

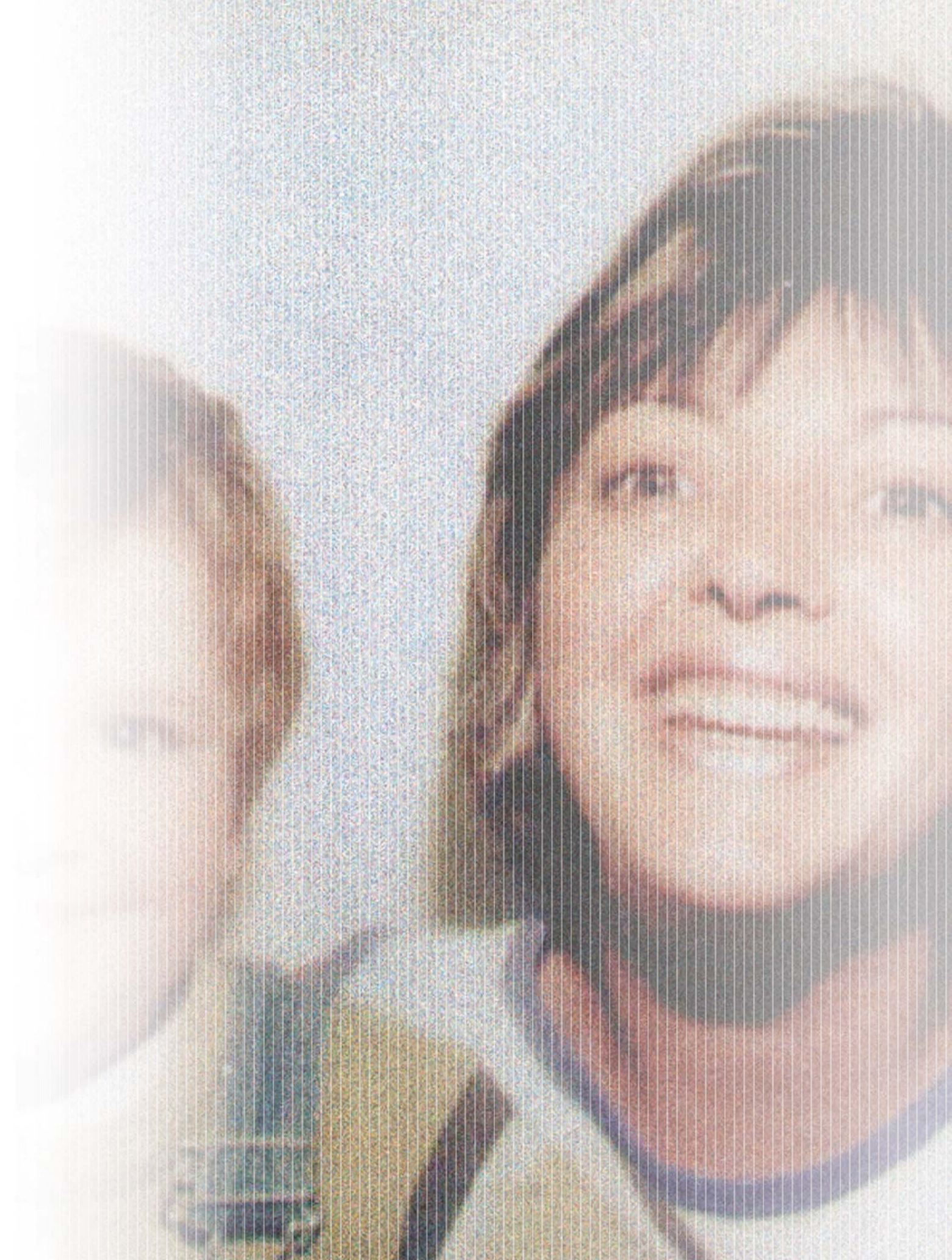
LOVE AND DEATH

ONE FAMILY'S TRAGEDY UNDERScores THE PERILS OF CONCEALING ABUSE BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER

By Allison Bressler

During the early morning hours of September 9, 2002, Peter Clancy arrived at his house in upscale Cortlandt Manor, N.Y., armed with a large kitchen knife. He tried the garage, which did not respond to his opener, and then the front door, but the lock had been changed. So he picked up a chair from the deck and hurled it through a kitchen window.

