

# Forgotten Victims of Domestic Violence

By Vicki Stevens

Every 15 seconds, a woman living in the United States is beaten by her partner. Each day, at least four of these women die from their injuries. People who have never been involved in such abusive relationships sometimes wonder why women who are don't simply leave. The reason is because, in many cases, battered women lack the emotional support and financial resources necessary to make leaving their batterers a realistic choice. Furthermore, any attempt by a woman to flee her batterer is fraught with danger, especially without a carefully considered plan and a safe, secret place to go. Even if the woman is successful in escaping the home, she has not necessarily escaped her abuser. Anecdotes from social workers suggest that a battered woman is most at risk of being stalked and killed by her partner just after she leaves him. Unfortunately, leaving a violent partner is far from simple.

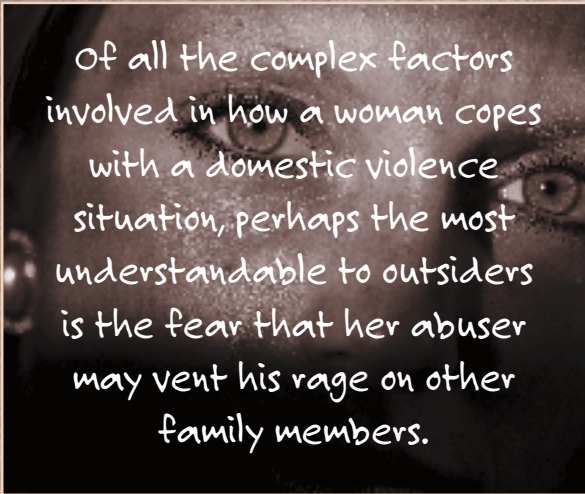
Of all the complex factors involved in how a woman copes with a domestic violence situation, perhaps the most understandable to outsiders is the fear that her abuser may vent his rage on other family members. Recent studies have shown that a batterer's expressions of violence will almost always grow to include all family members—from a partner to a child to an animal companion.

Like child abusers, men who batter women may threaten to harm or actually kill a beloved animal in order

to intimidate their human victims into obedience and silence. An abuser may even give an animal to his partner as a "gift," with the specific intention of later using that animal as a tool to manipulate and control her. Batterers will often harm or kill animals in front of their partners to demonstrate the punishment they are prepared to inflict for their "disobedience." Perhaps most disturbing, batterers may even force their partners to participate in the sexual molestation of an animal companion. Finally, if a woman does manage to flee, her batterer may

into silence, an animal companion may be the sole source of friendship and comfort. Yet, for a variety of reasons, including health code restrictions, lack of space and resources, concern that traumatized animals may injure clients, and concern that traumatized children may injure animals, most domestic violence shelters can not or will not accept animals. Furthermore, many domestic violence workers do not know how to assist women who wish to find shelter for their animals. As a result, it is estimated that up to forty percent of women delay leaving their batterer due to concern for the safety of their animal companions. Obviously, this can have fatal consequences for the women, their children, and their pets.

One of the first groups to address this problem was Feminists for Animal Rights (FAR). In 1993, FAR launched their Companion Animal Rescue Effort (CARE) network, described on their web site (<http://www.enviroweb.org/far/care.html>) as "a foster care program for the companion animals of women who are victims of domestic violence." During the four years this program operated in North Carolina, FAR members convinced local domestic violence case workers to include questions about companion animals on their client intake forms, and to notify FAR when abused animals were in need of shelter. All aspects of the CARE program were administered by FAR volunteers. Their duties included developing and maintaining a list of



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threaten to harm or kill her animal if she doesn't return.

The importance of an animal companion's well being to the battered guardian and her children has only recently been recognized. For a woman whose batterer has isolated her from family members and friends, or for an abused child who has been frightened

qualified foster homes, transporting animals, and soliciting veterinarians for free or low cost medical care. While this type of program provides an invaluable service, well-intentioned volunteers may not always realize the high level of commitment it requires. Volunteers must be on call 24-hours a day, and foster families must be prepared to deal with abused animals who may have behavioral problems.

In the years since FAR initiated its CARE network, other organizations have developed similar projects. One outstanding example is the Humane Society of Southern Arizona's "Safehaven" program, founded by manager of operations Pat Hubbard. Battered women who wish to have their animals sheltered by Safehaven must sign a contract relinquishing ownership of their animals to the humane society for a period of thirty days. The contract stipulates that all Safehaven animals will be vaccinated and spayed or neutered. Rather than taking up limited shelter space,

Safehaven animals are boarded in private kennels, the locations of which are kept secret for the animals' safety. Shelter staff involvement is limited to



transporting the animals; the kennel operators provide all other care. This arrangement ensures that shelter

space and staff remain available to animals being left for adoption. Hubbard is rightfully proud of her organization's "progressive community outreach program," describing Safehaven as "a very positive thing to do, helping both women and animals." Proving widely popular, Safehaven has won grant funding and has increased donor base for the humane society.

