

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, everyone 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 & Sexual Violence. These coalitions provide assistance to programs that serve victims of domestic and sexual violence, such as the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service, 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. 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. Jane Caputi & Diana E.H. Russell coined a new word in a *Ms.* magazine article that best describes this gruesome list of violent behaviors against women. They called 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 15 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.

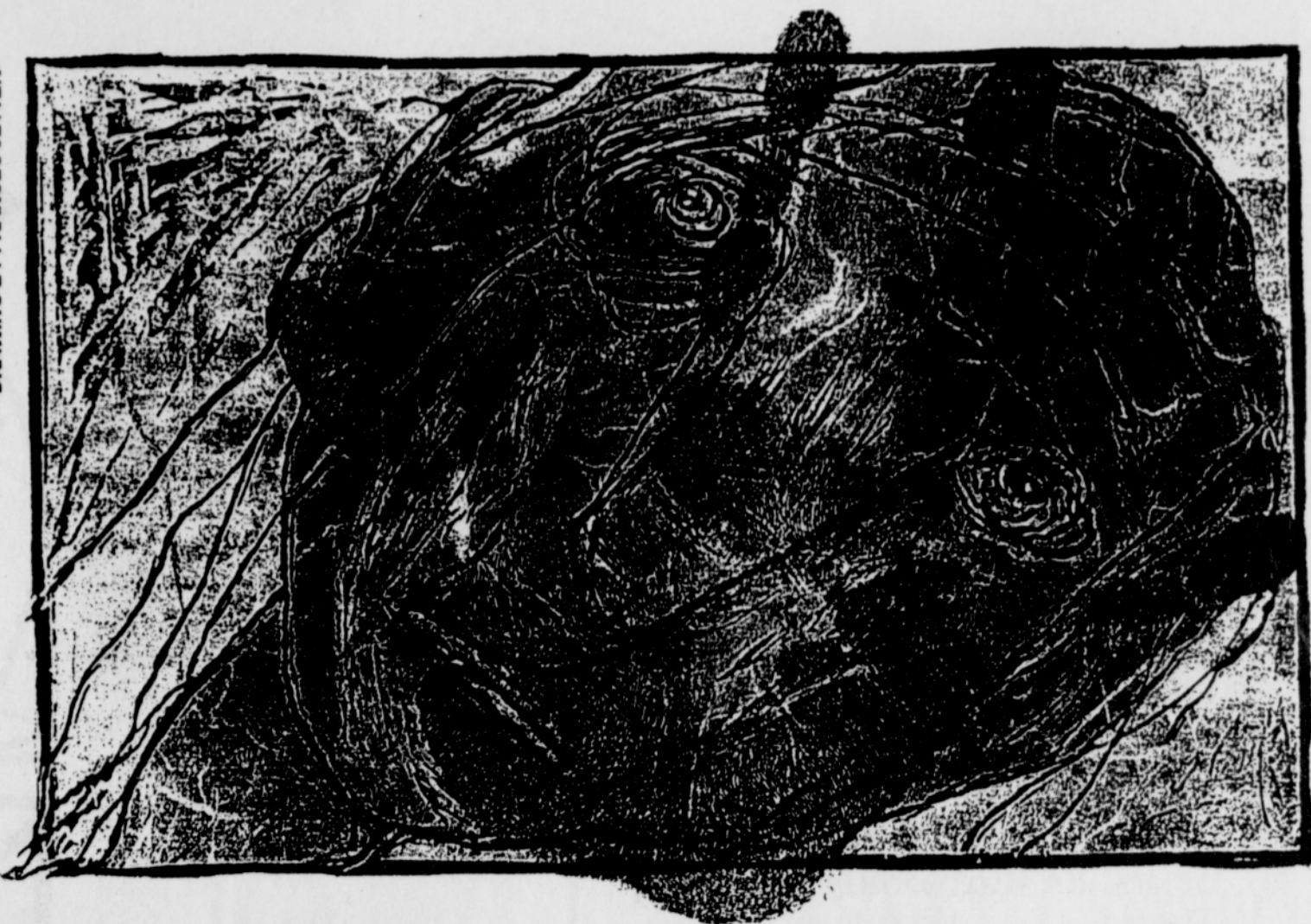
Violent crimes against women have escalated in recent decades, say authors Caputi & Russell. "We see this escalation of violence against females as part of a backlash against feminism. This doesn't mean it's the feminism: patriarchal culture terrorizes women whether we fight back or not. Still, when 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 the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence 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 individuals and collectively, because the violence we encounter, and the disbelief and contempt with which we are met when we do speak out, is so often so traumatic and life threatening that many of us engage in denial or repression of our experiences," state Caputi & 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 former director of the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service. She wrote this article for the October 1990 *NCTE*. It is reprinted in recognition of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Pax Greenway succeeded her in May as director.

