

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

BY KAREN MELLIN

Domestic violence sounds like an oxymoron, the juxtaposition of two absolute opposites that contradict each other in a joining that startles the mind. Home ought to be a safe place; but it isn't. The words domestic violence, so unsuitable to each other, indicate a schizophrenic condition that is pervasive in our culture. However, we are not alone. Domestic violence is an integral part of most cultures that reside on Mother Earth, our home. It affects us all, every one of us. Whether we choose to talk about it or keep it hidden, our shared experience binds us in one universal wish: we don't like it one bit, and we want to see it eliminated. No small task.

Eliminating violence from our society is the major goal of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCADV and OCADSV). These coalitions provide assistance to programs that serve victims of domestic and sexual violence, and their purpose is to change societal conditions that cause violence to exist. Awareness of the problem is the first step in dealing with the cure. To heighten this awareness, October has been declared Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness Month by both state and national proclamations. President Bush, who signed the national proclamation, states, "This war against women must stop... fundamentally, violence against women won't subside until public attitudes change."

A sense of entitlement is a major cause of violence against women and children by men. Many males believe they have the right to get what they want from women even if it includes rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, deprivation, sexual harassment, genital mutilations, unnecessary gynecological operations, forced motherhood, forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, psychosurgery, abusive medical experimentation, cosmetic surgery and other mutilations in the name of beautification. In the second issue of the new MS. magazine, Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russell create a new word that best describes this gruesome list of violent behaviors against women. They call it "Femicide," which is sexist terrorism motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women.

It happens all the time. It is estimated that a woman is battered every fifteen seconds in America; it is the single largest cause of injury to women. These figures are from the U.S. Department of Justice, which reports that more than one third of women homicide victims over 15 are killed by a male spouse or boyfriend. The Journal of the American Medical Association states that in 50% of the families where the wife is being abused, the children of that family are also abused. Until recently law enforcement and judicial systems have viewed spousal abuse as a "private matter" and have been hesitant to intervene or treat domestic assault as a crime.

