes in My Head* received was 'incredible.'

'I never experienced anything like it because I am a fairly controversial person,' she says with a laugh. 'This is the only thing I have ever done that I got nothing negative, not even on Twitter. There was one tweet that said, 'How does she remember? This is all bullshit. There's no such thing as multiple personalities.' There was one tweet from somebody who didn't even know how to tag me.

'This book is about the interplay between healing from abuse and activism. My mental injury actually helped me to be a better activist because it made me fearless, for one thing. I couldn't feel fear. People think of me as strong and fearless, and a lot of that is because I was so disassociated from my feelings.'

To join the dialogue at In Conversation: Author & Activist Judy Rebick with Brock Weir, reserve your free ticket at aurorapl.ca and come out on Wednesday, May 1 at 7 p.m.