Hearing the breaking glass, Debbie Clancy called the police and told them her husband had just broken into her house. Debbie then ordered her two young sons, ages nine and four, who had been asleep in her bed, to stay put. She grabbed a golf club and ran past the bedrooms of her other two sleeping children, a 10-year-old boy and seven-year-old girl. Facing Peter on the stairway, she turned, ran back to her bedroom and slammed the door, but Peter chased after her. With the knife in his hand, he approached Debbie and stabbed her in the stomach. Debbie fell onto the bed. While Debbie screamed and kicked, her



Crime scene photographs depict a side view of the Clancy home from above (left, center house), its broken kitchen window (middle) and kitchen (right).



children begged, “Stop! Stop!” Even the dog went after Peter, biting him in an attempt to protect Debbie. Debbie slid to the floor, where Peter stabbed her repeatedly with the knife—seven times, according to newspaper accounts. Debbie was still breathing, so Peter pinched her nose and mouth until she stopped.

Peter then lay down next to Debbie’s body and waited for the police to arrive. “Why, Daddy?” the children sobbed. As the police rushed up the staircase, he took those moments to explain to his children why Mommy had to die.

I did not know Debora Riggs Clancy. I met the family the day of the funeral. As then the senior domestic violence counselor at the Northern Westchester

Shelter, now named Hope’s Door, I was there to provide emotional support, solace and perhaps insight to the family. It was the first domestic violence homicide in northern Westchester County I had ever heard of, and it stunned residents throughout the county. Unfortunately, I had entered the picture far too late.

Despite a decline in the rate of domestic violence in recent years, the problem remains widespread—and hugely significant. Between 2003 and 2012, intimate partners committed 15 percent of all violent crimes, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice. In the NCVS for 2010, about 1 percent of females aged 18 to 49 reported being a victim of such crimes, which include rape, robbery, and sexual and other forms of assault by an intimate partner over the past year. Lifetime rates of serious violence between intimate partners are far higher. In a 2010 survey, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that one in four women and one in seven men have at some point experienced severe violence—like being hit hard, beaten or slammed against something—by a

current or former spouse or partner.

Short of death, the results of such altercations include brain injury, broken bones and hearing loss. The psychological fallout can be as brutal as the physical damage. Nearly half of victims suffer from depression, 64 percent suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and 18 percent are suicidal, according to a 1999 statistical analysis by psychologist Jacqueline Golding of the University of California, San Francisco. Killings are not unheard of either. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, intimate partners committed 39 percent of the 3,032 homicides of females in 2010; the corresponding figure for the 10,878 male homicides was 3 percent.

Most fighting between couples is intermittent, triggered by disagreements about explosive topics such as money or sex. Both parties may be yelling, but because males tend to be more violent than females, a man is more likely to start a physical fight with a female partner, and his likely greater size and strength mean he can inflict far more damage. According to the NCVS, more than 80 percent of the victims of violence between intimate partners are female.

FAST FACTS

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

- 1 Between 2003 and 2012, intimate partners committed 15 percent of all violent crimes.
- 2 A woman is in greatest danger of serious assault or murder in the first months after she leaves an abusive partner.
- 3 Men who commit murders seemingly out of the blue are psychologically very similar to perpetrators with prior convictions.

PRECEDING PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DEBORA RIGGS’S FAMILY; THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NEW YORK STATE POLICE, VIA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION LAW REQUEST



(Because of this gender gap, I use “she” to refer to the abused in this story.)

Partner violence does not always emerge from mutual combat but can, at times, represent a persistent, escalating and more calculated pattern of cruelty that males virtually always instigate. In one 2002 report, sociologist Michael S. Kimmel of Stony Brook University wrote that “the more systematic, persistent, and injurious type of violence ... is overwhelmingly perpetuated by men.... More than 90% of this violence is perpetrated by men.”

Debora Riggs Clancy was a victim of such relentless brutality. No amount of wealth or privilege could protect her from the psychological and societal forces that drove her husband’s behavior. In fact, in some ways, as I later learned, the upscale town in which she lived made her situation particularly problematic.

“You’re So Damn Stupid”

Debora Riggs met Peter Clancy when his family moved from England to quiet Throggs Neck, N.Y., when he was just a boy. Peter was three years older than Debbie, but they ran in the same circles. He was highly intelligent and

surpassed all academic expectations. He was also a self-proclaimed know-it-all, which did not help him make close friendships. Debbie’s mother, Joan DiNapoli, remembered Peter as an altar boy and honor student who looked like he had a promising future.

