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CASA Newsletter October 2009



October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month



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20 Reasons Why She Stays, Pt.2

*A Guide for Those Who Want to Help Battered Women
By Susan G.S. McGee*

Last month CASA began publishing installments of a powerful and comprehensive article on domestic violence by Susan G.S. McGee. Because of this newsletter's e-mail format, we are not including the footnotes - a vital and incisive part of the article. We are, however, providing the text of the entire 20-part article, with footnotes, in PDF format, [here](#). We will continue to provide the complete text with each segment of the article as it is presented in CASA's monthly e-newsletters.

Part II. There are incorrect assumptions underlying the question "Why does she stay"?

Many don't stay. Many battered women do leave. Shelters are usually full. Some battered women stay only for a short period. Some battered women leave immediately after the first assault and

never return. Almost all battered women try to leave at some point. Leaving is a process and it may take several times before the survivor is able to depart. Our communities are full of formerly battered women who are living safely and independently.

For battered women who leave the violence is often *just beginning*. Batterers oftentimes escalate their violence when a woman tries to leave, shows signs of independence or has left.

Although the concept of stalking is often associated with celebrities, survivors and their advocates knew about stalking long before it became a crime or attracted the attention of the media. Assailants often stalk their partner both during the relationship and after it ends. The batterer's pursuit rarely ends until he has found a new victim, the victim relocates or the consequences for the stalking are too great. However, some assailants return years later to re-assault or to kill their partners. National expert Lydia Walker believes that assailants re-contact and harass all their prior victims as each of their relationships end.

In almost all of 50 domestic violence homicides that our shelter tracked in Michigan in 1993, the woman had left her assailant, was about to leave, or had given him good cause to believe that he had finally lost her. Assailants are most likely to kill their victims when they believe that she is actually going to leave them.

Separation Violence

Many, perhaps most, people believe that battered women will be safe once they separate from the batterer. They also believe that women are free to leave abusers at any time. However, leaving does not usually put an end to the violence. Batterers may, in fact, escalate their violence to coerce a battered woman into reconciliation or to retaliate for the battered women's perceived rejection or abandonment of the batterer. Assailants believe they are entitled to their relationship with battered women and that they "own" their female partners. They view women's departure as an ultimate betrayal that justifies and demands revenge. (Saunders & Browne, 1990; Dutton, 1988; Bernard et al., 1982)

A group of advocates and survivors started naming this concept "separation violence" in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Evidence of the gravity of separation violence is overwhelming:

Up to 3/4 of domestic assaults reported to law enforcement agencies were inflicted after separation of the couples. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1983)

One study reveals that 73% of the battered women seeking emergency medical services sustained injuries after leaving the batterer. (Stark et al., 1981)

In another study in Philadelphia and Chicago, almost 1/4 of the women killed by their male partners were separated or divorced from the men who killed them. 28.6% of the women were attempting to end the relationship when they were killed. (Casanave and Zahn, 1986). In one study of spousal homicide, over half of the

male defendants were separated from their victims (Bernard et al., 1982)

Women are most likely to be murdered when attempting to report abuse or to leave an abusive relationship. (Sonkin et al., 1985, Browne, 1987).

In his book on domestic violence homicides, Neal Websdale cites the following studies: "The extant research literature shows that women experience an increased risk of lethal violence when they leave intimate relationships with men. Wilson and Daly's analysis of interspousal homicide from summary data in Canada (1974-90), New South Wales (1968-86) and Chicago (1965-90) reveals that wives experienced a 'substantially elevated' risk of lethal victimization when estranged from and no longer living with their husbands. These researchers comment that among married, cohabiting Canadian spouses between 1977 and 1983 'a man was almost four times as likely to kill his wife as to be killed by her; among estranged couples, he was more than nine times as likely to kill her as she him.' According to Wilson and Daly the significantly increased risk was not due to an escalation of the violence that was already present in these marital relationships. Rather, they point out that batterers warned their wives that if they left they would be killed; they then followed through on those threats.

Easteal also reports that it was more likely that the batterer would kill himself after killing his partner if they were separated before the killing, although she contends that the length of the separation does not seem to be important. For Easteal, in cases of homicide-suicide, it is the inability of the offender to conceive of himself as an entity separate from his partner that propels him toward killing."

Some of my earliest experiences as a shelter worker included the following:

In the Jones case, (not the real name) Joe Jones, a psychiatrist under contract at Community Mental Health, was convicted of felonious assault for hitting his soon to be ex-wife over the head seven times with a claw hammer. She had been separated from him for a year, was in counseling, and had a restraining order. The divorce was final one week after the assault took place. Carlos Warrington was convicted of second degree murder for smashing his three year old son's head in with a furniture table leg. The jury decided that he had meant to kill his (soon to be ex wife,) but killed his son instead when she escaped. She had left him, had her own apartment and had a restraining order. Sharon White was killed by her former boyfriend Lyle Taylor. He had been arrested four times for domestic assault, and convicted. Unfortunately, the two felonies were plea bargained to misdemeanors. Greta Haaken, age 13, was murdered by a boy with whom she had broken off a dating relationship. He had confessed to choking her into unconsciousness the week before, but had not yet been arrested. Holly Jones was murdered when her assailant received an eviction notice for her apartment.

Susan McGee is a veteran community activist, advocate, consultant, trainer and author. For many years she was the director of a battered women's

shelter in southeastern Michigan. She now works as a consultant doing grant writing and training (mostly on violence against women, racism, and homophobia) and teaches community organizing at Humboldt State University. She lives near the Redwoods and the Pacific Ocean with her spouse, two kids and three cats.



