

Reflection

DEL MARTIN

The idea for the book *Battered Wives* came from Ruth Gottstein, publisher of Volcano Press. On a trip to London she met Erin Pizzey, author of *Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear*, who was conducting an aggressive campaign on behalf of battered wives in England. Ruth decided to visit Chiswick Women's Aid, the refuge Pizzey had founded as an escape hatch for abused women and their children.

When she returned home, Ruth told me, "This can't be just a British problem. It has to be going on here in the States, too." She then began a campaign of her own to get me to write the American version. That wasn't difficult. Ruth had published *Lesbian/Woman*, the book Phyllis Lyon, my partner in life and work, and I had co-authored. I had been wanting to write something to show that as a lesbian feminist I was not a single-issue advocate.

At the outset I was told I had to produce extensive and verifiable statistics on the incidence of violence against women. Excerpts from this chapter, *Violence in the Home*, concentrated on the results of my research. I concluded that incidence and incidents of violence in the home reached into the millions. My editor deleted my estimate on the grounds that I couldn't prove it. Since then, academia has confirmed my *virtual* estimate and admitted that lacking uniformity in the way data are accumulated makes it impossible to provide *actual* statistics.

In the course of my research I came to the realization that all the women's issues we had tackled in the National Organization for Women related to the plight of battered women. I saw a common thread in the life experiences of all women, no matter their background, whereby males in a dominant position assigned, defined, and confined them to inferior roles by intimidation, threats, and the use of force. The power dynamics in patriarchal society have historically depended on control of women's sexuality and sex-stereotyping that links maleness to dominance and violence (Sonkin et al., 1985).

My book, *Battered Wives*, has been credited as the catalyst for the Battered Women's Shelter Movement. I am told that 27 years since it was first published it is still being used as an educational tool by shelters and related agencies in the prevention of domestic violence and treatment of its victims.

That is flattering, but in writing a foreword for K. J. Wilson's (1997) book, *When Violence Begins at Home*, I discovered the sequel to *Battered Wives*. Wilson did a superb job in summarizing what we have learned and accomplished in 27 years.

In closing I would like to share some of my own observations. There is much truth in the adage, "Nothing is permanent save change." Although great strides have been made to provide recourse and safety to battered women, the systems we have developed are not fail proof. It is necessary to watchdog every agency in the system and see that protocol is enforced. Personnel changes, for instance, make education a never-ending process.

REFERENCES

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- Wilson, K. J. (1997). *When violence begins at home: A comprehensive guide to understanding and ending domestic abuse*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House.