



Child abuse affects all society

PAIYE HEAT

By MARGARET MILLER

Child abuse isn't an isolated problem that affects a few unfortunate youngsters and happens to other classes of society. Rather, it's a part of every strata of society—probably every family to some degree—and it may be the primary reason for the escalating crime in this country.

That's the message being taken around the country by two representatives of Parents Anonymous, a nationwide organization to combat such abuse. They are now at Patuxent and clinical social worker Leonard L. Lieber, P.A.'s national administrator. They stopped at the Plymouth Hilton hotel during a brief visit for radio and television appearances in the Detroit metropolitan area.

"We're all capable of abusing, given a situation of sufficient stress," said Mrs. Wheat, who has just written "By Sanction of the Victim," a novel depicting an extreme abuse case placed in a family setting.

"I don't know any parents who have not on occasion been abusive," she added. Lieber looked at the matter from a little different angle.

"We've already lost a president to child abuse," he stated.

"Lee Harvey Oswald was an abused child. So are many others who have come into the news for other killings, and a large percentage of the 17-year-olds in street gangs knew abuse as seven-year-olds."

IN THEIR VISIT here, Mrs. Wheat and Lieber also talked about recent governmental recognition of the enormity of the problem and the funding of Parents Anonymous work, of visits around the country with units of P.A. and of incidents in visits to many cities that show the problem is coming into the open.

That wasn't the case, the writer said, when she first began recognizing the problem about 1963, five years before Lieber, the counselor, and Jolly K., a prisoner held in a child's death, began the organization of Parents Anonymous.

Mrs. Wheat said it was when her own three children were aged 18, eight and three, that she read an account in Time magazine about a teen-aged girl who was left by her parents with a woman who "disciplined" her to death.

"I guess even then as I read the story treated as an isolated murder. I had a feeling on the gut level that there was in this country a great hypocrisy, on the one hand child worship and on the other hand a hostility of doing very little for children."

"My research went on, and I collected many news stories and heard of more incidents. I learned, although the term 'child abuse' wasn't in common usage then, that it represents a pattern, with the parent who has been hurt as a child unable to treat his own children any differently."

More and more, I realized that as parents we are no better nor worse than the parenting we received, unless therapy intervenes.

Mrs. WHEAT also talked of "institutionalized" child abuse, which she said results from "apathy and government greed," in the way prisons put young delinquents into the company of older and more hardened criminals.

"As long as brutality in any sector of our society is accepted, we will have child abuse," she added.

The period of study of child abuse and her eventual joining forces with the P.A. group as editor of its monthly newsletter also became a time of looking closely at her own life, Mrs. Wheat said.

"I had a mother I always could talk to, and that part of my background was good," she said, "but I also had a father who walked out of our lives, and left that feeling of abusive neglect in me."

"I found that in dealing with my own children, I sometimes fell apart under stress, and then I became so fearful of this anger that I would withdraw from them."

"I know I have grown a great deal over the past 16 years and can handle this far better. I'm still growing and my relationships with my own children is far more open now."

BOTH VISITORS said a large part of their mission is to emphasize that child abuse is not just beating and physical harm.

"You can wreck someone's self-esteem without laying a hand on him," the novelist said. "There's verbal and sexual abuse, and patterns of sexual abuse are just coming out."

"And then there's what we call the 'Bevery Hills syndrome,' the parents who are always out at social events, leaving the children the car and the liquor cabinet and the message 'don't bother me with your life.'"

"People don't like to recognize that kind of abuse, but it is very much part of the scene."

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WHILE IN THE Detroit area, Mrs. Wheat and Lieber met with Jill Mauch of Plymouth, a regional representative of Parents Anonymous.

Mrs. Mauch told them about the work that is being done here with a \$25,000 grant, part of money appropriated in 1974 by the U. S. department of Health, Education and Welfare's office of child development.

"We now have an office in Lincoln Park," Mrs. Mauch said, "and parents interested can reach us by calling 381-5387 or 381-5388. We also have an emergency number for parents in stress situations, and that's in operation 24 hours a day in the office of Downriver Guidance, 303-9900."

She also said P.A. has an increasing number of units functioning in the metropolitan area, and further growth will become possible as more leaders volunteer services.

IT IS THIS KIND of groups, Lieber said, that is getting major attention in the appearances he and Mrs. Wheat make around the country.

"This grant is a major breakthrough of recognition of this problem," Lieber said. "We hope to have it renewed when it runs out in another nine months."

"We want it known that this three-quarters of a million dollars is being matched all over the country by hours of volunteer work of equal value, and the impact is beginning to be felt."

"The reality of child abuse in its many forms is now out in the open. That's the right kind of use of government funds."

THE TOUR also is aimed at publicizing Mrs. Wheat's new book, which already has 125,000 advance orders and has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

It is, Mrs. Wheat said, a fictionalized account of that first case of child abuse that caught her attention, and it was written because over the years the question that kept haunting her was how did it feel to be that young girl.

Lieber, in his preface, called the book one that "should become part of the growing recognition public awareness of our mutually shared responsibility—to make safe the formative years of all our families, our most important natural resource."



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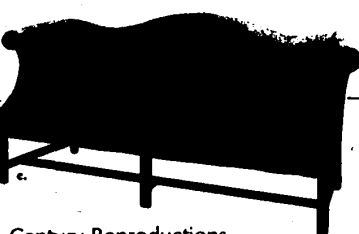
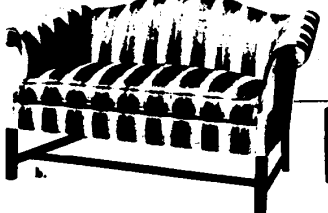
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