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Domestic Violence Needs to be Taken More Seriously

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For a minute, my friend felt safe.

She had peace.

She felt safe when a nearby law enforcement agency called to inform her that her ex-boyfriend had been arrested.

“That call was the best news I heard all year,” she said “and the year is still young. For a minute, I feel safe.”

She had peace.

Now, the minute is over.

The ex-boyfriend, charged with domestic violence against her, is free.

My friend is captured by fear.

I cannot blame her.

On Christmas morning, she left a message fearing for her life. She said if she was found dead, this is who killed me: Her ex-boyfriend, the father of her two children.

She called the Mansfield Police Department three times telling them her ex-boyfriend had threatened her life. A dispatcher told her they were only handling emergencies.

The dispatcher asked if she could call back Monday. Furthermore, she was told if police arrived and the ex-boyfriend was not there, she could be arrested.

When does a person fearing for their life not constitute an emergency?

After all, this was not the first call my friend had made to police concerning her ex-boyfriend. It is documented within the last year, police received 13 calls from her residence.

Anyone who has worked with police understand domestic violence calls are the most dangerous calls police respond to – for the police and the people involved in the domestic dispute.

Sometimes, it seems, no one wins – only someone gets hurt.

Ron Kreuter, Mansfield's service-safety director, said my friend's first two calls were not an emergency and "the third time it was and an officer was dispatched immediately.

"Once the dispatcher heard him (ex-boyfriend) beating on her door, he dispatched somebody right away . . . The dispatcher's choice of words was not the best . . . Procedurally, the dispatcher did not do anything wrong."

That, however, depends on how you look at right and wrong when a woman's life is threatened.

Kandice Springer is a victim advocate for the Richland County prosecutor's office. She has worked with women suffering from domestic violence for more than 10 years.

Springer said my friend "did the right thing calling the police," but the police should realize, "even if it had been 20 calls they had responded to at her residence, you have someone afraid of someone. Women do not call police for the fun of it. Once in a blue moon, a woman may call to get back at a man, but if your life feels threatened, you call the police."

For several weeks, after Christmas-morning, life-threatening call, my friend's ex-boyfriend continued to call her at home and work. Those calls violated a no-contact order.

He even left a message saying how much he cared for her, but he was not going back to jail.

"That is a threat," said Springer. "He has nothing to lose and he may have thoughts of killing everyone around him. I do not know what you have to do if you do not take that seriously."

And that's the problem, Springer added, with domestic violence: No one takes it seriously until someone is dead.

Although there is the national Violence Against Women Prevention Act of 1998, the San Francisco-based, The Family Prevention Fund said in 2001 more than 588,490 women were victims of nonfatal violence committed by an intimate partner.

Furthermore, FVPF statistics indicate, daily, three women are killed by an intimate partner and more than 3-million women are physically/mentally abused by an intimate partner each year.

That's your mother.

My niece.

Your daughter.

My friend.

As a result, this column is not just about my friend; it is about all women suffering from domestic violence.

It is about women who want to feel safe – for more than a minute – every moment of the day and night.

Women who do not want to live in fear.

Women who want peace.

“Domestic violence is too common,” said Jeffrey Betcher, a FVPF spokesman, adding for two decades the FVPF has been focused on preventing domestic violence.

“There are many women living in fear and it is horrible. Domestic violence is epidemic. Your friend is living a microcosm of a global issue.”

The FVPF’s Web site says “domestic violence does, indeed, cause higher health care, law enforcement, court, educational and other costs . . . the toll on children, families, neighborhoods and communities is incalculable.”

No it is not.

It is measured when my friend worries about when, not if, her ex-boyfriend calls and leaves a message.

It is measured when she’s not expecting company, and someone knocks on her door. She then fears for not only her life, but the lives of her two children.

The terrible toll can be measured. It just takes more than a minute to do the calculations.

“For a minute,” my friend said, “I felt safe but that did not last long. He is out now. I do not know what he is going to do. I don’t know what I am going to do. I feel my rights have been violated. I just want justice.”

And peace that lasts longer than a minute.

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