Debbie was outgoing; she loved animals and had a lot of friends. She was not always the best student and was drawn to Peter’s self-confidence and intellect. At age 16, Debbie had her first boyfriend in Peter.

By outside accounts, Peter was the one in charge in their relationship. He had an opinion about virtually everything. He dictated how she wore her

makeup and her hair. He was extremely jealous and would not allow Debbie to socialize without him, even with her own family. Over time, her friends became fewer as they tired of being around Peter and of telling Debbie how they felt about her boyfriend.

Peter’s behavior often confused Debbie and made her doubt the relationship, Debbie’s sister, Darlene Alberts, says. Yet Peter could be loving and kind, and Debbie had come to rely on him for direction. She convinced herself that he was just a very protective boyfriend who wanted the best for her. “How could he not, he loves me so much,” she would say.

Indeed, Peter’s actions may have perversely drawn Debbie closer to him. Since the 1980s researchers have acknowledged the possibility of “traumatic bonding,” in which deep emotional attachments develop from two features of abusive relationships: a power imbalance and unpredictable shifts between warmth and malice. These dynamics keep a victim working ever harder to make her abuser happy, in hopes of earning a bit of kindness from him. Because she is told she is the cause of any relationship problems, she feels responsible for fixing them. As the pattern persists, it begins to seem normal, and the ties between abuser and victim grow stronger. As if to fortify this bond, Peter defended his actions with statements of

Peter then lay down next to Debbie’s body and waited for the police to arrive. “Why, Daddy?” the children sobbed.

Because Peter had to focus on his studies, Debbie took a job 10 miles from their home. Peter bought a car to drive the three miles to school and gave his new wife a bike .

love, insisting he had Debbie's best interests at heart. He would remind Debbie that he was in her life to help make her better. Without him, he added, she would go nowhere.

In reality, such toxic treatment by male partners is not motivated by love so much as insecurity and a need for power and control. Such men "only feel secure if someone else is less secure," says psychiatrist Rahn Kennedy Bailey of Meharry Medical College, who has treated many victims of intimate partner violence. Peter's attempts to isolate Debbie from her friends and family deepened her insecurity. Demeaning comments are another common means of putting a partner in her place and consolidating power. According to Darlene, Peter repeatedly told Debbie she was "stupid

and brainless." (Later, after her pregnancies, she was a "lard-ass.")

After high school, Peter lived with Debbie in a low-income apartment owned by his family in a rough section of the Bronx. While Peter was attending Manhattan College to become a civil engineer, Debbie took a job to bring in what money she could. After graduation, Peter decided to change careers and attend graduate school. He was accepted to Harvard Business School, an achievement that made it easy for him to convince Debbie they would have a wonderful future together.

According to Darlene, in June 1983 the couple wed and moved to Boston. Because Peter had to focus on his studies, Debbie took a job as a secretary 10 miles from their home. Peter bought a car to drive the three miles to school and gave Debbie a bike. Even in rain or snow, Debbie biked to and from work. She handed Peter her paychecks. When Darlene expressed concern over this arrangement, Debbie said, "He is focused on making our family better. It is my job to support him."

"He bossed her around constantly," Darlene remembers. "I suspected that she did as she was told so as to avoid his wrath." Hearing of her disapproval, Peter claimed his sister-in-law was jealous of their happiness and trying to break up the marriage.

After Peter finished school, they moved to New York City. Debbie wanted to be a chef and began taking classes at a local culinary school while Peter got his first job in banking. Although Peter did not like her new freedom, he occasionally helped her with her schoolwork. Darlene was happy that her sister was getting out more, but she remained wary of her brother-in-law. One night when Darlene and her husband, Larry Alberts, were visiting Debbie and Peter, Darlene and Larry watched Peter slap Debbie across the face for not understanding an assignment. "You're so damn stupid!" he yelled in disgust. Deeply shaken, Darlene spoke to her sister in another room. Debbie admitted this was not the first time Peter had hit her.

Darlene remembers that the emotional and physical assaults had started to wear on Debbie. Her new friends at culinary school helped her realize that her relationship was not normal. She also knew that despite the classes Peter was paying for, he was too controlling to actually allow her to become a chef. They had a more basic conflict, too: Peter did not want children, and she did. She told Darlene that she wanted to meet someone new and have a family. She left their home and stayed with a friend.

