

Effects of abuse linger

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(Photo: Jason J. Molyet/Staff photo)

BUCYRUS – By the time she was 3, Rhonda Hero-Wilson had suffered more violence than most people do in their entire lifetime.

She said her father abused her and her eight siblings, and was known for drunken rages.

"My dad would line us up and point his gun at us. Sometimes he would shoot it at the floor to scare us. This particular night, he had been drinking all day and was brushing my hair while yelling at my mom. He then beheaded one of our chickens and told my mother to cook it for him in five minutes or she would be dead," Hero-Wilson said.

Hero-Wilson's father then shot his wife, sending his children fleeing to hide in fear that his rage would be turned on them.

That was in August 1959 in Wyandot County. The article appeared on the front page of the Aug. 22, 1959, edition of the Marion Star.

The effects of the horrible domestic violence that Hero-Wilson suffered have lingered on for her and her two sons.

"I was adopted by the age of 5," Hero-Wilson said. "My dad was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and only served 18 months in prison."

Hero-Wilson said she suffered more abuse in her adoptive home and ran away with her boyfriend at age 17 to get married.

"We grew up in Marion, but moved to Columbus when I got married in July of 1974," Hero-Wilson said. "I am proud to say that I did graduate from high school in Columbus."

She said she suffered more later in life. While she was in the hospital recovering from injuries, she said, her husband left the state with her two sons.

"When I got out of the hospital, I had nowhere to go and did not know where my boys were. I sunk into the deepest depression I have ever been in and actually lived on the streets of Columbus for almost two years," Hero-Wilson said.

Hero-Wilson searched for her sons for years while getting her life back on track.

"I had issues with drugs and alcohol. The Volunteers of America organization helped me so much during this horrible time, and I was at a Salvation Army when I met a man who gave me a card and told me to call Catholic Social Services, that they could help me. I thought they only helped people who are Catholic, which I found out was not the case at all. They helped me get an apartment and a job. I will always be grateful to them," Hero-Wilson said.

Hero-Wilson made her way back to Marion and eventually remarried, although that marriage failed after several years. It was during that marriage that one of her sons found her through a neighbor.

"I was able to reconnect with Jeremy in 2000 and I got to meet my granddaughter," Hero-Wilson said.

She would later reconnect with her other son, Jason, although neither union lasted long.

"Their father had told them I didn't want them and that I was dead. He also raised them to be disrespectful toward women so our relationships are strained although I love them, and my grandchildren, very much and hopeful about the future with them," Hero-Wilson said.

Hero-Wilson recently married the man she refers to as the love of her life.

"He treats me so nice that sometimes I am confused by it. I was so used to abuse that it's actually hard for me to accept that not everyone is abusive," Hero-Wilson said.

Hero-Wilson's issues are not uncommon for someone who has suffered domestic violence, especially during childhood. Each year an estimated 3.3 million children are exposed to violence against their mothers or female caretakers by a family member.

"Children need stability in their lives and when there is domestic violence in the home, it takes that away from them," Bucyrus police Chief Dave Koepke said.

Koepke said when his officers handle a domestic violence call and children are involved, their main goal is to ensure the safety of the children.

Turning Point Domestic Violence Center in Marion serves Marion, Wyandot, Crawford, Morrow, Delaware and Union counties. Last year, it housed 113 children along with 105 women and six men because of domestic violence.

"In our victims' rights advocacy program, which includes going to court with clients to get civil protection orders and some child custody and divorce issues with domestic violence involvement, we served 249 new clients and a total of 417 clients," said Kristi Butler, who heads up the community education programs at Turning Point.

According to Turning Point, a child's exposure to the father abusing the mother is the strongest risk factor for transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next. The number one predictor of child abuse is mother abuse.

"Last fiscal year, we had 76 crisis calls from Crawford County, 566 from Marion County and 137 calls from other counties, which include Richland and Franklin counties," Butler said.

Butler said Turning Point offers transitional housing at the shelter.

"We also own three homes in Marion. The transitional houses are single family homes and we are their landlord, but still have the Turning Point supportive system in place. We have had 14 families in transitional housing with an average stay of six months," Butler said.

Butler said 75 percent of the families helped through transitional housing reported living violence free nine months after leaving the program.

Hero-Wilson is now attending the Marion branch of The Ohio State University to earn her degree in psychology so she can help others who have been the victim of domestic violence. She has also written a book of poetry, "She Has Awaken," about her experiences.

For information about Turning Point, visit turningpoint6.org (<http://turningpoint6.org/>) or call the shelter 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 800-232-6505.

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Effects

Potential effects of domestic violence on children:

Emotional:

- • Grief for family and personal losses
- Shame, guilt, and self blame
- Confusion about conflicting feelings toward parents
- Fear of abandonment ,expressing emotions, the unknown or personal injury
- Anger
- Depression and feelings of helplessness and powerlessness
- Embarrassment

Behavioral:

- Acting out or withdrawing

- Aggressive or passive
- Refusing to go to school
- Care taking; acting as a parent substitute
- Lying to avoid confrontation
- Rigid defenses
- Excessive attention seeking
- Bedwetting and nightmares
- Out of control behavior
- Reduced intellectual competency
- Manipulation, dependency, mood swings

Social:

- Isolation from friends and relatives
- Stormy relationships
- Difficulty in trusting, especially adults
- Poor anger management and problem solving skills
- Excessive social involvement to avoid home
- Passivity with peers or bullying
- Engaged in exploitative relationships as perpetrator or victim

Physical:

- Somatic complaints, headaches and stomachaches
- Nervous, anxious, short attention span
- Tired and lethargic
- Frequently ill
- Poor personal hygiene
- Regression in development
- High risk play
- Self abuse

SOURCE: Turning Point Domestic Violence Center

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