

# Farmington Observer

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## Police wrestle with silence of spouse abuse

By LYNN ORR

There's little argument today that violence in the American home runs rampant.

But there is disagreement about how to leash that violence.

Legislators may be convinced that new laws giving police more leverage can curb domestic abuse. Gov. William Milliken recently signed a five-bill package concerning spouse abuse that allows police to arrest suspected spouse abusers without a warrant.

But like other societal hot potatoes dropped in the laps of police officers, spouse abuse cannot be controlled with legislation, police insist.

The complex pressures that mold physical violence between husband and wife cannot be removed through law enforcement. And because the vast majority of spouse abuse goes unreported, police deal only with the tip of the iceberg, they're convinced.

Whether police can arrest a battering spouse without a warrant has little merit if the spouse beater goes undetected, and the laws do little to change the locked-in situation of the battered spouse who can't break out.

"The statistics are bad, because I'm convinced they're a small percentage of what's going on," says Farmington Public Safety Director Dan Byrnes.

"I'VE SEEN situations that really disturbed me," he recalls, and those situations aren't limited to on-the-job work. A jaundiced eye can detect spouse abuse among friends, acquaintances and peers, he says.

"You see a young wife with two children being abused by her husband—I would like to do something about it, including arrest. But she doesn't want an arrest."

"She calls us because she has no recourse. She wants a temporary solution, she wants him to stop kicking her. But her real solution is to get out, and there's no money, no skills for a job, no place to go. There's no permanent solution. We can't do anything because what we can do—put him in jail—will hurt her ultimately."

Yet the problem falls on us by default. We're not trained, nor are we in a position to do anything about the basic underlying situation. The bottom line still lies with the complainant, and

the realities are that a police officer is not going to make an arrest if the officer knows the abused person isn't going to sign a complaint.

"Why should the cop be the bad guy?"

The major thrust of the five-bill package provides for increased police leverage in handling spouse abuse cases and a uniform reporting system in which local police will report the incidents and outcomes of domestic assaults to the Michigan State Police.

Under the law, a police officer may arrest an alleged assailant in a domestic scene without a warrant. Officers also may arrest sans warrant if a court has issued an injunction, barring an individual from any physical action against the spouse.

ENFORCING injunctions without a warrant may be the most helpful tool in the new laws for police officers, Byrnes says.

"Maybe arresting them for contempt will open the judges' eyes and force them to deal with the issue," he explains. He's also convinced that half-way houses for abused spouses, currently under consideration, are a step in the right direction.

Farmington Hills Police Lt. Richard Niemisto agrees that arresting without a warrant when an injunction has been ordered will have the most impact on the problem.

"That's a deterrent," he says. Knowledge that police officers can arrest on the spot may work as preventive medicine, he says; but he's not convinced that the new laws will do much to alleviate the causes of spouse abuse.

"It's not a panacea," he says. "It will help certain people, but not the majority who need the help."

Statistics don't tell the story, Byrnes and Niemisto agree. Embarrassment about calling the police and the potential problems after the police leave prevent the majority of abused spouses, both husbands and wives, from calling in the first place, they say.

"If they're in fear of their lives, they won't call," he says.

(Continued on page 9A)



Leslie Friend's flowers are a colorful sight to behold. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

## Every garden needs a Friend

By KATIE KERWIN

You might say Leslie Friend's hobby just kind of "blossomed."

"I started by having a few flowers and it got bigger and bigger," Friend recounts.

Friend, 52, has been gardening for 41 years. He moved into his present home on the northwest corner of Rochester and Wattles Roads in 1947, and as his garden expanded, his flowers began attracting the attention of passers-by.

"People would stop by and want to know if they could buy some of my flowers," he said.

Friend's retail business in flowers

and vegetables got under way nearly 18 years ago. The business kept expanding and he now sells roots and seeds, as well as cut flowers.

"I gradually got into it. I just kept adding a little more of this, a little more of that."

Friend's "thistles" and "thats" have increased his stock from the original irises and peonies to one that now includes lilies, day lilies, daffodils, narcissus, poppies and chrysanthemums. He also grows and sells strawberries, raspberries, corn, canteloupe, beans, carrots and beets.

