

# WOMEN IN CRISIS

BY LEE ANN JONES KELLY

*Lee Ann Jones Kelly came back to Astoria for a month or so late last year to care for two ailing children, a daughter diagnosed with lymphatic cancer and a son who was severely injured aboard a fishboat by a deckmate's errant gear handling. She left for Idaho when the crisis was over. She is used to responding to crises. She is the founder of the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service, which is now the Women's Resource Center. Her written account of the early history of the Crisis Service is printed here to commemorate March as Women's History Month and April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.*

I have been asked to give a personal history of the beginning of the Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in October 2004.

I think it began with me in the early new year 1978. As memory is now fairly distant, some dates may be wrong and some people's names, if not faces, are hidden in the mist of living a very busy life the last 25 years. The story, as remembered by me and the two persons closest to me at the time, goes like this:

The best and dearest friend I ever had was murdered by her husband in the late fall 1977. Several months later another friend was raped by an acquaintance. I was experiencing violence in my own marriage and the news on national television was about an Oregon woman named Greta Rideout who had charged her husband John with marital rape. The question on all the talk shows and local stations was, "Can a married woman be raped by her husband?"

I felt rage and powerlessness at the violence directed toward woman and could not imagine that it could ever be different. I was watching a talk show on Portland TV with Jim Bosley and Margie Boleau (I think that's her name): they were discussing this issue and interviewing a woman named Norma Joyce. She was the administrator of a place in Salem called "The Women's Crisis Service". I had never heard of such a thing and as soon as I could reach Ms. Joyce I implored her to give me all the information about her program. She suggested that she come to Astoria and meet with me. We spent two days together and she left me with several books, printouts and a "training."

At about that time I read that a small group of women professionals from Clatsop Community College had received a grant for a Woman's Resource Center and had rented a tiny office space. Within a day or two of meeting with Ms. Joyce, I went to the Woman's Resource Center office to see what they had there. These women were into meditation, alternative healing and feminist theory. They did not have anything there for rape or domestic violence. So I went home, got a typewriter, the books and materials that Ms. Joyce had left with me, and a telephone, and returned to the Women's Resource Center.

I walked in and announced that I was there to provide services for women who were victims of violence, and how about I just use this desk right here? Can you imagine the gall! Whatever was I thinking? I was in a fever of righteous indignation about what I saw as a huge social injustice and with a fire in my belly to make it my life's work to right that wrong. Needless to say I was not viewed as welcome as flowers in May. I seem to remember pointing out to the women there that the grant was for services to Clatsop County women, not just for only them and their friends, and they retreated to a far corner whispering among themselves and looking at me with dark eyes. Sometime during the next few weeks I realized that I was the only one left in the office and settled in for the duration.

It never occurred to me that I was being pushy. Looking back, I cringe with embarrassment to recall how I must have appeared to everyone who came in touch with me in those months and years. I was a zealot and something like a force of nature not to be denied. I read every book, magazine, contacted every person, gleaned every drop of information I could about women and their lives in history, law, society, culture, church, home and politics I could find. Every day I hungered for new information and knowledge; all that information put more fuel on my fire.

I got a job at a nearby bar as a bartender to pay for the books and other supplies I needed and started spending all my time at the center. I brought my daughter Jodi with me to Astoria from Knappa. She attended school at Star of the Sea. I started pressuring the newspapers in Astoria, Seaside and Cannon Beach to do features on domestic violence and rape, and began advertising for volunteers for the Women's Crisis Service.\* The first group had 12 women.

I applied for a non-profit status 501-3 and as soon as we received it I applied for a grant for \$1,200 to buy a machine which would answer our phone and transfer the caller to a third party. Nowadays that service is a part of your telephone bill but back then it was real high-tech and would enable us to have 24-hour coverage with people taking calls at their home. We got the grant and the phone, and suddenly we seemed real. We still did not have a board of directors and I continued to be the bow of the ship charting those choppy and suspicious waters where domestic violence still did not have any credibility or social recognition.