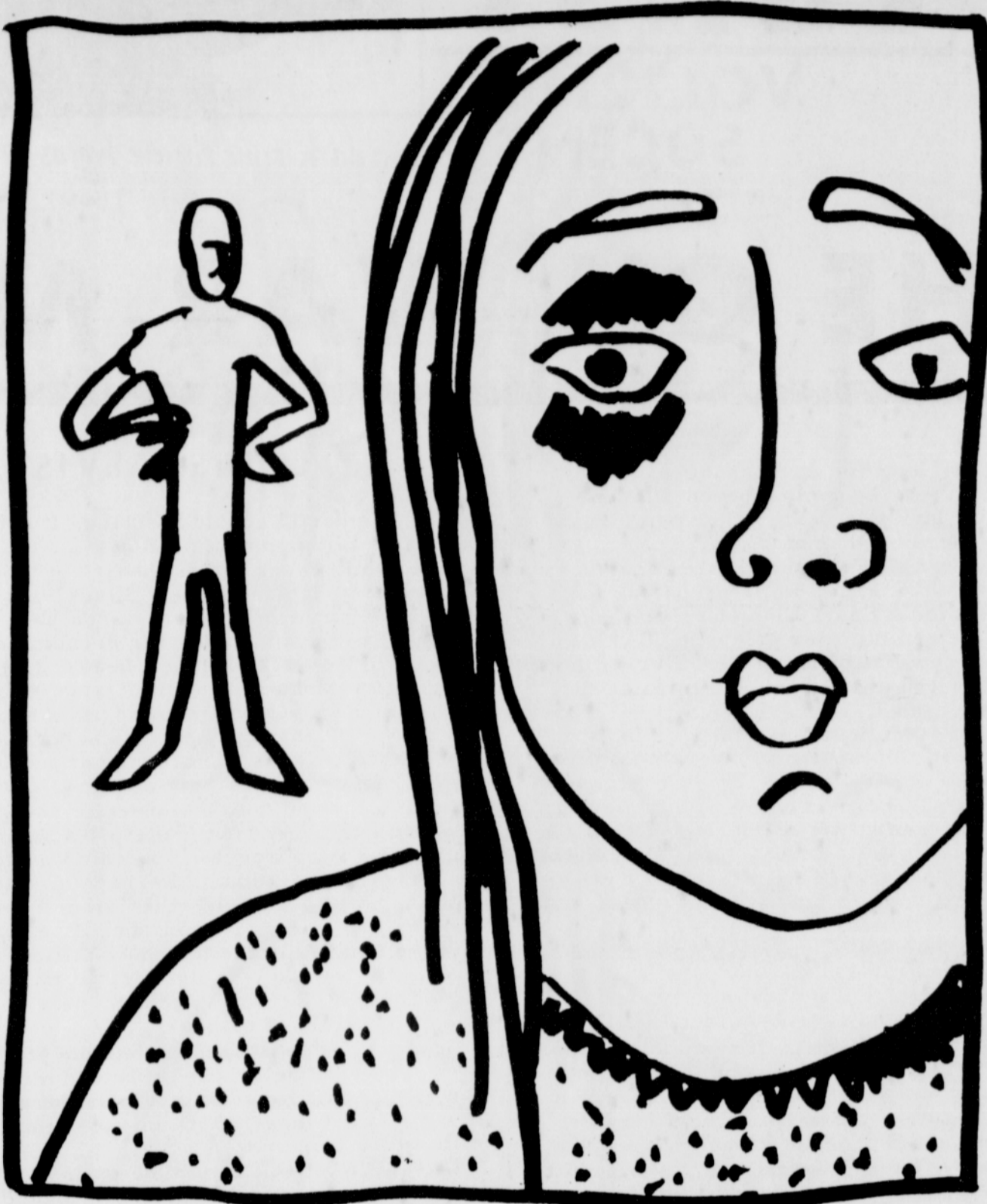
Violent crimes against women have escalated in recent decades, say authors Caputi and Russell. "We see this escalation of violence against females as part of a backlash against feminism. This doesn't mean it's the feminism; patriarchal culture terrorizes women whether we fight back or not. Still, when male supremacy is challenged, that terror is intensified. Women who stepped out of line in early modern Europe were tortured and killed as witches (estimates range from 200,000 to 9 million killed), today such women are regarded as... deserving whatever happens to them."

The Statement of Philosophy of OCADSV recognizes that the root causes of this violence stems from a belief in the supremacy of one sex over the other that is legitimized by a complex series of institutional and social arrangements that define and treat women as subordinates. "It is painful for most women to think about men's violence against us, as indi-

viduals and collectively, because the violence we encounter, and the disbelief and contempt with which we are met when we do speak out, is often so traumatic and life-threatening that many of us engage in denial or repression of our experiences," state Caputi and Russell. However, "We must demand an end to the global patriarchal war on women."

All women have the right to freedom from violation and to their own self-determination. We must all, collectively and internationally, take on the task of formulating strategies of resistance to the massive and formidable horrors that confront women and children everywhere. We must eliminate violence from our lives.

Karen Mellin is Director of Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service. She lives in Astoria.



NICOLE FERENTZ

Lazy Susan Cafe
A Specialty Breakfast & Lunch Restaurant
Coaster Square - Cannon Beach 436-2816

CHEERS TO YOUR EARS
MUSIC MUNCHERS

Bikes & Beyond
NEW LOCATION
1335 MARINE DR.
ASTORIA, OREGON

Parnassus Books
234 Tenth Street
Astoria, Oregon
97103
Monday through Saturday 10-5:30
325-1363

KAYAKS
• Sales • Rentals • Accessories • Tours
OVER BAY LANDING

10 Columbia Ave. • 325-1793 • Astoria, Oregon