While Friend has some customers who come year after year for cut flowers, a large part of his business

comes from motorists who are drawn by the field of color flowers that catches the eye along Rochester Road. Friend said he receives many compliments on the "beautiful corner" and knows of one local school teacher who detours several miles to pass by his flower field on her way to work each day.

Friend plans to enter his flowers in competition this year for the first time. He'll show his lilies in a July contest and his mums in October, in hopes of winning a trophy or ribbon, he said.

Friend, who ran the nursery with his wife's help, does all the gardening himself since her recent death.

He now has about a quarter of an acre planted in flowers and vegetables, but plans no further expansion.

Since his retirement from a General Motors machine shop in December, Friend has been able to devote more time to his gardening. The nursery demands long hours, and in the summer he frequently works until sundown.

Despite all the hard work and occasional setbacks caused by frost or heavy rains, Friend plans to keep the business going. He could never make a living off it, he concedes, but admits, "I guess I got into it mostly for liking flowers."

## ...as families struggle to maintain harmony

By LYNN ORR

As the ugly truth about spouse abuse emerges from behind the drapes of American living rooms, it gets a little easier for the battered spouse to come forward with his or her story.

But the victims of a battering spouse often extend beyond the couple to include children, relatives, and friends. Violence in the home affects all of those exposed to persons who allow anger to strike out at those around them.

ARLENE and Ken lived in an upper middle class subdivision, surrounded by the luxuries that a well-paying job can provide. Their marriage of nearly 20 years produced three children, now in their teens—all of whom now are experiencing the pangs brought on by divorce.

The family is now in counseling, attempting to recover from the drastic changes that began several years ago when Ken began hitting his wife, then his children, and finally a family friend.

"I BLAMED a lot of it on my yelling on a rotten temper," Arlene begins softly. "You're basically in love with the guy, and being a good wife, you excuse things. And it doesn't start over until it goes by degrees. Arlene started throwing things, and gradually the things he threw got closer to me."

Outside pressures, particularly from his job, created severe depressions in Ken, she says. "When things were going well, everything was great. And when you have that base of love, you just make excuses. But the verbal abuse gradually increased. 'You don't know how to do anything,' he'd yell at me, whenever he was angry."

"When you love someone, and they keep telling you you're terrible, you just keep thinking you're a dummy."

EVEN NOW it is hard for Arlene to talk about herself and Ken. She speaks

in terms of "you do this" rather than "he" or "I." And she seldom calls Ken by name. But she believes she's beginning to understand why he strikes out.

"When you love someone, and they don't love themselves, they hit out, because you're better than they are somehow," she reflects. Ken was physically abused as a child as well, and Arlene believes that violence is the only way he knows to handle depression and pressure.

"I know that when he's yelling at me, he's really yelling at his mother," she says. Analysis has assisted her in getting to that point of understanding, she says. But analysis and understanding can't change the past.

"Have you ever been yanked around by the hair?" she asks, answering her own question. "It's the most demeaning experience. It's worse than being hit."

At the same time, Arlene and the children were dependent on Ken as the provider.

"THAT'S WHY I went back the first time," she says softly. She left home for a week after Ken pushed her head against the car window hard enough to give her a severe concussion. That's also the first time the police were called, by her daughter.

"I got my dad to talk to Ken, and for a while it helped. And his job got better and he was happier. But he continued to throw the verbal abuse, and you put up with it, because that's what people do. I thought he loved me," she says, struggling her shoulders.

The belittling and sarcasm is all part of his attempts to control her, she says.

"After a while, I didn't take him seriously. When he got jealous of friendships, I just couldn't believe it. I never felt guilty because I never saw other men. I needed a friend, not a lover."

For Arlene, the break came from outside. When she moved to the metro

**"When you love someone, and they don't love themselves, they hate you—because you're better than they are."**  
—A spouse abuse victim

Detroit area a few years ago, she got a job in an office and started to make some friends.

"They made the difference," she recalls. "This person you have chosen to live with doesn't like you, you finally realize. He may love you, but he doesn't like you—but you begin to discover that other people do. You can't get his approval, but you can get the approval of others, and you have to learn to reach out. That's the bottom line."