The separation lasted one month. Peter told Debbie he could not live without her. He promised to work on their marriage and agreed to have a family.

No One Is Protected

Peter secured a high-level position at Barclays. He and Debbie purchased a large, four-bedroom colonial home in picturesque Cortlandt Manor. By 1998 they had four children. Debbie was very involved with her children and their schooling. On weekends, Peter would take the older kids off on ski adventures. They drove a big, expensive truck to shuffle the kids around to their many activi-

THE AUTHOR

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ties. Beneath the veneer of normalcy, however, Peter's reign continued.

Although Debbie had to run the household day to day, Peter devised clever ways to micromanage her, many of them involving finances. He provided Debbie with money, but it did not always cover expenses. It was not unusual for Debbie to knock on her neighbor Eileen's door to borrow \$10 or \$20 for milk or other essentials for the kids. Peter paid close attention to what she spent. When Debbie bought clothes or toys for the kids, she would often ask her sister to say the purchases were gifts from her so Debbie would not get in trouble. If the items had not been on sale, Peter would become enraged. Debbie told Eileen that one time Peter ignored his crying children as he snatched the kids' favorite Lunchables off their plates, insisting Debbie return them because they had been too expensive. And, of course, major purchases, such as the house and cars, were made in Peter's name.

They lived on two acres of land in a neighborhood where virtually all residents hired others to maintain very large lawns. Not Peter. He did not want to spend money on a lawn service, so he bought Debbie a tractor. Neighbors watched as Debbie weeded and mowed the vast expanse of grass each week. Sometimes she would ask Eileen's husband to help her move the heavy backyard furniture, which included tables, chairs and a 150-pound trampoline. When asked why she did not hire someone, she would reply with a smile, "I don't mind."

Peter also regulated activities that were essentially free. According to Larry, Peter told Debbie what television shows he considered unsuitable for her or their children, disapproving of those depicting families of lower socioeconomic status because they might lead Debbie and the kids to pick up unseemly habits. For similar reasons, he tried to

make sure his kids socialized only with other kids of their same social class or educational pedigree.

Wealth is often seen as a shield against domestic abuse, and an increased risk of intimate partner violence is indeed one of the many perils of poverty. When the World Health Organization surveyed 19,517 women from 10 countries who had partners, they found that high socioeconomic status and educational attainment generally protect women from domestic abuse. In a separate analysis of U.S. couples published in 2002, a team led by epidemiologist Carol B. Cunradi of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation found that, out of all the factors investigated, low annual household income was the strongest predictor of intimate partner violence.

Yet the ranks of victims include people from all walks of life—blue collar, middle class and wealthy—and so do the batterers. I have worked with close to 1,000 victims through nonprofits and in my private practice, in which the vast majority of my clients are well-to-do, educated white women. (In my experience, wealthier victims tend to turn to private therapists; they often question whether social service and domestic violence agencies are for them.) In short, abuse can happen to anyone. No one is protected.

"Why Do You Stay?"

In Cortlandt Manor, the Clancys were seen as a respectable family. No one heard yelling coming from their home. Peter was a quiet, educated man who wore a suit. Other men on the block found him to be reserved but nice, although he did not form close friendships.

Families on their quiet cul-de-sac would gather on Friday nights at Eileen's home for pizza, but the Clancys never joined them. Sometimes Debbie would stop by but quickly leave, saying she had

WHEN SOMEONE NEEDS YOUR HELP

If you know someone in an abusive relationship, you could be that person's lifeline. Here is what to do.

—A.B.

1. Be specific when discussing what signs you have seen or behaviors you have witnessed that raise red flags.
2. Let her know that she is not alone and that professional agencies exist to help women like her.
3. Express your concern for her safety but do not judge her. Listen.
4. Ask how you can help.
5. Stay away from statements suggesting she might be partly to blame. Do not ask, "Why don't you just leave?" or say, "Don't do anything to make him mad."
6. Ask open-ended questions such as "What behaviors does your partner display that show you he does or does not love and care for you?" Such inquiries lead a victim to gain some clarity about the situation.
7. Be supportive but do not pressure the victim. Let her make decisions at her own pace. She should guide the process and decide when to leave because she knows her batterer best.
8. Go to the Web site of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and obtain the phone number for the domestic violence coalition in your state and county (www.ncadv.org/resources/StateCoalitionList.php). Alternatively, urge her to contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE, which provides crisis counseling and safety planning, as well as referrals to local hotlines and agencies.
9. Offer to sit with her while she calls a hotline or to accompany her to an initial appointment.
10. Direct her to the tips for safety planning on page 47.