DRAWING BY FRANCES JETTER



BEATING HER UP BY LAURA SNYDER

"I have permission to go to the store." "He smashed my head into the radiator until it bled." "He tied me up and twisted me like a pretzel." "I'm pregnant and he threw me down on the floor." This is not the script for a made for TV movie, nor is it a sensational portrayal of the "myth" of violence in the home. These and countless other stories have all been told to me during my work days at the Women's Crisis Service. In your neighborhood, someone is beaten on a regular basis by her intimate partner. Maybe you've heard those muffled shouts, maybe even called the police. In your neighborhood, a child is being sexually abused. A quarter of the women in your workplace were raped as adults or as children. If you are a school teacher, you are working with children who live with violence.

Did you know: Police officers in Astoria estimate that 60% of reported simple (meaning misdemeanor) assaults here are domestic in nature. In Clatsop County the rate of known child abuse is double the state average, and per capita alcohol consumption is second only to Lincoln County. The Oregon Criminal Justice Council reports that the county with the highest total reported crime rate in 1993 was Clatsop. Clatsop also ranked #1 in behavioral crimes, and ranked above the state average in person crimes. Domestic and sexual assault and abuse account for most person crimes in Clatsop County.

I think hard about domestic violence on a daily basis. People most commonly ask why women stay in abusive relationships. They stay out of fear (most women who are killed by their partners are killed in the process of leaving the relationship), economic dependence, having nowhere to move to, and the inability to act on their own behalves and low self-esteem that are one result of being battered repeatedly.

People most rarely ask why men batter, intimidate, and in 1500 instances per year in the U.S. kill the women they claim to love. Myth: Women's behavior provokes beatings. Fact: *No one can make another human being hurt them.* Most people blame the victim of battering for the crime, sometimes without realizing it. They expect the woman to stop the violence, and analyze her motivations for not leaving, rather than scrutinizing why the batterer keeps beating her, and why the community allows it.

Until responsibility for acts of violence is placed on the perpetrators we all suffer. Battering is a learned behavior. Children who are witnesses to violence often grow up to be abusive to their partners and children. 85% of men who batter were abused or witnessed assaults on their mothers. Somewhere along the line, batterers have learned that violence is a way to gain power and maintain control over their intimate partners and children. And somehow our culture has taught itself that power and control is an end.

We live in a world that grieves for the "tragedy" of O.J. Simpson rather than for two of those 1500 lives per year that are brutally ended through domestic violence. A world where

tabloids imply that Nicole Brown Simpson's lifestyle may have provoked her ex-husband to an uncontrollable, murderous rage. We live in a world where, for many simple and complex reasons, I have no faith that O.J. Simpson is innocent, and no hope that a jury will convict him.