I put together a big map of the area from St. Helens to Tillamook on the office wall. We started sticking pins with colored heads into places we had assisted, responded to or received crisis calls from. Soon we saw clusters of red pins, blue pins, yellow pins — after two years we had small forests of pins in each area of the map. This simple method formed the basis of numbers of women who had asked for services. We used the pins and the numbers they represented to apply for more grants. We used them to obtain statistics to lobby the Oregon Legislature for laws prohibiting violence against women. We won every

\* Cannon Beach was early on a huge financial and people resource for us. Leslie Storm coordinated South County for the Crisis Service, and Deborah Cooper became our trainer and the glue that held us together the next few years. Michael McCusker, editor of the Times Eagle, which was published in Cannon Beach at the time, was one of our strongest supporters.

\*\*The program in Coos Bay never faltered after I left and is still going strong. I made many friends and even though we were exposed to many truly ugly things, I will always be glad Jodi and I went there.



DOUG GRISWOLD

battle in those years and sponsored, lobbied for and won not only our bills (the marriage license tax was the first of those bills), but also the first bill to protect elders from abuse, neglect and exploitation. But that all came later.

I was approached one hot spring day in 1979 by some women who walked into the office, about attending a conference in Ashland, Oregon. They said it was for women working in shelters and other crisis services. I did not even know that there were other shelters around the state; there were only four that I can remember now, and a few 'crisis lines'.

The conference was the shock of a lifetime to me. I had never met any feminists before, let alone political feminists. These women were awesome. I was so confused. I recall that at one point the conference leader had all the women there (about 150) sit cross-legged in a big circle and do a deep breathing exercise where you sit straight up, close your eyes and breathe through your vagina. I looked around between my closed eyelids to see if anyone else did not know how to breathe through their vagina. It appeared to me that I was the only woman there who was even shocked to hear that word out loud, much less attempt to breathe through it. By the time the two days were over I was bonded forever to the vision of sisterhood, women's full political and legal rights, and protection from violence and oppression guaranteed by law and enforced by the courts.

As the conference was winding down an announcement was made for anyone who was interested in forming a group of programs in Oregon could stay and talk about it. As the sun set that day, seven of us were left. We had a fire in a pit, a bottle or two of wine. I had a map of Oregon in my car, and using an eyebrow pencil from my purse, the seven of us crudely drew out the areas we were from and called them our regions. I had the map and the eyebrow pencil, which is why Clatsop County is Region One. As fate would have it, the regions were almost exactly the seven geographical areas of Oregon. We each committed to meet in a different region for the next year every six to eight weeks, and the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic Violence (OCADV) was born that night. (The word 'Sexual' was inserted much later.) I served on the board of directors until 1982.

Over the next two years Clatsop County Women's Crisis Service continued to recruit and train volunteers (many of whom were victims of domestic abuse), have fund raisers, do many public speaking engagements of from two to a hundred people (anybody who would listen), respond to police calls about battered women, frantic calls from women running away from abusive situations, all the while fending off heavy criticism from the religious right and angry husbands who claimed that we were the cause of decline in family and the American Way of Life.

Also during that time, OCADV became a very savvy board of directors writing and winning a proposal to bring VISTA volunteers to each region to help organize on the ground. This

was the very first VISTA grant of its kind and it served as a pilot for other states. Several of us who had been taking other jobs to support our programs got VISTA positions. I was one of the lucky ones. Along about the second year OCADV was able to write a grant and get a part-time director.

Also in that winter of 1981, when Reagan came into the White House, the first National Coalition Against Domestic Violence conference was held in Washington, D.C. I attended as the representative from Region 10 (U.S.), which was Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, California, Alaska and Hawaii. I was gratified to find that Oregon was nationally recognized to be one of the most progressive, organized and effective states in the U.S. for programs for violence against women.