Debbie and Peter on vacation in Florida in 1988.

to get back. They did not socialize as a couple with the neighbors.

Eileen and another neighbor, Fran, eventually befriended Debbie, and they began witnessing some odd behaviors. When the kids clogged a toilet with a toy or sent a baseball through a window, Debbie would call one of these women, panic in her voice, and beg her to send her husband to fix the problem before Peter got home from work. Many evenings Debbie asked Eileen to keep an eye on her children playing outside while she

went inside to change her clothes and put on makeup because Peter expected her to “look nice” on his arrival. Debbie often asked Eileen if she could put her trash in Eileen’s cans because Peter looked through their garbage in hopes of finding evidence of purchases for which he could scold Debbie.

As word got around about these unusual requests, neighbors speculated about their cause. Many assumed Debbie was simply odd or troubled. Debbie knew she was being discussed, but she was

SIGNS SOMEONE YOU KNOW MAY BE ABUSED

- You often see bruising on her, and when you inquire, she often attributes the wound to walking into something or otherwise accidentally injuring herself.
- She always seems to ask for her partner’s permission to do anything.
- You notice that she is frequently “checking in” with her partner and justifying her whereabouts.
- She seems timid or slow to respond to questions in the presence of her partner.
- She is not allowed to socialize with someone of the opposite sex or even be alone with same-sex friends.
- She often justifies a partner’s rude or nasty behavior.
- She questions healthy relationship behaviors in others. She may say, “Your spouse doesn’t mind that you have a male friend?” or “You’re allowed to just make plans without permission from your partner?”
- She talks about her partner’s extreme jealousy.
- Her phone rings excessively, and it is always the partner.
- She continually makes excuses to family members and friends for not seeing them.

—A.B.

afraid that if anything negative got back to Peter, he would further isolate the family. She also feared the truth would ostracize her and her family even more. Eventually, however, she began to reveal small bits of information. For example, on three or four occasions, she said she had worn long sleeves to cover up bruises on her arms from Peter grabbing her tightly. At first Eileen and Fran thought the stories were embellished. They could not picture Peter being violent in any way.

But Debbie’s accounts became increasingly frightening. During one argument, she told both Eileen and Fran, Peter threw her to the floor and repeatedly slammed her head on the hard tile, only stopping when he mistook spilled jelly for blood. They heard Debbie say, “Pete’s gonna kill me one day.” Eileen and Fran asked, “Why do you stay?”

Many of my clients get this question. Leaving the relationship may seem like the obvious choice—if you are not the one in it. Consider having to leave your partner today. Where would you go? Imagine now that you had no access to your finances and no income of your own. Many victims of intimate partner violence are so financially controlled that the thought of leaving is overwhelming. And consider the impact of tearing your children away from their home, school and community.

Women also typically feel intense pressure to keep a family whole. If a woman cannot manage that, no matter the reason, she may blame herself. As a result, many women decide to keep their family unit together while they try to figure out how to improve things. Especially when emotional abuse has not escalated to physical assault, victims may not see it as abuse; they feel they just need to work harder at their marriage.

Children may also be used as weapons. When they argued, Peter often told Debbie that if she left him, he would take

the children and she would never see them again. She had no reason to doubt him. He had the power, and he had routinely followed through on his promises.

On top of all those obstacles and pressures, there is one more horrible truth for a woman in Debbie's position: if she leaves, her husband becomes more dangerous than ever. In cases such as this one, violence is the response to a perceived loss of control. "The use of violence may indicate not the experience of control but the experience of loss of control," Kimmel wrote in his 2002 review. He highlighted three antecedents of men's use of violence: "their sexual jealousy, their perception that the women failed to perform a household task such as cleaning or preparing a hot meal, and women's challenging the men's authority on financial matters. All of these are indicators of a breakdown of men's expected dominance and control."

When a woman leaves, the man's control over her drops precipitously—so the risk of violence rises in tandem. According to the WHO, a woman's chances of being murdered by her partner escalate significantly around the time she tries to escape. For good reason, then, many of my clients are more fearful of navigating life without their partner than with him.