Depressing? Yes. But there is hope for change, and it comes with the establishment of a Coordinated Community Response which has succeeded in San Diego, Minneapolis, the state of Kentucky, and an increasing number of locales where service providers are determined to stem the tide of family violence and mandate the accountability of abusers. Task forces including domestic and sexual violence victims' advocates, law enforcement, and prosecutors created policies and procedures that would deter further abuse, decrease the number of repeat calls to the same address, and that would not re-victimize the victims of domestic violence. This work has successfully changed the focus in domestic violence cases from the victim to the abuser by replacing the age old question, "Why does she stay?" with "Why does he hit her?" and "How can we stop him from hitting her?" The Domestic Violence Unit of the City Attorney's Office in San Diego has become expert in prosecuting domestic assault cases without involvement from the victim, who is often intimidated, threatened, or scared by her abuser out of cooperating with police and prosecutors. Prosecutors obtain over 2000 convictions per year without the victim's testimony.

The Domestic Violence Unit of the San Diego Police Department has implemented a pro-arrest policy mandating long term treatment for batterers or substantial jail time, with priority placed on the safety of the victims and their children. If it took a lifetime to learn the use of violence to control another person, it will not be undone with a fine or a few years in jail. Officers and detectives on this unit are trained extensively in the dynamics of domestic violence and confront their own assumptions, biases and privileges which might hinder their effectiveness in the field. In one year preliminary violence reports from police increased by 60%.

There is great potential here in Clatsop County to create effective policy that works while fostering trust and partnership among committed people in all facets of service to victims and their children. It is time to move forward as a community. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Take time to think about your own neighborhood, your own workplace. The epidemic of family violence raging across the U.S. is happening in our own backyard. Tell a friend or neighbor in an abusive situation that she has a right to be safe. Find out how to help her become safe. Demand accountability for abusers. Get involved. Be aware from this October forward.

Laura Snyder is Community Service Coordinator for the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

BY MARGARET FRIMOTH

The fear of male violence is bred into women's very souls. It is the fear of being harassed, beaten, threatened and kidnapped, of being raped, of being tortured and treated as less than human, and then killed at the hands of male power. The single most common fear of women is being violated by a man she does not know — the stranger rape, the mugger, the burglar. However, women are constantly surrounded by many forms of male violence. It is in our homes and in our relationships. Our stories are in the newspapers. We hear it in popular music. We are shown violence to women and children in advertising and on TV shows and the movies. Still we fear the stranger more than we recognize the violence that threatens us every day.

Women are trained to be conflicted about these fears. We are simultaneously taught to fear men because of their greater physical strength, and to rely on men as our benevolent protectors. Most of us learn to minimize our fears. When we discuss the intuitive dangers around us and our terrors of walking alone at night or the subtle threats that come from male peers, we are often categorized as oversensitive or hysterical. When we find ourselves in abusive relationships, we are told we love too much. When we reject the blaming and focus on the acts of male violence as the problem, we are targeted as angry women and men-haters. And most importantly, we have been taught to fear the targeting more than the physical dangers, so that when one woman is targeted other women learn to step away and remain silent. Their silence is seeped in fear. Historically women who have been models of strength, outspoken and verbal about the abuses around them, have been publicly ridi-

culed and socially chastised. Many women are beaten when they speak out. No less than 3 million women were burned as witches. Male violence and the fear of violent male retaliation has effectively hidden these truths behind the guise of male protection. Individual violence is also systemic violence. Women and children fall prey to both these violences.

If I were granted the power to eliminate all the violence done by women to men and children, would there still be violence in the world? Yes, indeed! If I could eliminate all the violence done by men to women and children, would there still be violence in the world? Yes, probably, but this thought calms me more than the previous question. If men were held accountable for acts of violence neither individual nor systemic acts would be socially tolerated. I am weary of being assigned to the role of caretaker based on my gender. I am exhausted from caring for women and children without substantial financial stability. Perhaps men could hold themselves accountable by passing a "restitution tax" subject to all men based on the premise that men are the predominate violators of women and children. Money from this tax could fund women's crisis services and child abuse centers. Crazy? Radical? Perhaps. But the thought brings to mind a more peaceable kingdom. Perhaps it is time for outrageous responses to the outrageous acts of violence.

Margaret Frimoth is a former director of the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service. This has been excerpted from an article that appeared in the April 1989 *Times Eagle*.

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