

The SECOND Closet

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home because their life doesn't match stereotypes. "Just because you're not poor or uneducated, you think that you're above it, but it can happen to anyone," Roper says.

Low self-esteem, a history of abuse, anger management problems and alcohol abuse are cited as precursors to battering. But some say a batterer just as likely could be a charming and self-assured social drinker from a nonviolent family.

"We don't know why people batter. Nobody knows," Roper says. "Batterers come from all kinds of backgrounds." In 20 domestic violence cases, Roper says all 20 will be unique.

But the incidence of alcohol abuse in domestic violence is high, says Ken Stofft, a drug and alcohol counselor. He also does domestic violence intake, assessment and counseling in Washington County at the Shelter Domestic Violence Resource Center as a volunteer.

William's experience with his partner proves alcohol abuse can play a role in domestic violence. The product of an upper-middle-class family, he went to college and made a good living in the entertainment industry.

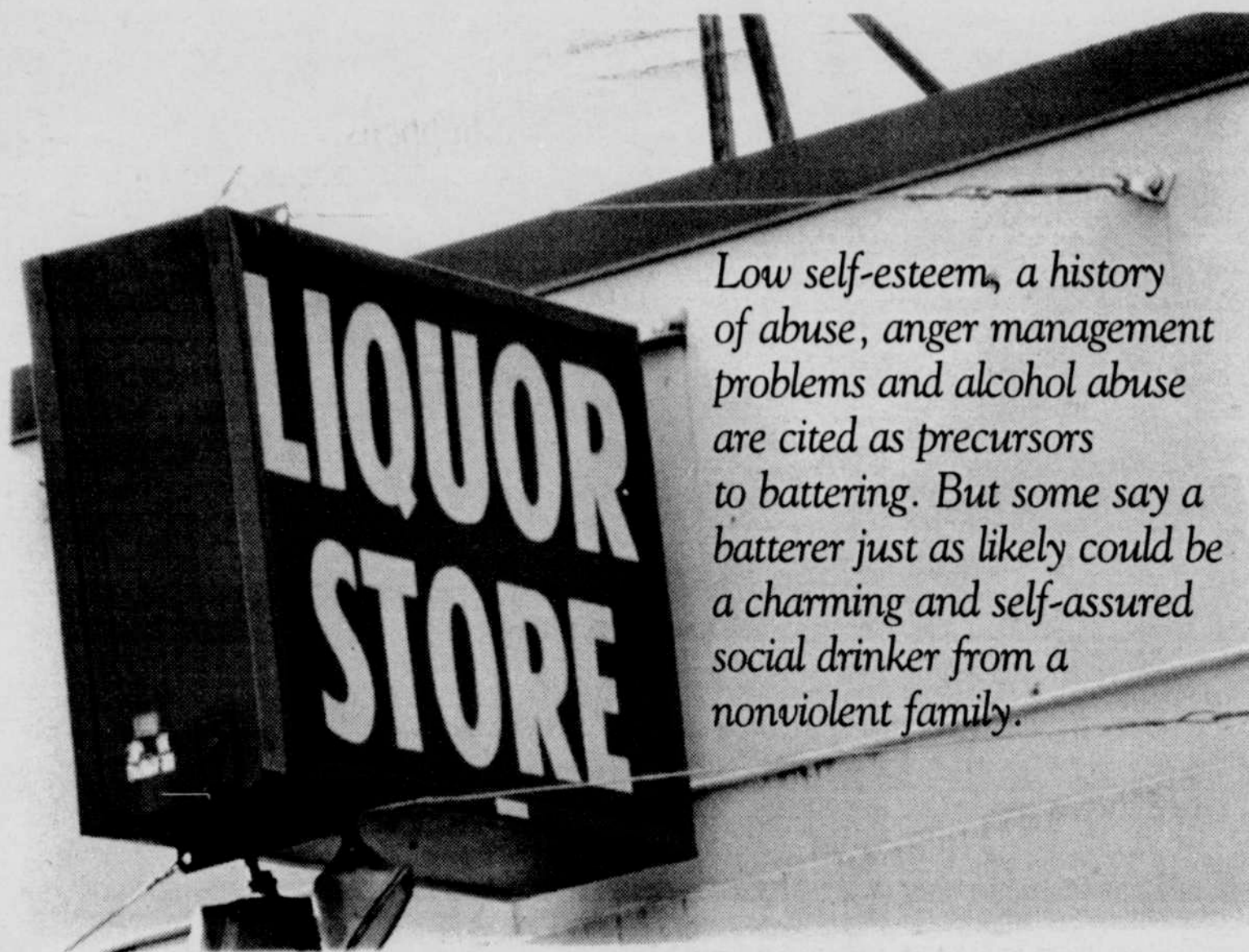
Still, he found himself in a violent relationship. His partner verbally harassed him and sometimes got violent—always when he drank or did drugs. At one point, William almost was run down by his partner with a car in a parking lot.