Exactly 14 Days

Eileen, Fran, Darlene and Larry were worried about what they were observing. "After years of seeing this, we knew she was abused; we knew she was battered; we knew she was scared, but we did not know what to do," Fran says. "She was so sad and distraught, but she just continually told us he would take her children and she would never see them again."

Despite such concerns, no one dared to say the words "domestic violence." Domestic violence did not happen in their

cozy town where the crime rate was so low that they did not even have their own police department. But did Debbie know? So many women, even after they have been physically assaulted, do not believe it is domestic violence. Often they think of their partner as uncaring and selfish, maybe even downright mean. Most people do not consider themselves victims, especially not of someone they have known for most of their lives.

Debbie, Peter and the kids had happy times. Holidays, weekends away and some "good" days were filled with joy for Debbie. But she hid a deep sadness and became increasingly debilitated by frequent and severe migraines, which may have been a somatic response to her emotional pain.

Meanwhile Debbie's assigned chores mounted. She had to maintain not just the inside but also the outside of the home—say, fixing the deck if a step broke. On winter mornings she got up early to clean off and heat Peter's car for him. She cleaned and professionally pressed his laundry with the equipment he purchased for her because he would not pay for dry cleaning. She even drove to the train station he walked in and out of daily to purchase his monthly tickets because he felt he should not be bothered with the task.

Even more disturbingly, she had to sexually please him even if she was sick or just plain exhausted, she told Darlene.

It was easier to give in and do it rather than be berated half the night because she would not. The thought of sex made Debbie physically sick.

Debbie even brought Peter to marriage counseling in the hope that someone else would tell him his behavior was not okay. No one informed her that in cases of intimate partner violence, marriage counseling is not recommended. Because of the power imbalance, the abuser would likely punish the victim if she disclosed too much about their marriage. Knowledgeable therapists who see such cases will refuse to offer couples counseling and suggest seeing each partner separately.

Debbie did not contact a domestic violence agency. Women of means often do not think "those" types of services are for them, believing social service agencies are strictly for low-income women who cannot afford private therapists. But in fact, domestic violence agencies provide counseling to anyone being victimized in their relationship, whereas many private therapists lack training in violence between partners. When a private therapist deems what amounts to abuse a "couple's issue," for example, the victim may end up in greater danger.

Debbie was trapped in fear. Her migraines worsened. Peter had been badgering her about her expenditures and kept insisting that she show him her

Most people do not consider themselves victims, especially not of someone they have known for most of their lives.

A neighbor recalled seeing Peter's car return to the house later that day, a violation of the order of protection for which **he could have been arrested**.

receipts and financial books, Darlene recalls. To her sister, Debbie repeated the promise he made to her that she felt he might keep: "If you don't produce them for me when I get home," Peter reportedly said, "you're dead."

After 25 years under Peter's control, Debbie told her mother she wanted a divorce. Her mother had not been completely blind to the abuse but did not know its extent. Debbie planned to apply for the order of protection that she had been told about when she called a local victim service hotline.

At the White Plains courthouse, she filed a petition for a temporary order of protection and described to a judge the emotional, verbal, sexual, financial and physical abuse she had endured. According to the judge's ruling, Peter would have to stay away from their home, except for his court-ordered visitation with the children, whom he would have to pick up and drop off at curbside. He could not contact Debbie in any way. As the order was being served, in late August 2002, Debbie stayed with the kids at Darlene and Larry's home while police officers waited for Peter to gather his belongings from the Clancy residence and leave.

Debbie finally had freedom. Eileen and Fran, as well as Darlene, say they had never seen her so happy. She could come and go as she pleased, not worrying if one of the kids clogged the toilet or

broke a pane of glass. Peter went to the Bronx to stay with a family member. Although he called Debbie, begging her to take him back, and contacted both Darlene and Larry, pleading with them to "talk some sense" into Debbie, Debbie did not budge. She smiled, socialized with her neighbors and made her own decisions for exactly 14 days.

Unraveling

Meanwhile Peter had been doggedly digging up information about Debbie: "... he apparently became increasingly obsessed with his wife's activities, but, seemed to primarily focus on gathering information to 'present evidence in order to acquire custody of the children,'" according to a psychiatric evaluation requested by Peter's attorney. Like many abusers, Peter believed he was the victim. Based on comments he received from a friend and a sister, among others, Peter became increasingly concerned that Debbie had been having extramarital affairs. He also believed she was a drug addict and had been hurting the children by exposing them to unhealthy behaviors. (Darlene acknowledges that Debbie did become dependent on prescription painkillers after years of debilitating migraines.) Peter later detailed these transgressions to justify the fatal stabbing to his children in its immediate aftermath.

