

Outdoors provides author solace from abuse

By Kathryn Reed



Tracy Ross reads from “The Source of All Things” at LTCC on Feb. 7. Photo/Kathryn Reed

With raw honesty, Tracy Ross has confronted her demons in a poetic, thoughtful manner that makes listeners want more and yet has them feeling a bit voyeuristic because of that desire.

Ross was at Lake Tahoe Community College on Feb. 7 as part of the Writers’ Series. She was reading from “The Source of All Things”, which came out in 2011 and in paperback last year.

The accomplished magazine writer left her comfort zone of being a journalist to write this memoir. While the story is new to readers, it has been Ross’ reality since 1978. That’s when the abuse began. She was 8.

It was in 1985 that she first wrote a poem about what was going on. She continued writing in college.

Then *Backpacker* magazine paid for her to return to the Sawtooth Mountains of her youth. It was time to ask her father four questions. It was 2007 and Ross was 35 years old.

(During the talk she didn't reveal the questions or answers, just that it took another meeting to get her dad to answer the fourth question.)

Not knowing if she wanted her story in print, her editor encouraged her to write the essay and they'd evaluate it and decide from there. It was published in *Backpacker* in December 2007. It won the National Magazine Award in 2009 – the highest award for a magazine writer.

And then she flushed it out to make it the book that people were lining up to buy Thursday night.

At LTCC she read three passages – interrupting each to add more detail for the more than 50 people listening.

With her forte being outdoor writing, Ross weaves in the splendor of nature in the book.

It's a complicated tale. And she says to this day her relationship with her parents is complicated. They remained together through the strife. She still calls him dad. (Her biological dad died of an aneurysm while hiking in the Sierra. Ross was an infant at the time. Her mom remarried when Ross was 4.)

Ross says her relationship with her mom is the hardest.

"She was weak. She was so unprotective," Ross said. "She has tried to apologize."

Ross tried telling her mom, friends, others about the abuse and no one listened. Finally, a friend's mom called the police. But this was the 1980s and in Idaho they didn't know what to do with such a case. Her dad confessed to touching her once. (The abuse started when she was 8 and ended at age 14.)

He had to stay away from her for a year and then the family was put back together.

Ross left. She found a boarding school in Michigan. There she reconnected with the outdoors. And finally, after college, she spent time in Alaska. That, she said, is where she was able to come to terms with what happened as a child.

But she also told the Lake Tahoe audience that hers is an evolving story. She's married with children. And one day Ross knows her kids will read the book and that their relationship with their grandfather is bound to change.