William didn't see the abuse coming. His partner was also college-educated and had a good job. The pair lived in a nice apartment and had a large group of close, supportive friends.

Just when William resolved to get out of the relationship, his partner would show a better side. Inevitably, the substance abuse would return, though—and the violence was never far behind.

Stofft says it is common for partners to say, "If only they'd handle their liquor." But in many cases when you take alcohol away from a batterer, a sober batterer remains, he says. Substance abuse and domestic violence might be tied together, but they are two separate issues, according to Stofft.

William finally left, but others stay and try to



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get legal protection from the batterer, especially when physical violence is part of the scenario. Victims of domestic violence are urged to obtain a restraining order against the batterer as a first step. Although protective orders are available to same-sex partners in two-thirds of the country's courts, other states do not make protective

orders available to same-sex partners.

Oregon's domestic violence protective orders use gender-neutral wording, making protective orders available to same-sex couples in many cases. Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky and Ohio specify same-sex couples in the language about protective orders.

WHY THEY STAY

- Victims love their batterers.
- Victims do not want to leave the person they love; they only want the violence to stop.
- Victims hope and believe, often for a long time, the violence will stop.
- The violence is periodic, and the loving periods between violent episodes entice the victims to stay.
- Victims might think they provoke, cause or deserve the violence.
- Victims often are told by others that they provoke, cause or deserve the violence.
- They might have left before but were encouraged by friends, family, therapists, clergy or police to "go home" where they belong.
- Victims might have tried to leave and been beaten for it.
- Learned helplessness sets in, and victims no longer think they can escape.
- Victims are threatened with more violence, or even death, if they try to leave and, with good reasons, believe these threats.

—Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them: Battered Gay Men and Domestic Violence
by David Island and Patrick Letellier (Harrington Park Press, 1991)

Getting Help

Batterers can be extremely socialized and charismatic. Friends and family often don't even suspect someone is capable of battering. So when a problem occurs in the relationship, most acquaintances encourage couples to seek counseling.

Because of the difficulty in treating couples embroiled in domestic violence and the danger involved, Stofft says the worse thing for victims to do is to seek couple's counseling. Even the best of counselors can miss what is happening in the relationship; the batterer subtly remains in control during the counseling sessions.

Because Portland is a small city, Hale says people are often reluctant to seek help because of the shame and embarrassment they feel. Both victims and batterers fear being seen by friends or acquaintances at

support groups or group counseling sessions.

"In a small town or in a small culture it's a very, very small world," Hale points out. She says Portland has many subcultures in the gay community, and that can lead to barriers in getting help. People are afraid of their anonymity in what they perceive is a small community.

For those who do find help, recovery is a process, Hale says. Like treating alcoholism or diabetes, treatment after domestic violence can be lifelong.

Lynn's recovery has been slow. After escaping her first partner's abuse, she says she carefully picked a new partner—who turned out to be another abuser. She got out of the relationship as quickly as she could but was disturbed that she made another bad decision.

"I do have a lot of embarrassment that it has taken me so long, and I'm not over the hill yet," Lynn says about her recovery. "I'd like to say I'm cured, but I don't think I am. Love is blind sometimes."

But Lynn says it isn't as though she seeks out abusers. "They find you; you don't find them," she says.

These days, she won't accept an offer for a date; she has to make the first move. "I've found that's what I have to do."

Also at issue is what some refer to as the "cycle of violence." Batterers are quick to show



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