Meanwhile Peter minimized his own aggression toward his wife. To a worker with child protective services, for example, he admitted to only striking his wife three years ago, according to the psychiatric evaluation. Another time, he recalled kicking Debbie but implied that little harm was done. "She said that I broke her pelvis when I kicked her, but she never went to a doctor," he was quoted as saying in the document.

Having left Peter, Debbie was in great danger. Exactly what measures Debbie took to protect herself and her family—or whether she was even aware of the danger—is unclear. When Debbie obtained her order of protection, an advocate from the court should have alerted her to the heightened threat and discussed a safety plan. Debbie should have told neighbors to call the police if they ever saw Peter around aside from the drop-off and pick-up times for the kids. She should have given the kids passwords that, when spoken, meant: hide in the home or at a neighbor's. She should have been told about safe and confidential shelters. All we know is that she changed the locks to the house.

On September 8, 2002, Peter picked up the kids and dropped them off as instructed. A neighbor recalled seeing Peter's car return to the house later that day, a violation of the order of protection for which he could have been arrested. But a neighbor who has not been informed of the provisions of the order will not know to call the police.

The next day, when word got out about the murder, the town was in shock. Often when someone perceived as normal commits a violent crime, the community concludes that a sane person has somehow "snapped." Instead, as Peter Clancy's story reveals, the truth is more complex. In 2009 criminologists Rebecca E. and Russell P. Dobash, both at the University of Manchester, with their col-

league the late Kate Cavanagh of the University of Stirling in England, found that men who commit these seemingly out-of-the-blue murders are psychologically very similar to perpetrators with prior convictions. Men in both groups display possessiveness, jealousy, and lack of empathy or remorse. According to Bailey, abusive men also often suffer from chronic excessiveness in their behavior, along with extremely poor judgment and impulse control. Thus, even in acts of passion that seem to come from nowhere, a worrisome personal history most likely exists. In Peter's case, of course, many of the signs had been there for a long time.

Dangers of Discretion

In all the years of abuse, the police never visited the Clancy home until the day they served Peter with the order of protection. According to the latest NCVS, only about half of all incidents of partner violence are reported to the police, although data from European countries indicate that reporting is much lower, at 14 percent. My 15 years as a domestic violence counselor, advocate and program director suggest that middle- or upper-class victims may be especially reluctant to share what is happening to them. In affluent neighborhoods, airing "dirty laundry" in public is a powerful deterrent. Unlike in communities where crime is pervasive, the arrival of a police car on a well-heeled block brings residents out to the ends of their driveways to discuss what might have happened.

No matter where they live, however, people have reasons for not wanting to call the police on their partners. Victims want the violence to stop; they generally do not want a partner arrested. Although officers may sometimes simply break up a fight and defuse the situation, an arrest is not an unlikely consequence of summoning them. In New Jersey, the police must issue an arrest if there is any physi-

STEPS TO SAFETY

Leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for a victim. But all victims, whether living with an abuser or preparing to leave, need a plan to protect themselves and their family. Here are some safety tips I give to the women I counsel.

—A.B.

IN THE HOME

- If an argument seems unavoidable, try to have it in a room or area with an exit and not in the bathroom, kitchen or anywhere near dangerous instruments or weapons.
- Practice how to get out of your home safely. Identify which windows, elevators or stairs would be best.
- Have a packed bag ready and keep it in a secret but accessible place so you can leave quickly.
- Identify a neighbor you can tell about the violence and ask that person to call the police if a disturbance is heard coming from your home.
- Devise a code word to use with your children, family, friends and neighbors when you need the police.
- Decide and plan where you will go if you leave home (even if you do not think you will need to).

PREPARING TO LEAVE

- Determine who will let you stay with them or lend you some money.
- Always try to take your children with you or make arrangements to leave them with someone safe.
- Leave money, clothes, extra keys and copies of important documents with someone you trust.
- Open a savings account in your own name to establish and increase your financial independence.
- Program phone numbers for shelters into your mobile phone.
- Review your safety plan with a domestic violence advocate to devise the safest way to leave your abuser.

