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Domestic Violence Wrecks Thousands Of Homes

By Jalyne Strong
 Post Managing Editor

The family is considered to be the "peaceful" unit on which our society is based. Most people think of their family members as being loving and caring. Yet there are quite often differences between what is ideal for a family and what may occur in reality. Domestic Violence, spouse abuse and battering, occur in thousands of homes.

In Charlotte, between July 1984 and June of 1985, the Police Department investigated 2,380 offenses in which the offender was a spouse, ex-spouse or other family member.

In 1985, Charlotte's Shelter for Battered Women served a total of 249 resident women, 295 resident children, and 494 nonresidents.

Also in 1985, according to the District Attorney, during an average week in Courtroom 12B, where criminal domestic cases are heard, 225 cases were scheduled, 60 of which were assaults on females.

Most victims of domestic violence are women.

And there is no "typical woman" who is a victim of domestic violence. Catherine Reid who has been a volunteer working at Charlotte's Shelter for Battered Women since 1979, says, "It can happen to any woman. It happens in all races, all socio-economic groups. It is an across the board problem." Last year, Reid adds, the Shelter served 1,000 women and children.

About four years ago, Fannie Brown was one of the women who sought shelter from a violent home. She had been a victim of domestic violence for 13 years.

"The abuse commenced two weeks into my marriage, lasting two years after the marriage ended," Brown tells.

From her husband of 13 years, Brown took "full-fledged" beatings, precipitated by minor disagreements they had. She recalls 10 such incidences occurring in the first year of their marriage. "An average of one per month," she says. "And, slapping or hitting at any given point."

Under such circumstances why did Brown remain with her husband? "I thought if he knew that I loved him, that he had someone he could count on, things would change," she confesses.

Reid maintains this is a common thought shared by the women she's seen at the Shelter. But she warns, "Domestic violence is an escalating crime. Early in relationships: he hits, she cries, he apologizes and says it will never happen again. But, though it may start with a slap, the violence becomes more severe."



To be abused by a spouse...or to witness such abuse, carries with it a particular agony. Victims wrestle with feelings of fear, loyalty, love, guilt and shame. Anyone who lives in a violent home experiences an essential loss. The one place on earth where they should feel safe and secure has become instead a place of danger.

Such was the case for Brown, as the beatings she was subjected to by her husband became "progressively worse."

The beatings increased in frequency and severity and, in relation, Brown's emotional well-being deteriorated. She remembers, "I felt like I was about as worthless as a twig. I had no self-concept." Brown was a professional working woman, she had been a teacher for two years prior to getting married. "However, after years of constant abuse" being told that you're stupid and unattractive, even the strongest person breaks," she explains.

"I stayed in the marriage because I thought, 'Where can I go? I can't do anything.' I had never cashed my own check. My husband always did. The one time I did go ahead and cash my own check, he almost killed me," says Brown.

This is an example of the type of control tactics that keep women in abusive home situations. The tyrannical behavior of the husband results in a feeling of helplessness on the part of the wife. And, as

Reid describes it, the woman develops a certain fear that keeps them from acting.

"In my opinion," claims Reid, "fear of the unknown is the primary motivation for women staying in violent homes. They ask themselves, 'How can I raise my children alone?' 'How can I support myself?' However bad their situation may be they feel at least they know what to expect. For some women it's more frightening to face the unknown than to face their husband's wrath."

Other factors also contribute to a woman feeling "trapped" in an abusive situation. There are the feelings of embarrassment and failure on the part of the woman. Explains Reid, "Domestic violence is not the kind of thing people want to put up front. Most women look to their spouses for support and when it turns out not to be that way, they feel they have failed."

There is also society's pressure on the woman to "keep the marriage together." Brown felt this pressure. She says it was a common idea among women that "having any type of man around was better than having no man around."

But for Brown eventually the beatings became "unbearable" until she was ready to kill her husband, while he slept.



Fannie Brown

"I awoke one night, picked up a .38, pointed it at him, squeezed the trigger, but just couldn't do it. I knew then I had to leave," Brown relates.

She took her three children and went to the Shelter for Battered Women. There Brown received

advice and counseling as did her two daughters who were ages eight and 10 at the time. Her son was only two. Eventually the Shelter helped Brown secure a deposit for an apartment. For two years after she had left her husband he continued to harass and threaten her but Brown persevered.

Today, Brown, age 40, has been out of her abusive marriage for four years. She says, "To borrow Jesse Jackson's phrase, I've discovered 'I am somebody.' I have a good position with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System. I'm completing my master's degree. I'm learning to manage and survive for my family."

"Abused women do not feel they have survival techniques," admits Brown. But she has learned differently. And she does not hesitate to expose her hurtful experience if it means other women in similar situations will be helped.

Last year, Brown took the initiative to contact Jane Harper of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Domestic Violence Task Force and she obliged, at Harper's request, to testify at a Task Force hearing on Domestic Violence. She has also appeared on WSOC's week-long news series on Domestic Violence. She has since been working with the Citizen's Committee appointed by the Domestic Violence Task Force.

Brown's husband now lives and works in another state. He has, however, expressed to her his outrage over her going public with their story. But Brown takes whatever protective steps she can and goes on.

"It's frightening," she admits. "But I feel good (telling her story) because I want women in similar situations to know they can come out and survive. It's hard and it's rough. But so is staying in the situation."

