

The Light & Champion (Center, TX)

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Domestic Violence – Part 1

(Editor's note: This is the description of an event as related by a reported victim of domestic violence.)

By John Krueger, Editor

It was a scene worse than she had ever found herself in, but one that in the back of her mind she always worried that the relationship might come to. She was alone with the man she loved, but over time she had grown to fear for her life when he lost control. She was terrified by his actions, by the tone of his voice and the verbal threats he had made to her time and time again. But yet, despite the innermost feelings she felt more and more, she felt helpless to get away.

They had returned to his home like before, but this time he seemed more angry than usual. The evening had began as a simple night out with friends – but her friends and family had become her worst enemy because of his intense jealousy and ever-present control.

He had brought her back to his home this time by force...mental force because she was afraid of what he was capable of when he seemed out of control and physical force by gripping her arm tightly and leading her into the dwelling.

After arriving, she tried to leave on several occasions, but every time she attempted to escape he would throw her back on the couch.

This time he was over the edge.

Finally, she was sitting on the couch, with no hope for escape. The look in his eyes appeared more intense than ever before. She didn't look at him, locking her eyes on the refrigerator in the nearby kitchen, because she was afraid of what he might do. It was as if he was a lion stalking his prey as he paced back and forth in front of her, while she waited; hoping that he would calm down and things would go back to 'normal'. But would he carry things to the next level, she wondered.

Suddenly she found him hovering over her, his legs straddling her hips. His 220-pound frame was too much for her to force off. He kept telling her to look at him, but she continued to fix her eyes on the refrigerator. He firmly pressed his left hand on her right shoulder. His leverage and weight made it almost impossible for her to move. His right hand grabbed her under her jawbone as he clenched his fingers tightly, closing off the

air passage to her lungs and blood supply to her brain.

He continued to yell obscenities at her, telling her to look him in the eye and answer his threatening questions as the grip on her head and neck became tighter and tighter. Things then went black for the woman as she lay helplessly in his grasp. The next thing she knew she was waking up with her head draped over the wood support on the back of the couch, the man's hand still at her throat and jaw.

The woman's first thoughts after coming to consciousness were, "Why are his hands around my throat," and "Why is my bottom warm and wet?" She had involuntarily defecated and urinated on herself, a tell-tale sign she later learned, that she had been strangled and the blood flow had been stopped to her brain.

She started crying uncontrollably, and then suddenly she quieted and said to the man as if it were another voice speaking, "I bet God's real proud of you now," with tears running down her face. He responded to her saying, "Don't turn this around and make it my fault."

She then looked him in the eye, not caring at this point if he ended her life or not and said, "I hope nobody ever does this to one of your girls."

This is a description of what happened to an East Texas woman during the early morning hours on June 30, 2005, as it was described by the victim. It was a day/night that changed her life; robbing her of the future she once hoped.

She wouldn't even realize the extent of the damage that was done for some time – not the true effects of the action of the man she thought she loved and thought had loved her.

But it wasn't just this event that changed her life, she said, but also what happened in the days, weeks and months to follow, as this woman not only saw her life change at the hands of a man, but also at the hands of a justice system who she thought was there to protect her; a system that promotes women to come forward when attacked by their domestic partner even though the victim thinks no one will believe them.

Who was on her side? Who believed in her? Where was she to turn? Who would truly be there for her and give her the strength and courage to continue on?

This is the first of a six-part series on domestic violence. It is not based on just this one woman's life and how violence from someone she cared about changed it, but about what women in society face every day. It's not just in the large cities, but happens in rural areas as well – areas just like Shelby County; including this county.

There is no escape by geographical setting. Nearly one in four American women between the ages of 18 and 65 experience domestic violence at least once, according to Body Shop

(1988).

According to the Texas Council on Family Violence, in Texas alone there were 187,811 family violence incidents in 2005. In all, 143 women were killed by their domestic partner. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that in 2004, the women killed in Texas by their partner stood at 140 and nearly two million Texans (1,479,912 females and 372,394 males) – or almost 13 percent of the population – have been sexually assaulted.

More shocking statistics show that in 2005, 11,996 adults in Texas received shelter from their abusive relationships.

Forty-seven percent of all Texans report having personally experienced at least one form of domestic violence, either severe, verbal and/or forced isolation from friends and family at some point in their lifetime.

Is this woman alone in her plight? No. But does she feel like it? Yes. Like many other women who fight the same battle each and every day of their relationships, she said felt she had nowhere to turn; nowhere to hide; no place to find the help she needed to get away from the abuse, both physical and psychological.

Her abuser was calculating and controlling, she said. Over time he had ‘trained’ her that this was what relationships were about; what love was about. She said she was afraid for her life; ashamed to tell others; humiliated and scared of what might lie ahead. This series from time to time will reflect on the life of Gail Davenport, a fictitious name given to this woman to protect her dignity and life.

She has come forward with her story so other women may learn what their rights are, and to find out what they can do if they find themselves in a similar situation.

The series will dig into domestic violence and some of the many ways women are often persecuted, pressured and left to feel that they have no hope for a normal life. They may not even know what a normal life truly is.

It will dig into Ms. Davenport’s life and what she did when she felt there was no where to turn. It will shed light on options that she found out she had, but also the struggles that she faced when she did seek help.

This series will also enlighten readers that no family is necessarily spared from this plight. Domestic violence doesn’t fit any certain social class, or any certain size family. It could be happening next door to anyone.

The signs of domestic violence will be brought forth in this series and some of the devastating permanent effects will be brought to light.

This series isn't to deter women from seeking help, but to let them know that no matter what, they do have options; they do have someone who is on their side.

But it will also show in Ms. Davenport's case, that the system isn't perfect and women must want a better life, to gather friends and family around to support and help them and let them know how important they are to her.

The importance of acceptance of this problem by society will also be brought forth. And the value of family and friends gathering and supporting victims who have and are suffering from this battering will also be shown.

It is crucial that these people who are and have suffered through this horrid experience are first believed, then helped, and furthermore supported as they try to regain their normal role in society...a society they believe is much different than their prospects in earlier years of their life.

How serious is domestic violence in today's society? The following national statistics are staggering, but true:

- On average, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day in the U.S.
- One in four of domestic violence incidents result in substantial physical injury. Ten percent of those were knocked unconscious.
- Only 25 percent of those who seek medical help admit the injuries were caused by a partner because they are so frightened that if they do, their life will be in jeopardy.

In the next five issues of *The Light and Champion*, several different areas of domestic violence will be looked at. They include:

Part 2: What are the signs of a woman caught in a domestic violence situation? What does a woman in this situation feel and why are they helpless against their aggressor?

Part 3: Strangulation or choking: What is the difference and how serious is this to a victim?

Part 4: The law: How does it protect the victim?; How can the victim help build her case?; What should law enforcement officials take into consideration?

Part 5: What help is out there for victims to assist them in starting over and why is this help so important?

Part 6: What does the future hold for victims of domestic violence? How important is it that victims stop their aggressor as soon as possible?

This series is not only to bring light to this life-altering crime to the public, but law enforcement as well. It is the hope that each case of domestic violence will be treated with individuality and given the sensitivity it deserves by those who represent the law and the victim's chance for survival.

Domestic violence is a silent epidemic in today's society, from which no one is immune. It is the hope that bringing it to light – and the struggle that 'Gail Davenport' has fought – will help make a difference for others.

John Krueger, Editor, The Light & Champion, Office Ph: (936) 598-3377, Cell Ph: (936) 332-9332, Fax: (936) 598-6394, Email: editor@lightandchampion.com