

RAPE IS A CRIME OF VIOLENCE

by Margaret R. Frimoth

It's late afternoon in the Crisis Office and I've got a few hours to myself. Seems like the perfect time to write up my notes from our recent Rape Advocacy Workshop. Ha! It always sounds like an inside joke to call it "rape advocacy" as if we advocate rape. Hardly! But sometimes I need the simple comic relief. Besides, I said I'd write this article about the workshop because it would be great "community education." I thought it would be easy, just type up the notes and let folks know the facts about rape. No problem. But this is much harder than I imagined.

I guess what's really got to me has been re-typing the Oregon laws pertaining to the so-called "sex crimes." I was listing one after another — rape, sodomy, sexual abuse, public indecency, contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor, and then the startling crime, the crime that took me back, the crime that made me feel dirty even while I sat typing cleanly at my desk, the crime that makes me furious, and the crime that sums up my understandings, my knowledge, and my emotions associated with rape and its counterparts — ORS 163.408 and 163.411: "Penetration with a Foreign Object is a crime if a person uses a foreign object to penetrate the anus, vagina, or penis of another person." This describes the absolute truth about rape and the rest of the crimes. None of the crimes have anything to do with sex, except genitals, and even genitals can be excluded and rape remains.

All rape is penetration with a foreign object. Even if a penis is used, it has nothing to do with the intimate physical communion shared while lovemaking. The penis becomes a foreign object, a weapon of power, an object used in an intense act of violence. Rape is violence. Nothing else.

Let me calm my anger and get down off my soapbox long enough to explain some of my understanding. However, don't expect me to remain calm. It's quite impossible.

The issues of rape are enmeshed in myths. Our social upbringing influences our beliefs about who we are as little boys and girls, and then later as woman and men. Our culture also protects us by preventing us from knowing the realities of rape and other forms of sexual misconduct. We confidently say, "Rape isn't really a serious problem. It doesn't occur that often."

This is not the truth. It is a myth. Rape is the fastest growing and most underreported crime. One in three women are raped in their lifetime. Seventy percent of all rapes are acquaintance rapes. Only one in ten rapes are reported. Half of all American children will be sexually exploited before they reach age sixteen. Fifty percent of these children are males, eighty percent of these involve someone the child already knew.

It makes me wonder who in the world is not either a victim or a perpetrator of violence. More personally, it means that if I write down the names of thirty women friends, I can expect that ten of them have been or will be raped, and that seven of the rapists will be someone they know (someone I might know, also). It means that if I write down the names of a dozen kids,



HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

Immediately following the attack, encourage her to see a doctor. She should be checked for injury, pregnancy, and VD. (Follow-up checks for VD are crucial.) Accompany her to a doctor if she requests you to.

Encourage her to talk, and when she does, listen. Hold back on the advice. Most rape victims need to talk about the experience. It is not helpful to tell her not to think about it. She does, and needs to, before she will be ready to move on confidently.

Rape and other forms of sexual assault are major crimes. Have patience with the recovery process. It takes time (five months to a year is common for women who are dealing with an assault).

Do not be judgemental. Counteract self-blame statements. Our society places blame on women for being assaulted and this adds to guilt and feelings of self-blame: "I shouldn't have..." (gone somewhere, done something, said something) are all statements of self-blame. Although a woman may have done something unwise, she did not cause the assault. Continuing to blame her only compounds her difficulties and keeps responsibility from those upon whom it should rest.

Denial of violence against women is common in this society. Believe her!

A rape survivor has lost control of her life. She needs to get her personal power back. Therefore, resist any temptation to be overprotective. Let her make her own decisions. (For instance, let her call the Crisis Service.)

There is something called the "Rape Trauma Syndrome" that helps to explain the physical and emotional symptoms that are frequently described by rape survivors. These symptoms often last for up to a year. It is helpful to understand the syndrome. A Crisis Service volunteer can give you that information. Call the Women's Crisis Service at 325-3426.