ARLENE seldom confided her problems with abuse to her friends. She says she didn't want to "throw her mud" on others. But her friends took note of her depression. Ken's facade of the wonderful, smiling husband he presented to the world finally wore thin.

"The times between his hitting grew shorter and shorter, and finally I knew I was numb. I was drowning, and I was outside myself looking at everything. I went to the psychiatrist, and after a few months, when I told her I was going to file for divorce, she told me she had known that. I needed the moral support to do what I wanted to do."

For Ken, however, the thought of divorce was terrifying. And he reacted as he always did to pressure—by times by attacking their oldest child.

"He had him down on the ground, choking him, and we were trying to get him off. When Ken gets like that, you're just trying to stop him, you're not thinking of the police. My daughter called the police."

Without an injunction, however, the police could do little more than stop Ken from beating their son. Arlene got

an injunction shortly thereafter. She hoped that would end the terrifying, but Ken went beyond the limits of many spouse abusers.

HE STRUCK out at one of their friends.

"The reason I was pulled into the thing is because I was a parent," Paul explains sadly. "My first instinct when Ken and Arlene's marriage started to go was to split. Maybe because I'm divorced, I just didn't want to be around it. At the same time, there's a lot of guilt about that because one of the tragic side-effects to divorce is the way your friends drop off."

Paul had no suspicion that Ken was hitting Arlene, but he did know there were problems with Ken's children.

"The father role was diminishing," Paul recalls. "The kids weren't listening to him. It had never struck me before that he perceived of them as property."

Paul's first confrontation with Ken occurred over the phone.

"He said 'Take good care of Arlene.' I didn't know what he was talking about. Arlene and I were friends, and I thought Ken knew that he and I were friends as well. But when you get to know Ken, you understand that he thinks the only relationship a man and a woman can have is sexual."

"To me, that's ridiculous."

THE PHONE conversation confused Paul. Did Arlene want more than just a friendship or was he sending off signals in some way?

"I went through all the questions, but by the time time came to my house, I knew that I was dealing with irrationality."

Ken walked in and began yelling, accusing Paul of sleeping with his estranged wife. Shouting obscenities, Ken started beating Paul, throwing him to the floor and hitting him in the head.

"But he was pulling his punches," Paul recalls. "I knew instinctively if I fought back, he'd really cut loose. I just attempted to be completely passive, hoping he'd stop."

Paul managed to get to the phone, dialed the police, and started a plea for help. Ken immediately backed off, pleading with Paul to hang up and promising to leave. Paul complied with the request, and Ken attacked him again.

"One mistake I made—I should have told the police to call back in five minutes and send a car if I didn't answer," Paul says now. "I finally just kept moving toward the door, trying to calm him down."

AFTER KEN left, Paul sat on the floor shaking.

"I was angry, frustrated, and I cried because I felt helpless and powerless. I knew what it was like to be a rape victim, because I'm physically strong, and I've never been physically afraid; but I knew there was no way I could overpower Ken. And I was hurt."

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because I never thought someone could attack me like that.

"He's taken away my freedom," Paul says with anger. "I have to be more cautious, and I've never been like that. All I wanted to do is throw the guy behind bars."

But two motives prevented Paul from filing criminal charges.

"I didn't want to relive the whole experience before an audience. It's one thing to talk about it with friends—that's hard enough but it's a cathartic thing. I knew that going through the whole court thing would be terrible. And then, what if Ken lands in jail? Where does that leave Arlene? If he loses his job, what happens to her child support?"

The experience radicalized Paul.

"I know that I'm not responsible for what happened to me, but it also resurrected my political feelings about repression. I've been sitting through a period where liberal stuff was acceptable. I had patience with the legislative process."

"But I'm going to be less tolerant of the political forces that defend conservatism. I really don't think much of marriage, because I've had it with overpower. Ken. And I was hurt."

(Continued on page 9A)

### inside

Columns  
Classifieds  
Community Calendar  
Sports

10A  
Sections B,C  
7A  
Section A  
Section B

#### Community mourns

The Farmington area lost a community leader last week with the death of Vernon Fisher. To see how his civic colleagues viewed him, turn to page 2A.