

# Battered Women

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me enough to require medical attention," she said. "I took it for a while -- I don't know how many years -- but I knew that time was going to be the end of it."

The next time Barbara saw her husband was in the courtroom when he appeared on assault charges. She said his arm was in a cast because he had hit her so hard that he had broken his hand on her head. He received a six-month sentence and Barbara said they never lived together again.

Dr. Myrna Brake-Williams, a local psychologist, is not surprised at the actions of Barbara's husband. Unfortunately, she said, his behavior is a classic example of an individual who has not learned how to handle their aggression.

"A batterer of any kind is likely to be aggressive," Brake-Williams said. "Many times a person can't take it out on the person that they're mad at and they take it out on someone else. It's a statement of aggressive power and control. If a person is not verbally expressive, they can get out their aggression by displaying their power over a person they feel they dominate. All of us have aggression. Some of us handle it. Some of us beat up on inanimate objects and, unfortunately, some of us beat up on animate objects."

### A Quiet Demon

The battering of women is not something that is discussed openly in communities. Often, abused wives feel embarrassed and alone, and choose to keep their secret hidden from family and friends. Many in the community find it too hideous a topic to discuss and choose to ignore it, pretending that it "isn't really that bad" or believing that somehow not mentioning it will keep it from being real. Others

mistakenly assume that it happens to "someone else" or to a particular social class. However, according to statistics compiled by the Center of Women's Studies in Washington, an American woman is abused by her partner every 18 seconds of every day. Forty percent of female homicide victims are killed by family members or boyfriends and battering is the single major cause of injury to women. Although he declined to give specific numbers, a spokesman for the Winston-Salem Police Department estimated that well over 50 percent of the domestic violence calls handled by the department involve spousal abuse.

The problem is not exclusive to big cities. Last year in Forsyth County, 645 women and children found temporary protection and counseling in the Battered Women's Shelter.

The shelter, established in 1978, provides interim protection for women seeking refuge from abusive partners. The facility offers room and board and day care services for children. The staff also provides counseling and referral services for the shelter's clients. One of the staff's primary objectives is to improve the client's sense of self-worth.

"Carolyn, one of the shelter's clients, said achieving self-confidence is one of her biggest goals at this point in her life. A 23-year-old mother of four who quietly offers details about her problems, Carolyn has made her second trip to the shelter but promises that this time will be her last. She originally came to the shelter about a year ago. After staying for a few days, she returned to her partner, the father of her children, but she said the beatings began again. Carolyn said she returned to her home

because she thought that things would change. They didn't and she again found herself the victim of her partner's abuse.

"I couldn't take it no more, so I left again," said Carolyn, whose four children range in age from 3 to 7. "I probably would have been dead the way things were going. It's bad to be with someone you're scared of."

### Searching For Answers

Carolyn's case raises one of the most obvious, and most difficult, questions to answer involving wife abuse: Why do women remain in abusive situations?

There is no easy answer, said Brake-Williams, and the answers are as varied as the situations in which the women find themselves.

"One of the main reasons is finances," she said. "Women feel they can't make it alone so they stay in the abusive situation. There also is the condition of women having low self-esteem. One (reason) can be just as strong as the other."

Outsiders assume that if the situation is truly unbearable a woman can just leave. But it rarely is that easy, Barbara said. She said many women depend totally on the abusive partner because they lack job skills and feel that even the beatings are better than being out in the street.

"A lot of women have to have the support of the man," said Barbara. "They have no skills of their own and they haven't worked before. They think they can't take care of themselves and their kids or else they're afraid to get out there and try."

The problem is intensified also by the fact that many women are afraid to seek help from the legal system. The police department spokesman said that because a woman is afraid to testify in court the culprits are allowed to continue their abusive patterns.

"A lot of times women are afraid to testify in court," the spokesman said. "They are afraid to speak out in court and they will go right back into the situation."

The spokesman said the officers who respond to the domestic violence call are helpless to arrest abusive spouses unless the wife goes downtown to take out a warrant. If a spouse strikes his wife in the presence of the officers, he can be arrested on the spot for a misdemeanor.

For a battered wife, the road back to normalcy can be a long and hard one.

### Putting The Pieces Back Together

They face the prospects of finding a job and a permanent home for themselves and for their children. On a more intangible level, they literally begin to put the pieces of their emotional lives together and to heal the hidden scars of wife abuse. For some, like Barbara who is remarried "to a very nice man who respects me," the story, despite bad memories, has ended happily. Others, like Carolyn, are in the process of rebuilding their lives and looking forward to a new start.

"I got to the point where I felt nothing but hate for my husband," said Barbara. "But we got separated and went our separate ways. I knew it wasn't going to work and I had to get over it."

"Right now, because of that experience, if a man hit me the first time, I wouldn't have to see if things would get better. When I looked in the mirror and saw my face that time, I just knew that I would never let myself be in that situation again."

\*The names of the victims interviewed for this story have been changed to protect their privacy.

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## Winston-Salem Recreation Department to relocate offices to Tobacco Square

The Winston-Salem Recreation Department is moving Thursday, Feb. 25, from the eighth floor of the NCNB Building to Tobacco Square at 836 Oak St.

The department had been located at the NCNB Building for the past 14 years. Nick Jamison, the director of the recreation department, said the move is being made at the aldermen's request. The aldermen asked that the

department find a more suitable and economical space once the NCNB lease was up.

Jamison said the new location will provide free parking for staff and the public, easy first-floor access for the handicapped and will save the taxpayers money on lease payments.

He said the Special Populations unit and senior citizens programs will continue to be handled at the Elms.

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