Do not try to do it all yourself. Help the survivor build an adequate support network. The Crisis Service is available if you need:

Support for yourself as a friend, relative, or lover. Volunteers are available twenty-four hours to help you understand what a victim is going through and to offer you support as you help her and yourself get through this traumatic experience positively.

Support for the victim. The Crisis Service has a twenty-four hour crisis line, as well as support groups for women trying to resolve experiences of sexual assault. Call the Crisis Service for more information, or for appropriate referrals.

six of them will be sexually assaulted long before they can vote; and four of them will know the perpetrator.

There's another myth that is being dispelled here. We like to think that rapists are just a few sick men. But that cannot be true if so many of the people on my list knew the person that violated them. It means that there are a lot of violators walking around in our community. It means that our friends, perhaps our lovers, perhaps members of our families are rapists.

Sit down on that one. Who do you trust once you've heard these kinds of statistics? Let me rephrase that statement and say, "Who do you trust once you have been a rape victim?" Rape victims certainly ask that question. They ask a lot of other questions, too, like "Why me?" or "What's left in my life?" or "Why didn't he just kill me like he said he would, and then I wouldn't feel like I do now?"

Rape victims go through a devastating physical, emotional, and psychological trauma. The trauma, called the rape trauma syndrome, lasts at least a year... sometimes a lifetime. The victim needs tending, understanding, and time to work through the different stages of the trauma. Too often, though, the victim is blamed for her behavior. We say, "she asked for it (by being in a bad part of town, or by wearing a certain outfit, or by her provocative behavior)."

We must remember, first of all, that rape is violence. How many people do you know that go around asking for a black eye, a bloody nose or a broken arm? Nobody asks to be violated! Therefore, a rapist doesn't care what a woman is wearing, where she is, or how she's behaving. A rapist is looking for a way to vent hostility and exert power over someone else.

Secondly, even if a woman is acting unwisely, or is in an unsafe part of town, it certainly does not mean that she caused the assault. Rape is intended to humiliate, it is intended to degrade, it is intended to do harm — none of which anyone deserves.

Thirdly, there seems to be tremendous paradox in our social conditioning that encourages women to be sexually attractive (check out a few magazine or television commercials), and then condemns women by saying they were raped because their behavior, dress, and attitude "deserved it."

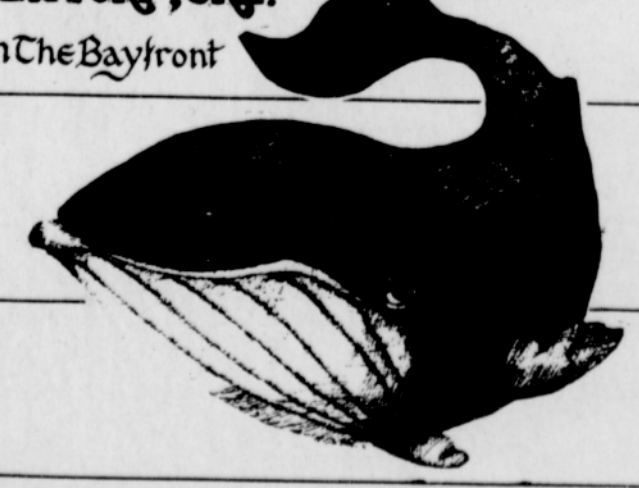
Ultimately, we are dealing with a power issue. Women and children are the usual victims. They usually have less power than men. Men are the usual violators. Men continue to violate women and children because they have not been stopped. They have not been stopped because our society has refused to see the enormity of the problem. It is a complex problem. It is a difficult issue to deal with or even to talk about. But we must. We must open our eyes. We must dare to see the pain experienced by our friends, lovers, children, parents. We must be committed to changing lives, to making our individual lives better. Mostly, we must be willing to hear the truth, and then to speak the truth and break the silence, break the denial, banish the myths. Ending violence begins with our relationships. Ending violence begins in our hearts. Ending violence begins at home.

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WHALE'S TALE

NEWPORT, ORE.
On The Bayfront



EATING WITH US IS NOTHING LESS
THAN AN AUGUSTIAN EXPERIENCE