

Author tells about encounter that changed her life

New York Times bestselling author Laura Schroff was guest speaker at the Seaford library's annual gala in early June.

Schroff's book, *An Invisible Thread*, released in November, tells the true story of her friendship with Maurice, whom she met when he was a child and was begging on the streets of New York City.

Schroff is a former advertising executive who worked for media companies such as Time Inc. and Conde Nast and with publications such as USA Today, Ms. Magazine, Brides and People.

She is also the niece of Rita Procino, Seaford, a connection that the library was able to use to invite Schroff to come to Seaford.

Peggy Boyd, spokeswoman for the library board's sustainability committee, which sponsored the event, said many people have compared Schroff's book to *The Blind Side*, a 2009 film starring Sandra Bullock and based on a book, *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, by Michael Lewis.

As part of the evening's activities, Don Moore auctioned off several items donated by local businesses and artists.

Proceeds from the gala went toward the library's capital campaign.

Local ties to western Sussex

Schroff thanked Carol Sapna for allowing her to be a part of the Seaford Library and Cultural Center event.

"This evening is especially important and meaningful to me because I have my most favorite relatives in the room," Schroff said.

"As a child growing up, my family would visit my Great Aunt Nancy, my mother's aunt in Laurel. Our visit was always magical. So I would love for my dear, sweet Aunt Nancy to stand up. She is her tonight with her daughter Star and Star's daughter, Justina."

"Now, probably most of you know my Uncle Pat, and my Aunt Rita (Procino). My Uncle Pat has always been my biggest fan. After my mother passed, we could always count on my Uncle Pat and of course, my Aunt Rita," Schroff said.

The Invisible Thread

"What amazes me is how my life's journey continues to have so many unexpected and unplanned blessings. Maurice was definitely one, the book another and being here tonight.

"When I met Maurice Mazyck over 25 years ago, I could never have imagined that our story and my book, *An Invisible Thread* would be a New York Times Bestseller. Who could ever have imagined?"

"For those of you who have not read *An Invisible Thread*, let me take you back to September 1, 1986. I was single and 35 years old. I left my midtown apartment in New York City and as I walked up 56th Street towards Broadway, I saw an 11-year-old boy, with his hand out.

"As I passed, he said, 'Excuse me lady, do you have spare any change? I am hungry.' and I said NO and kept walking.

"But halfway across Broadway, something made me stop. What resonated with me were the words 'I am hungry.'

"I followed this strange instinct and went back to the boy. I said to him, 'I don't want to give you any money. But if you're hungry, I will buy you lunch at McDonalds.'

"As we walked toward McDonalds, I said, my name is Laura and he said 'Hi,

I'm Maurice,' and that was the first meal we would share together, but unbeknownst to us not the last.

"I knew the day I met Maurice he was hungry, but what I didn't know was how dire his situation actually was. At 11 years old, Maurice had no choice but to fend for himself. He was trapped in a desperate cycle of poverty, drugs and violence.

"His father, a gang member, left Maurice when he was six, and his mother, Darcella, whom he loved dearly, was addicted to heroin and crack.

"By the time I met Maurice he had lived in some 20 different shelters and welfare hotels.

"He was then living at the Bryant Hotel in a room 12 x 12 with only two single beds, no bedding, pillows or blankets. There was only one chair in the corner, a half refrigerator and a television that sat on top. He lived in this room with as many as 12 people at one time. His mother, grandmother, his two sisters, his aunt, two baby cousins, and uncles who came and went.

"As a child, Maurice could never remember food in the fridge, only water and baking soda to cook the drugs.

"While the children slept on the two single beds at night, the adults fed their drug habit into the early morning hours and slept the day away.

"As a young boy he remembers receiving only two gifts, a small yellow Hess truck and a joint that his grandmother gave him when he was six. Can you imagine?"

The brown paper bag

"I told him I could not bear the thought that he was not eating, but explained because of my hectic work schedule I couldn't see him everyday.

"So, I suggested I could give him money on Monday and he would have to be very careful as to how he spent it, but he would be able to buy food throughout the week.

"Or, I suggested, on Monday night we could go to the supermarket and I would buy him all of the things he loved to eat and I would make him lunch and leave it with the doorman and on his way to school, he could swing by and pick it up.

"Maurice looked at me and asked, 'Miss Laura if you make me lunch will you put it in a brown paper bag?'

"Now this time I was really confused. I didn't understand if he wanted his lunch in a brown paper bag or not, and he said, 'Miss Laura, I don't want your money, I want my lunch in a brown paper bag because when kids come to school and they have their lunch in a brown paper bag that means someone cares about them.'"

"I remember telling my friends all the time, if we could all just walk in Maurice's



New York Times bestselling author Laura Schroff

footsteps for 24 hours, we would never complain again."

"Maurice was teaching me how the simple things that are so precious are the ones sometimes we most take for granted.

"Maurice taught me to be grateful for what I have, and not be depressed or angry about what I didn't have.

"And, that's what *An Invisible Thread* is about. It's about opening our eyes to the hidden blessings in our lives.

"Maurice taught me what truly matters in life."

One small gesture

"If I can leave you all with just a few thoughts.

"There are nearly 17 million, or almost one in four American Children who are at risk of hunger like Maurice.

"Maurice's life, although it was 25 years ago, it unfortunately still represents the lives of many struggling families today.

"In the state of Delaware alone the Food Bank serves more than 17,500 families which includes 7,700 children each week.

"So, one small gesture, one little act of kindness can make an enormous difference. In fact, it can even have a profound way of breaking terrible cycles and having an amazing ripple effect just like it had on Maurice and me and now his family."

Library accomplishments listed

Kay Wheatley, president of the Seaford District Library Board of Commissioners,

listed the recent accomplishments and Statistics of the Seaford Library & Cultural Center. Here are some of the highlights:

- Since December 2009 there have been over 250,000 visits to the Seaford Library. During that same time period over 230,000 items were borrowed from the library.

- The Seaford Library is ranked 4th in circulation and 3rd in patron visits of the 15 libraries located in Sussex County. Only Lewes, South Coastal and Milford were ranked higher.

- The Seaford Library Job Center Laboratory was opened in September 2011.

From September 2011 to February 2012, 876 hours of computer instruction classes, ESL instruction, financial literacy classes and other job related programs. Rae Wolfe is the Friends Volunteer Job Center computer instructor.

- Provided wireless broadband computer access for public use.

- Installation of credit card capability for patron payments.

- The Seaford Library offered 234 children's, teen and adult programs in 2011.

- In May 2012, 9,538 electronic books were borrowed from Delaware's public libraries.

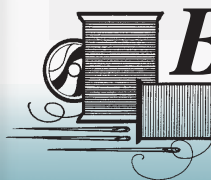
- In May 2012, 1,772 persons visited the Seaford Library to use a public computer.

- The Seaford Library added 4,800 books to the collection, as well as 850 audio books, music CDs and 585 DVDs; 97 Spanish and Haiti language titles; 15 playaway titles for children and one very popular Zumba kit.



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