In 1998, Dr. Frank R. Ascione of Utah State University conducted a nationwide survey of domestic violence and animal protection agencies to determine how many were prepared to assist the companion animals of battered women seeking shelter. He eventually received responses "identifying 113 programs in various stages of conception or operation." In his recently published study, *Safe Havens for Pets* (see sidebar), Ascione provides contact information for over forty of these programs, along with sample intake forms and other materials on which future programs can be modeled.

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## What You Can Do:

Contact your local battered women's shelter and humane society to determine whether or not your community has a sheltering program for the animal companions of domestic violence victims. If so, find out what additional resources are needed, and volunteer your services. Perhaps you can help transport animals or staff a 24-hour hotline number.

If your community does not have such a program, help start one! Obtain a copy of *Safe Havens for Pets: Guidelines for Programs Sheltering Pets for Women Who are Battered*. Copies are free to domestic violence and animal welfare agencies; private citizens pay \$25.00. Send a self-addressed, self-adhesive mailing label and a check (if applicable) made out to AUSU Dept. of Psychology to: Frank R. Ascione, Ph.D., Dept. of Psychology, Utah State University, 2810 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-2810. For more information, you can contact Dr. Ascione at (435) 797-1464, or FrankA@COE.USU.EDU.

For more information about the Humane Society of Southern Arizona's program, or for a list of guidelines about how to set up a similar program in your area, contact Pat Hubbard at (520) 321-3704, ext. 138, or phubbard@humane-so-arizona.org.

Help build awareness among domestic violence workers and humane officers of the connections between domestic violence and animal abuse. If you live in the Washington, D.C. area and would like to attend or host a workshop on this topic, or if you would like assistance in developing your own workshop, contact Katy Otto at 301-779-3159, or kalotto@hotmail.com.

To learn more about domestic violence, visit the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence web site at [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org).

If you are a victim of domestic violence, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

To donate your used wireless phone to help fight domestic violence, mail the phone, battery and charger to: CALL to PROTECT c/o Brightpoint, Inc. 501 AirTech Parkway, Doors 23/24, Plainfield, IN 46168. For more information, visit [www.donateaphone.com](http://www.donateaphone.com)

## Other Resources:

*Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention*, edited by Frank R. Ascione and Phil Arkow. Available for \$24.95 + shipping from The Latham Foundation for the Promotion of Humane Education. (510) 521-0920; [orders@latham.org](mailto:orders@latham.org); [www.latham.org](http://www.latham.org)

"Woman Battering and Harm to Animals" by Carol Adams in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, edited by Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. Duke University Press, 1995.

The Humane Society of the United States' First Strike Campaign against animal abuse and human violence. 1-888-213-0956; [www.hsus.org/current/strike.html](http://www.hsus.org/current/strike.html)

The American Humane Association's campaign on the Violence Link. 1-800-227-4645; [link@americanhumane.org](mailto:link@americanhumane.org); [www.americanhumane.org/link/default.htm](http://www.americanhumane.org/link/default.htm)

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All over the country, domestic violence personnel and animal advocates are teaming up to cross-train on the issues and brainstorm ways they can assist each other. Here in the nation's capitol, Suzanne Marcus of My Sister's Place, a shelter for battered women and their children; Cory Smith, educator for the Washington Humane Society; and Katy Otto of The Empower Program, whose mission is to work with youth to end the culture of violence, have joined forces to create a workshop which helps people see the connections between human and animal abuse.

The increasing awareness of these connections and the programs that result from it are crucial to cre-

ating a more humane society. In her essay, "Animal Abuse and Family Violence," Jane Ann Quinlisk writes, "All programs, whether for people or animals, are hampered by financial and time constraints, but all it takes, in most cases, is one person willing to make the effort to bring people together. It can be energizing to find others in related fields who share these concerns...building a coalition means new opportunities for funding, publicity, education, and providing better, more comprehensive services. It means saving lives."

*Author's Note: Throughout this article, I refer to batterers as male and to their adult victims as female, in part because, according to the United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, "women are six times more likely than*

*men to be the victim of a violent crime committed by an intimate." However, the roles of abuser and victim are not confined to any one gender or sexual orientation.*

*About the Author: Vicki Stevens is a recent graduate of the University of Maryland's Women's Studies program. She has worked for animal rights organizations for the past eleven years. Vicki and her husband, DDAL's Director of Communications, Richard De Angelis, share their home with six rescued cats: Cleo, Brandon, and former ferals Xena, Nemo, Mina, and Serena.*