* * *

CASA Community News



***Taylor Redington**, age 9, of St. Petersburg, is following in the footsteps of her older sister and brother by asking guests at her birthday party to bring donations for CASA participants instead of presents for Tay! Last month she and her mom brought bags of supplies for the shelter and Youth Center and Taylor posed for a quick picture at the CASA Community Center. Gratitude and admiration for Tay and her family for thinking of others at such an early age!*

* * *



***Ken Donaldson**, Licensed Mental Health Counselor and author of **Marry Yourself First - Saying "I Do" to a Life of Passion, Power & Purpose**, presents a copy of his new book to **Linda Osmundson**, Executive Director of CASA. Ken donated a box of books for participants at CASA Transitional Housing and will be presenting a program for CASA survivors of domestic violence.*

* * *

No One is Immune

by Judy Lambdon, Long-time CASA Advocate

***Judy Lambdon** was a CASA Advocate for over 24 years until her retirement in 2008 [see Judy below]. In August, 2009, her cousin's daughter was murdered by a man she had been dating. Judy shares a real-life, close-to-home experience of the domestic violence which she has worked her whole life to defeat. As a companion piece to Susan McGee's Part 2, above, Judy's account of her experience is a heart-wrenching call for all of us to remember this October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and to choose to respond in every way we can.*

As I write these words I reflect on the hundreds and hundreds of survivors of domestic violence that I had the privilege of knowing, during my almost 25 years working at CASA. Having grown up seeing one of my aunts being abused by her husband, I hoped that in some way I could “give back” and help other women escape the fear and terror she lived with every day for 39 years.

Well, I just received news that burst my bubble. My cousin's daughter was murdered last week in California. I'll call her J. J. was the same age as my oldest daughter. She had two teenage children. J. was a beautiful, gentle soul with an outgoing, friendly personality. Her smile could light up a room. She was extremely popular and well liked. Her friends were many. I remember her as a young girl. She always took the lead in games and activities when our families got together. She looked out for her brothers and often would take the blame for their shenanigans. She had her own mischievous streak and loved to laugh. Family was the most important thing in her life and she was so proud of her children.

I immediately called my cousin praying that I would be able to say something that would help, but what do you say to someone who lost her child to the violence you fought against for so many years? When I heard her voice I realized that the best thing I could do was what many women in the shelter thanked us for - I could listen. Listening is often the most merciful, comforting thing that you can do. It was obvious that my cousin was in shock.

“My J. was a very self assured, confident, intelligent woman. This was to be her last contact with her boyfriend. She only went out with him for dinner to make sure he understood the relationship was finally over. I am so angry with her. She should have learned more from listening to the cases she heard every day in family court.”

She said that J. had been beaten, strangled, and slashed so badly that she wasn't allowed to see the body. “I have prayed to God that she was unconscious before she was slashed and her throat cut. I am so angry with her that she didn't learn from listening to all those victims in family court where she was a court reporter. She knew all about domestic violence from hearing about it every day.”

Due to J's popularity in the courthouse, a blanket recusal of all judges was issued and the case was moved to another venue, as it was feared the alleged perpetrator would not be able to get a fair trial there. The “alleged” perpetrator is in custody with bail set at \$15,000,000. His rap sheet shows that he was charged with beating and choking a girlfriend in Florida in 1992. He reportedly was booted out of the Navy as a result of that case. It was also reported that he left his 10 year old daughter home alone while he was committing this act. It took the haz-mat team 12 hours to clean up the crime scene.

Domestic violence is a hideous threat to the peace and welfare of the family. It is insidious and knows no boundaries. It sneaks up on even the most intelligent, knowledgeable people. Even knowing the dynamics of domestic violence I must confess that at times I still have trouble understanding why a victim thinks they have the means to “change” or “make things better”. I am not in any way blaming the victim. We do enough of that in this society.



After all the years of doing this work I am just still trying to figure out how to convince victims to understand and accept, that the violence is ***NOT*** their fault and that it is the abuser's problem, not theirs.

I remember waking up in the middle of the night when I was a young child and hearing my Aunt scream and cry for help. There would be crashes, thuds, and horrible noises. I had been told not to ever come out of my room if I heard anything. I lay there crying and in terror not knowing what I would find in the morning. J's children were not home to hear her cries for help but they will suffer for the rest of their lives from the devastation of the domestic violence she

went through. I am sure her son will never be able to erase the pictures in his mind from finding her body when he returned home.

I would like to close these musings on a more positive note... Recently I was having breakfast in a local restaurant when a woman heard me discussing where I had worked for so long. She slid in the booth beside me and confided that she would probably be dead if it hadn't been for a wonderful woman named Sandy at CASA. The woman went on to say that Sandy helped her understand what was going on, discussed a safety plan with her and gave her the courage to get out of the situation. "Sandy literally saved my life. I am out, I am happy, and I am not being abused anymore. You should be proud of the work you did."

Success must be measured in small increments. If one person was alive at the end of the day because of the work I did for all of those years I guess my time was well spent. I console myself by hoping that the number saved was greater than the number lost.

* * *

If you would like someone to speak to your group and raise awareness of what can be done to protect people from domestic abuse, please call or e-mail **Tuesdi Dyer**, Development Director, at **(727) 895-4912 x 114**, **tdyer@casa-stpete.org**.

If you would like to help survivors of domestic violence directly, please contact **Danielle Schaffer**, Volunteer Coordinator, at **(727) 895-4912 x 107** or e-mail **dschaffer@casa-stpete.org**.



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