AFTER A SEPARATION: ON THE JOB AND IN PUBLIC

- At work, decide whom you will tell about your situation. Include office or building security. Provide a picture of your abuser if possible.
- Arrange to have someone, a receptionist, say, screen your telephone calls at work, if possible.
- Have someone escort you to your car, bus or train. Use a variety of routes to go home, if possible. Think about what you would do if something happened while going home.
- If you have a restraining order (termed an "order of protection" or "protection from abuse" in some states), make sure that all the people in charge of the institutions you and your children frequent have a copy. These may include security at work, your boss, the school principal and the director of a child's day care center.
- Inform your neighbors and landlord that your partner no longer lives with you and that they should call the police if they see your abuser near your home.
- Change or add locks on your doors and windows as soon as possible.

Her story was poignant to me because Debbie seemed like the girl next door. She was the soccer mom, the Cub Scout leader, the school cafeteria volunteer.

cal sign of assault—from a scratch to a broken bone. Even reports of joint pain may be sufficient cause. In addition to an arrest of a spouse, victims fear that social services will remove the children from both parents if police detect abuse. Unfortunately, that worry is not unfounded.

Police may sometimes do too little rather than too much. Officers entering a million-dollar home can be manipulated into thinking that a cry for help was a false alarm or an overreaction. They may thus leave a true victim in peril.

My agency trains police and other possible first responders such as school clinicians, social service workers and health care workers to spot abuse in its various forms—emotional, verbal, sexual, financial and physical—and to differentiate between an occasional fight or hurtful comment and an escalating pattern of cruelty. Properly trained, these individuals can provide support and direct victims to agencies that offer counseling until they are ready to take legal action.

Ideally, a victim who is living in fear but is not in immediate danger will call a counselor at a domestic violence agency. The counselor can help her evaluate the situation and decide on a course of action. If she decides to leave the relationship, a legal advocate will accompany her to the courthouse to get a restraining order, and the counselor can help her devise a safety plan. From there, the agency may

secure other needed services such as counseling, career support services, children's counseling, legal help and possibly shelter. In Massachusetts and elsewhere, domestic violence high-risk teams serve as alternatives to shelters, setting up protections for victims in their own communities. These multidisciplinary groups consist of police department representatives, domestic violence counselors, parole officers and others. They assess the risk of each situation and take precautions—such as monitoring a home, confiscating weapons, suspending child visitations and extending sentences—to keep a victim safe. The program has had astounding success in reducing the

homicide rate from domestic violence.

Even after more than a decade, Debora Riggs Clancy's family still struggles with the horror of how she was made to live and eventually die. I pieced together her history from legal documents and extensive interviews with members of her family, her neighbors and the attorneys involved with the case. Her story was poignant to me because Debbie seemed like the girl next door. She was the soccer mom, the Cub Scout leader, the school cafeteria volunteer. Her death changed how I looked at my own community. On the day of the funeral, I thought about how she would never celebrate a birthday with her family as I would that very day with mine. I wish often that I could go back in time and talk to Debbie about what had been happening to her. I would have told her that Peter's behavior toward her wasn't her fault and that she had a right to be treated with respect. Most of all, I would like to think I could have helped her get out of the relationship safely.

For his part, Peter pled guilty to second-degree murder and is serving a sentence of 20 years to life at Downstate Correctional Facility in Fishkill, N.Y. **M**

FURTHER READING

- **“Gender Symmetry” in Domestic Violence: A Substantive and Methodological Research Review.** Michael S. Kimmel in *Violence against Women*, Vol. 8, No. 11, pages 1332–1363; November 2002.
- **“Out of the Blue”: Men who Murder an Intimate Partner.** R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash and Kate Cavanagh in *Feminist Criminology*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pages 194–225; July 2009.
- **What Factors Are Associated with Recent Intimate Partner Violence? Findings from the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence.** Tanya Abramsky et al. in *BioMedCentral Public Health*, Vol. 11, Article No. 109; February 16, 2011.
- **A Raised Hand: Can a New Approach Curb Domestic Homicide?** Rachel Louise Snyder in *New Yorker*, pages 34–41; July 22, 2013.
- **Nonfatal Domestic Violence, 2003–2012.** Jennifer L. Truman and Rachel E. Morgan. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 2014.

From Our Archives

- **The Thin Line between Love and Wrath.** Eli J. Finkel and Caitlin W. Duffy; November/December 2013.