When the Washington conference ended, I went to Coos Bay (Oregon) to organize a domestic abuse program because everyone who had been sent there had been scared off. My daughter Jodi went with me, and she can tell stories about some of our experiences there. She knew how to talk to scared children who had just seen a bloody battle in their home and could keep a cool head in situations that no mom should ever be dragging her kids into — but those years she was with me pretty much all of the time. She has turned out to be a wonderful mother, daughter and friend.

Back in Astoria, Vickie (Swanson) Garmoe took my place (as a VISTA) at the bow of the ship of Women's Crisis Service and held it together as well as she could. But times were changing — as the program became more mainstream, there was more pressure to have "professionals" in leadership positions. Jodi and I stayed in Coos Bay for about a year and then returned to Astoria.\*\* I came back to a faltering program and the realization that I was fried, burned out, flamed out and downright beat tired and ready to rest. It seemed that the need for a spearhead and single director was gone with the maturity of the program. Based upon that I took the job back for only a few months, asked for support from the professional community, and with help from volunteers, a board of directors was formed. Committed women, and I believe also a few men, stabilized the Crisis Service — and the rest is history.

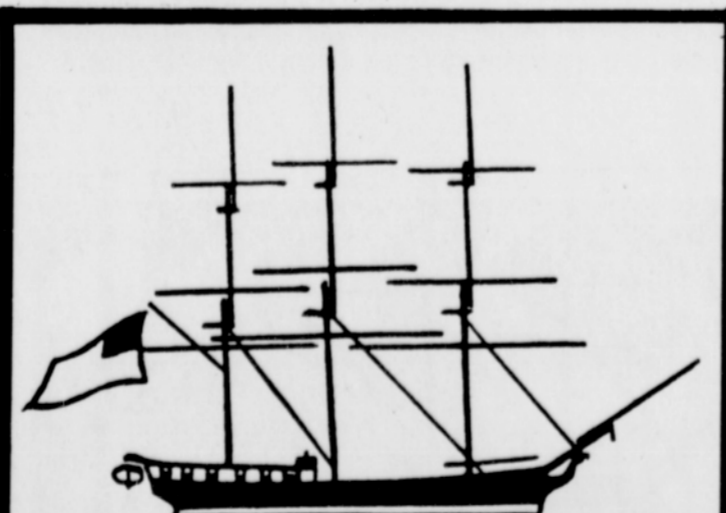
After being advised for several years to get a college degree, I finally started attending Clatsop Community College in the fall term of 1983. I used school as a form of grief therapy after my oldest son Darren was killed in June that year. Eventually I went on to get a MSW in June 1991, LCSW in June 1994, and worked in counseling from then until the present. Last year I worked in Alaska for the Fairbanks Native Association in the Ralph Purdue Alcohol & Drug Treatment Program to get CADV.

There are many stories to tell about those beginning years in Astoria and Coos Bay with the Oregon and National Coalitions Against Domestic/Sexual Violence. Those years changed my life and the lives of many others since that time. Like the widening rings from a stone in water, maybe my friend Janet's death at the hands of her husband, the rapes of Greta Rideout and others closer to me, and my own destructive life fed the fire of my anger and others and we collectively said: "NO MORE!"

I have not written here about the love and support Deborah Cooper and Vickie (Swanson) Garmoe gave my daughter Jodi and me during those years, how they both shaped and supported me because only they can really understand what we shared and the sisters it made of us. But quite simply, I don't think it could ever have happened without them, and all the women who volunteered and stepped into the breach when one or another would falter. I wish I could give their names but time has passed and to remember just a few other than Deborah and Vickie would leave out too many whose names have fled my leaking memory cells.

I am sure that I did a good thing then, a thing of my heart. I am also sure there are those who will remember me as a real pain in the behind. Perhaps if one charges into the battle there are those who will follow, those who will watch, and those who will try to shoot you down. I hope that the spirit of social justice, fairness and support of our sisters is still alive and well in River City.

Lee Ann Jones Kelly is currently living and counseling in Idaho, acting also as a domestic/sexual abuse liaison with the state legislature this session.



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