Brown's primary message is "These things don't get better unless you stop and get treatment for what's wrong."

To that, Reid agrees. At the Shelter, she has seen all degrees of abuse ranging from slaps to murder.

"In a very short time frame last year, about a month's time," tells Reid, "there were three murders resulting from domestic violence: Two men killed their spouses and one woman killed her spouse."

Reid concludes Domestic Violence "can be very dangerous."

Next week: What help is available for victims and perpetrators of Domestic Violence in Charlotte



Dr. Lowery

SCLC National Conference In Charlotte

The SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) State Convention will be held in Charlotte, Friday and Saturday, May 15-16, at the Radisson Plaza Hotel-Charlotte, 2 NCNB Plaza.

Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, SCLC National President, will be present for much of the conference. He will hold a press conference on Friday at 9 a.m. and participate in a "People to People Tour" of the poverty areas in Charlotte, beginning at 10 a.m.

Also scheduled for the first day of the conference is a lunch with the poor at a feeding shelter; a Poor People's Crusade Hearing to be held at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church; dinner with Dr. Lowery and a mass meeting, featuring Dr. Lowery as speaker, at University Park Baptist Church.

Friday's events will culminate with SCLC Night at the Excelsior Club on Beatties Ford Rd.

On Saturday, the convention will continue at 9:30 a.m. with Chapter Concerns. Areas to be discussed include: chapter development, membership, the Poor People's Crusade; and the National Convention.

Greenville Area Public Meeting

A public meeting has been scheduled by the City Engineering Department at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 19, in the Greenville Center Gym, 1330 Spring Street, to discuss the potential construction of a new City facility in the Greenville area for the relocation of several City Divisions of the General Services, Transportation and Engineering Departments.

Development will require approximately eight acres and is being considered for undeveloped property on Spratt Street.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues surrounding potential development of property on Spratt Street and to solicit public input. A potential development plan will be presented for discussion.

Citizens interested in obtaining further information about the project should contact Dick Williams, City of Charlotte Engineering Department, 301 S. McDowell Street, Suite 400, Charlotte, NC 28204. The department's phone number is 336-2291.

Domestic Violence Conference Held In Raleigh May 27-29

Professionals and volunteers who assist victims of domestic violence across the state are encouraged to attend a conference on domestic violence at Peace College in Raleigh, May 27-29.

Featured speakers will include Sister Elaine Roulet, known for her ministry to women in prison; Rep. Margaret Keenan-Forrester of Greensboro; Beth Richie, co-chair of the Women of Color Task Force of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence; and Catherine A. Jourdan, a clinical counselor with the Stress Management and Counseling Center in Winston-Salem.

Participants will attend workshops covering topics such as grant writing, rural program needs, legal issues, education in the schools and in the community, child sexual abuse and many others.

The fee for conference registra-

tion is \$30, covering workshops, materials and breaks. For those who register by May 15, the fee will be \$35.

For information and registration, contact Julia Reeves, director, N.C. Domestic Violence Project, 526 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh, NC 27604, or call 919-733-2455.

The conference is being sponsored by the Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence and the N. C. Council on the Status of Women in cooperation with about 15 other agencies.

"Each month, programs and shelters across the state are seeing an average of a 1,000 women who are victims of domestic violence and are seeking help for the first time," said Anna Mills Wagoner of Salisbury, chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence.

Senate Bill To Fund Crittenton Home

Raleigh - Sen. Harold Washington, D-Lenoir, has introduced Senate Bill 523 for the appropriation of \$2 million for Charlotte's Florence Crittenton Home, which serves unwed mothers, to be used in the construction of a new facility.

Mecklenburg County co-sponsors of the bill include Sen. James D. McDuffie and Sen. James F. Richardson.

Florence Crittenton Services is a private, nonprofit

United Way agency where residential and non-residential programs are offered to young women experiencing problems with single pregnancy, single parenting, and releasing a child for adoption. Previously housed near Charlotte Memorial Hospital facilities, the home is now using temporary accommodations until a

new home can be constructed.

Charlotte Memorial's need to expand its facilities made it necessary for the Crittenton Home to be moved.

Citing the fact that North Carolina has no state supported beds available for unwed mothers or their babies, Sen. Hardison said the home was "too valuable a service to North Carolina for it not to be funded."

Considering the alarming increase in the number of teenage

C. W. Williams Health Center Offers Free Checkups

The C. W. Williams Health Center, located at 3333 Wilkinson Blvd., will offer free cholesterol and blood pressure checkups throughout May to residents of Mecklenburg County. The medical staff is offering these services to increase awareness about Cardiovascular Risk Factors.

Staff doctors will provide screening on heart attack risk factors and also give free introduc-

pregnancies," Hardison said, "this is the most compassionate and economic service the state can render."

Florence Crittenton Services is the largest comprehensive residential problem pregnancy program in the US. Funded through private grants, donations, and Medicaid or AFDC monies, the \$2 million capital funding is the first money the home has requested from the state.

tions to the Center's Smoke Cessation Program.

Those interested in obtaining these services should call 704-393-7720 to schedule an appointment. Hours are 8:30 - 5:30 Mondays and Fridays, 10 - 5:30 Wednesdays, and 8:30 - 8:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Please contact Doris Stith if you have questions or need additional information, 393-7720.

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