

BEATING HER UP

BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

The woman had been beaten by her husband. He raped her also, then tore up the house. Now he was in jail and she was afraid of what he would do to her when he was released. She called the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service in Astoria.

She was told that a man had no legal right to hurt his wife and that she could press charges against him. There were other problems. Her husband's parents had the children and refused to give them up to her. She was also addicted to Valium. That night she called the Crisis Service a second time and asked if anyone would take her to a hospital. She had attempted suicide with an overdose of valium preceded by heavy drinking of alcohol. She was afraid her husband would kill her if she attempted to keep him in jail, she told the woman from the Crisis Service who drove her to the emergency room. The woman from the Crisis Service said she would accompany her to the police station. She said it was important to fight back against her husband's brutality. She knew first-hand about domestic violence, the Crisis Service woman said; she had herself been a battered wife.

Most of the women who volunteer for the Crisis Service have been victims of domestic violence. Like a majority of the women they attempt to help, it was initially difficult to break off with the men who beat them. Like the woman who attempted suicide they were afraid of their husbands or lovers. They understand when callers continue to stay with the men who beat them; some have called more than once.

The woman who overdosed on Valium was too frightened to press charges against her husband. After assuring her that she was safe from her husband, the police released him just before she signed a statement that would have kept him in jail.

"He was big," the woman from the Crisis Service said. "I shrank in a corner. He looked just like the guy who used to beat me up."

The frightened wife left the police station with her husband. The woman from the Crisis Service thinks he moved her out of town.

A typical case, she said. A woman held hostage, her children the weapon used to imprison her. If she did not break away from the pattern of violence and pain her next attempt at suicide might succeed, or she might die from drug addiction. It was not unlikely that she would be killed by her husband.

The Crisis Service was established in October 1979 to help break the pattern. Most of what the women who volunteer do is provide referral services such as medical and legal help. They also set up sanctuaries when needed. They are often at risk. Some have been threatened by husbands or lovers of women they assist. They are severely criticized by men who are alarmed by the feminist movement and the growing determination of women to protect themselves at a time when the violence against them has increased.

Each call received by the Crisis Service is logged. The information confidential and the daily reports do not identify the callers.

Here are some examples picked at random and scrambled somewhat to protect the identities of the victims:
Woman taken to hospital, badly beaten by husband of 5 months.

Battered wife moved out of home and needs shelter where he cannot find her.

Woman needs shelter, harassed by ex-husband. Bringing children with her.

Woman on the run. Talked fast. Will arrive for shelter in one hour. Afraid of husband.

Niece called. Uncle threatening her aunt.

Husband charged with kidnapping. Tried to take children.

Woman with four kids. Husband beat her severely. Threatened her and kids with gun. Police called. Took gun and husband. Woman asking for shelter if she decides to leave.

Boyfriend of rape victim asks what he can do to help her. She is withdrawn. Unable to respond physically. He wants some reading material on rape.

Woman married 9 months. Husband an alcoholic. She lost first husband and oldest daughter in a fire several years ago. Younger children ordered to in-laws by court. Present alcoholic husband shouts at her after drinking every night. She is very nervous. Needs company.

Husband brandished gun at wife and girlfriend. He took kids and left. She wants to file assault charges. Wants names of attorneys.

Woman called in regard to 13 year old daughter who is having problems after short stay with dad, who lives in another city.

Woman says husband's father a drinker and batterer. Woman's boyfriend tried to strangle her. She also has head injuries.

Woman beaten by husband. Put in shelter. Woman afraid of motorcycle club. Wants shelter. Woman choked by husband. Held her on bed.

Threatened her with gun.

Woman's husband jealous of her job and friends. Poured gas all over bedroom, himself and wife. Threatened to burn.

Unemployed husband tries to kill wife. Shot arrows at her. Smothered her. Slapped and beat her.

Boyfriend beats woman. Kicks her out of house. She stays one night in shelter waiting for emergency money from family in another state.

Woman trapped at home in terror for several days. Husband slaps her, spits and urinates on her. Pulls her hair and threatens to kill her.

Woman forced into sex. Put in shelter.

The list of abuse seems unending. More women are assaulted by men. And the more women attempt to defend themselves the more brutal are the men who assault them. The times do not favor gentleness. The hardening of the nation makes life more dangerous for women.

The women of the Clatsop County Crisis Service struggle along. Often disillusioned. Often in despair.

The calls come in.

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NICOLE FERENTZ

A RIGHT TO BE SAFE

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 were all told to me during my work days at the Women's Crisis Service (now the Clatsop County Women's Resource Center). 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 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.

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 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.

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 "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 2,000 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 United States is happening in your own backyard. Tell a friend or a 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 was Community Service Coordinator for the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service when she wrote this article in 1994. She is proprietor of Lucy's Books in Astoria.



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